

Why I believe in a Pre-tribulation Rapture by Pastor Paul LeBoutillier

Asking me why I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture is a little like asking me to sum up 43 years of marriage and explain to you why I love my wife. I would have to take a deep breath and ask you how much time you have to listen.

I'm not making excuses — it's genuinely difficult to explain my position on the timing of the Rapture and I cite the following three reasons:

1. My position is the by-product of years of studying God's Word that cannot be distilled down to a single proof test or quick comment.
2. My position is based on a whole-Bible approach to understanding the Word of God as well as discerning the heart of the Father.
3. Determining the timing of the Rapture is not unlike pursuing the solution to a crime. Both require a great deal of investigative research with various pieces of information brought together to collectively create a body of evidence that will ultimately tell the story.

A little of the backstory

Some of my reasons for embracing a pretribulation Rapture position are based upon what might seem to be disassociated beliefs and conclusions. For example,

- I believe the New Testament Church is nowhere mentioned in Old Testament biblical prophecy.
- I believe Israel retains a unique place in future prophecy and God's timing of last days events.
- I believe the Church does *not* replace Israel in *any* capacity.
- I believe that after the 69th Week of Daniel, God's program for Israel was halted to give time for the inauguration and growth of the New Testament Church.
- I believe that when the Rapture of the Church takes place, the 70th Week of Daniel (better known as the Great Tribulation) will commence.

Those beliefs may or may not seem connected to the timing of the Rapture, but they provide for me a kind of interpretive framework for viewing the prophecies of the Last Days and are crucial to how I see God's prophetic timetable unfolding.

You might be wondering why the beliefs I've expressed above concerning Israel are important. It's because, unlike the Church, Israel *will* be going through the Great Tribulation and there are many prophecies that make that clear. So, if you misapply those prophecies that are intended for Israel and embrace them as if they are meant for the Church you're going to naturally conclude that the Church is destined to endure the Great Tribulation. During His earthly ministry our Lord gave warnings to the Jews concerning their upcoming days of tribulation, but the assumption by many is that those warnings were meant also for the Church. I believe this error is one of the biggest reasons many get the timing of the Rapture wrong.

The Rapture of the Church

The best New Testament teaching concerning the Rapture is found in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:15–18 (ESV)

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE, WHO ARE LEFT, WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The words “**caught up**” from this passage are a translation of the single Greek word **harpazō** which means *to seize, catch up, snatch away* or *carry off*.

My teaching on this passage can be found here:

1 Thessalonians 4 (Part 2) :13-18 • The Catching Away of the Church • [Watch](#) | [Listen](#)

Much of the issue of the timing of the Rapture centers around the idea of “**imminence**.” This is the belief that the return of Christ to catch away His Church could happen at any time. In fact, I believe the Rapture is next in line on the prophetic calendar and there is nothing more that needs to happen before that event takes place. That’s the essential meaning of the word imminent. It is also clear the New Testament authors believed that Christ’s return could happen at any time. Indeed, I believe the Lord has always wanted His children throughout the ages to believe that as well — so that we might live with an expectation that would literally change the way we live day to day.

There are several passages in the New Testament that speak of the imminent return of Christ.

Matthew 24:44 (ESV)

“**Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**”

Not only does the above passage speak of the imminent return of Christ but it also speaks about timing. Jesus told us the Son of Man would come when He is otherwise least expected. If Jesus were returning either the mid-point or at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation, His coming would NOT be unexpected. This verse really only works for a time when people are saying, “Peace and safety.”

Revelation 22:7, 12, 20 (ESV)

“**And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.**” “**Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!**”

Three times in the passage above Jesus promises that **He is coming quickly**. The Greek word is an adjective that can mean “**quick**” or “**swift**.” Most of the promises related to the Rapture in the NT characterize our Lord's return as imminent and able to occur “at any moment.” This would NOT be the case if the Rapture were occurring mid-way through the Tribulation or at the very end. It would NOT be unexpected or quick.

A related promise in **Revelation 16:15** has our Lord saying “**I am coming like a thief.**” That kind of language suggests the idea of a sudden, unexpected appearance.

Some other passages that add to the evidence of the Rapture of believers occurring prior to the Great Tribulation are listed below.

