

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

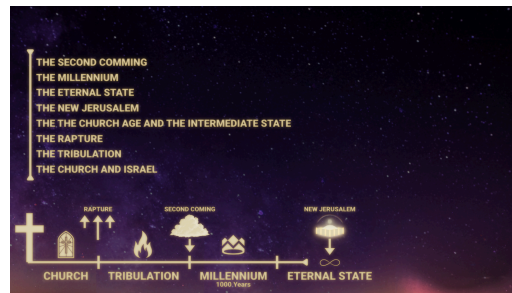
Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Final Things Lesson 6: “The Rapture”

We are in the midst of a series called “Final Things.” We started with the second coming of Christ in Lesson 1. We moved forward from there to the millennium, the eternal state, and the New Jerusalem. Last time we went back in time to discuss the church age and the intermediate state. Today, we move forward to the end of the church age, at the rapture. Next week, we’ll discuss the tribulation, and then in our final lesson, the church and Israel.



Today we discuss one of the most exciting and dramatic aspects of what’s called eschatology (the study of end times). Tonight we discuss the rapture. There’s a lot of confusion about this issue. And there’s a lot of controversy concerning it. There’s controversy about its timing. Is it pretribulational, posttribulational, or midtribulational? There’s controversy too about whether its even in the Bible. Some people assume that Christians are just trying to escape this world, and that’s why they invented the rapture.

Let me start tonight by saying that many of our friends and our Christian brothers and sisters disagree about the rapture. That’s okay. We love them. They don’t have to agree with us on everything eschatological for us to love them. But I’m going to do my best to build a biblical case for the rapture and for the pretribulational understanding of it.

Here’s your outline for today. I want to give you first three answers to the question:

What is the Rapture?

After that, I want to transition to a defense of a pretribulational rapture. As part of that, I’ll give you:

Seven Reasons for a Pretribulational Rapture

And then, we’re done. Write this down as a first answer to the question, “what is the rapture?”

1) The rapture **removes** the church to meet Christ in the air before his return to the earth (1 Thess 4:16–17)

I hope that you can tell that every word and every prepositional phrase in that first point is intentional and important. The rapture removes the church to meet Christ *in the air ... before his return ... to the earth*. Let’s return to 1 Thessalonians 4 to flesh this out.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 the following:

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

So Paul says here that Christ will come and remove those who are alive. Look again at verse 17,

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left,

That is Christians who haven't died in Christ yet. Those are the "we who are alive." Just to be clear Paul and the Thessalonians are no longer part of that category. They have died in Christ. They will receive their resurrection bodies just a few microseconds before those who are raptured.

¹⁷ *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

Notice a couple things here. We will be "caught up." This is the Greek word ἁρπάζω (*harpazō*). This word could be translated "raptured" or "seized" or "snatched up." This is the same word that is used of Philip in **Acts 8:39** when Luke says that after he baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch "the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing" (**8:39**). The Holy Spirit *harpazō-ed* Philip. He snatched him away! This is not the same technical thing that takes places in **1 Thessalonians 4**. Philip did not get raptured to receive a new resurrection body at this time. But the same word is used to convey a sudden and unexpected taking away.

So at the rapture, the saints that are still alive at Christ's coming will be snatched away and receive resurrection bodies immediately. And notice too that they will meet the Lord in the air. Everyone see that in **verse 17**? What does that mean? Why in the air? Why not on the earth where Christ comes to set up his millennial kingdom?

If you remember from **Revelation 19**, when Christ comes, with a sword coming out of his mouth and his thighs tattooed with "Lord of Lords," we are part of the Lord's entourage. We are on horses behind him. And Christ doesn't come to take us up to the air (i.e., to heaven). He comes to take us back to earth!

So how do we reconcile **1 Thessalonians 4** with **Revelation 19**? The answer is simpler than people make it. The answer is that Jesus comes for us, the church first, in the rapture. We spend a period of time in the air, or in heaven while the seven-year tribulation takes place on earth. And then, after seven years, we return with Christ from heaven to earth to participate with his setting up of the millennial kingdom.

And you probably have two questions about that. **1)** First of all, what do we do for that seven-year period? **2)** And secondly you might ask, "why seven years?"

