

Prophecy According to Jesus

Reasons for believing that Jesus will not return until after the tribulation¹

REASON ONE

Jesus said He would come after the tribulation.

In Matthew 24 and Mark 13 where Jesus outlined future events, he clearly said He would come after the tribulation.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send

¹ How important is this subject? See page 18.

His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Mt. 24:29-31).

Not only did Jesus say He would come after the tribulation, He made *no mention* of a prior coming to rapture believers. Should we add a pretrib² rapture? **“Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar”** (Prov. 30:6).

We should present prophecy the way the Lord does. **“Hold fast the form of sound words...”** (2 Tim. 1:13). In fact, the pretrib scenario-- rapture, then tribulation, then the Lord's coming in power and glory-- is never presented as such in Scripture, anywhere.

² Pretrib, or pretribulationism, refers to the belief that Christ may come at any moment to rapture believers before the tribulation, and then come again after the tribulation to rule the world. Posttrib, or posttribulationism, refers to the belief that Jesus will not return until after the tribulation.

REASON TWO

The Lord gave us commands for the time we will be in the tribulation.

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.... Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not (Matthew 24:21, 23).

He also commanded us to know the end is near when we see certain signs. **“So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors”** (Mt. 24:33). So we will be able to know when the Lord is about to come, but we will not know the day or the hour (Mt. 24:36). It’s like a fig tree: you can tell summer is near when leaves spring out, but you can’t tell the day or hour summer begins by looking at the leaves.

To see other commands given for those who will be in the tribulation, read Mt. 24:15, 23, 26. Jesus was talking to believers here. (The disciples were Jews, but believing Jews.) The pretrib system would have had the disciples raptured if the Lord had returned in their lifetime, but the Lord assumed they would have been in the tribulation. He did so by giving them commands for when they would be in the tribulation.

The commands He gave the apostles are *also for us*, because Jesus told the apostles in the Great Commission: **“Go ye therefore... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”** (Mt. 28:19,20). So commands Jesus gave the apostles for the time of the tribulation are for us, the church.

REASON THREE

The resurrection of believers at the rapture will come at “the last trump.”

Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (I Cor. 15:51,52).

This fact goes along with Mt. 24:31. **“And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect...”** This trumpet and gathering is **“after the tribulation of those days”** (Mt. 24:29). Pretribs and Posttribs agree that the resurrection of believers comes at the rapture as 1 Thess. 4:16 says; so the rapture must be after the tribulation.

Also, Revelation 11:15-17 says that at the last trumpet, the Lord will set up His Kingdom on earth, which Pretribs and Posttribs agree comes after the tribulation. So the last trump must be after the tribulation.

REASON FOUR

Judgment and rewards come at the seventh trumpet.

At the seventh trumpet **“the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ”** (Rev. 11:15). This is the time of judgment and rewards.

And the nations were angry and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, small and great... (Rev. 11:18).

But pretribs say that at the seventh trumpet judgments and rewards have already been given in Heaven (after the rapture and before the Lord’s coming in power and glory.).

REASON FIVE

Our rest will come at His revelation.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 specifically says when the Lord will give us rest-- **“when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God.”**

This fact is usually overlooked because in English the word “rest” appears to be a verb. It is actually a noun used as a direct object. So verses 6 & 7 are saying: God will recompense two things-- tribulation and rest: rest to those who are troubled, and tribulation to those who trouble you; and this recompensing will come **“when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire.”** So the rapture and revelation of His power come at the same time.

REASON SIX

**The day of Christ is not at hand:
the man of sin must be revealed first.**

In speaking of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “our gathering together unto Him” (2 Thess. 2:1), we are told:

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled... as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God...” (2 Thess. 2:2-4).

So the man of sin must be made known, proclaiming himself to be God, before the Lord comes to gather us together to Him.

REASON SEVEN

The first resurrection is after the tribulation.

Revelation 20 shows that “the first resurrection” comes after the tribulation. (Pretribulationists say that there will be a resurrection at the rapture before the tribulation, then after the tribulation a resurrection of those believers killed during the tribulation.) But here’s what the Bible says:

...And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4,5).

REASON EIGHT

The pretrib arguments are weak.

A major reason I left the pretrib position was the very weak arguments pretrib leaders give for their belief. Here are some commonly used arguments:

1. In Revelation 4:1 a voice says to John, **“Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.”** Pretribs often say this voice is calling the church to heaven before the tribulation. But it is plain the voice was to John, and his trip to heaven was for the purpose of learning “things which must be hereafter.”
2. In 2 Thessalonians 2:6,7 the restrainer or **“what withholdeth”**: is said by pretribs to be the Holy Spirit, removed from the world when all indwelt by the Holy Spirit are raptured, thus allowing the man of sin to make his appearance. However, to say that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit is a guess, because the Bible doesn't say so. It's a bad guess since it contradicts so many other Scriptures.

3. It is said that since **“we are not appointed unto wrath”** (I Thess. 5:9), God will have to rapture us before the tribulation. However, there is a vast difference between the tribulation from the ungodly (**“in the world ye shall have tribulation,”** John 16:33), and the wrath of God on the wicked!

God could rapture the saints after the tribulation and before the final pouring out of His wrath on the wicked. Even if we are on earth when God pours out His wrath on the wicked, God can protect us:

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked (Psalm 91:7,8).

