

The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church

by Charles Swann

The rapture of the church is a pre-tribulation event that will occur before the day of the Lord, and it is a visible and audible event that will be seen and heard by all.

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Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13

Topics: "Pre-Wrath Rapture"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of Revelation and the events that occur after the sixth seal is opened. He emphasizes that from this point on, everything becomes supernatural and no longer the result of a fallen world. The preacher describes the pouring out of God's wrath and the beginning of the day of the Lord. He highlights the devastation and destruction that takes place, including the death of a fourth of the population, persecution of the church, and various natural disasters. The preacher also mentions the significance of the silence in heaven before the storm of God's wrath is unleashed.

Transcript

Thank you. I appreciate the privilege to be here again tonight and again to look at God's words. So listen, we're not going to waste any time.

Let's get right into it, okay? Open your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 24. We're going to pick up where we left off, and tonight we're going to be talking about the rapture of the church, and we'll see how far we get into it. Let me quickly review and bring you up to where we are so you'll understand the time of the seven years and the chronology of the events surrounding the seven years.

We're talking about the 70th week of Daniel, which is the seven-year period some call the seven-year tribulation. In the seven-year period, there are three distinct events. One is called the birth pains that Jesus refers to in Matthew chapter 24.

The other is the great tribulation of Antichrist that Jesus also talks about in Matthew 24. And then we have the last part of it is called the day of the Lord, which the Apostle Paul refers to, John the Apostle refers to it, the Old Testament refers to it many, many times, the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is the day of God's wrath.

It is the time when God pours out His supernatural wrath upon this earth. Now, one of the things that most evangelicals believe today is that God will indeed remove His people from the wrath of God, and that's true. The Bible teaches us that.

Let me just read now in Matthew chapter 24 and bring us up to the place that we are from last evening. If you will, just consider with me verse 27. Matthew chapter 24 and verse 27.

Jesus says, For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the carcass is, the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the heaven, and the powers of the earth, or rather the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all of the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. I have told you that some believe that this portion of the word of God refers to the second advent when our Lord returns to set up His kingdom.

However, I am convinced, because of a number of ways this is communicated throughout the word of God, that this refers to the rapture of the church. That indeed what Jesus is talking about here is not the return to set up the kingdom after the seven-year period, but indeed He is talking about the rapture of the church before He pours out what is known as the wrath of God or the day of the Lord begins. Look at a few of these verses here just for a moment, verse 30 particularly.

It says, Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all of the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Notice this is not something that the people do not see. I told you last night I do not believe in a secret rapture.

I do not believe that it is going to be tried to be explained by UFOs, alien abduction, or whatever it might be. I am convinced that the word of God teaches us that when Jesus Christ comes and He raptures His church, there will be no questioning as to what is going on here. They will be absolutely convinced that the one who has showed up is indeed Jesus Christ.

However, even though they will know that, the Bible teaches us that they will still reject Him and still decide not to follow Him and give their lives to Him. And Jesus says in verse 31, He will send His angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they, that is the angels, will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. Now just hold your place there in Matthew 24, and I want you to turn with me now to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is the classic rapture passage.

Most of us are familiar with this passage because we have heard it so many times in messages on the rapture, and that should be the case because this is probably one of the most definitive passages in the word of God concerning the rapture. It is the passage that we get the word rapture from, as it is derived from a word in the Latin, raptus. But in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 13, listen to what the apostle Paul writes.

He says, But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means perceive those who are asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from the heavens with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Doesn't that sound very familiar to what Jesus said over in Matthew 24? The angels, the trumpet, the gathering together of His elect.

That's what Jesus said. That is the rapture of the church. Now let's just simply go back to Matthew 24 now.

I want to show you a couple of more verses here that clearly define for us that what Jesus is talking about here is not the second advent, but rather the rapture of the church. Why am I laboring this? Because it is an important issue. If you're going to understand Matthew 24, and also Luke and Mark's gospel concerning the event of our Lord's return, you have to understand what He's referring to.

If you believe that this passage in Matthew 24, verse 29-31 refers to the time that He comes to set up His kingdom at the end of the seven years, you're going to have to do some hermeneutical jumping through hoops to make this passage make sense. But I believe it's clear as to what He's referring to. Now let's look a little further.

Look at verse 36. Matthew 24, verse 36. But of that day and hour, no one knows.

What day is He talking about? The day when He returns to rapture His church. No one knows that day or hour. He cannot tell us, and He will not tell us.

Now as I've told you before, He has told us the season of His return. As a result of the signs that will be given, as a result of the events surrounding His return, we will know that we are in the season of His return, but we will never be able to pinpoint an exact day or hour. So Jesus refers to that.

Now look at verse 37. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

In other words, suddenly. He's coming, and He's coming to judge. And He's coming as He did with Noah, and even as Luke refers to, to Lot's situation.

He's coming to deliver the righteous from judgment, and He's coming to judge the ungodly. And so He tells us that's exactly what's going to take place. Now look at verse 40 and following.

It says, Then two men will be in the field. One will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill.

One will be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. I can remember when I began to study this passage, and I was looking at this particular text, and I was, I had learned for years that this was a reference to the time when Jesus would come and separate people with the judgment of the sheep and goats.

That this was at the end of the seven year period. That this was not a reference to the rapture of the church. However, as you study the text more, and you look at the Greek terms specifically, you find that the words that Jesus specifically chose here have to deal with the rapture.

