# Biblical Evidence for the Pre-Trib Rapture

**Introduction**

There are two fallacies being promoted today by those who are ignorant of Scripture and of end-time prophecy (eschatology). The first is that J.N. Darby (1800–1882) invented the Doctrine of the Rapture. The second is that C.I. Scofield (1843–1921) invented the Doctrine of Dispensations. The truth, which is evident in the Scriptures, is that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul taught both. Furthermore, both were repeatedly upheld by many early church leaders and writings, as we shall see.

**Three important rules for interpretation:**

1. The Bible is to be interpreted literally.
   Literal interpretation recognizes the use of figures of speech such as symbols, metaphors and analogies, but recognizes that they have a literal point they are making. For example, putting new wine in old wineskins (Matt. 9:14–17) is a metaphor for trying to fit new covenant truth and life into old covenant laws and standards.

2. The Bible must be interpreted in context.
   Contextual interpretation involves not only the text of the Bible, but also the culture, language, and history of Bible times.

3. The Bible must be interpreted categorically.
   This means that when studying a particular doctrine, we cannot build our conclusions on one or two passages but rather need to gather as many passages in that topic as possible, letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

**Three hindrances to interpreting end-time prophecies:**

1. Failure to distinguish between the standards of the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant.

2. Failure to distinguish between Israel and the Church as distinct agencies in God's plan.

3. Failure to acknowledge God's dispensational plan as revealed by Jesus (Matt. 16:17–18) and by Paul (Eph. 3:1–10).

## Major Texts Teaching or Implying a Pre-Trib Rapture

**1. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18: The Promise of the Rapture of the Church.**
Concerning this passage there are several pertinent questions:

- First: Do you believe this event will happen? To say "no" is to deny Scripture. To say "yes" is to acknowledge the event called "the Rapture" (Greek, *harpazo*; Latin, *rapio/rapturo*).
- To whom is this promise addressed? *"Brethren ... in Jesus ... in Christ."* These are references to Church-age believers only.
- Do we have biblical examples of how *harpazo* is used? Yes!
  1) It is used of Philip in Acts 8:39;
  2) Paul uses it of his experience in 2 Corinthians 12:2; and
  3) It is used of Jesus' ascension in Revelation 12:5.
- Is there another biblical term that is used for the Rapture? Yes! It is called "The day of Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6). Note that this is always a day of rejoicing. It is distinct from *"The day of the Lord,"* which is day of judgment on Israel (Isa. 2:17; 13:6–9; Joel 3:1–2, 14; Zech. 14:1–9; Mal. 4:1–2; 1 Thess. 5:2–3).
- When will the Rapture occur? Paul tells us in the context (1 Thess. 5:1–11).

**2. <u>1 Thessalonians 5:1–11</u>: The Rapture (Day of Christ) is not the Day of the Lord (The Wrath).**

- What is meant by *"the times and the seasons"*? The Greek word *chronos* speaks of time in succession (chronology), while the word *kairos* speaks of individual ages. In Acts 1:7, Jesus told the disciples they did not need to know about the future plan of history, but here in vv. 1–2, Paul says the Thessalonian believers knew *"perfectly"* about it. What happened in between? Paul's revelation of the "mystery" of dispensations (Eph. 3:1–3).
- Why does Paul shift from *"you"* in vv. 1–2 to *"they ... them"* in vv. 3–4? Because the *"you"* refers to Church-age believers, and the *"they ... them"* refers to those who will go into the Tribulation.
- To what does the *"labor pains"* of v. 3 refer? To the same time Jesus referred to in Matthew 24:8–9, which He refers to as *"tribulation."*
- Does the Church go into the Tribulation? No! This is clear from vv. 4–11. The Tribulation comes on the unbelieving world *"as a thief in the night"* (v. 2), but not on the *"sons of light and sons of the day"* (Church-age believers).
- Why is the Church delivered from the Tribulation? Because we are not appointed to "the wrath," v. 9 (Paul uses the definite article, as also in Rom. 5:9 and 1 Thess. 1:10, to refer to the Tribulation Period, as in Isa. 13:13; Jer. 10:10; Zeph. 1:15, 18).
- Note that the conclusion of v. 11 is the same as that of 4:18. They both refer to the same event, the Rapture of the Church.

