

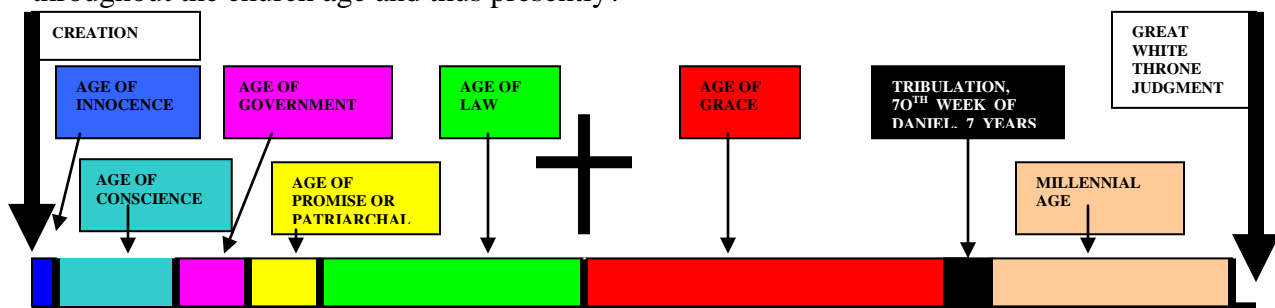
Theories About The Rapture

By

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Introduction

The Apostle John reports that our Lord said, “I will come again” (Jn. 14:3). The Apostle Paul echoes those words when he said, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven...” (1Thes. 4:17). There is no question that he is coming again, but many speculations have been posed about His coming. Is His return pre-millennial, post-millennium, amillennial, pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation? Is there a literal 1000 year period called the millennium or should it be treated allegorically? Is His return one or two phases? Is the tribulation, known as the Seventieth Week of Daniel or the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, occurring throughout the church age and thus presently?



The *timing* of being “caught up” to be “ever with the Lord” (1 Thes. 4:17) on His return, called the rapture,¹ is the issue. Surprisingly, some individuals believe the things on this chart should all be allegorized, especially when they do not allegorize the first coming of our Lord.

Interestingly, many of the insights into Scripture concerning the Lord’s return and the rapture were developed over the last one hundred and fifty years (Dan. 12:4). The discussion of many tenets associated with the currently held theories about the rapture and second coming

were considered during the Niagara Bible Conferences held each summer from 1878-1909. During those conferences the view that events of the book of Daniel and Revelation had occurred and thus were occurring, called the historic view, shifted to the belief by most men that the Seventieth Week of Daniel was yet future. However, the two stage second return of Christ, known as the Rapture and the Revelation, was not clearly seen at that time. Yet, they adopted in 1878 the strong statement in article 3 of the conference that the imminent return of Christ could occur at any moment. It was over this issue among premillennialists that various theories about the timing of the rapture began to mature. The discussion of the basic tenets frequently centered on whether the cosmic events of Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation gave any clue substantiating the return of the Lord at any moment or whether placing His return after the cosmic events destroyed imminency.

Over the years, men such as John N. Darby, A. J. Gordon, Robert Cameron, Nathaniel West, D. L. Moody, W. J. Erdman, C. I. Scofield, Arno C. Gaebelein, R. A. Torry, Harry A. Ironside, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles L. Feinberg, John F. Walvoord, and many others entered the discussions.² Also, other issues were brought to the table, primarily by those of the Reformed tradition. The issues most debated revolved around the separation of the church and Israel; and whether there is exemption, partial exemption, or no exemption of the church from divine wrath.

The debate has continued through the years and many significant hypotheses and variations have developed. There are six noteworthy theories which have arisen that will be discussed, but only one satisfies the words of Truth. The theories came about because of the issues presented above, but there are **two** basic problems: (1) First, there is confusion over the *first phase* of Christ's Second Coming called the Rapture of the church, which must be

distinguished from the *second phase* of Christ's return, which is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Arthur B. Whiting reports,

It [the rapture] is the first-mentioned aspect of our Lord's return which thus forms the subject of this present consideration. This great future event is frequently termed "The Rapture" in contradistinction to Christ's return to earth which is called "The Revelation." Like the word "trinity," the term "rapture" is not used in Scripture, but the absence of both words in no way militates against the plain and positive teachings which they represent.³ [my addition, HDW]

And Dr. Roy Wallace states,

A **vital truth** in the understanding of the rapture question is to be able to distinguish between the rapture and the revelation...It is evident that the Second Coming of Jesus is definitely in two stages – the rapture and the revelation.⁴ [HDW, my emphasis]

(2) Second, there is confusion about who is involved and when are they involved in His coming.

