

XI. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Now, What About the Rapture?”

Matthew 24

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I'd just like to brief you of where we've been in these past 11 studies of the end times. A lot of our differences come because the Bible when it talks of the end times speaks in symbolic language, apocalyptic language, which is with broad strokes, symbols and metaphors. Many of these would have been very understandable if we had been living 2100 years ago but we have to go back to that time and bring it up to our time in order to understand it. We give liberty and judgments of charity to one another as we work our way through this. Much of the reason for some of the confusion among us today is approximately 185 years ago there was a movement that began with this lawyer who said he was a theologian who claimed a number of visions. He introduced this notion that God didn't have one plan for the covenant of grace but that He actually has two plans. He has a plan for Israel and He has a plan for the church. He said God was working His theology through seven dispensations.

Dispensational theology has morphed quite a bit since then and today the seven dispensations aren't accepted but there is belief that God has two plans with a plan for Israel and a plan for the church. The plan for Israel has been put on hold at the coming of Christ and His ascension. God will pick up His plan with Israel at the end time in which Jesus comes again during a tribulation and He will rapture the church out at the beginning of a seven year tribulation which is the 70th week of Daniel. The 70 weeks of Daniel are 69 up till Christ and then there is this gap that is a church age then Jesus will have a secret second coming, not a full one, in which He raptures the church out. Then comes the seven year tribulation and the first of two second comings of Christ which is actually three second comings. There is the rapture second coming, a second coming at the end of the seven years to set up a millennium and at the conclusion of that there is a final rebellion with the thousand year reign and then He will come again. In that He will bring all these plans together going back to Israel during the thousand year reign.

Opposed to that which has been a consistent theme throughout Christianity is that God does not have two plans, but one plan called the covenant of grace. It comes through Abraham through whom God gives a nation and then in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Even though Israel rejected Christ God still accomplished His purposes and He brought the Kingdom of God and the covenant of grace through the coming of Christ and His victory on the cross. At that moment in time the Kingdom of God was taken from the kingdom of Israel and it is now in the stewardship of His church and goes to all the kingdoms of this world.

Yet God is not through with Israel as the book of Romans informs us God has a plan for Israel but it is not to go back to the sacrifices, the temple and all of those shadows. All of that is fulfilled in Christ but those of us who have been blessed by the Gospel because we have been commanded to take the Gospel to the Jew first and then to the Gentile, there seems to be this vibrant promise of the Gospel blessing of revival to the ethnic Jewish people. From us we go back to them and those broken off branches will be

re-grafted through the Gospel work into the wild olive tree and that is the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore from Daniel 9 the seventy week is being focused upon Christ establishing the firm covenant by having the victory over sin and establishing His work of grace. Because Israel doesn't respond to it, in that very generation, He brings a judgment upon them as we'll see in this study where the temple, capital, priesthood and sacraments are all destroyed because they did not affirm that sacrifice of Christ. They ended up reestablishing the veil and sacrifices after Christ's work and that became known as the abomination of desolation.

Then comes the unfolding of the Kingdom of God. The thousand year millennium is what I suggested to you as a realized millennium position that it is symbolic and the use of the number 10 as the number of completion used in consistently in the book of Revelation. So ten to the third power as the number of perfection and completion is now the thousand year reign of the Gospel moving throughout all the kingdoms of this world until the elect are brought from every tribe and nation unto Christ. It is at that time that Satan according to Revelation is now being restrained from deceiving the nations yet is allowed to rage against the church and then will be loosed for a short season in which there will be this present tribulation that then becomes a great tribulation. This is depicted by the term the battle of Megiddo or Armageddon. Many great battles have been fought there and that's the crossroads of the world but it uses that picture to describe the Lord coming at the end slaying Satan, the beast of the sea, the beast of the land and the prostitute of Babylon and bringing all glory and majesty unto Himself. It is through that period of time that the church will be under persecution yet the march of the Gospel of the Kingdom is going to be relentlessly moving throughout the entire world, then Christ comes again.

