

CONCERNING THE WAY

LESSON 58: PROPHECY SERIES — THE RAPTURE

MEMO

Gone to Father's house
to prepare your place.
Will be back soon
to pick you up.
Love, Jesus
(John 14)

The Rapture of the Church

Before we begin our study in the final section of our prophecy series, the book of Revelation, we're going to take one lesson and do an in-depth topical study of the Rapture of the Church. This is a doctrine that many Christians know very little about, because it is rarely taught in the local church these days. Most pastors either haven't been taught this doctrine themselves and therefore don't understand it, or else they refuse to teach it because they think it's divisive and they are afraid to offend part of their congregation. Why does it offend? There are a couple of main reasons. Some who believe in the Rapture disagree about the timing of it. Others have given up on the idea of Christ coming back at any moment, and they just don't want to hear this teaching.

So, we're going to see what the Bible says about the Rapture and the timing of it. I believe this is an important teaching that every Christian should know and embrace. Paul says in Titus 2:13 that we should be **"looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus"**. The coming of Christ is our blessed hope!

First, let's start with the basics. What do we mean by the Church?

Colossians 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

The Church is the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-16 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- (12) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, (15) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, (16) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

The Church is a combination of Jews and Gentiles united together by faith in Jesus Christ. There is no Gentile Church, and there is no Jewish Church. Gentiles have been grafted into a Jewish olive tree (Romans 11:16-24). This passage tells us that it was the Gentiles who were brought near to enjoy the blessings of the Jewish covenants, even though the covenants themselves still belong to Israel.

So, according to Ephesians 3:6, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs of the Body and partakers of Christ Jesus (partakers, not taker-overs). A major purpose of the Church Age is to call out a people for God's name (Acts 15:14). Jewish and Gentile believers have come together to form a new body, that of the Church. This calling out of the Gentiles will continue until the full number of Gentiles has come in. (Romans

11:25-27). These verses also say that the calling out of the Gentiles also involves the Jews, as God has put a partial hardening on them until the full number of Gentiles has come in, and then the remnant of surviving Jews at the end of the Tribulation will be saved. Another reason Gentiles are being called out is to provoke the Jews to jealousy, so that more Jews can be saved during the Church Age (Romans 11:11-15).

1 Corinthians 12:13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

This is how we get into this body, by spirit baptism the moment we believe, by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:5 For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

As of this point in time, spirit baptism was yet future, and the Church had not yet begun. So when did spirit baptism start and the Church begin?

Acts 11:15-16 Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning. (16) And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

This is Peter recalling what happened on Pentecost. Pentecost is when the Church, the Body of Christ, actually began. Entrance into this body is only by Spirit Baptism. So then, the church began in Acts 2, and is comprised of all believers from Acts 2 until the Rapture occurs. The Rapture excludes Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints, only Church saints will go to heaven at that time, as the Rapture passages clearly state that only those in Christ (baptized into the Body of Christ) will be included.

Now, let's look at the major Rapture passages:

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. (2) There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. (3) And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too.

This passage doesn't describe the Rapture itself, but does have a hint of it. Jesus says He will come again for His saints and take them back to Heaven with Him (as opposed to coming to the earth with His saints).

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. (15) For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

This is the actual description of the Rapture. The question was asked of Paul: Do believers who have died miss out on the Rapture? Some were thinking that only living believers would experience it. Apparently Paul had taught about the Rapture when he was with them, but had not taught about those who had died.

The term “fallen asleep” is used for the death of believers, never for the death of unbelievers. This is the Biblical view of the death of a believer, that they are only asleep, only temporarily unconscious until they awaken at the Rapture. This verse does not teach soul sleep, but only body sleep. Just as when we sleep, our minds continue functioning, so there is no suspension of spirit and soul activity when a believer dies.

The phrase “caught up” in verse 17 is where we get the word “Rapture”. The Greek word here is *harpazō*, which means caught up, snatched up, seized, take by force. The word implies that the action is quick or forceful. The same word comes to us from the Latin as “rapture”.

In verses 16 and 17, Paul tells us the program of the Rapture, of which there are seven steps:

1. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven into the atmosphere.
2. He will come down with a shout (the Greek word for shout is meant to be like a military command)
3. He will come down with the voice of the archangel. This is assumed to be Michael, but there could be other archangels. We don't know exactly what He will say, but it may be repeating what Christ shouts, much as a military officer might repeat the orders of his commander to his troops.
4. He will come with the sounding of the trumpet of God – the trumpet was traditionally blown as a summons, either to battle or to worship. This triggers the start of the Rapture itself.
5. The dead in Christ will rise first – this is the resurrection of dead believers, only those who are in the body of Christ. The O.T. saints will be resurrected later.
6. Living believers will then be translated into resurrected bodies and caught up (raptured) from the earth and meet with Christ in the air.
7. Finally, we have a guarantee that we will always be with Christ, as promised in John 14.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 **Now this is what I am saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (51) Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – (52) in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (53) For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (54) Now when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will happen, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (55) "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. (57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! (58) So then, dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

This passage focuses on the change that will take place in our bodies at the time of the Rapture. Because of sin, man has become subject to corruption and mortality (Genesis 3). The Bible sees us as having participated in Adam's sin:

Romans 5:12-14 **So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all people because all sinned – (13) for before the law was given, sin was in the world, but there is no accounting for sin when there is no law. (14) Yet death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not sin in the same way that Adam (who is a type of the coming one) transgressed.**

Mankind is living under the sentence of death because of Adam's sin, and is subject to corruption and mortality. The sin nature is in the body as long as it lives. This kind of body cannot enter Heaven, that's why this change has to be made.

