

WHAT IS THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE?

The rapture is an event that will take place sometime in the near future. Jesus will come in the air, catch up the Church from the earth, and then return to heaven with the Church. The Apostle Paul gave a clear description of the rapture event in his letters to the Thessalonians and Corinthians.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—

⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

The timing of the rapture is not known. From the Word of God and from sound reasoning – something Jesus used quite frequently – I hope to prove the reality of the pre-tribulation rapture.

The word “rapture” comes from Paul's “**caught up**” remark in verse 17. The words “**caught up**” are translated from the Greek word *harpazo*, which means “*to carry off*”, “*snatch up*”, or “*grasp hastily*”. The translation from *harpazo* to “*rapture*” involved two steps: first, *harpazo* became the Latin word *raptus*; second, *raptus* became the English word “*rapture*”.

SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

The Unknown Hour

When we search the Scriptures and read the passages describing the Lord Jesus' return, we find verses that tell us we won't know the day and hour of that event. Matthew 25:13 says Jesus will return at an unknown time, while Revelation 12:6 indicates that the Jews will have to wait on the Lord 1,260 days, starting when the Antichrist stands in the Temple of God and declares himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This event will take place at the mid-point of the seven-year tribulation (Daniel 9:27). Note that some people only see a three-and-a-half-year tribulation. In a way, they are correct because the first half of the tribulation will be relatively peaceful compared to the second half. Nonetheless, peaceful or not, there still remains a seven-year period called the tribulation. When the Jews flee into the wilderness, they know that all they have to do is wait out those 1,260 days (Matthew 24:16). There is no way to apply the phrase “**neither the day nor the hour**” to this situation. The only way for these two viewpoints to be true is to separate the two distinct events transpiring here:

1. **The rapture of the Church, which comes before the tribulation.**
2. **The return of Jesus to the earth, which takes place roughly seven years later.**

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

In Luke 12:36, the Word states that when Christ returns, He will be returning from a wedding. In Revelation 19:7-8, we read about the marriage itself. The marriage supper takes place before the marriage. According to Jewish custom, the marriage contract, which often includes a dowry, is drawn up first. The contract parallels the act of faith we use when we trust Jesus to be our Savior. The dowry is His life, which was used to purchase us. When it's time for the wedding, the groom goes to the bride's house unannounced. She comes out to meet him, and then he

takes her to his father's house. This precisely correlates with the events according to the pre-tribulation scenario. Jesus, the Groom, comes down from heaven and calls up the Church, His Bride. After meeting in the air, He and His Bride return to His Father's house, heaven. The marriage supper will take place there, while down here on earth the final events of the tribulation will be playing out. After the marriage supper of Jewish tradition, the bride and groom are presented to the world as man and wife. This corresponds to the time when Jesus returns to earth accompanied by an army “**dressed in fine linen, white and clean**” (Revelation 19:14).

What They Didn't Teach You in History Class

Many groups try to discredit the pre-tribulation rapture by saying most of the end-time events in the Bible have already taken place. A group of people called *preterists* claims that the Book of Revelation was mostly fulfilled by 70 AD. If the events described in the Book of Revelation took place in the past, I'm at a loss to explain some of the current situations I see around us:

- the rebirth of Israel, the reunification of Europe
- the number of global wars that have occurred
- the development of nuclear weapons

During history class, I must have slept through the part where the teacher talked about the time when:

- a third of the trees were burned up
- 100-pound hailstones fell from the sky
- the sea turned into blood (Revelation 8:7-8; 16:21)

I think several people would have to question their opposition to the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine if they knew that the evidence provided to them was based on the understanding that most tribulation prophecies have already occurred.

The People of the Millennium

If Christ were to come back after the tribulation, rapture all the saints, and slay all the ungodly, who would be left to populate the earth during the millennium? Only the pre-tribulation viewpoint can account for this post-tribulation problem. The Church is raptured before the tribulation, a vast number of souls are saved during this seven-year time frame, and those who make it through the tribulation go into the millennium while the unsaved are cast into hell.

The Saint U Turn

In the pre-tribulation scenario, after we rise to meet the Lord in the air, we will go to heaven and abide there seven years. At the end of that period, Christ will come down to earth, defeat the Antichrist, and cleanse the temple. In a post-tribulation rapture, we would rise in the air to meet the Lord, then do a 180-degree U-turn and come back down to earth. Revelation 1:7 states that Christ will appear out of the clouds and come down to earth. Zechariah 14:4 says that His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. If He's already headed our way, why would we need to be caught up to meet Him?