Then we picked up the matter concerning the tribulation. The tribulation is to be understood from the Bible three ways. One, the great tribulation imposed upon the Jewish people in 70 AD whereby the kingdom of Israel is brought to a conclusion and the Kingdom of God is entrusted to His people as it spreads throughout the world. Then there is this present tribulation where Jesus says to us 'in the world you have tribulations but in Me you have peace so take courage for I have overcome the world' therefore believers in the church have been under a present distress ever since His ascension and will be until His coming again yet the Lord continues to uphold His people under all this. Christ uses the persecution to spread the Gospel throughout the years of this present tribulation. Thirdly, the tribulation comes to a heightened focus where a literal blood bath is brought against the church of Jesus Christ in that short season that Satan is loosed and then Christ comes. As the Bible indicates there will be one second coming where He'll bring all things to a consummation and then will deliver us into a new heavens and a new earth. In the next study I'll tell you when I think His second coming will be.

In this study I want to answer the question of whether we'll be raptured out prior to that seven years. I don't think there is a gap between the 69th and 70th week so while I believe there is an intense tribulation I don't think that is the 70th week of Daniel. Is there any notion that Jesus has a secret second coming that the world does not see in which He raptures His church? I know movies have been made and books have been written about this and the title is Left Behind. This is where believers are taken and everyone else is left behind during the tribulation. There are two passages of Scriptures that are appealed

to here and one of them is from Matthew 24. So does the Bible teach of this type of rapture?

It wasn't taught anywhere in the church of Jesus Christ until about 185 years ago but it is taught regularly now. The vast majority are probably going to be in disagreement of what I'm going to give to you in this study about it. I came from that same era and I decided to study the Bible to see if it comes from the Bible. The key text is Matthew 24 and this contains the fifth of six sermons of Jesus. Five out of the six of His sermons are found in Matthew and of the five found two of them are considered major due to length with the third major being the Upper Room Discourse in John. This is known as the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, given on the Mount of Olives.

The context of this is this is Jesus' last week of ministry before He is crucified. He has cleansed the temple and so this is where we pick up. Matthew 24:1–2 says *[1] Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. [2] But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* They come to Him marveling. The Zerubbabel Temple was redone by Herod where one gate was 150 feet high and some would have called this the 8th wonder of the world in terms of the wondrous construction projects recorded in history. Jesus tells them this will all be cast down. You can almost hear the silence which continues until they pass over the Kidron Brook and they arrive at the Mount of Olives that evening.

Matthew 24:3 says *[3] As he 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?"* Dare I read into this? Jesus has said something that if it is true would mark the end of the kingdom of Israel. It would be the destruction of the city, the temple, the holy of holies and everything and look at this glorious project that has been built before us. To destroy something like this You must be talking about the end of the age. So they ask Jesus three things – when will these things be, referring to the destruction of the temple – when will be Your second coming – when will be the close of the age. As He answers these three questions He will continually go back and forth in His answers to these three questions. He will start with the last question.

Matthew 24:4–8 says *[4] And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. [6] 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. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

There have been wars and rumors of wars ever since the fruit was eaten in the garden. Jesus is saying that humanity, the governments and nations of this world and creation are under the very curse of sin. The curse of sin is convulsing all around you. There are earthquakes, famines, storms and it convulses in the lives of nations, peoples, wars and rumors of wars. There is nothing new about this. I do believe the indication is what has always been there since the curse of sin was introduced into this world through our disobedience, is an increasing intensity which is identified through His term of this being birth pains.

I am a strong proponent of how people had children in the 1950s to the early 1970s where the wife tells the husband it is time, he gets the belongings, put his wife comfortably in the car and makes sure they get safely to the hospital. Then you turn your wife over to people who actually know what they are doing and the husband gets out of the way until they call him back in after the birth of the child. This happened to me with my first two children but I was roped into seeing the birth of my last child and I'll never forget how that machine began to mark the coming of the child. As the birth pains were there and continued it showed on this machine as they increased in intensity both in feeling and regularity.