Well let's answer those questions in turn. The first question (what do we do for that seven-year period?) is answered elsewhere in Scripture. But notice how Paul ends **1 Thessalonians 4:17**,
we will always be with the Lord.

The short answer is we'll be with the Lord. **And that's enough for me.** To that you might say, "Yeah, but isn't that true of saints who have died already in the faith?" Yes, that is true. But they are either disembodied or **they have bodily rentals**. They haven't yet received their resurrection bodies. So to be more precise, during this seven-year period, we will be embodied with resurrection bodies! And we will be with the Lord!

I would add to that, that we will experience what's called "the bema seat judgment." I told you about this last week. **2 Corinthians 5:10** says that we must appear before the judgment seat (βῆμα [*bēma*] "tribunal" or "judicial bench") of Christ. Every single thing that we have ever done will be exposed before us and before Christ at the bema seat judgment (see **Rom 14:10–12**; **1 Cor 3:12–15**; **4:5**). And we will be rewarded at that time (see **Matt 5:11–12**; **6:1–21**; **10:41–42**; **16:27**; **25:21, 23**; **1 Cor 15:58**; **2 Tim 4:8**; **Jas 1:12**; **1 Pet 5:4**; **Luke 14:14**; **Rev 22:12**). We will be judged; but not judged and condemned. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (**Rom 8:1**). Instead, we will be judged and rewarded accordingly.

Also, **Revelation 19** alludes to the marriage supper of the Lamb that precedes Christ's second coming. I think this will commence during this seven-year period. That's the best way to make sense of the sequence of events in **Revelation 19–22**.

Now what about the seven years? Why seven years? Well, we'll deal with this more thoroughly next week when we talk tribulation. But let's dip our toes into **Daniel 9** to understand why seven years. Turn with me to **Daniel 9**.

Daniel writes in **Daniel 9:24**,

²⁴ *"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.*

The context of this passage suggests that these seventy weeks are actually weeks of years, meaning seven-year periods. So if you have seventy “weeks” or seventy “weeks of years” or seventy sevens, you have 490 years. And the language here is the language of a Messiah. There is atoning for iniquity. There is the bringing in of everlasting righteousness. Daniel, like other OT prophets, is prophesying the kingdom to come and the Messiah to come.

Look at **verse 25**.

²⁵ *Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.*

The decree to restore and build Jerusalem took place after Daniel in the days of Nehemiah (**Neh 2:1–8**). The Persian King Artaxerxes tells Nehemiah to go build up Jerusalem. And Nehemiah obeys. That took place in approximately 444 BC. Nehemiah built the walls around Jerusalem in 52 days (**Neh 6:15**). But it took more like 49 years (seven weeks of years) to restore the entire city of Jerusalem, namely its population, its infrastructure, and its civic life.

Look at the end of **verse 25**.

And for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

The city of Jerusalem grew and expanded over the years under the Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires. But there was never lasting peace. There was always trouble, because of the oppression of those powerful nations. Persia was a bear in Daniel’s prophecy in **Daniel 7**. Greece was a four-winged leopard. And Rome was an indescribable beast. They were all beastly kingdoms, and trouble always surrounded Jerusalem.

Look at **verse 26**.

²⁶ *And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.*

When you take those sixty-two weeks and add seven weeks to them, you get sixty-nine weeks or sixty-nine weeks of years, namely 483 years. So the *terminus a quo* (starting point) of this prophecy is the command to rebuild Jerusalem in approximately 444 BC (**Neh 2:1-8**).

Terminus a quo – Command to rebuild Jerusalem
in approx. 444 BC (**Neh 2:1-8**)

69 X 7 = 483 years [476 years according to Jewish calendar]

Terminus ad quem – The Messiah the King
(approx. AD 33)*

The *terminus ad quem* (ending point) of the prophecy is the Messiah (the “anointed one”) being cut off in approximately AD 33. Those 483 years are more like 476 years according to the Jewish calendar which is lunar not solar.¹ So you have 360 days a year, not 365.²

This is the time frame in between the call to rebuild the temple and the coming of the anointed one, Jesus Christ. He is “cut off,” in the sense that he is put to death. This would have been cryptic and hard to discern in Daniel’s day. But from our vantage point, the math (at least in terms of approximation) adds up. Daniel said himself that his own visions were confusing. But when you combine this prophecy with **Isaiah 53**, and when you see what transpired with the anointed one, Jesus Christ, at his crucifixion, this all makes sense.

