

THE RAPTURE, PART 4

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**(THIS FIRST PARAGRAPH WAS THE INTRODUCTION TO STUDY 07 AND IS PLACED HERE AS INFORMATION RELATED TO STUDY 07.)**

One of the problems that we need to address is what did the Old Testament Jews believe about what we call “**heaven**”. There is no easy answer to that question simply because their views were all over the map, especially early on in their history. The better question would be “*Did the ancient Jews believe in life after death?*” The answer to that is generally “*yes they did*”, but what that afterlife was really like does not have an easy explanation. Genesis speaks of someone who has died as being “**gathered to their people**”. The Old Testament actually speaks of “**everlasting life**”. God “**took**” Enoch ([Genesis 5:24](#)) and Elijah “**went up by a whirlwind to heaven**” ([2 Kings 2:11](#)). The prevailing view is that Jews believed that souls were immortal and would continue forever, but there is no strong teaching on how all that may be worked out. The primary concept is that righteous people waited in Sheol, but it was a place of darkness, a mysterious place where people had a conscious existence. The unrighteous were said to go the “lowest parts of Sheol”. Once again, there is not much detail about this. For the most part, the idea of heaven is a progressive revelation in the Bible, with most of the clarity coming from the New Testament. The point is that Old Testament believers did not view heaven and the afterlife in the same way that we do, and that is important as we continue to migrate through some of the passages.

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Before we get started this morning, I want to mention that after I complete this part of the study on the rapture that we will be answering the biggest question of all which is “*Will the Church go through the Tribulation?*” The first issue that we will try to clarify is the biblical difference between what we might call persecution, suffering, or severe trials and the idea of divine wrath. What we clearly know is that God has never promised the church an exemption from persecution or suffering. However, what we will clearly see is that divine wrath is very different than persecution. The flood was divine wrath. The fire and brimstone of Sodom and Gomorrah was divine wrath. The Tribulation and the Great Tribulation will be divine wrath. The Lake of Fire will be divine wrath. However, [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#) says,

**1Th 1:10 (NKJV) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

**[1 Thessalonians 5:9](#)** says,

**1Th 5:9 (NKJV) For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**[Romans 5:9](#)** declares,

**Ro 5:9 (NKJV) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.**

In essence, divine wrath is the outpouring of God’s wrath on the wicked in a very unprecedented way. We do not see any of that today. The sun rises on the just and the unjust. The rains fall on the just and the unjust. We simply are not living in a time of divine wrath, but in a time of divine grace. However,

if there was ever a book dealing with divine wrath, it has to be Revelation. Listen to how the lost man responds to the outpouring of God's divine wrath during this time. You would think that he would be more than willing to repent, but that simply is not the case. [Revelation 16:8-11](#) says,

**Rev 16:8 (NKJV) Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. <sup>9</sup> And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. <sup>10</sup> Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. <sup>11</sup> They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.**

For those who are concerned about going through the Tribulation, this will be the part of the study of Eschatology that you will not want to miss. What we will see is that in Revelation that it is God's divine wrath being poured out on the wicked in an unprecedented way. Stated another way, the wrath of God is not wrath for the church, but wrath for an unbelieving, Christ hating world.

Okay. As we migrate through all of the issues regarding the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the Millennium over the next two or three weeks, there is a very important verse in [1 Corinthians 10:32](#) which says,

**1Co 10:32 (NKJV) Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God,**

In essence, this verse identifies the three groups of people with which Scripture is concerned with in any discussion of prophecy and redemptive biblical history – Jews, Gentiles, and New Testament Christians. The term “**Greeks**” is a term which simply refers to anyone who is not a Jew, or what we will call “**Gentiles**”. Up until the time of Abraham, everyone was a Gentile. This included people like Adam, Enoch, and Noah. They were what we might call “saved Gentiles” and there were “lost Gentiles”. For instance, Adam, Enoch, and Noah were what we call today as Old Testament saints, or in New Testament terms, they would eventually spend eternity with God. Then there were those Gentiles who most likely would not spend eternity with God – Gentiles such as Cain, Lamech, and Nimrod. We would say that they were lost and did not know God.