I believe that is what Jesus is teaching here. All the stuff that has been there will be more intense in this world of tribulation and present distress but that is not the sign so don't buy the book that says it is. Those are the birth pains that are telling you sin is convulsing and God has a plan to bring forth something out of this fallen world. He will deliver something out of it that is glorious called a new heavens and a new earth. That is why Paul said the creation is groaning to be delivered. That's why we are groaning to be delivered into His presence. Those are the birth pains but that's not the sign of the close of the age.

Matthew 24:9–14 says [9] *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. [10] And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. [11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [14] And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* So He has answered the third question – when is the close of the age.

Basically after My ascension will come an assault upon My people and you will be hated because they hated Me. You will be persecuted, killed, pursued and all those things will happen but You will have your trust in Me and endure to the end. You are enduring in the mission, message and ministry to take the Gospel to all the nations and then the close of the age will be when this Gospel has been preached to all the nations. That's why this church since the founding of it is committed to world evangelism. So here Jesus answers that first question. Now He moves back to answering their original question. He is focusing on this present generation now.

Matthew 24:15–22 says [15] *“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), [16] then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. [17] Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, [18] and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. [19] And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! [20] Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. [21] For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. [22] And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*

When this comes it will come because of the abomination of desolation. The abomination of desolation is a phrase taken from the book of Daniel in chapters 9, 11, and 12 and the key text is in Daniel 9. Let's take a look at this text. Here the people have

returned from the Babylonian exile and runs for 490 years all the way up to the second coming of Christ. There is no gap between the 69th and 70th week but the 70th week is fulfilled in the days of Christ. Daniel 9:26–27 says [26] *And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing* (this is the death of Christ). *And the people of the prince* (referring to Titus of 70 AD) *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. [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* (Christ bringing to an end the offering and sacrifices when He died on the cross for it all). *And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.*”

This is what Christ is referring to in Matthew 24. When Christ goes to the cross and brings into existence the firm covenant, establishes the victory over sin, has brought to an end all ceremonial laws of sacrifices and offerings which are fulfilled in Christ, then that generation does the abomination of desolation. It is not Titus who does this but it is that generation who continued the sacrifices and offerings after Christ had brought it to a consummation. Now God brings a judgment to bring an end to the city, the kingdom and pours forth a judgment with a tribulation such has never been experienced before by Israel. Israel has experienced many tribulations but never has the wrath of God been poured out to bring to an end its kingdom. The historian Josephus writes that even in those days that cannibalism began to take place in Jerusalem.

Now these years later in 70 AD comes the judgment of God. At that time He tells them that you should have already fled. Extra Biblical material by two historians Josephus and Eusebius write about as that day began to approach in 66 to 70 AD the noted flight of Christians from Jerusalem to a place called the Pella Mountains, even as Christ had instructed them to do. They didn't wait until the last minute. They realized that God's judgment was about to fall through Titus himself. In light of that Jesus now moves back to these questions. He is back to the believer.

Matthew 24:23–25 says [23] *Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. [24] For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. [25] See, I have told you beforehand.*

They could be led astray by these religious works of power which Satan was behind but Jesus wants them to focus on the truth, the Word of God. When Satan works it's not a true miracle but it is beyond our explanation. Look at Egypt. What was one of the reason they were to follow Moses? It was because he could do signs, wonders and miracles but when he did the miracle of turning the staff into a serpent the Egyptian magicians did the same thing but it wasn't chicanery or illusion. But the serpent of Moses swallowed them whole and there is the power of God of the One who power greater than the one who has power greater than you. Don't become a seeker of miracles, not that we don't pray for or long for them when God has appointed to use them for His glory and it's not that the lack of miracles is a lack of faith, it's just that it is God's sovereign appointment. God's great miraculous work of His providence upholds His people. Yet people who are fascinated by miracles will be opened up to false christs and prophets.

