

THE RAPTURE

Part 4: Rescued FROM the Wrath of God

(preached 12/31/23)

Please turn to *1 Thessalonians 5:9-11, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, Revelation 11:15-18*

So far....

- Gateway believes in a ***Pre-Millennial*** view of the end times (including the Rapture), which means the Millennial Reign of Christ hasn't happened yet, but will take place in the future. Also called the "Futurist" view.
- THE TRIBULATION is the 70th "week" from Daniel 9 that hasn't happened yet. It's a 7 year period that begins with Revelation 6 and the debut of the Antichrist and ends with the 2nd coming of Jesus.
- The timing of the Rapture is around the Tribulation: pre-Trib, mid-Trib, Pre-Wrath, or Post-Trib.
- The Rapture will not be a secret event, but one preceded by SIGNS & PORTENTS that God provides. This has been the Biblical pattern since the beginning.
- God declares we are children of the Light who walk in the day and not night. Day/Light means knowledge vs. ignorance and secrecy = darkness.
- Signs & portents show believers that a prophetic event is "near, even at the doors" as Jesus said, giving believers a chance to PREPARE.

For any who don't like the idea of going through any part of the Trib, I'm with you! Let me speak briefly on that.

- **Christians are called to suffer for being Christians.** We've lost that in the modern western Church and have developed theologies to avoid suffering and add to comfort and prosperity. Do we believe any of the Christians in Iran are reading "*Your Best Life Now!*" by Joel Osteen whilst having to hide and change locations of their gatherings for fear of being executed?
- **A portion of what happens during the Trib is persecution of Jews and Christians, just for being Jewish and Christian.** The Antichrist as well as Mystery Babylon are speculated to kill God's people by the millions.
- **All the Christians in the 1st century suffered and most died due to their faith in Jesus.** Paul said: "*we're led like lambs to the slaughter all day long.*" We've enjoyed a window of safety and security here in America, but all bets are off during the Tribulation when the Restrainer of evil is no longer restraining.
- **The Bible states over and over that suffering (for the faith) refines one's faith.**
- **We may be immune to God's wrath but we're not immune from that of the devil or the world.** A servant isn't greater than his Master and Jesus is our Master Who suffered for Who He was.

In today's installment I want to continue a bit on the signs and portents God will give to believers so that we'll be ready, and then follow up with the promise of the Church being **rescued from the wrath of God**...which is paramount to timing this event.

We've spent lots of time in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, so let's do an overview to show why I **REJECT A PRE-TRIB RAPTURE** in favor of God revealing signs and portents to the Church. An imminent & secret Pre-Trib position creates too many theological barriers that we have to stretch and contort around like a ballerina.

Almost everyone with a futurist view agrees that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is about the Rapture. Those are the famous verses about the Lord descending from Heaven with a shout, voice or archangel, and trumpet call.

Paul sends the letter and then someone gives the Thessalonians some **FAKE NEWS: THE RAPTURE HAPPENED AND YOU MISSED IT!** This gets back to Paul who IMMEDIATELY sends a second letter—2 Thessalonians—to reassure the church and set the record straight. *He wrote the 2nd letter only 1-2 months after the first one.*

We expositied 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8 last week, so let's go to verse 9 which narrows down the TIMING of the Rapture:

[1Th 5:9-11 ESV] 9 For **God has not destined us for wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

The questions that need answering are these: 1) what does Paul mean by God's wrath? 2) When is this wrath going to happen?

God's wrath IS going to happen, which Paul also explains in detail to the Thessalonians, and the unbelievers are on the receiving end of it. I'm about to quote from Paul's SECOND letter to said church and remember: *the context of this letter is to respond to the TIMING of the Rapture* and to reassure the people that they didn't miss it:

[2Th 1:5-10 ESV] 5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering-- 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the **Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels** 8 **in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on**

those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Please remember that **in his first letter**, he assured them that 1) they would be kept/rescued FROM God's wrath. 2) God's wrath/2nd coming will be a physical, public display that everyone on the planet will see. *A global, apocalyptic event* that will be directly experienced with the 5 senses!

In other words, Paul is saying *“this hasn't happened yet! If it did, you would have seen it! There's no missing it people! All these things aren't going to happen in secret, but out in the open!”*

Remember an important guideline: **the 1st coming of Christ He concealed His full glory** to walk among as one of us. He only gave a glimpse of His fullness at the Mt. of Transfiguration and only to 3 disciples. **At the 2nd coming He's not holding anything back!** He's coming back in His full glory, authority, and power! Read Revelation 1 to see a description of what He truly looks like, and that's how He returns in Revelation 19!

