

# The Tribulation, the Rapture, and the Final Wrath of God

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## Introduction

There seems to be great confusion about the coming rapture of the saints, when it will occur, when (or if) it is described in Scripture, mistakenly viewing descriptions of the rapture as the second coming of Christ, and a confusion between the time of great distress – often called the Great Tribulation – with the period of God’s wrath. This short writing will attempt to clarify that confusion and answer questions pertaining to those issues.

## The Time of Tribulation – Great Distress

### A Mistaken Belief – the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

A popular belief, particularly in America, is that believers are raptured prior to the time when things get difficult on the earth. Those who believe that often seem unconcerned about events that show coming oppression and persecution. They seem to believe they will be “out of here” and don’t have to worry about it.

I fear such people are in for a rude surprise. Those expecting to be wafted away in the Rapture before experiencing hardship and persecution may feel betrayed; then, in bitterness, they may turn away from the faith, fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy: “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Matthew 24:10-13).

### Reason for Misunderstanding the Timing of the Rapture

Those who use the King James Version of the Bible push the pre-tribulation rapture hardest, it seems to me. While I understand the reasons for use of the King James Version and agree with many of them, the translation is not infallible. Scripture is infallible in its original writings, but not the subsequent translations of which we now have so many.

The misunderstanding comes from the King James rendition of Revelation 5:

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts *and* four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:8-10).

In verse 8, it is clear that those singing the song to God are the four beasts and the four and twenty elders. Those are twenty-eight persons in total. The text specifically says they sung (sic) a new song.

However, in verses 9-10, the King James Version renders the pronouns differently than the other translations, inconsistent with the text of verse 8, unless it is interpreted that the twenty-four elders are from earth – though there is no warrant to believe that. The KJV uses the pronouns us and we as if humans are singing the song. We know that the text refers to humans because it is **only humans who were redeemed to God by the blood of Jesus**. We know that humans are God’s chosen ones who will reign with Jesus on the earth.

From this translation error, however, comes the grave error of those following the KJV that humans are in heaven singing this song and that therefore the rapture must have already taken place by chapter 5 of Revelation. They ignore the fact that the text tells who is singing this song. It is by this error of interpretation they claim that believers have been rescued by the rapture from the tribulation of Revelation 6 and as described thereafter in the book of the Revelation.

Now look at the same passage in the New International Version (NIV):

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased **men** for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made **them** to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and **they** will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:8-10).

Now the pronouns are consistent with the prior text and in context. As one would expect, the heavenly beings in their song to God are referring to men that were purchased with Christ’s blood, that they (men) were made to be a kingdom and priests, that they (men) will reign on the earth.

When the pronouns match the context – as they do in all translations except the KJV (as best I’ve been able to determine) – there is no warrant or evidence of ANY human in heaven in the fifth chapter of Revelation (except John who was taken there in the spirit). If they are not in evidence, then there is no reason to believe they were not on earth during the distress and tribulation which is recited in Revelation 6 and after.

### **Believers are Present During the Period of Great Distress – the Tribulation**

Scripture passages uniformly show a period of great distress (or tribulation) that **precedes the signs we will examine** which **precede the rapture of the saints** – (Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24 plus the preceding verses in Mathew, Luke, and Revelation 6) and **precedes the harvesting of the earth** (Revelation 14:14-16). During this period the saints ARE on the earth; they have not been raptured. Jesus described it this way:

For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, **but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened** (Matthew 24:21-22).

Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. **But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them** (Mark 13:18-20).

The elect are still on the earth during this period of great distress – the tribulation period. In all the following passages describing the **signs preceding the rapture that follow the period of great distress**, the elect are still on the earth.

“But in those days, **following that distress**, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’” (Mark 13:24-25).

“**Immediately after the distress of those days**, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken’” (Matthew 24:29).

The following passage in Luke ties it all together, showing that the rapture takes place AFTER these signs.

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. **When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near**” (Luke 21:25-28).

The first part of Luke’s passage confirms that it refers to the same period as the preceding passages – there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. It is **at that time** Jesus commands the believers to **stand up and lift up your heads**, because your redemption is drawing near. And it is **at that time** that the other passages we will examine find the angels gathering the elect from the four corners of the heavens and the earth. **It is the time of the rapture** – not the time of the second coming of Jesus.

### Daniel’s Prophecies Confirm Persecution of the Saints

Before reviewing the other scriptures describing the rapture, let’s take a detour to reinforce the fact that believers will be subjected to the tribulation period. Daniel is given visions and explanations of the visions by angels which speak directly to this point. To understand Daniel’s prophecies, it is helpful to understand that the “horn” referred to is the anti-Christ, also referred to as the beast (see below) in The Revelation:

**The beast** was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation (Revelation 13:5-7).

Daniel prophesied the same hundreds of years earlier:

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom (Daniel 7:21-22).

He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time (Daniel 7:25).

Daniel learned about the timing of this awful persecution. He wrote:

One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?”

The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, “**It will be for a time, times and half a time.** When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed” (Daniel 12:6-7).

### **The Book of Revelation Also Emphasizes the Persecution of the Saints**

In the following verse, the dragon is Satan.

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:17).

The next verses refer to the beast (the anti-Christ).

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints (Revelation 13:5-10).

Note that verse 7 is almost the same wording as the prophecy of Daniel.

