

## Order of Future Events

(March 21, 2024)

Paul speaks of this Rapture (without calling it that, using the phrase *caught up* in **1 Thessalonians 4:15-18**).

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (NIV; emphasis added)

Usually, Posttribblers place this Rapture at the *end* of the Tribulation, as the Lord physically returns to earth. Posttribblers state that the phrase "*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven*" means He is returning all the way to the earth in His second physical coming. At that point, Christians will rise up into the air to meet Him, then everyone will follow Jesus to this earth for His 1,000 year Kingdom. The problem is that the text does not at all state that He is going to *continue* His return to the earth at that time. It simply says He will descend from *heaven* and literally call His Body up to Him. We will meet Him in the clouds, in the air.

Paul fleshes this out in **2 Thessalonians 2:2-4**.

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and **our gathering together to Him**, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (NKJV; emphasis added)

In the above text, Paul provides the order of events. If we look closely, we see the reference to the Rapture *and* the Second Coming separately in that paragraph. Let me quote from Ken Johnson.

Here Paul is giving the order of the end times [events]. He first refers to the Second Coming and 'our gathering together to Him,' which is the Rapture. First, he shows the order of events as they happen on earth. The church begins to become apostate, *then* the Antichrist is revealed, *then* the Day of the Lord comes, and *then* the Second Coming occurs resulting in the destruction of the Antichrist. But when does the Rapture happen? He teaches that the Rapture of the church, the gathering, is what restrains the Antichrist. The only reason they would be shaken by thinking the Day of the Lord had come is because that would mean they missed a pre-tribulation Rapture.[1]

The phrase "*our gathering together to Him*," is synonymous with the actual Rapture (cf **2 Thessalonians 2:2**), *not* the Second Coming. The events Paul lists *after* our gathering together to Him (or the Rapture, which he clearly mentions *first*), is listed. Once the Rapture occurs, then those other things can take place.

It is obvious to me that the presence of the Church in this world (the *invisible* true Church), acts as a dam against things becoming exceedingly bad in this world all over as they will during the Tribulation. It also

seems to be clear that until the Holy Spirit is out of the way (meaning no longer operating *through* the present Church), the Antichrist cannot be revealed. The Church effectively blocks the Antichrist from being revealed. That's how I understand it and I realize there are many who disagree with me on that.

6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 NKJV)

If we consider what is happening throughout the world right now, it is not simply that evil has increased and infested much of the world's governments, global society or even the *visible* Church. Total and complete evil is still being held in check by the Holy Spirit through the Church.

Consider **1 Thessalonians 5:3**.

While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (ESV)

When COVID hit, we were told we needed to lock down, wear masks, and social distance all for our "safety" and "security." In fact, every time the government says it does something for our "peace and safety" when this is obviously a lie. However, there will be a short time in the future when things will *appear* to offer peace and safety *globally*. As Antichrist rises to his vaunted (though short-lived) position of power over the earth, leaders will cry, "*We're almost there! Peace and safety is right around the corner!*" Though that's what people will believe to be the case, it will be severely short-lived as destruction comes.

Paul is explaining the nature of the "day of the Lord," a reference to the time when God's judgment falls on an unbelieving world. This will occur after the rapture—a bodily removal of all Christians by Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17). The day of the Lord will catch unbelievers by surprise. They will think the world is experiencing peace and security, but sudden destruction will come upon them, just as labor pain grips a pregnant woman. Unbelievers will enjoy a false sense of peace and security at the beginning of the tribulation, but the peace and security will not last long.[2]

Let's not forget that the first, second and early third century church fathers essentially taught a Premillennial, Pretribulation Rapture. It was the accepted doctrine of what Paul meant and since many of the most church fathers of the first century at least were directly taught by apostles, it is understandable that what the apostles taught would be what the early church fathers also taught. Why wouldn't they since they learned it directly from some of the Lord's inner circle?

As Ken Johnson notes, Paul refers to the Rapture (gathering), then he notes the order of events.

- apostasy of the church
- Antichrist revealed
- day of the Lord comes (following the signing of the covenant with Israel)
- Second Coming of Jesus happens who destroys Antichrist

Lee Brainard's book, *Recent Pre-Trib Findings in the Early Church Fathers*, highlights the general train of thought during the first, second and early third centuries. Brainard quotes numerous times from a prolific writer of the 4th century, Ephraim the Syrian (AD 306-373). These writings have been recently located in the Qumran Caves (Dead Sea Scrolls).

For the elect shall be gathered prior to the tribulation, so they shall not see the confusion and the great tribulation coming upon the unrighteous world.[3]

Behold, now the holy and the just are chosen and gathered into the harbor of life that they should not see the tribulation and the snares coming...[4]

...that he would take us out (remove us) from the coming fear, and count us worthy of that snatching away (rapture) when the righteous are snatched up (raptured up) in the clouds to the air to meet the king of glory, and we shall inherit the kingdom of heaven with meekness and humility. [5]

Brainard, who has read many of Ephraim's letters to the churches notes that Ephraim teaches a specific order of events of the last days leading up to the physical return of Jesus.

- the removal of church for the meeting in the clouds
- the raptured church continuing on to the glories of heaven
- the time of great tribulation, during which time souls are saved through the [earthly] ministry of Elijah and Enoch
- the Lord's coming in glory[6]

By the way, I find it interesting that Ephraim believed the two witnesses of **Revelation 11** will be Elijah and Enoch. Other early church fathers believed the same. Elijah and Enoch were two individuals who did not see death at all. They were "raptured" directly into heaven from earth while alive.

