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What is the Difference Between the Rapture and the Second Coming?

I Cor 15:50-54, Rev 19:11-16

The topic of Bible prophecy and the end times is a fascinating subject.

One thing that makes it particularly interesting is that we are talking about things that we will have a part of.

The sequence of events is: Rapture, Tribulation, Second Coming of Christ, Millennium, New Heaven and New Earth.

The subject we are looking at in this lesson is an area that is often confused.

The Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ are often confused. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a Scripture is referring to the Rapture or the Second Coming.

For us to understand the scriptures clearly, it is very important to differentiate between the two.

As an example of how two separate – but connected – events can be confused:

In the Old Testament, there were 2 different pictures painted of the Messiah: one suffering (Ps 22:6-8, 11-18; Isa 53:2-10) and one reigning as King (Ps 2:6-12; Zech 14).

Sometimes, a single passage is a prophecy of both: Isa 61:1,2, only 1/2 of which Jesus read and said was fulfilled in Luke 4:18-21.

Isaiah 61:1-2

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

As we study the scriptures, we see they predicted two separate comings of the Messiah: the first coming as a suffering Messiah and the second coming (still future) as a reigning King.

There are several main passages to read when looking at differences between the events of the rapture and the events of our Lord's Second Coming.

- The rapture passages are 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 1 Corinthians 15.
 - The passages concerning the Second Coming are Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19.
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One thing that we need to keep in mind, which will help us to rightly divide God's Word, is to ask ourselves whether the passage is talking about Israel or the church. They are not the same.

Matthew 24 is often quoted referring to the rapture, but it is clearly talking about Israel.

During the tribulation the church will be gone and God's attention is once again on Israel, as He is bringing them to Him.

That seven years of the tribulation is necessary to fulfill the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy or the 70 weeks.

Why is it important to keep the Rapture and the Second Coming distinct?

- (1) If the Rapture and the Second Coming are the same event, believers will have to go through the Tribulation. Even though they are promised to be rescued from wrath. (1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10).
- (2) If the Rapture and the Second Coming are the same event, the return of Christ is not imminent...there are many things which must occur before He can return (Matthew 24:4-30).
- (3) In describing the Tribulation period, Revelation chapters 6-19 nowhere mention the church. During the Tribulation, God will again turn His primary attention on Israel (Romans 11:17-31).

There are some key things that we need to keep in mind.

I. Location of Christians

The first difference to observe is the location of Christians for the events.

In the rapture, believers are called to meet Christ in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

In an instant the dead in Christ will rise and the believers who are left will then be called away.

In the case of the Second Coming, Christ returns with angels and thousands upon thousands of His holy ones. (Revelation 19:14).

He sets foot on the Mount of Olives and Battles the armies gathered against Him in the Valley of Armageddon.

This can be seen in Rev 16:16, 17:14, 19:11-19. Zech 14

Those who teach a post-tribulation return come up with the Yo-Yo problem.

Christians would be raptured to meet the Lord in the air and then immediately descend to earth with Him.

This is a mistake many make because they do not look at the other differences surrounding the two events.

II. Who Does He Return With?

The next difference is who will be with Christ.

When the rapture is described we see Christ returning alone.

When the Second Coming occurs, Christ returns with angels and Christians.

Jude 14-15 describes this as well as Zech 14

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” Jude 14,15

III. Purpose – Mercy or Judgment?

The purpose of the rapture and the Second Coming must be examined as well.

The rapture is viewed as an act of deliverance as believers are taken from the world so that God’s judgment can fall.

The Second Coming will be an act of judgment.

This is the coming of the conquering king that the Jews looked for in His first coming while missing the suffering servant aspect of His mission.

When Christ returns it will be a glorious day for those who belong to Him as He establishes His kingdom on earth but it will be a dreadful day for all those who stand opposed to Him.

The key to understanding the rapture revolves around God's mercy and His wrath. Scripture makes it clear that Christians will not suffer God's wrath. In addition to 1 Thessalonians is Revelation 3:10, and Romans 5:9. The Rapture is God's way to prevent Christians from suffering His wrath. It also removes the Church so that the focus can return to Israel.

IV. Who is Taken?

The focus of the rapture and the Second Coming is placed upon two different sets of people.

The Rapture is the removal of believers from the earth as an act of deliverance (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 5:9).

Also Matthew 25:1-13 tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

Those who had extra oil and were waiting and prepared for the return of the bridegroom were taken while those who were foolish and ran out of oil were left.

The Second Coming paints just the opposite picture.

The Second Coming includes the removal of unbelievers as an act of judgment (Matthew 24:37-42).

In the parable of the tares in Matthew 13, Jesus instructs that harvesters to allow the weeds to grow among the wheat until the time of the harvest. Then the weeds are gathered together and thrown into the fire to be burned.

