

# 1st resurrection and the rapture

By John Jones

## Introduction

Sixteen years ago, having been a believer for only a year, I set out to really understand prophecy for myself. By that stage I had already read and believed the teaching of my denomination. I was even quite sure they were right about all of it, but I still just wanted to be able to see it for myself directly out of the bible. At the time I envisaged this being a study that would last several months; I never imagined it would become a focus of my personal study for the next fifteen years. So what happened? Well, although I was able to verify most of my denomination's teaching on prophecy, serious difficulties arose in putting together the theory of pre-tribulation rapture.

After an extended period of unsuccessfully trying to fit the pre-tribulation pieces together to form a logical picture I eventually accepted that maybe the pieces actually just didn't fit. At that point I changed my tack and just started reading and re-reading every bible passage on prophecy without trying too hard to consciously understand everything, but just praying that God would make sense of it for me. When a new picture began to form a lot of things started to fall into place and make sense. Yet despite what I was starting to see I went through a five year period of limbo, seeing what I believed to be the truth but doubting myself against the collective might of the pre-trib rapture teachers. Bear in mind that at this point I had never come across any teaching other than pre-trib (no Internet then), so it seemed a bit preposterous for me to go against seemingly "everyone" in sound biblical circles.

Of course since then I've discovered that there are other biblical prophecy teachers who do teach differently concerning the rapture. This very condensed account is just intended to provide a quick, easy to absorb, overview of the competing theories and what I believe is by far the most natural interpretation to fall out of the pages of the bible on this topic. Being such a

brief account though it's only a starting point and I'd encourage anyone keen to really know the truth to follow up these thoughts via their own study of God's word, and possibly reading my more detailed eBook on Prophecy and End Times at Christianity.org.nz. (Most of the prophecy teachings on the site have a link to the eBook).

Before we start it's important just to pause a moment to clearly define a few of the key terms, and also to set out the timeline against which they are placed.

## Defining Terms

Critical to our frame of reference is the prophetic timeline given to the prophet Daniel, along with some of the additional details added to this timeline by New Testament teachings.

*In order:*

Covenant to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25 / Nehemiah 2:5-8 {445BC})

--- 69 weeks ("sevens" of years) of Daniel's prophecy ---

Messiah the prince (John 12:13)

--- The kingdom in mystery ---

The covenant renewed (Dan 9:27) – start point of the seventieth week (the tribulation)

Breaking of the covenant (by Anti-Christ) – half way through tribulation.

Outpouring of divine wrath (as opposed to earthly troubles) – sometime after half way point of tribulation; a little hard to be sure when.

Jewish national repentance (Zech 12, Hosea 5:15) – nearly at the end of the tribulation; immediately prior to Christ’s coming.

Christ’s coming – nearly at the end of the tribulation; he executes final judgment on the kingdom and armies of the beast in person.

Messiah the king – second coming of Messiah

Against this timeline, in particular the tribulation, we have the following terms concerning the timing of the rapture:

**Pre-trib**, short for pre-tribulation (before the tribulation) is the idea that Christ will return in a secret coming prior to the tribulation just to collect his own children off the earth before the time of tribulation.

**Mid-trib**, is that the same event will occur but not before the tribulation, rather at the mid-way point in Daniel’s seventieth week.

**Pre-wrath** is the idea that the rapture occurs after the midpoint of the tribulation but prior to the outpouring of God’s wrath.

**Post-trib** is the belief that we go pretty much right through the tribulation and that the rapture occurs “at Christ’s coming”.

...if it seems rather mad to you that there are so many theories on the timing of the rapture, well I have to say it is as mad as it seems; the bible really isn’t as confusing as mans intellect has made it.

## The cornerstone of pre-trib

Proponents of pre-tribulation rapture have a complete and well developed theological argument behind their position. I'll cover some aspects of this as I go, however my personal observation is that the main strength of their theory actually lies in the following piece of logic:

**Surely God will not pour out his wrath on his own children.** When all the theological debate is exhausted, this, presented in one wording or another, usually seems to be produced as the ultimate trump card by most pre-trib advocates. And it appears to be backed up by verses such as *1 Thessalonians 5:9* which says:

*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:9)*

But is this argument as convincing as it first appears? First, the juxtaposition against the word "salvation" clearly indicates that the verse is comparing eternal damnation with eternal salvation, not speaking of our presence or otherwise in the tribulation.