He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. (Revelation 13:15-17).

Verse 15 speaks of governmental power – even the death sentence – used against those who refuse to acknowledge the authority of the beast and take the mark of the beast. The media and government spokespersons may mockingly call them troublemakers, dissenters, fundamentalists, or cultists, even as is already happening in America.

Verses 16 and 17 speak of the infamous “mark of the beast” which for the first time is now being advocated by various governmental agencies and banking groups and which is technologically available for immediate use.

An article appeared in the Friday, May 16, 1997 issue of the Christchurch Star titled, “Do we want to go this way?” The article suggested that in order to prevent kidnapping, some children in Florida (America) are having microchips placed in the forehead or wrist. This is supposedly because they can now use microchip transponders developed in Germany powered by lithium which recharges by

temperature changes in the human body. The chips have 250,000 components and have to run on recharging circuits. The article suggested this could be called modern progress or one could call this pre-planned or even the impending fulfillment of Revelations 13:16-18.

### **A Purpose for the Suffering of the Saints in the Great Tribulation**

Some will say that God would not be so hard-hearted and uncaring that he would allow his saints to suffer in the tribulation when he could protect them or remove them from it through the rapture. One need only look at the church today, however, to conclude that it is similar to the Laodicean church of which Jesus said, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:15-17).

It is important to God that people who will come to spend eternity with him are purified, made holy and righteous. Consider what the angel told Daniel about the end times:

He replied, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand (Daniel 12:9-10).

Let us be among those who are wise and understand.

When the believers are confronted with the necessity of taking the mark of the beast or starving or being killed, the angel told John:

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Revelation 14:12-13).

None of this should surprise us. Our Lord gave us this instruction:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:24-27).

All who would be true believers are confronted with the challenge Jesus put before us. Jesus also stated: “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). For some (perhaps many) of us alive today, we may be faced with the need to give up our physical life to remain true to Jesus. I pray we will remain true to our Lord Jesus then and now!

## The Rapture

Jesus' promised, "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

The passage below, though not explicit, is a point of beginning, and a point of error for some who describe it as the Advent or the second coming of Christ.

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested (Revelation 14:14-16).

What is ripe? What is being harvested? I contend the following will show that the time is ripe for the "taking away" of the church – it has finally been purified and refined in the period of great distress. Subsequent passages will make that clear. I believe the harvest is symbolic of the rapture of all true believers.

### Believers Are to Be Alert and Expecting the Rapture

I have often heard the statement quoted, "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

Jesus told us: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:42-44).

But are you aware that Paul said, "But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief?" You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

This is not inconsistent with Jesus' statement, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! (Mark 13:32-33). We will not know the day or the hour. We do know the signs of his coming so his coming should not surprise us. We should be on guard and alert!

We should be fully aware of the signs of the coming of the Lord – those very signs that we will now look at in detail.

### The Timing of the Rapture

Within the book of Revelation, we can see when the rapture must take place:

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place (Revelation 6:12-14).

**Remember that description.** You'll see it on other occasions where the rapture will occur immediately after the foregoing signs in the heavens.

The verses immediately following show that the rapture has occurred after the signs recited above and before the following verses:

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man **hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.** They called to the mountains and the rocks, **‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’** (Revelation 6:15-17).

ONLY the unbelievers are in view in the preceding scripture, those that suddenly are terrified of God and the Lord Jesus, somehow aware that the time of the wrath of God has come. Notice the underlined words. The passage is inclusive of **everyone left on earth** – every slave and every free man, as well as every king, prince, general, rich and mighty person.

Would any true believer fear the coming of the Lord? Is this not the day we look forward to with great anticipation, the day we can join our Lord in the skies? This will be particularly true after the believers who are left have been persecuted in the great tribulation. The only conclusion: **ALL those remaining are unbelievers, those who have not trusted Christ as their Lord!** Thus, the rapture – the removal of all true believers – will take place before the events of those verses are in view.

To further corroborate from The Revelation that the rapture takes place at that point, **for the first time** – only 9 verses later – Scripture records people appearing in heaven before the throne of God. The description follows:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, **from every nation, tribe, people and language,** standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9-10).

We know only people – humans – are from nations, tribes, peoples and languages. In case further explanation is needed, the Apostle John and the angel discuss who these people are:

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, **“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation;** they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:13-14).

Now hearken back to the scriptures in Revelation 6 where I said we would know the rapture had taken place. Consider the parallel descriptions in the following passages that show the same signs as those in Revelation 6:

“Immediately after the distress of those days ”the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky.

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken' (Matthew 24:29).

"But in those days, following that distress, "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken' (Mark 13:24-25).

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars" (Luke 21:25).

These signs are given us by God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Revelation. God wants us to be aware and alert to the imminence of the rapture.

### The Description of the Rapture

In the preceding verses we see similarity of events and signs. Do the signs precede or follow the rapture? The passage in Matthew continues and relates Jesus' description of the rapture and confirms the timing as following the preceding signs:

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

The concept of the rapture means we will be "caught up" and meet Jesus in the air. It comes from the Greek word *HARPAZOMI* (*aJrpavzw*, (726)), to snatch, is translated to snatch in the R.V. only, in Matt. 13:19, A.V., "catcheth away;" John 10:12, A.V., "catcheth;" 10:28, 29, A.V., "pluck;" Jude 23, A.V., "pulling."