“Come Up Here”

Many pre-tribulation writers cite Revelation 4:1, which says, “**come up here**”, as a prophetic reference to the rapture of the Church, leaving Revelation chapters 1 through 3 as a description of the Church Age. After the shout to “**come up here**”, the Church is not mentioned in Scripture at all. The attention of Scripture switches from the Church to the Jews living in Israel.

Armies in Fine Linen

When Jesus returns (Revelation 19:18), an army follows Him. The army's members are riding on white horses, and they are clothed in fine linen that is white and clean. In Revelation 19:8, we are told that the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. If the saints of God are returning

with Christ to wage war on the Antichrist, then it is not possible to have a post-tribulation rapture without us running into ourselves as we are coming and going.

The Time of Jacob's Trouble

In several passages, the Bible refers to the tribulation as a time of trouble for the Jews. The phrase “**Jacob's trouble**” pertains to the descendants of Jacob. Jeremiah 30:7 says that this time of trouble will come just before the Lord returns to save His people. The final week of Daniel's 70th week is yet to take place. An angel told Daniel that, “**Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people**” (Daniel 9:24). Scripture never mentions that the tribulation is meant to be a time of testing for Christians. However, some post-tribulationists try to claim that they are the ones being tested during the tribulation. To make this so, they need to spiritualize the 144,000 Jewish believers in Revelation 7:2-8 who receive God's protective seal. Placing the Church dispensation into the same time frame as the seven-year Jewish dispensation, as the post-tribulationists do, raises one good question: **Can two dispensations transpire at the same time?** In the past, God has only dealt with one at a time. Having both present during the tribulation would have to be an exception.

“He” That is Taken Out of the Way

Before the Antichrist can be revealed, Paul said a certain “**He**” must be **taken out of the way**. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:7, the “**He**” that must be removed is widely thought to be the Holy Spirit. It has been promised that the Holy Spirit would never leave the Church, and without the working of the Holy Spirit remaining on earth, no one could be saved during the tribulation. The removal of the Church, which is indwelt by the Holy Ghost, would seem the best explanation for this dilemma. The working of the Holy Spirit could go on during the tribulation, but His influence would be diminished because of the missing Church.

War or Rapture

(Revelation 19:19-21) When Jesus returns at the end of the tribulation, He will be coming for battle. For those who believe in a post-tribulation rapture, it would be strange to meet your Lord and Savior just as He's rushing into battle. The idea that war and rapture could occur together is difficult to imagine, especially since they transpire at the same moment.

The Five Foolish Virgins

The wedding story that Jesus gave in Matthew 25:2-13, I believe, is a parable of the rapture of the Church. It explains how some will not be ready. Jesus clearly states that a group of people will miss out on the event, and will cry out to God to let them into the place where He resides, heaven. Although some try to put this parable in a post-tribulation context, it doesn't fit very well. The ones left behind in a post-tribulation rapture will not need to seek the Lord because they'll immediately be confronted by Him and His army of angels.

God Has Not Appointed Us To Wrath

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Paul assures us that God has not designated His people to wrath. This wrath is clearly the wrath of God that is to be poured out during the Tribulation. The pre-tribulation believers interpret this in the sense that Christians will be removed from the earth. Believers in a post-tribulation rapture tell a different story. They describe this in the sense that God will protect the Christians during the Tribulation and will pour out His wrath only on the unbelievers. This idea is directly in opposition to the declaration made in Revelation 13:7 in that the Antichrist is permitted to make war against the saints and overcome them. A belief in a post-tribulation rapture would make the promise of protection from the wrath of God a lie. In years past, it was possible to think of being protected the firearms and swords of that day. Today, any war implies nuclear and chemical arms and it is impossible to expect the same type of protection. When Nagasaki, Japan was bombed during the Second World War, the bomb exploded over a Catholic church. All those who were at the center of the explosion died – Christians and non-Christians. The only way to truthfully interpret the promise of protection from the wrath of God is seeing 1 Thessalonians 5:9 as the rapture of the church out of this world.

The Salt of the Earth

Jesus said, “**You are the salt of the earth**” (Matthew 5:13). When the believers are super naturally removed, the earth will be plunged into spiritual darkness. When this happens, the Antichrist will then be free to control the world.