And I'll show you that. Look at verse 40 now. He says, Then two men will be in the field.

One will be taken, and the other left. Now, some of the historical interpretation of this has been that the word taken means taken in judgment. And the word left means left to go into the millennial kingdom or the righteous reign of Christ.

So they would say this event occurs at the end of the seven year period. Two men are in the field. One is taken in judgment.

The other is left to go into the millennial kingdom. In verse 41, two women will be grinding at the mill. One would be taken in judgment.

The other would be left to go into the millennial kingdom. However, if we were just to look at the English words, we could say that. If we were to try to fit it into a theology, if we were to try to squeeze it into a particular view, but if we just look at the words grammatically, historically, linguistically, we'll find out in verse 40 and verse 41 that is not what Jesus is saying.

For instance, in verse 40 when he says, Two men will be in the field. One will be taken. The word taken is a very, very important word.

It is a Greek word, para-lambano. It's made up of two words, para, a preposition, lambano, meaning the verb, and when you bring them together, para means right alongside of. You get the word parallel from it.

And then lambano means to receive. Now you put the two together, para-lambano means to receive alongside of. It has nothing to do with judgment.

It is a term of endearment, and I'll show you that in a moment. And then in verse 40, I was looking at this one day, and I said, Well, you know, I'm just going to track down the word left here and just see exactly what kind of original derivative it had. In verse 40, it says this, One will be taken and the other left.

I tracked that word down, and I was amazed to find, and you can check this out for yourself, in the Greek lexicons, the word left here actually means left to destruction. I thought, Well, that's interesting. That rather changes the whole view of that text, doesn't it? Because what Jesus is saying is this.

Two men will be in the field. One will be taken in the sense of taken alongside of an endearment, and the other is left to destruction. And again, he says two women will be grinding at the mill.

One will be taken in para-lambano, received alongside of, and then the other left to destruction. There's another way you find out how Greek words are used. You not only look at them in their immediate context, but you find out how other authors in the Old Testament use that word.

And just so happens there's one other passage that is the classic rapture passage for many. It is found over in John 14. I want to show it to you, all right? John chapter 14 and verse 1. The Gospel of John chapter 14 verse 1. Listen to these words.

Very familiar to all of us. Jesus says, Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. Now listen to this.

He says, I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also. Guess what, folks? The word here in verse 3 when Jesus says, I am coming to receive you to myself, is the word para-lambano. It means that he's coming to take us alongside of himself, as he would his disciples here.

He's coming to take us home to be with him. That's the word para-lambano. To receive us to himself.

And now when you go back to Matthew 24 and you read this text when Jesus says, listen, it will be like the days of Noah. Noah was out preaching, proclaiming the kingdom, proclaiming coming judgment, saying the Lord's coming is near or the Lord's judgment is near. They were rejecting that message, not wanting to hear it, and then all of a sudden the rain started and the floods began to rise.

And then, of course, Noah's family went into the ark and were saved, right? And so is the case here. The Bible tells us that there's coming a time when God's going to come in Christ and judge the world. And when he comes to judge the world, the first thing he's going to do is rapture his church.

He's going to take his church out of here. That's why it says in verse 40 and 41 that he will take one and leave another. The point is some will be ready and some will not.

Some will be ready to be raptured. Others will not. In verse 42, he says, watch therefore, for you do not know the hour that your Lord is coming, but know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

Therefore, you also be ready for the Son of man is coming in an hour you are not expecting. In other words, you best be prepared, right? You best be ready. Now, I want to take you to another text now that deals with this.

We want to go back now to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 again, because we're going to deal with this and go a little further into this text here to deal with the rapture. As I've shared with you before, probably one of the most hotly debated issues concerning the return of Jesus Christ is the timing of the rapture. When does the rapture take place? Is it before the seven years? Is it halfway through the seven years? Is it at the end of the seven years? Are we even raptured at all? Some would say, well, obviously the Bible teaches that we are raptured, right? Or we would have to deny what the word of God clearly teaches us.

But we do have to ask the question, when? When are we raptured? Well, we'll find a few things that will help us with that. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, we read what it said in verse 13 and following when Paul talks about the rapture of the church. But even in that particular passage, he doesn't tell us the timing of it, does he? But let's go a little further.

We go on to chapter 5 verse 1. It says, But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly, listen to this, that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. Years ago, there was a movie that was put out called A Thief in the Night.

Remember watching that? And the classic idea is that Jesus is going to show up as a thief in the night. You better be ready. Talking to Christians too.

Christians, you better be ready. Jesus is going to show up as a thief in the night. You know what? That's wrong.

It's wrong. And the reason why it's wrong is this text. Let me show it to you.

Look at verse 3. He says, For when they say, that is, the world says peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them. Notice the words that he chooses to use. He says, For when they, that is the world, the ungodly, the unbeliever, says peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them.

Again, the unbeliever. As labor pains upon a pregnant woman. Remember what Jesus talked about? The birth pains? Here they are again.

And then he says this, And they, that is the unbelieving, Christ-rejecting world will not escape. But it gets even better. Look at verse 4. But you, brethren, now most of us understand that whenever he uses the term brethren, he's referring to the Christians of Thessalonica.

In a broader sense, he's talking to you and I, right? He's saying, But you, brothers and sisters in Christ, are not in darkness, that this day, and the day should be capitalized in your Bible. It refers to the day of the Lord, the day of God's wrath. He says, You are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake you as a what? Thief.

He says, You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as others, but let us watch and be sober.

