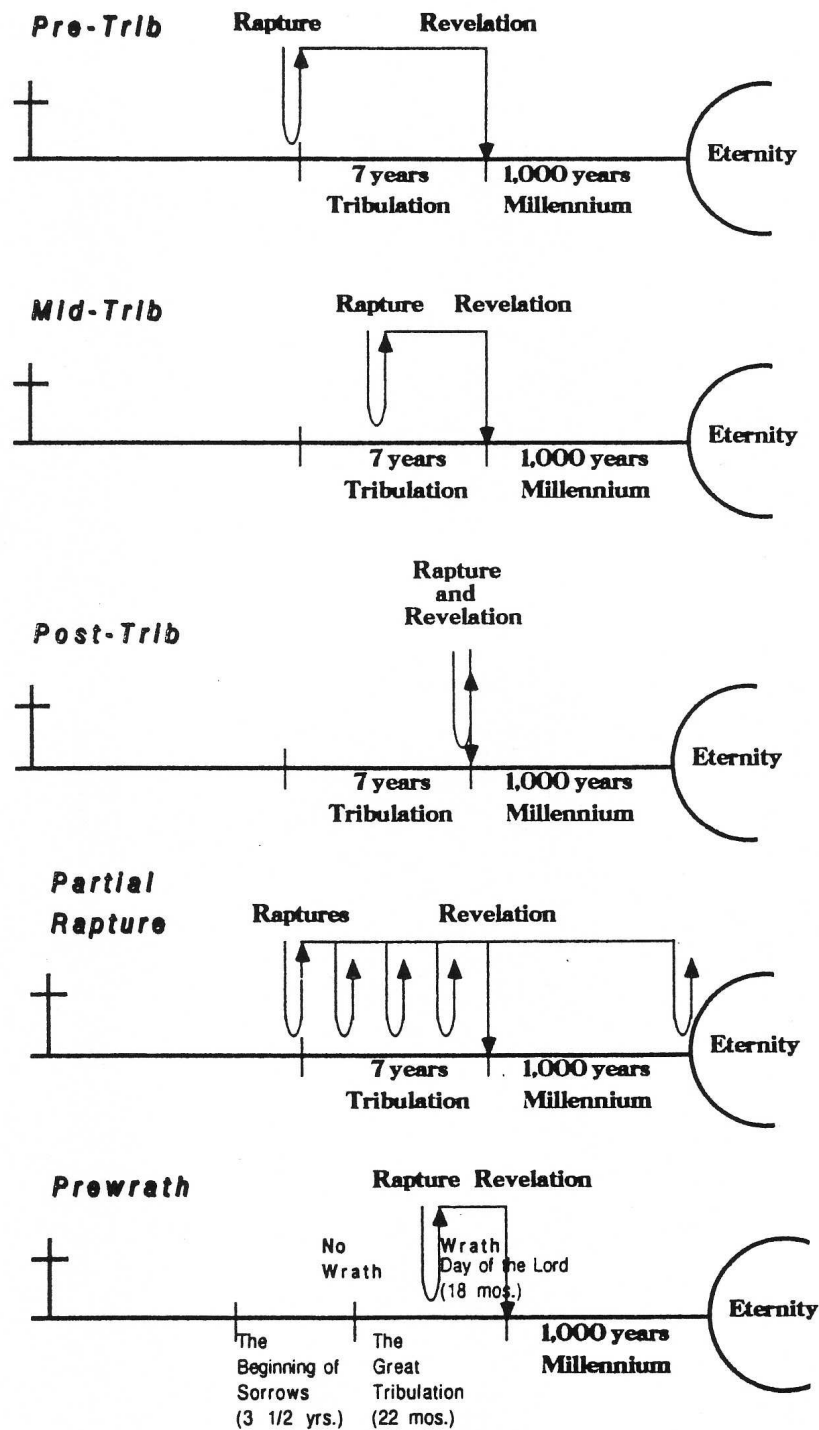


A STUDY OF THE RAPTURE

PART I: A SURVEY OF THE VIEWS

OVERVIEW



MEANING OF THE TERM "RAPTURE"

- A. The term "rapture" does not occur in the Bible, but is a word used to describe the coming of Christ to resurrect believers.
- B. The concept of the "rapture" is certainly in the Bible. For example, 1 Thess 4:17 states "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, . . ."
- caught up* = ἀρπαγησόμεθα [from verb root ἀρπάζω, meaning "snatch, seize or take away"; BAG 109]
- C. The Latin translation of this verse used the term *rapere*, from which we derive our English word "rapture."

SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES

- A. Key Passages
1. 1 Thess 4:13-18
 2. 1 Cor 15:50-57
- B. Secondary Passages
1. John 14:1-3
 2. Rev 3:10
 3. 1 Thess 1:9-10
 4. 1 Thess 5:9
 5. Phil 3:20-21
- C. Verses sometimes brought into the discussion: Matt 24:40-42; Rom 8:19; 1 Cor 1:7-8; Phil 3:11; 1 Thess 2:19; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1,6-8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1 Pet 1:7,13; 1 Jn 2:28-3:2; Jude 21; Rev 2:25; 4:1-2; and 12:5.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

A. Background

Prior to the 1800's, there is very little discussion about the rapture. In general, the various subjects of systematic theology have received different emphases at different periods in church history, with the doctrine of eschatology coming under close investigation only in the past few centuries. Up to the 1800's, the passages on the rapture were considered to be part of the Second Coming, and there was little thought given to distinguishing the "coming of Christ" into two or more phases. The reestablishment of the *futurist* viewpoint in the early 1800's, however, set the stage for a complete review and reassessment of eschatology.¹ In this new climate, John

¹Keep in mind that up until the 1800's, even many premillennialists took a *historicist* view of prophetic sections of the Bible (e.g., Daniel and Rev 4-19), i.e., they attempted to see the fulfillment of these passages in the historical past. It was not until about 1826 that the more literal interpretation method of *futurism* began to overtake the *historicist* view. LeRoy Froom says,

"Samuel R. Maitland, in his treatise of 1826, challenged the generally received year-day principle, as applied to the 1260 days of Daniel and the Apocalypse. In this he assailed the whole Protestant application of the symbols of the little horn and the beast of the Revelation—avowing that it was yet to be fulfilled in a personal and openly infidel Antichrist, with the days of his career as literal days" (*The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 vols. [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1946], 3:281).

Nelson Darby (1800–1882) began to study and teach on prophecy. Although he was not necessarily the first person to suggest a two-part coming, John Nelson Darby certainly became famous for popularizing the view of a pretribulational rapture.²

B. The Formative Period from 1878–1909

1. From the 1870s until 1900, a series of annual Bible conferences were held known as the Niagara Bible Conferences. Significant attention was given to the study of biblical prophecy.
2. Discussions arose about "imminency." How could Christ's coming be imminent (to happen at any time) if there were signs to precede it? Three views emerged:

- a. Position advocated by A. J. Gordon (historicist view)

Christ's coming is not imminent for all (there is a period of apostasy), but only for the final generation which knew that the long interval was drawing to a close.

- b. Any Generation View

The signs could be fulfilled, and He could return within the lifetime of any individual generation of believers.

- c. Any Moment View (pretribulationists)

The term "imminent" requires the coming of Christ for His saints as "possible any hour," and hence before the signs that precede the Second Coming.³

²The technical origin of the pretrib rapture is not certain. F. F. Bruce suggests, "What did he [Darby] get it? The reviewer's answer would be that it was in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy. . . ." ("Review of *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*," *Evangelical Quarterly* 47 [Jan–Mar 1975]: 58).

The charge by some posttribulationists (in a malicious attempt to discredit pretribulationism) that Darby got the doctrine from a Margaret Macdonald is certainly false. See Thomas D. Ice, "Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulational Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:586 (Apr–Jun 1990): 155-168.

³The pretribulationist view of imminency is reflected in the words of A.T. Pierson who wrote: "The imminence of the Lord's coming is destroyed the moment you locate between the first and second coming . . . any period of time whatsoever that is a definite period, whether 10, 100, or 1,000 years. I cannot look for a thing as an imminent event which I know is not going to take place for 10 years to come, . . ." ("The Coming of the Lord—the Practical Center of the Bible," *Addresses in the Second Coming of the Lord Delivered at the Prophetic Conference, Allegheny, Pa., December 3-6, 1895*, ed. Joseph Kyle and William S. Miller [Pittsburgh: W. W. Waters, n.d.], 104).

3. Controversy in the Niagara Ranks

- a. By the late 1890s, the pretribulational position became the dominant view.

Advocates included Presbyterian minister James H. Brookes (1830–1897), A.T. Pierson, A. C. Gaebelein, and C. I. Scofield. Brookes helped found the Niagara Conferences and served as conference president.

- b. Posttribulational Rebuttal: Robert Cameron and Nathaniel West.

4. Post Niagara Developments

- a. A. C. Gaebelein became editor of *Our Hope* periodical (advocated pretrib).

- b. Sea Cliff Bible Conference

As the Niagara conferences died out, the Sea Cliff Bible Conference was started in 1901, and included A. C. Gaebelein and C. I. Scofield. In contrast to the Niagara conferences which were broadly premillennial, the Sea Cliff conferences promoted the pretribulational rapture and dispensationalism (with an emphasis on nondenominationalism).

- c. The Scofield Reference Bible (1909) — advocated the pretrib position

C. Popularity and Predominance of Pretribulationism (1909–1952)

1. Reasons

- a. Popularity of the Scofield Reference Bible

- b. Influence of certain individuals

- (1) A. C. Gaebelein
- (2) C. I. Scofield
- (3) James M. Gray (Moody Bible Institute)
- (4) R. A. Torrey (BIOLA)
- (5) H. A. Ironside (Moody Memorial Church)
- (6) Lewis Sperry Chafer (Dallas Theological Seminary)

2. Change of View Regarding Terms for Christ's Coming⁴

parousia (παρουσία) = coming, advent, arrival

epiphaneia (ἐπιφάνεια) = an appearing

apokalupsis (ἀποκάλυψις) = revelation, unveiling

- a. Until mid-1940s, many pretrib premillennialists held a strong distinction between these terms.

