

# The Signs of the Times:

## Part 3—No Signs of the Rapture

By PAUL J. SCHARF

In our culture, it's become the proverbial fifth wheel of holidays.

Really, we don't even celebrate it anymore. It used to be that we would pause for much of the day—to feast, spend time with our families and, yes, to watch football ... but, most importantly, to worship and give thanks.

But sadly, those days are gone. Football is on TV the whole day now, but there's no reason to stay at home. The stores are open in full swing! *Black Friday* now begins on, well ... Thursday! And this day—once very meaningful—is now all but invisible.

I'm referring, of course, to Thanksgiving Day.<sup>1</sup> It happens to be my favorite holiday! Oh, I know I'm in the minority. Try to find a church that has a service on Thanksgiving morning these days—or even on Thanksgiving Eve! That's rarer than a drumstick an hour after the turkey dinner.

You don't have to go to church to give thanks. Thanksgiving is also a day for families, and that's a good thing, too. In fact, I rejoice that anyone is just taking time—even by themselves—to pause, give God thanks and ponder the significance of this special day.

But you won't find many signs of it—unless you're really looking hard. You might notice more cars on the road that Wednesday afternoon before Thanksgiving. You might see a little church somewhere with the lights on. And you'll know it's getting really close when you can smell the turkey.

Other than that—no signs. But when you perceive the multitude of signs for Christmas ... you know that Thanksgiving must surely be close at hand!

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“The signs of the times” (Matt. 16:3) pointing to Christ's second coming in glory are forming all around us. Once the tribulation begins, the signs will become physical—palpable.

The rapture, however, will not be preceded by any signs. It will take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). This will all transpire so quickly, there will be no time to react—not even to think! “The dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16) before anyone even knows what is happening.

I credit Dr. Thomas Ice for teaching me through the years that the word *watch* is usually connected to the final aspect of Christ's second coming—His return in glory (see Matt. 24:42, 43; 25:13; Mark 13:34-37; Luke 12:37, 39; Rev. 16:15). By contrast, when the

Scriptures instruct us about the first aspect of His second coming, the rapture, they normally use the language of *waiting* (see 1 Thess. 1:10).<sup>ii</sup>

One famous verse which might seem to challenge that notion is Tit. 2:13. However, the ESV translation is actually more precise here: “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>iii</sup> As Ice once reiterated regarding the rapture—according to the handwritten note in my Bible: “There’s nothing to look for.”<sup>iv</sup> It is *imminent* and, therefore, *signless*. (See also 1 Cor. 1:7; Phi. 3:20.)

Now that means that this is the time to prepare for the rapture! Place your trust in Christ alone for salvation, if you have not yet done so, then “set your house in order” (2 Kings 20:1; Isa. 38:1).

Indeed, once the signs of Christmas become evident, it’s definitely time to make plans for Thanksgiving. So it is that when we recognize the signs lining up to point toward Christ’s second coming, we need to focus our attention seriously on the pretribulational rapture.

All Bible-believers agree with the concept of the *rapture*, whether they use (or even like) that term or not. The only issue is its timing. I believe that the rapture will precede the tribulation, “(keeping us) from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world” (Rev. 3:10), before the signs of Christ’s return begin in earnest—and judgment begins to fall. It is the next item on the prophetic agenda, and it will impact the entire world.

Every generation hopes to be the one that will go to heaven without dying, but one will actually get to experience that. But don’t look for a sign, and don’t delay your preparations. The rapture may take place at any moment.

And, with that, there’s only one thing left to say: “O Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22).

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<sup>i</sup> This classic illustration, which I have modified and developed over the course of the three installments in this series, has been widely used, and is credited to Dr. John Walvoord. I have not found a particular source where Walvoord himself put this illustration in print. For background to it, see John F. Walvoord with Mark Hitchcock, *Armageddon, Oil and Terror* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), p. 200. Regarding the illustration specifically, see Ron Rhodes, *End-Times Super Trends* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017), p.10; and Thomas Ice; “Signs of the Times;” Pre-Trib Research Center; n.d.; <https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Ice-SignsoftheTimes.pdf>; p. 2; Internet; accessed 6 October 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example, Thomas Ice; “Imminency and the Any-Moment Rapture;” Liberty University; May 2009; [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=pretrib\\_arch](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=pretrib_arch); Internet; accessed 20 October 2022.

<sup>iii</sup> Another challenging verse with regard to this basic pattern is 1 Thess. 5:6, which is addressed to church age believers (“let us watch,” NKJV). Again, however, the ESV seems to capture the essence of the verse well in its context: “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”

<sup>iv</sup> I know that Dr. Ice shared this quote, but cannot recall or locate the time and place.