

**PART ONE: The Nature of the Rapture**

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** - We will be looking into God's word at the nature of the rapture, the practical value of the rapture in our daily lives and thinking and finally, the timing of the rapture in relation to other future events on God's calendar. God does not want us to be without the information regarding death and our future. Some believers flippantly say, that it does not matter what God is going to do and we should not concern ourselves with these details of death and the resurrection and the catching up or rapture of those who have trusted Christ. However, here, it is obvious God does not want us to be uninstructed and in the dark. The first reason that he gives us after that it that He does not want us to grieve like the unsaved who have no hope (=positive future expectation). This does not mean that we will not grieve at the death of a fellow-believer, especially a spouse, parent or child or close friend. It is just that the nature of our sorrow will be different. One of the paradoxes of the Christian life mentioned in 2 Cor. 6:10 is that we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. In the midst of all our sorrow, we experience joy because if that individual has placed their trust in Christ, we know that they will be with Christ bodily in the future and present now in their soul or spirit (2 Cor. 5:8 cp. Rev. 6:9-11).

The reason that we believers are not to grieve like the unbelieving world who has no hope (=future expectation) is the fact that we believe that Jesus died and bodily rose again. If (=since – the word “if” has a first class condition in the Greek which means that what is spoken of is assumed to be true ) we believe this, then God will bring with Christ those who are in Christ who have died. There are two possible meanings for this. The first possible meaning is that God will bring the souls/spirits of those who died with Jesus as He descends. When the bodies of believers are raised from the dead, these souls/spirits will be reunited with their respective bodies. The second possible meaning is that when Jesus descends and those who are in Christ who have died meet Him in the air, He will take them to where He is going. Since we know that both of these meanings are true, we just do not know which one is intended here. The term “sleep” does not mean that believers are not conscious between their death and resurrection. The body of the dead believer or unbeliever sleeps, but their soul/spirit is conscious (Rev. 6:9-11; Luke 16:19-31). As we continue looking at this passage, we are reminded that it is just as true as the death and resurrection of Christ Himself.

The words “caught up” in this passage is where the word “rapture” has its origin based on the Latin translation of the New Testament Greek manuscripts. When Jesus returns, there will be two groups of believers for which He is coming. When Jesus returns it is very clear that those who are dead will actually rise first out of their graves or place where their physical remains were and be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. Then those believers who are physically living when Jesus returns will actually be caught up with these resurrected believers in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. At the time Jesus comes, there will be these sounds: a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. This event speaks only of those who are in Christ. To be in Christ, one must trust Christ as Savior which results in being baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ Himself (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 2:11-12; Gal. 3:27). Keep in mind that Spirit baptism is the reality and water baptism which

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follows salvation at some point is the picture of that reality but is not the reality itself. This would exclude all those believers who died prior to Pentecost when Spirit baptism began. They will be raised with the tribulation believers (Dan. 12:1-2; Rev. 20:4-6) according to those who hold to the teaching that the rapture precedes the 7 year tribulation. Those who hold to the view that the rapture follows the tribulation either raise these people up at the same time as those “in Christ” or in other cases do not discuss the meaning of the words “in Christ.” From this point on believers will always be present with Christ. The practical value of this passage is that these words are to be used to comfort or encourage (same Greek word is used for both of these words) one another as believers, especially when there is the loss of a loved one who has also trusted Christ.

**1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 58** - When the word “mystery is used in scripture, it refers to a truth not revealed in the Old Testament but now revealed in the New Testament. The resurrection of the dead was taught in the Old Testament (Dan. 12:1-3; Job 19:25-26). The new truth is not the resurrection of the dead but the fact that everyone including both the dead and the living would be changed in their bodies. The first verse explains that not believers will die but that they will all be changed. This will occur in a moment of time and so will be instant. All believers who have died will be raised with bodies that are imperishable (=not subject to decay) and that are immortal (=not subject to death). All believers who are living will have their bodies changed to be imperishable and immortal. When this happens, death will be swallowed up in victory. It will not yet be abolished for that will await the New Heaven and New Earth mentioned in Rev. 21:4. However, for those who have trusted Christ as Savior, we will have our victory over death at the point that He comes for us. The last trumpet has been a point of differing views. Some who place the rapture of believers at the middle of the tribulation see it as the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet in Revelation. Those who place the rapture of believers at the end of the tribulation see it as the trumpet of Mt. 24:31. Those who place the rapture prior to the tribulation see it as simply the last of a series of trumpet blasts such as was done by the Roman army when they broke camp with the last blast of the trumpet being the one in which they were to move out of the camp. They also point out that the trumpets of Revelation and Matthew are the trumpets of angels whereas the trumpet of the rapture is the trumpet of God (1 Thes. 4:16). In addition, they make the point that the trumpet in 1 Cor. 15:52 is for the church whereas the trumpets of Revelation and of Mt. 24:31 are trumpets of judgment. We will look in detail at the time of the rapture in relation to the other events. The practical value of the rapture must not be missed. As believers, we are to be steadfast or stable in our thinking and behavior and not be moved away from the truth in our thinking or behavior and to be continually working for the Lord knowing that what we do for Christ will not be for nothing in view of our resurrection.

