

2nd Coming of Christ

Session 3

The Rapture of the Saints

Warm-up Question: Have you ever had an incident, good or bad, for which you were unprepared? How did you handle it?

The Door of Grace

¹ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. ¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ ¹² “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ ¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:1-13).

What do you think are the two most important truths to take from this passage?

In my opinion, the two truths that stand out are the fact that we are to keep watch (Verse 13), and that the door was shut (Verse 10). This passage speaks of the return of Christ, the Bridegroom, as He comes for His Bride, the Church. We see that all ten were waiting but five of the ten were unprepared for His coming—they were not ready (Verse 10) to enter in to be with the Bridegroom. Some people refer to this as the Rapture of the Church when only those who are ready will enter into the presence of the Lord. What I take from this passage as being the most important truths for us to see is; to be ready for Him when He comes, and to do what we can to reach those around us so that they will not be shut out. I cannot think of anything more terrible than for a

person to think that they have prepared themselves to enter eternal life, and then to discover that the door is shut to them! (Verse 10). There is a profound sadness in this passage, as we consider that some, by God’s grace, will stand on the inside watching those outside pleading and knocking on the door to be let in, only to hear the Master say, “I don’t know you” (Verse 12). Let’s read another passage on this topic, for it will help us in our understanding of what will take place at the rapture of the saints.

²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, **will try to enter and will not be able to.** ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up **and closes the door**, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, **‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’** ²⁶ “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ ²⁸ “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out (Luke 13:23-28).

I think we would all agree that this passage and the one above teaches that there will be no second chances, we are specifically told that the door was shut. We are seeing here, the final judgments of God. I don’t see anything in this passage that indicates even the slightest hope that if one were to come later he would find the door open again. There is no second chance at this point and no opportunities for one to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God after the door is shut. It is as if God’s drawbridge of grace has been lifted, and now there is the final judgment. This is a hard truth to accept because we all have relatives and friends which may be left outside that door when it closes. I do not want to imagine their moment of realization and their pleadings when they find that the door is closed to them. At that time, it will not matter what kind of good life that one leads on planet earth, when He comes for His church

the deciding factor will be, do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? If you are not sure as to where you will go on that day, then God wants you to be sure and you can know for certain if you are prepared for that day. God does not want to hide this truth from us. (1 John 5:13). The child of God knows within if he is in right relationship to Jesus Christ. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:16). God does not want you in doubt on this very important question. Now is the time to be ready, as the Bible says, "Today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2) and, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7).

At some point, either at the rapture or the day of our death, we will come before God at the entrance to the door of life. What would be your reply if He were to say, "Why should I let you in my kingdom?"

The only answer that He will accept is that of receiving the gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 6:23, John 4:10). What is the gift? It is Christ Jesus Himself. He wants to sit on the throne of your life, directing you in His ways while you get to know Him intimately.

The Rapture According to Paul the Apostle

In the last two sessions we have looked at a number of different passages such as Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 that speak of a time of difficulty for the people of God. We also looked at Daniel 9:27 which spoke of a seven year period with an event called by Daniel the Abomination of Desolation, which was three and a half years after a peace treaty in the Middle East was made, the very mid-point of the seven year period. We have seen that God's people will go through some measure of persecution at the hands of the Antichrist, the leader of a ten nation confederacy. He will call for the allegiance of the world to trust and to follow him. Those who will not abandon their faith and hold fast to Christ alone will be persecuted. The sign of allegiance to this world leader is a mark that he wants to put on your hand or forehead. We looked at the possibility that this mark could be an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chip. It is interesting at this point for us to consider that we have already seen more persecution of Christians in our generation than at any other time in history including the time of the early church. Some believe that the Church will escape the suffering brought upon the world by the Antichrist by the Lord intervening before

the Antichrist even comes on the scene. This view is called the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Those who hold to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture believe that the church will be caught up, or "raptured" before the Antichrist makes his appearance on the world scene. They believe that the whole seven year period known as the 70th week of Daniel is the tribulation and wrath of God. I believe this position is incorrect according to my understanding of scripture. I humbly ask that you examine the scriptures with me and see if you come to the same conclusion.

