

The Rapture As Taught In Revelation

Part 12—condensed **The Rapture Of The Church**

Compiled/Formatted By Tom Stephens

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God*: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Thessalonians 4:16-17.

Here's what Jesus said:

And when he had called the people [unto him] with his disciples also, he said unto them, "**Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.**" Mk 8:34.

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the son of Man." Luke 21:36.

Then, later He stated through John's vision:

"Because you have kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try those *who dwell on the earth*"*. Revelation 3:10.

If Jesus had made only one of these last two statements, it would have been enough to guarantee that all those who would consistently walk in His Spirit—and not in the flesh (under the law), would "escape all these things that shall come upon all the world, to try those *who dwell on the earth*"!*

NOTE: I want to emphasize both the above scripture passages in Luke 21:36 and in Revelation 3:10, where Jesus promised that if we persevere and pray always for accountability, He will keep us—not only from the terrible Great Tribulation—but He will also keep us from the "hour"—the entire seven years—of this period. There appears to be another very strong condition to this promise—to hear His voice and to follow Him—as all His own sheep do.

The term "rapture" is derived from the Latin word *raptus*, which means "caught away" or "caught up." This word is equivalent to the Greek *harpazo*, translated as "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians, 4:17. The event, described here and in 1 Corinthians 15, refers to the catching up of the church from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. It involves only the faithful of Christ's churches:

1) Just prior to the rapture, as Christ is descending from heaven for His church, the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" will occur (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Then we which are alive, and remain, are raptured.

NOTE: This is *not* the same resurrection found in Rev. 20:4, for the latter is an event occurring after Christ returns to earth, destroys the wicked, and binds Satan (Rev. 19:11-20:3). The resurrection in Rev. 20:4 relates to the martyred dead of the tribulation saints who were saved *and* beheaded during this seven year period, and possibly to O.T. saints (see Rev. 20:6). Revelation 20:6 is the only passage labeling the "believer's resurrection." Some believe this is the time of the "last trump", and that it is the rapture of the church. There is no "last trump" mentioned in these verses. The "Last Trump"*** in God's Word is a final blow of a series of blows of the shofar calling Israel to a "red alert" situation.

NOTE: It is important to understand that just as there are two phases to Christ's second coming—**1)** the Rapture of the Church (Rev. 4:1), and **2)** the Glorious Appearing (Titus 2:13)—so there are three phases to the resurrection of believers **A) the Church, B)** seven years later, at the end of the Tribulation, the **Old Testament saints** (Israel—some to eternal life; some to everlasting contempt), to be resurrected prior to the Glorious Appearing (Daniel 12; then compare Rev. 19:7-9 with Psa. 50); and **C) The Tribulation saints**. John merges these all together when he says, "*Blessed and holy are those who have part in the*

first resurrection.”

2) As the dead in Christ are raised, living believers will be transfigured; their bodies will put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51, 53). Their transformation will happen in a very short time, “*in the twinkling of an eye*” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

3) Both the resurrected believers and the transfigured believers will be “*caught up together*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) to meet Christ in the air, that is, in the atmosphere between earth and heaven.

4) They will be visibly united with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), taken to His Father's house in heaven (see John 14:2-3), and united with loved ones who have died (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

5) They will be removed from all distress (2 Corinthians 5:2,4; Philippians 3:21), from all persecution and oppression (Revelation 3:10), from the entire sphere of sin and from death (1 Corinthians 15:51-57); the rapture delivers them from “the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9), that is, from the great tribulation.

6) The hope that our Savior will soon return to take us out of the world to “*ever be with the Lord*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) is the *blessed hope* of all the redeemed for *His Glorious Appearing* (Titus 2:13). It is a major source of comfort for suffering believers (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18; 5:10).

7) Paul uses “*we*” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 because he knows the Lord's return was something that is imminent, and could have happened in his own lifetime; and he communicates this same anticipation to the Thessalonians. The Bible insists on a continual waiting with eagerness for the return of our Lord. Believers today must be ever watchful and hopeful for Christ's return to take them out of this world and unto Himself (cf. Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 7:29; 10:11; 15:51-52; and Philippians 4:5). There is no imminence in His Glorious Appearing.

8) The portion of the professing church that fails to abstain from evil and is unfaithful to Christ will be left behind at the rapture (Mat. 25:1; Luke 12:45). They will remain as part of the apostate church subject to God's wrath (Rev. 17:1; see article entitled *The Age Of The Antichrist*, p. 1896 from “The Full Life International Study Bible”).