Then, to understand what Jesus is saying, consider the earth as a globe. When the rapture comes, suppose the believers go straight up, just as Jesus ascended into heaven. If they do, they will all be going in different directions. Those on one side of the earth will be going in one direction, those on the other side the opposite direction. How appropriate then that Jesus would say the elect will be gathered by the angels from the four winds – from every direction, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Mark recorded a similar description:

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens" (Mark 13:26-27).

The parallels in the passages of Matthew and Mark are obvious. Here he adds the fact that Jesus will send his angels to gather the elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

The timing of the rapture is confirmed. It immediately follows the signs in the heavens we first examined

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<sup>1</sup>Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

When “the angels gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens,” that event can be referred to as the “harvest of the earth” (Rev. 14:14-16). It is the harvest of believers from the earth.

In one of the best recognized descriptions of the rapture, Paul states: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Paul’s description of the rapture confirms what we’ve learned from the other New Testament writers: the Lord himself will come down from heaven – “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30 & Mark 13:26) – and with the trumpet call of God – “And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call” (Matthew 24:31) – to meet the Lord in the air – “and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27).

### **Paul Confirms the Timing and Description of the Rapture**

Paul begins his letter to the Thessalonians by reassuring them of God’s love for them and that the result of their suffering will be eternity with the Lord. In doing this, he tells them the end-time scenario in a way that confirms what we have just seen in a remarkable way:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed

(2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Paul emphasizes the timing: This will happen **when** the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. We’ve just seen the same sight – “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” – at Matthew 24:30 and Mark 13:26, immediately following the signs in the heavens. Those verses also show it is exactly at that point that the rapture takes place. Jesus is coming on the clouds of heaven to claim his own from the earth and his angels gather them from the four corners of the heavens (Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27).

Paul says of that time, as it relates to the believers, “He will . . . give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.” Isn’t that exactly what the rapture will do? It will remove all believers from the face of the earth during a time of extreme persecution and tribulation.

We also know from Revelation 6:15-17 that at that moment the ones remaining on earth will be in terror of God and the Lamb because “the great day of their wrath has come.” Speaking of the unbelievers, Paul says “he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you” (2 Thessalonians 1:6) and “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). That describes the time of wrath that will come upon all who remain on the earth.

Paul again emphasizes the timing: “on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10). Those things – the rapture and the beginning of the time of wrath – will happen “on the day” the Lord Jesus comes to be glorified in his holy people.

What does the following describe: “**he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed**”? Is not this the rapture? Note that he is not coming to be marveled at among all people. No, just among **all those who have believed**. “We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them (those who had died in the Lord) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) is equivalent to “all those who have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Through different writers writing at different times and places, **Scripture perfectly corroborates itself**.

### **Event of the Rapture Is Visible to All**

The foregoing passages are often confused with the second coming of Jesus because tradition has grown up that the rapture will be a quiet, almost secret event, where the believers will suddenly disappear. As we will see, the rapture is quite the opposite. It will be an event of earth-shaking proportions of which all are aware.

Look again at Revelation 6:15-17. As we saw before, this passage places in view **ONLY** the unbelievers, those that are suddenly terrified of God and the Lord Jesus, somehow aware that the time of the wrath of God has come.

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man **hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains**. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “**Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?**” (Revelation 6:15-17).

Could this be the second coming of Christ? No, because at his second coming Christ’s army is coming with him to fight the battle at Armageddon and some of his resurrected saints are coming to earth with him to judge the earth for a thousand years. That is not in view in that passage, but only terror of the unbelievers. See Jesus’ corroboration:

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Luke 21:25-26).

Why are they terrified? It is because of what they SEE!

“But in those days, following that distress,” “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

**At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.** And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens” (Mark 13:24-27).

It is worth repeating again. Tradition says this is the second coming. **It is NOT!** It is the appearance of Jesus IN THE SKY as he comes for his church. He is not touching down on planet earth. Jesus describes the view of his coming in Matthew:

**“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.** Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. **“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.** And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:27-31).

This appearance of Jesus – visible throughout the world – follows the signs we’ve looked at earlier which precede the rapture of the church. When Jesus appears, he is coming for his church – the saints, the elect. **This is the rapture!** We know this is a universal, world-wide event from verse 28 because vultures gather over carcasses everywhere. Wherever there are people, the appearance of Jesus will be visible.

And we have seen in Revelation 6:15-17, as in the verse above, the nations of the earth mourn and are terrified at what they see. Somehow they know the wrath of God will follow!

He is not yet coming to earth in his second coming to rule and to reign. He is coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. Before Christ’s second coming, God’s wrath must be poured out on the earth.

## The Coming Wrath

One of the primary problems in understanding the end-times seems to be the tendency to lump end-time events together, not understanding that there is a time of great tribulation or great distress (term used by Jesus), but there is also a time of WRATH – a period of time which follows the great tribulation!

### Believers Are Not On Earth During God’s Wrath

Another way to determine when the rapture will occur would be if one could determine when God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth; the rapture must occur first. First, however, let’s establish that believers will not be on earth when God pours out his wrath on the earth. God made this promise through the writing of the Apostle Paul:

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

And the following may be a reference to the same period, though the word “wrath” is not used. Jesus spoke this to the church at Philadelphia by a letter through the Apostle John:

“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

In the larger sense, it is likely that Jesus made that promise to all who have kept his command to endure patiently to the end. If that is so, the hour of trial is the time of God's wrath that he will keep them from.