Matt 24:37-42 Jesus speaks of how the days will be like that of Noah and His coming would be unexpected.

Many have mistakenly interpreted this passage to be in reference to the rapture.

I think we should see a different picture. The unsaved are being removed.

The believers that are alive at the end of the tribulation will enter into the kingdom as they are.

We need to recognize who the illustration is about.

In the days of Noah, it was the unrighteous who were not looking for the Lord and went about as they pleased.

These people were swept away in the flood while righteous Noah and his family were all that remained.

The coming of the Lord will be like the flood and will sweep away the wicked.

V. Who Will See It?

From our passage in 1 Corinthians we find that the rapture will be instant and "secret."

"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

No one will be able to witness it, only the effects afterward.

On the other hand, the Lord's return to the earth will be very visible. **Matthew 24:27 & 30** and Revelation 1:7 declare that all will see him as He returns.

Matthew 24:27

27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (Revelation 1:7)

The people of the earth will mourn as they witness the Lord's return.

We also learn that Jesus will return in the same way in which he left.

Acts 1:11 tells us that Jesus “will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.” The prior verses tell of Jesus rising slowly and visibly as the disciples watched until He was hidden by the clouds.

VI. The Timing

It is clear from scripture that no one knows when the Lord’s return will be in regards to both His return in the air and His coming to earth.

However, we find from scripture that the rapture is imminent while Christ’s Second Coming follows certain recognizable events.

Our rapture passages make it clear that the Lord’s return is imminent.

We find from Revelation 3:3 that the Lord’s return will also be like a thief.

Those who are not watching will be surprised.

The Lord’s Second Coming must be preceded by certain events however.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 we learn that the antichrist must first be revealed. He will then be destroyed by the splendor of Christ’s coming.

The events of Matthew 24:4-30 need to take place before Christ’s Second Coming as well.

This passage is often used as “proof” that we are living in the end times and that Christ will soon return.

Indeed we have seen a rise in many of these things in our very lifetimes.

However, there will be a much greater increase during the days of the tribulation.

We know that this passage is not simply referring to the days before the rapture because in verse 15 it speaks of the abomination that causes desolation.

We learn from Daniel chapters 9:27 that this abomination occurs in the middle of the final “seven” – the middle of the tribulation.

Likewise, the return of the Lord at verse 30 refers to the Second Coming as we saw above.

The Lord’s return will occur 1260 days after the abomination that causes desolation. (Daniel 9:24-27 & 12:11-12.)

Likewise, it will occur after the final 42 months (1260 days or “time, times and half a time” depending on the wording) according to Rev 12:6,14 & 13:5.

VII. The Millennial Kingdom

The Millennial Kingdom follows the Second Coming according to a literal interpretation of scripture.

This causes problems for putting the rapture and the Second Coming together or immediately one after the other.

At the rapture, Christians are immediately changed, given their glorified bodies.

This is found in the discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 as well as 1 John 3:2 which tells us we will be like Christ.

We know that Christ’s resurrected body is not like His earthly body but rather it was changed.

On the other hand, those who are in the Millennium have very mortal bodies as they have not yet been changed.

Isaiah 65:20 records that death will still occur, even if it is at a much slower rate than we presently see.

The only explanation that allows us to see some entering the kingdom with their glorified bodies and others entering with their physical bodies is a pretribulation rapture.

The conclusion

If scripture were clearer on these issues, there would be less room for argument. However, God has left some things with the intention that we would study and find the truth.

As Christians we have every reason for hope for the future and we should look forward to the day that the Lord returns for us.

POST-TRIB PROBLEMS

One of the strengths of the pre-trib position is that it is better able to harmonize the many events of end-time prophecy because of its distinction between the rapture and the second coming. Normally, posttribulationists do not even attempt to answer such objections and the few that try struggle with the biblical text. Yet, pretribulationists do not encounter difficulties in providing answers.

What are some post-trib problems?

First, posttribulationism requires that the church will be present during the 70th week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27) even though it was absent from the first 69. This is in spite of the fact that Daniel 9:24 says that all 70 weeks are for Israel. Pretribulationism is not in conflict with this passage since the church departs before the beginning of the seven-year period.

Second, posttribulationism must deny the New Testament teaching of imminency-that Christ could come at any-moment. Pretribulationism does not have a problem with these New Testament passages, since they believe that no signs must precede the rapture.

Posttribulationism has no answer to the problem of who will populate the millennium if the rapture and second coming occur at the same time. Since all believers will be translated at the rapture and all unbelievers judged, because no unrighteous shall be allowed to enter Christ's kingdom, then no one would be left in mortal bodies to start the population base for the millennium. The pre-trib viewpoint does not have a problem at this point.