The word rapture is a word we use to describe the church, the people of God, being caught up to heaven. Actually, the word "rapture" itself is not found in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word *rapere*, meaning *rapid*. The Latin word *rapere* is from the original Greek word *harpazō*, translated as "caught up" in the New International Version and King James Bible. *Harpazō* means: "to strip, spoil, snatch. To seize upon with force; to rob. It is an open act of confiscatory violence...to snatch or tear away, yank away, pluck out of, remove by swiftly and aggressively grasping."¹ It goes along with what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:52, "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Let's examine together 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and we will see what the Apostle Paul has to say about the Rapture:

¹³ Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Remember that chapter divisions were not added until a thousand years after this letter was written by Paul—

¹ Key Word Study Bible, AMG publishers. 773 Harpazō

what am I saying? These two passages of 1 Thessalonians chapters four and five were written together and should be read together. This is evident from the use of the word “Now” used at the beginning of chapter five (5:1):

1 Thessalonians 5

¹ Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the **day of the Lord** will come **like a thief in the night**. ³ While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” **destruction will come on them** suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ **But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief**. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ **For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation** through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11).

What are the main points that stand out to you from this passage in Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica?

1. It will be the Lord Himself that will come for His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
2. Those who are dead in Christ will rise before those believers who are still alive.
3. The rapture or being “caught up,” is to meet the Lord in the air (4:17).
4. Just as a thief in the night is not expected so destruction will come on them (those who are non-Christians) suddenly and will seem unexpected (5:3).
5. This Day of the Lord will not surprise the believers, for they are not in darkness (5:5).
6. This act of being caught up will be **before the Day of the Lord** where the wrath of God will be poured out (1Thessalonians 5: verses 2 and 9). The saints are not appointed to suffer the wrath of God, but they will receive salvation (Verse 9). The Greek word translated *salvation* is *sōtēria* which can refer to spiritual salvation or physical deliverance, the passage is being written to believers so it more

logically should be translated *deliverance* through being caught up, for these people are already saved. This gives credence to the thought that the snatching away (rapture) happens at a time when the saints are being persecuted by Antichrist. I believe that this persecution takes place before the Day of the Lord. God's people are persecuted because they refuse to worship Antichrist and by not taking the Mark of the Beast. They take a stand for Christ, refusing to become part of Antichrist's World Order. We are clearly told that there will be a war in heavenly places (Revelation 12:7) and the result of that war is that Satan is hurled down to the earth, along with his angels (Revelation 12:9). Woe is pronounced on the earth because of the devil's fury (12:12) in being cast down, we are then told clearly he will make war against “those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17).

What do you think is meant by the term, “the Day of the Lord?”

It is the day of vengeance of our God on His enemies, a day of darkness and gloom, a time of destruction for those who worship the beast and have taken the mark, the number of his name (Revelation 14:9-10). God brings justice and demonstrates His anger. Isaiah the prophet describes it in this way:

⁶ Wail, for the **day of the LORD** is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. ⁷ Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. ⁸ Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. ⁹ See, the **day of the LORD** is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. ¹⁰ **The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.**

¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹² I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will make **the heavens tremble**; and **the earth will shake from its place** at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger (Isaiah 13:6-13).

Paul tells the Thessalonians that the saints, the true

church, will be “caught up” before the wrath of God is poured out at the Day of the Lord.

When Will the Rapture Take Place?

Paul answers our question for us. He tells the Thessalonians that he does not need to even write about this, for he says that they already know such things (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Paul taught often on this topic. In his next letter to them, 2 Thessalonians, he said:

⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

Nothing needs to be written on the times and dates, he says (1 Thessalonians 5:1), for it is an obvious thing to Paul and the Thessalonians. He says that they should know very well that the day of the Lord (and before it the rapture) will come when the world will be saying; “peace and safety.” He is reminding them that he taught often on these things—I wish it was so today.

To whom will the day of the Lord come like a thief in the night?

