

WILL THE CHURCH GO INTO THE TRIBULATION – Part D

This morning I want to simply identify why the church is different than Israel and because of that reality it means that how God deals with the church will be different than how He deals with Israel in the Tribulation. Israel will go through the Tribulation and the church will not go through the Tribulation. It is that simple and I hope that is an encouragement to you. The problem that we have seen in the last two messages is simply that of the three major views on Eschatology that two of them state that Israel and the church are one, what they call “spiritual Israel”, and therefore the church will go through the Tribulation with Israel. I want to continue to refute that position this morning.

As I have studied for this part of the series on whether or not the church will go through the seven years of Tribulation, I have always appreciated that the Scriptures offer a means of escape from those unimaginable seven years. [Luke 21:36](#), speaking of the this time period, says,

Lk 21:36 (NKJV) Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Obviously, the way of escape is through faith in Jesus Christ. The unfortunate reality, however, is that most people will not escape and will actually refuse His offer of salvation. [Matthew 7:14](#) is very clear about this when it says,

Mt 7:14 (NKJV) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

I think it is important to appreciate that when most people speak of the church, that they are speaking about a building, a place. People may say, “I go to church on Sunday”, which simply means that they go to a place, to a building where people meet for a church service. In reality, however, the church is not a building. It is a specific group of people who have been saved. In the true church, everyone is saved, and every true believer will miss the Tribulation. In a sense, the true church is actually invisible because we do not always know which people are truly saved and which ones who claim to be saved actually are not saved at all. In the church building on any Sunday morning, many of the people may not be saved. There are sheep and there are goats that are there, and there are wheat and there are tares that are there, and both the goats and the tares will miss the rapture and go into the Tribulation.

People do not like to talk about it too much, but there are always consequences for the choices that we make – either good or bad. I can assure you that God will NOT force you to believe in Him and to entrust your life to Him. Stated another way, there will be consequences for unbelief that cannot be later reversed. Unless you have genuinely been born again and your life testifies to that reality, then you are not ready for the rapture. No matter how good of a life that you may have lived, a good life has no eternal weight with God simply because we are the ones who have defined the word “good”. Here is what we know with absolute certainty, and that is that Jesus Christ is coming for His church in the rapture, and once that event occurs, all of those who are left behind do not have one single thing to which they can look forward. You have to be ready for that so that you can escape. Those seven years of Tribulation will be a time like no other, and it is very unlikely that most people will even survive it.

Now, in order to have a fundamental grasp of the events of the Tribulation and whether or not the church will actually be raptured, we must understand the **nature** of the church itself. I.e., we have to understand

the make-up and purpose of the church as distinct from the make-up and purpose of Israel. The Post-millennial view assumes, and without any substantial proof, that the word “**church**” is an all-inclusive term synonymous with “**Israel, the elect**”, and “**the saints**”. I.e., anytime in the prophetic timetable that you see any of these terms, the Post-millennial view sees them as synonymous with the other three. So what this view says is that any saint from the past, and anyone who will be saved in the Tribulation / Great Tribulation is a part of the church. I certainly agree that people were true believers in the Old Testament and that people will be saved in the Tribulation, but the question to resolve, and it is a very significant question with considerable implications, is whether or not Israel, Old Testament saints, tribulations saints, and even millennial saints are a part of the church. The Post-millennial view maintains and affirms that all saints of all ages comprise the church. On the other hand, the Pre-millennial position, which I certainly hold, states that the church is only comprised of those saints who were saved since the Day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#) and which ends at the rapture PRIOR to the beginning of the seven year Tribulation period.

Please keep in mind that nowhere does Scripture ever specifically talk about the true church as existing during the Tribulation period. For instance, if you read through [Revelation 6-19](#), you will not find one single reference to the church as an entity existing at that time – not one. Obviously people will be saved during the Tribulation, as well as Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. However, the church itself as a distinct New Testament entity is not even mentioned in the historical prophecy of the Tribulation as provided in [Revelation](#). The church is **NEVER** mentioned as existing during that period – whether in the New Testament or in the Old Testament. So, one would assume that if the church was still a major player in this prophetic time period, that they would at least be given some identification and some purpose for what they were to be doing during that time, and how their redemptive role would be executed. We know about the 144,000 Jews that are set apart, and about the angels flying around the earth proclaiming the gospel, and about the two witnesses killed and resurrected – but there is not one single word or reference to the church.

So, from a very simplistic theological position, the reason the church is not even mentioned is more than evident. It is because the church is not on the earth, but is in heaven experiencing both the Judgment Seat of Christ and its marriage to the Lamb. Obviously, those intervening events justify the absence of the church being mentioned in [Revelation 6-19](#), and give credence to the actual rapture of the church from the earth prior to the unfolding of the seal judgments.

We know that people will be saved during the Tribulation and that Israel will be saved at the end of the Tribulation. [Revelation 6:9-11](#) says,

Rev 6:9 (NKJV) 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. ¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed* as they were, was completed.

