

Inputs about the Rapture

Preface: I am clear that I don't know when the rapture will occur because I know that God can do what He plans to do. Based on what is revealed in Scripture and God's character, I do place a high likelihood on the *ekklesia* being present on the earth for a significant portion of the Great Tribulation. I would prefer a pre-tribulation rapture, but I cannot see how it lines up with what the Bible says.

I believe every believer should avoid making a 100% conclusion that they are certain about the timing of the rapture. I believe it is important to know that God keeps things secret and that it is best for us to have **readiness** to respond and adapt to whatever happens. Our faith is not founded in our position about rapture. It is a lesser theological item which will become plain as future events unfold. I have found these two passages to be the most relevant as far as establishing a healthy mindset about Christ's Second Coming.

1 Thessalonians 5:6–9 (LEB)

6 So then, we must not sleep like the rest, but must be on the alert and be self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But *because* we are of the day, we must be sober, *by* putting on the breastplate of faith and love and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation, 9 because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Luke 21:34–36 (LEB)

34 "But take care for yourselves, lest your hearts are weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of daily life, and that day come upon you suddenly 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who reside on the face of the whole earth. 36 But be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these *things that* are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

If I escape all of the Great Tribulation, I will rejoice along with the rest of the *ekklesia*. If I do not escape all of the Great Tribulation, then I will continue trusting in the Lord day by day to lead and guide me (and others I know) through this perilous time. In this case, I pray the Lord grant me excellent hearing, humble repentance and even better obedience to His voice as the best way through each day.

Moving past this preface...

I do not believe that the absence of the Greek word *ekklesia* after Revelation 4 is sufficient to say that the church is raptured before the Great Tribulation. I don't believe this idea synchronizes with the rest of what the Bible reveals regarding the End Times and Jesus' Second Coming.

Before I go any further, I want to clarify something I am not saying with the following presentation. I am not saying that I believe that any part of the *ekklesia* will be subject to, the target of, or destined for God's wrath. At the same time, this does not PROVE that we will not be present on the earth for some portion of the Bowls of Wrath described in Revelation. If we look back and the Israelites in their deliverance from Egypt, we see that some of the plagues affected them, but as the plagues progressed God made a separation. The Egyptians experienced the consequences of the plagues, but the Israelites did not. They were preserved while the plagues of God were being carried out. This is not a perfect parallel to the events of the Great Tribulation, but it is important to keep in mind when thinking about what God ways.

After presenting some challenges to the pre-tribulation rapture viewpoint, I will provide some additional in depth details about what the Bible says about the *ekklesia's* involvement in the time of God's wrath. I believe the wrath of God is fully poured out at the end of the seven bowls of wrath in Revelation, but all seven bowls represent some of His wrath. The first six bowls show that this wrath is targeted to those who bear the mark of the beast and won't repent. They also affect the whole creation.

Here are some key items to address in Scripture which are a challenge for pre-tribulation rapture viewpoint.

- **Item #1** – I don't believe any of the people of God have "avoided/evaded" judgment. Rather they have passed through judgment and found a "way of escape" because they paid attention to God. Almost everywhere (only one possible exception) that there is an "escape" from God's judgment the people of God experience some of the impacts (directly or as a side-effect) of judgment, but they are able to make it through by repentance and turning to God for help.
 - God's people (the church included) have never been exempted from experiencing God's judgment. Throughout the ages, God has judged his own and brought discipline which has been very bad. These times of judgment are not His wrath. They are judgment with discipline. The Great Tribulation is stated to be the worst in all of time, but I am unable to say that the entire Great Tribulation EQUALS God's Wrath based on anything in Scripture.
 - There is only ONE person in the Old Testament that may kind of "escaped" judgment without going through the judgment to find the "way of escape". It is Lot and even he suffered loss in escaping judgment by losing his wife.
 - There aren't any other of God's people who escape judgment without some consequences. This is true in Christian history as well beyond the scope of what is written about in the Bible.