The change will happen quickly, in the blinking of an eye. The meaning of this is actually faster than you think; it is like the flash in your eye when you recognize someone.

What will this resurrected body be like? Well, the Bible doesn't say a lot about it. But here are some clues:

1 Corinthians 15:35-49 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" (36) Fool! What you sow will not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed — perhaps of wheat or something else. (38) But God gives it a body just as he planned, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. (39) All flesh is not the same: People have one flesh, animals have another, birds and fish another. (40) And there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. The glory of the heavenly body is one sort and the earthly another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory. (42) It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. (43) It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; (44) it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (45) So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living person"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (46) However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. (47) The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. (48) Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. (49) And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven.

There are six things here that we learn about the resurrected body:

1. The body is incorruptible (42)
2. It is a glorified body (43, also Philippians 3:21)
3. It is a body of resurrection power (43)
4. It is a spiritual body (44-46)
5. It is a heavenly body (47-49)
6. It is an immortal body (53)

Another source of information for this body is in studying Christ's resurrection body. We must be careful here, though. Just because Jesus was able to do these things does not necessarily mean we will be able to do all the same things. He was God, after all. Here are the things we know:

1. Jesus's voice was recognized as the same one that He had before His resurrection (John 20:16)
2. His physical features were somewhat the same, but different enough that he wasn't immediately recognized. (John 20:26-29, 21:7)
3. It was a real body, not just a spirit or phantom body, because He could be touched and hugged (John 20:17,27)
4. He was able to appear and disappear, and go through solid walls, although this may have been because He is God.
5. Jesus's body was able to eat food (Luke 24:41-43)

Ten truths about the Rapture

1. The Rapture is an important doctrine
 - a. We live in a period where people say it doesn't matter, so the doctrine of the rapture is irrelevant
 - b. Most people think the Rapture is not clearly taught in the Bible, so they will not teach it.

- c. Paul would be appalled if he saw how it is being ignored today in the churches
 - d. Other important doctrines are taught in these chapters right alongside the Rapture, for example, sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 5:23
 - e. Paul considers this a critical, crucial doctrine. Paul is speaking to baby Christians here in Thessalonica. This letter was written just a few months after the church was established there.
 - f. This doctrine is important to understand for a believer's sanctification. It teaches us to be ready for His return and working until then.
2. The Rapture is an event that is distinct from the 2nd coming – they teach two different things
- a. How can we be confident of this? The Old Testament teaches two different comings, so this is not unprecedented. Isaiah 53 teaches that the Messiah will suffer and die, and Isaiah 9:6-7 teaches He will rule and reign. How do you harmonize those two passages? There are two comings.
 - b. The 2nd coming of Christ is not described in the same way. The only way to harmonize it is to realize that there are two phases to it.
 - c. The differences are:
 - i. In the Rapture Christ comes in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17), in the bodily appearing He comes to the earth (Zechariah 14:4-5, Acts 1:11).
 - ii. In the Rapture He comes for his own (John 14:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:17), in the 2nd coming He comes with his own (Revelation 19:14, Zechariah 14:5, 1 Thess. 3:13)
 - iii. The Rapture is a blessing, the bodily appearing is a judgment
 - iv. The Rapture only affects believers, but in the bodily appearing both believers and unbelievers will be affected.
 - v. The Rapture will be invisible (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), but the bodily appearing will be visible to all. In the Rapture only believers will see Christ. In the 2nd coming the whole earth will see Him (Revelation 1:7, Matthew 24:30).
 - vi. The Rapture is announced only by an archangel, Christ Himself will descend. The bodily appearing will involve myriads of angels, Jude 14
 - vii. The Rapture is a resurrection, the bodily appearing involves no resurrection
 - viii. The Rapture is a rescue of the Church – 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 4:13-18, the bodily appearing is a rescue of Israel (Matthew 24)
 - ix. He comes to claim His bride (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), in the bodily appearing He comes with His bride (Revelation 19:6-14)
 - x. After the Rapture the Tribulation begins, (2 Thessalonians 2:6-9), after the bodily appearing the Millennial kingdom begins (Revelation 20:1-7)
 - xi. In the Rapture the saved are delivered from Wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9, Revelation 3:10), in the bodily appearing the unsaved experience the Wrath of God (Revelation 6:12-17)
 - xii. No signs precede the Rapture (1 Thess. 5:1-3), signs precede the BA (Luke 21:11-28)
 - xiii. After the Rapture the world is deceived (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12), after the bodily appearing Satan is bound (Revelation 20:1-2)
3. The Rapture will involve the catching up of every living believer to meet the Lord in the air - 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

