**Midtribulationism**

According to the midtribulation rapture position, the rapture of the church will occur before the wrath of God falls upon the earth during the last half of the Tribulation period, and it happens after “man’s wrath against man” during the first half. The rapture will fulfill Christ’s promise in Revelation 3:10 to remove the church from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world. It occurs in the middle of the seventieth week and is preceded by the initial signs of the Tribulation. Some proponents find their support for this theory in Revelation 11:11-15; others find it in Revelation 14:1. This view agrees with the pretribulation view teaching that God removes the church before pouring out His wrath. Midtribulationists and pretribulationists disagree over the timing of the rapture, the distinction between the wrath of God and man’s wrath against man, and the issue of an imminent (at any moment) rapture of the church.

According to the midtribulation position, the seventieth week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27) will last seven years. At the beginning of that period, the Antichrist will enter into a treaty that guarantees freedom of religion to Israel, and he will keep that promise for three and one-half years. That first half of the Tribulation is known as the “beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8). This period includes the chaos and tribulation of all seven seal judgments and the first six trumpet judgments of Revelation. It also includes two of the first three woes described in Revelation 9 and 11:14. The seals, the first six trumpets, and the first two woes are seen as excruciating agonies much like what the people of God have endured throughout the ages (Acts 14:22; Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 1:6). The Lord Himself endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2), and according to tradition, both Peter and Paul suffered agonizing deaths. So too, believers alive at this time will suffer the consequences of what midtribulation rapturists believe to be man’s wrath against man.

The adherents of this theory hold to the promise that the true believer will be saved from the wrath that is to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Romans 5:9; Revelation 3:10). Citing Daniel 7:25; 12:7,11; and Revelation 13:5, midtribulationists contend that the wrath of God lasts not seven years but only 3½ years. Nothing that precedes this final 3½-year period is regarded as the wrath of God (Archer, p. 139; Walvoord, p. 100).

**The Seven Seals**

The midtribulationists’ claim that the wrath of God begins at the seventh trumpet has several problems. First, in Revelation 5:1-10, the seven-sealed scroll is taken from the hand of Him who sits on the throne. The one taking the scroll is said to be the only one worthy to open it. The Lord Himself breaks the seals and unleashes the judgments. Therefore, they signal the wrath of God, not the wrath of man. Second, those experiencing the sixth seal (Revelation 6:15-17) understand what is happening and from where the wrath emanates. The seal judgments precede the trumpet judgments, so the wrath of God has already begun. Third, the seal judgments are so calamitous that at least one-fourth of the world’s population dies as a result of the fourth seal alone. By the time the sixth trumpet sounds, at least one-half of the world’s population has perished as a direct result of the judgments. That means that by this time, less than half of the world’s population remains. Subtract from that total the number of believers to be raptured, and the remainder would be left to face the wrath of God. This hardly fits with an “hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 3:10 KJV).

**The 144,000 And the Two Witnesses**

Gleason Archer, a proponent of midtribulationism, sees the rapture of the church occurring just prior to the wrath of God being poured out at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation. He cites Revelation 14, where the 144,000 are assembled on Mt. Zion, as the likely point of the rapture. He acknowledges that Revelation does not explicitly mention their rapture, but he contends that the description of their condition suggests it (Archer, p. 142). Norman Harrison, who popularized the midtribulation theory in 1941, sees the rapture in Revelation 11:1-13, where the two witnesses are resurrected and ascend to heaven. These two witnesses symbolize a larger company of witnesses—presumably the living church and the resurrected saints (LaHaye, pp. 190–91).

The weakness of this viewpoint is that the two witnesses are real people and not symbols of larger groups. They perform individual activities, and the Bible even describes their clothing. These witnesses are killed by the Antichrist and resurrected. If they were symbolic of a larger group of believers, the implication would be that all believers they symbolize would be martyred. In such a scenario, no believers would be left alive on earth to populate the millennial kingdom (see Matthew 25:31-34). This would also have implications for the 144,000 who have been sealed for protection as detailed in Revelation 7:1-8.

**The Last Trump**

J. Oliver Buswell identifies the rapture with the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15-19), equating it with 1 Corinthians 15:52 (Archer, p. 143). The connection of the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 presents difficulties. The trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 heralds the call of Christ to the church to join Him in the air. It is a trumpet of blessing that the expectant church eagerly awaits. The seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 heralds’ anger, wrath, judgment, fear, and destruction. Aside from this distinction, the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 is not the last trumpet. At the second coming, which occurs after the seventh trumpet, Christ will send His angels to gather together the elect. The signal for that event to occur will be a “great sound of a trumpet” (Matthew 24:31).

**The Holy Spirit**

Regardless of which passage represents the rapture, midtribulationists believe that when the rapture happens, the Holy Spirit will remove His influence, which is currently restraining unredeemed man from totally disregarding the moral law. The Holy Spirit will cease to strive with man, just as He did in the days of Noah, and society will degenerate over the seven-year Tribulation. Despite the downward spiral, an amazingly successful evangelistic outreach will cause countless Jews and Gentiles to come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (Archer, pp. 126–27).

**Signs**

Midtribulationists believe signs will accompany the rapture. Matthew 24:4-14 details eight signs: (1) false Christs, (2) wars and rumors of war, (3) famines, (4) earthquakes, (5) hatred, persecution, martyrdom, (6) apostasy, (7) survival of the remnant, and (8) the worldwide spread of the gospel. Second Thessalonians 2:3-4 adds two more signs: (1) the building of a Temple in Jerusalem and (2) the enthronement of the Antichrist in that Temple. The rapture cannot be expected until these events occur (Archer, pp. 122–26).

Because midtribulationists identify these ten signs or events as preceding the rapture, they do not look for an imminent appearing of Christ. They do acknowledge an attitude of expectancy that they trace back to the apostle Paul. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, Paul uses the personal pronoun “we” to seemingly include himself among those expecting Christ to return in his lifetime. Midtribulationists believe that a 3½-year Tribulation creates a greater sense of expectancy of Christ’s return than does a seven-year tribulation view (Grudem, p. 1133).

**A Mediating View**

Midtribulationism is a mediating view between pretribulationism and posttribulationism. It attempts to address prophecies that some Bible scholars insist must be fulfilled prior to the rapture. At the same time, it provides comfort by claiming the promise that God will remove the church from earth prior to pouring out His wrath.

In contrast, the pretribulation rapture view teaches that God will pour out his wrath during the entire seventieth week of Daniel. He will remove the church from that hour of trial. Pretribulationists see the rapture as the next prophetic event on God’s timeline and look expectantly for that blessed hope.

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