For example, Dr. John F. Walvoord related,

"There has arisen in the last century, however, a small group of pretribulationists who contend that only those who are faithful in the church will be raptured or translated and the rest will either be raptured sometime during the tribulation or at its end. As stated by one of its adherents: "The saints will be raptured in groups during the tribulation as they are prepared to go."⁵

Therefore, this study will examine six views of the rapture, particularly the concerns over the timing related to imminency and cosmic events associated with Christ's return, which are alleged by some to occur *before* the rapture. There are five views that are pre-millennial and one that is post-millennial. They are all immanently concerned with dispensationalism, amillennialism, and the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶ They are: **(1)** The Partial Rapture Theory, **(2)** The Mid-tribulation Rapture Theory, **(3)** The Pre-wrath Rapture Theory, **(4)** The Post-tribulation Rapture Theory, **(5)** The Pre-tribulation Rapture Theory, and **(6)** The Post-millennialism (Rapture) and Amillennialism (No Rapture) Theory. A comparison chart of these theories may be found at the end of this study.

The Partial Rapture Theory

There are several individuals who have popularized this theory. They are Robert Govett who first wrote about the theory in 1853 in his work, *Entrance into the Kingdom*; G. H. Lang

was an able advocate of the theory; and D. M. Paton (1935) used his position as editor of *The Dawn* to popularize the theory by using the writings of authors who supported the theory. The theory was never widely accepted.⁷ Walvoord reports that one of the partial rapture theorists said,

“The basis of translation [rapture] must be grace or reward. ...We believe that frequent exhortations in the Scriptures to watch, to be faithful, to be ready for Christ’s coming, to live Spirit-filled lives, all suggest that translation is a reward.” The theory includes the concept that only the faithful saints will be resurrected at the first resurrection.⁸ [my addition, HDW]

This theory is rejected immediately because it is based on works. Admission to the church of the Living God, which will be raptured, is based on faith alone. All of the church will be raptured (Jn. 14:1-3, 1 Cor. 15:51-52). Admittedly, rewards will be given at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10-11, 1 Cor. 3:10-15). However, the judgment or bema seat of Christ for the church is for those who are raptured, which is *all* of the church. Secondly, their theory divides the “body of Christ” for which there is no Scriptural support, and against which there are significant warnings against (Eph. 4:3, 13, 1 Cor. 12:12, Rom. 16:17, 1 Cor. 11:18)

The verses they usually cite for support are: Matthew 24:40–51; 25:13; Mark 13:33–37; Luke 20:34–36; 21:36; Philippians 3:10–12; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:24–28; and Revelation 3:3, 12:1–6. Dr. Walvoord decisively destroys their exegesis of the verses in an article, *The Partial Rapture Theory* in Dallas Theological Seminary’s journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 112. One quickly discerns the partial rapture theorists blur the distinction between Israel and the church. The 70th week of Daniel is the time of Jacob’s trouble (Dan. 9:24, Isa 22:5, Jer. 30:7). “Jacob” is frequently a euphemism in the Scriptures for the nation of Israel. Therefore, the time of Jacob’s trouble is not for the church. Lastly, a haze is created about the judgment of *all* of the church at the bema seat of Christ.

The Mid-tribulation Rapture Theory

Presbyterian J. Oliver Busnell, a former president at Wheaton College (1926-40), a professor and an author of a systematic theology work, and dean of graduate studies at Covenant College and Seminary was one of the primary proponents of the mid-tribulation rapture theory.

Dr. Busnell's primary points are:

"The first 3½ years of Daniel's 70th Week see nothing more than general trials and troubles that the world always goes through.

- The Antichrist is revealed with the abomination of desolation half way through the 70th week.
- The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are killed halfway through the 70th week.
- During the 3½ days when the dead bodies of the two witnesses are left in the streets to be seen, Christians will experience tremendous and intense tribulation. This tribulation is not characterized as the wrath of God but as the wrath of man.
- At the end of the 3½ days, the two witnesses are resurrected and raptured (Rev 11:11–12) which is a picture of the rapture of the Church. This is associated with the 7th trumpet in Revelation 11:15 (which in turn is associated with the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52—"at the last trumpet").
- At this point, the Church is raptured and joins Christ in the air.

Four things could be said about the remaining 3½ years of Daniel's 70th week:

1. Christ remains in the air with his saints for the next 3 1/2 years, watching the ensuing developments on earth.
 2. The millennial reign of Christ begins and, thus, overlaps the judgments of the vials.
 3. The wrath of God is poured out on the earth.
 4. Antichrist generally prevails on earth.
- At the end of the 70th week of Daniel, Christ stops his watching and comes down to earth with His saints to destroy Antichrist and to continue his millennial reign on the earth."⁹

A summary of the mid-tribulation rapture theory is given by James F. Stitzinger who says,

This view teaches that the rapture will take place at the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation or after 3½ years. The view holds that only the last half of Daniel's seventieth week is tribulation. **The position struggles for convincing texts.** Though asserting that only the last half of the tribulation contains judgement, they struggle to deal with the fact that God pours out His wrath through the entire 70th week."¹⁰ [my emphasis, HDW]

Gleason L. Archer, Jr., is a staunch defender of the midtribulation rapture, which he prefers to call the mid-seventieth-week rapture, to avoid confusion because he alleges that the first

"term gives rise to a possible misunderstanding. If the Great Tribulation is to be identified with the second half of the final seven years prior to Armageddon, during which the bowls of

divine wrath will be poured out upon the earth, then the view we are about to advocate is really a form of pretribulation Rapture.”¹¹

Immediately, one is struck with the understanding that we are back to the disagreement over whether the tribulation is seven years (7), three and one-half years (3 ½), or even a shorter span. He uses many verses in the book of Daniel to defend his position (Dan. 7:25, 9:27, 12:7, 11). He, like others, proclaims that God’s permissive revealed will, which allows the tribulation to start with the announcement of Israel’s covenant with *the* Anti-christ, is null and void (Dan. 9:27). One must understand that none of the verses in Daniel allude to the rapture.