- a. Critics argue the word rapture is found nowhere in scripture, but neither is the word Trinity found in the Bible, but the concept of the Trinity is revealed in scripture. The word Rapture comes from the Greek word *harpazo* (Catching up). Rapture comes from the Latin, also means caught up.
4. The Rapture will be a reunion (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The Thessalonians were worried that their deceased loved ones in Christ had missed the Rapture (vs.13). Paul explained that the Rapture will begin with those who have died (from the day of Pentecost until the moment the Rapture occurs) will be resurrected first, then those living will be caught up and resurrected, and then all of us will be with the Lord forever. The Rapture is not there to cause fear, but to comfort them about the spiritual state of those who have passed on, and our own future.
5. The Rapture will be a resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-57)
 - a. Resurrection is the opposite of death. Death is separation. The soul is separated from the body. God has designed all humans to live forever. (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Resurrection erases death, the part of us that has been designed to live forever is placed in a glorified body. The Corinthians were denying the reality of the resurrection.
 - b. When do we experience resurrection? At the moment of the Rapture.
 - c. Why do we need to be resurrected? Because this body is falling apart, and will die. The body was cursed in Eden at the fall. This body we have now is not suitable for heaven, because this body is sinful, and heaven is holy, and this body is temporary, and heaven is eternal. In verse 51 deceased believers are resurrected, and then living believers are resurrected.
6. The Rapture will exempt an entire generation from death. They will not experience death. Death is a painful experience, it has a sting. Critics say this is pure fantasy, but that's what the Bible says. It has happened in the Bible to people – Enoch, Elijah, Christ at His ascension, Philip, Paul and John (some of these came back). The idea of people taken to heaven before the end of their lives is a fairly common experience in the Bible. But this time God isn't going to take just one person, but an entire generation of believers.
7. The Rapture will take place instantaneously (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:52) The words "Twinkling of an eye" means it's a split second. Sometimes God does something over a long period of time, but this is an event that will occur instantly.
8. The Rapture is a "mystery", which is a poor translation. The English definition of mystery is totally different than the Bible's definition. We think of a mystery of something that's obscure, something that has to be searched out. The Bible uses the word mystery in a totally different sense. (1 Corinthians 15:51). Mystery in the scripture is a revealing, a totally new disclosure, a revealing of a truth that has never been known before. It's a brand new truth, not anywhere in the Old Testament. The bodily appearing is taught in the Old Testament (Zechariah 14, Job 19) and the New. It's not just the Rapture that's a mystery, but it's the church, the concept, and the period of time, never revealed before in the Old Testament, and only hinted at in the Gospels. Paul's main calling was to unfold the mystery doctrine of the Church, in between Pentecost and the Rapture. In all 13 letters

Paul unfolds every aspect of the Church. He explains how it starts, how it is to operate, what it is made up of, and how it ends with the Rapture. Just as the church began with a miracle at Pentecost, it will end with a miracle at the Rapture.

9. The Rapture is imminent. 1 Corinthians 15:51. Paul expected he would participate in this. Immanency means it could happen at any moment. James 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 1:7, Phillipians 3:20. We're not sitting around waiting for the Antichrist to appear, we're waiting for Christ to appear. All the events that have occurred, like Israel returning to the land, the nations lining up against Israel, are wonderful to study and watch, but that's not what the church's focus is on. We're looking for the coming of Christ. This is an incentive for holy living. Any second we can be whisked away to the Bema seat of Christ to be judged for what we did for Him on earth. If you know Christ isn't going to return for a specific time, we can live our lives however we please, and then clean up our act just before He returns. When you're a teenager, if your parents leave you alone in the house for 7 days and say they will return at a specific time, then what will you do during that time? Party!! But if they leave you alone and tell you they could return at any time, you're going to make sure that you keep that house spotless and behave. It also gives you an incentive to evangelize people, because we don't want anyone to go through the horrors of the Tribulation. The immanency of the Rapture affects the way we live our daily lives.
10. The Rapture is a traditional doctrine that is now being recovered. Critics say the church fathers never taught it, it's not in the creeds or traditions, it's a recent doctrine. Our response is the same as Luther's in the reformation. I have an authority which exceeds all of them, it's taught in the Bible. Why do we not see it in the early church? Augustine and Origen, in the 3rd and 4th century, introduced the spiritualizing method of interpretation, and the church has been living in the shadow of those two men ever since. They argued that prophecy could not be understood literally. So it makes sense we don't find much in the creeds of the church since then, because the literal-grammatical method of interpreting scripture was not used as much after that. However, there were those who clung to the literal understanding, like Ephraim in the 4th century, who in a sermon expresses the pre-tribulational belief in the Rapture. More and more writings are being discovered like this, writings and sermons are being found that express a pre-trib view.

Timing of the Rapture

When will the Rapture take place? Well, there are four views:

Post-tribulation – those who hold to this view believe the Rapture will occur at the end of the Tribulation. In fact, most of them see no difference between the 2nd coming and the Rapture.