Second, even according to pre-trib theory, there are a group of saved children of God who do go through the tribulation - those saved in it! Thus, pre-tribulation rapture in itself does not solve the problem of how God judges the world without pouring out his wrath on those who are his own. To play this issue down pre-trib advocates tend to call those saved in the tribulation "tribulation saints" rather than "Christians", and usually say that they are more akin to the saints of the Old Testament in their position before God. This point is based on the thought that after the pre-trib rapture the "church age" is over and Israel is back in prophetic view. There are problems with this conjecture though. First, it's quite clear from scripture that Christ comes only when Israel as a nation repents (in your own time have a look at Zechariah 12, Hosea 5). Thus Israel, at a national level, is still in unbelief during the tribulation, so while Israel is mentioned a few of times in Revelation it's questionable whether the church age really is immediately over. Second, aligning those saved with the Old Testament saints is kind of

undoing the New Covenant. It makes no sense to think that anyone saved both after the establishing of the New Covenant and after Christ's sacrificial death are somehow in the category of Old Testament saints - it's rather artificial.

Now, going back to the verse we saw earlier about Christians not being appointed to wrath. The first thing to say here is that Christians definitely are spared from the outpouring of God's wrath, the only question being whether they are spared from it while still on the earth, or whether they are completely removed from this world before it is poured out. If we do take the latter view, that they are removed before God's wrath comes, then I believe it would actually most natural to end up in the mid-trib, or pre-wrath, camp.

## Mid-trib and timelines in Revelation

So let's look at mid-trib for a moment. Mid-trib teaching correctly points out that the tribulation has two phases. Much of it is simply major troubles on the Earth such as wars, violence, famines, pestilence, etc. Only the latter part of the tribulation (half or less) is actually the outpouring of God's divine wrath. It is in a sense Pre-wrath, it's just that unlike Jacob mid-trib advocates believe the period of wrath starts immediately with the breaking of the covenant by Anti-Christ half way through the tribulation. The obvious question to ask in regards to this idea is whether or not there is any event in the bible of this nature that occurs part way through the tribulation. Mid-trib rapture advocates would say that the latter parts of Revelation 11 are just this.

*In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And*

*the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth." Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. (Revelation 11:13-19 )*

Convincing? Yes indeed, yet the logic being applied is completely flawed. These verses occur in the middle of the book, but not in the middle of the tribulation. It's quite clear if you study the book of Revelation in depth that these verses belong to the very end of the tribulation period. A number of events in them line up with events spoken about at the end of the tribulation, most notably the verse about it being the **time to judge the dead and reward the saints**. This is picked up on again in Revelation 20. And, just to demonstrate that Revelation is not entirely consecutive time-wise, you'll find that the first verses in Revelation 12 (immediately following) are clearly about a time even before the birth of Christ. The timelines of Revelation are another whole topic, however in a general sense they are similar to the book of Daniel which lays down the big picture, then makes another pass over it in more detail and finally opens up even more detail about some particularly important events near the end. For example Revelation chapter six broadly covers events right through to the hours before Christ's coming even though chapter six is early in the book, and Revelation 11 also takes the reader right through to about this same time. So, getting back to the mid-trib view, the problem with it is that a clear understanding of the timing of events in Revelation rules out using the verses we've just looked at from chapter 11 to support mid-trib.

## What Christians believed before 1830

At this point it wouldn't hurt to look at what Christians believed up until around 1830. It seems from what I've been able to find that in all of the two thousand year history of the church there are only a tiny number of examples of pre-trib rapture being taught before 1830, and none in the early church (before the Constantinian change and the birth of that Christian-Pagan hybrid we call Catholicism). For instance, the most recent identifiable teaching on pre-trib rapture prior to 1830 comes from a Catholic Jesuit priest, Emmanuel Lacunza who outlined this theory in his 1812 book, *The Coming Of Messiah In Glory And Majesty*. Oddly the rebirth of this idea around 1830 may also have had Catholic origins as you'll see from what follows.

