

End-times Revealed through Bible Prophecy Pt. 4

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Subtitle: The Rapture of the Church Pt. 2

We are journeying through a series of messages on the subject of End Times to gain understanding of certain events that will take place in the near future.

The ultimate event of End Times will be the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. He will be returning to earth soon to establish His literal Kingdom.

Last Sunday we spoke about the Rapture of the Church (Pt. 1). Today we continue on that theme and cover Pt. 2 of the Rapture.

1 Thessalonians 4:15–18 (NKJV) *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that **we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord** will by no means precede those who are asleep. **16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then **we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.***

- One day soon, Jesus will leave heaven and come to earth to “collect” those believers “*who are alive and remain*” in the last days
- We are supposed to “comfort one another with these words”
- The message of the rapture of the church is not supposed to frighten Christians – it is supposed to comfort Christians!

Last week we covered 4 points:

- A. Why will Jesus Christ “catch away” the church before He returns to earth?
- B. Various terms for the “Rapture” of the church
- C. Our bodily resurrection at the time of the Rapture
- D. A previous bodily resurrection of some of the Old Testament saints

Today we will endeavour to answer 5 questions:

- a. Will we really disappear in the twinkling of an eye?
- b. Are there any records in the Bible of any previous rapture-like events?
- c. When will the rapture take place?
- d. Why is a pre-tribulation rapture the most likely timing of this event?
- e. Who will be left behind?

1. Will Christians really disappear in the twinkling of an eye?

1 Corinthians 15:51–54 (NLT) *51 But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. **We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!** 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. 53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.*

- This passage speaks mainly about the transforming of the body of believers, NOT about the disappearance of believers
- The “blink of an eye” moment is reference to the bodily transformation of the living saints, from mortal (dying) bodies to immortal bodies

Most Christian movies about the rapture show an instant disappearance of believers, but that may not be the case if we consider the Bible records of previous rapture-like events.

2. Are there any records in the Bible of previous rapture-like events?

There are at least 3 such events.

Enoch did not experience death. He had a rapture-like experience as God took him to heaven at age 365 years (Genesis 5:24).

Elijah also had a rapture-like experience and was taken to heaven without having experienced death.

2 Kings 2:9–12 (NLT) *When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away.” And Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor.” 10 “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah replied. **“If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”** 11 As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 **Elisha saw it** and cried out, “My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!” And **as they disappeared from sight**, Elisha tore his clothes in distress.*

- Elisha watched Elijah being taken up by a chariot & horses of fire, and saw the whole event until Elijah disappeared out of sight in the sky
- The sons of the prophets also watched from a distance, and saw Elijah being taken up
- The bible doesn't specify how long it took for Elijah to disappear, but it certainly didn't happen "in the twinkling of an eye"

Other interesting facts:

- Elijah knew (by the Spirit) when he would be "taken up" to heaven
- Elisha also knew (by the Spirit) that Elijah would be "taken up"
- The 50 sons of the prophets also knew (by the Spirit) that Elijah would be "taken up"

Jesus' ascension to heaven could also be deemed a rapture-like event.

Acts 1:9–11 (NKJV) *Now when He (Jesus) had spoken these things, **while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."***

Just like with Elijah's experience of being taken up before Elisha, Jesus' disciples were able to watch His Ascension as it took place before their eyes.

Based on these last two examples, our disappearance at the rapture may not be instant or invisible.

3. When will the Rapture of the church take place?

Jesus spoke about of a period called "the Great Tribulation" that will take place just prior to His visible return to earth. (Matthew 24:21).

- The Great Tribulation will be 7 years in duration
- This 7 year Great Tribulation is also referred to as "Daniel's 70th Week"
- This 7 year Great Tribulation will end with the 2nd Coming of Jesus

There are 3 possible positions concerning the timing of the rapture:

- a. **Pre-tribulation rapture** (rapture **before** the Great Tribulation)

- b. **Mid-** tribulation rapture (rapture in the **middle** of the Great Tribulation)
- c. **Post-** tribulation rapture (rapture **after** the Great Tribulation)

4. Why a pre-tribulation rapture is the most likely timing of this event

There are several reasons why I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture:

a. Reason 1: Dispensational

God does not operate randomly or by whim. He works to a definite plan which He worked out before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4, Matt. 25:34)