**John 14:1-3** - This passage is often misused to refer to the death of the believer. It actually refers to the rapture. In death the believer departs to be with Christ (2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 4:6-8) and his soul is taken there by the angels (Luke 16:22). In the rapture the Lord Jesus comes for the believers (1 Thes. 4:16-17). Jesus states that there is plenty of room where God the Father dwells in heaven. Jesus is preparing a place for believers of this age or time period between His first and second coming. The word “place” shows that heaven is not just a

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state of mind but an actual place. After doing this, Jesus will come again and receive us to Himself as taught in 1 Thes. 4:16-17 and 1 Cor. 15:51-54. We are promised that we as believers will be with Him. It is very interesting to note that those believers who are raptured have a place prepared for them in heaven. When Jesus judges the living nations, i.e. Gentiles, at the end of the tribulation the sheep, i.e. saved, will enter the kingdom in their natural bodies (Mt. 25:31-34). That kingdom has been prepared for them from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34). For these reasons, we see a contrast between believers living in the present time period beginning at Pentecost and ending at the rapture and people who become believers during the tribulation by comparing John 14:2 with Mt. 25:34. The important point that we must not miss is that we are to respond to the truth of John 14:1-3 by not worrying and a continual trust in God and Christ to direct and order our lives.

***Philippians 3:20-4:1*** - Notice that Jesus has the power to subject all things to Himself. He will use that power to change our bodies when we are raised from the dead or simply changed (if living when He returns). He will change our bodies to be like His resurrection body. It is an actual body with flesh and bones and not simply a spirit (Luke 24:39). It is a body that will be visible and able to be touched. This event awaits the rapture. We are told in 1 Cor. 15:51-54 that these bodies will be not subject to decay and not subject to death. In the meantime we are citizens of heaven rather than the world although we are in the world (John 17:14-16). Our response is to demonstrate firmness by being consistent and stable in our obedience to God's word.

***1 John 3:1-3*** - We see from this passage that when Christ comes for us as believers that we will experience not only a total bodily makeover and/or resurrection. We see that we will be changed in our character and disposition to be like Christ. It has been revealed as to what we will be, but what we will be has not yet appeared. There is confusion in some of the translations using the word "revealed" but it should be translated by the word "appeared" as in the NASB. We who are now children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (John 1:12) have the assurance or knowledge that we will be like Christ. God predestined us to have that likeness. Throughout our earthly lives, our encounters with the scriptures and suffering are designed to conform us to the likeness of Christ. It is in seeing Christ as He is—in His glorified state—that this process will be completed. Every believer who possesses this hope or confident expectation with regard to the future continually involves himself in thinking and doing that which will take out the sinful behaviors and thoughts, and substitute right behaviors and thoughts. Our model for this is Christ Himself because we purify ourselves as Christ Himself is pure. The present tense is used in the Greek of the word "purifies" which emphasizes that this is an ongoing process in this life. The finished product of complete Christ-likeness awaits the return of Christ for us.

***Luke 14:12-14*** - This passage clearly establishes the time when believers will be judged and rewarded. It will be at the time when they are raised from the dead. We know that the unsaved dead will not be raised until the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ. This passage also gives insight to what types of behaviors will bring reward. The emphasis is what we do for other believers that cannot be repaid in this life by them. We are promised that will God

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reward us at the time we are raised from the dead. If what we do for other believers is repaid in this life, then there will be no future reward for us. The question we must ask ourselves as believers is, am I giving because I love the brethren or am I giving because I expect that I will receive something from the brethren? Am I serving because of what Christ has done for me, or am I serving because of what's in it for me here and now?

**Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:9-10** – One of the events that happens at the time of the rapture will be an appearance before the judgment seat of Christ. We notice that all believers will be present for this judgment. The purpose of this judgment is not to determine whether the believer enters hell or heaven. That was determined at the time Christ was trusted for salvation (John 3:18, 36). It is very clear that the believer is delivered from any judgment of condemnation (John 3:18, 36; 5:24; Rom. 8:1, 33-34). The purpose of this judgment to reward believers for the deeds they did while in the body. The good deeds are those deeds that will last while the bad deeds (not bad in the sense of sinful but lacking value) are those which will not last (1 Cor. 3:10-15). We see that our good works will be rewarded (cp. Gal. 6:9). Our ambition or goal is to be pleasing to Christ whether we are present with Him at death or absent from Him while still living on this earth. This means that it is not our goal to please people (Gal. 1:10) or ourselves (Rom. 15:1). We will be giving an account of ourselves to God. One of the practical issues that the passage in Rom. 14 raises is that we must not judge other believers who are less restrictive than we are on issues not commanded or forbidden by scripture. In addition, we are not to show contempt for or look down on believers who are more restrictive on issues not commanded or forbidden by scripture. In conclusion, it is best to keep short accounts with God and confess any sins now so that we will not have to give a more detailed and explicit account later.

**1 Cor. 3:10-15** - This gives us more information regarding the judgment seat of Christ and how the issue of rewards will work. Our lives are compared to a building. Laying the foundation of the building is equivalent to trusting Christ for salvation. Notice that we cannot lay any other foundation than Christ. Christ is clearly the only way of salvation (John 10:1, 9; 14:6; Acts 4:12). The deeds or works that we do after salvation are equivalent to building upon that foundation. The lasting and valuable works that we do are compared to gold, silver and precious stones. The works that are not valuable and not lasting are compared to wood, hay and straw. Each believer's work will become evident or obvious when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Each believer's work will be tested by fire. Notice that it is the quality rather than the quantity of each believer's works that will be tested. Any good work (built on the foundation, i.e. after trusting Christ for salvation) of lasting value that survives the test will be rewarded. Notice that any believer's work that does not survive will be burned up, but the believer himself will be saved even though it will be like one who escapes a house fire without any possessions. Even though the believer who sees his work burned up will be saved from the presence of sin, he will still suffer loss. Notice that this believer will not enjoy the loss. While I think we must be careful not to turn this event into some kind of Protestant Purgatory, all suffering does not end until we are in the eternal state in heaven (Rev. 21:3-4) and all memory of the old order will be erased (Isa. 65:17). There will be memory while we are reigning with Christ on the earth during the 1000 year kingdom (Rev. 5:9-10; 20:6; Mt. 12:41-42).

**PART TWO: The Timing of the Rapture**

***Revelation 3:10 - Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (NASB)***

This verse is one of the key verses that helps establish the timing of the rapture in relation to other future events. Obviously, no one knows when the Lord Jesus is going to return (Mt. 24:42). It is very important to note the meaning of phrases and words by seeing how they are used in scripture and in particular John's writings. This verse has been mutilated by many of the modern translations and paraphrases. However, the KJV and the NASB do a great job in preserving the actual meaning. The first question is: what does it mean to keep Christ's word? Look at John 8:51 where it says, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."*** (NASB) Jesus is obviously speaking of the second death in this verse. Since we are told that faith in Christ is the sole condition to receive God's provision and gift of salvation 150 times in the New Testament, the concept of keeping Christ's word is simply placing one's faith in Him and the testimony of God's word concerning His substitutionary death and bodily resurrection. In addition we must note that the aorist tense is used of the words "have kept" and "keeps". This emphasizes an event that took place at a fixed point of time in both passages. The only possibility is the point of time that one exercised faith in Christ. If we do not understand John 8:51 in that way, we pervert the gospel of Christ by adding something we must do in addition to believing in order to be saved. Notice it is the word of Christ's perseverance (Christ said here "My perseverance") not our perseverance as some translations have so badly mutilated the verse. Salvation is not a matter of our perseverance. It is a matter of God's perseverance and Christ's perseverance as clearly shown in verses such as Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8 and 2 Tim. 1:12. We will continue building upon what was discussed in this paragraph in the coming paragraphs on this verse and also address some common workarounds used by those who hold other viewpoints on the timing of the rapture.