Now look at the middle of **verse 26**.

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

This is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. That happened after Jesus’s death and resurrection. And the prince referenced here is the man of lawlessness who Paul mentions in **2 Thessalonians**

¹ 483 lunar years × 360 days = 173,880 days ÷ 365.2422 days ≈ 476 solar years.

² See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 1977. See also J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 1363.

2:3–4. This is the antichrist or “the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3) who is restrained by the Restrainer for a time (2 Thess 2:6–7).

But, look at **verse 27.**

²⁷ And he [the prince or the man of lawlessness] shall make a strong covenant with many for one week,

So you have 69 weeks leading up the coming of Christ. And then you have one week after that. You have one week or one seven of years, namely a seven-year period.

²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

I’m sure after receiving this Daniel was utterly perplexed and flabbergasted. In fact, Daniel says in **Daniel 8:27** after a similar vision, “I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king’s business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.” Probably something similar happens here at the end of **Daniel 9** too.

But what we do see is that there is a reference to a seven-year period. That seven-year period has to do with Israel and its anointed one. And that seven-year period is cut in half indicating something.

Look again at **verse 27:** “and for half of the week.” That half-week corresponds roughly to the “time, times, and half a time” mentioned in **Daniel 7:25** and **12:7** and echoed in **Revelation 12:14**. It also aligns with the 1,260 days referenced in **Daniel 12:11–12** and in **Revelation 11:3** and **12:6**. Also it aligns with the 42 months noted in **Revelation 11:2** and **13:5**.

Now here’s where we need to put our Bible together as good Bible students. How do we make sense of these different passages in the OT and the NT? Not all Christians agree, but many premillennialists, and especially pretribulational premillennialists, believe that the 483-year period of time is that time between Nehemiah and the first coming of Christ. After that, there is a parenthesis called the church, where God grafts Gentiles into his plan of redemption. We see a similar gap in other places in the OT (see e.g., **Isa 61:1–2; Dan 2:40–45, 7:7–8; Zech 9:9–10**).

And then after that, there is a seven-year period of tribulation where the man of lawlessness or the antichrist or the desolator is unleashed on the world. And after that seven-year period, there is the second coming of Christ, the millennium, then the great white throne judgment, and then the eternal state. All the stuff we’ve studied the last five lessons.

“Tell me more about this tribulation, Pastor Tony. Tell me more about the antichrist and the removal of the church.” I can’t tell you more about that right now. Because I’ve got to save some material for next week, when we deal with the tribulation.

So more on that next week, unless the Lord raptures us before then. Write this down as a second answer to the question, “what is the rapture?”

2) The rapture **provides** resurrection bodies for believers who have not died (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:16–17)

Turn with me to **1 Corinthians 15**. We looked at this passage last time, but let’s revisit it. Let’s look at **verse 51 and 52.**

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

Remember the context of this. This is Paul talking about our resurrection bodies. And he says that Jesus’s body is the firstfruits of our own resurrection bodies. But he adds this interesting statement about those who shall not sleep. What does that mean?

Well “sleep” is Paul’s beloved euphemism for the death of a Christian. Christ died, so that we just fall asleep in Christ Jesus. But some won’t sleep. Why not? Don’t we want to fall asleep in Christ Jesus? Yes, but some will instead be changed instantaneously.

Look at **verse 52.**

⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

We will be changed. It’ll be so fast! It will be incalculably fast—the twinkling of an eye! We will shed our old bodies and put on new bodies without ever having to die.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

So the dead will be raised imperishable. But we... Paul is referring to those who are still alive at Christ's return... We are part of that "we" now, but Paul is no longer part of it.
we shall be changed.

We shall shed this skin like a snake! Like a lizard... except faster! And immediately, we will put on immortality. We shall shuffle off this mortal coil, and put on immortality. That's the rapture.

