

STUDY SEVENTEEN – RAPTURE VS SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Some people confuse the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ, but in this study, we will see five key differences between these two separate and distinct events. The words "Second Advent" and "Second Coming" are both names for the exact same event.

Once again, the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ are two separate events in our present age—the Church will be caught up in the air to meet Christ and will be removed from the earth for a time, and the time frame that follows is a period the Bible calls the Tribulation, also known as the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. The Tribulation will begin at that moment and will last for seven years. At the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, Christ will return visibly to the earth with His saints, and that event is called the Second Coming of Christ.

DIFFERENCE NUMBER ONE: IN THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH, JESUS WILL RETURN FOR HIS SAINTS—AT THE SECOND COMING, JESUS WILL RETURN WITH HIS SAINTS

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Here we see that when the Rapture of the Church occurs, Jesus will come for His people to retrieve and snatch them from the earth before the seven-year Tribulation period begins. That seven-year Tribulation period in Scripture is also called the "Day of the Lord," and this phrase refers to the unique period during which God will pour out wrath upon the earth.

"So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." (1 Thessalonians 3:13)

At the 2nd coming of the Lord, He will be coming WITH all His saints.

DIFFERENCE NUMBER TWO: IN THE RAPTURE, JESUS WILL RETURN IN THE AIR—AT THE SECOND COMING, JESUS WILL RETURN TO THE EARTH

When the Rapture occurs, Jesus will descend into the lower atmosphere to deliver, rescue, remove, and snatch us into the air to meet Him in the clouds. After that, we will immediately be transported to Heaven for the seven-year span of time during which our works will be carefully examined by Christ Himself at the Judgment Seat of Christ and we will be rewarded accordingly (see 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). And, of course, all believers will participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (see Revelation 19:9).

When these events are completed in Heaven at the end of seven years—and when all God's wrath has been poured out on the earth during this same time frame—that is when Jesus will return to the earth in His Second Coming with His saints and set His feet upon the Mount of Olives. This is the Second Coming of Christ.

Just before Jesus ascended into the heavens, we are told in Acts 1:9-12, "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

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Thus, these angels declared to the disciples that at the Second Coming at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, Christ will return visibly—exactly as He left them—and He will set His feet on Earth, upon the Mount of Olives. The Rapture will occur in the air, and Jesus will never touch the earth at that time. But at the Second Coming of Christ, Jesus will literally, physically return to the earth and set His foot upon the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

DIFFERENCE NUMBER THREE: THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH IS A CLANDESTINE OPERATION—THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST WILL BE VISIBLE WORLDWIDE

Another major difference between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ is that the Rapture will be a clandestine operation that occurs exclusively for believers, but the Second Coming that will occur at the end of the seven-year Tribulation will be visibly witnessed by the entire world.

First, let's look at the clandestine nature of the Rapture. In Matthew 24:36-41, Jesus said:

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.”

The word "left" in these verses is significant. We have seen that those who do not belong to Christ are tragically "left behind." For those who are left on the earth after the Rapture, it will be a very desperate moment. Jesus used this word to picture those who are working side-by-side and going about their daily routines, when suddenly one of them is caught, taken, or snatched away, while the other is painfully left behind with deep regret and sorrow.

The Second Coming of Christ that occurs seven years later, at the very end of the Tribulation period, will be an event that is visible and witnessed by the entire population of the world. There will be nothing clandestine, covert, or stealth about it.

In Matthew 24:29-30, Jesus said, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will **appear** in heaven, 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."*

Jesus said that at the end of the Tribulation period, *"the sun [shall] be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."* Notice Jesus said the sun will be "darkened." The word "darkened" is interpreted from a Greek word that describes obscurity or utter darkness. By using this word, Jesus states that at the very last moment of the Tribulation period, the light of the sun will literally be put out and there will be utter darkness. He continues to say that "the moon shall not give her light." Since the moon is a reflector of the sun, it is obvious that if the sun turns to utter darkness, the moon will no longer be able to reflect or to give light, and the earth will experience utter darkness.

Jesus then states in that moment, *"the stars shall fall from heaven."* Jesus then adds that *"the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."* The word "powers" is interpreted from a form of *dunamis*, and it pictures the strength resident in the "heavens." As a phrase, it literally means the very powers and strength of the highest heavens will be shaken to the point that they will waver, totter, and be moved.

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In Matthew 24:30, Jesus says, *"...Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven."* The word "sign" in Greek is semeion, which denotes a visibly clear sign or something that is clearly visible. When all the lights go out, suddenly Christ will appear in the heavens in such a way that the whole world will visibly see this event. In fact, Matthew 24:30 says, *"...And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn..."* In this grand event, the whole world will see Christ as He descends with thousands of His saints, and there will be those on the earth who will "mourn" when they see Him.