God Takes an Inventory

In Revelation 7:3, an angel descends to earth and seals the servants of God. Two bits of information about this sealing highly disclaim a post-tribulation viewpoint.

1. The first item is the number of people sealed: 144,000.
2. The second one is that all those who are sealed are from the 12 tribes of Israel.

For the events in Revelation 7:3-8 to be true in a post-tribulation interpretation, either the Church has turned against God or God has turned against the Church. A post-tribulationists could write a thousand-word commentary about why the Church doesn't need to be sealed. Instead of trying to argue about why the Church is not mentioned or sealed, a pre-tribulation proponent could just say, “We're already in heaven.”

Noah and Lot as Examples

The tribulation period is compared to the times of Noah and Lot by Jesus in Luke 17:28. Most people argue over whether the time frame Jesus was talking about in that passage was pre-tribulation or post-tribulation. In doing so, they miss an important point. The two circumstances that the Noah and Lot situations have in common are the removal of the righteous and the judgment of the unbelievers. From these two accounts, we see that God prefers to remove His own when danger is involved.

Common-Sense Reasons for Believing in the Pre-tribulation Rapture

The World Test

One way to check the soundness of a doctrine is to see how the world reacts to it. One company put out a questionnaire that was used to screen prospective employees. One of the questions was, “Do you believe in the rapture?” If you answered “yes,” your chances of getting hired would not be good. Some Internet sites do not allow the topics of Rapture or Second Coming. They do allow topics such as sex, gays, and drugs. The only time the news media mentions the rapture is when someone sets a date and is proven to be wrong.

That Old-Time Religion

It used to be a rule of thumb that when one was visiting a church or listening to a preacher, one could assume the preacher believed in repentance, prayer, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost if he taught the rapture doctrine. It was also true that the churches on fire for God worshipped out of storefronts. Today, many of those storefront churches have moved into marble palaces and have strayed from their principal doctrines.

Birds of a Feather Flock Together

Whenever I look at all the groups that teach false doctrine and are highly focused on end-time events, I cannot find any that support the rapture theory. Some organizations, the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, teach a false gospel and are heavily into Bible prophecy. Why, then, don't Jehovah's Witnesses teach a false doctrine that would be right up their alley? Could it be that the demonic forces that influence these groups know something that Christians opposed to the rapture don't know? The list of prophetically minded cults that reject the idea of a rapture goes on and on. Here are some more: the Mormons, the Worldwide Church of God and the Moonies, as well as leaders like Jim Jones and David Koresh.

The Church Would Rebuke the Antichrist

If the Antichrist came to power with the Church still here, I do not see how he could operate. When Hitler was fighting to take over England, a number of Christians were praying for victory.

Hitler made mistake after mistake, and England outperformed its enemy at every stage of the conflict. It is difficult to measure the impact of intercessory prayer in physical warfare. Little is known of how great a role praying saints played in the defeat of Nazi Germany. If the Church were to reside on earth during the tribulation, I am sure she would give the Antichrist fits. In Revelation 11:3, the two witnesses alone give the Antichrist enough headaches. Millions of Christians who know their Bibles well would recognize the man of sin and pray fire down on his head. The post-tribulation view would have to plan on the Church just rolling over and playing dead the whole seven years.

Defending the Pre-tribulation Rapture

Somebody asked a great question the other day. "Does Scripture actually promise a pre-tribulation rapture, or is it just an opinion passed along from teacher to student?" Then they were challenged to cite even one Bible verse that would lead a person to believe the Pre-tribulation position if they hadn't already heard about it from some Bible teacher. They said that in all their studies they had not been able to find one. Let's see if they're right.

First, Some General Points

The Rapture is not another name for the Second Coming. As 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and John 14:1-3 explain, the Rapture is an unscheduled secret event where Jesus comes part way to Earth to meet His Church in the air and take us to be with Him where He now is. I say unscheduled and secret because its specific timing will remain unknown until it actually happens. On the other hand, The Second Coming is a scheduled public event where Jesus comes all the way to Earth with His Church to establish a Kingdom here. I say scheduled and public because the general time of His coming will be known on Earth over 3 1/2 years in advance, and public because everyone on Earth will be able to witness His arrival. Matthew 24:29-30 says it will happen shortly after the Great Tribulation has ended and all the nations will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds in the sky.