⁴For a helpful discussion concerning the meaning and usage of these terms, see Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From the Hour* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Pub. Co., 1991), 19-24.

- b. Charles Feinberg and John F. Walvoord, however, argued that these were not technical terms for distinct phases of the Lord's return, but were dependent on the context as to which aspect of His coming they might be referring.⁵
 - c. Implication: *parousia* may refer at times to the Rapture and at other times to the Second Coming. The meaning must be determined by context.
3. Introduction of Mid-trib View
- a. Those who were pretribulationists held the view that the rapture occurred on or prior to the beginning of Daniel's 70th "week" (i.e., 7 years prior to the Second Coming).
 - b. In 1941, Norman B. Harrison introduced the view that the rapture occurred 3 1/2 years prior to the Second Coming.⁶
- Clarification: For Harrison, this view was not really "Mid-Trib," for he held that the Great Tribulation and the time of God's wrath (i.e., Rev 4–19) were in the 2nd half of Daniel's 70th Week.

D. Challenge to Pretribulationism: 1952 to Present

1. 1952 – George E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*
 - a. Saw the "kingdom" in this present age (not as a postponed kingdom)
 - b. Challenged the view of the "church." Previous rapture discussion had dealt with the topic of whether the "church" would go through the tribulation. Ladd viewed the "church" as the *spiritual Israel* (lessened the distinction).
2. 1953 – Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*

Argued for a sharp distinction between Israel and the "church." Dr. John Walvoord did the same through a series of articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (the official journal of Dallas Seminary).
3. 1956 – George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*

Challenged the popular teaching of a pretribulationist rapture by writing a serious defense of the posttribulationist rapture (this was a popular level book, but Ladd himself was an informed scholar which gave his view serious attention).
4. 1957 – John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (1st ed.)

Walvoord incorporated material from his earlier journal articles defending the pretribulationist rapture, and responded to Ladd's challenge. Walvoord relied heavily on the issue of "imminency."
5. 1962 – J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*

⁵See Charles Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1936), 205-08; and John F. Walvoord, "New Testament Words for the Lord's Coming," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101 (Jul–Sep 1944): 283-89.

⁶Norman B. Harrison, *The End: Rethinking the Revelation* (Minneapolis: The Harrison Service, 1941).

Payne tried to argue for the posttribulational view of the rapture, but in contrast to Ladd he held that the Second Coming was a single united event which was *imminent* (possible any moment). He also took a historicist position on Daniel's 70th "week."

6. 1963 – J. Oliver Buswell, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*

In his systematic theology, Buswell (once president of Wheaton College and later professor at Covenant Theological Seminary) challenged the pretrib view by arguing that the trumpet of the rapture was the same as the 7th trumpet of Revelation. For Buswell, the rapture was simultaneous with the sounding of the 7th trumpet and the resurrection of the two witnesses of Rev 11. Since Buswell located the 7th trumpet at the mid-point of Daniel's 70th week, his position was essentially a Mid-tribulationist view. [Other Mid-tribs often place all the judgments in the final 3 1/2 years; Buswell, in contrast, would see the Great Tribulation as beginning with the bowl judgments (note Rev 11:18), with the seal judgments and first six trumpets in the first half of Daniel's 70th week].

7. 1970 – Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*

Lindsey himself made no contribution to the rapture debate, but is significant for writing a popular level book that was bought and read by millions. In this, he took the pretrib and premillennial positions. The great popularity of his book probably did more than any book since the *Scofield Reference Bible* to spread the pretrib view. Lindsey subsequently wrote *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* in 1983.

8. 1973 – Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*

Gundry made a serious defense of the posttribulational rapture, though he claimed to be a dispensationalist. He downplayed the issue of imminency, and attempted to argue from an exegesis of the text. Gundry's work was very persuasive, and probably represented the best defense of posttribulationism to date.

9. 1976 – John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*

This was an attempt to argue for the pretrib position, but primarily to give a response to the challenge of Gundry.

10. 1990 – Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*

Rosenthal abandoned the pretribulational view of the rapture and set forth a case that the rapture occurs about 2/3 of the way through Daniel's 70th "week" (the church would go through Satan's wrath, but not experience the pouring out of God's wrath).

11. 1991 – Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From the Hour*

This was a 4th edition of a work first published in 1956. Stanton argues for the pretribulational rapture (probably the best in print), and carefully analyzes all the relevant verses and arguments. This edition included a rebuttal to Rosenthal's work.