[Romans 11:26](#) declares about Israel,

Ro 11:26 (NKJV) **And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "*The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;***

So, in our biblical terminology, at the point of their salvation, these people mentioned here can legitimately be called “**saints**”. However, if the church and Israel are the same, and we know for sure that Israel will go through the Tribulation and be saved at the end, then we cannot be raptured until they are raptured. If Israel and the Tribulation saints are a part of the body of Christ, then the body **MUST** stay together, and therefore all of us will go through the Tribulation together with Israel and the martyred saints. If Israel is actually a part of the bride of Christ, which is the church, then we will have to wait on them – which means that we will go through the Tribulation. Christ is not going to receive a partial, incomplete bride. [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#) says,

1Th 4:16 (NKJV) **16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.**

So here is the sequence of events. Those who have died “**in Christ will rise first**”, and then those who are alive in Christ will “**be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**”. The “**them**” is clearly all of the believers who have died since Pentecost. If I can use this term simply to make the point, the bride of Christ will not be “dismembered” and come to Christ in various parts and at different times. Everyone in the church – both those who have died and those are alive, “**will be caught up together**”. The point is that if we are all one and the same, then of necessity the church simply will have to go through the Tribulation in order to wait on the other members of the body of Christ to be included. Then, to make it even more complicated, if we are all the same and all are a part of the church, then what about those people who will saved during the Millennium? Are they a part of the bride of Christ? How do they fit into the picture? From that point, your theology can become an absolute nightmare. On the other hand, however, if the church is distinct and different, then the issues are easily resolved, and each entity can have a separate ending – just as each entity had a separate beginning.

Now, I certainly believe that the correct doctrinal position supported by Scripture is that the church and Israel, as well as the Tribulation saints and the Millennial saints, are all different and separate from one another with distinct roles and purposes. It should be obvious that the role of Israel and the role of the church are similar in some respects, yet very distinct. We understand that both were provided as channels of redemption to the world, but how they actually functioned in that redemptive role is uniquely different. Israel had a temple, was only a national presence in Jerusalem, they had priests and sacrifices, and worst of all they **rejected** the Messiah. The church has only a local presence with pastors and elders and deacons, it makes no animal sacrifices, but it has **received** the Messiah.

In my mind, it is very unbiblical and incredibly demeaning to Christ to say that those who have totally rejected Him and His work are one and the same with those who have fully trusted Him. One is national and called the nation, and the other is universal and called the church. One is married to Jehovah and is described as a harlot and an adulteress, and the other is described as a bride and a chaste and pure virgin waiting to be married to Christ. In fact, the concept of the church is not even mentioned or identified in the Old Testament and is referred to in the New Testament in [Ephesians 3](#) as being an actual “**mystery**”

to Israel. [Colossians 1:26-27](#) provides the central feature of the mystery as that of being indwelt by Christ Himself.

Col 1:26 (NKJV) **the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.** ²⁷ **To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

From [Colossians 1:24](#) we know that Paul is speaking about the church in this passage when he says,

Col 1:24 (NKJV) **I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,**

There is absolutely nothing like this in the Old Testament – nothing. Then, to make the point even more apparent, there is nothing like this in the Millennium – this body, this indwelling, this living within. In the Millennium, the glory of Christ will be visible to all – lost or saved, and Scripture identifies that during that time that He will dwell with men, but it never says that He will dwell in men. He will be visible and He will be physically present on the earth, but not as He now is in heaven. As believers today, Christ dwells in you through the Holy Spirit, but His glory is veiled, it is not seen. However, in the Millennium, His glory will be completely unveiled and manifested for all to see, but what we know as the “indwelling” of the Holy Spirit will be conspicuously absent. Why? It is because it is solely reserved for the body of Christ, for the church. This is a very important distinction to understand simply because Israel is always seen as a nation, as a people among whom God dwelt. We see this in the temple proper and with the entrance of the Shekinah glory of God that came into the temple and dwelt in the Holy of Holies, but that glory, that indwelling was never in the Old Testament saints as it is with those who are members of the church. In the Old Testament God dwelt among His people and would come upon them at specific times, but in the New Testament Christ dwells in His people.

So, the point is simple – **the church is NOT Israel, and Israel is NOT the church.** The church is not “spiritual Israel”. They are not one and the same and [Romans 9-11](#) makes those points very clear. So, it should be obvious that how God deals with either one is sovereignly and distinctly different. It is by recognizing these differences that we are greatly helped in seeing that the church will not go through the Tribulation as Israel will. They are both uniquely different and have very different functions and therefore God will deal with both of them in a different way. In our case, it means that we will not go through the time of “**Jacob’s Trouble**” and will be spared the judgment and wrath of God in the Tribulation. I genuinely hope this is a great encouragement to your life. It should be and you should be extremely grateful for this reality.

So, here is what we have seen. Because the church and Israel are completely different from one another, they both have different timings for their ending and different kinds of ending. Because of the rapture, the church will be in heaven with Christ, and Israel, who is not saved at the time of the rapture, will go through the Tribulation and be saved when they see Christ at the Second Coming. The beauty of all of this for you is that Christ has made everything possible for you to be saved so that you can escape those things that are coming on the world.