9) Following the rapture is the day of the Lord, a time that brings tribulation and wrath to the ungodly (1 Thessalonians 5:2-10). That will be followed by the second stage of Christ's coming, when He comes to destroy the ungodly and to reign on earth (Matthew 24:42).

**those who dwell on the earth*—the book of Revelation readily uses this term, strongly indicating these are all the evil ones who have consistently—during the seven years of the Tribulation period—rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, and have willingly taken the mark of the beast—in contrast to those who dwell in heaven.

** “The Last Trump” (Trump of God)—in God's Word, this is a final blow of a series of blows of the shofar calling Israel to a “red alert” situation. (See 1 Corinthians 15:52, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Blessings from Tom and Linda Stephens

All scriptures were taken from the KJV of The Full Life International Study Bible.

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The Rapture As Taught In Revelation
The Rapture Of The Church
“Age Of The Antichrist”

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"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." (2 Thes. 2:3-4).

According to the Bible, the antichrist (cf. 1 John 2:18) is coming, the one who engineers the final onslaught of Satan against Christ and the saints just prior to the time when our Lord Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom on earth. Paul's terms for the antichrist are the "man of sin" and "the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Other terms used in the Bible are the "beast [rising] up out of the sea" (Revelation 13-1-10), "a scarlet colored beast" (Revelation 17:3), and "the beast" (Revelation 17:8,16; 19:19-20; 20:10).

SIGNS OF THE ANTICHRIST'S COMING. Unlike the rapture, the coming of the antichrist will not be without warning. Several signs point to his coming and his appearance. At least three events must occur before he makes his appearance on earth: (1) the "mystery of iniquity," already at work in the world, must intensify (2 Thessalonians 2:7); (2) the "falling away" must come (2:3); (3) "he who now letteth" must be removed (2:7).

- (1) The "mystery of iniquity," that behind-the-scenes activity of evil powers evident throughout the world (2 Thessalonians 2:7), will increase until it reaches its climax in the complete ridicule of and disregard for any standards and commandments held sacred in the Bible. Because of a prevailing spirit of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:10-12; cf.; Luke 18:8). Yet a faithful remnant will remain loyal to the apostolic faith as revealed in the N.T. (Matthew 24:13; 25:10; Luke 18:7; Revelation 2:7). Through these faithful people, the church will remain a warrior church, wielding the sword of the Spirit until it is taken out of the world (Ephesians 6:11).
- (2) The "apostasy" (Gk. *apostasia*), literally meaning "departure," "falling away" (2 Thessalonians 2:3), or "abandonment and rebellion," will occur. In the last days, multitudes within the professing church will depart from Biblical truth.
 - (a) Both the apostle Paul and Christ depict a dismal picture of the condition of much of the visible church—morally, spiritually, and doctrinally—as the present age closes (cf. Matthew 24:5,10-13,24; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). Paul in particular stresses that the churches, will be invaded by godless elements in the last days.
 - (b) This "falling away" within the church will have two dimensions. (i) *Theological apostasy* is the departure from and rejection of a part or all of the original teachings of Christ and the apostles (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3). False leaders will offer salvation and cheap grace and ignore Christ's demand for repentance, separation from immorality, and loyalty to God and His standards (2 Peter 2:1-3,12-19). False gospels centering on human desires, needs, and goals of self-interest will become popular (2 Timothy 4:3-4). (ii) *Moral apostasy* is the severing of one's saving relationship with Christ and returning to sin and immorality. Apostates may proclaim right doctrine and N.T. teaching, yet abandon God's moral standards (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 23:25-28). Many churches will tolerate almost anything for the sake of numbers, money, success, and honor (1 Timothy 4:1). The gospel of the cross with its call to suffer reproach from the world (Philippians 1:29), to radically renounce sin (Romans 8:13),

