

WHY I TEACH THAT THE RAPTURE WILL OCCUR BEFORE THE GREAT TRIBULATION

- A. The Great Tribulation is identical to the Seventieth Week of Daniel's prophecy (9:27) which is the resumption of God's national program for Israel as announced by the angel Gabriel (9:24 - "'Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.>"). The Age of the Church is a time during which the "natural branches" (Israel) have been broken off and "a wild olive shoot" (the Church) has been grafted in (Romans 11:17-24). But the time will come (during the Great Tribulation and on into the Millennial Kingdom) when God will "graft" Israel back into "their own olive tree" (Romans 11:24), i.e., God will resume his spiritual and national ministry to the Jews, through them witness to the world, and, during the Millennium, govern the world from Jerusalem with Jesus Christ seated on the throne of David (Romans 11:25-26 - "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: `The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'")

Therefore, since the Church was not on earth during the first 69 weeks of Daniel's prophecy, it is reasonable to expect that the church will not be on earth during the 70th week. Note that in Romans 11:25 the historical punctuation mark for the grafting back in of Israel is the incoming of "the full number of Gentiles." This implies that the quota of souls for the Church will at that point be full and the Church will be removed from the earth. Otherwise, souls would continue to be saved and added to the Church, and therefore the number of the Gentiles could not be said to be full.

- B. The teaching of the pre-tribulational rapture is the only interpretation of biblical prophecy which does justice to the passages that teach the imminence of the Rapture, i.e., that Jesus could return at any moment and that each Christian should live with that holy expectancy (I John 3:2-3 - "...we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him just as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."; Titus 2:13 - "...we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"). Those who reject the teaching of the pre-tribulational Rapture also must reject imminence as daily expectancy of Christ's return. In the mid- and post-tribulational schemes, Christians have 3 1/2 or 7 years warning, respectively, of the coming of the Rapture and would be able to predict it within days or weeks since the advent of the Great Tribulation is signaled by the confirmation of a covenant by the antichrist establishing peace in Palestine (Daniel 9:27).

Although Israel was given signs concerning the Second Coming of Christ to set up His Kingdom (Cf. Matthew 24), no such signs have been given to the Church concerning the Rapture. All passages about the Rapture imply that it is the next event on God's prophetic calendar and that there is no requisite preceding event.

- C. If all earthly believers are raptured at the end of the Tribulation, receiving glorified bodies (I Corinthians 15:51-54), who will be left to people the Millennial Kingdom and bear the children who will repopulate the earth, many of whom will rebel against Christ's earthly rule and be destroyed (Revelation 20:7-9)? The charter members of the Kingdom cannot be unbelievers for they are consigned to eternal fire at the end of the Tribulation (Matthew 25:31-46). The best answer to this question is that the Church is raptured before the Tribulation begins. During the Tribulation, Israel as a people turns to Christ as their Messiah-Savior and many Gentiles believe as well, just as there were Gentile "god-fearers" in Old Testament times who were saved. These Tribulation Gentile saints, with the surviving believing Jews, are those who enter the Millennial Kingdom with natural bodies. They are the "sheep" and the "righteous" in Matthew 25:31-46 who are invited to "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

- D. The pre-tribulation view does not confuse the biblical distinction between Israel and the Church and honors the legitimacy of God's numerous covenantal promises to Israel concerning national restoration, global political dominance, and spiritual blessing. It also recognizes that the Great Tribulation is a time for the repentance of apostate Israel and the outpouring of divine wrath on an unbelieving world (I Thessalonians 1:10 - "Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath." While this may refer to the many dimensions of God's prophesied outpourings of wrath, it certainly includes the Tribulation and likely specifies it.).

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