DISCUSSION OF THE VIEWS

A Message to my Students

I want to be very humble in approaching an evaluation of the subject of the rapture. I want all of you, my students, to know that I have spent many hours studying this topic, but I myself have great difficulty in being able to say "I am positive that I am right." There are many things that I am still uncertain about, and questions I have for each of the views. Although I may "lean" in a certain direction, I sincerely do not want to come across as dogmatic in any way. I feel that I have a long way to go in my own understanding and will therefore attempt to remain open and deal with the data as objectively as I can. Although I feel very certain about the issue of the millennium (I am a convinced premillennialist), I cannot speak with as much certainty in regard to the rapture. I hope that we will all be open, loving, accepting, and humble on this matter.

Note: Since the two primary views (pretrib and posttrib) will be analyzed in Parts II and III of *Appendix C*, I will only give a brief introduction to them at this point.

A. The Pretrib View

1. Advocates: A. C. Gaebelain, C.I. Scofield, H. A. Ironside, John F. Walvoord, Charles Feinberg, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles C. Ryrie, Hal Lindsey, Thomas Ice, Tim LaHaye, Gerald B. Stanton (and many others)
2. Description
This view advocates that the coming of Christ is in two distinct phases. He will first come "for the church" at the beginning (or before) of Daniel's 70th "week," and later "with the church" at the glorious Second Coming. The rapture is held to be in the first phase.
3. Primary Arguments
 - a. The issue of "imminency" — Christ could come for us at any moment (no necessary preceding signs).
 - b. The promise to be delivered from the "wrath" of God (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10)
 - c. Various theological arguments which attempt to reconcile all the data with what we know will happen at the Second Coming.

B. The Partial Rapture View

1. Advocates: Ray Brubaker, R. Govett, G. H. Lang, Witness Lee, D. M. Panton, G. H. Pember, J. A. Seiss, Austin Sparks and Thomas Waugh
2. Description
This view focuses more on the *people* of the rapture rather than the time, for according to this view there will be several raptures. Only saints who are worthy will be raptured before the wrath of God is poured out; those who have not been faithful will remain on the earth to endure the tribulation.

They anticipate a rapture at the beginning of Daniel's 70th week (as do Pre-tribs), but subsequent raptures during this 7 year period. The first will be for the spiritually mature saints. Then at various times during the seven years of the tribulation other raptures will

occur to remove saints who were unprepared at the beginning of the tribulation but who have shown themselves worthy in the meantime.

3. Primary Arguments

- a. The warnings in Matt 24:36-44 (cf. Lk 21:36) to be "ready" and "on the alert" for the Lord's coming, for some will be taken and some will be left (Mt 24:40-41).

Response: This is a misinterpretation of these verses. Yes, all are admonished to be "alert," but the ones taken away are not taken in rapture but in judgment (this will be shown later in the session on posttribulationism).

- b. Christ will return only for "those who eagerly await Him" (Heb 9:28)

Response: This appearance of Christ is looking at the Second Coming (not a rapture prior to the Second Coming). There may be an allusion to special reward for "those who eagerly await Him," but nothing in the text suggests that this is the rapture itself. In the context of the book of Hebrews, this could be a special inheritance and reward in the kingdom (note Heb 10:35-36; Heb 1:14 looks at an eschatological salvation).

- c. Not all Christians will be raptured simultaneously, since 1 Cor 15:23 states that believers will be resurrected "each in his own order."

Response: The rest of the verse clarifies that Paul is not talking about multiple raptures within Daniel's 70th week, but the contrast between the resurrection of Christ (1st) which precedes any other resurrection. The church will be resurrected at "His coming." [Note 15:22 which states that "all shall be made alive"].

C. The Mid-trib View

In general, this view takes the rapture as occurring in the middle of Daniel's 70th week. But, this view takes more than one form:

1. The judgments of Rev—seals, trumpets and bowls—occur in the last 3 1/2 year period (though Archer allows for some seal judgments before this).

- a. Advocates: Norman B. Harrison and Gleason L. Archer, Jr.

Note: Archer regards the first 3 1/2 years as distinct from the last 3 1/2 years. The first he calls the period of the wrath of man, and the second half he calls the period of the wrath of God. The first is a "lesser tribulation" during which the Antichrist is increasing in power, while the second is the Great Tribulation (*The Rapture*, 139). However, on page 136, he states that the church is raptured sometime between the opening of the fifth seal and the opening of the sixth seal.

- b. In essence, Harrison and Archer regard the rapture as being pretribulation, i.e., before the tribulation. But they limit the tribulation to the final 3 1/2 years.

2. Only the bowl judgments of Rev occur in the last 3 1/2 year period

- a. Advocates: J. Oliver Buswell
- b. Description
The sounding of the 7th trumpet in Rev is the same as the trumpet of the rapture (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52). Also, the resurrection of the two witnesses in Rev 11 is simultaneous with the rapture of the church. He locates the 7th trumpet (containing the bowls) at the middle of Daniel's 70th week. Based on Rev 11:18, this is when the time of wrath begins.

