

THE RAPTURE, PART 6

In our last study, we began to address some of the issues related to the Olivet Discourse and the rapture in [Matthew 24-25](#). The problem in studying the passage in [Matthew 24-25](#) is that there is absolutely no mention of the rapture whatsoever. It simply is not there. I think the reason for that is obvious in that the church had not yet been created and formed or even taught about during the ministry of Jesus. So, the disciples did not see or know anything about what we know as the “church”, or the “church age” in which we live. It seems that if Jesus had talked to them about the church being “raptured” that they would have had the deer in the headlights look, or “*what in the world are You talking about*”. Then to make it even more clear, it is apparent in the gospels that up until [Matthew 24](#) that Jesus talked much more about His death than He did about His Second Coming. So, because the church was what would be raptured, it simply was not something with which the disciples would even have been remotely familiar or knowledgeable. Then to make it even more obvious that they were extremely limited in their understanding, [1 Thessalonians 4-5](#) and [2 Thessalonians 2](#) which address the rapture had not even been written yet. The only reference they could have had to the rapture was [John 14:1-4](#), but in that passage Jesus did not use the Latin word “rapture” or the Greek word “*harpazo*” for “**snatching away**” as was used in [1 Thessalonians 4](#). So, if Jesus had actually addressed the rapture in [Matthew 24-25](#), it would probably have totally confused the disciples.

It is important to appreciate that [Matthew 24-25](#) are exclusively about the future events that concern Israel and the Jewish nation. I.e., it is not a passage that even addresses the church. The events described in [Matthew 24-25](#) really have nothing to do with the church or what we call the “church age” in which we live. At this point in the prophetic picture, except for [Matthew 24:4-8](#) and what were several signs that would precede the Tribulation period, there is nothing that relates to the church because the church is in heaven with Christ after the rapture. You would think that if the church was actually on the earth during the time of the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation in [Revelation 6-19](#) that it would have been mentioned somewhere in those chapters, but it is not mentioned one time – either here in [Matthew 24-25](#) or [Revelation 6-19](#). Once again, the only time that Jesus actually alluded to the rapture was in [John 14:1-4](#), but even then it is surely was not something that the disciples even understood.

So, here in the Olivet discourse, Jesus is answering three questions the disciples asked Him in [Matthew 24:3](#), and we must keep in mind that these three questions are directly related to what we call “The Second Coming” and not the rapture. What He says to them in v8 is very important for He says,

Mt 24:8 (NKJV) **All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.**

The word “**sorrows**” is a very specific Greek word that speaks of the travail and pain that a woman experiences as childbirth. In fact, most every other translation other than the KJV and NKJV translate it as “**birth pangs**” or “**birth pains**”. The NASB translates it,

Mt 24:8 (NASB) "**But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.**

At first the birth pains are relatively mild and infrequent, but they quickly become much greater in the pain level and much more frequent. So, what Jesus is teaching in this passage is twofold. First, He is warning that before He returns for His Second Coming that the world will become more and more hostile and aggressive in their hatred of Israel and ultimately that will reflect itself in a hatred of Christians. So,

as the rapture gets closer and closer, one of the signs of the that event will be a dramatic increase in hostility toward Christians and towards the church. This will surely be something that we will probably experience at a much greater level than we currently are experiencing. Secondly, Jesus is urging everyone to be prepared for His coming and the judgments that are associated with it. However, because these two chapters are basically written for those living in that seven year period, we know that Jesus is primarily addressing the nation of Israel. It is at the end of this time that “**all of Israel**” will be saved ([Romans 11:26](#)) and fully restored to enter into the Millennium. So, when you read [Matthew 24-25](#), the majority of these events will not impact you as a believer except for that which precedes the Tribulation and that which follows the Great Tribulation when all who were raptured right before the Tribulation begins will come back with Christ.

The “**signs**” listed in [Matthew 24:4-7](#) certainly are not a complete list of what will be happening prior to and after the rapture, but just a few of them. In essence, all of these signs will culminate and climax in a much larger magnitude than before the rapture, but they will be happening before the rapture as a prelude to the rapture. In fact, it would not be difficult to find similar events that are currently happening in our lifetime, but in reality all of the Christian era has been characterized by these type of events in varying degrees. Collectively, though, they certainly appear to be growing much worse and with greater frequency.