A few years ago I came across a book entitled "The Great Rapture Hoax". In it the author, Dave MacPherson, quotes writings expressing the views of well known and respected early church writers, church fathers, reformers, radicals, revival preachers and some modern teachers too. This list is virtually a who's who of church writers from the beginning until now. They may collectively have many differences in viewpoint, but on the matter of the "catching up" into the air of believers left on the earth and the second coming of Jesus they all expressed the same thought; that these events are one. In addition to this Dave MacPherson presents his research into the roots of the pre-trib idea, arguing that it started with the vision of an 18 year old Catholic girl called Mary Macdonald in Scotland in 1830. Now history is often somewhat debatable, nevertheless it's worth reading his account of things. Apparently a secretive sect, the Catholic Apostolic church, picked up on Mary Macdonald's vision and it became their accepted doctrine. John Darby of the Plymouth brethren also visited Mary Macdonald during the summer of 1830, and though he commented afterwards that she quoted the scriptures out of context he became more and more interested in pre-trib rapture, ultimately making it his own and forming a complete theology around it (though it's possible he had come to this conclusion prior to meeting Mary Macdonald – this is at least what he later claimed). Either way Darby went on to travel all over the western world preaching and promoting this new doctrine.

As his own notes actually record he often did this subtly at first, recognizing that it was a new thought and that most people were not ready to accept it straight away.

### The immediate implications

But if the rapture does not occur until the second coming of Christ (as so many teachers prior to 1830 believed), how do we answer the earlier question posed regarding God pouring out his wrath on his own children? Well first, let's recall that due to people being saved during the tribulation, a lack of pre-trib rapture doesn't entirely solve this anyway. Nevertheless answering this question is still important to our understanding. Perhaps the first part of the answer to it is to understand that there may be very few Christians left on Earth at the time of Christ's coming. Daniel and Revelation both teach that the Antichrist makes "war against the saints" and prevails against them. It seems as though the cosmic struggle is along the lines that the Antichrist makes war against God's people and God makes war against the kingdom of the Antichrist. You will recall that in Joshua chapter 10 God rained down hailstones on the armies of the five kings as they fled before the pursuing Israelites. Note that there were no Israeli casualties. God can be very accurate and is quite able to pour out judgment on the kingdom of the beast without hurting his own people.

## The case for post-trib

Now, I'm going to get into some slightly meatier bible study around this. This is just a summarized look at these issues, so I'm just going to hit some key points, starting with the problem that sent me down this track in the first place.

It was actually the Panorama Bible that raised the issue due to its use of the first resurrection verses in Revelation chapter 20 in connection to pre-tribulation rapture. At first I just thought they'd used a verse out of place, but as I tried to sort out what they'd done I just got deeper and deeper into problems.

Let's have a look at The First Resurrection

*And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Rev 20:4-6)*

Chapter 20 of Revelation speaks of "the first resurrection", and in the context of the way it flows on from chapter 19 there seems no mistaking that it is about events at the end of the tribulation. Chapter 19 & 20 up to verse 6 collectively cover:

- The readiness of the bride of Christ for marriage
- The return of the Lord
- The destruction of the armies of the beast
- The binding of Satan
- The first resurrection

The verses concerning the first resurrection in chapter 20 are used with regards to pre-tribulation rapture in some scholarly circles, but my impression is that this whole set of events are all quite tightly knit together around the second coming of the Lord.

But it's actually chapter 19 that most strongly suggests this – I'll come back to chapter 19 later once we've covered a few other bases.

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## I Corinthians and the resurrection

We all know the classic I Thessalonians 4 account of the rapture. Less commonly referred to is the I Corinthians 15:51-53 passage which is a parallel account.

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (I Cor 15:51-53)*

Now, if you know chapter 15 as a whole you should be thoroughly aware that its whole focus is **the resurrection of the dead and what kind of body they are resurrected in**. So here the chapter as a whole is firmly focused on **a resurrection of dead believers**.