In the previous paragraph, we noted that the identity of the ones who kept the word was the same as one who had trusted Christ for salvation based on John's use of that term in John 8:51. We also noted that our salvation is about God's perseverance and not our own based on Phil. 1:6. Observe carefully that this hour of testing, i.e. the tribulation (7 year time period that precedes the 1000 year kingdom of Christ) is going to test those who dwell on the earth. The phrase "those who dwell on the earth" is used of unbelievers throughout the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8). Those who dwell in heaven in Rev. 12:12 and 13:6 obviously speaks of believers. This time of testing, i.e. the tribulation is going to come upon the whole world. The Greek word for world speaks of all the inhabited earth. Some have objected to identifying this hour of testing with the 7 year tribulation. They believe that it refers to some historical event in the ancient world. Based on the information in the balance of the book of Revelation, it does not appear that this is very plausible. Others say the word "hour" should be taken in a literal sense but John uses the term "hour" for a time period in John 5:24-25 and 5:28-29. The "hour" in 5:24-25 has lasted for 2000 years as spiritually dead people have been hearing God's word and living spiritually. The "hour" in 5:28-29 lists the resurrection

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of life and the resurrection of judgment in which the judgment of each group is separated by a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6). By understanding the word “hour” as referring to a time period, this clears up any mystery and difficulty in understanding Revelation 3:10.

We noted that the testing coming upon the world, i.e. the seven year tribulation is going to test those who are primarily unbelievers. The promise for believers is that we are going to be kept from the time of the tribulation. Much detailed discussion has occurred regarding whether the words “keep you from” mean not to be there or to be kept through the event, i.e. the tribulation. However, Ryrie in his commentary cuts across all this back and forth discussion by pointing out that the promise is that believers will be kept from the time of this event, i.e. the tribulation. It is one thing to be kept from an event and perhaps kept through it, but it is quite another thing to be kept from the time of that event. That would simply mean you would not be there. This is one scripture that clearly shows that the church (all true believers from Pentecost to that time) will be taken out. This would require a pre-tribulational rapture. Those who advocate a different timing for the rapture in relation to other prophetic events would try to explain this away by various views. One view is that this applies only to the local church at Philadelphia. I have coined the term “localizing away the clear teaching of scripture.” The problem with the “addressed local church only” approach is that one could state that 1 Thes. 4:16-17 only applies to the church at Thessalonica. We could say that the promise of the Holy Spirit only applies to the Apostles in the upper room in John 14:16-17. Others refuse to interpret the scripture in a plain and normal sense. Another view is that some other crisis besides the tribulation is in view but as we noted in the last meditation, that this view does not fit with rest of the book of Revelation at all. Failing to interpret this scripture in the context of the book of Revelation and the scripture as a whole sets up the one studying this passage to much uncertainty. I want to strongly urge those who read this study to look up the scripture references in a good translation like the New American Standard translation because it is the entrance of God’s word that gives light (Psalm 119:130).

**Revelation 6:16-17; Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11** - In looking at the time of the rapture in relation to other prophetic events, we see that God’s wrath arrives early in the tribulation according to Rev. 6:16-17. God’s word promises that those who are presently justified by Christ’s blood will be saved from the wrath of God through Christ in Romans 5:9. If believers of the present church age were present during the tribulation, they would be recipients of God’s wrath. However in 1 Thes. 5:9-11, the promise is that we have not been destined for wrath and will obtain salvation from any future wrath of God. Regardless of whether believers are awake, i.e. alert or asleep, i.e. indifferent (see table below), they will not experience God’s wrath.

Awake 1 Thes. 5:10	Asleep 1 Thes. 5:10
“Awake” is same Greek word as “alert” in 1 Thes. 5:6	“Asleep” is same Greek word as “sleep” in 1 Thes. 5:6-7
“Awake” is a different Greek word than alive in 1 Thes. 4:15, 17	“Asleep” and “sleep” are a different Greek word from “sleep” referring to death in 1 Thes. 4:13-14

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What this is saying is that regardless of one's level of spirituality as a believer or one's lack of spirituality as a believer, all believers comprising the church (all believers from Pentecost until the rapture who comprise the true church) will not experience the wrath of God poured out at the early part of the tribulation which begins in Revelation 6:16-17 and ends with the return of Christ to earth to set up His kingdom and judge the living Gentiles and Israel. The word "therefore" in 1 Thes. 5:11 looks back at the discussion of 1 Thes. 5:4-11. Notice that the practical implications of this are that believers are to be involved in encouraging one another to live spiritually alert lives and to build up one another which simply means to promote the likeness of Christ in one another's lives. We will be discussing the term "Day of the Lord" in our study of 2 Thes. 2:1-7.

