

The (Great) Tribulation

Tribulation: A time of intense suffering and persecution

Note: Though those who are Amillennial and Postmillennial can believe in some type of tribulation, the *timing* of the tribulation in regards to the second coming of Christ is more of a discussion in Premillennial camps.

In the Old Testament and non-canonical Jewish literature

Daniel 12:1 - "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

Zephaniah 1:14–15 - The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

Testament of Moses 8:1 - "And there will come upon them...punishment and wrath such as has never happened to them from the creation till that time when he stirs up against them a king of the kings of the earth."

2 Baruch 27:1; 15 - "In the first part there shall be the beginning of commotions...For some shall leave out some of their own, and receive (in its stead) from others, and some complete their own and that of others so that those may not understand who are upon the earth in those days that this is the consummation of the times."

Didache 16:5 - "Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself."

In the New Testament

A specific, cataclysmic "tribulation"

Matthew 24:21 - For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

Matthew 24:29 - "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Revelation 7:14 - I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

General Tribulation

John 16:33 - I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:22 - strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Romans 12:12 - Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Revelation 1:9 - I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

In Jewish and Christian history

The exile of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C. and the exile of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The rule of Antiochus IV Euphianes in the mid-second century B.C.

The Jewish War between Judea and Rome in 66-70 A.D.

The persecution of Christianity under Nero, Decius, Diocletian, and other Roman Emperors.

Five ways to understand the Tribulation

1. It is something that is always going on as God's saints are persecuted in the church age.
2. It is the period of time around 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and massacred the Jewish people.
3. It is an undefined period of suffering in the future that God's people will have to endure. This is called "post-tribulation" or "post-trib" because Christ comes back after the "Tribulation."

4. It is a seven-year period of suffering in the future that God's people will not have to endure at all. This is called "pre-tribulation" or "pre-trib" because Christ comes back *before* the "Tribulation."

5. It is a seven-year period of suffering in the future that God's people will have to endure for 3 ½ years, but don't have to endure for the second, worse 3 ½ years. This is called "mid-tribulation" or "mid-trib" because Christ comes back *in the middle* of the "Tribulation." This is a vary rare view held by theologians such as Gleason Archer, that believe that the 7-year tribulation is broken up into 3 ½ years of the "wrath of man" and 3 ½ years of the "wrath of God." This view is based on the fact that in Daniel and Revelation the time periods that describe the end are cut in half.

Note 1: If that isn't confusing enough there is a small, minority view called "pre-wrath" that states that Christians will still be raptured but that the rapture will come after the seven years of man's tribulation.

Note 2: In the first three views above you have those in the Amillennial, Postmillennial, and Historic Premillennial camps. In the fourth and fifth views you only have Dispensational Premillennialists.

Why Dispensationalists say Christians will not go through the "Tribulation"

They believe there has to be a time for all the promises in the Old Testament (made to ethnic Israel) to be fulfilled in ethnic Israel. The "tribulation" is when they believe this will happen. How will the Jews see they are wrong? Because all the Christians will be sucked up to heaven.

Response: Jesus is the true "Israel" and those that are linked to him are truly Jews. Their system misunderstands the role of Israel and the church and bifurcates Israel and the church.

This would mean that God was pouring his wrath out on believers.

Response: God is not pouring out his wrath on believers. He is pouring it out on non-believers and, because they are suffering, they are persecuting believers. The same thing was true in the plagues of Egypt. God was judging Egypt so the Egyptians got mad at the Hebrews and made their lives harder.

Revelation 3:10 - 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.

Response: This text says nothing about believers being taken out of the earth. It just promises God's protection of his people. Also, if it was talking about a rapture that was going to happen over 2,000 years, how would that encourage the church at Philadelphia?

The Bible teaches that Christians will be “raptured” away

Response: (See below)

What’s the deal with the “Rapture?”

The Greek word that we translate as “rapture” is *harpazo*. The Latin term is *rapio* which means to “seize” or “snatch.”

Technically all Christians believe we will meet Christ in the air. The question is, “are we meeting him in the air because we are escorting him back down to earth (traditional view) or are we meeting him there because we have been secretly taken away from earth before the (third) coming of Christ (dispensational view).”

So, technically, all Christians believe in a “rapture.” But when people say “rapture” today they almost always mean “pre-tribulational, secret rapture.” In that sense we should not believe in a “rapture.”

Passages that don’t actually teach a pre-tribulation “rapture”

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 - 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.

Notice, the context of this passage (in the larger context of 1 Thessalonians) is the actual, bodily second coming of Christ, not a “rapture.”

Notice that the “rapture” is about a secret, invisible coming of Christ. This passage says there is a voice of an archangel, a trumpet, and a shout (cry of command). It is obvious and visible.

Matthew 24:37–41 - For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

In context, you want to be the person that stays, not the person that’s taken! The person “taken” is the one who is washed away in judgment like Noah’s enemies.

Why Christians will go through the “Tribulation”

1. The Bible does not teach a pretribulational “rapture” and the Bible says that Christ’s final coming is after the tribulation so, logically, Christians will go through it.
2. The Bible (and church history) are very clear that part of the mark of true Christians is that they don’t fall away when persecution becomes very intense. The Bible also seems to say that things get worse for Christians right before Christ returns.
3. There are not two returns of Christ taught in scripture, which is a necessity if you think Christians will not go through the tribulation.
4. Many passages seem to imply that we will go through the tribulation.

Mark 13:20–21 - And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. (notice that this is directed to Christ’s disciples and it is about believers, not Jews who convert in the tribulation)

Revelation 6:9–11 - When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Revelation 12:11 - And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Revelation 2:10 - Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Matthew 24:7–9 - For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.

Luke 21:11-13 - There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

John 17:15 - I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

Why does this matter?

1. It matters because God wants us to rightly understand his word.
2. It matters because it gives us hope.
3. It matters because it helps us understand suffering. (no name it and claim it)