

The Case of the Missing Saints
(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)
Rocky Jackson - November 24, 1999
Section 10 of 13

The Rapture in Revelation

Our task now is to determine, if possible, where the Rapture may be found within the events of Revelation. We have gathered many clues. By summarizing our Casebook Notes we see that we need to look for the following:

1. Signs in the Heavens – Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:24,25, and Luke 21:25,26.
2. The Last Trumpet – 1 Cor. 15:52, 1 Thess. 4:16, and Matt. 24:31.
3. Desolating Sacrilege/Great Tribulation – 2 Thess. 2:3,4, Matt. 24:1-25:46, Mark 13, and Luke 21:5-36.
4. The Two Harvests – Matt. 13:24-30 and Matt. 13:36-43.
5. The Lord Coming in the Clouds – 1 Cor. 15:23, 1 Thess. 4:17, 2 Thess. 2:1, Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:26, and Luke 21:27,28.
6. The Voice of the Archangel – 1 Thess. 4:16.
7. The Shout of the Lord – 1 Thess. 4:16.
8. The Thief in the night – 1 Thess. 4:15, 5:2,4.
9. The day of the Lord – 2 Pet. 3:10 and 1 Cor. 15:23.
10. The resurrection of the living – 1 Cor. 15:51,52, 1 Thess. 4:15-17, Matt. 24:31, and Mark 13:27.
11. The judgement of the nations – Matt. 24:1-25:46.

Signs in the Heavens

We find unusual signs in the heavens spoken of in conjunction with the Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:12-17 – IV.F. on my outline) and the Fourth Trumpet (Rev. 8:12 – IV.G.4.).

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (Rev.6:12-17)?

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12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise (Rev. 8:12).

It appears that there will be a continual string of signs in the heavens much like the wars and rumors of wars along with the other birth pangs Jesus spoke of in His Olivet discourse.

The Last Trumpet

The last of the seven trumpets of Revelation is found in Rev. 11:15 (IV.G.7.). The sounding of the seventh trumpet seems to bring events to a final culmination. It includes the final seven bowl judgements and can be seen lasting from Rev. 11:15 through Rev. 16:21. We do not definitively know that this trumpet is the last trumpet spoken of in 1 Cor. 15:52. However, if we find the Rapture within this portion of Revelation, then it could fit.

After the Desolating Sacrilege and the Great Tribulation

The Desolating Sacrilege is described in the eighth sidebar (Rev. 13:1-18 – S8). It is in the midst of a group of sidebar articles located between the Seventh Trumpet and the First Bowl. We know from the passages we've reviewed in the gospels that this Desolating Sacrilege marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

The two Harvests

In Revelation 14:14-20 (sidebar S12), looking forward to the final seven judgments, we are told about two harvests which will occur. These are the final two climactic events that the human race will experience before the Lord begins his earthly reign. In the first one, the Son of Man reaps the harvest of the earth, which we are told is ripe. This is a look ahead to the rapture.

14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped (Rev. 14:14-16).

The second harvest is of the vintage of the earth. This harvest of grapes is destined for wrath. They are gathered and thrown into the great winepress outside of the city where they are crushed. We're told that blood will flow out of the winepress and rise as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of "a thousand and six hundred furlongs." This will occur at the battle of Armageddon.

17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

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18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs (Rev. 14:17-20).

The order of gathering the harvest of the Lord and the vintage of the earth is not the same here in Revelation as it is in Matthew where the tares are gathered first and the wheat last. We must ask the obvious question, "Why?" Are these harvests different events? We don't have enough information to answer these questions at this time. We'll have to hold on to them until we learn a little more.

The Lord Coming in the Clouds

Referring back to the scripture of the two harvests, we see in Rev. 14:14 that the Son of Man is sitting on a white cloud with a sickle in His hand ready to take His harvest.

14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle (Rev. 14:14).

The Voice of the Archangel

In the next verse, Rev. 14:15, an angel comes out of the temple and cries with a loud voice that it is time to reap the harvest.

15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe (Rev. 14:15).

The voice of the archangel is referenced in 1 Thess. 4:16-17, which says:

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

This is not a definitive fulfillment of 1 Thess. 4:16, but it is a possibility.

The Shout of the Lord

In Rev. 16:1 a loud voice is heard coming from the temple. It commands seven angels to go forth and pour out the contents of their bowls on the earth. These are the final plagues with which the wrath of God on the earth is completed.

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth (Rev. 16:1).

Could this voice from the temple which commands the angels be the shout of the Lord referred to by 1 Thess. 4:16?