However, when God called Abraham, who was actually a pagan at the time that God called him, Abraham became the first Hebrew or Jew, and it was from his seed and family tree that the Messiah would be born. His grandson was named Jacob who had 12 sons who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel, or the Jewish nation. So, Scripture divides everyone in the Old Testament into being either Jew or Gentile, and there were what we would call saved Jews and unsaved Jews. After the death of Christ, the church was born and is composed of both Jews and Gentiles, but primarily Gentiles. It is the true church which will go to be with Christ in the rapture. The Jewish nation, which will still be in unbelief relative to Christ, will not be raptured. However, any Jew which came to Christ became a part of the church.

We know that within the makeup of most any local church that there are those who are saved and those who are lost. Just because someone is a member of church does not make them a Christian. In fact, in [Matthew 13:30](#) is a parable which addresses this, and it says,

**Mt 13:30 (NKJV) Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' ' "**

**Matthew 13** is composed of parables about what the “church age” will be like, and we learn from this particular parable that the church is composed of both wheat and tares, or in our terminology of both saved and lost. Those who will be raptured are a part of the true church made up of only genuine believers. The church as God’s primary redemptive channel began at Pentecost, but it will come to an abrupt end at the rapture. So, those who are saved during the Tribulation and the Millennium will not be a part of the church. The point is simple in that from God’s perspective, He has a clear prophetic plan for all three groups.

What I want you to do is to think of the church as having two distinct and different elements that need to be clearly differentiated. There is the true church and the false church. The false church is visible and the true church is invisible. Only God knows those who are truly a part of the true church. I.e., you could be here today and be a member of this local, physical, denominational church, but not a member of the true church. I think this is very common in most any church that you could attend. For instance, **Matthew 7:21-23** 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. <sup>22</sup> 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?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**

These were all people who thought that they were saved. They were religious and outwardly spiritual, but in reality there was something about them that was insincere when it came to genuine conversion. The church has always had false teachers and false prophets who have preyed on the church for revenue, for money. The false church is composed of every element of what we might call Christendom such as Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox church, cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormon Church, but it would also include what we call Protestantism – Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Pentecostals, Church of God, Assembly of God, and many more.

Think of it this way. There are true believers, and then there is the rest of Christendom – and both have very distinct and different destinies. The obvious problem is that there are many people in Christendom that believe that they are saved and a part of the true church that actually are not saved at all. They have fallen prey to religion, to creeds, to catechisms, and to false teachers and terrible biblical teaching that has led them straight into an eternity without Christ. We have a term that we use today called “easy-believism”. This is a term that describes the watering down of the gospel by trying not to offend the lost sinner with words like sin, judgment, Lake of Fire, commitment. The Emergent Church does not call people sinners, but seekers. Why is that? It is because they want them to be comfortable in church, feel at home and at ease. They do not want them to hear a message that may offend them and cause them to no longer come to church. The problem is that any church which is genuinely doing what God wants it to be doing will not water down the gospel or its demands on the sinners life, and the inevitable result is that lost people will be offended. **Galatians 5:11** calls it “**the offense of the cross**”. The gospel, if it is

preached properly, will always be offensive to the proud and arrogant self-serving individual who feels that they have no need for God, for Christ, or for salvation.

In fact, the false church, or what we could call the “False Tribulation Church” which is left behind at the rapture, will most likely serve as Satan’s “**harlot**” ([Revelation 17](#)). That false church will help facilitate the great delusion of the antichrist in the form of a one-world church. Today we might call it the ecumenical church and the apostate church which inevitably is paving the way for a one-world religion. It will support the worship of the antichrist and everyone being forced to take the mark of the beast in [Revelation 13](#). It should be interesting to you that the right hand man of the antichrist is called the “**False Prophet**” – a very “religious” term, and he will probably be the head of the new one-world religion.

