

The Rapture in Revelation

Revelation 14:14-20

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One of the glaring weaknesses of the pretribulation rapture view is the complete omission of any mention of a pretribulation rapture in Revelation. The book of Revelation was written to the "seven churches of Asia" to reveal the things that "must shortly come to pass." Its name literally means "the unveiling of Jesus Christ." If a pretribulation rapture was to be found anywhere in the New Testament, it should be found in Revelation prior to the tribulation scenes.

The Olivet Discourse gave us the sequence of events leading up to the end of the age. In that passage, no rapture before the tribulation was suggested. There is only the gathering of Jesus' elect "*immediately after the tribulation.*" (Matt. 24:29-31). Pretribulationists are forced to speculate where their alleged "rapture" fits into the Olivet Discourse. The book of Revelation presents the same problem, moving from the seven letters to the churches to the tribulation scenes without mentioning any coming of Christ at all. Many pretribulationists employ allegorical interpretation in order to fabricate a pretribulation rapture in Revelation, claiming that John's being caught up to heaven to see the future "represents" the Church being raptured. This argument will be addressed in our rebuttals to pretribulation arguments section.

Not all pretribulationists believe John's being caught up to heaven represents the rapture. Some excuse the omission of a pretribulation rapture by claiming the rapture is not the focus of the book. But, Revelation is addressed to the seven **churches** in Asia, and it exhorts them to remain faithful **until Jesus comes for them.**

Rev 2:25

25 But hold fast what you have **till I come.**

Rev 3:3

3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, **I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.**

Rev 3:11

11 Behold, **I am coming quickly!** Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Rev 22:7

7 "Behold, **I am coming quickly!** Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Rev 22:12

12 "And behold, **I am coming quickly,** and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Rev 22:20

20 He who testifies to these things says, "**Surely I am coming quickly.**" Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

From beginning to end, the Book of Revelation exhorts Christians to be watching for Jesus' coming for them. Notice, in some of the above verses, Jesus exhorted believers to do something in anticipation of His coming for them. This proves that **the coming of Christ for His Church** is indeed the central focus of the book. Yet, the coming of Christ in Revelation is posttribulational only.

Revelation gives only one clear description of the rapture. It is described in terms of a harvest. Christ is seen on a cloud harvesting the earth. The symbolism of a harvest was a common way of describing the rapture to believers in the first century. This idea was first introduced in Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares. That parable shows that both the righteous and wicked would grow together until the time of "harvest." Then, the angels would separate the two at Christ's command. James 5:7,8 borrows from Jesus' parable, also describing the rapture in terms of a harvest, essentially applying Jesus' parable to the Church.

James 5:7-8

7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

The imagery of Christ's coming for His Church portrayed as a "harvest" was already firmly fixed in the minds of first century believers to whom the book was addressed. In the above passage, the delay leading up to the rapture was compared to the farmer awaiting the time of harvest. When the rainy season comes, he knows that the time of harvest has arrived. In the same way James exhorts us to be patient and wait for the rapture.

Revelation 14:14-20 vividly describes this harvest of the elect, followed immediately by the battle of Armageddon.

Rev 14:14-16

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like **the Son of Man**, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "**Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.**"

16 So **He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.**

This is the rapture of the Church that James instructed us to be patiently awaiting. The same scene is found in Matthew 24:29-31. This is the Son of Man coming on the clouds, harvesting His elect. Immediately following, the wicked are harvested by the angel and thrown into the winepress where Christ destroys them. Revelation fourteen, like Luke 17:24-37, ties together the rapture with the battle of Armageddon.

Rev 14:17-20

17 Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

18 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "**Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.**"

19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, **and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.**

20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

What we have here is a dual harvest. The first harvest gathers the wheat. Then the rest are harvested immediately and cast into the winepress of God's wrath. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is a fundamental technique of good Bible study. This is especially apparent in Revelation where allusions to Old Testament prophecy and to Jesus' teaching abound. Comparing parallel passages helps us collate Revelation with previous prophecy.

Revelation fourteen is an important passage because it brings together several elements from other parallel passages. I believe there can be no doubt that the winepress of wrath in Revelation 14:17-20 is drawn directly from Joel.

Joel 3:12-16

12 "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

13 ***Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow — For their wickedness is great.***

14 *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.*

15 ***The sun and moon will grow dark, And the stars will diminish their brightness.***

16 *The LORD also will roar from Zion, And utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; But the LORD will be a shelter for His people, And the strength of the children of Israel.*

The "winepress of the wrath of God" is further described in Revelation 19.

Rev 19:11-16

11 *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.*

12 *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.*

13 *He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*

14 *And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.*

15 *Now out of His mouth goes a sharp 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.***

16 *And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

Joel adds something very important to this event. First, he included the cosmic sign, the darkening of the sun and moon. And, he called this the "**Day of the Lord.**" The parallel **winepress** in Revelation 19:15 makes it all but certain that each of these passages refer to the battle of Armageddon. Yet, the sun and moon sign ties in the Olivet Discourse where Jesus spoke of these events as occurring "*immediately after the tribulation.*" Jesus also spoke of the Son of Man coming on the clouds to harvest His elect, again paralleling Revelation 14:14-16.

Day of the Lord	Sun & Moon Darkened	Armies Gathered	Winepress of Wrath	Second Coming	Kingdom Follows
In Joel 3	vs.15	vss. 9-11	vs. 13	vss. 12,16	vss. 7-21
In Rev. 14		vs. 18	vs. 19		
In Rev. 19		vs. 19	vs. 15	vs. 11	Chap. 20

The comparison of these three passages shows clearly that each are speaking of the same event, the second coming of Christ after the tribulation. **So, the placement of the first harvest by the Son of Man, on the cloud, clearly reflects the idea that the rapture of the righteous occurs just before the battle of Armageddon.** This is consistent with the Olivet Discourse.

The uniform teaching of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, and John's description of a dual harvest makes a very compelling case for the posttribulation position. These parallel passages also make a good case for the idea that Revelation is not entirely sequential from beginning to end. If the battle of Armageddon is found in chapters 14 and 19, Revelation, like Daniel, must contain a certain amount of recapitulation.