Membership in the Church and therefore participation in the Rapture is contingent upon having personally accepted the Lord's death as payment in full for your sins. While His death actually purchased full pardons for everyone, we each have to personally ask to have ours activated. Everyone who asks for salvation receives an unconditional, irrevocable "Yes!" (Matthew 7:7-8, John 3:16, Ephesians 1:13-14) **For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.** (2 Corinthians 1:20)

It's Greek to Me

And finally, although cynics can truthfully say that the word "*rapture*" doesn't appear in any passage of Scripture, the statement is not correct in its intent. Rapture is a word of Latin origin, not Hebrew or Greek, the languages of the Bible. (One of the earliest translations of the Bible was into Latin, and the word rapture comes from there.) Its Greek equivalent is *harpazo*, which is found in the Greek text of 1 Thessalonians 4:17. When they're translated into English, both words mean "*to be caught up, or snatched away*". *Harpazo*, the word Paul actually used, comes from roots that mean, "*to raise from the ground*" and "*take for oneself*" and hints that in doing so the Lord is eagerly claiming us for Himself. So while the Latin word doesn't appear in our Bibles, the event it describes certainly does. There's a similar situation with the word Lucifer, also of Latin origin. It doesn't appear in any of the original texts either, but no one would be naive enough to deny the existence of Satan on such a flimsy basis. With that introduction, let's go first to the best known of the Rapture passages.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

¹⁵ **According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

¹⁶ **For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.**

¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Most of us are very familiar with these verses. But notice they don't tell you when the rapture happens, only that it does. Notice also that the Lord doesn't come all the way to Earth. We meet Him in the clouds and then according to John 14:1-3 go back with Him to where He came from. If this was the Second Coming, He would be coming here to be where we are, not coming to take us there to be where He is. Paul described the same event in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye the dead in Christ will rise and the living will be transformed. There he said that he was disclosing a secret, but the resurrection of the dead was not a secret. It can be found throughout the Old Testament. The secret was that some would not die, but would be taken alive into the Lord's presence following an instantaneous transformation. The rapture happens fast. In one instant we're walking on Earth and in the very next, we're in the Kingdom.

By the way, don't try to use the trumpet reference in verse 52 to pin the timing of the rapture to some other event. Since both the Corinthian passage and the one from Thessalonians describe the same things, it's safe to assume that the term last trump refers to the fact that the trumpet call of God from 1 Thessalonians 4:16 will signal the end of the Church Age, at which time the Church will disappear from Earth. So these two references both say that one generation of humans won't die but will be suddenly changed from our earthly form to our heavenly one. And since both Matthew 24:31 (they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other) and Revelation 17:14 (with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers) say that we'll be with the Lord when He returns, this has to happen sometime before the 2nd Coming. And it can't be just the resurrected believers coming back with Him because the Rapture passages above say that we'll be changed at the same time as the dead are raised.

So, When Does This Happen?

In the New Testament, the clearest indication we get in the timing department is found in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. They tell 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 rescues us from the coming wrath.

The Greek word translated "from" in this passage is "apo". Translated literally, it means we're to be rescued from the time, the place, or any relation to God's wrath. It denotes both departure and separation. This is supported by 1 Thessalonians 5:9 that declares, "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ".

Some folks are fond of pointing out that you can't use God's wrath interchangeably with the Great Tribulation. They're not the same, they say. And they're right, the two terms are not synonymous. The Great Tribulation is 3 1/2 years long and begins in Revelation 11-13. God's wrath is much longer, beginning in Revelation 6, as verse 17 explains. Post-tribulation and pre-wrath rapture advocates try to deny this but the Scripture is clear. The time of God's wrath begins with the Seal Judgments. The Bowl Judgments that come later don't begin the time of His wrath, they conclude it. (Revelation 15:1) Being rescued from the time, the place and any relation to God's Wrath means the Church has to disappear before Revelation 6, and that's why we believe the Rapture takes place in Revelation 4 and the Church is the group of believers in view in heaven in Revelation 5.

You Be the Judge

Now let's apply the questioner's litmus test. Could a believer, sitting alone on the proverbial desert isle with nothing but a Bible and with no pre-conceived ideas, conclude that there's a pre-tribulation Rapture just from reading about it, or could he only be led into this position by first hearing someone teach him about it? Well, from Isaiah 13:9-13 and Amos 5:18-20, he would have learned that God is going to judge the Earth for its sins in a terrible time called the Day of the Lord when He'll pour out His wrath on mankind. Reading Matthew 24:21-22 would have told him that this time of judgment would be so bad that if the Lord didn't put a stop to it no one

would survive. But the Lord will put a stop to it by returning in power and glory. Since he would know that the Lord hasn't returned yet, he would know that God's wrath is still in the future.