You know what he's telling us? It's not going to catch us off guard. We're not going to see it as a thief in the night. Why? Because he's given it to us in all of these signs and all of this information, and if you know all of this stuff, you're prepared for it.

You're looking for it. Most of us tonight, if we knew a thief was coming to our house, we would have made preparation for it, right? I doubt we would have done what my friend Mike Miller did, just go ahead and give them the remote after they've taken the stereo, because they needed it to make it function. But nevertheless, we would be prepared.

Had he known that they were coming, he would have definitely prepared for their arrival. And I'm not going to tell you what he might have done, but we definitely would have been prepared. And what Jesus is saying is that this is so very important to the unbelieving world.

Jesus shows up as a thief. They're not ready. They're not anticipating his return.

They are in fact rejecting the fact that he's going to return. They don't believe he's coming back. But to the Christian, to the one who loves the Lord, he is eagerly looking forward to the time of our Lord's return.

And he's anticipating his return. He's preparing for his return. He's getting his house in order for his return.

And so it is a classic error to believe that Jesus is coming to the church as a thief in the night. He is not coming to the church as a thief in the night. He is coming to the world as a thief in the night.

And so it tells us, since we do know these things in verse 6, therefore let us not sleep as others do. He says let us watch and be sober. Why? Because we know he's coming.

Let's be alert. Let's be ready. We know the Lord is coming back.

He's coming back to rapture his church. Let's go a little further. Look at 2 Thessalonians for a moment.

2 Thessalonians. Now what it tells us, if you just caught what it said in 1 Thessalonians, it tells us that we are not going to be here during the day of the Lord. We're going to be taken out of here before that day begins.

We will not find ourselves in the middle of the day of the Lord. And then we find a little bit more information as to when that day is going to take place. Okay.

Look at 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Very, very important passage. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. That's good. That's the right slide.

Just making sure we had the right one up. Paul the apostle writes, now brethren concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him. Notice that Paul puts them one in the same.

He uses the word here for coming, the Greek word parousia that we referred to earlier that Jesus used over Matthew 24. And he uses that word to refer to his coming to this earth, to rapture his church, to bring judgment to this world and to eventually set up his kingdom. So it says now brethren concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him.

And the word gathering together to him is the word synagogue, meaning assembling together. He's saying concerning the coming of our Lord and the fact that he will rapture us to be with him. He says, we asked you in verse two, 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 synonymous with the day of the Lord.

Now, what is important about this is that the Thessalonian Christians were under a great deal of persecution. And as a result of them being under persecution, they thought they were already in the seven year period. And they thought that perhaps they had missed it.

They thought the day of the Lord had come and they were all left here to endure the wrath of God, you see. And so Paul had to write to them and explain to them the chronology of the events in the seven year period. This is so very important because the apostle Paul puts it in order for us to understand when these events take place.

We need to ask the question, first of all, when does the day of the Lord take place? Because when we find out when the day of the Lord takes place, then we'll know when the rapture takes place, because we're raptured before the day of the Lord. So we look at it again. He says, I want to write to you in verse two.

I don't want you to be shaken in mind or troubled either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of the Lord or the day of Christ had come. He said, let no one deceive you by any means. Listen to this.

For that day, the day of the Lord, the day of God's wrath will not come unless the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed. Now, I don't know if it could get any clearer than that. He simply says the day can't start until the antichrist is revealed and until the falling away comes first.

Now, what we have to do is define exactly what he's talking about. So we'll understand what he's referring to, right? Some would say, well, the antichrist is revealed whenever he sets up the seven-year treaty with Israel. Not necessarily, because that's not what Paul points to as the revealing of the man of sin or antichrist.

You remember whenever he comes on the scene and he rises to his place of prominence and he makes this seven-year covenant with Israel, he is at that time looked at as the great ruler of the world. He's this great political figure that has all of the solutions to the Middle East problems. And he comes on as the savior of the world.

And they're so happy that this guy is here finally. We have a brilliant mind here, a great military mind. But then halfway through the seven-year period, you remember what he does? He walks into the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

He desecrates the temple by setting up an idol of himself. And he says, I'm God, you worship me. And if you don't worship me, you're going to die.

That's what he says. And that is what Paul refers to as the revelation of the man of sin. He is the man of sin because he sets up himself against the God of gods.

He sets up himself against Jesus Christ. Look at it again in verse three. He says, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition or the son of destruction.

And how do we know who he is? Look at verse four, 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. And the only time that takes place is halfway through the seven-year period. There's no doubt about that.

Jesus called it the abomination of desolation. He talks about it in Matthew 24, verse 15, referring back to the Old Testament passage in the book of Daniel. But listen to this.

It goes on even further. Look at verse five. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things and now you know what is restraining that he may be revealed in his own time for the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

Only you now restrains will do it until he's taken out of the way. Some say that's the spirit of God removed. It is not the spirit of God removed completely.

It is his restraining work of evil. He withholds and pulls back his restraining work that allows evil to go as far as it possibly can. You see the world is not as evil as it possibly could be right now because God is withholding it.

If he lets go, folks, it's going to be bad. And at this time he lets go. And so the restrainer pulls back.

It says in verse eight, and then the lawless one, another word for the Antichrist, the one who regards no law. He is, it says, the one who has revealed whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming and the coming of the lawless one. Notice this very important is according to the workings of Satan with all power signs and lying wonders.