In addition, there is disagreement between Busnell and Archer. Archer does not agree with Busnell’s tenet that the rapture is with the seventh trumpet.¹² He concludes that Revelation 4:1, which the pre-seventieth-week theorists use, is not the rapture, but that Revelation 14:14 is the “far more likely point.”¹³ Archer and other midtribulationists also claim the resurrection of the two witnesses is a “type” of the rapture (Rev. 11:12). There is no clear support for this in Scripture; and the “type” is very poor at its best because the two witnesses are killed by the Beast, and men will gaze at and desecrate their bodies. The church is never overcome by the enemy.¹⁴

Also, Dr. Archer holds a view that the 144,000 witnesses are members of the church. It is not a view which can be supported from the Scripture. Plus, the Scripture affirms repeatedly that the church will be kept from wrath (cf. Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 5:9), and the 144,000 are in the middle of the seventieth week, a “week” of wrath. Finally, the church is to always look for Christ’s return. Pin-pointing the rapture with the tenets of midtribulation theorists destroys the imminent expectation of our Lord’s return. This is a major objection to this theory. The imminent Second Coming is a call to holiness, which man needs to help overcome his depraved

and deceitful heart (Jer. 17:9). “**Watch** therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” (Mat. 25:13)

The Pre-wrath Rapture Theory

The pre-wrath rapture position separates the tribulation period into (1) the beginning of sorrows, (2) the great tribulation, and (3) the Day of the Lord. They propose the Day of the Lord is the time of God’s wrath that Christians will not have to endure. However, James F. Stitzinger says,

“This threefold division creates numerous and significant linguistic, exegetical, and theological problems regarding the seven-year length of God’s wrath and the length of the Day of the Lord.”¹⁵

Keith Essex, who disagrees with the theory, reports the same divisions. He relates, the pre-wrath supporters split

“Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan 9:27) into three periods: the first three and a half years are ‘The Beginning of Sorrows’ (cf. Matt 24:8), followed by ‘The Great Tribulation,’ which occurs after ‘The Abomination of Desolation’ (cf. Matt 24:14, 21), which is less than three and a half years because it is cut short (cf. Matt 24:22), followed by the pouring out of God’s wrath in ‘The Day of the Lord’ at the end of the final three and a half years.”¹⁶

Dr. Michael Stallard notes,

“[t]he best expression of the pre-wrath rapture view has been given by Marv Rosenthal [a proponent]

- The first 3½ years of Daniel’s 70th week are the beginning of sorrows but do not constitute any wrath of God, only the trials and tribulations of life. In fact, Rosenthal insists that the word “tribulation” is never used for the first half of Daniel’s 70th Week.
- The term “Great Tribulation” applies to a second period of Daniel’s 70th Week for which there is intense tribulation or persecution of Christians. This period lasts an indeterminate amount of time but less than 3½ years. Most of the diagrams show it ending half way through the last 3½ years of Daniel’s 70th Week.
- The first six seals cover the time from the beginning of Daniel’s 70th Week until the end of the Great Tribulation (roughly 5¼ years). In their entirety they constitute the wrath of man through Antichrist.
- The sixth seal marks the coming of cosmic signs that precede the trumpet judgments.
- The Lord raptures the Church at the end of the Great Tribulation.
- The Day of the Lord is the time of God’s wrath that covers roughly the last half of the second 3½ years of Daniel’s 70th Week. This follows the rapture of the Church. This time of wrath is God’s anger poured out on all mankind including Israel and the nations.

- This time of God's wrath actually extends for thirty days after the end of Daniel's 70th Week as God's bowl judgments are poured out on the nations who persecuted Israel. This thirty-day period is based upon Daniel 12:11¹⁷ [my addition, HDW]

There is great similarity between the pre-wrath opinions and the position of the mid-trib position. However, the pre-wrath camp claims the rapture will take place near the mid-point of the second three and one half (3 ½) years of the 70th week of Daniel, which they claim is immediately before the trumpet judgments. The mid-trib rapture position places the rapture after the trumpets. Also, the pre-wrath position on Rev. 6:12-17 is that the wrath of God correlates with the Olivet discourse, Mat. 24:29. However, the mid-trib theorists believe this verse heralds the arrival of Christ on earth.¹⁸