This view basically says there is no difference between the Rapture and the 2nd coming, they are one and the same. Most post-tribbers associate the Olivet Discourse with the Church, which we studied in detail the last two lessons. You just cannot put the Church in there! One of the obvious problems with this view, is that if everyone is raptured and resurrected at the end of the Tribulation, who is going to inhabit and propagate the earth during the 1,000 year Kingdom? There have to be people who will live, marry, have children, and die during this period. Then you have the silliness of the idea that Christ would catch us up in the air, take us to heaven, and then turn right around and come back with us to the earth. That just doesn't

make sense, especially when you consider the aspect of the Church being the Bride of Christ. There are events with the Church that need to happen in heaven before Christ returns to earth, like the Judgment Seat, and the Marriage Supper, which we'll talk about a little later.

“Posttribulationism has a veritable logjam at the second coming of Christ. A number of the judgments have to occur then, the rapture will occur then as part of the second coming, the wrath of God must be held off until then, there has to be a time of peace and safety, and the Day of the Lord will begin with those judgments and yet not include any part of the Tribulation!” Charles Ryrie

This view doesn't deal with the Bible literally, and it blurs the distinction between Israel and the Church. There are many other problems with the post-trib view, but we just don't have time to go into it in detail. You should not take it lightly, though. This is the view of the Roman Catholic church and many of the big protestant denominations today. *“Advocates of Posttribulationism who are skilled logicians and exegetes can make their view seem reasonable. At least to those who are not so skilled, or are not inclined to be. Gundry is a good case in point. His book is a labyrinth of exegetical data, assertions, assumptions and dogmatisms.”* Steven L. McAvoy

I have some excellent articles on Posttribulationism if you'd like to read further on it.

Pre-wrath – Church removed before the final quarter of the tribulation, before the wrath of God begins

This is the newest of the theories, and is more accurately called the Three-Quarters rapture view, because the theory is that the rapture will occur about three quarters of the way into the seven-year tribulation. Robert Van Kampen was the inventor of the three-quarters rapture theory in the late 1970s.

Through redefinition of the different terms used in the Bible for the Tribulation period, Van Kampen says that the wrath of God won't start until the final year and three-quarters of the seven-year period and thinks that the rapture occurs right before that time period. To get to this odd conclusion, Van Kampen chops the seventieth week of Daniel into three parts: 1) the beginning of birth pangs (first three and a half years), 2) the great tribulation (first half of the second half of the seven years), 3) the day of the Lord (last half of the second half of the seven years, plus a thirty day period after the second coming).

By arbitrarily compartmentalizing the 70th week of Daniel in this way, Van Kampen prepares the way for his view by saying that the first two periods (first three-quarters of the seven-year period) are the wrath of man and Satan but not God's wrath. By speculating that God's wrath only occurs during the last quarter of the 70th week of Daniel, he concludes that the rapture occurs at that point and keeps the church out of the wrath of God.

But does the Bible make such distinctions with its terms for the Tribulation? It does not! Van Kampen tried to take liberties with the Greek language to show that terms like “tribulation”, “Day of the Lord”, and “wrath” refer to sections of the seven year period, but you don't even need to know Greek to see that in many passages in the Bible they refer to the entire seven year Tribulation period. Van Kampen also tries to show that the seal judgments in Revelation are not really God's wrath, thereby postponing the “wrath” until the final quarter of the Tribulation. But Revelation is very clear that they are from God, it is Jesus Christ Himself that breaks the seals! This is only a couple of problems with this view, and it really has no Biblical support at all.

Mid-tribulation – the Rapture occurs midway through the Tribulation

The midtribulation view is the view that the Lord Jesus is going to come in the air in the middle of the tribulation period – at the three and a half year mark of the seven years. This is really a pretribulation

view in the sense that most people who believe this view believe that you should only call the last three and a half years of the seven-year period the tribulation, because they believe the wrath of God doesn't start until then. And so they say, we really believe in a pretribulational doctrine, too, we just call the last half of that seven-year period the tribulation.

While the Bible is clear the judgments of God during the tribulation are intensified in the last half of the Tribulation, it does not follow that God's wrath is limited to the final three and one-half years. Revelation 11:18 does not say that the wrath of God on earth is only beginning at the mid-point of the tribulation, but that it has come. Revelation 6:16-17 also says the wrath of the Lamb has come. Therefore, to fit midtribulationalism, the seal judgments would have to occur in the second half of the tribulation, which does not fit the chronology of Revelation 6-18 nor that of Matthew 24. The context of all of Revelation 6-18 is that of God's judgment upon a rebellious and unbelieving world. So, it is impossible to limit just the last half of the tribulation as the wrath of God and consider the first half as the wrath of men.

The mid-trib rapture belief is based on Revelation 11:15-19 in which it mentions the seventh trumpet of the judgments of the Book of Revelation. And since Paul stated in 1 Thessalonians 4 that the Lord Jesus was going to come at the last trump, and since we are in the Book of Revelation given a description of seven great trumpet judgments which are to be poured out on the earth, they expect the Lord to come at the time of the seventh of the trumpets, which they place in the middle of the tribulation period.

Now, that, of course, overlooks the fact that we may have, and I think do have, two different series of trumpets in these two passages. In Revelation, we are distinctly told about seven trumpet judgments poured out upon the earth during the tribulation period. The statement in 1 Thessalonians 4 about the last trump says nothing whatsoever about any series of trumpets before that time. And there is no reason, and many commentators agree, there is no reason to equate the two trumpet series.