So, in this passage in [Matthew 24:4-7](#) Jesus gives four (4) precursor signs which will be real prophetic events that happen during the seven years of Tribulation.

Mt 24:4 (NKJV) **And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For (1) many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. ⁶ And you will (2) hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For (3) nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be (4) famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.**

It is very important to appreciate that we are talking about signs that take place on a global level – much of which could never have been known by those living in the time of the early church. The transfer of information was much too slow, but today we can know of something that happens on the other side of the world in literally seconds. We can actually see footage of it taking place.. All of the signs that Jesus gave the disciples in v4-7 are similar to a woman who is in labor. The pains of childbirth increase in both frequency and intensity, and these signs are just the beginning. I.e., there will be many similar events that will begin to increase in intensity and magnitude. It is not that there is just a war or a rumor of wars, or that one nation will rise against another nation, or that there was an earthquake or a pestilence or a famine that occurred somewhere. That is not the point. The point is that all of those type events will begin to increase in both intensity and magnitude at an alarming rate and will come to a final form of judgment during the seven years of Tribulation. So, the preliminary birth pains that Jesus gives to the disciples are what set the stage for the seven years of Tribulation clearly described in [Revelation 6-19](#).

The next era of prophetic biblical history will be the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation, and the signs that Jesus gave the disciples are simply some of the “**signs**” that will be in place right before the beginning of these seven years. The rapture itself is a signless event. I.e., it is something that is imminent and could happen at any given moment. However, because we know that it immediately

precedes the seven years of Tribulation, the preliminary signs that usher in that period will also serve as viable signs for the rapture to occur. We can view these signs as “general trends” that are taking place in the world over a period of time as we near the end of the “**last days**”. None of the signs, other than the rebirth of Israel as a nation, are single isolated events, but are events that continue to increase in both their intensity and their magnitude and in locations all over the world. No country, no government, no people are exempt. No one can find a place to hide that will be sufficient to deliver them from the suffering that is to follow. These seven years are clearly a designated time by God where He personally pours out His wrath on a God hating, unbelieving, immoral and ungodly world. People will believe anything but the truth. So, what we are looking at are these general trends that will turn into the actual fulfillment of prophecy AFTER the rapture and during the seven years of Tribulation. Stated a different way, they are the signs that are leading up to and will be fulfilled right up to the Second Coming.

The first preceding sign is that there will be false messiahs. Jesus said “**Take heed that no one deceives you.** ⁵ **For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.**” (v4-5). [2 Peter 2:1-3](#) says,

2Pe 2:1 (NKJV) But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

Just in our lifetime we have witnessed many false Christs, most of them associated with various cults. However, during the Tribulation period, these false Messiahs will reach unprecedented proportions. You have to appreciate that when the church has been removed and the Holy Spirit has removed His restraining influence that these kinds of people will exploit everyone they can. [2 Thessalonians 2:7-8](#) 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.

Then to make it even easier for these false messiahs, people will have less and less discernment. Why is that? It is because during this time [2 Thessalonians 2:11-12](#) identifies that God will send a strong delusion as part of His judgment on the wicked.

2Th 2:11 (NKJV) 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.

No matter how smart or how discerning some lost person may think they are, they simply have no power to escape this deluding influence that God will send on them. It is simply a part of His wrath being poured out on those who have ignored God and played their little religious games with Him. They lose, and there is nothing they can do about it. If we think that the world is disintegrating before us now, I assure you that we have not seen anything yet that even resembles these seven years of Tribulation.

The second sign in this passage is that of “**wars and rumors of wars**”. V6 says,

Mt 24:6 (NKJV) And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

It is not just that there will be wars, but there will be the increase of the threat of war and in our lifetime the use of nuclear weapons or EMP’s unleashed in the atmosphere that will literally shut down life as we know it and place us in the dark ages again. The average person in America has no concept of what survival will entail in these kinds of conditions. The phrase “**you will hear**” literally means that “**you will be continually hearing**”. The threat of war will dominate the political landscape.