Some of the problems with the pre-wrath view are: **(1)** Their claim that the church enters the tribulation and is not raptured until very late in the 70th week of Daniel. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly relates the church will be kept for the hour of temptation (Rev. 3:10-11), and Paul affirms it in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thes. 4:13-18). **(2)** Their claim that the “great multitude” before the throne in Revelation 7:9-10a is the church. The “multitude” is *not* the raptured church, but they are those that came out of the tribulation, which is clearly stated in Revelation 7:14. **(3)** This theory changes the focus of the church. Gerald B. Stanton says, “Such a change of emphasis is unfortunate, for it moves the “blessed hope” of the believer away from the expectation and joy of being in the presence of Christ to the more human desire of escaping outpoured wrath in the coming judgment.”¹⁹ **(4)** Their claim the tribulation cannot refer to the entire 70th week of Daniel is not Scriptural. An evaluation of the use of θλιψις (“tribulation”) in

“Matthew 24:9 chronologically relates to the first half of the 70th week because it precedes the midpoint, when the abomination of desolation will be set up (Matt 24:15–21). Verse 9 states, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation [θλιψιν], and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.” The first half of the 70th week, then, is a time of tribulation. The second half of the 70th week is also described as a time of tribulation. “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire” (2 Thess 1:7), that is, at Christ's second coming, God “will repay with affliction [θλιψιν] those who

afflict [θλιβουσιν] you" (1:6). Therefore it is proper and even biblical to refer to and even describe the 70th week of Daniel as "the tribulation," or "a time of tribulation."²⁰

Clearly, the pre-wrath theory is exegetically wrong.

The Post-tribulation Rapture Theory

Robert H. Gundry, Alan Ladd, Alexander Reese, and Douglas Moo are major spokesmen for this position. The theory can be likened to the other pre-millennial views except for the pretribulation rapture position.

"This view has been widely popularized by Ladd, Gundy, and others. It holds that the rapture occurs at the end of the great tribulation period, when Christ returns. Posttribulationism differs from pretribulationism on several basic issues: (1) the nature of the tribulation, (2) the distinction between Israel and the church, (3) the doctrine of imminency, (4) the distinction between the rapture and the second coming, (5) the meaning of eschatological terms, and (6) sometimes hermeneutical issues. There are four distinct positions within this view.

- Classic posttribulationism or historic premillennialism. Here the events of the tribulation are understood to have always been in place and the church is already under God's wrath. Christ's return is "imminent," but the view relies on both allegorical and literal hermeneutics. This is the view of J. Barton Payne, and is sometimes known as moderate preterism as well.
- Semiclassic posttribulationism. This view also holds that the tribulation is a contemporary event but teaches that some events of the tribulation are still future. The view forsakes imminency and also draws on conflicting hermeneutical principles. There are considerable differences between proponents of this view. This is a kind of catch-all view for those who do not fit the other categories.
- Futurist posttribulation view. A relatively new but very popular view held by George Ladd and others. This view holds to a future seven-year tribulation followed immediately by the second coming. The church goes through the entire tribulation and the Israel/church distinction is blurred. Hermeneutics are more literal in this view.
- Dispensational posttribulation. This is the view of Robert Gundry who attempts to keep the distinction between Israel and the church clear, while believing that the church will live through all seven years of tribulation. At the same time he believes that the church will also in some way be "exempt" from God's wrath. In this view, imminency is aggressively denied.²¹

The most significant problem the post-tribulation rapturists face is the order of events surrounding the second coming of Christ. Dr. Walvoord appropriately relates the subject matter of Matthew 24 (Olivet Discourse) to Christ's answer of the questions of four of the Apostles about: (1) the "signs" of His second coming, (2) when it would occur, and (3) the end of the age (Mk. 13:3); and the rapture was not presented by the Lord Jesus Christ because there was so much the Lord needed to teach them without confusing them further. The disciples did not even understand the concept of the church, much less that there would be an interval of time between the first and second phase of his second coming. This is similar to the prophets and early

Christians not perceiving a gap for the church age in Daniel 9:26. How could man have understood?

Therefore, the use of Matthew 24 by the posttribulationists is very tenuous in light of the questions by the four Apostles recorded in Mark 13.²² Matthew 24:31 is the verse usually used by the posttribulationists; and the rapture is seen by them in verses 40-41, which most likely relates to those who will be taken into the millennium, and not to those who are raptured. This correlates with Luke 17:37 because where the vultures (eagles) are there are dead bodies (e.g. those killed and not taken into the kingdom age).

Similarly, John 14:2-3 is twisted (spiritualized) by the posttribulationist to mean the Lord was preparing a house, which they insist is “*spiritual abodes within His own Person*” for the Apostles. “One is at a loss to know how to comment on such fanciful exegesis.”²³ And so the arguments go. For certain the rapture is not mentioned in the synoptic gospels and not until John 14:2-3.