The Thief

We refer to the Rapture as the time when the Lord Jesus Christ gathers his own from the ends of the earth and the ends of heaven. It is also referred to as the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14 and Acts 24:15) or the resurrection of the living (John 5:29). Perhaps our most common association is as the time when our Lord Jesus Christ comes like a thief to steal His own out of the world. We see this in Matt. 24:43, Luke 12:39, and 1 Thess. 5:2,4. About the Rapture we are also admonished to “watch” in Matt. 24:42-44, Matt. 25:13, Mark 13:32-37, Luke 12:35-40, and 1 Thess. 5:6-7.

Is the time when the Lord comes like a thief found in Revelation? Yes, in the sixth bowl judgment that is found in Rev. 16:12-16 (IV.G.7.f.). Here we see that the Euphrates River will be dried up to allow the armies of the East to come to the battle of Armageddon. Three evil spirits will be let loose to gather the kings of the whole earth to the battle. Then, at that time, Jesus tells us that He will come as a thief and we will be blessed if we watch and keep our clothes so that we will not be seen in our shame and nakedness. Finally, we’re told that the mobilization of the armies will be completed when they are gathered together at Armageddon.

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16).

Most commentators either ignore verse 15 or they treat it as a misplaced promise that we will miss all of this. However, the Holy Spirit doesn’t make mistakes. This verse didn’t get lost in the heavenly word processor and then get pasted here by accident. Neither did Jesus ask the angels to spread the pages of Revelation out so He could throw a dart to randomly find a place for this extra verse. No, Jesus tells us explicitly here in His Revelation that the Rapture will occur during the time of the sixth bowl judgment, while the world’s armies are gathering for the battle of Armageddon.

How long will it take to gather these armies? In the Persian Gulf war of 1990, it took the allies six months to gather enough men and materials to push the army of Iraq out of Kuwait. For this battle angels will help to prepare the way and many of the armies will be close by. Will three months, a season, be long enough to gather them together? We see, then, that this passage does not reveal the day or the hour of the Rapture, but only the general season when it will occur.

Now, remember the question we're holding? Why is the order of the harvests we see in Matthew and Revelation different? We see from the passage we just looked at that the Rapture occurs while the armies are gathering for Armageddon. The Rapture occurs in a moment, at a single point in time. It will take a season of undefined length for the armies to gather. So, the harvest of the vintage of the earth or the tares begins first but finishes last. Therefore, either order would be appropriate. If one's perspective was the start of the harvest, then the harvest of the tares begins before the harvest of the wheat. On the other hand, if the end of the harvest is in view, then God's grain is harvested first followed by the harvest of the vintage of the earth.

The day of the Lord

The day of the Lord or Christ's millennial reign is found in Rev. 19:1-20:15 (V.). We know from 2 Pet. 3:10 that the Rapture is the first or initiating event of this day. Here there is some overlap with the preceding events in the article on the Redemption of the Earth (IV.). For we saw above that the Rapture occurs during the sixth bowl judgement (IV.G.7.f.). We then attend the marriage supper of the Lamb that is found in Rev. 19:1-10 (V.A.). Then we return with our Lord to the earth for the Battle of Armageddon in Rev. 19:17-21 (V.C.).

The First Resurrection

Following the battle of Armageddon and its conclusion with the binding of Satan for a thousand years, we find another reference to the Rapture in Rev. 20:4-6 (V.E.). Here we're told about the Lord's followers who return with Him at His Second Coming. They have been resurrected and will reign with Him during his millennial reign. We are told specifically in verse five that, "This is the first resurrection." We have seen that the Rapture and the resurrection of the dead in Christ occurs at the same time. In fact, in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 we're told, "...and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).

There is one group of believers that is specifically mentioned as part of this first resurrection. They are the martyrs who would not receive the mark of the beast or worship him.

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They have obviously lived and were martyred during the great tribulation. Here we see that the first resurrection, the Rapture, can not occur before the tribulation or these believers could not have a part in it.

The judgment of the nations

We saw in the outline of the Olivet discourse in the gospels that the Rapture would precede the judgment of the nations. There is still consistency with Revelation as the judgment of the nations is found in the passage we just looked at (Rev. 20:4-6 – V.E.). Here we have been raptured and returned with our Lord to judge the world.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - Our Lord Jesus Christ in the role of a thief, Rev. 16:15.

What? - The harvest of the earth and the first resurrection, Rev. 14:14-16 and Rev. 20:4-6.

When? - During the sixth bowl judgment, while the armies are gathering for the battle of Armageddon, Rev. 16:12-16.

Where? - From the earth to be with the Lord, Rev. 20:6.

Why? - Because the harvest is ripe, to escape the second death, to be priests of God, and to reign with Christ a thousand years, Rev. 14:15 and Rev. 20:6.

How? - By the sickle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Rev. 14:16.