Jesus gave a specific illustration that shows the timing of the removal (rapture) of the church and the subsequent wrath poured out on the earth:

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:28-30).

The day Lot left (the day the church is raptured), judgment fell on Sodom (will fall on the earth). Jesus assured us it will be “just like this” on the day the Son of Man “is revealed.” Note again, verse 30 referring to “the Son of Man is revealed” does not refer to the second coming of Christ; this is when Christ will be revealed to the whole earth as he comes for his saints – as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other (Luke 17:24).

### The Time of Wrath

Twice we've looked at Revelation 6:15-17 where all the people left on earth were so terrified of God that they called to the mountains and the rocks to fall on them. Let's see again what they said:

“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:16-17).

Later John showed us a summary of the time of wrath.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into **the great winepress of God's wrath** (Revelation 14:17-19).

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because **with them God's wrath is completed** (Revelation 15:1).

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We must take time for a further proof that the rapture has already taken place. The following verses show what is happening in heaven when John saw the angels with the seven last plagues but before the plagues were poured out on the earth.

And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: (Revelation 15:2-3).

The believers are now in heaven. They hold harps given them by God and are singing songs of praise to God and to the Lamb. From this point on, there is no reference to saints, elect, or

believers on the earth. Only unbelievers remain. Note that those with the harps were victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. The ones who were left were not victorious. They were the ones who worshipped the beast:

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

They had taken the number of the beast on their right hand or forehead so they could conduct business and buy food. What did God say of those who would take the number of the beast?

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:9-11).

All those who took the mark were condemned. That is a warning for all believers in the world today. Should you ever be faced with the edict to receive the mark, you must choose death rather than submit to that. There is NO SALVATION for anyone who takes the mark of the beast. There is no way to rationalize it, saying it was important to take it right then, but you will repent of it later. There will be no opportunity to repent of it. All who take the mark are eternally condemned!

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Let’s return to the subject of God’s wrath being poured out on the unbelievers who now are alone on the earth. After the view of the saints with harps worshipping God, the following is seen in heaven:

**After this I looked** and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. **Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God,** who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Revelation 15:5-8).

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, **“Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth”** (Revelation 16:1).

### **The Plagues of Wrath**

Revelation 16 proceeds to detail the terrible plagues God will pour out on the earth in his wrath. They are very different than those we saw in the tribulation period summarized in Revelation 6, while the believers were still on earth.

These plagues of God’s wrath involve painful sores (Rev. 16:2), water turning into blood causing the living things in the sea to die (Rev. 16:3), then rivers and springs of water turning into blood (Rev. 16:4). At this point an angel declared:

“You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve” (Revelation 16:5-6).

Is this language which describes believers? Obviously not. This follows the terrible carnage throughout the earth in which believers were slaughtered. These people are the ones who slaughtered the saints of God or were present on earth as (or when) it was done.

The fourth bowl was poured on the sun and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire (Rev. 16:8). The fifth bowl was poured on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness (Rev. 16:10). The sixth bowl was poured on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East (Rev. 16:12).

When the seventh bowl was poured into the air, a loud voice came from the throne, saying, “It is done!” (Rev. 16:17). The seventh bowl produced flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake unlike any that has ever occurred since man has been on earth. The cities of the nations collapsed and Jerusalem split into three parts. It is then that God gave Babylon the Great the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men.

### **Who is Mystery Babylon the Great?**

Chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation are devoted to God’s curse and punishment – the pouring out of the cup of his wrath – on Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth. Doesn’t it seem astonishing that God would devote two chapters of his Scripture to exposing this entity and showing his anger toward it? Who is this?

Dave Hunt wrote a definitive book, *A Woman Who Rides the Beast*,<sup>2</sup> which answers the question with in-depth research and proofs. He names Mystery Babylon the Great as the Roman Catholic Church.

Why would God be so angry? He tells why. John stated, “I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth” (Revelation 18:24). He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants” (Revelation 19:2).

This is not the appropriate venue to detail all the proofs. Suffice it to say that the Roman Catholic Church alone, and no other, appears to satisfy the description set forth in Revelation 17 and 18.

A caution should be given. It is the Roman Catholic Church – the organization – that is named by God to suffer his wrath. Likely this will include most of the people who have been deceived by her, but there are true believers within her. We know this from Revelation 18:4 where a voice from heaven says: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.” God is warning his true believers to come out of her so that they will not suffer her punishment.

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<sup>2</sup> Hunt, Dave, *A Woman Who Rides the Beast*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers) 1994.

## Reaction to the Plagues of God's Wrath

Did these plagues bring repentance, sorrow, and a return to God? Apparently the hearts of the people who were left on earth after the rapture were hardened beyond redemption. Consider their reactions to the plagues:

They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him (Revelation 16:9).

Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done (Revelation 16:10-11).

From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible (Revelation 16:21).

This is further and final proof that there are no redeemed people left on the earth at this time. God's people do not curse him. God's redeemed do not refuse to repent. These people, without doubt, are in permanent rebellion against God. They received the mark of the beast and are condemned.