The day of the Lord will not surprise the believers! It will be unexpected for those who are not anticipating His return. The day of the Lord will come as destruction on **them** (Verse 3). Who are the people that Paul is referring to? Those who are in darkness! Just so that we don't miss the fact that Paul is talking about the unbelievers he reiterates what he is saying later on in the same verse using the words, “and **they** will not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Those that are sons of the light, the people of God, will know what is happening, for they are not in darkness that the day of the Lord should surprise them (Verse 4).

The link word for is used at the beginning of verse 9 and links us back to Paul's statement about believers who will not be surprised at the coming of the Lord and the wrath of God being poured out. He makes it clear that when that Day comes, believers will be raptured, or “**caught up**” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and will not suffer the wrath of God being poured out.

There are those who tell us that no one will be expecting the rapture when it occurs. They say that it could happen at any time. Some teachers have given this teaching a name, calling it “The Doctrine of Immanency.” They say that there are no prophesied events that must oc-

cur before the Church is caught away. Those who hold to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture talk about the Doctrine of Immanency. They believe that the Rapture could occur at any minute. Like a thief in the night is not expected, they say that Christ will come at an unexpected time. But Jesus said that we will know the general time, just not the exact day, “No one knows about that **day or hour**, not even the angels in heaven...” (Matthew 24:36). He said:

³² “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ Even so, **when you see all these things, you know that it is near**, right at the door. ³⁴ I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (Matthew 24:32-34).

We should know by the signs of the times that the season of summer (The coming of Christ) is near. Scripture says that those who belong to Christ will be aware of what is happening and they will rightly interpret the signs of the times in order to anticipate the soon coming of their Lord.

As I previously stated, there are varying viewpoints concerning the timing of the events leading up to the Day of the Lord. Some hold the viewpoint that the Lord can come at any time, any day now, and without any further prophesied event taking place beforehand. This view does give us a sense of urgency, and would dissuade anyone from putting off their decision to follow Christ. However, none of us know when our time on earth may cease, and so this sense of urgency should always be with us. I believe the scripture has always pointed to times and seasons when events must occur, and that God does not do anything without first revealing His plans to His prophets (Amos 3:7). Before His first coming, God gave His people signs for His people to look for. I believe He will do the same with His second coming, and from what I see in the scriptures, it is clear that some things are yet to happen before His return.

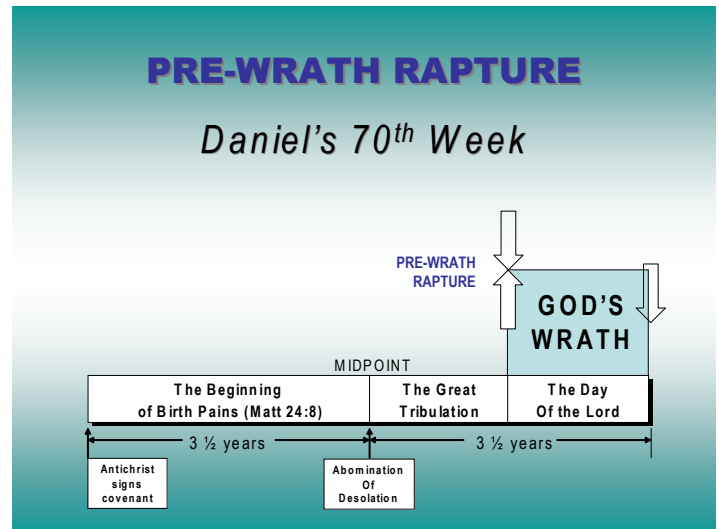
One question many have when viewing the events preceding the coming of Christ is the timing of the rapture, or being caught up. While looking forward to His return and being taken away when He comes for His Church, we need to acknowledge that whatever we face in the days ahead, God is able to prepare us. He will give us all we need to go through whatever we may encoun-

ter in our future. The thing that concerns me about the view that the rapture will happen before the Antichrist appears, is that when he comes on the scene and the believers are still here, will those believers be in dismay and feel misled? Will they mistrust the Word of God because of being misled? Their expectation to be taken out of the way before any suffering begins would be dashed. This might cause some to be unsettled in their faith.