Now, if you are really just drawn to the miraculous, you have to be careful because folks, the Bible tells us that whenever the Antichrist shows up, he's going to show up with miracles. He's going to work miracles and they're not going to be fake ones. They're not going to be frauds.

They're not going to be lengthening legs. They are going to be doing some very powerful miracles. As it says in the book of Revelation chapter 13, he's going to be bringing fire out of heaven.

He's going to be resurrecting from the dead. It tells us in Revelation 13, three times. So the Bible tells us he's going to come with signs and lying wonders and miracles.

And the reason why he does this is this. He brings the world to his feet in worship because they begin to believe that this really is God. And it's not, it's the devil incarnate in Antichrist.

But we'll deal with him a little later on in more detail. But let me point out again when it says in verse three, he says, let no one deceive you by any means for that day, the day of the Lord, the day of God's wrath will not come unless the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed. So now we know that the day of the Lord cannot start until, until we find the revelation of Antichrist, right? Isn't that what Paul said? It can't happen until at least halfway through, at least until the abomination of desolation takes place.

But we also know this. If you'll go back with me now to Matthew 24, that after the abomination of desolation, after the time, the man of sin is revealed after the time that he walks into the temple and desecrates the temple and really shows himself for who he really is and calls himself God. You remember what Jesus said in verse nine of Matthew 24, he says, then they will deliver you up.

The then means the time whenever the abomination of desolation takes place. He says, whenever that takes place, everything changes. He's no longer the man of peace.

He's the man of war. He's no longer the man who's out for your best benefit. He's only out for his own.

He's out to destroy every single Jew and every single Christian who names the Christ. And that's exactly what he's after in verse nine. It says, then they will deliver you up to tribulation and do what kill you.

Notice again, he uses the personal pronouns here to refer to the disciples and you, he says, will be hated by all nations for my namesake. And then many will be offended and will betray one another and will hate one another. And he goes on and talks about how the believers will die at the hands of antichrist.

Now, here's what you have. If you'll remember what it said, I should have told you to hold your place in second Thessalonians, because there's one of the word I have to refer to there that helps us to understand what's going on. Paul said, there's two things that have to take place before the day of the Lord starts.

The first thing he said is the falling away, right? Then he said the man of sin is revealed. Now we have to ask the question, what's the falling away. If that's something that has to take place before the day of the Lord starts, we need to understand what the falling away is.

And really just from the very word itself, we understand what he's referring to. The word falling away is a Greek word. It is a word that is transliterated and sometimes translated apostasy.

And what he's saying is, is there's going to be a great apostasy and then the man of sin is going to be revealed. And of course, all this takes place at the same time. And then the day of the Lord will take place.

So what would be the great apostasy? Well, we have to define what apostasy is, don't we? Apostasy is simply this. It's for someone who adheres to the evangelical doctrine and says he believes it and then walks away from it and denies it. That's apostasy.

That's one who says, I am fundamental. I am evangelical. I believe Jesus Christ is the Savior.

I believe he's the Lord. I believe he died on the cross. And then they have some pressure put on them and they turn away from it, walk away from it and deny it.

That's the apostasy. You know what I believe that Paul is referring to here in second Thessalonians chapter two, when he says the falling away will take place and the man of sin is revealed. It is this that whenever the antichrist comes on the scene and he begins to put pressure on the church, that there's going to be many people within the church are going to say, listen, this was just something I did on Sunday.

It's not really real to me. You know why? Because the antichrist is going to put some pressure on them. He's going to say, you can't buy, you can't sell, you can't eat, you can't have commerce, you can't go to Walmart, you can't do anything without me.

You've got to take my sign. You've got to take the number. And so some are going to say, you know, I'm willing to do that.

You know, Sunday was just an event for me. I'm not really committed to Jesus and so forth. Uh, you know, we'll just go ahead.

It's a great apostasy. The things that they claimed that they really believe, they don't really believe and they walk away from and deny them. Let me show you this again.

I want you to go with me to revelation chapter 13. All right. Revelation chapter 13, show you what happens whenever the antichrist gets hold of the world and what he does in revelation 13, you remember it talks about the beast, the beast that rises up out of the sea.

John sees this beast. This beast refers to the kingdom of antichrist and the antichrist himself. And in verse five, it says this, and he that is the antichrist was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies.

And he was given authority to continue 42 months. The 42 months refers to the last three and a half year period always. So God says, I'm giving you 42 months antichrist.

That's what you've got. And that's it. And in verse six, it says, then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God to blaspheme his name, his tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven.

And listen to this in verse seven, it was granted to him to make war with the saints. You know, what was interesting about that? Who grants it? God grants it. So what's God doing here? Why is he allowing such a thing? Verse seven, it says it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them.

And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him. Whose names have not been written in the book of life of the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

We referred to this last time when we said this, no believer will ever worship the beast. I've had Christians ask me this. They've said, you know, well, will I be deceived? What would I take the mark of the beast? No, absolutely not.

No way. Now, if you're not a Christian, you probably will, unless you give your heart to the Lord. But the point is, if your name's written in heaven, your name will never be written in hell.

If your name's written in heaven, you'll never give your allegiance to the devil. You will be given enough understanding, enough enlightenment to know what's going on. And you will never sign up with the beast ever.

And so it goes on and tells us, look at verse 11. Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke like a dragon. This is the false prophet.

This is the sidekick of the antichrist. This is the guy who kind of speaks on his behalf and pulls down the miracles. And verse 12, it says that he exercises all authority of the first beast in his presence and causes the earth and those who dwell on it to worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed.