Fourth, posttribulationism is not able to explain the sheep and goats judgment after the second coming in Matthew 25:31-46. As in the previous problem, how would there be any believers in mortal bodies, if they were raptured at the second coming, who would be available to enter into Christ's kingdom? Pretribulationism does not have such a problem.

Fifth, since Revelation 19:7-8 indicates that the church, Christ's Bride, is made ready to accompany Christ to earth (Rev. 19:14) before the second coming, how could this reasonably happen if part of the church is still on earth awaiting Christ's coming? If the rapture of the church takes place at the second coming, then how does the Bride (i.e., the church) also come with Christ at His return? There would not be sufficient time for this to happen within a posttribulational sequence, but the pre-trib position has no such problem.

What is the Difference Between the Rapture and the Second Coming?

	Rapture		The Return with the Saints
1	Jesus coming for His Church/Bride up to Heaven, before tribulation. John 14:1-3; 1Thess 1:10, 4:14-17, 5:9; Rev 3:10	1	Jesus coming with His Church/Bride down from Heaven, after tribulation. Zech 14:5; Col 3:4; Rev 19:7-8,14, 21:9-10; Matt 24:29-31; Jude 14,15; 1Thess 3:13
2	Caught up with Him in the air, in the clouds, 1Thess 4:13-18; Appears to Believers only. Mat 5:8, John 11:40, Heb 9:28	2	Jesus' feet touch the earth Zech 14:4; Rev 19:11-21, and he brings war, then peace. Every eye will see him, including unbelievers. Rev 1:7, Zech 12:10, Mat 24:30 Luke 3:6 John 19:37
3	Christians taken first, unbelievers are left behind a shut door. Mat 25:1-13; Rev 3:8-10; Rev 4:1, 1Thess 4:13-18	3	Wicked are taken first, Mat 13:28-30 the righteous (Tribulation saints) are left to populate the millennium
4	Purpose: To present the Church to Himself and to the Father in Heaven, 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:6-9	4	Purpose: To execute judgment on earth and set up His Kingdom on earth. Zech 14:3-4; Jud 1:14-15; Rev 19:11-21
5	Purpose: to reveal the man of sin in the Tribulation 2 Thess 2	5	Purpose: to cast Satan to the bottomless pit, to bind Satan after the Tribulation. Rev 20:1-7
6	Happens in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, no war, globally. 1Cor 15:52	6	Slow coming, at war, to specific locations, from Edom, to Bozrah, to Meggido or Armageddon, to Jerusalem. Isa 63:1-3, Rev 16:16, Zech 12:9-10
7	Christians are changed, and get glorified bodies, go to heaven and do not marry, and become immortal; Mat 22:30; 1Cor 15:52; 1John 3:2	7	People populate the earth during the millennium; some people still die, not being changed to immortality as at the rapture. Isa 65:20
8	Jesus descends with a shout (for resurrection) and trumpet noise. 1Thess 4:16	8	No shout mentioned Rev 19:11-21
9	A resurrection takes place of all saints to immortality, to rule as kings and priests 1Cor 15:51-54; 1Thess 4:13-18	9	Resurrection of the martyred tribulation saints to immortality who worship day and night in the temple of God. Rev 7:15, Rev 20:4-6,
10	Occurs as a thief in the night, at the 'no man knows the day or hour' festival of the Feast of Trumpets. 1Thess 5:4-6; Rev 3:3	10	Occurs at end of 7 years of Tribulation; exact day predicted; 3.5 years or 1260 days after the abomination of desolation: Dan 9:24-27, 12:11-12; Rev 11:2, 12:6,14, 13:5
11	Is likened to the abduction of the bride during the Jewish Wedding, and the union of the bride and groom, which occurs at the start of the 7 day bridal week. Gen 29:22-28, Judges 14:1-18	11	Is likened to the marriage feast, which occurs after the 7 day bridal week, returning from the wedding. Luke 12:36; Rev 19
12	The dead in Christ rise and together with then living will be changed into their new bodies and leave Earth with Jesus. 1Thess 4:14-16	12	Christians return with Jesus in already resurrected bodies riding on white horses. Rev 19:11-21
13	Jesus returns as a savior from wrath Luke 21:36; Rom 5:9; 1Thess 1:10, 5:9; Rev 3:10	13	Jesus returns on a white horse, full of wrath. Rev 19:11
14	For the Church only (those in Christ) 1Thess 4:14-17	14	For redeemed Israel & Gentiles Mat 25:31-46; Mark13:1, Luke 21:5; Rom 11:25-27
15	A message of hope and comfort 1Thess 4:18; Titus 2:13; 1John 3:3	15	A message of judgment and woe Joel 3:12-16; Amos 5:18; Mal 4:5; Rev 19:11-21