Now let's turn back to **1 Thessalonians** again. And let's see the correspondence of these ideas with **1 Corinthians**. There's the same flow of thought as **1 Corinthians**, but Paul gives more precision in **1 Thessalonians** about the sequence of the when the dead in Christ and the alive in Christ receive their resurrection bodies.

Look at **1 Thessalonians 4:16**.

¹⁶ *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.*

Notice "the trumpet of God" here. Same audible signal as **1 Corinthians**. Will we hear a trumpet at this time? Yes, we will. Will the rest of the world hear this trumpet when the church is raptured? I don't know. Maybe so. Will they hear the cry of the command of the Lord and the voice of an archangel? I don't know. Paul doesn't specify.

But Paul does specify this. Look at the end of **verse 16**.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

So again, *the rapture provides resurrection bodies for believers who have not died.* And technically speaking, both believers who have died and those who are still alive will receive resurrection bodies when Christ gathers us up in the air. We talked about this last week. Those believers who have died already are in a disembodied state in the intermediate heaven, in the intermediate state. If they do have bodies, they are temporary bodies. Because they, like us, are waiting for Jesus to gather up the church in the air to receive their bodies.

But I prefer to reserve the term "rapture" for only those who are still alive at that future time. **It might be us, if we live till that event. We don't know.** And for those who are alive at this time of Christ's gathering, we are privileged to receive our resurrection bodies immediately after those who have died in Christ. And we receive our resurrection bodies *without dying*.

I know I've said lots of times, **"Born once; die twice. Born twice; die once."** And that's a great statement. **I don't know who made that statement first, but I've been plagiarizing that person for twenty plus years.** But there is one exception to that expression. Those who are raptured are born twice. They are born to their parents, and they are born again in Christ. But they don't die once. And they don't die twice. They never die. Bully for them! Like Enoch in the OT, they skip death (see **Gen 5:24**).

And the way Paul frames it in 1 Thessalonians is kind of like a father telling his children that each of them is special in their own way. But they are all his children. Those who die before the rapture. They get raised first. That's awesome. They get a head start on being with the Lord. That's fantastic.

But then there are those who get raptured without dying! That's awesome too! You don't have to die. Each opportunity is special, but the end result is the same. We will be embodied with the Lord Jesus, all of his saints in the air awaiting (for seven years) his victorious return.

So I kind of imagine us gathered around Jesus after the rapture. And we're all swapping stories and admiring each other's new resurrected state.

"Check out my resurrection body! Don't I look fabulous?"

"Yes you do! Check out my new resurrection body!"

"Did you get raptured? No, I've been with Jesus for 500 years waiting for this day."

"Really, that's awesome! What'd you do during that time?"

"We were cheering on the saints like you to finish well! Did you get raptured?"

"Why, yes, I did!"

"How was that?"

“It was awesome. I didn’t have to die. It was just as amazing as Paul said it would be in 1 Thessalonians.”

And we’ll swap stories. And we’ll celebrate. And we will visit with those who died before us, then we’ll experience the bema seat judgment. And then we’ll begin the marriage supper of the Lamb. And we will wait seven years until it’s time to return to earth with Jesus as part of his victorious entourage.

Write this down as a third answer to the question, “what is the rapture”? Thirdly...

3) The rapture **precedes** the pouring out of God’s wrath upon the earth (1 Thess 5:9)

Let’s look together now at **1 Thessalonians 5:1–11**. Now sequentially, **1 Thessalonians 5:1–11** follows **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**. Let me just tell you, that is not an accident. In other words, Paul talks about how we will be raptured and taken up to be with the Lord in the sky in **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**. And then he talks about the cataclysmic Day of the Lord in **1 Thessalonians 5:1–11**. Those events are sequential—one follows the other.

And Paul writes in **5:1**,

¹ *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.*

Paul must have shared something about the end time with them. Maybe Paul didn’t get into the particulars of how Christ was going to raise the dead when he returned, and how Christ was going to rapture believers... that’s why he wrote **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**. But the Thessalonians did know *something* about Jesus’s return. Paul taught them something.

Look at **verse 2**.