When he got to 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 he would see a pretty clear statement. Jesus rescues us from the coming wrath. In the "who, what, where, when, and why" methodology of the investigative reporter he would have the Who, (Jesus) the what, (rescues us) and the when (the time of the coming wrath). Reading on he would come to 1 Thessalonians 4:15:17 and get the where (from Earth to the clouds) and in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 the why (because we're not appointed to wrath). From there he would logically conclude that since we'll be rescued around the time of the coming wrath and since we're not appointed to wrath, our rescue has to precede it.

He could also answer another of the investigative reporter's questions in 1 Thessalonians 4:15:17 and that's how it would happen. The Lord himself will come down from Heaven into our atmosphere and suddenly snatch us away from Earth to join Him there. In chapter 5 he would learn that he would never know the exact timing of this event but only that it would precede the coming wrath. Of course, there are many more passages I could reference but I think I've made my point and answered the question. In fact, I'll go one step further.

I believe that since our hypothetical reader has no one to persuade him differently, he would assume that what he's reading is to be taken literally. And if that's the case, then the pre-tribulation position is the only conclusion he could logically come to, because every other position requires a moderate to massive re-interpretation of Scripture. I contend that left alone to work this out with only the Holy Spirit as his guide he would expect to be raptured before the wrath of God begins in Revelation 6. You see, God didn't write the Bible to confuse us, but to inform us. It's mankind that's gotten everything all mixed up. If you give the Holy Spirit a clear minded student, uncontaminated by man's opinions and prejudices, He would bring that person to the understanding of the rapture that's most consistent with a literal interpretation of Scripture. And that requires a pre-tribulation rapture.

But Wait, There's More

While we're on the topic, there's another issue that points to a pre-tribulation Rapture and it comes to us in the form of a clue in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, right at the beginning of the Rapture passage. Verse 15 opens with the phrase "**According to the Lord's own word**". There simply is no place in the New Testament where Jesus speaks of some being resurrected and some others being transformed to meet the Lord in the air. He never said anything like that, nor does he even imply such a thing. Those who believe they see it in Matthew 24:40-41 first have to ignore the fact that Jesus was explaining events on Earth on the actual day of His return, which would place the Rapture after the 2nd Coming, something no one believes. They also have to ignore the fact that in Matthew 24:40-41 both believers and non-believers are sent somewhere, believers being received unto Him, while non-believers are sent away. You have to research the Greek words translated "**taken**" (*paralambano*) and "**left**" (*alphiemi*) to realize this, but when you do you'll see that the English is misleading. No Rapture view includes the disposition of non-believers, nor does it even mention them.

By the way, this is a great example of why the literal, historical, grammatical interpretation is so important. Our Bible was mostly written in Hebrew and Greek. Every translation relies on the movement of words from one language to another. This process doesn't always produce a perfect fit, and so learned men have to make allowances for this and exercise their own judgment from time to time. But men are not perfect. We all have our biases. When it's an important issue where you want an exact meaning it's always a good idea to double-check their work. Fortunately, we have an incredible tool in the Strong's Concordance. It contains every Hebrew and Greek word in the Bible with their primary and secondary meanings, how often each word appears in the Bible and what meanings are used in each appearance. You can compare these with the meaning the translators used and see if you agree with their treatment of the passage. By doing this with Matthew 24:40-41, you'll find that the primary meaning of "**paralambano**" is to receive and the primary meaning of "**alphiemi**" is to send away. People with

a post-tribulation disposition read 1 Thessalonians 4:15, and then turned to Matthew 24:40-41 where they saw one group being “*taken*” and another group being “*left*” after the end of the Great Tribulation. Assuming that these were the Lord’s own words Paul was referring to, they stopped there. They had seen what they wanted to see.

In actuality Matt. 24:40-41 is most likely a preview of the Sheep and Goat judgment of Tribulation survivors. The word taken (received) refers to believers going live into the Kingdom, and the word left (sent away) applies to non-believers who are sent to the place prepared for the Devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:31-46) Of course none of this pertains to our desert island reader above. The verses I used there are clear enough that they don’t require any research into the original language. So, he wouldn’t need a Strong’s Concordance, just his Bible.

What’s Your Point?