Matthew 24:26–28 says [26] *So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. [27] For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [28] Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

So the next question Jesus answers is when are You coming again? He says when the corpse has been laid out. He will come again like lightning from the East and shines as far as the West. In other words when He comes again you’ll know it for there will be nothing secret about it. When He talks of the corpses and vultures He is speaking of the depravity of humanity coming to its consummation. The nations have gathered around the corpse of humanity that is in rebellion against God. When sin has been measured out and up then Christ comes in judgment. It’s amazing to see us as a culture making decisions that assure our destruction culturally and that will happen throughout the world as Satan is loosed for a short season. The nations will be deceived and that depravity will come to its consummation. Then the Savior comes like lightning from the East shining all the way to the West. It will be the universal awareness of His second coming. Then He goes on to explain the coming of the Son of Man even more clearly.

Matthew 24:29–31 says [29] *“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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [30] Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all 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. [31] And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

So when will He come again? He will come after this present tribulation has morphed into that great tribulation, the depravity has filled itself up, and the nations have gathered like vultures around the corpses of humanity and they are feeding upon it in rebellion against God. Immediately after that Christ comes like lightning with this second coming being a worldwide awareness and as He comes the very heavens and earth will convulse for the final time as the old heavens and old earth will be rolled up and a new heavens and a new earth will yet to be rolled out. The sign that will appear will be Him, Jesus, Himself.

The sign of the Son of Man could mean two things. One is that the Son of Man will have a sign but it could mean that the Son of Man is the sign. There is nothing secret about it at all. We will be here to see Him because we haven’t been taken out for we are enduring to the end. He will come when the elect have been saved. You have already had step one which is the great tribulation upon Israel. You are already seeing the convulsion of wars and rumors of wars with the birth pains. You have already seen the increasing tribulation and assault upon His people. Satan is loosed for a short season. Depravity is seemingly winning the day as the culture eats itself alive. Then Christ comes to bring His church to glory and judgment upon humanity. You will not only see Him but you will see Him who has gathered the elect from all the corners of the earth.

Why hasn’t Jesus come back yet? It is because wickedness hasn’t been filled up. It is because the Gospel hasn’t been preached to all the nations. It is because all the elect haven’t been saved. One day there will be a Christian who leads someone to Christ who ends up being the last one that needs to be saved for then the elect will have been

gathered in and none are lost but all taken to glory in Christ. Then Jesus gives an illustration in the next part.

Matthew 24:32–35 says [32] *“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. [33] So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. [34] Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. [35] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. His Word is unbreakable and will be fulfilled. It yet remains, which will be the last generation to see this in its completion and its consummation. So when will that day be? I will give you the day and hour in the next study.*

Matthew 24:36–39 says [36] *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. (Jesus is speaking in His humanity here. The God who put in place all the laws of algebra would have to learn algebra as the Son of Man and so as He is speaking here not even the Son of Man would know that time. Now we get back to answering the disciples questions.) [37] For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [38] 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, [39] and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

In the coming of Christ He will judge the world by fire whereas in the days of Noah He judged the world by water. At that time He raised up a type of Christ and a type of Christ’s work – Noah and the ark. Noah began to preach righteousness and call people to repentance but they didn’t believe him and they mocked the call to safety, redemption and deliverance. They were saying nothing was going to change and it would be business as usual in the culture as they went about drinking, eating and giving in marriage. Then the judgment of the water came. Jesus is saying that His second coming will be like in the days of Noah. Jesus represents the ark also. If you’re not in Christ and the Ark then the judgment when the Son of Man comes will fall upon you. Then He continues.

Matthew 24:40 says [40] *Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.* Just like in the days of Noah, one is taken and one is left behind. Who was taken in the days of Noah? The unbeliever was taken. This isn’t a rapture of believers. This is a reminder that if you’re not right with Christ, when Jesus comes you’ll be like those in the days of Noah, taken away in judgment. If you’re in Christ, like Noah, you’ll be left behind. Noah was left behind and deposited from the ark in a cleansed heaven and earth. You will be left behind and deposited, not in a cleansed heaven and earth, but in a new heavens and earth.