² *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* 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.*

The language here is similar to Jesus’s language during what’s called the Olivet Discourse (**Matt 24–25**). Jesus took his disciples aside and told them what to expect before his second coming. And one of the things that Jesus told his disciples is that people will be surprised (even shocked!) at his coming. Jesus even compared his second coming to the days of Noah. Jesus said, “For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (**Matt 24:37–39**).

People will be having a good time. People will be assuming that they are good with God. People will be saying, “there is peace and security,” even though there isn’t on earth or in their hearts. They are not at peace with God. And in that season of obliviousness and apathy towards God, Christ will return. And the wrath of God will be poured out on the earth.

I’m really thankful for that “Noah analogy” that Jesus uses, because that’s how I see the church at the time of Christ’s return. We will escape God’s judgment and the pouring out of God’s wrath just like Noah and his family escaped God’s judgment at the flood. But instead of a boat, we will escape through rapture and the receiving of our new bodies.

Jesus also compared the timing of his coming to the labor pains that come upon a pregnant woman. Let me read another section from the Olivet Discourse. This is **Matthew 24:3–8**. “As [Jesus] sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.’”

So, as I understand it, there will be “signs of the end of the age” including these birth pains: war, rumors of war, false messiahs, famines, earthquakes, etc. It’ll seem like the earth is groaning and heaving like a woman about to give birth. And this will signal that the time is near.

Keep in mind, though, that in that same Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, “No one knows the hour or the day” (Matt 24:36). So, we will have a sense that the coming is near, but we won’t have specificity.

Some of you might come and ask me after the service, “Pastor Tony, do you think the rapture will happen this year, or next year, or the next few years?” And if you do, I will tell you, “Maybe!” Maybe, because I can see an increase in catastrophes worldwide and wars and rumors of wars. I even see evidence of false Christs out there who try to compete with Jesus.

But I’m not going to stake my reputation as a Bible teacher on the rapture taking place this year or next year or any time soon. But I do believe in what’s called the “imminent return of Christ.” I believe that his return for the church can happen at any time. And that’s why we need to be ready for it. **More on that later.**

Now, back to **1 Thessalonians 5**. Look again at **verse 3**.

³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them ... and they will not escape.

Concerning that, you might say, “**What does that destruction look like?**” Well, I believe that this is the wrath of God detailed in the Book of **Revelation** (see especially **Rev 6 –19**). This includes the seven seal judgments, the seven bowl judgments, and the seven trumpet judgments. There are descriptions of this in the OT as well. All of this “destruction,” as Paul calls it, will take place in a seven-year period of tribulation involving an antichrist, a false prophet, and Satan producing a massive upheaval in our world.

Some believe that the church will live through that seven-year period of tribulation and be a witness for Christ in the midst of that chaos, namely those in the midtribulation camp and the posttribulation camp.

But I’m a pretribber. I believe that the church will be raptured out of the world during that period and escape God’s wrath, just like Noah and his family in the ark.

But for the unbelievers who live through that period, they will experience God’s wrath and judgment. **And verse 3** says clearly, *they will not escape.*

But that’s unbelievers. Paul says in **verse 4** concerning believers:

⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

The “you” there is emphatic in the Greek. It’s a hard contrast from those who won’t escape judgment in **verse 3**. “But you (You, brothers!) are not in darkness!” It’s emphatic, but it’s also plural. It refers to all the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. **And it applies to you as well, church. If you truly are in Christ, then you are not in darkness, and you have nothing to fear.**

Look again at **verse 5**.

⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

Jesus said himself, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (**John 8:12**). **Do you follow Jesus, church? Are you one of his disciples? If so, you do not walk in darkness. You have the light of life.**

In light of that, look at **verse 6**.

⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

Now let me explain something here, because this is a little confusing in English. It’s clearer in Greek. Last week we talked about those who sleep as a euphemism for death. And Paul used the word κοιμάω in **1 Thessalonians 4:13**. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep [**κοιμάω meaning “those who are dead”**], that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (**4:13**).

