

Who Is The Group In Revelation 7:9-14?

An Examination of The Pre-Wrath
& The Pre-Tribulation Perspectives

By

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Introduction

There are many views found within Christianity concerning what has become known as the *eschaton*, which is defined as “the last things.” The last things that are discussed in Scripture reveal events that have yet to have taken place in history. Some of the books in Scripture that address future events include the major and minor prophets, the four gospels, the epistles of the New Testament, and the Book of Revelation. Within these books there is rich detail and imagery that is given to communicate to the reader the events that will soon transpire in the future.

Among these views regarding the eschatology are various perspectives on some of the figures that are discussed in these books, specifically the book of Revelation. One’s approach to the text will determine how a person understands these images and pictures, and ultimately how one will explain what these images mean. When it comes to eschatology there are various views of not just *what* and *will* take place in the end times, but *when* these end times events in the book of Revelation will take place. There are those who believe the events in the book of Revelation were already fulfilled in the past and the final thing Christians are waiting on is the physical Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There are others who believe that Christians need to conquer the world before the ushering in of the Second Coming of Christ. How a person comes to the text is very important as to how they explain it.

The Book of Revelation: Two Views

There are two views that have similar views concerning the last things found in the book of Revelation, however there is a distinct difference of these two perspectives based on the *timing*. One similarity is that both observe these end times events and as being literal events that will take place. Furthermore, both believe that Christians will be raptured before the wrath of God on

the earth commences, however the timing of these views are different. By contrast one believes that Christians (i.e., the body of Christ) will be raptured before the wrath of God (spec. what is known as the “trumpet” and “bowl/vial” judgments)¹ is poured out on the earth before the Second Coming of Christ . This particular view is what has become known as the “Pre-Wrath” view. The second view believes that Christians will be raptured before the wrath of God has commenced also, however, the rapture is the event that happens before the seven year tribulation takes place (which has within this time the trumpet and bowl judgments). This view is what as become known as the “Pre-Tribulation View.”

Eschaton (Concerning the Rapture)	
Pre-Wrath View	Pre-Tribulation
Christians will be raptured before the trumpet and bowl judgments	Christians will be raptured before the the 7-year Tribulation (which has within them the trumpet and bowl judgments)

Although there are some similarities between the two distinct views (literal events, rapture of the Church, etc.) due to the way each perspective approaches the text, consequently how one approaches the timing of the book of Revelation, will affect how a person views the people that are within the eschaton.

A Brief Exposition of Rev. 7:9-14

These two views, due to the difference in timing, have a different explanation concerning the people that are described in Rev. 7:9-14 which is cited below:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the

¹ These judgments are described in detail in Revelation chaps. 8-9, & 11 and Revelation 16:1-21.

Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (NASB).

For an individual who espouses a Pre-wrath perspective, these people who the elder is describing to John in Rev. 7:9-14 are Christians due to the observation of how they are described in the text (i.e., "clothed in white robes...they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."). Those who hold to the Pre-Tribulation view, these people in this passage are not Christians. They are saints (spec. Gentiles) who are within the 7-year Tribulation who have been martyred for the faith of the anticipating the Messianic kingdom of God.

The following paper will address the group that is described in the above passage: Are these Christians, in the technical sense, who are raptured before the wrath of God is poured out on the face of the earth, or are these saints who are within the Tribulation who have been martyred due to the activity of the Antichrist? The first section of this paper will observe the details of the book of Revelation, specifically Rev. 7:14. The second section of the paper will discuss some of the qualities of the wrath of God. In each of these sections the Pre-wrath and the Pre-Tribulation will be compared and contrasted.

A Brief Exegesis of Rev. 7:14

John, the human author by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, begins this chapter detailing the sealing of the 144,000 from the nation of Israel before the destruction of the earth commences by God (Rev. 7:1-8). John, after observing the sealing of 144,000 of the Israelites, writes that there is a "great multitude" from all over the world that are before the throne of God (which is the

Father) and the Lamb (which image is representative of Jesus Christ). John records this great number of people have palm branches in their hand and they are wearing white robes praising the God the Father on the throne and the Lamb (Rev. 7:10). The angels, elders, and the four living creatures who are seen earlier in the book of Revelation (c.f., Rev. chaps. 4-5) they are seen once more, falling prostrate before the Lord and the Lamb and declaring that God is worthy of all blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might (Rev. 7:12). John details one of the elders approaches John and question him on who these people are and where they come from (Rev. 7:13). John replied to the elder that he knows who they are, and John records the elder's reply, "And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"(Rev. 9:14 NASB).