I think what is important to understand in all of this is that the role of the church and the plan of God for the church are much different than His plan for Israel and the Jews. We are talking about two distinct and different entities. For the most part, aside from the parables of Christ in [Matthew 13](#), there really are no major prophetic events for the church that were prophesied, and even in [Matthew 13](#), the content is basically related to the “conditions” that will exist in the church during the church age. In reality, the rapture is the only real prophetic event that is prophesied. What [Matthew 13](#) reveals to us is several things. The Word of God will be sown in the world, but as it is being sown, there will be a counter sowing of false teaching to undermine it. The kingdom will grow in size, but it will be marked by much false teaching that will corrupt the church. There will be some who find great joy in Christ and fully surrender their lives to Him. The church age will end in judgment and those who are not a part of the true church will be excluded from God’s kingdom and will not enjoy the reign of Christ on the earth.

One of the dominant characteristics of the church in what are called the “**last days**” is that of “apostasy”. There are seven major passages in the Epistles that deal with this subject of “apostasy” – [1 Timothy 4:1-3](#), [2 Timothy 3:1-9](#), [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#), [James 5:1-8](#), [2 Peter 2:1-22](#), [2 Peter 3:3-6](#), and [Jude 1-25](#). For the most part, the majority of people think of apostasy as people leaving the church, and I am sure that that is an actual part of apostasy. However, I want you to think of apostasy in a different way. I want you to think of it first as a “doctrinal defection” from the truths found in God’s Word. I have said it often, but I personally believe that there is more false teaching than true biblical teaching. The idea of apostasy is not necessarily that people leave the church (which many will), but that false teachers and false prophets will steadily undermine the fundamental doctrines and truths of Scripture and lead people away from a true and biblical salvation at an alarming rate. For instance, [1 Timothy 4:1](#) says,

**1Ti 4:1 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,**

[2 Timothy 4:3-4](#) says,

**2Ti 4:3 (NKJV) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because they have itching ears*, they will heap up for themselves teachers;  
<sup>4</sup> **and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.****

The gospel will be watered down and the major doctrines of Scripture will be ignored. Sin will be minimized. These individuals are motivated by personal ambition and greed, and are willing to sacrifice

the truth of Scripture for personal recognition and for money. So, at the time of the rapture, it will have been preceded by this doctrinal defection that has led many people away from a genuine saving faith in Christ. It is critical to understand that the word “**apostasy**” (Gr. *apostasia*) does NOT refer to genuine Christians who depart from Christ and leave the Christian faith, but it refers to those who are simply mere “professors” of Christ, but not “possessors” of salvation. They are those in the church who are Christians outwardly, but not inwardly. In my mind, this abandoning of strong doctrine becomes the seedbed for the False Prophet and the one-world religion that will be such a major part of the Tribulation period. The unbelievers who are left behind will most likely become the focus of this super church and will quickly embrace the false teachings of the False Prophet and actually support the antichrist.

So, at the rapture of the church those who are a part of the true church will be taken, and everyone else who is a part of Christendom, but is not saved, will be left behind to face God’s wrath in the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation. It is the true church that will be raptured, and it may not be as many as some may think. Jesus said it this way in [Matthew 7:13-14](#),

**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. <sup>14</sup> Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**

Just because someone is a member of a local church or grew up in a Christian family does not mean that they are saved and will be raptured, but that is what so many people believe. They are trusting in some decision they made that for the most part has never really made any kind of meaningful difference in their life with regards to their relationship with Christ. Local churches are filled with people like this and that is why Jesus identified them in [Matthew 13](#) as tares and as bad fish. They are the people who may know the correct answers to spiritual questions, but have never truly and genuinely committed their life to Jesus Christ. They will be left behind at the rapture, and for most of them their actual fate is sealed at the rapture because of their rejection of Christ and their love of unrighteousness ([2 Thessalonians 2](#)).