D. The Pre-wrath Rapture View

1. Advocates: Marvin Rosenthal, *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church* (1990)
Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign* (1992)
2. Description

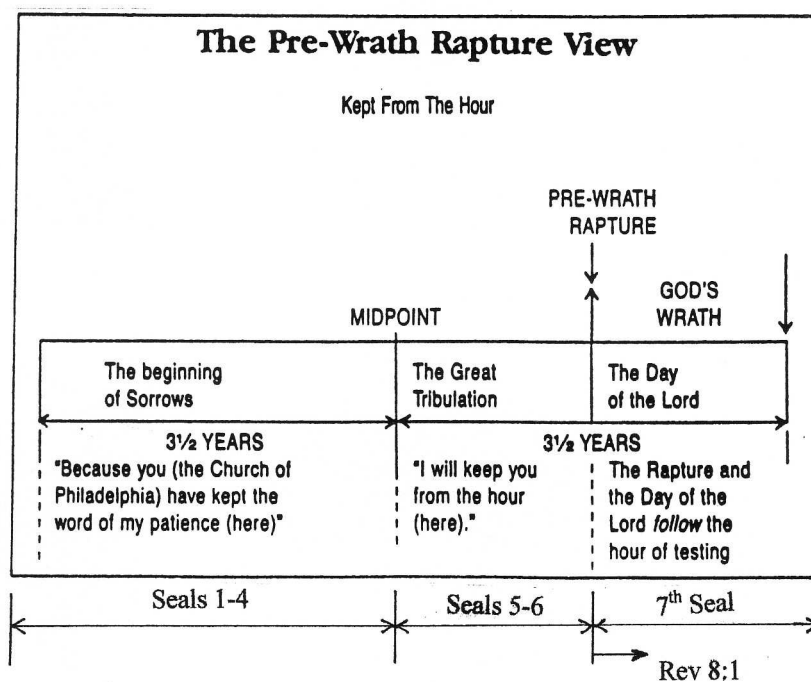


Chart is adapted from that provided by Dr. Robert P. Lightner in his book, *The Last Days Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding the Different Views of Prophecy* (p 69).

The Prewrath Rapture View asserts that the rapture will occur 21 months before the Second Coming, so that the church will be on earth throughout most of Daniel's 70th week and for some of the judgments of Revelation. Basically, the church will experience tribulation, but not the wrath of God.

3. Primary Arguments
 - a. The "hour of testing" in Rev 3:10 (from which the church at Philadelphia is to be kept) is not the "Great Tribulation" but instead the "Day of the Lord." For him, the "Great Tribulation" is the 3rd quarter of Daniel's 70th week, and the "Day of the Lord" is the last quarter of the week. Hence, the "Great Tribulation" and the "Day of the Lord" are distinct periods. Christians are promised protection during the time of man's wrath, and will be raptured prior to the time of God's wrath.

Response: His view of the "Day of the Lord" is in conflict with 2 Thess 2, which specifies that the "Day of the Lord" will begin at the mid-point of Daniel's 70th week (since the Antichrist has 3 1/2 years in power).

- b. The first six seal judgments of Revelation 6 do not represent the wrath of God. Divine wrath begins only with the 7th Seal (the trumpet judgments) introduced by cataclysmic disturbances.

Response: It is difficult to imagine that the execution of 25% of the earth's population (Rev 6:8) and the levelling of the earth's mountains (Rev 6:14) cannot be described as the wrath of God. Even more significant is the fact that these judgments are twice specifically referred to as the wrath of the Father and Jesus Christ (Rev 6:16-17).

For further refutation, see:

- 1) Gerald B. Stanton, "A Review of *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (Jan–Mar 1991): 90-111.
- 2) John A. McLean, "Another Look at Rosenthal's 'Pre-Wrath Rapture,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (Oct–Dec 1991): 387-98.
- 3) Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church; Is It Biblical?* Langhorne, PA: BF Press, 1991.

E. The Posttribulational View (see Part II for a detailed analysis)

1. Advocates: J. Barton Payne, George E. Ladd, Robert H. Gundry, Douglas J. Moo
2. Description
Holds that the rapture of the church happens at the Second Coming of Christ. Hence, the church will go through the entire time of tribulation of Daniel's 70th week.

PART II: THE POSTTRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE EXAMINED

VARIATIONS OF POSTTRIBULATIONISM

Most pretribulationists tend to be dispensationalists, and hence they come from a common theological commitment. The same cannot be said of posttribulationists.

1. Amillennial Posttribulationism (so Hoekema)
2. Covenant Premillennial Posttribulationism (so Ladd)
3. Dispensational Posttribulationism (so Gundry)
4. Posttribulationism of J. Barton Payne (attempts to maintain imminency)

Implication: It is difficult to interact with posttribulationists, because there is a great deal of diversity in their theological foundations. It makes a great deal of difference in discussing passages as to whether one is premillennial or amillennial, whether one is a dispensationalist or not a dispensationalist (especially ones outlook on Israel and the New Testament expectations for Israel as a nation).

POSTTRIBULATIONAL ARGUMENTS

- A. The vocabulary of Christ's return favors the posttribulational view.