He performs great signs so that he even makes fire to come down out of heaven on the earth in the side of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs, which he is granted to do in the side of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and be, and cause as many as would, excuse me, let me back up to verse 15.

He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be, what? Killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand and on their foreheads that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name. You know, I've heard people say, you know, I don't think we're going to be willing to receive this little mark that's going to come on our hand or on our forehead.

You know, people are talking about it was a little barcode that used to disown everything now and so forth. And who knows what it will end up being, whether it's a little microchip that's implanted or whatever it might end up being. But the point is this, this is not something that people take voluntarily.

They're not looking at it saying, you know, I just want to take up with the beast and I'm going to make sure he knows everything about me. So I'll take this mark with me so I can buy and sell. It's going to be coerced and forced on the people.

And he's going to say this, if you don't take the mark, if you don't subscribe to my political system, you will not live. That's the dictator. That's the ruler of the Antichrist.

And the reason why people are going to do this is this. He's going to say you can't have food. You can't have shelter.

You can't have a place to live. If you don't follow me, if you don't worship me and people are going to sell their souls for food, they're going to sell their souls for shelter. They're going to sell their souls because they're going to be concerned about their children having a place to stay out of the cold and the wet.

You see, the sad thing is folks, people are going to see the temporary and they're going to think that's more important than the eternal. And they're going to give their souls and their lives to the devil through the Antichrist in Miss Heaven. So he forces this worship.

And as a result, my point is this, as a result of him bringing onto this world at the halfway point, whenever he abominates the temple, whenever he brings into the world and says, I am God, you worship me. And if you don't worship me, you're not going to have anything to buy or sell or so forth. He says, if you don't worship me, you're going to die.

Many within the church who are religious professors and not possessors are going to worship the devil and they're going to give their lives to him. And there's going to be a great apostasy. So now we know that there are two things that Paul refers to that have to happen before the day of the Lord starts.

And it is this first, the great apostasy, the great apostasy cannot take place until the abomination of desolation takes place. Whenever the Antichrist stands up, abominates the temple and calls for everybody to worship him. So now we have these two events taking place.

And Paul says this, the day of the Lord will start after these two events. Now, this is critical folks. Very, very critical because for many of us, we have learned and we have heard that we are going to escape the persecution that's going to come on the world.

I don't believe the Bible teaches us that. I believe, in fact, it teaches us, as I've shown you already many verses, that indeed the saints of God will be persecuted by the Antichrist. But some say, you know, I'm looking for Jesus, not the Antichrist.

Well, I know that whenever the Antichrist comes, Jesus is coming. I say I'm looking for signs and the signs that Jesus gave his disciples are found over in Matthew 24. And he tells us specifically there, after the tribulation of those days, he says, after the great tribulation of those days, whenever Antichrist persecutes the people of God, he says, then immediately the sun will go dark and the moon will not give us light and the asteroids will fall from the heavens and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens and he will just come with the angels and the trumpet of God and he will gather his elect from the four winds and you and I will go to heaven to be with him.

And then the wrath of God starts. Now we're going to go to Revelation now. All right.

And show you this in that same text. Look at Revelation chapter six. Now, now looking at the chronology of the seven year period, we have the first part that Jesus referred to called the birth pains, right? The birth pains make up the first four seals of Revelation six.

They are the rise of Antichrist wars and rumors of wars and famines and pestilences. And by the way, I did not point this out Sunday, but I have to make mention of this in the fourth seal. When it tells us that this pestilence came on the earth and it tells us that men were killed by the sword and hunger and death and the beast of the field.

Notice it tells us at the end of verse eight or toward the middle of verse eight, that a fourth of the earth was killed a fourth. Now, if you look at the population of the world now, it's over 6 billion. And if you have a fourth of that, that die as a result of this fourth seal, you have over a billion, 700 million people who die.

That's a lot of people. And listen to this. We haven't even gotten to the wrath of God yet.

These are just wars and rumors of wars and pestilences and famines. These are the birth pains. This is not bad yet.

It's the natural events. As we talked to have living in a fallen world that God providentially is orchestrating to bring about the return of Jesus Christ. But then it tells us in verse nine, the fifth seal is open.

And whenever you move from the fourth seal to the fifth seal, you see that little white space between verse eight and verse nine, you see that that is the abomination of desolation. That's where it occurs. That's where it fits in right there, because you know, then whenever the abomination of desolation takes place, what does the devil do? What does the antichrist do? He begins to persecute the people of God, doesn't he? That's when he pours out his fury.

And that's why when we read the fifth seal, that we have these words. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar, the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony, which they held. They're in heaven because they've been killed for their faith.

They're in heaven because they stood up for Jesus Christ. In verse 10, it says, and they cried out with a loud voice saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth. Most important verse.

And the reason why it is saying that is this. The wrath of God has not started, folks. If it had started, they wouldn't have to say that.

If the first four seals were the wrath of God, why are they then crying out for the wrath of God? They're crying out for it because it hasn't begun yet. And look at it in verse 11. Then a white robe was given to each of them and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who would be killed as they were was completed.

I love that. And you know what it tells us? You can't die as a Christian until God determines you're going to die. And if you're one of the numbered ones that he has decided you're going to die, you're going to die.

I like what John MacArthur said. He said, you know, I'm not really that concerned as to when we end up being raptured because it's not going to matter. He said, because whenever the antichrist shows up or he's anywhere near, I'm just going to go up to him and preach the gospel.