## Rejoicing in Heaven

While men on earth cursed God, the saints in heaven, watching God's wrath as it is poured out on the earth rejoice:

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever" (Revelation 19:1-3).

## Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ

At the sixth bowl of wrath, God prepared the way for the showdown at Armageddon by drying up the great river Euphrates to prepare the way for the kings from the East. At that time we are told:

Then I saw **three evil spirits** that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the **dragon**, out of the mouth of the **beast** and out of the mouth of the **false prophet**. They are **spirits of demons** performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty (Revelation 16:13-14).

While Satan and his demons will be summoning the kings of the earth for a battle against the Holy City, preparations will also be underway in heaven. In a magnificent description of Christ Jesus as King and Warrior, the Apostle John tells us what he saw:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no

one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." **He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.** On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

### **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great" (Revelation 19:11-18).

Note that as Jesus and his army go into battle, "**He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.**" This battle concludes the wrath of God poured out on the earth and it brings the Lord Jesus to earth in his second coming.

John next describes the battle itself. The beast and his false prophet are both captured and thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. All the rest are killed!

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh (Revelation 19:19-21).

Paul spoke of the same results in these words: "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth" (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Zechariah prophesies the description of how they will die:

**This is the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem:** Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. . . . A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps (Zechariah 14:12,15).

The number killed is enormous:

The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's **wrath**. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia (Revelation 14:19-20).

In the above scripture we see the symbolic result of the battle at Armageddon. The Lord Jesus Christ has won. His enemies are vanquished and he begins his 1000-year reign on the earth.

## Armageddon and Christ's Second Coming and Reign Prophesied in Zechariah

In the following passage, the Lord is speaking.

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city (Zechariah 14:2).

The Lord declares that he is the one bringing the nations against Jerusalem as his wrath is poured out on the earth. Note that Jesus is not on earth at this time. Jerusalem is captured, the houses ransacked, the women raped, and half the city goes into exile. There has been no divine help for Jerusalem up to that time. But that changes:

**Then** the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. **On that day** his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. . . . **Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.** . . . The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name (Zechariah 14:3-4, 5, 9).

I believe this to be the most explicit language in Scripture describing the “touchdown” of the Lord at his second coming. Contrary to the thinking of some who believe his second coming is at the time of the rapture, Jesus comes the second time (after Jerusalem has been overrun) to fight the battle of Armageddon and to begin his millennial reign. He comes as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, “and all the holy ones with him.” These are those described in Revelation 19:14, “The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean” and at 20:4 describing those resurrected who had been beheaded, who “came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

Once again the Holy Scripture demonstrates it is a single message system from the one God who has a consistent message delivered by forty different writers in sixty-six books over thousands of years. Zechariah's message fits perfectly with the message God gave John in The Revelation.

### The 144,000 Sealed from the Tribes of Israel

Immediately after the rapture, John describes an unexplained event. 12,000 from each tribe of Israel have a seal placed on their forehead. They are servants of our God:

“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:3-4).

Where did these come from? Who are they? The next passage helps explain that when the 144,000 are mentioned again:

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And **they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.** No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from

the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. **They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.** They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (Revelation 14:1-5).

Note these are called “firstfruits.” Jesus is also called a firstfruit, as the first to be raised from the dead. But James speaks also of the first believers as firstfruits:

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18).

Consider also that after the destruction of the temple, the records were lost which showed which tribe each Jew belonged to. It seems very hard today for any Jew to prove that he belonged to a particular tribe of Israel. But in the first century, there was likely little doubt of the lineage of each Jew. And then the Jewish Christians suffered extreme persecution.

If the 144,000 were selected from those first Jewish Christians (in the heavens) to be sealed by God, then it would follow that they would be among the “firstfruits” and their lineage as belonging to a certain tribe of Israel would be clear (though this would never be a problem with God who would know the lineage of each Jew at all times). If this were happening in the heavens and not on earth, it would also be easy then to understand the language quoted above, “They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” This could only happen in heaven prior to Christ’s coming to earth to reign. The Lamb (Christ) is not on earth until his second coming. Further evidence that this had to be in heaven is the statement: “they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.” We know the four living creatures and the elders are in heaven around the throne of God. The 144,000 were with Christ when he returned to earth:

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

Many have suggested that the 144,000 were selected from Jews here on earth and then acted as God’s evangelists during the period of tribulation. There seems to be no evidence of that. (Usually these same people claim a pre-tribulation rapture which we have already seen is not true.) Instead, immediately after John sees the ceremony sealing the 144,000, he notices the multitudes from every people and nation standing before the throne of God – the people now in heaven who have been raptured from the earth. We know that all saints who died previously were also in heaven – the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thess. 4:16). Thus the early Jewish saints – often martyred – were also in the presence of the Lord at the time the raptured saints from earth were there. From them the Lord appears to have selected 144,000 to be sealed.

### **Satan is Bound for a Thousand Years**

After the battle at Armageddon, we read:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time (Revelation 20:1-3).

During the millennial reign of Christ, Satan is unable to interfere with men on earth; he is locked up in the Abyss.

### **The Millennial Reign of Christ and the First Resurrection**

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

Many in Christendom today preach that all believers will come and reign with Christ for a thousand years. Is that what the passage above says? Not at all. Only those who have died because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God will be resurrected and reign with him. I do not venture to say whether the death must be by beheading; that may be a figure of speech to specify those persons who were killed for Christ, however they were martyred.

