

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture Doctrine

Historical:

Of late, the doctrine of a catching-away of the church of Jesus Christ prior to the Great Tribulation has come under attack on an historical basis. Some teachers, always in an effort to prove a post-tribulation rapture, or even a preterist view of Biblical prophecy, trace the origin of this doctrine to sources that are doctrinally questionable. They'll often trace it to a Jesuit Priest named Ribera around 1591 A.D. Ribera apparently believed in a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation including a personal Antichrist and a rebuilt Jewish Temple. Supposedly in the late 18th century another Jesuit named Lacunza picked up Ribera's eschatological views and wrote a book published in 1812 propagating these views including a pre-trib rapture. This has long been thought to be the earliest recorded mention of the doctrine. These views as well as Lacunza's book were reportedly picked up by a Charismatic Presbyterian named Edward Irving who published a paper around 1827 based on Lacunza's work. A few years later the movement that Irving started produced a young convert (15 years old) named Margaret Macdonald who supposedly began to have visions of a secret rapture. Years later a very reputable Bible Teacher to which we're indebted today for his prophetic groundwork, a Plymouth Brethren named John Darby became acquainted with the Irvingites, the visions of Margaret Macdonald, and the writings of Lacunza. Darby systemized and expanded the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture, and his work was undeniably very influential in the doctrinal foundation of a Cyrus Ingerson Scofield. Scofield in turn produced a study-Bible which still is widely used today some 100 years after its first printing effectively indoctrinating multiple generations of Bible-Believing Pastors and Teachers. So in effect the Preterists and Post Trib Rapturists seek to debunk the Pre-Tribulation Rapture by tracing its origins to Roman Catholic Jesuits, Charismatic Presbyterians, and Vision-Seeing Teenage Girls.

There are two problems with this line of reasoning:

1. None of these sources we've mentioned account for earliest mention of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Of late there have been a couple of early accountings of this doctrine. One dates back to 1742 (pre-dating Lacunza's work of the Irvingite movement) by a Morgan Edwards that wrote of the rapture of the church 3 ½ years prior to the Millenium. But even more convincing than this is the discovery of a work call "Alexander's Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition" published only in the last 20 years, but reportedly written in the 4th Century (!) by Ephraem Syrus. Included in this book is a sermon entitled "The Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World". Within that sermon the following quote appears:

"For all saints and the Elect of God are gathered prior to the Tribulation that is to come; they are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."
2. The other problem with the historical attack on this doctrine that has been launched of late is the fact that it doesn't make any difference who found it first or when it was found. Our authority has never been and can never be Church History our authority is the word of God. What if a Catholic found it first? John Huss, Savanorola, and Martin Luther were all Roman Catholics. The Roman-Pagan-Mystery Religion has always been overshadowed with spiritual darkness, but don't forget that the clergy within the Roman Church did have access to portions of the scriptures. What is of interest to you and I must not be who said what when, but rather, "What saith the scriptures."

The Rapture vs. The Revelation

1. The rapture accounts the coming of the Lord *for* His saints.
The revelation relates to the coming of the Lord *with* His saints.
2. At the rapture the saints are caught up in the air.
At the revelation Christ returns to the earth.
3. The rapture brings a message of hope and comfort.
The Second Advent brings a message of fear and judgment.
4. The rapture is an event without any signs, only promises.
The revelation is an event preceded by a multitude of signs.
5. The rapture is strictly a New Testament mystery.
The revelation is the subject of Old Testament prophecy.
6. The rapture is a promise given exclusively to the church.
The Return of Christ primarily concerns the nation of Israel.
7. At the rapture the church's expectation is to be taken into the Lord's presence.
At the revelation, Israel's expectation is to be ushered into the Kingdom.