The more I study the writings of the early church fathers, the more convinced I am that they rightly understood Scripture based on what they were taught by either the original apostles or by disciples of the original apostles. Those teachings were carefully passed down the centuries. They were only derailed when the Roman Catholic Church came into being, gained power and began introducing the heresies related to Amillennialism and an allegorical interpretation of prophecy. Yet, it is clear enough that the early church fathers were far more aligned with what Dispensationalism actually teaches but the RCC eclipsed the early teachings of Christianity, replacing it with their own errant views. Then they told people they were not smart enough to read the Bible for themselves, which shut down investigating the Scriptures.

One of the biggest arguments against the PreTrib Rapture (as I've noted before), is that it is "absent" prior to Darby and Scofield. It may have *looked* that way years ago, but since then, many manuscripts from early church fathers have been discovered among the Dead Sea caves and many have not even been translated yet. This is an ongoing process and the ones that have been translated shed marvelous light on what the early church fathers believed and taught, not simply the Rapture either, but other controversial areas like how long is the Tribulation? What did they believe about women in the pastorate? What about the sign gifts? We'll cover some of these in the "*What They Taught*"[7] series.

But let me be absolutely clear about the PreTrib Rapture, so that there is (hopefully) no confusion. Even though I firmly believe the Bible teaches a PreTrib Rapture and is backed up by writings from early church fathers, this does *not* mean that Christians will escape *persecution* in this life! The only thing the Church will escape is God's *wrath* poured out during the coming Tribulation. There is plenty of evidence that supports the notion that Christians throughout the world now are being persecuted to *death*. God has not kept that from them. Satan has always hated mankind and wants to destroy us. God allows it within the parameters of His will.

Things are increasingly worsening throughout the globe. Christians (as well as political conservatives), are being singled out for political persecution. This will likely increase into outright physical persecution as the NWO comes into view. It would be wrong of Christians to believe that God will protect us from all manner of persecution. He has only promised to keep us "from that hour" (the outpouring of His *wrath*) that is coming to the whole earth (**Revelation 3:10**).

What all of this means is that things will not become as bad as they will become on earth until *after* the Rapture occurs and evil is allowed to have its day. That, coupled with God's wrath will overwhelm this world in judgment. Jews and Gentile believers during the Tribulation will be hunted down, persecuted and even martyred for their faith in Christ. However, as I've stated before, this does *not* mean that things will not get bad on the earth because we certainly see that happening. It simply means that God's *wrath* will not be poured out until *after* His Bride is safely removed. What is growing throughout the world now is Satan's and man's wrath against Christians.

While what early church fathers had to say is *not* equal to Scripture, their testimony is valuable. Their writings may not have been "inspired" as God's Word is inspired, but they clearly outline what they believed based on what they were actually *taught*.

In 2023, 8,000 Christians were murdered by Muslims in Nigeria. Muslims go around taking care of what they believe is the problem and killing many Christians (and Jews) because of it, in the name of Allah, their moon god is what they believed they're called to do. But let's keep in mind that these barbarous acts against Christians are *not* evidence of God's "wrath" being poured out on Christians. It is simply evil rearing its ugly head and creating many martyrs within Christendom because God allows it, just like He allowed it during the time of Nero and other portions of history since Jesus to today.

This same thing will occur during the Tribulation period against those who become true believers during that period of time mainly due to the two witnesses and the 144,000 Israelites who are sealed and become evangelists for Jesus. These are not part of the Church (which is gone), but are counted as the saints of the Old Testament. God will allow their martyrdom for His glory, but their deaths again does not equal God's wrath because Christians are not appointed to God's wrath. We have been saved from it and are now considered by God to be "righteous" due to our faith in Christ's finished work. This is whether or not we "feel" righteous, which is our position in Christ. Lot was considered righteous because of faith even though he clearly lacked righteous living.

Based on this, we need to ask ourselves how we should live? Let me go back to **1 Samuel 15:11**, where God speaks to Samuel about Saul.

I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.

Samuel was grieved. Saul had not been *obedient*. This led Samuel to explain things to Saul and in the process said the following.

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
And to heed than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

The point is obvious. If we consistently endeavor to *obey* the Lord in all our dealings, we will have no need to "sacrifice" (repent for wrongdoing). Being human beings and fallen at that, we cannot help from

time to time to sin, but our sin should not be *deliberate*, but *accidental*. In the Old Testament, there was no provision for intentional sinning, but only for *unintentional*. Saul was obstinate and even arrogant at this point. He thought because he was the king, he could offer sacrifices and ignore God's direct commands by taking spoil and keeping King Agag alive.

As Christians, we need to adopt an attitude that demands our obedience to God, not out of duty or legalism, but out of love and devotion to Him. The time is certainly now.

[1] *Ancient Prophecies Revealed*, Ken Johnson ThD, 2010, p 144

[2] <https://www.bibleref.com/1-Thessalonians/5/1-Thessalonians-5-3.html>

[3] Lee W. Brainard, *Recent Pre-Trib Findings in the Early Church Fathers*, (2023) p 10

[4] *Ibid*, p 11

[5] *Ibid*, p 19

[6] *Ibid*, p 33

[7] <https://studygrowknowblog.com/2024/02/16/what-they-taught-pt-1/>