Does the first resurrection include more than those who were beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus as recited in Rev. 20:4? Likely it does. Though the text seems to speak only of this particular group, it is likely these are the only ones John saw at this time as they were going to earth to reign with Christ for the 1000 years. Earlier we saw “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9). And Paul spoke with specificity about the rapture: “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Thus all the believers are resurrected at the rapture. None remain. That means that when John said, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (Rev. 20:5), it is the unbelieving and wicked who were not then resurrected.

Some claim that at the time of the wrath of God the wicked will all be killed and the earth left barren. Zechariah says that is not so:

**Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem** will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. **If any of the peoples of the earth** do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain (Zechariah 14:16-17).

Likely during the time of Christ’s reign the earth will enjoy the blessings God intended for earth from the beginning. Isaiah described the harmony the earth will experience during the reign of Christ:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the

viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Isn't that a beautiful picture? That's what man lost when our parents (Adam and Eve) were seduced by Satan into sin.

For a thousand years, Jesus will rule. Isaiah describes that rule:

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist (Isaiah 11:3-5).

Oh, to have leaders who would rule in righteousness! And that is the blessing the earth will experience for 1000 years.

### The Iron Scepter

The rule of Christ will not be an easy one for many of those who remain on the earth. This is a condemned generation. Many took the mark of the beast. According to God's word they are condemned. It matters not that the Lord Jesus Christ is now on earth and reigning – they will not and cannot be saved. There will likely be millions more, however, who missed the rapture because they didn't know the Lord, but who didn't take the mark, likely because it wasn't brought to the villages and people groups far from those countries it was most important for the anti-Christ to control. Many peoples do not go to grocery stores to get their food, do not use money, and would be unaffected by the demand that only those with the mark are able to buy and sell.

We saw a type of generation similar to that in the Old Testament. When Moses took the children of Israel to the border of Canaan they refused to enter for lack of faith in God. As a result, the entire generation (over 20 years of age) was condemned to die in the wilderness before any could enter the promised land. So it will be when Christ Jesus returns as King. The generation then living that took the mark of the beast must die condemned, as did the generation in Moses' time. Their children could be saved, but it appears many will continue to rebel even though the King of kings is ruling in righteousness. Ultimately, after 1000 years, there will be a last and final rebellion against Jesus by the descendants of that wicked generation who took the mark of the beast.

Jesus came to rule them with an iron scepter (Rev. 19:15, 12:5, 2:27, Psalm 2:9, Gen. 49:10). This is not the gold, royal scepter used in the throne room for official functions. This is the scepter of punishment (Psalm 2:9). You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth (Numbers 24:17).

### Speculation

Consider the strange language at the end of Daniel that speaks of timing:

"From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. **Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days**" (Daniel 12:11-12).

It is possible the period of oppression of the saints would begin when the anti-Christ abolishes the daily sacrifice – an act of open defiance opposing the Jews’ religious traditions. If that were the case, his oppression of the saints likely would end 3 ½ years later when the rapture would occur. 1290 days is 30 days more than 3 ½ years, that which is likely the time, times and half a time referred to in Daniel 7:25, the time that the anti-Christ will oppress the saints of God. There might then follow 30 days of confusion on earth – while the anti-Christ tries to explain the sudden disappearance of all the Christians who survived his prior onslaught. Is “the abomination that causes desolation” the act of the anti-Christ setting himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:4)? As we’ve seen, the rapture should be the trigger that begins the wrath of God on the earth.

Is the period of the wrath of God the 75 days from the 1260<sup>th</sup> day to the 1335<sup>th</sup> day? Who are those about whom it is said, “Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.” Could that refer to those who manage to live through the period of the wrath of God? They will be the ones remaining on earth who will then come under the millennial reign of Christ. They would be blessed by surviving God’s wrath, by being able to experience the peace and harmony of creation as God intended from the beginning, and by being under the righteous rule of King Jesus! Some may also have been saved by faith in Christ during the period of wrath, though there is no evidence in Scripture of that, and doubtless many will come to faith during the millennial rule of Christ. Others remain condemned because they took the mark of the beast in rebellion against God.

### The Final Battle and Satan’s Doom

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And **the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever** (Revelation 20:7-10).

The people who will again rebel against God and against the Lord Jesus Christ are the descendants of those who survived the outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth. Incredibly, even after the rule of Christ on earth, man’s heart is still bent toward evil and multitudes will gather with Satan to battle against the Lord. Their entire army will be destroyed supernaturally by fire from heaven, which will devour them.

### The Final Judgment

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and **each person was judged according to what he had done.** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the

second death. **If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire** (Revelation 20:11-15).

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—**their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur**. This is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Those who live for the flesh – glorying in the litany of sin listed above – will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, the second death.

Heaven (and eternal life) is for those who have purified themselves, who are holy, who are conformed to the likeness of the Son of God, and for whom Jesus Christ is Lord!

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “**Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me: “**It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son**” (Revelation 21:1-7).

## Timing – What Must Happen Before the Rapture?

It is common to hear preached that Jesus can return at any moment, that everything is in place for his coming, that all prophecies have been fulfilled that must be fulfilled before he returns. But is that so? Paul says not!