Seven General Proofs of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture

1. **The passage that we've taken up in 1 Thessalonians 4 would not make sense** if the church at Thessalonica was to be preparing to enter the Tribulation. These believers were likely familiar with Paul's teaching on the resurrection. But they had been taught to wait on the Lord from heaven to come back specifically for them (1:10, 4:17). Their ignorance was concerning the dead in Christ. They were concerned that their loved ones may miss the coming of the Lord because they had died. If they had were awaiting the Great Tribulation they wouldn't have been saddened or disappointed by the death of their loved ones, they would have been relieved that they were going to be spared the wrath of God and the persecution and suffering of the Man of Sin.
2. **"The church" can not go through the Tribulation, because most of "the church" is not on earth presently.** Old preachers used to speak of the church militant and the church triumphant. One of the obvious reasons that "the church" can not go through such a time is because a great company of its membership is already in heaven.
3. **The church is completely absent from every accounting of the Great Tribulation in both testaments.** There is no mention of the church anywhere in the Old Testament including the times detailing the events of the Great Tribulation. And the church is nowhere to be found in the book of Revelation from the start of the Tribulation at the opening of the first seal in Rev 6 to the pouring out of the last vial in Rev 16. After Rev 2-3 the next time the church shows up (other than their typical representation in the 24 elders around the throne in chapters 4-5) is in Revelation 19 at the Marriage of the Lamb, and there they are seen in heaven only to be returning with Christ in verse 14.
4. **The return of the Lord for His church is spoken of as "the blessed hope",** but the fact is that awaiting a time of tribulation unlike any other the world has ever known complete with judgment, wrath, enduring to the end and not taking the mark of the beast isn't blessed or hopeful. Our blessed hope is in meeting the Lord in the air prior to all of that happening.
5. **Our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father forbids it.**
 - a. We are the bride of Jesus Christ (Eph 5:25). We're told to love our wives as Christ loved the church. Any of us love our wives enough to rescue her from certain danger if it is within our power.

- b. We are joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17) and children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26). Jesus Christ said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt 7:11). Any of us would do our best to deliver our children from such trouble.
 - c. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20). We’re here in a foreign land on official business for our homeland. No country is so base as to forsake its representatives in a time of all out attack on the foreign land in which they’re located.
6. **The scope and purpose of the Great Tribulation.** The most significant passages in the Old Testament that deal with the period of the Great Tribulation are concerned with the nation of Israel and their relationship with God. In Jeremiah 30 it is spoken of as “the time of Jacob’s trouble”; clearly unrelated to the church. In Daniel 9, an essential passage in establishing the purpose and nature of the Great Tribulation, the passage is about God’s dealing with his chosen people Israel that is at issue, including the confirmation of covenants, the fate of Jerusalem, the sacrificial system, etc. all distinctly Jewish subjects.
7. **The typical evidence.** You can’t depend on this solely, but when considered with everything else it strengthens the argument.
- a. Enoch (a type of the church) knew of the oncoming judgment upon the earth and yet he didn’t have to endure the flood (a type of the tribulation), but was spared by being translated and taken directly to heaven.
 - b. Joseph married his Gentile bride (a type of the church) prior to the famine (a type of the tribulation).
 - c. Moses married his Gentile bride (a type of the church) prior to plagues sent upon Egypt (a type of the tribulation).
 - d. The Lord refused to destroy righteous Lot (even though no one else could tell he was righteous) along with wicked Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Necessity of the Doctrine to Rightly Dividing the Word

A post-trib rapture will make it impossible to rightly divide the word of God and force a host of contradictions that don’t exist:

- Matt 16:18 says the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, and yet in Rev 13:7 it is given unto the beast to make war with the saints and overcome them.
- In Gal 1:8 Paul pronounces a curse upon any angel that preaches “any other gospel” than what he preached, and yet in Rev 14:6 an angel is preaching a different gospel (the everlasting gospel).
- In this dispensation of the church there is neither Jew nor Gentile among the redeemed for we’re all in the same body making up the church (Eph 2, 1 Cor 12). Yet in the Tribulation there is a group of 144,000 saved Jews that maintain their national and tribal distinctions (Rev 7:4-8).
- In the Tribulation men are judged in some respect as to the keeping of the Sabbath (Matt 24:20), and the church is explicitly told to let no man judge us in respect of the sabbath (Col 2:16).
- In the Tribulations period a man’s salvation is connected with “enduring to the end” (Matt 24:13) and the keeping of commandments (Rev 12:17, 14:12), while you and I are said to be saved unconditionally by grace through faith apart from our own works (Eph 2:8-9).
- The simple fact that this miraculous “change” and resurrection of the dead in Christ is spoken of as a “mystery” indicates that it can not be the same event as “the first resurrection” itself, because that is the subject of Old Testament prophecy.
- Having the church go through the Great Tribulation, which is significantly a time of “wrath” (Rev 6:16, 14:10, 16:1) would negate the simple promises of deliverance and salvation given to the church (Rom 5:9, 1 Thess 1:10, 5:9).