Both Mid-tribbers and Post-tribbers try to associate this "last trumpet" with the 7th trumpet in Revelation. But that cannot be what is meant by this. John hadn't written Revelation yet, so the Corinthians to whom Paul was writing would have had no idea which trumpet he was talking about. But he does say "The" last trumpet, so he expected the Corinthians to know which trumpet he was talking about. The only trumpets they would have known about would have been those the Old Testament spoke about, especially the Feast of Trumpets.

This last trumpet probably refers to the Feast of Trumpets and the Jewish practice of blowing trumpets at this feast each year. During the ceremony there are a series of short trumpet sounds, concluding with a long trumpet blast, which is called by the Jews, "The Great Last Trumpet". This must be what Paul was referring to; he could be saying this event will fulfill the Feast of Trumpets. The last trumpet is the same as the "trumpet of God" we just read about in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

In Jewish literature, the blowing of trumpets occur for a variety of reasons. In 1 Corinthians 15:52 the trumpet is sounded for resurrection and deliverance, it is the last trumpet for the church. In Revelation 11 the seventh trumpet is of judgment. Also, in Revelation 11 the seventh trumpet is only the last of a series. The true last trumpet is that of Matthew 24:31, which is at the second coming of Christ. Clearly there are some serious problems with the midtribulational viewpoint. Very few people today hold the midtribulational view.

Pre-tribulation – the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation

Most scholars think we can't know for sure about the timing. However, the pre-trib view can be defended

Biblically. Here are seven arguments, which should be considered all together. I believe this view is important because it changes your whole outlook on life. Are we waiting for Christ or are we waiting for the antichrist? This has an enormous impact on how I live my life, it severely impacts how much hope you have. In my experience, none of the other views can answer these seven reasons:

1. The purpose of the Tribulation concerns Israel, rather than the church (Jeremiah 30:7). It is a time of testing for Jacob. God's whole focus is on the nation of Israel. It is part of the 70 weeks of Daniel (Daniel 9:24) – 490 years, final 7 is the tribulation, the entire period is about Israel. Daniel 12:7 – the purpose of the tribulation is to shatter the nation of Israel, to bring them to their knees, and by the end of the period, they will call their Messiah back to the earth. God uses the Church and Israel on a mutually exclusive basis, I believe the church can't be here during the tribulation. God's purpose in this time period is not to cause the church to believe, because the church already believes, it's the nation of Israel that is in unbelief. The focus is totally on Israel.

2. There is an absence to any reference to the church in Revelation chapters 4-22. Revelation 1:19 shows the structure of the book. The reference to "things which he has seen" is Revelation 1, the reference to the "things which are" are in Revelation 2-3. The "reference to the things to come" are in Revelation 4 to the end, in chapter 22. The word "church" appears 19 times in the first two sections. From 4-22 there are no references to the church, except at the very end in chapter 22, when Jesus tells John to preach these things in the churches. The word is not there because the church is not on the earth at this time.
 - a. Read Revelation 13:9 – here this phrase doesn't refer to the church, like it did 7 times with the same phrase before in chapters 2-3 (compare to 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6,13,22).
 - b. Paul says the church consists of both Jews and Gentiles, national distinction is gone. (Ephesians 2, Galatians 3:28). But from Revelation 4 on the distinctions are back again. The 144,000 are Jews, the two witnesses are Jews. In Revelation 12 the dragon is pursuing the nation of Israel. So the whole concept of the church, not just the word, seems to be missing.
 - c. Revelation 1:20 refers to the lampstands being the seven churches. In Revelation 4:5 the lampstands are in heaven before the throne of God. The church is in heaven.
 - d. You can apply this concept to any reference in the Bible to the Tribulation. You will never find the church mentioned in any references to the Tribulation. (Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24 and 25, Ezekiel 38 and 39, and all others). Why not? The only logical explanation is that the church is in heaven at this time.

3. The church is promised an exemption from divine wrath, and the tribulation is a time of major divine wrath. (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9, Romans 5:9, Revelation 3:10)
 - a. Wrath – Revelation 6:17, 11:18, 15:1, 15:7, 16:1, 16:19
 - b. Paid in Full – what Christ said from the cross – all of the wrath of God against me has been satisfied when I accepted Christ's death on my behalf. Jesus bore the wrath of God in my place. So how can the church be present during the period of the expression of the wrath of God? Why do some think we need to be present?
 - c. This is not escapism. Of course we suffer the trials of life, we have problems and suffering. God uses those to conform our character. We are candidates for man's wrath (2 Timothy

3:12), we experience Satan's wrath (Ephesians 6:11-12), we experience the wrath of the world system (John 15:18-19), but we do not experience God's wrath.