1. Vocabulary
 - a. ἀποκάλυψις (revelation, disclosure, unveiling)
 - b. ἐπιφανεία (appearing, appearance)
 - c. παρουσία (presence, coming)

 2. Example of παρουσία (*coming, arrival, presence*)
 - a. The term παρουσία is clearly used of the Second Coming itself after the Tribulation (Mt 24:30).
 - b. All agree that the rapture is described in 1 Thess 4:13-18, but note vs. 15:

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming (παρουσίαν) of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep."
 - c. In order for pretribulationists to maintain their view, they have to admit that terms like παρουσία are used in two different ways, sometimes of the Second Coming and sometimes of an earlier phase for the rapture.
 - d. There are several cases where παρουσία clearly means the Second Coming, but there are none (says Moo) where they *clearly* mean an earlier rapture. In cases where παρουσία is clear, it does mean the Second Coming.

 3. Response: This is a good point, and careful study needs to be made to see if such terms (especially παρουσία) can have this flexibility. Can παρουσία be used to speak of two "comings"?
- B. Some of the "rapture terminology" is also used in Second Coming passages, thereby suggesting that they are one and the same.
1. "trumpet"
 - a. Rapture passages have this:
 - (1) 1 Cor 15:52 – "at the last trumpet"
 - (2) 1 Thess 4:16 – "with the trumpet of God"
 - b. Old Testament passages have this.
 - (1) The "trumpet" is a feature of the OT Day of the Lord when the Jewish nation experiences final salvation and judgment.
 - (2) Examples: Isa 27:13; Joel 2:1; Zeph 1:16; Zech 9:14
 - (3) Isa 27:13 – mentions a great trumpet in connection with the gathering of Israelites for entrance into the millennial kingdom.
 - (4) Isa 27:13 could imply that OT saints participate in this same event (which is contrary to pretribulationism).
 - c. The Second Coming verse in Matt 24:31 has this!

"And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."
 - d. Moo concludes (p 180):

". . . the reference to 'the last trumpet' in 1 Corinthians 15:52 would suggest that the 'transformation' Paul describes takes place at the time when the Jewish nation experiences its eschatological salvation (Isa. 27:12-13) *after* the Tribulation (Matt. 24:31)."

2. "gather together"

The verb ἐπισυνάγω ("gather together") in Matt 24:31 is used in its noun form ἐπισυναγωγή to depict the rapture in 2 Thess 2:1.
 3. Response

Terms like "trumpet" are used frequently in the Scriptures, and for different situations (e.g., the judgments). It would need to be demonstrated that the mention of such terms in one place should preclude their meaning in another. Does this alone equate the rapture and Second Coming passages?
- C. Warning passages in regard to the Second Coming seem to be applied to the New Testament audience, implying that they will go through the Tribulation.
1. Following the announcement of the Second Coming in Lk 21:27, the audience is warned in such a way that implies they could face the Tribulation leading up to the Second Coming.

"Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Lk 21:34-36)

Point: Why would he admonish them to pray this prayer if they expect to be raptured ahead of time anyway?
 2. 1 Thess 5:2-8
 - a. They are being encouraged to "watch," not because they will be raptured beforehand, but because they will face "the day of the Lord" mentioned in 5:2 (note the verbs in verse vv. 6 & 8, "be alert," "be sober").
 - b. Moo: ". . . the verbs Paul employs in his commands (vv. 6, 8) do not connote watching *for* something, but faithfulness to Christ, as incumbent upon those who belong to the 'light' and to the Day." (186)
- D. When Paul speaks of "relief" for the suffering Thessalonians, he connects this relief with the Second Coming (2 Thess 1:5-10).
1. ". . . it is only at the posttribulational advent that believers experience deliverance from the sufferings of this age" (Moo, 187).
 2. Paul seems to speak as if the generation in which he lived *might* be the last. Moo notes, "The only satisfactory way of explaining this text is to assume that Paul addresses the Thessalonians as if they would be alive at the Parousia—and he states that they experience 'rest' only at the posttribulational revelation of Christ" (188).
- E. When Paul wants to convince the Thessalonians that they were not in the Day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:1ff.), he does not appeal to the rapture or state that they should not expect to be in the Tribulation, but rather points out signs that will occur in the Tribulation.

Elaboration: If Paul had truly taught them a pretrib rapture in 1 Thessalonians, it is unlikely that a mild panic would result in which they would be thinking that they were in the Day of The Lord. They would have known to expect rapture first, if this indeed were the case.

- F. Matthew 24 places the rapture after the Second Coming (note vv 36-42).

Response: This is a weak argument. Those taken are taken in judgment (note the illustration with Noah where the unrighteous were taken away in judgment [v 39]). Hence, this is not looking at the rapture.