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-7** - To understand this passage, it is important to understand the phrase "The day of the Lord". It is very interesting to see this phrase not only in the New Testament but in the Old Testament as well. This phrase is not to be confused with "the day of Christ." The "Day of Christ" is spoken of in 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16. This is the event that begins with the rapture, resurrection and reward of the believers of the present time period of the church. Keep in mind that the seven year tribulation precedes the setting up of Christ's 1000 year kingdom on the earth. A careful reading of Isaiah 2:12-21 and Revelation 6:12-17 shows us that the Day of the Lord begins during the first half of the tribulation during the last part of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. This is evidenced by the earthquake and men hiding in the caves. By reading Isaiah 34:1-8 and Revelation 19:19-21, we observe that the Day of the Lord continues through the battle of Armageddon at the close of the tribulation when the world's armies gather for battle. Zechariah 14:1-21 explains that the Day of the Lord will include the second coming of Christ to earth, accompanying events and His reign over the entire earth which will last 1000 years (Revelation 20:4-6; 5:9-10). Finally 2 Peter 3:10-13 shows us that the Day of the Lord ends with the dissolution of the present earth and heavens by fire and the formation of the new heavens and earth. 2 Thes. 2:2 explains that the Thessalonian Christians thought that they were in this time period due to their sufferings and somehow being misled (by demon, message or letter purporting to be from Paul and were confused regarding what they had been previously taught. In light of this, 2 Pet. 3:11, 14 urges us to live lives that are holy, godly, spotless, blameless and peaceful. In the next paragraph we will look at events preceding the Day of the Lord not only from this passage but other scripture passages as well.

We have noted that the Day of the Lord is a specific time outlined in Biblical prophecy which begins in the first half of the seven year tribulation which occurs just prior to the return of Christ to rule with believers and extends all the way through Christ's 1000 year reign on earth and finally ends with the destruction of the present heavens and earth. We also noted it is distinct from the "Day of Christ" which speaks of the time of the rapture of believers living during the present time period of the church. We will see that there are four events which precede the Day of the Lord. In Malachi 4:5 we see that the return of Elijah precedes the Day of the Lord. By comparing Revelation 11:2-6 with 2 Kings 1:10-12, it seems rather obvious that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses. While the return of Elijah will precede the Day of the Lord, so his martyrdom will occur during the middle of the tribulation by which time the Day of the Lord will be occurring (Rev. 11:3, 7).

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By comparing Joel 2:31 with Rev. 6:12-17, we see that the moon will be turned into blood and the sun darkened (Rev. 6:12-13) in the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal right before the Day of the Lord begins in Rev. 6:16-17 at the concluding part of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. 2 Thes. 2:3 states that the apostasy or falling away will occur prior to the Day of the Lord and this agrees with Mt. 24:9-12 and Rev. 6:9-11. Notice that the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> seal of Revelation will occur prior to this (Rev. 6:3-8 cp. Mt. 24:6-8). 2 Thes 2:3 also states that the man of lawlessness also noted as the Antichrist will be revealed prior to the Day of the Lord. This is supported by the first seal of Revelation 6:1-2. Dan. 9:27 also supports this as the Antichrist will show himself by making a firm covenant with Israel for a period of seven years (a week of years is 7 years). It is very important that the reader review this paragraph and the previous paragraph and carefully read and study the scriptures used. Without understanding what the term "Day of the Lord" means and entails this passage cannot be solidly understood and much confusion will result.