Many times God has protected His own during His wrath on the wicked without using a rapture. He did not rapture Noah from the flood or the Israelites from the ten plagues, but He protected them.

4. **“I... will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world,”** (Rev. 3:10) is a verse sometimes used as a promise of a pretrib rapture. From a quick look at the context it is easy to see that the Lord was talking to the church at Philadelphia. He kept them from the hour of temptation. He did not rapture them to do it.
5. Pretribs make a distinction between “the rapture” and “the revelation,” between coming “for” His saints and coming “with” His saints, a thing to anticipate and a thing to dread. A simple illustration of how the same event, the Lord’s return, can be viewed different ways is seen by Patton’s invasion of Europe at the end of World War II. He was coming “with” Allies and “for” Allies; his coming brought relief to the Allied POW’s but horror to the Nazi’s.
6. One of the most common arguments for the pretrib position is that since we are **“waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Cor. 1:7) and we look for His appearing (Heb. 9:28), then, we are told, the tribulation could not come first, because then we would be

looking for the tribulation, not His coming. However, the Bible also says we “**look for new heavens and a new earth**” (2 Pet. 3:13). Pretribs certainly do not believe the new heavens and the new earth could come at any moment! The fact that we look for the Lord’s coming does not mean His coming is imminent.

When I was engaged to Vicki she flew out to Chicago to see me. I was looking for Vicki! I knew the plane had to land *first* and taxi into position, and others would come off the plane *first*. But my big excitement was to see Vicki! I was looking for Vicki!

The pretrib sequence of events (rapture, then tribulation on earth and the judgment seat of Christ in Heaven, then the Lord’s return in power and glory) is never presented in Scripture. The posttrib position simply follows the Lord’s outline in Matthew 24 and Mark. 13.

Furthermore, pretribs cannot document one writer in church history before 1830 who outlined the pretrib position. In March, 1830, Margaret

McDonald claimed to have a vision that the Lord's return would come in two phases, the first being a pretrib rapture.³ Edward Irving and John Darby, who were associated with her, adjusted somewhat and popularized the new idea. Darby influenced C. I. Scofield who incorporated the pretrib system into his notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Thus, multitudes have accepted it without question as though it were Scripture.

Even Walvoord, a leading advocate of pretribulationism, admitted that "the preponderance of evidence seems to support the concept that the early church did not clearly hold to a rapture as preceding the end time tribulation period."⁴ He further confessed, "Posttribulationism has long been a common doctrine held by the majority of the church.... Posttribulationism, as far as the church as a whole is concerned, is the majority view."⁵

³ William R. Kimball, *The Rapture A Question of Timing*, p. 44, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1985.

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, p. 24, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976.

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 131, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1957.

How should this affect us?

When Jesus foretold the future He gave some down-to-earth commands:

Matthew 24 & 25

- Don't be deceived.
- Be ready.
- Don't be troubled-- even about wars.
- Serve Him faithfully even in the little things.
- Love and help God's people in need.

Revelation 2 & 3

- Hate false teaching.
- Don't leave your first love.
- Get rid of fornicators in the church.
- Don't be lukewarm.
- Don't fear the tribulation that you will suffer.

How did the apostles counsel new converts?
“...Continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Jesus said,

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt. 10:28).

Paul wrote,

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation... (1 Thess. 3:3,4).

Peter wrote,

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings... (1 Pet. 4:12,13).

These Scriptures are foreign to many modern Christians!

I suspect a huge number of Christians will be shocked and disillusioned when they begin to suffer great tribulation. They should be mentally armed. **“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind”** (1 Pet. 4:1). I wonder how many people will take the mark of the beast, thinking, “This cannot be the mark of the beast. We know the church will be raptured before the tribulation comes.” But the Bible warns,

If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same... shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night” (Rev. 14:9-11).

How important is this subject?

Why argue about prophecy? Shouldn't we just concentrate on winning souls?⁶

Jesus commanded us to not only make disciples but to teach them to obey *all* the things that He commanded (Matt. 28:19,20). **“If ye love Me, keep My commandments”** (John 14:15). **“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”** (1John 5:3).

The Word of God repeatedly commands us to let no one deceive us regarding the timing of His return: it is not at hand; certain things must happen first (2 Thess. 2:2-4; Matt. 24:4, 29-31).

Also there are commands for those who will be alive during the tribulation. We must be ready to obey those commands.

It is dreadfully important that we do not turn away from the faith when the tribulation comes or

⁶ Soul winning *has* been the emphasis of my ministry since I began preaching in 1966.

receive the mark of the beast thinking God has failed us in not rapturing us out first. Jesus said many will be offended (Matt. 24:10). How many of them will turn away from the faith because we did not give them the Bible warnings?

Conclusion

Since Jesus said He will come after the tribulation with no mention of a pretribulation rapture, and since other Scriptures agree with this teaching, and since there are no strong reasons for the pretrib view; we conclude that the pretrib position is an unscriptural invention. It contradicts commands in Matthew 24:33 and Mark 13:29. It especially contradicts 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3:

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition....

While many earnest Christians hold the pretrib view, and we love them, yet we must be loyal to God's Word-- not tradition. As George Muller said, "The time came when I had to either part with my Bible or part from John Darby. I chose to keep my precious Bible and part from John Darby."⁷

⁷ William R. Kimball, *The Rapture A Question of Timing*, p. 39, 40, Baker, 1985.

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