**3. <u>2 Thessalonians 2:1–12</u>: The Rapture Precedes the Day of the Lord.**

- In 2 Thess. 1, Paul speaks of the Day of the Lord—judgment on the unbelieving and vengeance on those who reject Christ and persecute His people.

- He then gives comfort, in 2:1, based on *"the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,"* an obvious reference to what he wrote in 1 Thess. 4:13–18.
- The believers in Thessalonica had been assaulted by false teaching through pseudo-visions, false letters and messages that *"the Day of the Lord had come."* While some translations have "day of Christ" here, both the context and other versions/translations have the *"Day of the Lord,"* which was the topic in 1 Thess. 5 and 2 Thess. 1, as the accurate translation.
- Paul assures them that *"that day"* (i.e. the Tribulation, or Day of the Lord) would not come before *"the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him".*
- His reference in v. 5 to what he had told/taught them before is an obvious allusion back to the teaching of 1 Thess. 4:13–18 and 1 Thess. 5:4–11.
- The order Paul sets down in this passage is:
  1) *"Our gathering together to Him,"* v. 1;
  2) The *"falling away"* (apostacy of organized religion), v. 3;
  3) The revelation of Antichrist, vv. 3–4, 8–10, who cannot be revealed until the *"restrainer"* (i.e. the Holy Spirit, indwelling the Church) is *"taken out of the way"*, vv. 5–7; and
  4) The Second Coming of Christ and the destruction of Antichrist, v. 8b (see 2 Thess. 1:9–10.

**4. <u>Daniel 9:24–27</u>: The Entire Future History of Israel Prophesied.**

While there is disagreement among commentators as to various decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, these all relate to "when" the 70 weeks began. Our focus is not affected by any of these, because the point we are making is simply that the entire Church Age occurs between Daniel 9:26–27, from the crucifixion of Christ to the Tribulation Period.

- To whom is this prophecy directed? *"For your people* [Israel] *and for your holy city* [Jerusalem]," v. 24.
- What will the *"seventy weeks"* accomplish? (v. 24). The judgment of Israel's rejection of the Messiah (see Matt. 23:15–36), the reconciliation of the nation, and the establishment of Jesus' earthly kingdom.
- What time period does *"seventy weeks"* refer to? The word *"weeks"* is literally "sevens," and speaks of weeks of years, or 490 years total. We know this because the *"seven weeks"* and the *"sixty-two weeks"* (69 weeks or 483 years) began with the command to restore Jerusalem, given by Artaxerxes in 445/444 B.C. (Neh. 2:7–9), and led up to the coming and crucifixion of Jesus, *"Messiah the prince,"* v. 26, followed by the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus the Roman in 70 A.D.
- In v. 27, we have reference to Antichrist (*"he*"), who will commit the *"abomination of desolation"* in the middle of the Tribulation Period (see Dan. 12:7–11; Matt. 24:15–22. Here, note that Jesus relates this to *"the holy place ... Judea ... the Sabbath ... great tribulation"*).

- What happens between the 69th and the 70th week? The entire Church Age. Why is it not mentioned? Because it was a *"mystery"* not revealed to Old Testament prophets (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26–27).