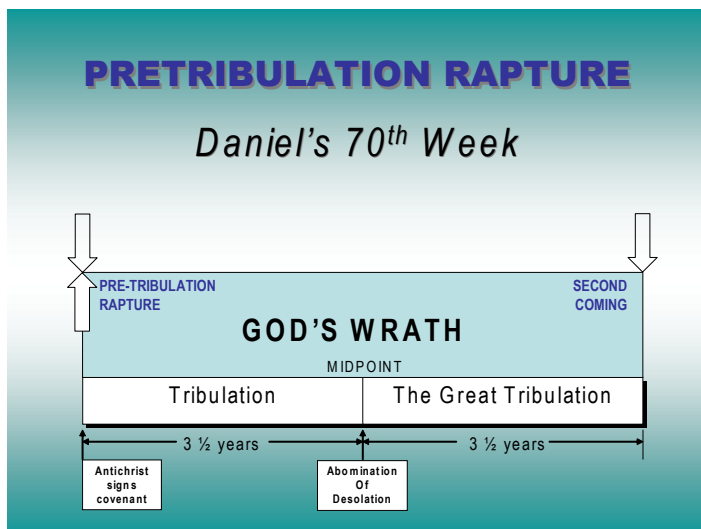
There will be a time of testing, because scripture teaches that some will give in to Antichrist and receive his mark. Scripture declares that there will be a time of apostasy, a falling away or rebellion, mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. If we truly understand that a period of worldwide persecution is coming to the church, then we can prepare ourselves spiritually for it and that is what I want you to take home from this study.

I do hold the view that there are some things that must take place before we can expect the Rapture and Day of the Lord, and I believe that the scriptures clearly teach this. Here is a diagram of the Pre-Tribulation position and, further on down, the position which I and many others believe to be biblically based, the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church. Note that the Pre-Tribulation position is that the rapture happens before the 70th week of Daniel starts.

sage.



So the real question which should be asked is, “what are the things that must happen before we can expect the Rapture and the Day of the Lord?” I would like to point out, in understanding the time frame of these events that scripture does not tell us that the Day of the Lord will last the whole seven years of Daniel 9:27, which is the assumption of those that teach a Pre-Tribulation rapture. I do not believe that the population of the earth would last seven years of God’s wrath being poured out. The Day of the Lord happens at the Seventh Seal (Revelation 6:12, 16-17; 8:1), which is at an unknown point sometime during the second half of the 7 years of Daniel’s 70th week. We will look at the opening of the seven seals in the next session.



Paul is very helpful concerning what will happen just before the church is caught up (raptured). He writes a later letter to the same church, 2 Thessalonians. Let’s turn to chapter 2.

The Pre-Wrath view sees the rapture happening at some point during the second half of the 70th Week of Daniel. It’s called the Pre-Wrath position because of the scripture saying that God has not appointed us, His church, the people He has set apart for Himself, to suffer wrath but to receive salvation (deliverance) (1 Thessalonians 5:9). We will look at the verses surrounding this pas-

¹ Concerning the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ and **our being gathered to him**, we ask you, brothers, ² 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.** ³ 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.** ⁴ 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.** ⁵ Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5).

Paul says that day (The Day of the Lord and with it our being gathered to Him) will not come **until** three things happen (Verse 3). What three things in the passage above does Paul say will take place before our being gathered to Him and the Day of the Lord?

1. The apostasy, falling away or rebellion, depending on your translation (Verse 3).
2. The man of lawlessness (The Antichrist) is revealed (Verse 3).
3. He will set himself up in God's Temple, proclaiming himself to be God (Verse 4).

It seems that Paul has received a letter back from them after his first letter, for he starts out this chapter with the word "concerning." The Thessalonians have received some communication from some people trying to deceive them into believing that the day of the Lord, and with it, the Rapture, has already happened (Verse 2). They were being told that the persecution they had been enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:4) is the persecution associated with the end time coming of the Lord. It's interesting that Paul uses the same Greek word, *thlipsis*, translated in Matthew 24:21 with the word tribulation (King James Version - KJV) or distress (New International Version - NIV) to describe the persecution that the Thessalonians were enduring. Paul writes to them to ease their fears that they had been left behind and missed being caught up to the great gathering together with the Lord in the air. It is clear that Paul believes that the Day of the Lord will happen just after the church is caught up to the Lord, as shown in the context of verse 1 and 2. He calls the coming of the Lord and our being gathered to Him as "the day of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

He reassures them that they have not missed the rapture by telling them that there are three things that will happen before that day (The Day of the Lord) comes (Verse 3).

