

## Lesson 14

### CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGES ON THE RAPTURE QUESTION

Evangelicals disagree over when the rapture will occur. Arguments by pretribs and posttribs are often based on inference and not the clear teaching of scripture.

The best any person can do is try to study the Bible and take the Bible as literally as possible. Never build theological systems, especially eschatological systems, on unclear passages.

#### Coming “With” and “For” the Saints

##### Pretribs

The Bible speaks of Christ’s coming in two stages: the rapture “for” His saints (the church) and the second advent when He returns “with” His saints (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:13-18).

##### Posttribs

There is no verse in the Bible, which describes the Lord’s coming in terms of “for the saints.” There is only a theological inference based on 1 Thess. 4:13-18, when Christ will come “for” the living saints, but it is not stated as such.

First Thessalonians 3:13 teaches that at Christ’s second advent He will come with all His saints.” Christ returns with the souls and the spirits of all saints of all ages who have died (Old Testament saints, church saints, tribulation saints). As Christ is descending towards earth, He “will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:14). Those bodies of all the saints who have died shall be resurrected bodies. Then those saints who are living at the second advent shall be caught up (raptured) and transformed (without dying) by receiving a new body. Those saints who died and those saints transformed will meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever.

There is no exegetical basis to make a distinction between “with” and “for” so as to have two stages of Christ’s coming.

The Gospels and the Epistles seem to teach one coming of Christ, and the descriptions of His coming in both are very similar.

Matt. 24:12	Preceded by terrible evil	2 Thess. 2:4
Matt. 24:5, 24	False christs	2 Thess. 2:4
Matt. 24:15	Antichrist in the temple	2 Thess. 2:4
Matt. 24:37-51	False security	1 Thess. 5:3
Matt. 25:5	Danger of sleep	Rom. 13:11-12
Matt. 24:19	Birth pangs	1 Thess. 5:3
Matt. 24:27-31	In triumph	2 Thess. 2:8
Matt. 24:30	In power	2 Pet. 1:16
Matt. 24:30	In great glory	2 Thess. 1:9
Luke 21:28	Release from trial	2 Thess. 1:7
Matt. 24:39	Sudden destruction	1 Thess. 5:3
Matt. 25:31	Universal judgment	Rom. 2:8-9, 16
Matt. 25:31	Announce the reign of Messiah	2 Tim. 4:1

#### Deliverance “From” or “Through” Tribulation Rev. 3:10

##### Pretribs

Pretribs assume that the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 represent the entire panorama of church history: Ephesus (Apostolic church), Smyrna (church of persecution to A.D. 316), Pergamos (the church

under Roman imperial favor (from A.D. 316 to 500), Thyatira (the age of the Papacy and a believing remnant from A.D. 500 to 1500), Sardis (Reformation, a believing remnant), Philadelphia (the true church in the last days) and Laodicea (the apostate church in the last days). The church of Philadelphia is promised to be kept from “the hour of testing” (tribulation, temptation) which will come over “the whole world.” The Philadelphian church is promised deliverance out of the tribulation period and this could only be by a pretrib rapture.

This church is promised deliverance from “the hour of testing,” which seems to be a definite hour. This must be the tribulation.

This testing is to come upon “the whole world” which seems to be the tribulation of the last days.

The words “keep you from” (*tareo ek*) denote a physical removal from the tribulation period, which can only come through a rapture of the church before the tribulation period.

### Posttribs

It is only an inference to assume that Revelation 2 and 3 represent the entire panorama of church history. These letters were written to seven local churches in that time and had significance to them in particular. These seven churches might represent the church at any state of its history but not necessarily seven stages of history.

If the tribulation (testing) were not to come in the lifetime of the local church at Philadelphia, the promise would seem to be rather meaningless to them.

If Revelation 2 and 3 teaches a panoramic view of church history, then there could be no imminent return of Christ because these stages would have to be fulfilled before the Philadelphian church (the true church) could be raptured.

The words “the hour of testing” are significant. It does not say “tribulation” (*thlipsis*) as in Matthew 24:21, 29 but “testing” or “temptation.” This “testing” seems to be local and have to do with physical persecutions, not the tribulation period. These testings are said to come upon “the whole world” but the universal term “whole world” is often used in the New Testament to speak of the civilized world of that day, the Roman Empire (Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6). There were several worldwide persecutions of Christians in the first century, which could easily satisfy these universal requirements. The letter to Philadelphia was probably written in the time of severe Domitian persecutions to comfort and encourage the believers who were facing possible martyrdom. Revelation 3:10 would promise them something more immediate and tangible than removal from a trial, which was not destined for their lifetime.

Some posttribs do see “the hour of trial” as future and referring to the tribulation. If so, it still does not prove a pretrib rapture

The words “keep from” are a translation of the Greek words *tareo ek*. This could mean, “kept from” or “kept through.” The only other place when the words “keep from” are used is in John 17:15 where Christ prays, “I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.” Christ is not praying that they should be kept from Satan by physical removal, for He just prayed to keep them in the world. He is not praying for physical removal but “protection in” or “preservation from.” We have, therefore, in Revelation 3:10, not a keeping from testing but a keeping in testing. Revelation 3:10 is a promise of protection through tribulation, both historically (since it was written to the church of the first century) and as a final persecution under Antichrist finds momentum.

Christians going through the tribulation will not experience the wrath of God. They shall be protected or preserved from the wrath of God. However, Christians shall not escape the fury of Antichrist and many shall die as martyrs. Martyrdom is nothing new for the Christian church. God will protect the Christian from His wrath in the same way He supernaturally protected the children of Israel during the plagues in Egypt. It is God’s principle to preserve in. He preserved Noah through the flood. He preserved Joseph in the court of Pharaoh. He preserved and protected Daniel in the lion’s den and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the flames of the furnace.

## **No Mention of the “Church” In Revelation 6-19**

### Pretribs

The term “church” is not mentioned in Revelation 6-10; therefore, the church is not in the tribulation since this section is all about the future tribulation. Since the church is not mentioned, it must have been raptured.

### Posttribs

In the Book of Revelation, God’s people are called “servants” (Rev. 1:1; 2:20; 11:18; 19:2) and “saints” (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4; 13:7; 13:10; 19:8). These terms are all used in the New Testament of Christians.

The term “church” refers to the universal body of Christ and does not appear at all in Revelation. Only local churches are mentioned. Are we, therefore, to conclude that the Book of Revelation has nothing to do with the universal church?

Using the same kind of argument from silence as do the pretribs, we can say that the word “church” does not appear in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17) so are we to conclude that these chapters do not apply to the church? Nor does the word “church” appear in 2 Timothy, 1 and 2 Peter and 1 and 2 John, so are we to say these do not apply to Christians?

Argument from silence can go both ways. The word “rapture” or its concept is not stated in Rev. 1-22. Furthermore, the church in Revelation is not said to be in heaven at anytime.