5. **<u>Ephesians 1:7–12; 3:1–10; Colossians 1:26–27</u>: The Mystery of the Church Age Defined.**
   - The word translated *"mystery"* (*musterion*) is clearly defined by Paul as divine revelation relating to the Church Age, which was never before revealed to Old Testament prophets.
   - Paul identifies this age as *"the dispensation of the fullness of times"* (Eph. 1:10) and *"the dispensation of the grace of God"* (Eph. 3:2).
   - The word *"dispensation"* comes from the Greek *oikonomia,* from which we get our word "economy." It is made up of two Greek words: *oikos*, which means house or household, and *nomos*, which means a rule or law. Thus, we have the rule of the household.
   - In Hebrews 3:1–6, we read of two distinct "households," that of Moses (the Age of Israel), which was under the "old covenant," and that of Jesus (the Church Age), which is under the "new covenant." Thus, Paul's use of "dispensation" speaks of the distinction between the Age of Israel and the Age of the Church.
   - Most modern confusion regarding the Doctrine of Dispensations is the result of a failure to distinguish between the Church and Israel as separate "economies" —one ruled by the Law, the other by the grace of God.
   - Paul clearly explains in Ephesians 3:3–5 and Colossians 1:26–27, that neither the Church Age, nor the doctrines that are pertinent to it, were revealed in the Old Testament. This is why no Old Testament prophet ever spoke of the Rapture, for it relates only to Church-age believers. The evidence for this is overwhelming in the New Testament.

6. **<u>Luke 4:18–19 (quote Isaiah 61:1–2b)</u>: The Reason Jesus Stopped in Mid-Verse.**
   - In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus gave His first public message. He quoted from Isaiah 61, to proclaim that He Himself was the fulfillment of that prophecy.
   - By comparing the two texts, it is obvious that Jesus stopped His quote mid-sentence in Isaiah 61:2b. Why did He do that? Because Isaiah 61:1–2b refer to His First Advent, while Isaiah 61:2b and following refer to His Second Coming.
   - Just as the people of Jesus' day could not distinguish between prophecies of His first and second coming, so many today cannot distinguish between His coming for His Church (the Rapture), and His return to Israel (His Second Coming).
   - Again, the root of this problem is a failure to distinguish the revealed plan of God for Israel, versus His plan as revealed for the Church. These problems can easily be resolved by a careful study and understanding of Romans Chapters 9–11.

7. **<u>Romans 9–11</u>: Paul's Overview of the History of Israel; and the Intercalation of the Church.**

The word "intercalation" is a theological term that refers to the insertion of the Church Age into the previously revealed flow of history. This would be like the sudden insertion of an added day into a week. It would be "mysterious."

- In Romans 9–11, Paul gives us an overview of the entire history of Israel, and explains the purpose of God for bringing in the Church Age.
  1) Romans 9 = Israel's past.
  2) Romans 10 = Israel's present.
  3) Romans 11 = Israel's future.
- In these three chapters, Paul is answering three rhetorical questions he raised earlier in Chapter 3:
  1) "What advantage has the Jew?" (3:1). This is answered in Romans 9.
  2) "Will their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God?" (3:3). This is answered in Romans 10.
  3) "Is God unjust to inflict wrath?" (3:5). Once again (as in Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10 and 5:9), Paul uses the definite article, "the wrath" —a reference to the "Day of the Lord," the coming Tribulation Period.
- In Romans 9:4–5, Paul cites the eight spiritual privileges God gave to Israel, culminating in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, on Whom all the others depended.
- In spite of their glorious privileges, Israel rejected their Messiah (Rom. 9:14–33) and today remain in unbelief (Romans 10). Thus, God raised up the Church to preach the Gospel message, and to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 10:14–21).
- Because of God's faithfulness (Romans 11), they still have a future. By their rejection of Jesus Christ, He was sent to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6), and the Church was "grafted into" the root of Israel.
- When God is finished with His plan for the Church, He will remove it (Rapture) and complete His plan for Israel (Rom. 11:25). Again, the unrevealed "mystery" is that when *"the fullness of the Gentiles has come in"* (i.e. Rapture), then *"all Israel will be saved."* This will come about by God's plan for the Tribulation Period.