Verse 14 in the Greek language reads as follows:

καὶ εἶρηκα αὐτῷ κύριέ μου σὺ οἶδας καὶ εἶπέν μοι οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ
τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης καὶ ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἔλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν
τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου (BZM)

There is an observation in this verse that must be noted. The Greek word ἐρχόμενοι is a present participle, which is translated as "come" in verse 14. The next word is the preposition ἐκ, which is translated "out (of)." The following words after these two Greek words describe what these individuals have "come out (of)" and that is τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης, which is translated "the tribulation of the great" or "the great tribulation." The ones who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb are the ones that "come out (of)" the "great tribulation."

According to the "Pre-Wrath" view, believers will be raptured *before* the wrath of God (This is one of the verses that is used to express this view). However, this is not what John wrote. John

communicated these are the saints that “come out” of “the great tribulation,” not “come out of before the great tribulation.” If the elder wanted to communicate to John that these saints came out *before* the great tribulation, the elder communicating to John would have used the Greek preposition *πρό* (a preposition used to refer to an aspect of time). The sentence would have looked like this:

καὶ εἶρηκα αὐτῷ κύριέ μου σὺ οἶδας καὶ εἶπέν μοι οὗτοί **εἰσιν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ πρό τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης...**

Translation: “and I said to him ‘my lord you know’ and he said to me “**These are those who come out before the great tribulation....**”

The implications of the person who holds to a “Pre-wrath” view, based on their explanation of this specific text, would have to believe that Christians are going to go *through* the great tribulation based upon how the preposition *ek* that is used in this sentence. By contrast the implications of the person who promotes a Pre-Tribulation view, observes that these are not Christians in the technical sense (because Christians, the term that has been used to refer to the church, have been raptured), but these are saints who hold to the testimony of the coming of the Messianic Kingdom (i.e., the Second Coming of Christ). These are the same saints that are described in Rev. 6:9-11 as one of the seal judgments of Christ:

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (NASB).

In short a person *cannot* be taken out of something they are not in. The Pre-wrath view is inconsistent with the language that is being described here in the text discussing the saints

in Rev. 7:9-14. The Pre-Tribulation perspective, taking into account the language and the grammar recognizes that although these are saints this is not the church that is being discussed by the elder to John.

The Mystery of The Church and The Antichrist

The prophecies concerning the eschaton are consistent from the Old Testament and the New Testament. However, the explanations regarding the characters in the eschaton also have implications of how a person examines the characters in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Paul, in his various epistles, describes the church (i.e., the body of Christ/Christians) as a mystery (Rom 16:25, Eph. 3:1-7, 3:9, and 5:32; Col. 1:24-26). The body of Christ was not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. However the Antichrist is discussed in the pages of the Old Testament concerning Israel. Daniel discusses the Antichrist in Daniel 9:27

And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."(NASB)

In the general context of this passage, we discover that Daniel, who is in captivity with the Israelites in the nation of Babylon, was observing the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah began praying to God on behalf of Israel acknowledging their sins and petitioning God for mercy and His faithfulness (Dan. 9:1-19). Gabriel, an angelic messenger in response to Daniel's petition, came to give Daniel a message (Dan. 9:20-23). Gabriel begins to lay out the future of the Israelites using the years of the Israelite captivity (describing them in this context as "weeks"). In this particular text, Gabriel communicates to Daniel several events that will occur: The rebuilding of Jerusalem after their captivity (Dan. 9:25), the

first advent of the Prince (i.e., the Messiah) (Dan. 9:25), the death of the Messiah (Dan. 9:26), the destruction of Jerusalem and the sanctuary by the people of the “prince” (that is the Antichrist) (Dan.9:26), and the “prince” will make a firm covenant with “the many” (in context this is Israel) for “one week” (according to the context this is seven years) (Dan. 9:27). This is where one gets the doctrine of “7-year Tribulation” based on the explanation that is in Daniel 9:27.

The Antichrist is also mentioned as the beast who overcomes the saints of God from the book of Revelation:

It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints (Rev. 13:7-9 NASB).