Another significant issue is the meaning of “the day of the Lord.” Dr. Walvoord reports,

[Alexander] Reese holds that the use of the expression “the day” indicates that endtime events all occur in rapid succession, including the translation of the church and the various judgments of the saints and the wicked. He identifies the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5 with other references to “the day” as found in 1 Corinthians 3:13 and Romans 13:11–12. He likewise so identifies the expressions “in that day” (2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 1:18; 4:8); “the day of Christ” (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16); “the day of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7–8; 2 Cor 1:14); and “the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:4–5; 2 Thess 2:1–3). According to Reese, all refer to the same time and the same event. [my addition, HDW]²⁴

Obviously, the day of the Lord is a complicated topic that would require an extensive work to exegete. Dr. Walvoord concludes, however, that the “day” can be placed into three categories.

(1) references to a day of the Lord as referring to any period of time in the past or future when God deals directly in judgment on human sin; (2) a day of the Lord in the sense of certain specific future events constituting a judgment of God; (3) the broadest possible sense of the term, indicating a time in which God deals directly with the human situation, both in judgment and in blessing, hence broad enough to include not only the judgments preceding the millennium but also the blessings of the millennium itself.²⁵

For example, the day of the Lord in 1 Thess. 5:2 differs from the use in 2 Thess. 2:2.

It is significant that the Thessalonians thought that they were in the tribulation, since they were experiencing significant persecutions, and they believed that they had been left behind and separated from their loved ones. If they had been taught posttribulationism by Paul, they would not be so alarmed. The posttribulation rapture requires that violence be done to the Scriptures to arrive at their exegesis.

The Pre-tribulation Theory

This theory meets the literal interpretation of Scripture and has the support of most dispensational theologians. Dr. Paul D. Feinberg believes the church will not go through the tribulation because the entire time of the 70th week of Daniel is “the outpouring of penal, retributive, divine wrath, as well as the promises of God to the church that exempt it from both the time and experience of wrath.”²⁶ Dr Walvoord cites Revelation 6:17 and states, “the only way one could be kept from that day of wrath would be to be delivered beforehand.”²⁷ Dr. Feinberg notes “that the question of divine wrath is a fundamental one for the Rapture positions.”²⁸ God clearly proclaims that believers will not suffer His wrath (Rom. 5:9, 1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9, Rev. 3:10). Therefore, the rapture must come before the tribulation.

The central passage for the pretribulationists is 1 Thess. 4:13-18. The posttribulationists claim that Daniel 12:1-2 places the “sleepers” after the tribulation. However, if this were the case as Paul explains to the worried Thessalonians, the dead in Christ would *not follow* those alive to alleviate their fears. In other words, they were not in the tribulation, the dead had not been forgotten, and the rapture was yet to come. Their loved ones in Christ would not be left behind.²⁹ Paul further explains the sequences in a second letter to the anxious Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:6-7).

The contention by those opposed to the pretribulational rapture frequently centers on the use of prepositions. A through discussion of this topic would require a major work. Let it be accepted that the King James Bible translators got the prepositions right.

Most believers throughout the church age have believed in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people. Our Lord said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.” Paul said that we are “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13) “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1Thess. 1:10). The angel said, “...Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” which will be with a shout and a trumpet (Acts 1:11). Peter said, “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pe. 3:3-4). He is coming. Praise God! It will be “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). There is no reason to believe “the trumpet shall sound” is any of the trumpets associated with judgments in the book of Revelation. There is no indication in Scripture that we will have any “sign” in the heavens or any events on earth before the “glorious appearing” and our hope. Let us be ready “daily” and live our lives in the power of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Post-millennialism (Rapture) and Amillennialism (No Rapture) Theory

Some holding these positions are Vern Poythress and David Chilton. These positions deserve very little comment. Many of their views stem from the amillennialism of some early members of the ‘church,’ such as Origen and Augustine. They allegorized a great deal of the Scripture. They believed that the “millennium” was simply a “type,” since the premillennial rapture belief and the Lords return, which was considered by the post-apostolic church to be “soon” and imminent, had not occurred. The amillennial position continued into the reformation and many Reformers accepted the tenets of amillennialism.³⁰

The death of Christ for many amillennialists and postmillennialists was only to demonstrate the love of God, and therefore influence us to repent of our rebellion against God. Also, many of them believe *our* death is the “coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” They simply refuse to consider the clear verses indicating the literal return of the Lord to the earth. “Also, a post-millennial view is based on certain interpretations of sin; Christ triumphed over sin in His death and [is the] purpose of His Second Coming.”³¹ [my addition, HDW] Some postmillennialists even postulate the following,

“Finally, let us consider postmillennialism. Postmillennialism says that, through the gospel, allegiance to Christ and Christian obedience will gradually spread through the world until the great majority of people are Christians. Societies and their institutions will be progressively conformed to the will of God, and an era of great peace and prosperity will ensue before the second coming.

In my opinion, it is possible that this sort of thing might happen. In fact, because I am awed by the power of God for salvation in the gospel (Rom 1:16) I am optimistic about the future. Christ may return very soon, but if he does not return in the next hundred years we may see a great harvest for the gospel. Some other amillennialists display the same optimism.”³²

This is contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:1-5). In addition, their allegorizing of the literal 1000 years (millennium) is superintended by their belief that the saints are “ruling” in heaven now.³³ Many amillennialists and postmillennialists believe the “resurrection” to

judgment is something other than what the word means.³⁴ Of course, they also blur the difference between Israel and the church.