In reviewing, we discussed that the Antichrist will be revealed prior to the Day of the Lord. 2 Thes. 2:4 explains what the Antichrist will do during the Day of the Lord. He will exalt himself and oppose any other god or object of worship. He will take his seat in the Jewish temple of God and present himself as being God. Jesus referred to this as the Abomination of Desolation predicted by the prophet Daniel. According to Dan. 9:27, this will occur at the half-way point of the 7 year tribulation and will involve the Antichrist setting up this Abomination of Desolation on a wing of the temple (see Dan. 9:27 NIV translation). At that time, there will great persecution on the part of the Antichrist and Satan according to Mt. 24:15-21 and Rev. 12:13-17 against the nation of Israel and many Jews especially Jewish Christians will have to flee for their lives on very short notice. In 2 Thes. 2:5 we see that Paul kept on telling the Thessalonians these things regarding future events and the timing of them. Acts 17:2-10 shows that Paul was with them for only 3 weeks. Yet he took time to repeatedly tell them these things. This serves as a solemn warning to pastors and Bible teachers not to neglect teaching new converts the scheme of future events outlined in God's word. Many of them still obviously lacked understanding of future events according to 2 Thes. 2:1-2. As a result, patient instruction in this area was needed. In our next paragraph we will discuss how the identity of the restrainer and the relationship of the restrainer to future events will help us to see the timing of the rapture in relation to other future events.

So far, we have seen that the Day of the Lord begins at some point in the first half of the tribulation at the conclusion of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. It then continues through Christ's Second Advent when He returns to earth, through Christ's 1000 year reign including the rebellion led by a freed Satan after that time period and concludes with the destruction of the present earth and heavens. We also saw several events that precede the Day of the Lord and occur during the early part of the tribulation. One of these is the revealing of the Antichrist called the man of lawlessness. We noted that this will become obvious when he makes the 7 year pact with Israel spoken of in Daniel 9:27. The first earthly event mentioned in the book of Revelation with regard to the tribulation is the first seal when we see the Antichrist revealed. God's word tells us that the only thing that keeps him from being revealed is some type of restrainer. There are several views on the identity of the restrainer. The first view is that Satan is the restrainer. However, John 8:44 states that he was a murderer from the beginning and the



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source of lies. 1 John 3:8 goes on to say that Satan kept on sinning from the beginning. Reasoning from Matthew 12:24-26, if Satan were restraining evil, he would be fighting against himself. Others have taught that human government is the restrainer based on Rom. 13:3-4 which shows this. However, human government will not be taken out of the way during the tribulation as evidenced by Rev. 13:2, 7; 16:13-14. The third view is that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer. Gen. 6:3 shows that the Holy Spirit was a restrainer of evil. 2 Thes. 2:6-7 shows that the restrainer is a "what" (neuter pronoun) in verse 6 and a "he" (masculine pronoun in v. 7). The neuter pronoun is used in Rom. 8:16, 26 for the Holy Spirit (the Greek word for Spirit is neuter). However, in John 14:16-17, 26, the masculine pronoun is used of the Holy Spirit which is a violation of normal Greek grammar. If one uses the Old King James version of the scriptures, this can be clearly seen. No other candidate for the restrainer uses both the masculine and neuter pronouns. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the restrainer. The Holy Spirit permanently indwells every believer in Christ (John 14:16-17; Rom. 8:9). It is not said that the Holy Spirit is taken out of the world but that He is taken out of the way. He will still be present to give new life to those who place their faith in Christ during the tribulation. However, with the removal of believers, His restraining influence through believers will be greatly reduced. Believers are said to be salt and light in a dark and condemned world (Mt. 5:13-14). If we are gone, how on earth will anyone trust Christ during the tribulation?

**If believers are raptured before the 7 year tribulation, how will anyone trust Christ during the tribulation?** There will be two witnesses specially selected by God during the first 3 ½ years of the tribulation (Rev 11:1-12). Their first converts will be the 144,000 Jews from 12 tribes (Rev. 7:1-8 cp. 14:1-5 – see the word "first fruits" in Rev. 14:4). These 2 witnesses along with the 144,000 and the angel in Rev. 14:6-7 will see that the gospel goes out to all the earth. As a result a multitude (not a majority by any means – Mt. 7:13-14) will trust Christ for salvation (Rev. 7:9-17).

**Revelation 4:4, 10-11** - Another support for the pre-tribulation rapture is the fact that the 24 elders are pictured as seated in heaven (prior to the events pertaining to the tribulation's onset in Rev. chapter 6). They are clothed in white garments which represents the righteous deeds of the saints, i.e. believers (Revelation 19:8, 14). They are seated on thrones which show that they have authority. 1 Cor. 6:2-3 tells us that believers of the present church age are going to be involved in the judgment of the angels and of the world. In addition these 24 elders have crowns on their heads. There are two Greek words for crowns. There is the ruler's crown (diadema) such as will be worn by Jesus (Rev. 19:12) and the victors crown (stefanos) such as are given as rewards for believers (1 Thes. 2:19-20; 1 Cor. 9:24-25; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). Rewards are given at the resurrection of the righteous according to Luke 14:14. This leads to the conclusion that these 24 elders represent the church (=all believers in Christ from the day of Pentecost until the time of the rapture). Here we see them in heaven already rewarded which strongly shows that those believers comprising the church will already be raptured. The rewards consisting of crowns (stefanos) will be thrown or laid at the feet of God to praise Him in heaven.

