

## WILL THE CHURCH GO INTO THE TRIBULATION

This morning we want to examine the question as to whether or not the church will actually go through the Tribulation. Since I believe in a pre-tribulational rapture, obviously I do not believe that the church will. However, the question relative to the great snatching away of the church has always been an issue of “**when**”, not if. We know without any question that Christ is coming for His bride – the church. Scripture is absolutely clear on that issue. So, the question is when does He come relative to the Tribulation – before, in the middle, or after. It is really a very important question with incredible implications for those who would be left behind if the rapture did not occur before the Tribulation.

It is important at the very outset of this issue to define that there is a difference between persecution and divine wrath. We have seen several times that God has never promised the church an exemption from persecution, suffering, trials, or trouble. To the contrary, [2 Timothy 3:12](#) states that all of those who just “**desire to be godly in Christ Jesus**” will suffer persecution. Just to validate that fact, we know that Christians throughout most parts of the world today are being persecuted and losing their lives in the process, and many times in very horrible and torturous ways. However, divine wrath is different from persecution. Think of it this way. Persecution is what believers experience, but divine wrath is what unbelievers experience. [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#) states that Jesus actually “**delivers us from the wrath to come**”. Divine wrath is the outpouring of God’s wrath on the wicked in an unprecedented way. Today, the sun rises on the just and the unjust alike. He sends the rain to the just and the unjust alike. We simply are not living in a time of divine wrath, but in a time of divine grace. However, if there was ever a book of divine wrath, it has to be the book of Revelation, and in the end, the lost man still shakes his fist at heaven and mocks God. [Revelation 16:8-11](#) says,

**<sup>8</sup>Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. <sup>9</sup>And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. <sup>10</sup>Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. <sup>11</sup>They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.**

So, I want us to understand that the wrath of God is not for the church, but for a wicked, unbelieving, Christ hating world. [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#) declares,

**For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,**  
[Romans 5:9](#) says,

**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.**

The point is simple. As Christians we can fully expect trials, suffering, and persecution, but at the same time know that we will be delivered from the divine wrath of God which is to come upon the whole world. So, if Jesus delivers from the wrath to come and if what [Revelation 6:17](#) says is true contextually that “**the great day of His wrath has come**”, then the only way to escape that wrath is to be delivered from it beforehand. The true church is exempt from God’s “divine wrath”. They are not exempt from persecution. Obviously, there will be people saved during the Tribulation, but the people who are saved

during the Tribulation are not identified as part of the church. Theologically, they are called “tribulation saints”, and unfortunately they will not escape the ensuing events of Revelation just because they have been saved. Will God perhaps provide them with some level of protection? He could, but Scripture does not say that He will, and I think it would be foolish on our part to speculate if He will or will not. To the contrary, they most likely will be martyred for not taking the mark of the beast, as well as suffer and many die through some of the horrific last days judgments.

We know from Scripture that there are two great future eschatological events where God’s divine wrath will be poured out. The first is during the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation, and the second is at the Great White Throne Judgment of God. Now, just to place all of this in perspective, there really is no major debate among the pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation theologians regarding the actual occurrence of these two events. They are all agreed on the fact that these two future events will take place. However, there is a large disagreement that comes as to what time within the seven year Tribulation that God’s divine wrath is actually poured out. If it can be shown that God’s wrath is poured out toward the end of the tribulation, then that would fit the post-tribulation position, and if it can be shown that God’s wrath begins in the middle of the Tribulation, then that fits the mid-tribulation position.

Now, it is important to some attention to this issue. All three positions are generally agreed that there will be a rapture, but it is the “timing” of the rapture that is in question. For instance, those who do not hold the pre-tribulation view divide the various kinds and types of judgments in Revelation into different categories – tribulation, chastisement, man’s wrath, satanic wrath, and finally divine wrath. Once they make those distinctions and categories, it is easy to see how they can place divine wrath beginning at some time other than the start of the Tribulation. Since God will only deliver the church from His divine wrath, it follows that if God’s divine wrath begins at some later date in the 7 year Tribulation that the church will have to go through that earlier period of persecution and suffering.

In a practical sense, what this means is that members of the church will die from persecution and man’s ruthless inhumanity towards other people during that time. This would not be new, but simply a continuation of what many Christians worldwide already experience. The church has never been exempt from these kinds of atrocities. So, the issue squarely revolves around “when” divine wrath begins. For instance, in the post-tribulation view which says that the rapture occurs at the end of the tribulation, some state that it will probably start with the sixth seal judgment, the fourth trumpet judgment, or the first bowl judgment. I have no intention of trying to explain why those particular judgments have been chosen, but rather I just want to point out that somehow they arrive at those conclusions. They would say that divine wrath is associated with what Scripture calls the “**Day of the Lord**” or the “**day of His wrath**”. [Revelation 6:17](#) speaks of that time when it says,

**<sup>17</sup>For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?!”**

So, their conclusion is that the church will be on the earth until that event occurs – which in their mind is chronologically later in the Tribulation time frame. The post-tribulation position is that divine wrath is concentrated towards the end of the Great Tribulation. Therefore, they have the church being raptured and removed from this divine wrath towards the end of the Great Tribulation. In that case, then, the church would not be exempt from earlier persecution and death from the anti-Christ, Satan, or lost men.