Gundry, a posttribulation rapturist, even makes the following statement in favor of the postmillennialists. He believes that “Since the judgment of the wicked, admittedly postmillennial (Rev 20:11–15), is joined with the second coming, nothing keeps the judgment of the righteous from being postmillennial, too.”³⁵ In light of the above, it does not surprise anyone that if any amillennialists or postmillennialists believe in the rapture, he believes it occurs simultaneously with a second coming of Christ at the end of the millennium. There are so many variations of these concepts that a consistent amillennial or postmillennial position is very hard to decipher.

We will conclude the postmillennial view by saying that it goes against all the numerous specific literal prophecies already fulfilled in Scripture, and again we see great violence to the Scriptures done by those who hold to this position.

RAPTURE THEORIES COMPARISON CHART³⁶

RAPTURE THEORY	(CLAIMS OF) SUPPORTING VERSES	CONTRARY VERSES	COMMENTS
1. Partial	Mat. 24:40-51, 25:1-13, Mk. 13:33-37, Lk. 21:36, Phil. 3:10-12, 1 Thes. 5:6, 2 Tim. 4:8, Heb. 9:24-28, *Rev. 3:10 (main verse)	1 Cor. 15:51, 1 Thes. 4:16, 1 Thes. 1:9-10, 2:19, 5:4-11, Rev. 22:12	Based on works. Divides the body of Christ. Ignores plain teaching—rapture of all true believers.
2. Mid-tribulation	Rev. 11 (7 th trumpet) = 1 Thes. 4:16 & 1 Cor. 15:52 (trump); imminent return of Christ denied with Jn 21:18-19, 1 Pe. 1:1; Paul’s commission, a long preaching career, Acts 22-21—apostasy comes 1 st , 2 Thes. 2:3, 2 Tim. 3:1—yet the 2 nd coming is an incentive to holy life, Tit. 2:11-13, 1 Cor. 45:51; Phil. 3:20, 1 Thes. 4:17; carry gospel to <i>all</i> the world 1 st , Mk. 16:15; Rev. 2-3 represents a long period; church age and tribulation overlap, Lk. 23:17-31, Mat. 24:9-11, Mk. 13:9-13; seals & trumps of Rev. not judgments; only last 3½ yrs. of trib the time of Jacobs trouble or wrath; two witnesses of Rev. 11 are symbolic of two groups—living and dead at the rapture, the voice,	Paul did believe imminent return, 1 Cor. 15:51-52, 1 Thes. 4:15-17; Divine wrath of seals and trumpets clearly indicated, Rev. 6:16-17—seals the start of wrath, trumpets continue wrath, Rev. 11:18; Rev. 7:14 indicates 7 years are Jacobs trouble—not split; “thief in the night” may relate to the rapture as part of	No overlapping of ages, e.g. law with grace, or grace with tribulation. Believing Jews brought into “body” before Cross; their chronology is faulty—there is overlap of judgments. The trump of 1 Cor. 15:52 sounds before wrath & is about blessings, life, and glory & trump of Rev. 11 sounds end of time of wrath. Advocates, J. Oliver Buswell, Harold J. Ockenga, Gleason Archer