**Hebrew Marriage Custom Points to a Pre-tribulational Rapture**

**2 Corinthians 11:2** - This corresponds to the church that is said to be betrothed or pledged to be the bride of Christ as in Ephesians 5:23-32. This speaks of the present relationship of the church to Christ. In addition the bride of Christ is said to be His body in this passage. This was the first phase of the Hebrew marriage custom.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** - This speaks of the second phase of the Hebrew marriage custom in which the groom comes for the bride.

**Revelation 19:7-9** - This speaks of the third phase of the Hebrew marriage in which the groom comes with the bride to the marriage supper. Christ is said to be returning with His saints in 1 Thes. 3:13; Zech. 14:5 and Jude 1:14. While the Greek word for “saints” can be translated “holy ones” and could just as easily refer to angels, it is not so easy to make these references in Rev. 19 out to be angels. Revelation 19:11-16 shows Christ returning with the believers on white horses. These are clearly identified as believers as clarified by comparing Rev. 19:14 with Rev. 19:8. Looking at Revelation chapter 19 as a whole, it is obvious that the believers are those that are the bride of Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:23; Matthew 13:41-43, 48-50** – It is important to contrast the rapture in which Christ comes for the church (those who are “in Christ”) who will meet Him in the air with the resurrected dead coming first and the living believers then coming up together with them. In doing this the saved are taken out from among the unsaved. However, when Christ returns to earth with His church (those who are the bride and body of the Lord Jesus Christ – see Eph. 5:23-33), the unsaved will be taken out from among the saved according to Mt. 13:49). This means that there will be people who were saved during the tribulation following the rapture and preceding the 1000 year reign of Christ who will enter and populate the 1000 year kingdom of Christ. This solves the problem that comes with the error that the rapture and return to earth are at the same time. There would be no one to enter the kingdom and reproduce since believers in their resurrected and changed bodies will not marry (Mt. 22:30). Matthew 25:31-46 explains how the sorting of the saved and unsaved occurs at the end of the tribulation. The saved Gentiles who survive the tribulation will actually live on the earth and have children during the 1000 year reign of Christ. The saved or those righteous by faith will shine as clearly as the sun in showing forth the righteous character of God. The practical application for us who are now living is to remember that since we live in the kingdom of God (although it is not fully revealed as it will be when Christ returns) from the moment we trust Christ (Col. 1:13), we are to do our honorable deeds in such a way that it glorifies God the Father (Mt. 5:16). This way we can shine to some degree now in relation to how we will shine when the kingdom is fully revealed at Christ’s return to earth.

**Matthew 24:38-41; Luke 17:34-37** - Many believers have understood the taking of one individual and the leaving of another refers to the rapture. After all, something very like this will happen at the rapture. However, we know Matthew is not speaking of the rapture but the return of Christ to the earth. There are some very pertinent items to be observed. We noticed in Mt. 13:49 in our previous meditation that the wicked would be taken out from among the righteous when Jesus returns to the earth. When the disciples asked Jesus in Luke 17:37, where the people taken would be transported, Jesus gave them an answer that indicated that they

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would be taken away to judgment not to heaven or some exalted place. Furthermore, when we look in Mt. 24:38-39 at the judgment in the days of Noah, it was the unsaved who were all taken away by the flood. In Mt. 24:40-41, it would logically follow that the ones taken away are taken away for judgment. This would be in harmony with Mt. 13:49 and Luke 17:37. Matthew 24:42 tell us that the practical application is be spiritually alert. To be spiritually alert is to be discerningly evaluating events and opportunities in light of the uncertain time of Christ's return.