At that moment, the whole world will visibly see and witness the Second Coming of Christ. That is why Jesus goes on to say, *"...And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."* Thus, we know there will be nothing clandestine about this event, for all the people of the world at that moment will behold this dazzling moment.

DIFFERENCE NUMBER FOUR: IN THE RAPTURE, JESUS WILL NOT TOUCH THE EARTH—AT THE SECOND COMING, JESUS WILL PUT HIS FEET ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

This section is similar to "Difference Number Two" that we looked at previously, in which we saw that Jesus in the Rapture catches away His Church in the air (not on the earth)—but at His Second Coming, He actually does put His feet on the earth.

It's easy to see that the Rapture of the Church is an event that will occur in the air, above the earth, and in this event Christ's feet will never touch the earth—rather, He will gather us to Himself in the air.

But at the Second Coming of Christ, which occurs at the end of the seven-year Tribulation, Jesus will visibly return with innumerable numbers of His saints to deal with evil and set everything in order—and He will set His feet upon the Mount of Olives. The prophet Zechariah spoke of Christ's Second Coming when he wrote, *"Behold, the day of the Lord is coming.... And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east..."* (Zechariah 14:1-4).

In Acts 1:9-11 records the same event. The place where Jesus ascended into Heaven was the Mount of Olives (see Acts 1:12), and what the angels mentioned in Acts 1:10 and 11 confirms the prophet Zechariah's prophecy that when the Lord returns to the earth in His Second Coming, He will physically return to the very same mountain from which He ascended into Heaven. And He will annihilate the Antichrist and establish His Kingdom headquarters in the city of Jerusalem.

DIFFERENCE NUMBER FIVE: IN THE RAPTURE, JESUS WILL COME TO DELIVER THE SAINTS—AT THE SECOND COMING, THE SAINTS WILL COME TO RULE WITH HIM

In First Thessalonians 5:9-10, Paul said, *"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."* God has not appointed us to wrath!

BY THE POWER OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS, WE ARE SAVED FROM THE WRATH OF GOD

But in Romans 5:8-9 (NASB), Paul furthermore said, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."*

Once again, a principle that Paul regularly stated is that God will deliver His people and not leave them to experience His wrath that will be poured out during the seven-year Tribulation. Christ will snatch and receive the Church to Himself so that where He is we will be also (see John 14:3).

After the Church has spent seven years in Heaven with Jesus, enjoying the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and being rewarded for what we did in obedience to Jesus on the earth, the saints will return with Him

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to the earth to reign and rule. This will be the fulfilment of First Thessalonians 3:13, Jude 1:14-15, and Revelation 1:7. Among many other prophecies, these verses state that at the Second Coming of Christ, Jesus will return with His saints to reign and to rule. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and Jude 1:14 are especially important, so let's look at each of these verses.

In First Thessalonians 3:13, Paul wrote, *"so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."*

Here, Paul referred to the moment when Christ will come with all His saints at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, which will, indeed, be a moment of great rejoicing when Christ sets up His Millennial Reign and rules with His people.

In Jude 1:14-15, Jude wrote, *"Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.'"*

With these words, Jude directly quoted from the Book of Enoch, which is not a canonical book of the Bible, but in early New Testament times, it was regarded as an authentic work that contained serious Old Testament commentary. Enoch was a patriarch in biblical history, the son of Jared, and the father of Methuselah, and one of the earliest prophetic voices of the Old Testament.

The words "ten thousands" are interpreted from a form of the Greek word *urias*, which here pictures an innumerable multitude.

IN SUMMARY

We have seen that there are five key differences between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ. The Rapture of the Church is the next prophetic event to occur in the sequence of events at the end of the age, and although we don't know the exact day or the hour, we know we're nearing that event on God's timetable, and it could occur at any moment.

When Jesus warned us of signs that would occur at the end of the age, He communicated them in such a way that those times would be easily recognizable, not obscured or difficult to understand. Jesus gave us concrete markers to let us know where we are on our journey, approximately how close we are to our destination, and what we need to know so we can remain safe and effective on the path.

It is my personal conviction that we are living in the last moments of this present age. If you have not read the signs, you will see before Jesus comes, I urge you to read it because Jesus gave specific predictors in Matthew, Mark, and Luke to let us know that we are leading up to the closure of this era. By reading these three Gospels and comparing what Christ said in each of them concerning these events, we can assemble a list of things He said we would see as we approach the territory of the very last of the last days. In these Gospels, Jesus even forecast that these particular signs would escalate in intensity as we approached the very end of the age.