So, if Jesus never taught about the Rapture, to which of the “**Lord’s own words**” was Paul referring? Some dismiss the phrase, saying that Paul was speaking of a conversation he had with the Lord that doesn’t appear in Scripture. But I think we deserve a better answer than that. Remember, 1 Thessalonians was probably Paul’s first written communication, undertaken in 51 AD. Depending on whose opinion you accept, Matthew’s Gospel was either just being written or was still nearly 10 years away. Those who give it an early date say it was written to the Jews in Jerusalem and may even have been written in Hebrew. In any case neither it nor any other Gospel was yet in wide distribution. (Mark’s Gospel, the other candidate for earliest one written, doesn’t contain an equivalent to Matthew 24:40-41.) So if Paul was referring to Scripture, as I believe he was, it had to be the Old Testament. Yes, like everything else in God’s plan, you’ll find hints of the Rapture even in the Old Testament.

Look at this passage from Isaiah 26:19-21. **But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins.**

Notice how the pronouns change from second person when God speaks of His people to third person when He speaks of the people of the Earth. It means the two groups are different. Those called “**my people**” are told to “**enter your rooms**” (the rooms of John 14:1-3?) because the others, called “the people of Earth” are going to be punished for their sins in a period of time called His Wrath. Sound familiar? (Note: the Hebrew word translated “**go**” in the phrase “**Go my people**” is translated “**come**” in some translations, recalling the command to John in Revelation 4, “**Come up here!**” But the word has another primary meaning and it’s my favorite. It means vanish. “Vanish, my people!” Yes, we will.)

Not by any stretch of the imagination has this passage been literally fulfilled. It’s an End Times prophecy that promises a resurrection of the dead and hiding of God’s people while God’s Wrath is unleashed on the people of Earth for their sins. And it was written 2750 years ago. The hiding of the Jews in the desert on Earth at the beginning of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 12:14) cannot be considered as a fulfillment of this passage because no resurrection accompanies it. (The resurrection of Old Testament believers takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation. (Daniel 12:2)) Of course, no one knows for sure that this is the passage Paul referred to, but as evidence of its influence on him, let’s compare it with what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4-5.

- Isaiah in 26:19: **But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.**
- Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:16: **The dead in Christ will rise first.**
- Isaiah in 26:20: **Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.**

- Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: **After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**
- Isaiah in 26:21: **See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins.**
- Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:3: **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.**

The wording is a little different, but it sure looks to me like they're describing the same event.

And Still More

There are other sound theological reasons why the Church will be raptured before the End Times judgments begin.

1. One is that the Lord seems to keep Israel and the Church separate, never dealing with both at the same time (Acts 15: 13-18) If the primary purpose of Daniel's 70th week is to finish fulfilling the six promises to Israel in Daniel 9:24, then the Church has to disappear.
2. Another is that the Church was purified at the cross at which time all the punishment due us was born by the Lord Himself. From that time forward the Church is considered by God to be as righteous as He is (2 Corinthians 5:17 & 21) The idea that the Church needs to undergo some discipline to become worthy to dwell with God is not scriptural and denies the Lord's completed work on the cross.
3. And third, the stated purpose of the Great Tribulation is twofold, to purify Israel and completely destroy the unbelieving nations. (Jeremiah 30:1-11) The Church isn't destined for either of these outcomes. There are also several subtle clues that on their own can't be used to support the pre-tribulation position, but which underscore the validity of the clear passages I've just cited. Take for instance the fact that Enoch, who bears a great similarity to the Church, disappeared before the Great Flood, that the angels couldn't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah until Lot and his family were clear, and that Daniel was missing from the story of the fiery furnace, a model of the Great Tribulation.

When the Lord described His coming in Luke 17:26-29 He said that it would be both like the days of Noah (some will be preserved through the accompanying judgments) and the days of Lot (some will taken away before them). And what about the promise He made to the Church in Philadelphia that he would keep us out of the "hour" of trial coming on the whole world. (Revelation 3:10)

But being asked to cite verses that didn't require any prior knowledge I picked two that are clearest to me, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 and Isaiah 26: 19-21. And so, by the testimony of two witnesses, one in the Old Testament and one in the New, we see the physical separation of believers from non-believers preceding the time of Judgment. And by the testimony of two witnesses a thing shall be established. (Deuteronomy 19:15) Of course some won't be convinced until we show them a verse that says the rapture will precede the Great Tribulation in those exact words. Obviously, such a verse doesn't exist. I guess we'll just have to wait and explain it to them on the way up.