

THE RAPTURE, PART 3

As far as I can tell, counting today's message, there will be 4 more messages on the rapture. I want to be as complete as I can possibly be in explaining to you all of the different positions and views that people hold so that you can see the contrasts, the reasons, and the disagreements that comprise the debate on the "timing" of the rapture. Once you have seen all of them, then you can make your own decision regarding the "timing" of the rapture and whether or not the church will actually go through the Tribulation. I have to say up front that that is the issue that makes people anxious – thinking that the church and Christians will actually have to go through the rapture. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them, but I think that I will actually answer your questions by the time that I complete this part of the study. I will arrive at the position that the rapture happens immediately preceding the seven years of Tribulation as described in Revelation.

So, what do we want to talk about today regarding the rapture of the church? I thought it would be worthwhile to think about a couple of real life scenarios regarding how people today may actually be thinking about the rapture and its relationship to their present day Christian life. I wish that I could say that everyone who claims to be a Christian actually was a Christian. That would be nice and it would solve a lot of problems, but unfortunately that is simply not the case. For instance, [Matthew 7:13-14](#) says,

Mt 7:13 (NKJV) "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Then [Matthew 7:21-23](#) seems to reiterate that reality and says,

Mt 7:21 (NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

If I can say it a different way, you cannot play your little spiritual games with God. You will not win. God is not going to be mocked and you cannot treat Him or His demands on your life anyway you please. You may have what you want now, but you will not be given what you want later. A person may think that they can postpone committing their life to Christ, but the longer that continues, the greater the reality that they probably will never be saved and enter into God's kingdom. Listen to these two very important verses in [John 6:44](#) and [65](#),

Jn 6:44 (NKJV) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jn 6:65 (NKJV) And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

People are living under this great delusion if they think that they can simply ignore God and come to Him whenever they please. Jesus stated it this way when He said the following in [John 10:27-28](#),

Jn 10:27 (NKJV) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

The point is very, very simple. Everyone who comes to Christ will always come to Him on His terms and not theirs. Okay, I want to look at two scenarios that will be very prevalent at the rapture of the church.

Let us just assume for a moment that you are here when the rapture happens, but you have never really been saved and have never become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. You may have been religious, but you were never truly converted. You simply will be not be raptured. You will be left behind, and your chances of being saved once the Tribulation period begins are really fairly slim. To not be raptured means that during your life that you decided that you would rather live how you wanted to live and for all practical purposes ignored God, His Son, His Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit. You simply were never saved. Your thinking has been, and this is very common among people who are not committed followers of Christ, that if the rapture happens while you are alive and you are left behind that immediately you will recognize what happened and then give your life to Christ, and take your chances with what happens in the seven years of Tribulation. I doubt very seriously that that will actually happen as you anticipate. Why? Well, it is because of [2 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#). This is a passage which speaks in v1 of “**our gathering together**” to Christ. This is something that happens at the rapture and not the Second Coming because at the Second Coming we are coming with the Lord, not going to Him. However, the rest of the passage deals specifically with the antichrist and what happens to those who willingly and knowingly decided to not come to Christ, but to play their spiritual game of live how I want to live now, and then make everything right with God after the rapture actually happens. Listen to the warning that Jesus gives in [Luke 22:34-36](#) relative to the issue of watching for this day that is coming.

Lk 21:34 (NKJV) "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The word “snare” simply means a trap. The idea is that once a trap closes on its victim, it is almost impossible for the victim to escape. Vine’s Dictionary seems to actually capture the intent of the verse correctly when it says that it refers to the “sudden judgments of God to come on those whose hearts are overcharged with “**carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life**”.

Listen to [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#) which summarizes what will most likely happen to the individuals who have ignored the Word of God to live as they please. This is a very, very sober warning, so please do not take it lightly.

2Th 2:9 (NKJV) The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This passage seems to be directly referring to people like I have just described. No matter how you may want to read those verses, it would be outrageously insane to ignore what they are saying. If I can say it this way, you will not find it to your advantage to be playing games with God when it comes to ignoring and refusing His offer of salvation today.

You have to appreciate that the seven years of Tribulation is a very distinct time of God's judgment, a time of God pouring out His wrath on all those who both openly and willingly rejected Christ. It is interesting to me that in Peru where Dr. Ildefonso serves as a missionary that most everyone that he speaks to has never even heard the word "**gospel**". Even though the Catholic Church is very strong there, they have no idea what salvation is. In China where James and Cindy served, there were people who did not even know what the Bible was and had never even heard of Jesus Christ. In reality, many of these people who have never heard the gospel may be saved during this period. Obviously, many will not, but some will. So, this passage is speaking directly of those individuals who do know that there is a God, that Jesus died to save them from their sin, but who intentionally and willingly refused to come to Him on His terms. They played the religious game, but in reality they were not willing to "**receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved**". That phrase implies that they knew the truth, but they rejected it. For those people, v11 clearly states that "**God will send them strong delusion that they should believe the lie**" and that "**they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness**". This is the person who is religious, but not saved. This is the person who knows the truth, but refuses to commit their life to it. This is the person who talks about God, but has no intention of committing their life to Him. They want to live a certain way and are determined that they will. When the rapture happens, at that moment their future is sealed. They will not come to Christ. It would be similar to what happened with Noah. The Scripture says this about what was happening in the day of Noah right before the flood in [Matthew 24:38](#),

Mt 24:38 (NKJV) For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

I.e., they were just going about their life with no regard for God – eating, drinking, marrying, but it says nothing about God. [2 Peter 2:5](#) says that Noah "**was a preacher of righteousness**".