	cloud, and trumpet are 1 Thes. 4:16 types; Rev. 4-11 describes 1 st 3½ yrs., 12-19, the 2 nd 3½ yrs. trump of Rev. 11 & 1 Cor. 15:52 the same.	the Day of the Lord	
3. Pre-wrath (a significant variant of mid-tribulation) Occurs after the mid-point of the trib near the mid-point of the second half.	Olivet Discourse is paralleled with Rev. 6 seals sequence of events. The Day of the Lord begins with seal 7. Claim the use of “tribulation” “great tribulation” in Mat. 24:15-20, 29, Mk. 13:14-19, 24 (affliction = same Gr. word for trib.) is significantly different than other places as Deut. 4:30 & refers to man against man, not to the wrath of God as in 1 Thes. 5:9, Rom. 5:9. Claim the Day of the LORD does not include the Great Trib. Claim cosmic disturbance in Rev. 6:12-13 seal are mid second 3 ½ period. Claim God will cut 70 th wk. short. Claim, 2 Thes. 2:3—the apostasy and revealing of the man of sin occurs during 70 th wk. not before. Claim “saints” in 1 Thes. 3:13 are “angels.”	“Tribulation period” is not a contrived term anymore than trinity or rapture is. Rev. 6:16-17—seals the start of wrath, trumpets continue wrath, Rev. 11:18; Rev. 7:14 indicates 7 years are Jacobs trouble—not split; Scripture indicates the trib is 7 years. 1 Cor. 15:23-24 does not mean “the end” of the trib, but the end of the church age	Although pre-trib, mid-trib, and post-trib are “pre-wrath” positions (“keep from the hour” Rev. 3:10), the timings are <i>significantly</i> different. Exegesis of The Day of the Lord & the cosmic events are determining factors for holders of these theories. “at the last trump” 1 Cor. 15:52 not at the 7 th trumpet judgment, but the last trump of church age when Christ returns, Psa 47:5 with Acts 1:11. The Day of the Lord is not one day but a whole program of events.
4. Post-tribulation Four (4) types a. Classic (trib is already past) b. Semiclassic (trib partially filled) c. Futuristic (7 yr. trib before rapture and 2 nd Coming) d. Dispensational (essentially same as futuristic.)	Hold to rapture and revelation are the same event. Saints return immediately with Christ. Argue no hx. of pre-trib view, and “saints” are “all” from all ages at rapture. Lk. 23:27-31, Mat. 24:9-11, Mk. 13:9-13—these verses used to prove church goes thru the trib.; deny imminency with Jn. 21:18-19; claim long interval before Christ’s return—Mat. 25:14-30, Mat. 13:1-50, 28:19-20, Lk. 19:11-27, Acts 1:5-8; destruction of Jerusalem preceding 2 nd Coming—Lk. 21:20-24, and signs 1 st —Mat. 24:1-25:30—then the return; Rev. 20 used to support translation or resurrection at the close of the trib; and all in one day—Jn. 5:28-29, 11:24;	Doctrine of imminency—Jn. 14:2-3, 1 Cor. 1:7, Phil. 3:20-21, 1 Thess. 1:9-10, 4:16-17 (see above)+	The Day of the Lord is not one day but a whole program of events. The 3 Gr. words, parousia, apokalupsis, epiphaneia, used by them to support post-trib appearing, but a concordance proves otherwise. Their arguments built on system of denials rather than + exposition. They do not distinguish between church and trib saints. Their hx. argument falls flat. (e.g. justification by faith not clearly taught until Luther). Advocates, Alexander Reese, Robert Gundry.
5. Pre-tribulation	Based on literal interpretation rather than spiritualizing many Scriptures; believers in church age; trib about Israel—time of Jacob’s trouble; therefore whole, entire 70 th week 1. wrath, Rev. 6:16-17, 11:18, 14:19, 15:1, 7, 16:1, 19, 1Thes. 1:9-10, 5:9, Zeph. 1:15, 18; 2. judgment, Rev. 14:7, 15:4, 16:5-7, 19:2 3. indignation, Isa 26:20-21, 34:1-3, 4. punishment, Isa 24:20-21, 5. hour of trial, Rev. 3:10, 6. hour of trouble, Jer. 30:7, 7. destruction, Joel 1:15, 8. darkness, Joel		See Luther, Calvin, John Knox, Latimer’s comments re imminent return in Dr. Roy Wallace, Systematic Theology. The world will be asleep spiritually; Comes like a thief to take his “jewels.”; and M. R. DeHaan said, “Jesus would shout from the air, but only the ones who are tuned in on station B.L.O.O.D. and F.A.I.T.H. would...hear.”

	2:2, Zeph. 1:14-18, Amos 5:18. Imminent return! 1 Thes. 1:9-10, Tit. 2:13, Jn. 14:2-3, Acts 1:11, 1 Cor. 15:51-52, Phil. 3:20, Col. 3:4, 1 Thes. 1:10, 1 Tim. 6:14, Jam. 5:8, 2 Pe. 3:3-4 **Mat. 24:37-39, Mat. 24:40-41, 24:42-43, Lk. 12:37-40, be ready, Mat. 24:4, 25:13, 13:35-37, Lk. 21:34-36; virgins without oil are without Holy Spirit, Mat. 25:1-13, Rom. 5:5, 8:9, 1 Cor. 6:19-20, 2 Cor. 6:16, for <i>all saved</i> , 1 Cor. 15:51-52—raptured, even tho all sleeping, saved and unsaved, Mat. 25:5		Advocates & details worked out by John Darby, Schofield (Reference Bible), Harry Ironside, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Feinberg, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrrie, Dwight Pentecost.
6. Amillennialism, Post-millennium or A-tribulation/rapture	Acts 1:7	These views stem from the allegorizing of Scripture, beginning with Philo & Origin, continuing thru Augustine into the reformation. Many reformers held this view, and many of the Reformed church continue in this tradition.	Most holding this view believe that there is no rapture, trib, or millennium. Judgment occurs and then eternity. This position ignores large portions of Scripture. Dan Whitby, a 17 th century Unitarian held to post-millennialism, believing the gospel would permeate the earth, making it better (see 2 Tim. 3:1-5.

Endnotes:

¹ “Caught up” is from the Greek word, harpazo (**a r p a z w**) –to seize, or catch or snatch away; the Latin word for carry off is raptus, from which we get rapture. The doctrine of the rapture is established by 1 Thes. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:51-52 (from Liberty Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988, p. 1877)

² Gleason L. Archer et al, Richard R. Reiter’s section, *The Development of the Rapture Positions, The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, MI) 1984, 10-44

³ Arthur B. Whiting, *The Rapture of the Church* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1945, *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 102*) 360

⁴ Dr. Roy Wallace, *Studies In Systematic Theology* (LinWel, Shreveport, LA) 2001, 348

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *Partial Rapture Theory* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955, *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 112*) 193. This is an excellent discussion of the problems of the partial rapture theory and their poor exegesis.