- d. Don't we all want to escape the wrath of God? Isn't that the point?
4. Because the Rapture is an imminent event, it must take place before the Tribulation begins.
 - a. The Rapture can occur at any moment, has always been that way. Nothing is holding it back.
 - b. Only the pre-trib view deals adequately with the subject of imminence. If you're a mid-tribber, can Christ return at any moment? No. If you're a post-tribber? No. You get the point.
 5. The doctrine of the Rapture is designed to comfort believers.
 - a. It's not meant to fill the heart of the Christian with fear (John 14:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:18, Titus 2:13)
 - b. Only the pre-trib view adequately handle these texts about comfort
 - c. The idea that we have to endure various judgments, possible martyrdom, etc., before Jesus takes me to heaven, does not bring comfort to me
 6. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 – The antichrist cannot come to power until the church's restraining power is removed.
 - a. Something is holding back the anti-Christ, who is this restrainer?
 - b. The restrainer can only be the Holy Spirit.
 - c. The Holy Spirit is performing a unique ministry of restraint against evil, and He currently indwells Christians forever (John 14:16)
 - d. The event that starts the tribulation is the antichrist enters into a peace treaty with Israel.
 - e. The Spirit must be taken out of the way before antichrist can make this treaty with Israel
 - f. Since the Spirit indwells us, we must be removed before the antichrist can come to power.
 - g. God is using us to fulfill this unique function of holding back the antichrist.
 - h. We should be involved in society to help restrain the spirit of antichrist.
 7. Symbolic parallels mandate a pretrib rapture
 - a. 2 Peter 2:4-9 – God knows how to preserve the godly from wrath, but the ungodly for destruction – the examples of Noah and Lot
 - b. Luke 17:26-30 – Jesus compares the Tribulation period to the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah
 - c. In both events God's people are taken out of the way before destruction comes.
 - d. In the flood, Enoch is taken away before the flood, Noah and his family were preserved in the ark.
 - e. In Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his family are taken out of the way by the angels before the destruction.
 - f. Lot was a carnal Christian – he was a believer but lived a carnal lifestyle. He was saved, and was taken out of the way. Genesis 19:22
 - g. This would seem to reject the partial-rapture view, the view that only spiritual Christians will be taken in the rapture, only the Holy Christians. This view divides the body of Christ, and totally ignores what happened with Lot.

It is my belief, and those of the majority of Bible scholars who take the Bible in its normal-historical sense, that the evidence of scripture is that the Rapture will happen before the Tribulation. There are specific passages in the Bible that teach a pre-Tribulational Rapture, some we mentioned above. Here's one:

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 For people everywhere report how you welcomed us and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (10) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath.

The wrath of God is used in two senses in the Bible. First is His general wrath against sin, as in Romans 1:18. The other is the future wrath of God in the Tribulation (Revelation 6:17, 14:10,19: 15:1,7, 16:1 are only a few). The word is never used for hell or the Lake of Fire. The wrath of God in this passage is future, it is referring to the Tribulation. As believers, we are delivered from the general wrath of God (Romans 5). We are also delivered from the future wrath of God, the wrath of the Tribulation, which is the point of this passage. Hell and the lake of fire are also yet future, but that cannot be what this passage is referring to, because by virtue of our salvation, we believers have already been redeemed from hell. We were delivered the moment we turned to Christ in faith because of His death on the cross. So, this coming wrath that we are to be delivered from could only be the Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 Now on the topic of times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you. (2) For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come in the same way as a thief in the night. (3) Now when they are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape. (4) But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the darkness for the day to overtake you like a thief would. (5) For you all are sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. (6) So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert and sober. (7) For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. (8) But since we are of the day, we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet our hope for salvation. (9) For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (10) He died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him.

Here you can see the context of the term wrath in verse 9 by looking at verse 2 – the subject is the Day of the Lord, a common term for the Tribulation period. In this passage Paul is telling us that believers are not destined to go through the Day of the Lord. This passage follows the chapter 4 description of the Rapture. There he was speaking of the Rapture, and next he is speaking of the Tribulation, which makes sense chronologically.

Notice that the salvation Paul mentions in verse 9 is yet future, it is not the salvation of our souls which we have in Christ right now. This refers to the redemption of the body, which will happen at the Rapture. So, another way of saying verse 9 is that God did not destine us to go through the Tribulation, but we are destined to receive the resurrection of our bodies in the Rapture.

Verses 4-8 show why the Church will not need to fear the coming of the Day of the Lord. The Tribulation is often referred to as a period of darkness and night (Zephaniah 1:14-20, Joel 2:1-2, 10-11) It will come upon the sons of darkness, the unbelievers. But because believers are of the light, the day, the Day of the Lord will not come upon them.

Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept my admonition to endure steadfastly, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

Here Jesus is promising to keep the Church from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world. This period of testing is the Tribulation period described in chapters 6-18 of this same book. Notice this verse does not say the Church is going to be kept safe during the period of testing, but kept from the hour, or the time of the testing itself. This could only happen by the removal of the Church before the Tribulation begins.

Those who believe in a mid-Trib Rapture only see this verse as promising that the Church will be kept safe during the Tribulation. But if that's what it means, then something goes terribly wrong, because throughout the Tribulation, saints are being killed on a massive scale (see Revelation 6, 11 12, 13, 14, 17, 18). I don't think you see believers being kept safe in these chapters. This only makes sense if the Rapture takes the Church out before the Tribulation, and the saints that are killed in these later chapters are people who have accepted Christ during the Tribulation, they could not be Church saints.