He's going to kill me. I'm going to go to heaven anyway. So, and that's a lot of people are going to be like that.

Some of the believers are going to be fervent about that. They're going to, they're going to be one of the first to be shot or beheaded or whatever happens. But the point is God has a specific number of martyrs that he has selected.

And if you are one of those martyrs, you will be one who will be given that great boldness of heart, courage to stand up and say, listen, I'm not going to renounce Christ. And if you want to take me right now, go ahead. And you'll be up in heaven and you'll be doing this right here.

You're reading what you're going to do. You're going to say, Lord, when are you going to pour out your vengeance? When are you going to pour out your wrath? And so we're now in the great tribulation. When we're in the fifth seal, that's the abomination of desolation.

And Jesus talks about, there will be great tribulation, unlike anything in the world that has ever been. He says to the Jewish people, you need to run from Judea. You need to leave Jerusalem.

Hope you're not pregnant in those days. Hope you're not running on the Sabbath in those days. Don't go back and pack anything out of your house and get out of there, he says, because there's going to be great tribulation.

So when we come to the end of verse 11, we know then that the wrath of God has not started. Listen, persecution of the people of God is not the wrath of God. People of God have been persecuted for the centuries.

If you go back, if you've ever read the Fox's Book of Martyrs, you'll know how severely people were persecuted under the rulers of Rome. Nero was one of those kind of rulers that liked to persecute the people of God. In fact, he would do some horrible things to the people of God.

He would tie them up in animal skins and send them out to the animals to be torn apart. He would dip them in pitch and light them with fire to be candles in his garden parties. He would cut their body pieces and parts off while they were alive and watch them suffer.

That was Nero. And there were ten periods of great persecution in the early church period. And then we went into the dark ages where the church went underground and Roman Catholicism really ruled and reigned during that time.

And people were burned at the stake for denying Roman Catholicism. And then we get into the time that we find even in current days when people throughout the world are dying for their faith in Christ. Listen, persecution is not the wrath of God, it's the will of God.

God has willed that we be persecuted. He says in Timothy, those who live godly will suffer persecution. He says in 1 Peter, this is the will of God even that you suffer.

That doesn't go well in North America where we like the prosperity. But that's exactly what the Word of God teaches. And here we find in verse 9-11 that we find the people of God, not all of them because obviously there's some left to be raptured, right? But many of them die for their faith.

And then in verse 12 we find this extraordinary cosmic event that occurs. The same exact thing that Jesus referred to in Matthew chapter 24 verse 29 and following. When he said the sun was going to go black and the moon wasn't going to give us light and the stars were going to fall from the sky, right? He said that.

Then he's going to come and gather his elect from the four winds and so it says in the sixth seal, verse 12, then I looked and he opened the sixth seal and behold there was a great earthquake and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood and the stars of the heaven, by the way the word for stars is ateros, it means asteroids. They fall from the heavens as the fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up and every mountain and every island was moved out of its place and the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains and said to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of his wrath has come.

And who is able to stand? It's exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 24 when he said the tribes of the earth will mourn. You see they see him. Can you imagine just for a moment that God puts every light in the universe out, it's completely pitch black and he shows up in all of his glory.

I can guarantee you this, if CNN has a generator to give us enough information over our televisions, you're going to see it. I believe you're going to see it without TV. It's going to be that much of a cosmic event.

Everything is pitch black and he shows up. So then we find out what happens after that. I can't go into the detail of this but I just want to point it out to you immediately after this and it is at this sixth seal by the way that the church is raptured right here.

Jesus says it, right? Matthew 24 verse 29 he says he gathers his elect together. That's when he gathers them, right then. The sun goes black, the moon doesn't give us light.

He gathers his elect. So we're gone. We're out of here.

Where are we? We're in heaven, right? Well before John looks up in heaven to see us there, in verse 1 of chapter 7 he sees something else take place. He sees that God seals 144,000 Jews. They are sealed after the rapture.

They become God's evangelists. They are divinely protected during this time of God's wrath. They do not experience the wrath of God.

They are divinely protected. By the way, it is also a time whenever you find the two witnesses around. They're running around everywhere witnessing.

Whether you believe they're Moses or Elijah, whoever they are, they're around the last three and a half years so they're already around. That's going to be amazing, isn't it? They're going to be doing miracles too. They're going to be telling the world about Jesus Christ and about what he did on the cross for us.

And God seals 144,000 Jewish people, 12,000 from each tribe. And then we get a little glimpse up into heaven. We move from earth now.

We go back up to heaven. John has the vision of heaven. Verse 9, I shared this with you last night, I believe.

He says, After these things I looked, and behold, a great number which no one could number. As I said, John Piper said, You can't count that high. Listen folks, this is a large group of people.

So many, no one can number them. Of all the nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. And they're standing before the throne of God.

And what are they doing? They're praising his name for salvation. They're praising his name for deliverance. That's what salvation means.

Listen, they were under the pressure of Antichrist. They were under the pressure of a dictator who wanted to take their life and the life of their children. And then Jesus shows up and raptures them out of here.

And they're in heaven in a split second and they're up there praising God. Isn't that wonderful? And of course, as would be the case in heaven if you have a couple of billion, zillion people show up, all of a

sudden, you want to find out where they came from. I mean, what bust dropped this load off? Right? And so there's this dialogue that goes on.