Matthew 24:41 says [41] *Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.* Jesus is an equal opportunity person. He puts women in here as well. Now you don’t know the day or the hour but you know He’s coming just like the illustration with the fig tree. You know that things are coming to a conclusion, a consummation. The coming of Christ will not be like a thief in the night for you for you will be looking and you will have your lamps lit. You are anticipating and longing for it but it will be like a thief in the night upon the unbeliever – business as usual. Then Christ comes and there are no second chances, no mulligans, no preaching of the Gospel again but taken away in judgment. So what should you, as the believer do?

Matthew 24:42–44 says [42] *Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. [43] But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. [44] Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

I believe there will be a sense of the season but you won't know the day or hour nor do you need to know the day or the hour. You just need to know that He is coming and that you'll be ready. If I happen to know that He was coming tomorrow and my job was to prepare for next Sunday's sermon, I would be preparing next Sunday's sermon. I would be doing what I was called to do.

After my dad left baseball he opened up Auto Parts stores and there was a group of people who named a date and an hour that Jesus was returning right there in North Carolina, out of Charlotte. One of these people owned an auto parts store and said he was going to sell it based on this information so my dad with his scots-Irish blood low balled him in an asking price and the man agreed saying, "It's not going to do you any good." Those people went to the church that day and climbed up in the Oak trees so that they would literally be the first ones up. What was the result? My dad got an auto parts store at a good price.

That is just foolishness. You live your life in light of Christ's coming at any day and any hour for you'll know the season. Whatever is right to do in that day and hour then do it so that when He comes He won't find you exotically climbing a tree but He'll find you faithful with your lamp lit ready for His coming. I do believe you'll sense the seasons in that time and will know its close. I want to close by looking at a text in I Thessalonians 4 and how this is used to teach the rapture. I will come back to this topic in the next study as well.

In I Thessalonians 4 they have sent Paul a letter asking when Jesus is coming and wondering if they had missed it. I Thessalonians 4:13–18 says [13] *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep (believers who have died), that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [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 (the one second 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. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

So what will happen? Jesus will come back. He will capture His people up into Himself. He will roll up these heavens and earth and will deposit them in a new heavens and a new earth with a new body to be with Him forever. There He will have established the judgment for those who don't know Him go to the lake of fire and those who do know Him go to the final state, the eternal state of a new heavens and a new earth. There is nothing secret here at all. It is happening at the trumpet of God, the coming of the Lord. When will that happen? It will happen when the Gospel has been preached to all the nations and all the elect have been gathered in where God's full measure of sin and

rebellion comes to its consummation. Then He comes to bring judgment upon it and an end to it to gather His people to Himself. It will come like a thief in the night for those who go about business as usual mocking the Gospel.

It will come to those who are ready even though they don't know the day or the hour for they long for Him and they have safety because they have come to Christ, not because they have done better. They have rested in Him, the Ark of their redemption, Christ the Lord of glory. Those who aren't in Christ are taken away. Those who are in Christ are left behind for the new heavens and the new earth for our judgment has already fallen upon Christ and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So with all due respect for my dear brothers in the Lord, Left Behind is a nice title but you have the wrong people. It's not the unbeliever that is left behind at the rapture but it is the believer that is left behind in Christ for a new heavens and a new earth. The unbeliever when Jesus comes will be taken away suddenly but it will not be sudden for you the believer. You will be ready. In fact, go read Matthew 25 and light your lamp. Be ready when the Bridegroom comes for His bride. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. I'm grateful to You for its clarity. Allow us to have our study of Your Word framed by Your Word and taught by the Holy Spirit. We are grateful Father for the wonderful debate that believers can have and realize there can be differences of opinion but there aren't differences of truth. Help us to know the truth. Help us to know the second coming accurately. Help us to know the anticipation of what awaits Your church now and for eternity and help us Jesus to stay fixed on Christ, You our Lord. May we say to You Jesus, come quickly Lord Jesus for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.