I'll mention again another big reason I believe in the pre-trib Rapture, that is the doctrine of imminence. The New Testament makes it clear that the Lord coming for His saints is imminent – it could happen at any moment. If you are a mid-Tribber, it means the Rapture is always at least 3 ½ years away. If you are a post-Tribber, it means the Rapture is always at least 7 years away. Moving the Rapture into the Tribulation destroys the imminency of the event. John 21:20-23 seems to say that Jesus could have come back within the lives of the apostles. In Romans 13:11-12 the redemption of our bodies is seen as near. In James 5:7-9 the coming of Jesus is seen as very close, that he is even at the door. In Revelation 22:20 Jesus says He is coming quickly. So it is obvious that the Rapture could have happened at any time since Jesus ascended into Heaven.

Also, keep in mind that the Rapture does not start the Tribulation, it could happen well before it. The seven year covenant the antichrist signs with Israel is what begins the Tribulation. So, the evidence in the Bible is that the Rapture could happen at any time between this very moment you are reading this and the start of the Tribulation.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

This is the judgment that will take place in heaven after the Rapture of the Church, and it will be a judgment of the believer's works. Here are the key passages about this event:

Romans 14:10-12 But you who eat vegetables only — why do you judge your brother or sister? And you who eat everything — why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (11) For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God." (12) Therefore, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Every believer will stand before Christ and give an account of what we did after we were born again. We will not receive the due punishment for our sins; that was lifted at the cross when we accepted Christ. (Romans 8:1). We are not under God's wrath, Jesus took that on Himself. That does not mean we won't receive discipline, however:

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether

good or evil.

So the basis of this judgment will be the works the believer has done. The believer will be rewarded or not based on what they have done in their life. While we cannot lose our salvation, we do face the possibility that we will be rebuked by Christ for evil we have done and will lose rewards and privileges in the Kingdom. John warned that we should live so that we will “not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” (1 John 2:28) God does discipline us in this life, and that leads us to believe He may discipline us at this time in heaven.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master-builder I laid a foundation, but someone else builds on it. And each one must be careful how he builds. (11) For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, (13) each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done. (14) If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward. (15) If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Notice what the foundation is, it is Christ who is the foundation of anything we might accomplish in this life that is worth anything. This judgment will be based on quality, not quantity of works. Did the believer follow the will of the Lord, and fulfill the ministry for which he was given spiritual gifts? If so, he will be building on the foundation of Christ, it will be revealed by fire and survive the fire, and the believer will receive a reward. Fire only refines and purifies precious stones and metal. If the believer did not follow the will of God, if they did not use the spiritual gifts they were given, then their works of wood, hay, or straw will be burned up in the fire.

Some believers will see all their works burned up, others will see just some burned, and the rest will be refined by the fire. There will certainly be believers in the Kingdom who have nothing to show for their lives here on earth (the ones who are saved, but only as through fire). They will suffer loss, the loss of rewards in the kingdom, perhaps the loss of authority.

This passage is proof against works-based salvation, because you can see clearly in verse 15, that even if a believer has done nothing in this life for the Lord, then he will still be saved, because of him trusting in Christ for his salvation. I believe this judgment will be used to determine the degree of authority the believer will be given in the kingdom.

What will the rewards be? Well, the Bible talks about the rewards in terms of *crowns*, and it speaks of five different kinds:

1. The Incorruptible Crown – this crown is given to those who are strong in self-control, and are able to gain victory in the Christian life, for those who have gained victory over the old sin nature, and have lived a spirit-controlled life.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 Do you not know that all the runners in a stadium compete, but only one receives the prize? So run to win. (25) Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.

2. The Crown of Rejoicing – This crown is given to those who win souls to Jesus Christ, for those who do the work of evangelism.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 For who is our hope or joy or crown to boast of before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not of course you? For you are our glory and joy!

3. The Crown of Righteousness – This crown is given to those who have kept the faith both doctrinally and morally in spite of adverse circumstances, and who long for and live with the constant expectation of the return of Jesus Christ. A life lived that is doctrinally and morally sound will produce a longing for His return.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith! (8) Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day – and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing.

4. The Crown of Life – This crown is given to those who faithfully endure trials and persecution with patient endurance, trusting in the Lord to get them through. It is also given to those who suffer martyrdom for their faith.

James 1:12 Happy is the one who endures testing, because when he has proven to be genuine, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love him.

Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself.

5. The Crown of Glory – this is given to those who faithfully feed the flock of God, it is available to pastors, elders and teachers who feed people with the milk and the meat of the Word of God.

1 Peter 5:2-4 Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you, exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly under God's direction, not for shameful profit but eagerly. (3) And do not lord it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock. (4) Then when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away.

There may be other crowns available, but these are the only ones mentioned in the Bible. At least these five crowns will be available as rewards to be given to those whose works survive the fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ. These crowns apparently will be used to determine the degree of authority each believer will have in the Kingdom. In the eternal state, all believers will be equal. But in the Kingdom, some will have more authority than others, some will have none. There will be degrees of rewards in the Kingdom, as shown in Luke 19:11-27.