**8. <u>The Book of Revelation</u>: The Outline of History; The Church vs. Israel.**

- In the beginning of the Book of Revelation, we are given God's own outline of the book, Revelation 1:19.
  1) *"Write the things which you have seen,"* that is, Chapter 1.
  2) *"and the things which are,"* this is present history—the Church Age, Chapters 2–3.
  3) *"and the things which will take place after this,"* the Greek here actually says, "after these things," that is, Chapters 4–22. It is worth noting that chapter 4 begins with the words *"After these things."*
- Chapters 2–3 give us, in the seven churches, a picture of conditions that will exist in the Church throughout the Church Age.

- In Chapters 4–5 we see the Church in Heaven, following the command, *"Come up here"* (4:1). How do we know it is the Church in Heaven? Because they are kings and priests (5:10), and this designation is never used in the Bible except for Church-age believers (1 Pet. 2:9).
- From Chapter 6 to Chapter19, we have the Tribulation Period. How interesting that the Church is mentioned 19 times in Chapters 1–3, but in Chapters 6-19 is never mentioned, while the whole focus turns to Israel (see Rev. 7:1–8). This matches Romans 11:25 perfectly!
- While some suggest that the *"wrath"* does not begin until the final judgments (i.e. Mid-Tribulation, Rev. 15:1), what is actually said is that the final seven judgments "complete" the wrath of God.
- Actually, the entire Tribulation is "the time of His wrath" as is made clear from Revelation 6:16–17.

**9. <u>John 14:3; Acts 1:10–11</u>: Jesus, the First One to Teach the Rapture.**

- Jesus, not J.N. Darby, was the first to teach about the Rapture, in John 14:3. Note that He says He will come again *"and receive you to Myself."* This matches Paul's description of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–18), but not John's depiction of the Second Coming (Rev. 19:11–16).
- Also, the angels present at Jesus' ascension declared that Jesus would return *"in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). This description certainly matches John 14:3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, but it does not fit with Revelation 19:11–16, the Second Coming.

**10. <u>Titus 2:11–14</u>: The Future Expectation of the Church.**

- Paul tells us in this passage that the future expectation of the Church is *"the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13).
- The early Church believed in and taught the Rapture of the Church. There is ample evidence of this consistent belief in the following teachers and writings. The dates often include only the time of preaching or writing. Just a couple of short quotes.
  1) Papias (A.D. 60–30).
  2) Clement of Rome (A.D. ?–100).
  3) The Shepherd of Hermas (A.D. 96–50).
  4) Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 98–117).
  5) Barnabas (A.D. 100).
  6) The Didache (A.D. 100). This is believed to be one of the earliest church writings.
  7) Justin Martyr (A.D. 110–165).
  8) The Epistle of Barnabas (A.D. 117–138).
  9) Irenaeus (A.D. 120–202).

     "When in the end that church will suddenly be caught up from this, then it is said,

there will be tribulation such as not been seen since the beginning, nor will be." (*Against Heresies* 5.29)

10) Tertullian (A.D. 145–220).
11) Hippolytus (A.D. 185–236).
12) Cyprian (A.D. 250).
13) Lactantius (A.D. 260–330).
14) Ephraim the Syrian (A.D. 373).

"... because all saints and the elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and be taken to the Lord." (On the Last Times 2).

With a list like this, it is certainly absurd to proclaim that J.N. Darby invented the Doctrine of the Rapture!

**11. <u>Revelation 22:7, 20–21</u>: The Final Prayer of the Church**.

- Our New Testament ends with a promise and a prayer. Both of these fit with a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.
- In Revelation 22:7, 12, and 20, Jesus promises, *"Behold, I am coming quickly."*
- To this promise *"The Spirit and the bride say, Come! ... Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"* (vv. 17 and 20). We know that the *"Bride"* is the Church, so the final prayer of the Church recorded in the Bible is an appeal to the Lord Jesus to come quickly. There is no reference here to tribulation, only to the eager expectation of His soon, glorious appearing for His Bride. Also, the Spirit and Bride will go together (2 Thess. 2:6–7).