### The Day and Hour Unknown

We must begin with the recognition Jesus made it plain that we are not to know the exact time of his coming in the rapture. He said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36. See also Mark 13:32).

### Signs of His Coming

But he did not say there would not be signs. We already saw the signs that would herald the time of his coming, i.e. “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light” (Matthew 24:29).

### Events Which Must Yet Occur

But what of signs – things which must happen – before he comes? Are there any such signs or have all pre-conditions for Christ's coming for his own already happened? Yes, there are signs that must happen before he comes. Paul speaks of them in 2 Thessalonians 2:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter

supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. **Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.** He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

### Man of Lawlessness Revealed

Paul speaks distinctly of two events which must occur before "that day" – the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him" (2 Thessalonians 2:1). They are:

1. The rebellion occurs; and
2. The man of lawlessness is revealed.

### How to Recognize the Man of Lawlessness

How are we to recognize the "man of lawlessness"? He will do four things that will make us recognize him:

1. He will oppose everything that is called God or is worshiped;
2. He will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped;
3. He will set himself up in God's temple; and
4. He will proclaim himself to be God.

### Counterfeit Miracles, Signs & Wonders

More signs will accompany the coming of the lawless one:

The coming of the lawless one will be **in accordance with the work of Satan** displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

Paul clearly tells us this is in accordance with the work of Satan. Jesus confirmed this would be so and further refined how this will happen:

"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible." (See also Mark 13:21-22). "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it" (Matthew 24:23-26).

Many may appear who claim to be the Christ. They will perform miraculous signs and miracles. Many will run after them. Many will believe this is the Christ, perhaps Christians in ignorance will believe this is the second coming of Christ Jesus. Jesus warns us ahead of time not to run after them or to go where they are. We are to believe his words and not be deceived, though he warns that many will be.

### Who Holds Back the Coming of the Lawless One?

Paul apparently talked to the early believers about the coming lawless one and what is preventing his coming – a mystery to the present church. He said,

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming (2 Thessalonians 2:5-8).

There have been many speculations about whom this is who is holding back the power of lawlessness. Some have said it was the church – the church would be raptured away so the lawless one could be revealed. But this cannot be so. Paul said one of the things that would happen before the saints would be gathered to Christ (the rapture) is that the rebellion must occur and the man of lawlessness must be revealed, and he will only be revealed when this “one” is taken out of the way.

Others have said it must be the removal of the Holy Spirit, which is the restraining influence. But the believers are still on the earth. Could the believers be here and the Holy Spirit not be here with them? No, that is not possible.

It is likely that there is a special angel who has been assigned the task of preventing the lawless one from coming until certain events and requirements have been satisfied. The book of Revelation contains many illustrations of angels who have been assigned special tasks, e.g. four angels who were released to kill a third of mankind (Rev. 9:14-15). Perhaps a better example are the four angels of Rev. 7:1 holding back the four winds of the earth. Could such angels not also hold back the man of lawlessness until God's timing was ripe?

### **The Two Witnesses**

Revelation 11 tells of two witnesses who will prophesy for 3 ½ years – 1260 days – clothed in sackcloth. They have the miraculous powers given to Moses and Elijah. They will be killed on the streets of Jerusalem where their bodies will lie for 3 ½ days. Then they will stand to their feet, a voice from heaven will command, “Come up here,” and they will ascent to heaven in a cloud while their enemies look on.

### **The Fourth Kingdom of Daniel 7**

Daniel had a vision:

“After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

“While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully (Daniel 7:7-8).

Daniel asked the angel to tell him the meaning:

I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell — the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them . . . The ten horns are ten kings

who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time (Daniel 7:20-21,24-25).

It is common to view the four beasts of Daniel 7 as identical to the nations referred to in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. The NIV shows a chart with Identification of the Four Kingdoms and shows the nations in chapters 2 and 7 to be identical. But are they? There are several factors which show they cannot be.

1. Daniel 7:17 states that the four beasts are four kingdoms that will arise from the earth. Could this be said of the kingdoms of Daniel 2? Not at all. Babylon was disappearing from sight, being conquered by the Medes and Persians. So at that time, both Babylon and Medo-Persia were already in existence, not future kingdoms as is required by the text of Daniel 7:17.
2. Daniel 7:11 refers to the end-time scenario where the fourth beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. It continues: (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) The four kingdoms of Daniel 2 followed one another, separated by hundreds of years. The four kingdoms of Daniel 7 exist concurrently – they are all in existence at the same time.
3. The first three kingdoms of Daniel 7 continue into the end-time, likely into the millennial rule of Christ. This, of course, is impossible for the first three kingdoms of Daniel 2 which disappeared from the earth hundreds and thousands of years ago. The three surviving nations will have lost their authority as nations as the entire world will be under the rule of Christ. The fourth kingdom (beast) is doubtless destroyed by the Lord Jesus at his second coming. Zechariah taught us that peoples from the various nations will come to Jerusalem to worship the King (Zechariah 14:16-17). The nations will have identity but not authority.

Who can these nations be? Without knowing for certain, there are clues.

The first beast of Daniel 7 is like a lion with wings of an eagle. The wings were torn off and the lion stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. Possibilities:

- England has as its national symbol a lion standing on two feet like a man.
- The United States national symbol is the eagle. The U.S. was “torn away” from England as the wings were torn off the lion.
- England has always been known as a highly civilized nation, perhaps referred to in this passage as having “the heart of a man.”