⁶ Gleason L. Archer, Jr.; Paul D. Feinberg; Douglas J. Moo; Richard R. Reiter; *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, MI) 1984, 34-38. An article in this book about the development of Rapture positions is fascinating, pitting John F. Walvoord, George E. Ladd, and others against various positions.

⁷ Ibid. Walvoord, *Partial Rapture*, 194

⁸ Ibid. Walvoord, *Partial Rapture*, 193

⁹ Dr. Michael Stallard, *A Comparison of J. Oliver Bushwell’s Mid-Trib Position with the Pre-Wrath Rapture View* (Journal of Ministry and Theology, Vol. 3) 1999, 86-87

¹⁰ James F. Stitzinger, *The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation* (The Master’s Seminary, Master Seminary Journal, Vol. 13) 170

¹¹ Gleason L. Archer, et al, *The Rapture*, Op. Cit., 139

¹² Ibid. 143-144

¹³ Ibid. 142

- ¹⁴ Ibid. 148. Dr. Paul D. Feinberg responds to Dr. Archer's "theories."
- ¹⁵ Ibid. James F. Stitzinger, *The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation* (The Master's Seminary, Master Seminary Journal, Vol. 13) 170
- ¹⁶ Keith H. Essex, *The Rapture and the Book of Revelation*, (The Master's Seminary, Master's Theological Journal, Vol. 13, Fall of 2002) 231-232
- ¹⁷ Ibid. Dr. Michael Stallard, *A Comparison of J. Oliver Bushwell's Mid-Trib Position with the Pre-Wrath Rapture View* (Journal of Ministry and Theology, Vol. 3) 1999, 88-89
- ¹⁸ Ibid. Stallard, 91-92
- ¹⁹ Gerald b. Stanton, *A Review of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955, *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 148*, Jan. 91) 91
- ²⁰ John A. McClean, *Another Look at Rosenthal's "Pre -Wrath Rapture"* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955, *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 148*, Oct. 91) 389-390
- ²¹ James F. Stitzinger, Op. Cit., 171
- ²² John F. Walvoord, *Posttribulationism Today* (Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra Vol. 133*, Jul. 77) 206-207
- ²³ Ibid. Walvoord, *Posttribulationism Today*, 212
- ²⁴ Ibid. Jan. 77, p. 5
- ²⁵ Ibid. p. 6
- ²⁶ Gleason L. Archer et al, Op. Cit., Section by Dr. Paul L. Feinberg, *Pretribulation Rapture*, 86
- ²⁷ Ibid. Archer, p. 51, Dr. Feinberg is quoting Dr. Walvoord from the article, *The Rapture Question*.
- ²⁸ Ibid. Archer, p. 223.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 225
- ³⁰ James F. Stitzinger, Op. Cit., (Masters Seminary Journal, Vol. 13) Fall, 2002, 168-169
- ³¹ Elmer L. Towns, *Answering the Arguments for Post-Tribulation Rapture Position* (Tyndale Theological Seminary, Conservative Theological Journal, Vol. 6) Dec. 2002, 313
- ³² Vern Poythress, *2 Thessalonians Supports Amillennialism*, (The Evangelical Theological Society, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol 37) Dec. 1994, 535
- ³³ Dr. Jeffery Khoo, *Dispensational Premillennialism In Reformed Theology: The Contribution of J. O. Buswell to the Millennial Debate*, (The Evangelical Theological Society, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol 44) Dec. 2001, 706
- ³⁴ Ibid. 706
- ³⁵ John F. Walvoord, Op. Cit., *Posttribulationism Today*, (Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra Vol. 134*) July, 77, p. 209
- ³⁶ Most of this chart is made possible by the information presented in Systematic Theology by Dr. Roy Wallace. Op. Cit.; significant other information was obtained from Marvin Rosenthal's *Pre-Wrath Rapture* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN) 1990, and the other works cited such as *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

The following Bibliography was found while doing research and is attached for future reference.

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Compiled by Dennis M. Swanson

Seminary Librarian

The subjects of eschatology in general and various positions on the rapture in particular have generated an enormous body of literature in the last century. This bibliography represents the collected research of contributors to this issue of *TMSJ* as well as additional sources not cited in the articles. To affirm pretribulationism, a response to points raised by other positions is necessary. As a general rule, writings related to the return of Christ to the earth and the millennium have not been included unless they deal with the timing of the rapture also. This bibliography is not exhaustive, but rather suggestive for those wishing to do additional study.

The bibliography's six major categories are (1) General and Introductory Works, (2) Biblical Commentaries, (3) Works on Posttribulationism, (4) Works on Midtribulationism, (5) Works on Pre-Wrath Rapture, and (6) Works on Pretribulationism. Each section contains monographs, multi-author works, journal articles, and unpublished material, all listed by author.

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