The Marriage of the Lamb

The 2nd event that involves the Church after the Rapture is the Marriage of the Lamb. To understand this, you really need to have at least a basic understanding of a Jewish wedding, which have four steps. This is still the practice in many areas.

1. The Arrangement – the father of the groom makes the arrangement with the father of the bride and pays the bride price. It could happen shortly before the wedding, but many times might happen when the bride and groom were very young, even when they were babies. Often the bride and groom did not even meet until the wedding day!
2. The Fetching of the Bride – the groom would come to the home of the bride, in order to “fetch” her to his home. This was often done with the accompaniment of a wedding procession. This could

happen weeks, years, or even decades after the first step.

3. The Marriage Ceremony – only a few were invited to witness this, usually only family members and very close friends, including the two witnesses that were to witness the marriage vows.
4. The Marriage Feast – This feast could last as long as seven days! Many more people were invited to the feast than to the wedding ceremony.

All four of these steps will be followed in the Marriage of the Lamb:

The Arrangement - God the Father made the arrangements for His Son to marry the bride (the Church), and paid the bride price, which in this case was the blood of Christ. This is the background for what Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-27:

Ephesians 5:25-27 **Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her (26) to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, (27) so that he may present the church to himself as glorious — not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless.**

2 Corinthians 11:2 **For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.**

The bride is the Church, who were paid for by the blood of Christ, and the Church is continually being sanctified by the “washing of the water by the word”, as it says in Ephesians 5:26. The Holy Spirit is working in the Church so that the true Church is slowly being conformed to the Word of God, by which it will also be cleansed. This is not water baptism here, but a description of God’s Word in its cleansing ministry. The purpose of this ongoing sanctification is to present it to Christ without any defect or defilement.

The Fetching of the Bride – Just as we said it could be many years between the arrangement and the fetching of the bride, so it has been for us waiting for our bridegroom to come for us, almost 2,000 years. But eventually it will happen, and I bet you can guess which event this fetching will be. That’s right, it is the Rapture of the Church. Jesus will come back (close) to the bride’s home and bring her out to meet Him, and take her to His home to be with Him.

The Marriage Ceremony – This will take place in heaven.

Revelation 19:6-8 **Then I heard what sounded like the voice of a vast throng, like the roar of many waters and like loud crashes of thunder. They were shouting: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All-Powerful, reigns! (7) Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (8) She was permitted to be dressed in bright, clean, fine linen" (for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints).**

The big announcement of the wedding celebration is made, and the bride is ready. The reason the bride is ready is because she is wearing her bridal gown. What does this bridal gown represent? The righteous acts of the saints. This tells us that at the time of this wedding ceremony, the sanctification of the bride will be complete, because all she is wearing are the righteous deeds. The ones present for this ceremony will only be those present in heaven at that time.

This takes place before the 2nd coming, because it occurs later in this chapter. In fact, it is clear that in verses 1-10 the Church is already in heaven. The rest of the chapter is about the 2nd coming, so the church is in heaven before the 2nd coming. This proves that the Rapture and the 2nd coming are two

separate events, else how did the Bride (Church) get there? Also, the church has been in heaven for some time, because she has obviously already been through the Judgment Seat of Christ. So, they are in Heaven during the Tribulation.

The Marriage Feast - Like a typical Jewish wedding, many more will be invited to the feast than were invited to the wedding ceremony. The duration will be for seven days.

Revelation 19:9 Then the angel said to me, "Write the following: Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!" He also said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Notice that the feast is not taking place yet, but the invitations have all been sent out. It also seems to say that the feast will be at a different place than the ceremony. Now we know that Old Testament saints aren't resurrected until after the 2nd coming, along with the Tribulation saints (Daniel 12:2).

John the Baptist makes an interesting statement in John 3:

John 3:27-30 John replied, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. (28) You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but rather, 'I have been sent before him.' (29) The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This then is my joy, and it is complete. (30) He must become more important while I become less important."

Notice what John is saying here. He is saying that he is not the groom, because he is not the Messiah, but he also says he is not the bride – he is not part of the Church. He is something else, he is the “friend of the bridegroom”. John is the last of the Old Testament prophets, so this would seem to indicate that Old Testament saints are “friends of the bridegroom” who will be invited to the wedding feast.

OK, stay with me here. Since the Old Testament saints won't be resurrected until after the 2nd coming, but they are invited to the wedding feast, being friends of the groom, we can assume that the wedding feast will most likely take place on earth after the 2nd coming. In fact, this is the event that probably begins the Millennial Kingdom. The Church will begin co-reigning with her husband, Jesus Christ, at that point. This completes the Marriage of the Lamb.

What happens next? You'll just have to wait until we get to that point in Revelation. Next week we start with Revelation chapter 1. Until then, I leave you with an appropriate salutation – Maranatha! (an Aramaic word for “Lord, come quickly!”, or “Our Lord is coming!”)

Please read these other passages related to the Rapture and resurrection – James 5:7-9, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2-3, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 35-57, Luke 20:35-38, 23:43, Philemon 1:23-24, John 5:28-29, 11:25.

And Paul warns in 2 Timothy 2:18 about those who say the Resurrection has already happened.

Maranatha!