

Charts:

PREFACE

At long last we come to the event which many (erroneously) think to be the starting point of the Eschaton: what us “pretribs” like to refer to as The Rapture. The word “rapture” is derived from the Latin *rapio*, meaning “seize, snatch, carry away.” [In this session we will make the case for the Rapture; in parts two and three we will examine the events of the Rapture itself.](#)

The pretribulational position is that the church will not go through the seven-year Tribulation—also known as “Daniel’s Seventieth Week” ([more on that in a subsequent session](#))—because it will be removed from the earth, by Christ Himself, just before the period of Tribulation commences. In fact, it is easy to conclude that the Rapture event itself is actually the trigger that releases the events of the Tribulation.

That is, from an earthly perspective, waiting in the wings is antichrist, who sees the elimination of the church from the earth as his opportunity to begin his campaign.

Sidebar: Why might antichrist consider this his perfect opportunity? [Turn please to 2 Thessalonians 2. Read vv5-7.](#) Now understand, many do, but not everyone agrees with the position I am about to state; this has been debated for the last two thousand years. I believe this passage refers to the removal of the Holy Spirit from earth, along with the church, at the Rapture. (I’ll not take the time here to substantiate this; if you wish to take issue with me, I recommend you read p160-161 of my Thessalonian study, which details this. Then we can talk.)

There will come a moment in time—a season, a proper time in the life of the antichrist—when Father God will declare, “Now!” Suddenly, without warning, the righteous force of the church will disappear from earth, and with it the exerting influence of the Holy Spirit. In their place will flood in evil of all sorts, and the “man of lawlessness” will gradually show himself to be the savior for which the world has been waiting. He will be winsome, agreeable, helpful, because, like his father, he will be a liar of the first order. Then, after a few years, when he takes his seat in the temple of Jerusalem, he will be revealed for what and who he truly is: the antichrist, evil incarnate, and the period that follows—the *Great Tribulation*—will make the previous three-and-a-half years look like a walk in the park.

From a *heavenly* perspective, however, it is *God's* opportunity; of course, He is the one orchestrating it all. If one appreciates symmetry, think of the Rapture as the end times reenactment of Noah's Ark, and the Tribulation as the end times reenactment of the flood.

Read Genesis 6:5-7.

Read Revelation 6:12-17. (during the Tribulation)

Tradition, as well as specificity, says that the Rapture is not literally Christ's "second coming," because he does not literally return to earth, but remains "in the clouds" and is not seen by everyone on earth. (M. R. DeHaan refers to this as the first of two "phases" of His Second Coming.) His *true* second coming is when he returns in triumph, in judgment, in righteousness between the Tribulation and Millennium. That one will *not* be private, but universal; that one will *not* be silent to the unregenerate, but deafening.

Sidebar: The different position closest to ours regarding the Eschaton is called *Classic or Historic Premillennialism*. This position has the events roughly in the same *order*, but with two important differences from ours. In Historic Premillennialism,

- the Church Age is extended *through* the Tribulation. That is, Christ does not return for His church until *after* the Tribulation. Christians alive at the time will suffer the Tribulation; and
- between the Tribulation and the Millennium, Christ "catches up" the church (dead and alive) and immediately returns to the earth with the church to inaugurate the Millennium.

Thus, in historic premillennialism there is no Rapture of believers separated by the Tribulation from Christ's second coming, there is only one "return" of Christ, and, worst of all, the church must suffer the events of the Tribulation.

Before we dig into the details of the Rapture—as to those details, there are about ten individual components to the event—let us pause for a moment to appreciate it for what it is. Upon departing the upper room after the disciples' last supper with Jesus, He comforted them with the promise of His return.

Read John 14:1-3.

That word translated “receive” or “take” is a wonderful word-choice by the Savior in this context. The Greek *paralambano* means to “receive near”; but it is far more than just physical proximity. It includes the idea of “associat[ing] with oneself in any familiar or intimate act or relation.” This is a picture of Christ Jesus returning to warmly embrace those who are His own.

I can think of no better illustration of the contrast between the perspectives of earth and heaven. Thinking in human, fleshly terms, if any one of us had made the kind of sacrifice Jesus made for sinful humans, I imagine our response might be something like, “Hey, after what I did for you, you *owe* me. You can find *your own way* up to heaven. I’ll see you when you get here.”

But, of course, that does not at all reflect the perspective of heaven, nor the heart of our Savior. The same measure of love that agreed to be nailed to a cross for sinners is the measure of love that sends “the Lamb that was slain” ([Revelation 5:12](#)) rushing down to the proximity of earth once again to bring home those who have given their lives to Him—to call them to Himself, to conduct them personally, safely, to their new home with Him. It will be a *glorious* moment.

THE CASE FOR THE RAPTURE

Please turn to [1 Thessalonians, Chapter Five](#).

Although it is mentioned elsewhere, the best sources for detailed information about the Rapture are found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and his two letters to the Thessalonians.

One of the challenging aspects of eschatology is that some terms or titles of events seem to be moving targets, difficult to place. And one of the more obvious examples of this is “the day of the Lord,” which the apostle Paul references in the first few verses of Chapter Five.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2.

By using the phrase “the day of the Lord,” Paul refers to far more than just the initial moment of the Rapture. That phrase is used elsewhere to refer to and include

- the ultimate overthrow of God’s enemies, which can include the idea of judgment (Isaiah 2:12; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5);
- a day of national deliverance for Israel (Jeremiah 30:8-11);
- a day of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9);
- the day of God’s wrath against His enemies (Isaiah 13:6-11);
- the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:20-21 with Jeremiah 30:7-8);

- Christ’s second coming (Revelation 19:11-21); and
- the destruction of the present earth and heavens (2 Peter 3:10).

Paul proceeds into this passage and very soon, in v3, we realize that he is *not* describing the Rapture when he mentions “a thief in the night.”

While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

Now we see that “the day of the Lord” here does *not* refer to the Rapture—for that verse has nothing to do with a silent and instantaneous Rapture—but to Christ’s more public second coming in judgment and wrath. Paul then proceeds to contrast those in darkness (i.e., those who will suffer God’s wrath) with those in the light, or day, and that “you, brethren, are not in darkness.” And he concludes his thoughts on this with vv8-10.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10.

The key verse for our purpose is v9; “God has not destined us for wrath”—i.e., “us” = those *not* in darkness, those (“you, brethren”) “who are all sons of light and sons of day” (v5). Believers have obtained “salvation” (*soterias*) from that wrath “through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As mentioned in our previous session ([1 Thessalonians 1:10](#)), the word translated “wrath” is *orge* (or-gay’), meaning anger, indignation, vengeance, punishment. It speaks of God’s anger and retribution; it speaks of the punishment God will inflict on those who have rejected Christ.

So why would He inflict this on those who *have* embraced Christ? The seven-year Tribulation period—and especially the second half (The Great Tribulation)—will be a terrible time to be alive on earth. When one reads in The Revelation the heavenly perspective of the Tribulation period—the hideous plagues and pestilence and utter destruction inflicted on the earth’s inhabitants by God and His Christ—there is no better picture of God’s wrath inflicted upon the sin and depravity of this world.

What the Lord God will release upon the earth during the Tribulation no sane human being would wish to experience. It will be a hideous time to be alive on earth.

So why would He inflict this on His church? We believe He will not. We believe His word *says* that He will not.