PART III: THE PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE EXAMINED

ADVOCATES

1. 19th Century:
John Nelson Darby, James H. Brookes, A. T. Pierson, George N. H. Peters
2. Early 20th Century:
A. C. Gaebelain (1861–1945), C. I. Scofield, James M. Gray (Moody), R. A. Torrey (BIOLA), Lewis Sperry Chafer (DTS), H. A. Ironside, Charles L. Feinberg, Leon Wood
3. Contemporary Advocates:
John F. Walvoord, Charles C. Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Hal Lindsey, Tommy Ice, Tim LaHaye, Paul D. Feinberg, Gerald B. Stanton, John S. Feinberg, Earl Radmacher, and Renald Showers

Note: The Pretrib position is part of the official doctrinal statement of Dallas Seminary.

THE PRE-TRIB RESEARCH CENTER

The Pre-Trib Research Center is a "think-tank" committed to the study, proclamation, teaching and defending of the Pretribulational Rapture. If you are interested in receiving their newsletter or finding out more about this ministry, you can visit their website at:

<http://www.pre-trib.org>

PRESUPPOSITION

All sides admit that the Bible clearly refers to the event of the rapture in at least three passages: John 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15:50-57; and 1 Thess 4:13-18. However, none of these passages clearly state the time of the rapture in relation to the Second Coming. Therefore, advocates of a pretribulational rapture rely primarily on various theological arguments and implications of various biblical data that we have pertaining to the end times.

PRETRIBULATIONAL ARGUMENTS

- A. The most natural way to understand John 14:1-3 is that Christ's promise relates to a pretribulational rapture.
1. Elaboration: According to John 14:1-3, Christ is now preparing a place for us in His Father's house (note the emphasis on *dwelling places*). When He comes again, He will then "receive us to Himself" and presumably give us our *dwelling place* that He has been preparing for us. When Christ comes at the Second Coming, however, He will come *to earth* from which He will reign for 1000 years. Hence, John 14 can best be reconciled

with the Second Coming if we understand it to refer to a rapture prior to the Second Coming (in which we go to these *dwelling places* in the Father's house). He will first come and receive us to Himself; later, we will return *with Him* to earth.

2. Response

The posttribulationist might argue that He does first receive us to Himself, but that we continue on with Him to earth for the millennial reign. Such a view, however, seems awkward, as John 14:1-3 does not give the impression that occupying the *dwelling places* is only momentary. Even if the pretribulationist is right about John 14:1-3, this would not prove pretribulationism, for the same argument could be used by midtribulationists.

- B. At the Second Coming, Christ is said to come "with all His saints" (1 Thess 3:13), whereas at the rapture He comes *for His saints*.

Response: Posttribulationists might argue that the rapture and Second Coming are part of the same event. Believers are first caught up to meet the Lord in the sky, and then join in His descent to the earth. Hence, He does come "with all His saints" immediately after He has raptured them. Such a view, however, is quite odd (a yo-yo effect). Why take believers up only to have them immediately return to earth?

In Gundry's posttribulational view, the rapture does slightly precede the Second Coming. At the very end of the tribulation, the earth will experience God's wrath. Believers will be raptured just prior to the pouring out of God's wrath, and then very quickly come with Christ in His descent to the earth.

- C. There is a "removal" of certain people in conjunction with the Second Coming as depicted in Matt 24:37-42, but the removal involves evil people in judgment.

Elaboration: Posttribulationists will sometimes appeal to Matt 24:37-42 which talks about certain people being "taken" at the Second Coming. Their argument is that those "taken" are believers, and hence the rapture occurs at the Second Coming. But such a view cannot be correct. Notice that prior to verses 40-41 in which some are "taken," a parallel illustration is given in vv 37-39 in regard to the days of Noah. In this illustration, those who are "taken," are taken in judgment (note vs 39!) and perish in the flood. Noah is allowed to remain and experience the *New World*. Hence, the ones who are taken at the Second Coming are not believers (as posttribs often assert), but unbelievers who are "taken" in judgment. Those who are "left" are believers. If believers are raptured at the Second Coming (so posttribs), then how can believers be "left" at the same time? Posttribulationism fails at this point.

- D. In Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, believers are given the promise of being spared from the "wrath to come," which looks at the wrath of the Tribulation period.

1. 1 Thess 1:10 ". . . to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."

1 Thess 5:9 "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. Elaboration: The latter verse is particularly instructive as this occurs in the discussion of the destructive "Day of the Lord" (see 1 Thess 5:2). In other words, the wrath in view is the wrath of the Day of the Lord,

which certainly includes the Great Tribulation. Christians are not destined for this wrath!

3. Response
 - a. George Ladd attempts to restrict the meaning of wrath, by arguing that the Church is sheltered from the "bowl" wrath.
 - b. Robert Gundry is similar, and claims that this promise only applies to "God's wrath." For Gundry, the judgment cycles overlap, so that the *divine retributive wrath* begins with the 6th seal, 4th trumpet, and 1st bowl. Hence, the Day of the Lord does not begin until the close of the Tribulation, near the time of the 6th seal. The Church is raptured before the divine wrath (which is very brief), and then we have the Second Coming.