The second beast looked like a bear. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth and was told “Get up and eat your fill of flesh.”

- Russia is and has been known as a bear.
- Hundreds of millions of people have been killed in Russia in the revolutions and purges by the Russian government.

The third beast looked like a leopard. It had on its back four wings, four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

- Germany had its panzer divisions in World War II. The panther looks like a leopard.

- German's attack in World War II was known for its speed – perhaps like a leopard or the flight of a bird – called the panzer divisions.
- Germany today has the preeminent spot in the European Union and has pushed the hardest for the common currency and the union of Europe into a single trading block.

The fourth beast was terrifying and very powerful. It was different from the former beasts; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It had ten horns.

- The United Nations has been given great power and authority in recent years, the result of a massive movement to have a one-world government.
- The United Nations is developing its own armed forces (police force), and has taken charge of global conflicts with soldiers from many nations serving under it.
- Unknown to most people, the United Nations already has divided the world into 10 regions (governed in the future by ten rulers?), which is to be implemented when it shall have authority over the whole earth.
- Already the United Nations has been ruthless in the conflicts in which it has been involved. There is evidence that the AIDS virus has been introduced to Africa and other continents through the vaccination programs of the World Health Organization, a division of the United Nations, possibly as part of the efforts to control and decrease the population of the world.

### **Paul's Man of Lawlessness = Daniel's Imposing Horn**

Paul's man of lawlessness and Daniel's imposing horn that spoke boastfully and waged war against the saints doubtless are one and the same person. If that is so, then we know there are other "signs" which we will be able to see before the rapture of the saints:

1. A kingdom will arise different from all other kingdoms, which will have ten (10) rulers – or governors, presidents, etc.
2. After the kingdom with its ten rulers is in place, another ruler will arise who will overthrow (subdue) three of the ten rulers.
3. This eleventh ruler will speak against the Most High.
4. He will oppress God's saints.
5. He will try to change the set times and the laws – may try to stop observance of the "Sabbath" or Sundays and laws pertaining thereto.

### **Life as Usual**

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed." Another sign is the sameness of life, going on as usual up to the time of Christ's coming (Luke 17:28-30).

## **Summary of Tribulation, Rapture, and Wrath**

- A great kingdom will arise, different from all others, which will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it (Daniel 7:19, 23). Ten kings will come from this kingdom. An eleventh king will subdue three of the kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints for three and one-half years (Daniel 7:24-25).

- There will be a period of great tribulation – great distress – which will be a time of persecution and death of the saints – the true believers in Jesus Christ as Lord.
- At the very end of the period of tribulation signs will appear in the heavens – the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.
- At that time – in that darkened sky – the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.
- That is the moment the rapture occurs! Christ will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.
- Unbelievers will be terrified. God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth, ending with the battle of Armageddon and the coming of the Lord Jesus. The anti-Christ and false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire and the armies of the anti-Christ destroyed by the sword coming from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Christ’s millennial reign will begin. Those believers who were beheaded (or martyred) for Jesus and because of the word of God will reign with him for a thousand years.
- At the end of Christ’s 1000 year reign, Satan will cause a final rebellion and gather the nations in battle against Jerusalem but they will be devoured by fire that comes down from heaven.
- There will be a white throne judgment in which the dead, great and small, are judged. All those whose names are not written in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire. Each person will be judged according to what he has done.
- Believers will enter into the New Jerusalem – heaven – to be in the presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb forever and ever.

**Signs and events that must be fulfilled before the rapture will take place.**

1. The rebellion occurs; (2 Thess. 2:3)
2. A kingdom will arise different from all other kingdoms which will have ten (10) rulers – or governors, presidents, etc. (Daniel 7:7, 23)
3. After the kingdom with its ten rulers is in place, another ruler will arise who will overthrow (subdue) three of the ten rulers (Daniel 7:24) – the man of lawlessness is revealed. (2 Thess. 2:3)
4. This 11<sup>th</sup> ruler will speak against the Most High; (Daniel 7:25)
5. He will oppose everything that is called God or is worshiped; (2 Thess. 2:4)
6. He will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped; (2 Thess. 2:4)
7. He will set himself up in God’s temple (possibly after rapture); (2 Thess. 2:4)
8. He will proclaim himself to be God (possibly after rapture); (2 Thess. 2:4)
9. His coming will be in accordance with the work of Satan; (2 Thess. 2:9)
10. His coming will be displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders; (2 Thess. 2:9)

11. His coming will be displayed in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing; (2 Thess. 2:10)
12. He will oppress God's saints; (Daniel 7:25)
13. He will try to change the set times and the laws – may try to stop observance of the “Sabbath” or Sundays and laws pertaining thereto; (Daniel 7:25) and
14. He will force everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead. (Revelation 13:16-17)
15. There will be two witnesses who will prophesy for 1260 days and be killed in Jerusalem. (Revelation 11)
16. Most people will be oblivious – going about their usual daily tasks without reference to God's timetable of wrath and judgment. (Luke 17:28-30)
17. This sign will immediately precede the rapture: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. (Mark 13:24-25)
18. At the time of the rapture the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30)

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We conclude this study as John concluded the book of Revelation at 22:20-21):

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.  
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.