No more secrets. Nothing hidden. He's gonna let it all out!

Back to 2 Thessalonians:

- VERSE 7: Lord Jesus revealed coming from Heaven with an army of angels. SAME event Jesus talks about in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, that we went over last week.
- Same event Paul is talking about in his 1st letter to the Thessalonians! Not 2 different events, not 2 stages of the same event.
- VERSES 8-9: Jesus returns in the flaming fire of vengeance, to make war against the unbelieving nations of the world. Same event as Revelation 19.
- VERSE 10: He also comes with his saints who are HUMAN. Jesus said the same thing in Matt 24, Paul said the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 4. These are the same things taking place at the same events!
- The Bible is 100% consistent and simple, not requiring doctrinal contortions when seen this way.

If one believes in a secret, imminent pre-Trib rapture then you need to be a theological ballerina and stretch around a bunch of criss-crossing laser lights to reach your goal. For example: you have to claim that Paul is talking about a pre-Trib rapture in his 1st letter to the Thessalonians and a separate 2nd coming event that takes place 7 years later in 2nd Thessalonians.

Matthew 24 requires even more gymnastic contortions that I'm just not willing to try. To make a pre-Trib rapture fit, you must claim that verses 1-14 take place pre-trib, verses 15-26 during the Trib, verses 27-31 post trib, and verses 32-44 pre-trib. I'm not talking about rapture timing here, but just events! It claims that Jesus jumps radically back and forth between these events AND that it's only for the Jews/Israel. The "elect" in Matthew 24 being the Jews/Israel is a pillar in pre-Trib theology.

Yet Paul, speaking of the same events to the Thessalonians, basically repeating Jesus' testimony, is talking to THE CHURCH and not Israel.

Thessalonica is part of Greece and both the country and church consisted of mostly Gentiles and not Jews. ALL [in the church] were Christians and not Jews/Israel.

- Yet Paul is writing them a 2nd letter to clear the air that they didn't miss the Rapture.
- He backs his letter up by telling them things that MUST happen BEFORE said glorious event, which we've already read some of in the above verses. Let's read some more:

[2Th 2:1-5 ESV] 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, [THE RAPTURE] we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day [THE RAPTURE] will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

Allow me to repeat several important points: *this 2nd letter is written to reassure the Christians at Thessalonica that the rapture [that he told them about in his first letter] hasn't happened.*

A pre-trib view demands that his first letter was about a pre-trib rapture, and that his second letter is talking about a 2nd coming 7 years later: 2 separate events or two "stages" of the same event, 7 years apart.

The fact is Paul is talking about the same event that happens at one time.

In his attempt to reassure the stressed out Thessalonians that they didn't miss their resurrection, Paul says [verse 3]:

For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed

TWO THINGS HAPPEN BEFORE THE RAPTURE: 1) there's a great falling away from the Christian faith and 2) the Antichrist finally makes his entrance into the world stage. Paul goes on to say what the Antichrist will DO and then wags his finger at the church in verse 5: *"I already told you all this! You shouldn't have fallen for the fake news that you missed this!"*

HE REPEATS THE SAME THING AS JESUS DID IN MATTHEW 24 AS TO WHAT THE CHURCH IS GOING TO SEE THE ANTICHRIST DO: enter into the Jewish Temple and declare himself as a deity. Jesus used the same phrase Daniel did: The Abomination of Desolation (the Antichrist) entering the Temple and profaning it.

So if I'm right (and I might not be!) here the signs that we, the Church, need to look for:

- Mass falling away from Christ.
- Debut of the Antichrist.
- Antichrist forms 7 year peace covenant with "many."
- Rebuilding of 3rd Jewish Temple.
- Breaks covenant 3.5 years into it, enters the Temple, and calls himself god.

There's a statement that sound pious and faithful, but (in my view) is not factual and it goes like this: *"I'm looking for Christ and not Antichrist!"* That's the opposite of what Jesus and Paul said concerning the end times.

Now let's talk about wrath, because the timing of the Rapture is predicated on a major "wrath/judgment day" event. Let's ask again: 1) what is God's wrath? And 2) when is this going to happen? We know that we, the church, will NOT be on the receiving end of it.