Verse 13, Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, who are these who are red and white? And where did they come from? And John says, listen, buddy, I'm the one just getting this revelation. You know, you tell me. In verse 14, he says, these are the ones who came out of great tribulation.

These are the saints of God who were either martyred and were already dead in Christ and were resurrected or were alive during the great tribulation and were raptured out of here. Now, I told you before that what happens is a transition here, and it's marked, it's very clear. You move from the seals, and after the sixth seal, everything becomes supernatural.

No longer is it natural. It's not the outworking of a fallen world under the providence of a holy and righteous God. It is now a supernatural work of God whereby he begins to pour out his wrath.

This begins the day of the Lord. Chapter 8 starts the day of the Lord. The church is gone, we're in heaven, and now God begins to pour out his wrath.

Look at chapter 8, verse 1. And when he opened the seventh seal, there was a silence in heaven for about a half an hour. You know what that means? It was quiet for 30 minutes. That's right.

That's what it means. It's amazing whenever you teach the book of Revelation, that old boy says something profound now. What does that mean? It means 30 minutes.

You ever heard about the calm before the storm? This is it. This is the calm before the storm. And the storm that is about to be let loose, folks, is horrible.

It's horrible. It's hard to even imagine what God could do in his wrath. But whenever we look at it, and we read through it, and we find ourselves struggling with it, that he could actually do that, what we find is that we don't truly understand how holy God really is and how sinful man really is.

Because what he does now is he pours out the wrath upon those who have rejected Jesus Christ and have decided to make the Antichrist their God. Now, what is important before we go any further in this, I hope you understand the chronology of the events. The Bible definitely teaches us that the church of God is raptured before the wrath of God.

But the wrath of God starts at the beginning of the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is clearly taught as the wrath of God. There's no ambiguity about that at all.

In fact, in the Old Testament, you can read many passages about the day of the Lord. They are prophetic in nature. And one of the Old Testament prophets says, the day of the Lord is like a man running from a lion and meeting a bear.

You just can't get away from it. No matter where you go, you are under the severe, supernatural, powerful wrath of a holy, righteous God who burns in his anger against sin. And it goes on here in chapter eight.

Now, the church is gone. The church is raptured. We're in heaven.

We're praising God. And now the wrath of God starts. Let me just go into this a little bit tonight.

OK, could we go to the next the next overhead, please? And let's see how far we are. We may have to go to the following. Let's go one more.

I think we'll be there. Are we going to go one more? Is it going? Oh, thank you. OK.

It must be one of those three eighty-six computers. Kind of slow, is it? All right. So we're looking at the beginning of the wrath of God.

Now, as you see on the the overhead up here, we have the birth pains being the first three and a half years, right? That's what Jesus said. The abomination of desolation starts exactly halfway through. That begins what Jesus said is the great tribulation, the great pressure of Antichrist against the people of God.

And he persecutes and kills the people of God. Then you have the rapture of the church. And immediately after the sixth seal and the rapture of the church, you have what starts as the day of the Lord.

This is God's wrath. Now, what I told you a long time ago now was this. You remember what Paul said and also Jesus referred to? He said these are the beginning of sorrows.

And he used a word that was referred to as birth pains. And at birth pains, you have initially they're far apart, not so severe. As you get closer to the end and the event of our Lord's return, they get much closer together and much more intense.

And that's exactly what takes place. The first three and a half years, you only have four seals. They're bad, but they're not as bad as it's going to get when you get to the seven trumpets.

They're a whole lot closer together and they're much more intense. And when you get to the bowl judgments, they happen in 30 days and they're a whole lot more intense. And then Jesus shows up riding on a white horse to set up his kingdom.

By that time, there's not a whole lot left. But let me show you this. OK, look at Revelation chapter eight.

We'll begin. We'll just go as far as we can tonight and see how far we get into this. When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about a half an hour.

Can you imagine the awe in the presence of God? You and I will be there. We will be in the presence of God experiencing this silence of 30 minutes. The church is raptured.

It's gone. Jesus has showed up in all of his glory. The earth is standing still, if you will.

It's dark. And all of a sudden, God begins to pour out his wrath. Verse two says, Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God into them were given seven trumpets.

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints ascended before God from the angel's hand.

Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings and a great earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

All of this great orchestration that is going on in heaven we are witnessing. Prayers of saints are being brought before the throne room of God. And who knows what those prayers would contain? Perhaps, Lord God, please save my mother.

Or, Lord, please save my brother. Or, Lord, please save my child. Or, in some cases, it would be, Lord, pour out your wrath.

Lord, when are you going to pour out your vengeance? As it was back in chapter 6 and verse 9. Nevertheless, we find the angels. They are prepared. They are ready.

And in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, we find that God uses angels many times to dispense His wrath. Right? Angels showed up, of course, even before God poured out His fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. And they show up many, many times before God shows and pours out His wrath.

Look at verse 7. The first trumpet now. The first angel sounded, and hail and fire followed, mingled with blood. And they were thrown to the earth, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all of the green grass was burned up.

Now you see what happens immediately. We move to supernatural events. We find hail mingled with fire falling to the earth.

And now we find, as a result of that, a third of the trees are burned up, and all of the green grass. And I don't know about you, but as far as I understand, trees and grass produce something we need desperately. Oxygen.

And now, as a result of this one event, one trumpet has sounded, and God has poured down from the heavens fire and hail, and a third of the trees are burned and all of the green grass. The second trumpet. Verse 8. Then the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain.

