

Studies in Daniel #10 – The Rapture and Christ’s Second Coming

Theme #8: The “Saints of the Most High” (continued)

In the last lessons we saw many references in Daniel to the Antichrist (called “the little horn”, “the king of fierce countenance”, “the prince that shall come”, and the “willful king”). We also saw several references to a people contemporaneous with the Antichrist - “the saints of the most High”, a godly and holy people who know God, have understanding, “do exploits and instruct many” (11:32-35), and turn many to righteousness (12:3), but they are warred against, and overcome, by the Antichrist (7:21, 8:24-25, 11:33-35, and Rev. 13:7). In their glorious end however, they will be resurrected to shine as the the brightness of the firmament (12:2-3) and will possess the kingdom of God for ever and ever (7:18, 22, and 27).

Persecution of the Saints by the Antichrist

We know that persecution has been a reality throughout Jewish and church history, and that it should be considered normal (Ac. 14:22). But Daniel focuses mainly on the end times when the Antichrist is revealed to describe times of targeted persecution against Jews and Christians. Why would this be? Because he is the Anti-Christ – he opposes everything that is of God, and exalts himself. He is empowered by Satan himself, and since Satan hates God, he of necessity hates God’s people who are called by His name. Satan obviously knows God’s intention to give the kingdom to His people, and so Satan is filled with contempt and hatred for us. We have the comfort and confidence however, in knowing that (as in the life of Job) Satan can do nothing against us that God does not allow, and if God does allow it, then it is somehow intended for our ultimate good, and His glory.

The last lesson ended by bringing up another issue often asked, **Will there be Christians present in the Tribulation?**, if we believe in a pre-tribulation rapture.

Unsurprisingly, there are any number of interpretations of the scriptures dealing with end-time events. “Amillennialists” do not believe there will be a literal thousand year reign of Christ as described in Rev. 20. Millennialists believe that the thousand year reign will be preceded by the 7-year “great Tribulation”, but differ as to when there will be a rapture – before, during, or at the end of the Tribulation. I believe the pre-tribulation rapture is correct and avoids many of the difficulties in the other theories.

1. We must first understand that **there is a difference between Christ’s coming to rapture the saints, and his coming to defeat and vanquish the Antichrist and set up His Kingdom** (as in Daniel and Revelation).

Rapture	End-of-Tribulation Return
Christ returns invisibly (to the unbelieving world). It occurs in the “twinkling of an eye”. 1 Cor. 15:51-52	<u>All</u> the world will see him, “every eye”. Rev. 1:7, Mt. 24:30
There are no preceding signs. Mt. 24:36-41	His coming is preceded by great signs in the sun and moon and heaven, Mt. 24:29
He comes “in the air”, but not really to the earth. 1 Thess. 4:17	He also comes in the clouds, but then his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4)
Purpose: to catch up resurrected and living saints to be with him 1 Thess. 4:17	Purpose: to fight against the nations that have gathered against Jerusalem (Zech. 14:3).
Changed saints go from earth up to heaven. 1 Thess. 4:17	The saints come from heaven <u>with</u> him at his return. Zech. 14:4, Rev. 19:11-14 (Saints come from heaven to earth)
The resurrected and raptured saints are just the firstfruits.	There will be a complete resurrection of saints, the “first resurrection”, upon whom the second death has no power. Rev. 20:4-6

What follows the resurrection/rapture is the rise of the Antichrist, a great falling away, 7 years of the great Tribulation, tremendous judgments of God on the earth, and tremendous numbers of people saved and martyred. 2 Thess. 2:3-12 and others	The second coming is followed by the defeat of the Antichrist and the armies of the earth, Antichrists' judgment into the lake of fire, deliverance and salvation of the Jewish survivors, a physical restoration of the earth, the binding of Satan in the "bottomless pit", and a thousand year reign of Christ with his saints, on the earth out of Jerusalem. Rev. 19-20 and others
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2. **The rapture is imminent – it could happen at any time.** There is nothing keeping it from happening but the sovereign will and plan of God.

The second coming of Christ is NOT imminent, because there are several significant things that must happen first – a great falling away, the rise of the Antichrist (the man of sin), and therefore the 7-year tribulation period. Since the antichrist is said to put the abomination of desolation in the temple, and causes the daily sacrifices to cease, it is also apparent that a new temple must be built, and a Jewish sacrificial system must be restored.

3. **There will be multitudes martyred during the tribulation,** and the Antichrist will overcome them (temporarily). So obviously, yes, **there will be Christians present on earth during the tribulation.**

This is probably the biggest objection to a pre-millennial rapture – if all the Christians are raptured first, what about all the scriptures that speak of the great numbers of Christian martyrs during that period? I believe this is answered in two ways – first, the rapture will not be of all Christians, but a "firstfruits", and second, there will be a tremendous number of people being saved in the Tribulation (both Jewish and non), despite the great judgments and persecution.

4. **Who will be raptured?** Obviously Christians, but I think it is naïve to think that this includes everyone who says they are a Christian. The parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins is a warning that only those who are prepared and waiting will be taken in to the wedding. There are many professing Christians who are living shallow and careless lives, with never a thought of Christ's return. Do we think that they will be taken up? If so, why the warnings to watch and be ready? Obviously some will NOT be ready, and will NOT be watching, and will NOT be taken up to meet Christ in the air. The rapture is of overcoming Christians. The rapture will be a great separation between the wise and foolish virgins. The wise will go to be with Christ in the air. They will be together with Christ in heaven, while his judgments (Rev. 6-19) are being poured out on the earth in the Tribulation. At the Second Coming, we will return with Christ on white horses for the defeat of the Antichrist and the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom here on a physically restored earth.

5. **But what of those who are left behind?** 2 Thess. 2:10-12 says that because they received not the love of the truth, God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, and be damned. However, I believe that there is a difference between such resisters-of-truth, and those who really are Christians, but are careless and foolish. The careless Christians who were not watching and ready will probably take one of two courses: the majority will probably be part of that "great falling away", but there may be a number who quickly grow up and get serious about following God. Unfortunately for them, the Antichrist will persecute them and multitudes will be martyred. This great martyrdom is seen in Rev. 6:9-11.

I believe that those who wrongly profess to be Christians, will fall into two groups – some will be deluded and ultimately damned (2 Thess. 2), but some will become saved and often martyred. Many others, who have never been Christians at all, will also be saved – 144,000 Jews (Rev. 7:1-8), and an innumerable multitude from all nations (Rev. 7:9-17). Who are they? 7:14 – "These are they which came out of [the] great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

6. **The Bible teaches us to be ready and watching,** so that we are not caught unready at Christ's return. Mt. 24:42 says "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." This will (God willing) be the topic of our next lesson.