If we look back historically, the entire 20th century was dominated by “**wars and rumors of wars**”. To start with we had WWI where over 20 million people were killed, and to make it worse there was the 1918 influenza epidemic which was spread by soldiers returning home. That single epidemic killed over 50 million people. There was the Russian Civil War that killed 13.5 million people. Then we have WWII. This was the largest and bloodiest war of all time. The death toll was between 62-78 million people, with over 50 million being civilians. We had the Cold War from 1945-1990. That is why there is a Savannah River Plant. There was the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Six-Day War, the Soviet-Afghan War, The Bosnian War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Persian Gulf War, the Afghanistan War, and the Rwandan Genocide. This is just a few of the wars in the 20th century, and the Great Tribulation will see the greatest war of all in what we call Armageddon. In fact, it is during this war that Christ will actually return at His Second Coming. If you add to all of that in the 21st century, we have civil wars all over the world, border conflicts, terrorism, and revolutions of every kind possible. The point is simple, so please do not miss it, but these are just the beginning of the end, just the beginning of the birth pains and sorrows that will follow.

Thirdly, [Matthew 24:7](#) says,

Mt 24:7 (NKJV) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

There will be a very dramatic increase in what we call “natural disasters”. [Luke 21:11](#), a parallel passage to [Matthew 24](#), adds a few more of these type of disasters.

Lk 21:11 (NKJV) And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

These “**great signs from heaven**” probably will be asteroids, debris from a comet, and similar cosmic type events. Even the prophet Joel spoke about the sun and moon be darkened. As famines and pestilences and earthquakes begin to happen with much greater frequency and intensity, it is simply a sign of God preparing the earth for “divine wrath”. I like to think of it as the world disintegrating. Listen to how Peter describes what is ultimately going to happen in [2 Peter 3:10-12](#),

2Pe 3:10 (NKJV) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ **Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,** ¹² **looking for and**

hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

If you are someone who wants to settle down into your nice little lap of luxury in this world, I imagine that you will be highly disappointed in what is to come. This world is not our home. I like the way Peter says it in v13 when he says,

2Pe 3:13 (NKJV) Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Everybody has to make a decision as to which world they want to live for – either the one in which we currently live or the one which is to come. I want to live completely for the one to come. [Philippians 3:20](#) says it this way,

Php 3:20 (NKJV) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

You can just imagine that once the global increase in a lack of food, in a global increase in disease and viruses, and in unprecedented natural disasters begin to rain down on the earth, that all of humanity will be tormented as never before. On top of all of these type of events, you have to appreciate that sin will be running rampant and the devil will unleashing all of his evil on mankind as never before. We know that at some point in all of the Tribulation that the demons who are currently in a bottomless pit will be loosed on all of the earth. Listen to [Revelation 9:1-12](#),

Rev 9:1 (NKJV) Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. ² And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. ³ Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. ⁴ They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment *was* like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. ⁶ In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. ⁷ The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces *were* like the faces of men. ⁸ They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' *teeth*. ⁹ And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings *was* like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. ¹⁰ They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power *was* to hurt men five months. ¹¹ And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew *is* Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. ¹² One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

Now, I know this passage that I have just read occurs during the Tribulation, but the other events that we have discussed are simply the “**beginning of sorrows**”. If you are someone who likes horror movies, the Tribulation / Great Tribulation will be granddaddy of them all. Listen to [Revelation 6:7-8](#) which gives a further description of all that we have been discussing as it is unleashed in the Tribulation..

Rev 6:7 (NKJV) When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." ⁸ 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.

No matter how you may read that, it is not good. You can stock up all you want, but if you go into the Tribulation, you are sadly deceived if you think it will be of any benefit. The only way to avoid the outpouring of God's wrath is by fully entrusting and committing your life to Jesus Christ. There are no options from which you can choose. It is Jesus or the Tribulation. It is Jesus or facing the wrath of God. You should be both thankful and grateful that you are living in the age of grace where you can freely come to Jesus Christ. However, once the rapture occurs, in all likelihood any chance of salvation for those who rejected Jesus Christ because they wanted to live how they wanted to live will quickly be gone and they will believe the lie and be both condemned and experience the wrath of God in an unprecedented way that will lead them to the Lake of Fire in the final judgment. Not good. May God continue to pour out His grace on all who will come to Him in simple childlike faith and entrust their life to Jesus Christ. Remember that the days are short and the time is near. Opportunities vanish with every passing day.

I pray that you are not too discouraged because we are just getting started.