Now this is John the Apostle looking at this vision, seeing this some sort of asteroid coming from the heavens, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. Notice it does say this. It became blood, not like blood.

And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. And the reason why the ships were destroyed, no doubt, is because of the tidal wave of the event of this great asteroid that comes and is thrown into the sea. And now, as a result of that, all, or rather a third of the seas become blood.

Now we're only to the second trumpet, folks. And we already have a third of the trees burned up, all of the green grass burned up, and a third of the sea is blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea are dead.

And ships are destroyed. We've got a long way to go yet. And it goes on.

Now if you can keep in your mind, this is most difficult for us to do this, but if we can keep in our mind that as you move to the next trumpet and the next trumpet, the results or the consequences of the earlier trumpets are still there. There's still blood in the sea. There's still dead creatures floating up on the shoreline.

There's still ships that are destroyed. There's still smoke where you can't even see the sunlight. There's still fire burning in the trees and the grass.

And in verse 10 it says this, then a third trumpet was sounded. And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch. And it fell on the earth, on a third of the rivers, of the springs of water.

The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became Wormwood. And many men died from the water because it was made bitter.

So God not only strikes the salt water supply, He now strikes the fresh water supply. Now I understand that many men can live a long time without food, but not without water. We need water.

So God sends this asteroid, this star from the heavens. It comes and it is making the rivers of the water, the waters that we drink from, bitter or poisonous. And then the fourth trumpet sounds.

Look at verse 12. Then a fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars. So that a third of them was darkened.

A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. It isn't meaning there that you end up with only so many hours in the day because God has cut out of the sun a pie shape of a third. The idea is that you now have lessened light.

Because God takes away from the sun and the moon and the stars light. And as God pours out His judgment upon the world, it gets darker and darker and darker. And it says in verse 13, And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpets of the three angels who were about to sound.

In other words, this angel flies through the heavens, folks, and he flies through and he announces to the inhabitants of the earth, what is now coming is a whole lot worse than what you've already seen. By this time, let me just see if I can put it in perspective for you. You already have a fourth of the population that die as a result of the fourth seal.

One billion seven hundred million plus people have already died. You have the Antichrist who comes on the scene and persecutes the church of God, and many saints die as a result of that. There are more bodies to bury than can be possibly buried.

And then at the same time, God begins to pour out His judgment. A third of the trees are burning. The grass is all burned up.

The seas are bleeding. There are creatures floating up on the shorelines. There's stench from dead everywhere.

And then you have the waters that are struck. And then the angel flies through the heavens and says what's coming is a whole lot worse than what you've already seen. Now, when we move to the fifth trumpet, this is one of the most amazing trumpets in the word of God.

I must admit that whenever I read this, I am astonished because what I find here is most amazing and sometimes unbelievable. But listen to it. It says this in Revelation nine and verse one.

This is the first woe. And by the way, the word woe means cursed or damned. And it says then the fifth angel sounded and I saw a star fall from the heavens to the earth.

To him was given a key to the bottomless pit. This is the abyss, the bottomless pit. The abyss is a place where demons were cast temporarily even during the times of the apostles and Jesus Christ.

You remember whenever Jesus came to Gadarene area and there was this man running around who was full of demons? And you know, the demons begin to speak to Jesus and say, what do you want to do with us, the son of man or the son of God? And they requested Jesus that they would be able to go into the swine, right? And not to be cast to the pit or the abyss. Because what Jesus would do with demons is this. He would cast them out of people and he would cast them to the pit or the abyss.

And in this bottomless pit are millions of demons that have been put there by God. And it says in verse two, then he opened the bottomless pit and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened again because of the smoke of the pit.

Then out of the smoke, locusts came upon the earth and to them was given power as the scorpions of the earth have power. And they were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree, but only listen to this. They were commanded to harm the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

That means they could not touch the 144,000 Jews, but they were commanded to harm any other person. Now the kind of character that is given to these demons is horrific, but listen to what it says in verse five and following. It says, and they were not given authority to kill them.

Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. And here is one verse that is astounding. Verse six, in those days men will seek death and will not find it.

They will desire to die and death will flee from them. And what it is telling us, men will seek suicide to get away from the demonic power and the torture of these demons coming upon the world. Men will jump from buildings.

Men will put 38 to their head and blow their head off and still will not be able to die. The whole point is God says you die when I want you to die and that is it. And here we find God allowing of course this wrath to be poured upon the earth and this creature, this devil, opens the bottomless pit.

These demons come forth, they torture men and notice it tells us they tortured them in verse five for five months. Now of course if it was for longer you could see what would happen. There would not be too many people left.

But these creatures come forth and you can see why the angel would fly through the midst of heaven and say whoa, whoa, whoa, right to the inhabitants of the earth for the last remaining plagues that are coming upon the earth. Look at verse seven, the shape of the locusts were like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns like something like gold.

Their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like a woman's hair and their teeth were like a lion's teeth and they had breastplates like breastplates of iron and sound and their wings were like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions and there were stings in their tails.

Their power was to hurt men five months and they had a king over them. The angel of the bottomless pit whose name in the Hebrews Abaddon and in the Greek is the name Apollyon, both names mean destroyer. Many believe it is a reference to the devil.

Look at verse twelve, one woe is past, behold still two more woes are coming. It is horrible to think about the fact that we are right now as we read chapter nine of the book of Revelation experiencing the severe wrath of God.

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