But here Paul changes the vocabulary of sleep from κοιμάω to another word for sleep, καθεύδω. Sorry to be so technical here, but this is important. This is a different kind of sleep and a different kind of sleeping. Paul isn’t talking about those who are asleep in the Lord, those who are “dead in Christ” (**4:16**). He’s talking about those who are asleep *spiritually*. They are not “awake” to the things of the Lord. They are *slumbering spiritually*. **You talk about the Lord, and they yawn. You mention Christ’s imminent return, and they rub their eyes and nod off.**

But Paul says, **“We are not like that! We are not children of the *night*; we are children of the *light*!”** Look at **verse 8**.

⁸ *But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*

Notice the threefold armor of the Christian in that verse: faith, hope, love. Paul uses that trifold elsewhere (see 1 Cor 13:13).

⁹ *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep [not asleep spiritually like we saw in verse 6, but asleep physically meaning “dead in Christ”] we might live with him.*

Paul says here clearly that we are saved from God’s wrath! How? Through the death of Christ. It’s right here in **1 Thessalonians 5** among other places. **We are not objects of God’s wrath!**

¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

The important thing to note in **1 Thessalonians 5**, among other things, is that “God has not destined us for wrath.” The cataclysmic day of the Lord which is prophesied repeatedly in the OT is an outpouring of God’s wrath on our world. But we are not objects of that wrath.

How are we going to escape it on the day of the Lord? The answer, of course, is that we will be raptured. And we will be with the Lord in that day. And that’s why I say, *The rapture precedes the pouring out of God’s wrath upon the earth*. The sequence of events recorded in Paul’s prophecy in **1 Thessalonians 4–5** substantiate that statement.

Now, stay with me here. Let me get technical with you on the different views of the rapture, before I come back to the pretribulationist view and defend it. There are *three* reputable views on the timing of the rapture.

1) Here’s the first—posttribulationism. Some of our good friends in the evangelical Christian community who share our premillennial viewpoint think that the rapture will take place at the end of this seven-year tribulation, not the beginning. They think that we, the church, will go through that period of tribulation. And we will be raptured basically right before Christ returns on horseback, *à la Revelation 19*. That view is called posttribulationism.

It’s a good view. It’s a reputable view. **Some of my favorite people and Bible scholars in the world hold to this: Wayne Grudem, John Piper, Doug Moo, Millard Erickson, D.A. Carson, Al Mohler, Jim Hamilton, etc.** Many refer to this position as historical premillennialism, because this view dates back to the early days of the church.³ It’s a good view. It’s not my view.

2) Now other premillennialists hold to what’s called midtribulationism. They advocate for a midtribulation rapture, or a variation of this view is what’s called a pre-wrath rapture. And this view maintains that the church will be raptured halfway through the tribulation, around that time in which Daniel speaks of the three-and-a-half-year mark when the antichrist is let loose.

Midtribulationists believe that this is the time that God’s wrath is unleashed, and because of that, the church is removed. Again, this is a good view. It has merits. **There are people I respect that hold to it.**⁴ It’s a smaller camp than the other views. But it’s not my view.

3) I hold to what’s called pretribulationism or a pretribulationist rapture. I’m a “pretribber” like John Walvoord, Tim LaHaye, Charles Ryrie, John MacArthur, David Jeremiah, John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg, Robert Thomas, Michael Vlach, Chuck Swindoll, Arnold Fruchtenbaum and many others. **It’s the stated position of the Moody Bible Institute where I teach. It’s the historic position of Dallas Theological Seminary and other likeminded institutions.** That’s my camp. That’s my tribe. I’m comfortable there.

³ See the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. Grant R Osborne, “The ‘Rapture Question,’” *Themelios* 2, no. 3 (1977): 78: “This movement was called ‘chiliasm’ in the early church, and disappeared after the work of Augustine and the rise of the historical interpretation of prophecy.”

⁴ Namely Gleason Archer, Norman Geisler, and a handful of other scholars. See the two editions of *Three Views on the Rapture* in my bibliography below.

But let's keep in mind what I said at the beginning of this series—**eschatology is that realm of Christian theology where we need the most generosity and grace toward one another.** Because there are lots of disagreements. And this issue is difficult when you try to put together all the texts of Scripture, like we've done today. And this isn't the deity of Christ.

Nevertheless, let me give you seven reasons why I hold to a pretribulation rapture. Write these down. I'll try to be quick.