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 (ESV)

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, JESUS WHO DELIVERS US FROM THE WRATH TO COME.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV)

For GOD HAS NOT DESTINED US FOR WRATH, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Revelation 3:10 (ESV)

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I WILL KEEP YOU FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL THAT IS COMING ON THE WHOLE WORLD, to try those who dwell on the earth.

So, what happens to the REST of the world when the Rapture takes place? Paul deals with that in this passage:

1 Thessalonians 5:2–3

for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. WHILE PEOPLE ARE SAYING, “PEACE AND SAFETY,” DESTRUCTION WILL COME ON THEM SUDDENLY, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Notice in the passage above the usage of the pronouns “them” and “they.” rather than *us* or *we*. The Apostle says “...**destruction will come on THEM...**” Paul is NOT speaking of the Body of Christ here but rather those who are left behind.

Finally, in those portions of the book of Revelation dealing with the outpouring of God’s wrath upon the earth we read nothing whatsoever about the Church. Whereas the Church is mentioned 19 times in **chapters 1-3**, there is not a single reference to the church that can be found in **chapters 6-19**.

Finally, in the Gospels Jesus often used **Jewish wedding traditions** as a picture of last days events, and when we look a little more deeply at the ancient Jewish wedding we find some very interesting correlations to how the pre-tribulation rapture is thought to unfold. Those elements are listed below:

The Ancient Jewish Wedding

Step One: Selection of the Bride

In ancient Israel, brides were usually chosen by the father of the bridegroom. He would send His most trusted servant to search for a bride for his son.

1 Peter 1:1-2 (ESV)

To those who are [chosen]...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

Step Two: Price of the Bride

Brides in Bible times were purchased. The price was paid to the father of the bride, both to

compensate him for the loss of a worker and to show him how much the bridegroom loved and valued the bride.

We, as the bride of Christ, have also been purchased with a price. A very high price—the blood of Jesus. His very own blood shed upon a cross on Calvary's hill was the price He paid for His bride.

1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV)

...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Step Three: Betrothal/Ketubah

The ancient Jewish marriage ceremony consisted of two main parts, beginning with the betrothal or engagement. The betrothal is much like our engagement today, but with a much greater sense of commitment. During the betrothal the couple is actually entering into a covenant.

A covenant in Bible times was serious, final, sealed in blood and legally binding. Once a couple entered into the covenant of betrothal, they were legally married in all aspects except for the physical consummation of the marriage.

At the betrothal ceremony, a marriage contract, called a *Ketubah*, was presented to the father of the bride. This contract would consist of all the bridegroom's promises to his bride. The bride would cherish these promises.

We, too, have a Marriage Contract from our Bridegroom. Our contract is God's Word which shows us all we are entitled to as the Bride of Christ. All the promises in God's Word are for us. As the Bride of Christ, we are entitled to them—they are part of our Contract.

2 Peter 1:4 (ESV)

...he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Hebrews 10:23 (ESV)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Step Four: The Bride's Consent

Although a bride was selected for the bridegroom, she still had a choice.

In **Genesis 24:57 and 58**, Rebekah was asked, concerning Isaac: "Will you go with this man?". She said, "I will go." She gave her consent—her "I do."

God is a gentleman and He never forces anyone to say "I do" to His Son. When we say "I do" to Jesus, we must believe with our heart and confess with our lips.

Have you said your "I do's" to Jesus?

John 1:12 (ESV)

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Step Five: The Cup of the Covenant

After the term of the Contracts was accepted, a cup of wine was shared to seal the marriage covenant. The second cup of wine would be shared many months later during the marriage ceremony. The cup that Jesus took at His last Passover on earth was the cup of the new marriage covenant with His bride.

Luke 22:20 (ESV)

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Matthew 26:29 (ESV)

“I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Jesus is speaking of the second cup that the Bride of Christ will share with Him one glorious day at the second part of our marriage ceremony.

Step Six: Gifts for the Bride

The Betrothal included the giving of gifts by the bridegroom to his bride. Many times a bridegroom gave a coin or other object of value to his betrothed bride. It would always be something special that would help her remember him while they were apart. This was because the real focus of the gift giving was to be on the giver and not on the gift.