1 Peter 1:20 (NKJV) *He (Christ) indeed was **foreordained before the foundation of the world**, but was **manifest in these last times** for you.*

Times – Gr. chronos – a space or segment of time

Acts 1:6–7 (NASB95) *So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”
7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;*

In God’s dealings with humankind on earth, we see 7 individual time segments (epochs) laid out in chronological order:

- i. Dispensation of Innocence – from Creation until the Fall of man
 - ii. Dispensation of Conscience – from Fall of man until the Flood of Noah
 - iii. Dispensation of Human Government – Noah until the Tower of Babel
 - iv. Dispensation of Promise – from Abraham until Moses
 - v. Dispensation of the Law – Moses until the Resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - vi. **Dispensation of Grace – Resurrection of Christ until the Rapture**
 - vii. Dispensation of Millennial Kingdom – Christ rules on earth for 1000 years
- The 7 year Great Tribulation period ‘sits’ between the Dispensation of Grace (#vi.) and the Dispensation of the Millennial Kingdom (#vii.)
 - The Great Tribulation could be considered a “transition period”
 - Yet, the Great Tribulation is Daniel’s 70 Week and therefore part of “Jewish Time”, not “Gentile Time”

Romans 11:25 (ESV) *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until **the fullness of the Gentiles** has come in.*

- The “Dispensation of Grace” is also called “the Church Age”
- The Church Age is “Gentile Time”, not “Jewish Time”
- The Church Age has a definite beginning and a definite end
 - It began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Pentecost)
 - It will end with the rapture of the church
 - It began with the birth of the church
 - It will end with the removal (rapture) of the church
- The completion of the rapture will make way for the 7 year Great Tribulation which is Daniel’s 70th Week
- At the rapture of the church, the Gentile clock stops ticking, and the Jewish clock starts ticking again until the 490 years of Daniel 9:24 are completed

b. Reason 2: Antichrist’s operation of exactly 7 years

- According to Daniel 9:27, antichrist will confirm a 7 years (peace) treaty
- This 7 year treaty relates specifically to Daniel’s 70th Week, which is the 7 year Great Tribulation period
- According to 2 Thess. 2:3, Antichrist cannot be revealed until after the departure (rapture) of the church (Kenneth Wuest Transl.)
- According to 2 Thess. 2:7,8 the church who is the restraining force on antichrist must be taken out of the way before antichrist can be revealed
 - If the antichrist cannot be revealed until after the rapture ...
 - And if his operation is for 7 years during the Great Tribulation ...
 - **Then the church must be removed before the Great Tribulation begins!**

c. Reason 3: The “no judgement clauses” in the Scriptures

- During the Great Tribulation period, God will progressively pour out His judgement on a largely Christ-rejecting world
- God promised Christians that *“He has not appointed us to wrath (judgement), but to obtain deliverance (salvation) through Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess. 5:9, Luke 21:36, John 5:24)

d. Reason 4: The “no judgement examples” in the Scriptures

- The Scriptures provide us with several examples where God removed His people from harm before He poured out His judgement
 - Noah and the Flood (Noah & his family were saved from judgement)

- Lot and his family were saved before Sodom & Gomorrah was destroyed

5. Who will be left behind at the Rapture of the church?

1 Corinthians 15:51 (ESV) *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed.***

- **All** genuinely born again Christians will be included in the rapture
- Inclusion in the rapture is not a works-based issue, it is a faith-based issue

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (ESV) *They (who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. [vs. 8]) 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.****

- Where the rapture of the church is concerned, don't let the focus be on Christians who might not be included in the rapture
- Let the focus be on unsaved people, because they will definitely be left behind in the rapture
- The **focus should be on evangelising unsaved people in these last days before the rapture**

Prayer for Salvation:

Dear God, I admit that I have sinned by disobeying Your commandments. I ask You to forgive me, and cleanse me from all my sins. Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, and that You rose again from the dead. I now surrender my life to You, and receive You as my personal Lord and as my Saviour. Please come into my heart, and make me born again. I ask You to lead me and guide me, and help me to live for You, for the rest of my life. Amen.