Seven Reasons for a Pretribulation Rapture. Here's the first.⁵

1) It could take place at any time—**imminence**

Let me read for you, if I could, our doctrinal statement on this at Messiah: "We eagerly await Christ's imminent return for the Church, when believers will receive a new body at the resurrection. We believe the church will return to Earth with Jesus at His promised Second Coming, when He will establish and rule over His 1,000-year Kingdom centered in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of the Kingdom, the world will experience a final judgment, after which the Father, Son and Spirit will dwell eternally among God's people in the coming New Heavens and Earth called the New Jerusalem."⁶

You'll notice there the statement about Jesus's millennial kingdom. You should notice too the statement concerning the new heavens and new earth and the New Jerusalem. You should notice too that we eagerly await Christ's *imminent* return.

Now we don't spell out there a pretribulation rapture. And we don't require members to hold to that. But the logic of imminence is better understood with a pretrib rapture than with a midtrib or posttrib rapture. Here's why I say that. Imminence means nearness or suddenness. And one of the things that the NT speaks about repeatedly is the imminent return of Christ, and our need to be ready for it (see **Luke 12:36; 21:36; Rom 8:23, 25; Phil 4:5; Titus 2:13; Jas 5:8–9; 1 Pet 4:7**). In other words, Paul and the other apostles thought it could happen at any time.

But if the logic of everything that I've presented tonight holds, then a midtrib or posttrib rapture can't really be said to be immanent. And that's because the clock on the seven years will have already started with the church in the tribulation. So the church would know that they are in that seven-year window. So there's no shock or surprise. They know the approximate timing of the rapture.

This is not an irrefutable, definitive, nail-in-the-coffin argument for the pretrib rapture. I don't know if there is a nail-in-the-coffin argument for any of these views. But, this is persuasive to me. Immanence means unexpected. And that makes sense in a pretrib scheme.

Here's a second reason for a pretrib rapture.

2) God pours out his **wrath** during the **tribulation**

As I argued earlier, the tribulation is tied to the cataclysmic Day of the Lord. And Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 5:2–3**, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief... then sudden destruction will come upon them." Just to be clear, we are not the "them" in that verse. We don't experience that wrath. That's for unbelievers.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:9**, Paul writes, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation." In **1 Thessalonians 1:10**, Paul writes, "Jesus... delivers us from the wrath to come."

Similarly, in the passages in **Revelation** that speak of the tribulation period, there are repeated references to God's wrath being poured out on the world. In **Revelation 6:16–17**, the people cry out, "hide us... from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come." In **Revelation 15:1**, it says, "with them the wrath of God is finished." In **Revelation 16:1**, it says, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." Why would the church be present during this time if we are "not destined for the wrath to come" (**1 Thess 5:9**)?

Again, this is not *indisputably* definitive. **This is not a nail-in-the-coffin.** But it's a piece of evidence that persuades me towards the pretribulation rapture view.

⁵ John Walvord gives fifty reasons in *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 269–77.

⁶ www.messiahbible.org/mission-values-beliefs#Beliefs

Here's a third reason.

3) The removal of the **Restrainer**

I won't belabor this one, because we talked about it last week. In **2 Thessalonians 2:6**, there is a Restrainer that is removed before the son of lawlessness is unleashed. What is that Restrainer? I don't know what else it could be other than the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit's influence through the church in our world. That work that began at Pentecost is completed at the rapture.

Now a midtribber might say that the Holy Spirit and the church has influence all the way until the halfway point of the tribulation. And then the man of lawlessness is let loose. That's a possibility. But if this happens at the end of the tribulation, then there's no time left in the seven years for the man of lawlessness to be let loose.

Here's a fourth reason for a pretribulation rapture.

4) God redirects his attention toward **Israel**

Now this is a position that is not shared by all premillennialists. But it is shared by most pretribulation premillennialists. And that position is that God has a future plan for Israel. There will be a time in the future where he will fulfill OT promises. Many of those promises are fulfilled in the millennial kingdom.

But that redirection towards Israel doesn't begin at the millennial kingdom. It actually begins when the church is raptured. That's why **Revelation 6–19** says nothing specific about the church. The word "church" (ἐκκλησία) largely disappears after **chapter 3**. Instead John talks about the 144,000 of the tribes of Israel.