1. The Rebellion occurs. The definite article is in the Greek text, but is not explicit in the English translation. It is *the* rebellion, not just any country wide rebellion but a worldwide falling away from the faith. The Greek word used is *Apostasia*, which means to depart, defect, and revolt. The meaning of this word is always speaking of a religious defection, a

departure from what is considered to be orthodox.² What would cause a worldwide defection from the faith? It is possible that when Antichrist and the False Prophet demand that everyone should receive a mark on their forehead or hand, and worship the beast, many that have a half hearted faith will fall away from the Lord. The true saints, symbolized by the five wise virgins in Matthew 25, will hold to their faith and continue to believe, anticipating the return of their Lord.

2. The second thing Paul says must happen before the Day of the Lord is for the man of lawlessness (another name for the Antichrist) to be revealed. I believe that he will resolve the Palestinian problem and a peace treaty or covenant will be signed on the whole issue of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27). His bargaining position chip will be to allow the Jewish people to rebuild their Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in exchange for the Palestinians to have a state in east Jerusalem. This peace covenant or treaty is a sign that we can look for. Those who believe in a Pre-Tribulation view do not think that the Church will witness any of these things. However, even in Paul's day, the Holy Spirit warned the Thessalonians, and us, to be aware of these events as signs of His coming.
3. Paul says the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, will oppose everything that is called God; in fact he will exalt himself as God, sitting in the Temple of God, proclaiming himself as God. He will set himself up in the newly rebuilt Jewish Temple. As at this present time (May 2011) there is no Jewish Temple that lies at the heart of Jerusalem.

Who is the One Who is Restraining the Antichrist's Appearance?

Paul then makes another assumption of the Thessalonians, that they know what is holding back the coming of the Antichrist:

⁶ And now you know **what is holding him back**, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ 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**. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ and in every

² Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, 686 Apostasia, Page 693.

sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12).

What Paul is saying in these seven verses is that the Day of the Lord, and with it the Rapture, can't have happened yet because the apostasy hasn't happened yet and neither has the Antichrist committed the Abomination of Desolation (mentioned in Daniel 9:27 as being in the middle of Daniel's 70th Week) by setting himself up in God's Temple proclaiming himself to be God. Jesus also mentioned that it was yet to happen and that right after that event would be the Great Tribulation (Greek word is thlipsis) (KJV English). The New International Version calls it the Great Distress (Matthew 24:21). Then he says that **those three things can't happen until the restrainer is out of the way**. If the restrainer is the Church, as the Pre-Tribulationist reasoning goes, the church must depart the world before the 70th week of Daniel starts (Daniel 9:27) because we know that the Antichrist will confirm the covenant that will start off the 70th week.

²⁷ He will confirm a covenant with many **for one 'seven.'** **In the middle of the 'seven'** he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an **abomination that causes desolation**, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him (Daniel 9:27).

I don't see how the restrainer (The one holding Antichrist back) can be the Church. First of all, the Greek noun *ekklēsia* ("Church") is feminine, and the restrainer (NIV "holds it back") is masculine. Furthermore, verse 7 says that **he** (masculine) is taken out of the way. Writer Robert Van Kampen in his book, *The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple*, writes:

"The context of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians is his instruction about what must happen **before** Christ comes to rapture His saints at the Day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2) making the true church of Christ an impossible candidate for the restrainer. You can't make the removal of the saints a condition that must be met before the saints are removed and the Day of the Lord begins, can you? Somehow the logic of that circular reasoning escapes me."