- to sacrifice for the kingdom of God, and to deny one's self will become rare (Mat 24:12; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:3).
- (c) Both the history of the church and the predicted apostasy of the last days warn all believers not to take for granted a continual progress of the kingdom of God through all ages until the end. At some point in time in the worldwide history of the church, rebellion against God and His Word will reach astounding proportions. The day of the Lord will bring God's wrath upon those who reject His truth (1 Thessalonians 5:2-9).
 - (d) The ultimate triumph of God's kingdom and His righteousness in the world, therefore, depends not on the gradual increase of the success of the professing church, but the final intervention of God when He breaks into the world with righteous judgment Revelation 19-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10-13; and the book of Jude).
- (3) A pivotal and decisive event must occur before the "man of sin" can be revealed the day of the Lord and its tribulation begins (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3), namely, the taking "out of the way" of someone (2:7) or something that "letteth" the mystery of iniquity and the "man of sin" (2:3-6). "Letteth" is an old English word meaning "obstruct, hold back, restrain." When he who holds back the man of sin is taken out of the way, then the day the Lord can begin (2:6-7).
- (a) "He who now letteth [restraineth]" (2 Thessalonians 2:7) may best be understood as referring to the Holy Spirit, who alone has the power to hold back iniquity, the man of sin, and Satan (2 Thessalonians 2:9). The restrainer, is referred to by both the masculine article ("he who now letteth," 2:7) and by the neuter article ("what withholdeth," 2:6). Also, the word for "Spirit" in the Greek language can be referred to by a masculine or neuter pronoun (John 16:8; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:17). Note the Holy Spirit's work restraining sin.
 - (b) At the beginning of the final seven years of tribulation, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:7). This does not mean He is taken out of the world, but only that His restraining influence against lawlessness and the antichrist's entrance will cease. All restraints against sin will be removed and the satanically inspired rebellion will begin. However, the Holy Spirit will still remain on earth during the tribulation to convict people of their sins, convert them to Christ, and empower them (Rev. 7:9,14; 11:1-11; 14:6-7).
 - (c) The Holy Spirit's being taken out of the way enables the man of sin to come on the scene (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). God will send a deluding influence upon all those who have refused to love the truth (2:11); they will accept the claims of the man of sin, and human society will degenerate to a depth of depravity never seen before.
 - (d) The Holy Spirit's sin-restraining ministry is carried on largely through the church, rich is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Therefore, many interpreters believe the Holy Spirit's being taken out of the way is a strong indication that the picture of the faithful will occur at the same time (1 Thessalonians 4:17). That is, the return of Christ to gather the overcomers of His churches unto Himself and to deliver them from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10) will occur before the beginning of the day of the Lord and at the time when the man of sin is revealed.
 - (e) Some scholars believe that the restrainer of 2 Thes. 2:6 (neuter gender) refers to the Holy Spirit and His restraining ministry, while in 2:7 the "he who now letteth" masculine gender)

refers to the believers who are gathered together to Christ and taken out of the way, i.e., raptured to meet Christ in the air in order to be with the Lord (1Thes. 4:17).

THE ANTICHRIST'S ACTIVITIES. As the day of the Lord begins, the "man of sin" is revealed. He will be a world ruler who will make a covenant with Israel seven years before the end of the age (Dan. 9:27).

- (1) His true identification will be confirmed three and one-half years later as he breaks his covenant with Israel, becomes the world ruler, declares himself to be God, desecrates the temple in Jerusalem, forbids the worship of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:8-9), and devastates the land of Palestine (Dan. 9:27; 11:36-45).
- (2) The antichrist will declare himself to be God and will severely persecute those who remain loyal to God and Christ (Daniel 7:8,24-25; Revelation 11:6-7; 13:7,15-18). He will demand worship, evidently from a great temple that he uses as the center of his pronouncements (cf. Dan. 7:8, 25; 8:4; 11:31, 36). Humans have sought this status since the beginning of creation (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 13:8,12).
- (3) The "man of sin" will demonstrate through the power of Satan great signs, wonders, and miracles in order to propagate error (2 Thessalonians 2:9). "Lying wonders" means that they are supernatural miracles that deceive people into accepting a lie:
 - (a) It is possible these demonstrations of the supernatural will be seen on television around the world. Millions will be impressed, deceived, and persuaded by this highly persuasive and popular leader because they have no deep commitment to or love for the truth of God's Word (2:9-12).
 - (b) Both Paul's words (2 Thessalonians 2:9) and Jesus' (Matthew 24:24) should caution believers to *not assume* that everything that is miraculous comes from God. Apparent "manifestations of the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:7-10) and alleged experiences from God or the Holy Spirit must be tested by the person's loyalty to Christ and Scripture.

THE DEFEAT OF THE ANTICHRIST. At the end of the tribulation, Satan will gather together many nations at Armageddon under the direction of the antichrist and make war against God and His people in a battle that will involve the entire world (Revelation 16:16). When that occurs, Christ will return and supernaturally intervene to destroy the antichrist, his armies, and all who do not obey the gospel (Daniel 11:45; Revelation 19:15-21). Thereupon Christ will bind Satan and establish His kingdom on earth (20:1-6).¹

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¹ The Age Of The Antichrist, P. 1896; Full Life Study Bible KJV; Zondervan Publ. House. USA; © 1992.