The book of Revelation expands on the influence of the “prince” (i.e., the Antichrist), which is discussed in the Old Testament. The wrath of God is also found in the eschatological prophecies of the Old Testament (Zeph. 1:15, 18, 2:2, Isa. 13:9,13), and the prophecies in the New Testament (Matt. 21:21). Israel is mention in the context of the prophecies concerning the eschaton in the Old Testament (Zech. 12:1-6), and the New Testament (Matt. 24:1-28). Furthermore the nations (i.e., the Gentiles) are also mentioned in the prophecies of the Old Testament (Zeph. 3:8, Hab. 3:12) and in the New Testament (Matt. 25:32). However, the church according to Paul is a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament, especially in the prophecies concerning the eschaton (in both the Old and New Testament).

The implications of the Pre-wrath perspective, is if these people who are described by the elder to John in Revelation 7:14 are the Christians that is raptured within the tribulation, then the person holding to this particular explanation of Scripture would also have to endorse the idea that Old Testament revealed prophecies concerning end times events revealed the church (that is, Christians), which would be inconsistent with the eschatological prophecies in the Old Testament. In addition, this would run counter to what Paul instructed concerning the church in that it was a mystery that was not revealed to those in the past. By contrast the Pre-tribulation perspective observes that consistency of prophecies concerning the eschaton from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Since the church is not in view in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation is consistent with Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, and the Gentiles, these are saints who will be martyred during the time of the Antichrist.

A Brief Exposition of 2 Thessalonians 2:3

The timing of the event of the rapture is one of the things that Paul addressed in his epistles to the churches in Thessalonica, which is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (NASB).

The churches in Thessalonica were going through fierce persecution and at that time may have been convince, through other's instruction, that the day of the Lord had come and the Antichrist had appeared. Paul, in essence, wrote this letter to address this particular

subject among the saints. Paul told the churches in Thessalonica that the gathering of the saints at the coming of the Lord would not come unless the *apostasy* (the departure)² comes first, and it is after this event of the departure of the saints that the Antichrist will be revealed. The order of events that Paul writes is important:

The Order of Events In 2 Thess 2:1-9	
The apostasy (The departure of the saints)	v. 3
The man of Lawlessness is revealed	v. 3
Man of Lawlessness self-exalts in the temple of God, and claims to be God	v. 4
The Lord will destroy Him	v. 8

Paul in his epistles consistently tells the believers to anticipate the revelation or the appearing of Jesus Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 7, 1 Cor. 11:6; 1 Tim. 6:14, 2 Tim. 4:18). When Paul mentions destruction in relation to the eschatological events they are mention *after* the departure, not before. In addition, the author of Hebrews also underscores this reality that the Jewish believer was to look not for the end times destruction, but Jesus Christ himself (Heb. 9:28). In the perspective of a person who subscribes to Pre-wrath, a person who endorses this view is convinced that the church will be raptured *before* the last half of the tribulation then the sign that a Christian should be looking for is the revealing of the Antichrist, in addition to all of the other destructive events that happen (which betrays the explanation of the being raptured before the

² There are many who are convinced this word refers to a great falling away, or a rebellion, of Christians however, this author is convinced that this particular word in this context is used to refer to the rapture for several reasons: The audience Paul addresses (He uses the pronoun “our” twice in this passage). Paul mentioned this to comfort the Christians in Thessalonica due to persecution and the teaching they were hearing. In addition, this word is used in the context of the “gathering of the church” at the coming of the Lord Jesus and discussing the “Day of the Lord” which is always associated with eschatological end-times tribulation.. Furthermore the word in the Greek is used as a noun suggesting an event that occurs, not a modifier (if it was a falling away or rebellion of the faith, it would state this as a modifier of the faith in the text, however it does not).

wrath of God). This is what the Scriptures do not endorse concerning the church (i.e., the Christians). The Pre-Tribulation view, based upon a plain reading of 2 Thess. 2:1-3 holds that the rapture is a “signless” event. This is what the Christian is eagerly awaiting on and anticipating what Paul references as the “Blessed Hope” (Tit. 2:11-13). Furthermore, the Antichrist will not conquer the church because the Antichrist will be revealed *after* the rapture of the church-age saints has taken place.