Robert Van Kampen then goes on to say on this same topic:

"Other Pre-Tribulationists will assert that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, reasoning that because the Holy Spirit indwells the true believer, the removal of the restrainer is an indirect reference to the rapture of the saints. But again, the circular reasoning that makes the true church an impossible candidate for the restrainer also makes the Holy Spirit an impossible candidate. Furthermore, like the elect of God, the Holy Spirit will still be on the earth after antichrist begins his persecution of the elect" (Mark 13:11; Matthew 24:21-22, 31).³

If we look at key passages in Daniel and Revelation we see the Holy Spirit still at work in His saints even after the Antichrist comes to power and during the 70th week of Daniel:

²¹ As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them (Daniel 7:21).

²⁵ 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).

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained (Revelation 6:9).

¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (Revelation 6:11).

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

¹⁴ 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 (Revelation 7:13-14).

¹⁷ 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).

⁷ He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them (Revelation 13:7).

³ *The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple*, Robert Van Kampen, Revell Publishers, Page 124.

⁶ 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).

⁴ 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 (Revelation 20:4).

Why do you think that God allows His people to suffer? What has history taught us about persecution of God's people?

Those who hold to a Pre-Tribulation rapture view say that those saints who are mentioned in the above scriptures that are being persecuted during the 70th week of Daniel, are those that become Christians after the church is caught up. I never have understood how people could get a second chance at salvation! Remember at the beginning of this study we looked at two scriptures that stated plainly that the door of salvation would be closed when the Lord came for His saints. You can't have the saints leaving before the 70th week starts and have others becoming Christians afterward—**The door has been shut!** If we believe that the above scriptures are people that are coming to Christ after a Pre-Tribulation rapture then that seems to me to be dangerous theology, because in essence we are teaching people that they can wait until the rapture happens and then they can become Christians afterwards and find the door still open for them. I see nothing in scripture that indicates a second chance after the door is shut! Why are we told that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth if there is still yet a chance? ²⁸“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out (Luke 13:28).

Jesus said it would be a back to back event. The rapture takes place and judgment falls right after, no time delay at all.

²⁶ “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage **up to the day** Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ “It was the same in the days of Lot. People

were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But **the day** Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰ “**It will be just like this on the day** the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26-30 Emphasis mine).

The day Noah entered the ark; the flood came and destroyed those outside:

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³ On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. (Genesis 7:11-13).

The same day Lot left Sodom was the same day when destruction fell on Sodom. What is the clear lesson with the above words? The only interpretation can be that it will be just like this on the day that Jesus is revealed. The wrath of God is only poured out after the Church is caught up.

So, who is holding back or restraining these three things from happening and with it the closing of the door of salvation with the Rapture of the saints? I put it to you that it is the Archangel Michael, the Prince of Israel. Let's look at three scriptures that may confirm this. The context of the first scripture is a conversation between an angel and Daniel found in Daniel chapter 10. The angel tells him that when Daniel first began to pray concerning the understanding of a revelation given to him, the angel had been sent in response, but a demonic prince, who oversaw the whole empire of the Persian kingdom where Daniel was living, withheld the angel from getting to Daniel. He was only able to come when Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help him.

¹³ But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, **one of the chief princes**, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia (Daniel 10:13).

²⁰ Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; ²¹ but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except **Michael, your prince** (Daniel 10:20-21).

First we are told that Michael is one of God's chief

princes but in the second passage we are specifically told that Michael is the Prince over the nation of Israel (Daniel being an Israelite in exile after the Persians and Medes captured Babylon). The angel helps Daniel understand some things concerning the future before going on to tell Daniel that there will be a time when Michael's protection will be lifted for a while. Here's what he says:

¹ “At that time **Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.** ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴ But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge” (Daniel 12:1-4).

Does it not seem that Michael is the restrainer? We are told that Michael, the Archangel that oversees the whole nation of Israel, the one that protects the people of Israel, will **arise**. The Hebrew word used is *amad*. Strong's concordance translates this word: “to stand, arise, cease.” The next verse describes what happens when Michael arises or ceases doing whatever he has been doing, “There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then” (Verse 1). I believe that if it had not been for the ministry of the Archangel Michael, the great prince that protects Israel, the many wars that the nation of Israel have fought since 1948 would have destroyed them.