- **Item #2** – References to His Return "like a thief"
 - **Summary:** The Bible specifically anchors the timing of Jesus' return "like a thief" to a point in time that is deep into the Great Tribulation. Most prophecy teachers avoid addressing Revelation 16:15 because it does not synchronize with their view. The only way for his coming "like a thief" near the end of the Great Tribulation to work together with a pre-tribulation rapture is for their to be "two returns of Christ" and some prophecy teachers put this idea forward, but there is not scriptural evidence to support this idea. The lack of scriptural proof does not rule out the possibility because God is God and He can do what He wants to do.
 - There are three or four "like a thief" references related to the second coming of Christ. The first two just make it very clear that "like a thief" is how God chose to present the nature of His return to those who are not paying attention. It is also an implicit warning/encouragement to those who are paying attention to remain steadfast in their waiting, watching and praying.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:2** - for *you* yourselves well know that the day of the Lord is coming in the *same* way as a thief in the night.
 - **2 Peter 3:10** - But the day of the Lord will come **like a thief**, in which the heavens will disappear with a rushing noise, and the celestial bodies will be destroyed *by* being burned up, and the earth and the deeds *done* on it will be disclosed.
 - **Revelation 3:3** – written to one of the seven churches. This reference may or may not be related to His second coming, but it uses the "like a thief" picture to indicate that those not paying attention will be surprised by Him.
 - The fourth reference of "like a thief" is the most interesting and challenging one.
 - Revelation 16:15 - Behold, I am coming **like a thief**. Blessed *is* the one who is on the alert and who keeps his clothing, so that he does not walk around naked and they see his shamefulness!
 - This reference is placed between the 6th Bowl of Wrath and the 7th Bowl of Wrath.
 - (Preparing for Battle of Armageddon) Revelation 16:12 - And the sixth poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, in order that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.
 - (Battle of Armageddon) Revelation 16:17 - And the seventh poured out his bowl on the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"
 - I believe the statement in verse 15 is placed just before the event of His coming occurs.
 - Only one church is said to be kept out of the "hour of trial" that is about to come upon the face of the whole earth, the church in Philadelphia. This leaves it possible for up to six of the churches to be present during the "hour of trial" and one of the seven (Sardis) who receives a "like a thief"

warning which may relate to End Times or it may just be a judgement against that church of some other kind.

- **Item #3** – “Last Trumpet”/”Trumpet of God” connected to the rapture.
 - **Summary:** The Bible is consistent in describing a ONE return of Christ and connects it to ONE resurrection from the dead, ONE rapture of those who remain and ONE inheritance of a new body. I believe we should understand the “Last Trumpet” / “Trumpet of God” based on God’s prophetic forecast through the Feasts (aka Appointments) of the Lord. There is one annual fall feast that features trumpets called the Feast of Trumpets. It includes a series of trumpet sounds including a “last trumpet”. Secondarily, there are trumpets sounded in the Year of Jubilee on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). The trumpets included in these specified feasts/appointments of the Lord are the most likely indicator of the timing of the “last trumpet”.
 - **Note:** Every detail of the Spring Feasts/Appointments of the Lord were fulfilled in the First Coming of Christ. It is very probable that all of the Fall Feasts/Appointments of the Lord will be fulfilled in Christ’s Second Coming.
 - Scripturally speaking there is only evidence of one rapture. There are multiple references that connect the rapture event specifically to the “Last Trumpet”
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 - For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a **shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God**, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who remain, will be snatched away at the same time together with them in the clouds for a meeting with the Lord in the air, and thus we will be together with the Lord always.
 - **Important Note:** snatched away in this verse is the Greek word *harpizo* which is where the entire idea of the rapture comes from.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 Behold, I tell you a mystery: we will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the blink of an eye, **at the last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
 - More verses about the resurrection and our new bodies which are connected to the return of Christ – 1 Cor 15:42-44

Important: If you look closely at these verses, they are closely synchronized and they show several things that happen at the same time.

1. Dead in Christ Rise == Dead Will Be Raised Imperishable
2. Not all fall asleep, all changed == We who are alive, who remain, will be snatched away at the same time (this is the same time as the dead are raised)
3. Trumpet of God == Last Trumpet

- **Item #4** – The goal is full maturity in Christ
 - Scripture appears to be very clear that the real goal of our lives is to attain full maturity in Christ. Yes, we are the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ, but this is true even before going through the process of sanctification. Our willing submission to the process of sanctification.
 - Ephesians 4:11–13 - And he himself gave some *as* apostles and some *as* prophets and some *as* evangelists and some *as* pastors and teachers 12 for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to a measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ,

In summary, the timing of what the Bible calls rapture (Gk *harpizo*) seems to synchronize in the text of the Bible to land between the 6th and 7th Bowl of Wrath.

More about God's Wrath and the Church

The idea that the *ekklesia* could be on the earth even after the bowls of wrath in Revelation 16 start presents a separate challenge that is very important. It is clear, we are not destined for wrath. We are not the target of God's wrath. God's wrath is stored up for the disobedient who refuse Jesus Christ. How can it be possible based on the Word of God that the Church is present through six bowls of God's wrath and for the Church not to be a target of God's Wrath?

Key Verses for "Saved Out of Wrath" / "Destined for Wrath"

Romans 5:9

9 Therefore, by much more, *because we* have been declared righteous now by his blood, we will be saved through him **from (apo)** the wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

10 and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who delivers us **from (Greek ek)** the coming wrath.