This is a huge topic. And I don't have time to get into all of it tonight. Thankfully, two weeks from today we will discuss the church and Israel. Come back for that. But be aware, this is one of the persuasive reasons to hold to a pretrib rapture.

And a corollary to that issue is this fifth reason.

5) Who populates Jesus's **millennial kingdom**?

This is more an argument against posttribulationism than against midtribulationism. I was introduced to this matter years ago by Paul Feinberg, who argued that if the church is raptured right before Jesus returns... and if Jesus comes to earth and destroys all his enemies... then who is left to populate the millennial kingdom?

As we've seen already, the millennial kingdom is full of both resurrected believers in their new bodies, and people who will live and procreate in the kingdom. There will be millions of people on the earth during this kingdom, some of which will rebel against the Lord and be part of Satan's final rebellion. But if you hold to a posttrib rapture, then who is left to populate the millennial kingdom? Everyone is either dead or raptured!

As of yet, I have not heard a good answer to this question from the posttrib camp. And it remains for me a persuasive reason to hold to a pretrib rapture.

And the same issue is in place for these last two questions. #6.

6) When does the **bema seat** judgment take place?

If we are raptured just before Christ's return to earth, then there's no time for judgment. We go up and then right back down!

When do we experience our judgment? We know it can't be at the great white throne judgment, because that's for unbelievers only, and that leads to the eternal death in the lake of fire. So when does the bema seat judgment happen?

A pretribber says during the seven years of tribulation. A midtribber might say during the three and a half years of the end of the tribulation, what they call the *great tribulation*. A posttribber has to find another time for this judgment.

⁷ See *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 45–112.

And this seventh statement is even more persuasive for the pretrib position, because the posttrib view breaks the sequence of Revelation 19.

7) When does the **marriage supper** of the Lamb take place?

In **Revelation 19**, we have the marriage supper of the Lamb after Babylon's destruction. And after that, we have Christ descending on horseback with his army, the church, behind him. But if we are raptured at the end of the tribulation, and then immediately on horseback with the Lord coming to the earth, when does the marriage supper of the Lamb take place?

Some might say, "**later.**" And that's fine. But you break the sequence of events in **Revelation**. Again, this is not indisputably definitive. **It's not a nail-in-the-coffin argument.** But it's another reason why I think a pretrib view is better.

And to all this, you might say, "Why does it matter? Why does it even matter? Jesus will come when he comes. What's happens will happen. Wake me up when it's time." Well, regardless of your eschatological position, that is the exact opposite of what the NT teaches us to do.

We don't say, "Wake me up when it happens?" We're alert. We're vigilant. Neither do we quit our jobs, move to Israel, twiddle our thumbs, and wait for Jesus to come back. Both of those responses are disobedient.

You know what we do? We wait anticipatngly. We watch. We're ready. We run the earth and watch the sky. We walk and chew gum at the same time. We can do this. We serve Christ. We serve the church. We tell people about Jesus. We raise our kids. We work hard to provide for ourselves. We gather as the church to worship Christ on Sunday. We run the earth as long as we have to. And we wait anticipatngly for Jesus to come for us return.

You know if someone asked me, "What would you do if you know this day would be your last?" To be honest, I would do the same things I do every day. I would love my wife, love my son, love my church, study the Scriptures, pray to God, and tell people about Jesus. I might eat something really, really unhealthy too! But everything else would (hopefully) be the same.

There's an old German proverb that goes like this, "If I knew that tomorrow the world would end, I would still plant an apple tree today."

So let me land this plane. We don't obsess about the timing of Christ's coming. We are not Chicken Little. "It's now! No it's now! No it's five minutes from now! Now!" No. That's ridiculous. We don't need Christians running around every time something cataclysmic happens in our world saying, "The end of the world is near! The end of the world is near!" Of course the end of the world is near. We believe in imminence. But we don't know with exactitude when God will initiate his plans for the end.

So what do we do? So let's run the earth and watch the sky. Be observant, Christian, but not obsessed. Be prepared, but not paranoid. Be ready, but not ridiculous. And let's say together with our brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with us on eschatology, "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus."

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