Of course, while less developed in its context, this is also the focus of the I Thessalonians 4 passage.

### **It starts:**

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have died, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. (I Thes 4:13-14)*

...and the rest is fairly similar to the I Corinthians account.

What I'm wanting to highlight here is that the rapture is primarily a resurrection of the dead – it's just that those remaining, possibly only a very few, are caught up in this event. The emphasis has gone all wrong here such that many think of this event only in terms of the more minor aspect of it; the rapture of living saints off the earth.

## Speculations - II Thessalonians

Some of the arguments for pre-trib theory are rather speculative at best. One of these speculations relates to II Thessalonians 2:6 where the verse indicates that some power, probably the Holy Spirit, is restraining evil from running its full course until the appointed time. Pre-tribulation theorists extend this to mean that when this restraint is removed this somehow automatically means that the Holy Spirit is completely removed from the earth and thus the believers with it. But then where do the great multitude of saved which no man can number (who are killed in the tribulation) come from? (Rev 7:9,14). Surely you can't say that a great work of God occurs on the earth without the Holy Spirit? It makes a lot more sense to see that these are the saints that entered into the tribulation period, not a whole new class of half-Christian (half Old Testament saint types) saved during it. This of course doesn't deny that many additional people will surely be saved during the tribulation.

The II Thessalonians 2 passage as a whole actually provides evidence that the rapture is not pre-tribulation. If you read it with fresh eyes you'll see that the context is Paul is speaking against those who were saying that the day of Christ was imminent at that time or had already passed; pointing out that the day of Christ won't come until after the Antichrist is revealed. So you'll see that he actually gives gentile Christians the sign of the Antichrist as preceding their expectation of Christ's return. Why would he do this if Christians would never see this road mark? Surely in the context he would tell us if we weren't actually going to be around to see this sign.

## Speculations – Revelation 4

Another common speculation is that surrounding John's experience in the book of Revelation. Jesus dictates seven letters to seven churches to John and then chapter 4 opens with:

*After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." (Rev 4:1)*

It is explained to support pre-trib theory that the seven letters to the seven churches represent the church age and this passage represents the rapture prior to what John was to see next. All I would say to this is – maybe?

I think it's hardly conclusive either way – it would add to understanding of pre-trib only if pre-trib was provable from other sources.

### **The Christian expectation**

Now, let's look for a moment at the general Christian expectation set out by Peter. In his second epistle he exhorts us as follows:

*Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat (II Peter 3:12)*

...what impression does this impart of the day Christians look towards? We are to be looking for "the coming of the day of God", and the character of that is made clear.

### **The resurrection at the last day**

Here's another point leading in a similar direction - Martha says of Lazarus:

*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day (John 11:24)*

Jesus says in the verse afterwards, 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

Do you see it? When Jesus returns the graves are opened because **he is the resurrection and the life** and those still remaining are simply caught up in this.

### The resurrection is from an earthly perspective

It's important to understand also that the resurrection is from an earthly perspective. It's certainly not from a heavenly one as Jesus said to the thief on the cross:

*...today you will be with Me in paradise. (Luke 23:43)*

Saints who have died are already alive with Christ in heaven; they don't need to be resurrected in that sense. **It is their return to the earth with him that is seen from an earthly perspective as their resurrection from the dead.**

They were dead from an earthly perspective and are again seen alive on the earth. That is the resurrection, a resurrection to a body that can again inhabit this earth.

### The parable of the wheat and the tares

*"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth and sever the wicked from among the just". (Matthew 13:49)*

Notice in this parable Jesus says that the angels sever the wicked "from amongst the just". He doesn't say that God takes away the just first then pours out his wrath on the wicked. Pre-trib advocates attempt to relate this passage to Messiah dividing the sheep from the goats after his return, but I don't think it reads convincingly that way. It sounds a lot more like the execution of judgment poured out via the angels in Revelation prior to Christ's return, though to be fair one couldn't be 100% conclusive either way just from this passage alone.

## The last trumpet

Do you know that one of the classic rapture verses may actually give the timing of the rapture quite clearly?