2Pe 2:5 (NKJV) and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;

If you do not think that God will judge the entire earth, then you simply do not know the Scriptures. The last time that God judged the earth, only eight people were saved from the judgment. Okay, that is scenario one.

Let us assume, however, that after the rapture, you fully realize what has happened and you do come to Christ for salvation and He does accept you. I.e., you were not like the person that I just described. For some, I believe that is a distinct possibility, but probably not what we would want to consider to be the norm in America where Christianity has prevailed for a long time. In America, it is difficult to not know about Christ and His invitation of salvation. You must appreciate that immediately following the rapture that there is not one single Christian on the planet at that moment – not one single believer. You will not have anyone with whom you can talk. The true church has been completely removed from planet earth, so if you go to a church that first Sunday after the rapture, those who will be there will not have

anything to tell you. They will all be lost. However, if you actually do come to Christ, unfortunately you will have to go through the Tribulation, and chances are very good that you will not survive the Tribulation, and may even be martyred for your faith. Listen to [Revelation 6:9](#) which says,

Rev 6:9 (NKJV) When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

Many people who are saved during the Tribulation will be beheaded. [Revelation 20:4](#) says,

Rev 20:4 (NKJV) And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

This is clearly speaking of people who were saved during the Tribulation. Once the judgments begin to unfold themselves, there will be people looking for answers and some will find Christ during that time. However, I doubt seriously that it will be many people, but there will be some.

That certainly is not much to look forward to if you think that waiting is a good option. You must remember that the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation are events where in just one of the judgments that 1/4 or 1/3 of the world's population will be violently destroyed under any of God's judgments. Listen to the following verses. [Revelation 6:8](#) says,

Rev 6:8 (NKJV) So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

In today's language, this refers to around 2 billion people being killed right at the beginning of the Tribulation. [Revelation 9:13-15](#) says,

Rev 9:13 (NKJV) Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

Based on the fact that only 6 billion people are left by this time, another 2 billion people are killed leaving only 4 billion people on the earth, or one out of every two persons has died, and there are more judgments to come. The odds are not in your favor. What I want you to notice is that even after all of this, that people were not willing to repent. [Revelation 9:20-21](#) speaking of the people who are left says,

Rev 9:20 (NKJV) But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. ²¹ And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

People are stealing and killing just to stay alive. In [Revelation 13:7 and 15](#) after the antichrist has set himself up as God in the temple in Jerusalem, it says this about those who refuse to worship him.

Rev 13:7 (NKJV) It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Rev 13:15 (NKJV) He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Then in [Revelation 13:16-18](#) it speaks about the mark of the beast,

Rev 13:16 (NKJV) He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,¹⁷ and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

These verses that I have read are just a sampling of what else is identified in [Revelation 6-19](#). The point is simple. These are not events that you can simply hide from and not be impacted. These judgments by God will find you. You cannot escape them just because you may become a Christian after the rapture. No matter what happens, for anyone either lost or saved who is living during these seven years, it will not be pleasant. Being left behind at the rapture of the church will not be good. In fact, once the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is removed ([2 Thessalonians 2:7](#)) and the church is gone, if you believe that it will be easy to come to Christ during that time, then you have been sadly deceived. If you are not willing to come to Christ when it is easy, it is very doubtful that you will feel inclined to come to Him when it is very difficult. Please appreciate that the rapture could happen at any moment. Once God shut the door on the ark, it immediately began to rain, the fountains of the deep were loosed and the water envelope that surrounded the earth was opened. [Genesis 7:11](#) says,

Ge 7:11 (NKJV) In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

No one left behind when this happened survived.

Please appreciate that the rapture is an event that has no specific signs preceding it – none. There are no preconditions for this supernatural, global, and sudden event that provide a sign as to when it will happen. The term that we use to describe the timing of the rapture is the word “imminent”, or simply that it could occur at any moment. There are general type events that are occurring prior to the rapture, but nothing specific that would be an actual signal that the rapture is very likely to happen. What I would say is that these preceding events all have a kind of similarity to what will be taking place during the Tribulation. We could call them “antichrist type events”. We know that there will be a great apostasy, and that apostasy, or falling away, has to occur within the church itself. If there are a lot of “goats” and “tares” in the church who are not saved, then it is easy to understand how and why this will be able to take place. Also, I think that I can rightly say that with the re-birth of Israel in 1948 that the rapture is the next event on God’s prophetic timetable, and it will be the event that ushers in the seven years of Tribulation as clearly described in [Revelation 6-19](#). Once the church and the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit as He works through believers and the church is removed, then last days events will begin to unfold very quickly. For instance, [2 Thessalonians 2:7-8](#) speaks of this restraining influence of the Holy Spirit being removed when it says,

2Th 2:7 (NKJV) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The “**lawless one**” is the antichrist. One huge event that will take place after the rapture is defined in [Daniel 9:27](#) and reveals that the antichrist will establish an agreement between Israel and “**many**” other nations and that is what will actually begin the countdown of the seven years of Tribulation until the Second Coming.

Da 9:27 (NKJV) Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

The “**one week**” represents seven years. We will look at all of this in future studies. The middle of the week, or after 3 ½ years, there is what is called the “**abomination of desolation**” as described in [Matthew 24:15](#) where the antichrist sets himself up as God in the temple in Jerusalem and demands worship. If a person will not worship him, then he will make war with them and they will be killed.

Mt 24:15 (NKJV) "Therefore when you see the '*abomination of desolation*,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),