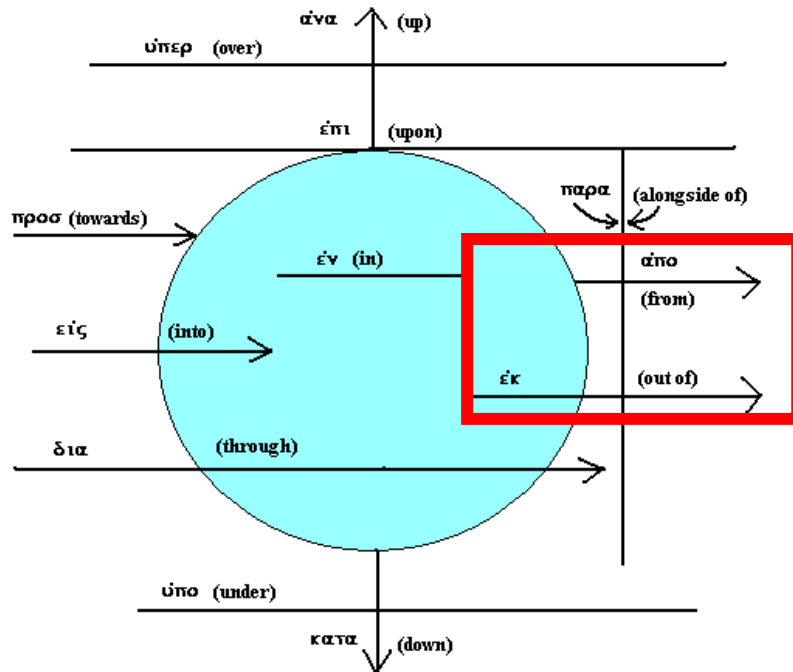
Note: There is a textual problem in 1 Th 1:10 where some early manuscripts have **apo** and some have **ek**. This may seem to be a minor thing, but when you look at Greek prepositions and their meaning it could be very important.

Lastly, we have another verse that connects back to the resurrection and the rapture of those still alive connected with the clear statement that we are not "appointed" or "destined" for wrath, but for salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

9 because God did not appoint us for wrath, but for the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live at the same time with him.

The following is a well-known chart that tries to portray the differences in various prepositions in Greek. There is more meaning in some of the Greek prepositions than you find in the English language. I am only interested in two of these prepositions here. The Greek word "ek" and the Greek word "apo". See below for more information.



I had to look at these two words repeatedly and read various lexicons to try to figure out their distinctive aspects. The diagram above helped me to understand them as well because **ek** makes it clear that the “out of” or “from” means that one thing was in the midst of another thing and then it was taken “out of” or “from” another thing.

Apo seem to denote the separation of one thing from another. There isn't a great difference between these words but from both of them I realized that when the Bible says “out of” or “from” or “away from” in relationship of God's people not part of God's wrath that it is possible that we are present during part of God's wrath like the Israelites in Egypt, but we are not the target of it and we will not receive His wrath. It is also clear that if we are present on the earth for any part of God's wrath we will be taken “out of” or “away from” His wrath.

Enhance Strong's Lexicon for apo and ek

575 από, άπαρτί, άποπέμπω [apo /apo/] preposition. A primary particle; GK 608 and together with Strongs 737 as GK 566, together with Strongs 3992 as GK 673; 669 occurrences; AV translates as “from” 392 times, “of” 129 times, “out of” 48 times, “for” 10 times, “off” 10 times, “by” nine times, “at” nine times, “in” six times, “since + 3739” five times, “on” five times, not translated 15 times, and translated miscellaneously 31 times. **1** of separation. **1A** of local separation, after verbs of motion from a place i.e. of departing, of fleeing, **1B** of separation of a part from the whole. **1B1** where of a whole some part is taken. **1C** of any kind of separation of one thing from another by which the union or fellowship of the two is destroyed. **1D** of a state of separation, that is of distance. **1D1** physical, of distance of place. **1D2** temporal, of distance of time. **2** of origin. **2A** of the place whence anything is, comes, befalls, is taken. **2B** of origin of a cause.

1537 έκ, έκπερισσώς, έκφωνένω [ek, ex /ek/] prep. A primary preposition denoting origin (the point whence action or motion proceeds), from, out (of place, time, or cause; GK 1666 and together with Strongs 4053 as GK 1735, together with Strongs 5455 as GK 1771; 921 occurrences; AV translates as “of” 367 times, “from” 181 times, “out of” 162 times, “by” 55 times, “on” 34 times, “with” 25 times, and translated miscellaneously 97 times. **1** out of, from, by, away from.