Now, the pre-tribulation position contends that the whole of the 7 year period, the entire 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel is a time of divine wrath – not just part of it. I find it difficult theologically to start trying to differentiate between judgment, persecution, and suffering that is clearly being poured out by God. In fact, Christ is the One who is actually loosening the seals that cause the various judgments to begin. He is the only One who has the authority to do so. For instance, look at [Revelation 6:1, 3,5,7,9, and 12](#).

**<sup>1</sup>Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, “Come and see.”**

**<sup>3</sup>When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.”**

**<sup>5</sup>When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.**

**<sup>7</sup>When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.”**

**<sup>9</sup>When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.**

**<sup>12</sup>I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.**

It just seems to be stretching Scripture to say that some of those seals are not His divine wrath being poured out if He in fact is the One who is specifically allowing them to occur. [Revelation 8:1-2](#) is when Jesus opens the seventh seal, and then gives the seven trumpet judgments which are to follow to seven angels. This is Christ doing this.

**<sup>1</sup>When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.**

All of these judgments – seal, trumpet, and bowl – are worldwide, universal, and on all men. There is no distinction made in Scripture that, for instance, some of the trumpet judgments fall on everyone, but just the last several ones are poured out as God’s divine wrath only on the lost. It is difficult to read these Scriptures and come to that conclusion. Every judgment from the first seal to the last bowl judgment comes as part of the divine wrath of God on an unbelieving, Christ-rejecting world. So, the conclusion is that if the church is going to be protected from God’s divine wrath, and that divine wrath begins with the breaking of the first seal judgment, then the church will necessarily have to be removed and raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation.

In other previous instances where God’s wrath was being poured out such as at the universal flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah, the righteous were not protected within that event, but they were removed from it. So, we at least have to give some credence to the fact that God is a consistent God, and that if He removes the righteous in one instance, that He may very well remove them in another. It is the idea of removal from versus protection within. [Revelation 3:10](#) states that the hour of testing will be on the whole world, not just part of it,

**<sup>10</sup>Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**

Now, there has to be an interval of time between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming. In the rapture Christ is coming **FOR** His church, and in the Second Coming, He is coming **WITH** His church. In order to come WITH His church, two previous events need to have happened – the Judgment Seat of Christ where rewards are distributed, and secondly, the Marriage of the Lamb where the Bride is made ready and given to Christ. The Bride cannot come with Christ at the Second Coming if she has not been made ready, and that of necessity requires that there be some relative time period where that can happen. [Revelation 19:6-9, 14](#) speaks of this second event and says,

**<sup>6</sup>And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! <sup>7</sup>Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” <sup>8</sup>And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’”**

**<sup>14</sup>And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.**

One last thing that I want to address is the necessity of those saints who are saved in the Tribulation will go through the Millennium in non-glorified bodies. Please appreciate that during the Millennium that even though there will be a radical reduction of evil and sin, as well as a flourishing of righteousness, sin will still remain during that 1000 years. We know that there will be huge rebellion that closes out the Millennial reign of Christ when Satan will be loosed and draw multitudes of people to himself. It seems hard to fathom, but it will occur. [Revelation 20:7-10](#) says,

**<sup>7</sup>Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup>and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup>They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup>The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

The question this raises that we have to answer is simple. Will lost people go into the Millennium? I think that the answer is **no**. In [Matthew 25:31-46](#) we have the account of Christ judging the nations at the end of the Tribulation. It is the dividing of the sheep from the goats. I.e., He is taking all of the Tribulation saints who are still alive, and then dividing them from all of the wicked that still remain. In [v32-34](#), He gives the kingdom to the sheep that He has placed on His right hand.

**<sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:**

Then in [v41 and 46](#), He commands the goats on His left hand to depart from Him into everlasting punishment.

**<sup>41</sup>“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:**

**<sup>46</sup>And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

So, what this means is that if all of the pre-tribulation saints have been glorified before the Millennium and all of the wicked have been excluded from the kingdom, where do the people in non-glorified bodies come from to actually populate the Millennium? Pre-millennialists agree on the fact that there will be wicked people in the Millennium, but how does that happen? I think the answer is really very simple. Those tribulation saints, those people who were saved during the Tribulation and who survived the Tribulation, they will go into the Millennium in unglorified bodies, and they will have children. They will be the ones populating the earth. However, their children will be just like ours – very capable of sin, and there are no biblical guarantees that they will be saved.

So, the people who enter into the Millennium are glorified saints who have been previously raptured and non-glorified saints who were saved and survived the Tribulation. In accordance with [Revelation 20:4](#), all of those people martyred during the Tribulation will be resurrected to be with Christ and reign during that time.

**<sup>4</sup>And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**

Those in non-glorified bodies procreate and populate the earth, and many of their children will not believe.

The post-millennialists cannot account for the entrance of any people into the Millennium in non-glorified bodies. Why? It is because in their theology all of the Tribulation saints, as well as the church, are raptured right prior to the Second Coming, and then all of the wicked are sent into everlasting judgment. The problem that the post-millennialists have is that if you have the judgment of [Matthew 25:31-46](#) after the Millennium rather than before it, then there will be unrighteous people who enter the Millennium kingdom.