In I Corinthians 15:52, which we read earlier, the verse actually says that the resurrection will occur **at the last trumpet**.

In a non pre-trib view there is no reason not to accept that this is simply the last trumpet sounded in Revelation 11:15, rather than trying to assign it (as pre-trib advocates do) to the earthly occurrence of a Jewish new year feast (Rosh Hashanah), which if anything in itself only contains a type of the coming trumpet judgments and the new era they will usher in and is thus far less significant than the judgment events themselves when they occur.

If you're familiar with Revelation you'll know that judgment is unveiled by the opening of seven seals followed by the sounding of seven trumpets and then the very last outpouring of severe wrath is in the form of seven vials, perhaps by Christ at his coming since we see in the latter part of Revelation 19 that he makes war against the kingdom of the beast in person.

## The grafting back on of Israel

Another pre-trib idea I must say a little more about is the idea that the church age will end before the tribulation and that Israel will come back into focus and 144,000 Jews will become the instrument of preaching the gospel during that time.

Does this make sense when the response of Israel to the Antichrist is initially that of ACCEPTANCE, as we learn where Jesus says:

*I am come in my father's name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive". (John 5:43)*

The unbelieving nation of Israel will actually make some kind of covenant with the Antichrist (Dan 9:27) and will only start to be concerned when he sets himself up as God in the rebuilt temple (according to II Thes 2:4); probably well into the tribulation period. From somewhere around that point we are told that the Holy Land will be trodden under foot by the gentiles for three and a half years (according to Rev 11:2), while God preserves a remnant of Israel in the wilderness (in Rev 12:14).

Far from Israel coming back to the Lord at the start of the tribulation, it seems that Israel's eventual repentance is what finally precipitates the return of the Lord.

*I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early (Hos 5:15).*

All Israel will be grafted back on, but only at the end of the tribulation. The source of confusion here is the 144,000 in Revelation chapter seven and again it comes down to timing in Revelation. You'll see that the end of Revelation chapter 6 is about the time just immediately before Christ's appearing – they call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of the Lamb, tying in with Matt 24:30 when the people mourn because they see the sign of the son of Man and know his wrath is about to fall on them in his coming. Just because chapters six and seven are early in the book doesn't mean all the events in them occur early in the tribulation. Revelation chapter six seems more of a high level overview of the whole period, while chapter seven deals with a special sealing of Jews (and the situation of the martyrs) at the same point of time that chapter six concludes; immediately prior to the Lord's return.

So who do the 144,000 preach to? Well Revelation doesn't actually say they preach to anyone; however my guess is that they may well be the agents of God who bring the remnant of Israel as a whole to repentance and to acknowledge the one they pierced.

## A plain reading of the most classic of all rapture passages

There are still more clues as to the timing of the rapture in those most classic rapture verses of all – I Thessalonians.

*We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that **God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are alive, who are left till **the coming of the Lord**, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (I Thessalonians 4:14-15) - NIV*

The NKJV effectively says the same thing however I've used the NIV here because the plainness of its wording makes its message even clearer. Look at the terms used – “bring with Jesus” & “the coming of the Lord”. Isn't the plain and obvious meaning to the non-preconditioned mind the second coming of Christ.

This passage is clearly saying that God will bring those who died in Christ with Jesus **at the time of his coming**. Then following these verses it goes on to describe his coming and how the dead will be raised (meaning that on the earth they will be seen alive again as I explained earlier). The part that is new here is the revelation that when this resurrection occurs those saints who remain alive on the earth at the time of his coming will also be caught up in this resurrection of the dead and receive their new resurrection bodies. Since the rapture is clearly tied to the resurrection of the dead saints, what meaning would it have to take it as being a secret event occurring before the tribulation? How can the dead rise first in a pre-tribulation rapture? Rise to where? Aren't they already in heaven? Only in receiving their resurrection bodies and being seen again on the earth does the resurrection of those already in heaven now make sense, and it's abundantly clear that this is when Christ returns in visible power to the earth (see Rev 19 explanation following).