[Rev 11:15-18 ESV] 15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,** and he shall reign forever and ever." 16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. 18 **The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged,**

and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

From the beginning of the Bible, God's prophets declared "The Day of the Lord" and said it was a day of God's wrath upon all the unbelieving nations of the world. Each of these prophesies listed signs and portents [blood, fire, pillars of smoke, moon red, sun black, etc.].

After the 7th Trumpet is blown, the 24 elders repeat what the OT prophets, Jesus, and Paul said over and over: the day of the Lord is one where He expresses His wrath, but NOT toward the faithful believers. Look what the 24 elders declare: 1) this is the day where Jesus' Kingdom invades the earthly kingdoms and Jesus' Kingdom REPLACES all the earthly ones. 2) the dead are judged, and the faithful are rewarded at this event.

WHAT IS THE REWARD? I've been telling you for awhile now: *the resurrection*. Remember what Paul taught the Corinthians: regular flesh and blood can't inherit God's Kingdom. *Only the resurrected saints will become co-owner's with Jesus when His Kingdom comes in full.*

Revelation 11 is telling us that His Second Coming is the day of the Lord's wrath and the raging unbelieving nations of the world will be on the receiving end of it.

The Bible even records what the unbelievers will say when it happens:

[Rev 6:15-17 ESV] 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

If there are still believers alive and on the planet at the time, Jesus' wrath won't be directed at them. They've overcome by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. They've been forgiven and their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. **Both the dead and alive in Christ will be kept FROM the wrath to come.**

If the 2nd Coming is the wrath of God, then the Rapture and the 2nd coming are the same event that will take place at the same time. This is called the Post Tribulation position.

There's one other possibility:

[Rev 15:1, 5-8 ESV] 1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. ... 5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

There are 21 events which take place during the Tribulation: the 7 Seals, the 7 Trumpets, and the 7 Bowls. **The 7 Bowls are the ones referred to as the Wrath of God.** The 7 Bowls happen in VERY quick succession and the last one is poured out right before the Battle of Armageddon. Some say it takes 70 days (10 days per bowl) others say less time, others say more. IDK how long its going to take, but I do know they happen quickly.

When the 7th and final bowl is poured out, it's directed at the evil city called "Mystery Babylon" in order to destroy it. Revelation chapters 17-18 state that her sins are many, including the martyrdom of Jews and Christians. When God finally destroys her, there's an "it is finished" moment.

Thus the Pre-Wrath position is that the Church will be Raptured right before the 7 Bowls are poured out onto the earth, which will take place near the end of the Tribulation.

There's another event that needs to be talked about as it relates to timing, which is the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. A whole sermon could easily be dedicated to this, but we're only going to hit highlights.

PRE-TRIBBERS believe that we'll be whisked off to Heaven before the Trib and that the entire 7 years we're there, we're enjoying the Wedding Supper.

Jesus spoke of the Wedding Supper and never indicates that it's going to be in Heaven, but rather on earth.

Please remember: **when Jesus talks about us entering "His Kingdom" modern day Western Christians immediately insert "Heaven" which is a mistake.**

The promise Jesus and the Apostles made, over and over, *is that Jesus brings His Godly Kingdom HERE on earth, as it is in Heaven.*

WHEN JESUS SPOKE OF HIS KINGDOM, THE CONTEXT WAS ALWAYS THE SAINTS ENJOYING IT HERE ON EARTH. ALWAYS. The Apostles preached the same thing. At some point as the Church became primarily Gentile and Western, we lost sight of this and made going to Heaven our goal and reward.

After the 7th Bowl is poured out and Mystery Babylon is destroyed, then it's time for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

[Rev 19:6-9 ESV] 6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

- Is this going to take place in the air or on the ground? IDK.
- We'll be newly resurrected so it could take place in the air, but might take place somewhere on land. IDK.
- If I were to believe in the pre-wrath position, the celebration might last around 70 days, give or take, and then its time to fight in the Battle of Armageddon.
- If I believed in the Post-Trib position, it might only last a few days or more, or less. IDK.

While I categorically reject a pre-trib timing, I see far more Biblical evidence of the pre-Wrath or Post-Trib timing, but am not firm on either.

What I do know is that it's going to happen, that you & I will be part of it, and that it's only good news! Don't we get frustrated with sin, evil, and injustice? Jesus is finally coming back to take care of it!