Feinberg takes Gundry's view to task. He notes that wrath is mentioned not only in Rev 15:1 and 11:18, but also in Rev 6:16-17 with the seal judgments. Feinberg carefully shows why Gundry's view of excluding the first five seals from the "wrath" is incorrect.⁷

- E. The pretribulationist view best accounts for the promise in Rev 3:10 of being kept from the hour of testing.

1. Rev 3:10 "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, **I also will keep you from the hour of testing**, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth."

Gk = κἀγώ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ

2. Contextually, this must refer to what is about to be disclosed in chapters 4–20.
3. Response by posttribulationists:
 - a. Believers will be in the Tribulation, but will be "kept from it" in the sense of being preserved through it.

This response is quite inadequate. (1) this is not the usual meaning of the preposition ἐκ; (2) many saints will die in the Tribulation (hence, not preserved); and (3) the prepositions ἐν or διὰ would have served better to express "protection through."
 - b. Believers will be in the Tribulation, but will be *kept from the hour* by being removed from the Tribulation at the very end when the divine wrath falls (so Gundry).

- (1) Defense

⁷Three important points should be made about Gundry's view: (1) for Gundry to claim that the coming of "wrath" in Rev 6:17 does not include the first five seals, he is dependent on taking the aorist verb ἦλθεν as an ingressive or dramatic aorist. Feinberg shows why this is doubtful. The most common type of aorist is a "constative" (= complexive) aorist in which the action is viewed as a whole with nothing being said about the duration or repetition. Hence, the wrath which has come is a summing up action that includes all the first six seals. (2) The promise in 3:10 tells us that the "hour of testing" comes upon the whole world, which would obviously include believers. (3) The first five seals should also be viewed as divine wrath, because all the seals are part of the scroll opened by the Lamb (ch. 5), and the scroll is the record of judgments. Everything that proceeds from this activity of the Lamb is part of one connected whole.

- (a) Gundry argues that ἐκ is a preposition of motion expressing "out from within." Hence, the church is *in* the Tribulation, but is removed from it.
 - (b) Gundry appeals to John 17:15, which is the only other case in either classical or biblical Greek in which the combination of the verb τηρέω and the preposition ἐκ occur together.
- (2) Response to Gundry

- (a) Gundry is wrong in limiting ἐκ to "out from within." Townsend has clearly demonstrated that "sufficient evidence exists throughout the history of the meaning and usage of ἐκ to indicate that this preposition may also *denote a position outside its object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object*" [emphasis his].⁸ Feinberg gives ample evidence to the contrary of Gundry (see pp 64-69). For example, one should note the use of διατηρεῖ + ἐκ in Prov 21:23 (a compound form of τηρέω).
- (b) The use of τηρέω + ἐκ in John 17:15 does not prove Gundry's point at all.

Jn 17:15 – "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one."

15a – Christ is not asking for removal from the world (ἄρχης . . . ἐκ)

15b – Christ is asking for preservation from the Evil One.

In this latter phrase, the idea cannot be "out from within." The disciples were not *in* the Evil One. The idea is protection, not motion. Though Gundry tries to make the point that the disciples were in the sphere of the Evil One, Feinberg disagrees and gives reasons to defend the idea that τηρέω ἐκ in Jn 17:15 is an expression of protection from an *outside position* (see p 68).

F. There is a need for an interval between the rapture and the Second Coming.

- 1. There must be saints that go into the Millennium in nonglorified bodies, in order to account for unrighteousness after the Second Coming.⁹

Elaboration:

- (1) "If all righteous are glorified before the Millennium and all wicked excluded from the Kingdom, where do the people in nonglorified bodies come from to populate the Millennium?" (Feinberg, 73).

⁸Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (Jul–Sep 1980): 252-66.

⁹Sin will still exist (cf. Ezek 43:13-27; Isa 19:21), there will be sickness and death (Isa 65:20), and there will be a rebellion at the end of the Millennium (Rev 20:7-10).

- (2) The "wicked" are removed prior to the Millennium
 - (a) There are judgments prior to the Millennium (Ezek 20; Matt 25)
 - (b) Scripture teaches that righteousness and new birth are required for entrance into the Millennial kingdom (Matt 5:20; Jn 3:3,5)
 - (3) The only satisfactory way to account for the presence of sin is by virtue of the children of nonglorified righteous in the Millennium. Not all of these children will believe, and hence the presence of sin.
2. If believers are raptured at the Second Coming itself (the posttrib view), then that would mean that only unbelievers would be left on earth. How then can Christ separate the sheep from the goats following His return as depicted in Matt 25:31ff.?

This is probably one of the best arguments for the pretrib position, and I have yet to see a good response from the posttrib side. Gundry tries to assert that the Matt 25 judgment is *after* the Millennium, not before (hence, one general judgment). But this is untenable: Matt 25:31-32a clearly connects the judgment to the Second Coming.

- G. In 1 Cor 15:51, Paul speaks of the rapture as a "mystery," i.e., a truth not previously revealed. The Second Coming, on the other hand, was predicted in the Old Testament (Dan 12:1-3; Zech 12:10; 14:4; and Isa 9:6-7).