On the other hand, accepting that the rapture is just when it says, at the coming of the Lord, makes clear and simple sense at all levels as well as tying in quite naturally with Jesus' own

account of the Tribulation. For in Matthew 24:30-31 he speaks of his coming and gathering of the elect in very similar terms, but in that case the event is absolutely and unmistakably tied to his visible second coming to the earth with power and great glory.

*For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.*

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

*And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:27-41)*

Note the agency of Angels, the trumpet and the coming in the clouds; all very analogous to our classic rapture verses:

*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. 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. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) - NIV*

## **Revelation 19 – the marriage of the lamb**

Now, I said I'd come back to Revelation 19. Lets look through that quickly now.

Verses 1-6 are rejoicing in the judgment of the great harlot in the preceding chapters. Let's pick it up from verse seven.

*Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" ... (Rev 19:7-9)*

So after the judgment of Babylon we see the bride of Christ ready to be united with the Lord in marriage.

The saints are arrayed in white robes, just as those in chapter seven who we are told "have come out of the great tribulation". In both cases we're seeing saints in heaven, indeed it's probably the same event. Neither of the verses pre-suppose that every single saint is in heaven at this point.

Then we see the coming of the Lord:

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

--- note that the armies "clothed in white linen fine and clean" come with him. This must surely be the bride mentioned in the same terms earlier as waiting for the marriage. Somehow in returning with him they are fully married to him – is this because the resurrection, when we receive new bodies like that of the risen Christ's, is when we become fully of the same kind as he is?

...we are all brought together in the resurrection at the last day, “at his coming” – including any stragglers still left alive on the earth.

The marriage is complete, now we are shown the marriage supper – judgment of the armies of the beast.

*Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.” And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.*

...what cotton candy has been spun about the marriage supper of the lamb, but this is the only passage in the bible that clearly purports to be about this very topic.

Anyway, you can see from this that we are at least spared the final in person pouring out of Christ’s wrath. So given that I believe the rapture is at the coming of Christ, this is still pre-wrath to at least some extent.

## Persecution

You can perhaps see why it’s a little shocking for those embedded in pre-trib to consider thinking differently.

It really is challenging to consider that the true church may face such intense times of persecution and trouble ahead.

But isn't this just going back to reality for Christians. Back to what Christians faced under successive Roman persecutions, the Catholic church and today in many Moslem countries.

Try telling those persecuted by Nero that God wouldn't allow his church to go through the tribulation and they probably would have laughed. Many thought they already were in the tribulation and that Nero was the antichrist so they certainly didn't believe in pre-tribulation rapture. Their experience, though not the tribulation as such, may well have been an early foreshadowing of it.

## Conclusion

I really never set out to change my thinking on the rapture; I was quite happy believing in a pre-tribulation rapture. But in successive passes over the topic, and much prayer about it over the years, I have come to the point where I am absolutely certain that it is an utterly flawed and artificial theory that does not align with the word of God. Sometimes I wonder if people who believe it really know what they believe. For instance, do they realize that by believing that I Thessalonians 4 verses are speaking of the rapture that, due to "the dead in Christ rising first" they actually believe in three resurrections. The one before the tribulation, the one after the tribulation at the coming of Jesus (which pre-trib teachers say relates only to those "tribulation saints" saved during the tribulation), and the one at the end of the millennium for the unbelieving dead. Why then does Revelation only speak of the first and second resurrections (being the latter two)? Why doesn't it call them the second and third? Also, the dead raised in the pre-trib rapture – what does it mean that they are resurrected? They started off in heaven and they end up in heaven. Of course there are pre-trib answers for all these things but you'll find they are convoluted answers.

Anyway, the poor logic of it aside, the reason I believe it is an important topic is this. If Christians entering the tribulation are too firmly wedded to pre-trib, is it possible that they will for some time fail to recognise the season and to act appropriately in casting off this world and just proclaiming the gospel and seeking the kingdom?

To this end, even if people don't specifically agree with me, I'm happy if people's minds are at least open enough to consider these things and let events interpret themselves when they occur. For those more curious though I highly encourage you to explore this topic further, mainly by reading prophecies in God's word with a willingness to just hear what they naturally say.