***Philippians 4:5; Titus 2:11-13; James 5:7-9*** - Many of the teachers who teach that the rapture occurs before the tribulation and distinguish it from the second coming to earth make the error of saying that the Greek words make that distinction. However, the more studied believers who teach the pre-tribulational view point out that all the Greek words that speak of the rapture also are used to speak of the second coming to earth. The most important distinction to be made is that the rapture is imminent. This means that it can occur at any moment. There are no signs that have to be fulfilled prior to this event. The second coming to earth which follows the tribulation will be preceded by numerous unique signs that have never been duplicated in human history. Matthew chapter 24 and Revelation chapters 6-18 detail those events that will serve as signs of the second coming to earth. The fact that the rapture is pre-tribulational and imminent has very practical value in how we live the Christian life. Philippians 4:5 reminds us that gentleness on our part is to be shown to everyone because Christ could return at any moment. The word for "gentleness" is opposite of being self-willed. This word speaks of being yielding, flexible and accommodating toward others. We work to validate what is correct in their understanding and shine the light of God's word to help clear up what is incorrect in their understanding. Titus 2:11-13 states that one of the motivations that helps us to live sensibly (=by reasoning from God's word and not from emotions and preconceived notions), righteously (=by God's standards and not human standards) and godly (=pleasing God first and not ourselves or others) in the present time is the anticipation of Jesus' coming for us. James 5:7-9 would show us that the anytime return of Jesus for us is to promote and motivate patience in our lives, stabilize our hearts, i.e. our thinking, and avoiding complaining against one another. In summary, the pre-tribulation understanding of scripture looks for the Savior with signs coming after He comes for those of us who comprise His spiritual body by faith in Christ while the post-tribulational understanding of scripture looks for signs before the Savior comes. The pre-tribulational view promotes the best division of God's word. Keep in mind, though, that believers who hold to the post-tribulational view are beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to conduct ourselves in a Christ-like manner toward them and seek to promote the likeness of Christ in their lives.

***Revelation 19:7-8, 11-16*** - Many books have been written setting forth a post-tribulational rapture position. The rapture is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-54. Christ descends from heaven and those who have trusted Him, i.e. those who are "in Christ" (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16) rise to meet Him in the air. Then both Christ and those who meet Him return to the earth. Revelation 19:11-21 describes believers as returning with Christ which is also taught by Zechariah 14:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 1:14-15. During that descent

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all the armies at Armageddon are killed and the Antichrist and False Prophet are captured alive and thrown into the lake of fire. Even if one accepts the contention that Zechariah 14:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 1:14-15 refer to angels returning with Christ, it does not remove the return of believers with Christ in Rev. 19:11-21 as can easily be seen by comparing Rev. 19:14 with 19:7-8.

The Post-Tribulational position sees the following sequence:

- (1) Christ descends and believers rise to meet Him in the air.
- (2) As they descend with Christ, the armies at Armageddon are killed by Christ and the Antichrist and False prophet are thrown alive into the Lake of Fire.
- (3) The rest of the unsaved, who are alive, are gathered together and thrown into the lake of fire.
- (4) Matthew 13:41, 49-50 make it clear that all those who are lost are gathered and that they are taken from among the righteous. If the righteous were already caught up as in #1 above, there would be no righteous people for the wicked to be taken out from among them as stated in Matthew 13:49.

An alternate solution that Post-tribulationists might offer to the problem raised in the preceding paragraph is:

- (1) Christ descends from heaven and the angels with Him. The angels gather the wicked from among the righteous. They are subsequently judged and thrown into the lake of fire.
- (2) The righteous or saved are caught up to meet the Lord in the air and they return to earth.
- (3) The problem is that as the righteous return with Christ, the armies of Antichrist are to be killed. How would that be possible if they were already gathered from among the righteous as stated in point # (1). Matthew 13:41 plainly states that all of the unsaved or wicked will have been gathered. If all are gathered, there would be no army at Armageddon to be killed. Also the Antichrist and False Prophet would have been seized.

As can be seen these scriptures cannot harmonize in either one of the post-tribulational models of Christ's return. The pre-tribulational model easily harmonizes all these scriptures.

- (1) Christ returns prior to the tribulation and church age believers (those "in Christ") are caught up to meet Him in the air and return to heaven.
- (2) The resurrected/glorified church-age believers return with Christ who kills the armies of the Antichrist gathered at Armageddon and then the Antichrist and False prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire.
- (3) The angels are sent forth and separate the unbelievers who physically survived the tribulation from among the people who became believers during the tribulation and physically survived it.

A final problem with the post-tribulational position is the fact that everyone would be in a resurrection body and who would populate the earth during Christ's 1000 year reign.