The Blood of the Lamb

This is stated in Rev. 7:14 it was stated by the elder to John that they cleaned their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. However, this is more than likely a qualitative term or a Jewish idiom to discuss the means for how a person generally is saved, which is by the sacrifice of Christ. For example, the nation of Israel will see their salvation by blood of the Lamb (c.f., Isa 53:1-12) The nations are also saved by the blood of the Lamb (due to the fact that Christ died for the sins of the world (c.f., Jn. 1:29). However, just because one is saved by the blood of the Lamb this does not technically automatically make them apart of the church (I.e., Christian)(For example, the Old Testament Israelites and Gentiles were justified by the blood of the Lamb and they are not called Christian). Second, the quality of a Christian is that they have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11) (It does not mention that the Old Testament saints, nor those who are mention in the Rev. 7:14, as possessing the Holy Spirit). Third, the term “saint” is used for all those who have been saved by the blood of the Lamb, but “Christian” is a term that is used only in this church-age economy.

OT (Israelites) Past	New Testament (Church) Present	Revelation Future
Saints (c.f. Ps. 16:3; Ps. 34:9) Christian: Not used	Saints (Rom. 9:32; Rom. 8:27) Christian (Acts. 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16)	Saints (Rev. 5:8; Rev. 13:7) Christian: Not used

This would also seem to be consistent with the prophecies concerning the eschaton in the Old and New Testament. For those who submit to the Pre-wrath view to call the saints in Revelation “Christian,” they would have to be convinced the Old Testament saints are Christian (due to the reality they were waiting for a Redeemer to atone for their sins). Yet, without the Scriptures stating in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation regarding this group this would be an inaccurate assessment. By contrast the Pre-tribulation view observes language consistently from the Old and New Testament and recognizes cultural idioms that observe the phrase “blood of the Lamb” as a general term (like the term *saints*) to describe one who knows that Jesus Christ took away their sin, which is applied to all those no matter what age they belong to.

Comparison and Contrast of These Two Views

Based on the points that were raised in this inquiry each of the views and their corresponding beliefs are observed below:

Perspectives	Pre-Wrath	Pre-Tribulation
The preposition <i>ek</i> in Rev. 7:14	Believes the church will go through the Great Tribulation. They deny the preposition in the sentence.	Acknowledges the preposition not attributing this to the church, but to saints that will have to endure the Great Tribulation.
The mystery of the church	Would have to believe the church is discussed in the Old Testament concerning the eschaton. Inconsistent with the writings of apostle Paul	They believe that the eschatological prophecies do not include the church. Consistent with apostle Paul.
The order of events	What the Christians have to look out for is the Antichrist (in addition, the signs of the Great Tribulation). This is inconsistent with Paul's instruction.	Believe that the rapture is the next event for the church. Due to the order Paul gives in the Scripture regarding the destiny of believers.
“The blood of the Lamb”	Believes “the blood of the Lamb” is discussing Christians when this term is used. Does not recognize this phrase as a qualitative and general term to describe how one is saved. Is inconsistent with the language of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation.	Believes the blood of the Lamb is a general and qualitative term (i.e, a Jewish idiom). Is convinced the word <i>Christian</i> is a technical term for those in the church age. Is consistent with the language of the Old Testament and Revelation.

The similarities of the two views are worth recognizing. They both believe the event detailed in the book of Revelation are not metaphorical, but are literal. They both believe in a literal Antichrist, and they both believe in a rapture. However, due to the timing based on the evaluation of the two viewpoints, and observing the Scripture in question in its immediate context, and auxiliary Scriptures which are associated with this topic, there is great reason to believe that the Pre-tribulation view makes the most sense concerning these saints that are discussed in the Rev. 7:9-14. If one adopts the Pre-wrath view, one would have several challenges to address. They would have to attend to an explanation of the preposition found in Rev. 7:14. Furthermore they would have to address the eschatological passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament when the church is not in future prophecy. Finally one who subscribes to the Pre-wrath view would have to confront the order of eschatological events from Paul, how the command of Paul to look for the revealing of Jesus, and the absence of the technical words in the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation.

Conclusion

Both perspectives seek to glorify God with their hermeneutic and their evaluation of the text. Both see the word of God as authoritative, and each group seeks to understand God's word as He has revealed to to mankind. However, we must be cautious to examine the language, grammar, syntax, and structure consistently. The Pre-Tribulation perspective fulfills this objective whereas the Pre-wrath view has challenges with the language as it must address due to its presuppositions. A studier of God's word must keep the plans between the different peoples of God separate, recognizing the specific details that God has for each group. The Pre-tribulation view satisfies this demand, and by contrast the Pre-wrath view appears to have some confusion

among these groups, and thus the timing is not aligned with what Scripture reveals. Let the body of Christ continue to recognize the language consistently, and acknowledge the differences between the groups in Scripture. By doing this we glorify God, understanding His word rightly.
Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!