Today we have the engagement ring. This is a symbol of love and commitment. When the bride-to-be looks at her ring, she is reminded of the one who gave her the gift. God’s Holy Spirit is our spiritual engagement ring. He doesn’t call attention to Himself but to the one who purchased us—Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

Acts 1:4–5 (ESV)

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Step Seven: Departure of the Groom

Once the marriage covenant was sealed, the bridegroom left his bride to go to his father’s house to prepare a wedding chamber.

John 14:2–3 (ESV)

In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

The Bridegroom could be gone for many months, during which the Father of the Groom would oversee the building of the wedding chamber. The only person who would truly know when the

Groom would return for his bride was the Father.

Matthew 24:36 (ESV)

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”

Our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, has gone to prepare a wedding chamber for His bride—the Church.

Step Eight: The Consecrated Bride

The Jewish bride was set apart, consecrated, separated unto her bridegroom — the one who purchased her. So, while waiting for his return, she was to stay faithful. It was probably easy at first. But when his return was delayed, the temptation would be great. After a while, the bride may even start to question his return. In the same way, we are His consecrated bride, awaiting His return. We cannot fall into temptation. We must be ready at all times for the return of our Bridegroom and King!

Titus 2:11–13 (ESV)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Step Nine: Return of the Bridegroom

Jewish bride grooms usually came for their brides late at night, near the midnight hour. The sound of the shofar would break the silence of the night and there would be great shouting and dancing in the streets.

Acts 1:10–11 (ESV)

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 (ESV)

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Step Ten: The Hometaking

The second half of the ancient Jewish wedding ceremony is called the “hometaking.” After the Bridegroom returned for his Bride, the couple were escorted to the bridal chamber where they would be alone for **seven days**.

John 14:3 (ESV)

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

I believe that while the wrath of God is being poured out on the earth, the bride of Christ will be hidden away with her Bridegroom in the place that He has prepared for her.

Step Eleven: The Wedding Supper

Following the seven days in the bridal chamber, the bride and bridegroom emerged to join their guests for a joyous marriage feast. Playing of music and dancing was a regular part of the celebration.

And for this element of the Ancient Jewish wedding ceremony we look no further than this very chapter in Revelation 19...

Revelation 19:9 (ESV)

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

You can hear my teaching on this passage here:

Revelation 19:1-10 • The Marriage Supper of the Lamb • [Watch](#) | [Listen](#)

For those who believe that the Rapture and the Second Coming of Jesus will happen simultaneously, the following two passages in Scripture would seem to contradict that idea.

1) Jesus said concerning His coming "**no man knows the day or the hour**" (Matthew 24:36)

And yet, Daniel was told...

2) "**From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.**" (Daniel 12:11)

So, if you were living during the Great Tribulation and were paying attention as to when the daily sacrifice was halted and when the abomination of desolation was set up in the Temple, you would know there are 1290 days until the Lord's return. In other words, you WOULD know the day of the Lord's return.

The only way to reconcile these two passages is to understand that the Rapture MUST take place prior to the Second Coming.

[**Note:** Although the two passages cited above don't produce a hard case for the pre-tribulation rapture, they do eliminate a post-tribulation possibility.]

IN SUMMARY

1. The distinction the Bible makes between Jesus coming for the Church and returning with the Church points to the pretribulation rapture of believers.
2. The hope that Jesus could come at any moment for the church relies upon the pre-tribulation rapture of the church.
3. The promise that we are not appointed to wrath requires the pre-tribulation rapture of the church.
4. The fact that the church must be removed before the antichrist will be revealed necessitates the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3)
5. The picture of the church as the bride of Christ waiting for her groom to come for her and snatch her away to the bridal chamber affirms the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture.

6. The examples of Noah and Lot as illustrations of the Lord's coming is only consistent with the pretribulation rapture of the church.

7. Revelation, the supreme book of prophecy concerning the tribulation and the return of the Lord, shows that the church is nowhere seen during the time of the Great Tribulation.

Final comments:

At the end of the day, my conclusions are not something I ever wish to bring division or separation between myself and any of my brothers or sisters in Christ. I reserve the right to be wrong about these matters, and if so, I will happily admit as much. But until the day reveals all of these things for all to see, I remain sincerely convinced that the next great event on God's prophetic calendar is the catching away of His Bride — the Church. Come Lord Jesus!

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier

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