Several years ago, when I lived in Israel for about a year and a half of my life, I had the pleasure of being in a home Bible group led by Lance Lambert, the writer and conference speaker. Lance spoke of the attack on Israel in 1973 by the Egyptians and Syrians on the holiest day in Israel, Yom Kippur, The Day of Atonement. One day a year, the Israeli's do not eat anything; they will not drive their cars, watch TV, listen to the radio, do anything apart from seek God and repent of their sins. The Arab armies chose that day to launch a surprise attack on Israel. The Russians had armed the Arab armies to the hilt with the best that Russia could

put together, while the Israeli's could not even muster their people. Lance in his book, *Battle for Israel*⁴, stated that there were more tanks on the Syrian front than in the 1941 German offensive against Russia which was 200 miles long and involved 1000 tanks. On the Syrian front, the Golan Heights, there were 1200 tanks on a 20 mile front. The Egyptians had 3000 tanks, 2000 heavy guns, 1000 aircraft and 600,000 men on the Sinai front. The regular Israeli garrison numbered only a few hundred men against Syria's massive tank attack. The Syrians advanced through Israeli lines easily with most of them at home for the holiday. Lance Lambert says:

“The Syrians should have been in Tiberias (A large city on the Sea of Galilee) on the evening of the first day of the war but just like the Egyptians on the Sinai front, they stopped for some reason. The commanding officer of Israel's Golani Brigade said later in my presence that when the Syrians were first advancing, the Israelis had only two tanks and ten men at their NAFAQ headquarters. This man held no religious belief, but he referred to this as a miracle. Although he had been involved in the four previous wars of Israel's history he had never seen anything like it. Wave after wave of tanks bore down on them. Then when they came to within one mile of the NAFAQ headquarters, they halted. ‘They saw the Lake of Galilee,’ he said, ‘they liked the view, and they stopped.’ As a result of these delays in the Egyptian and Syrian advance Israel had time to regroup and reorganize. Many think that it was this period of time that made all the difference to the outcome of the Yom Kippur War. Another Israeli captain without any religious beliefs, said that at the height of the fighting on the Golan, he looked up into the sky and saw a great, grey hand pressing downward as if it were holding something back. In my opinion that describes exactly what happened; without the intervention of God, Israel would have been doomed.”⁵

It is my opinion that Satan cannot do anything against the Jewish people (or the Church) without the expressed permission of God. Michael the angel is restraining every enemy that would seek to destroy the nation of Israel. God is bringing His purposes to pass.

So, what are we to conclude from our study on the rapture? I believe, based on our study of the scriptures, there will be a time of persecution against Christians and it is erroneous for us to believe that the Church will be caught up to heaven before the 70th week starts. We are to prepare ourselves spiritually. We should be grow-

⁴ *Battle For Israel*, Lance Lambert, Printed by Kingsway Publications, 1976, Page 11.

⁵ *Ibid*, Page 13.

ing in our dependence on the Spirit, learning to hear His voice, so that He can direct our paths in the days ahead. I believe it is important that we find a small group of like minded believers that we can grow close together with and support one another in the spiritual darkness of our time. The days ahead will be glorious days for the Church for wherever there will be great darkness the light will begin to shine in our hearts.

¹ “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you (Isaiah 60:1-2).

Yes, darkness may be over the earth, even thick darkness, but God has promised that His glory will be seen over His church. He will never leave us nor forsake us, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). He will snatch us up and out of Satan’s hand.

The scriptures tell us that all of creation groans and

waits for the coming of Christ. If the resurrection is the Christian’s greatest hope, then the return of Christ will be our ultimate triumph. We know that when He comes, He will bring perfect justice and we will reign with Him forever. Whatever happens before He comes will be worth all the suffering that has ever occurred in God’s eternal family. It is important that we remember that we have brothers and sisters in Christ in other nations that are already going through incredible persecution and suffering for the sake of Christ. For all of these reasons, in this present day more than ever, it is important that we remember often to lift up our heads and say; “Come Lord Jesus!”

Prayer: Father, help me not to fear, but to believe that You are my total sufficiency for every situation, every day. I pray that my faith will grow strong as you reveal Yourself to me in the small things as well as the big challenges in life. Help me to enjoy my journey with you step by step and prepare me for whatever lies ahead. My times are in Your hands, Amen.

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