

Is the Rapture Next? Part 4



- Do you think Christians will go through the Great Tribulation or will the rapture happen before then?
- Is the rapture next on God's calendar?

A careful study of the various Bible passages that describe Christ's second coming shows that it will occur in **two phases**—the **rapture** and the **return** (also called the **revelation**). One Bible teacher explains Christ's second coming like a *two-act play separated by a seven-year intermission* which is the Tribulation period. The Rapture and the return focus on two different purposes and are separated by time.

Is the Rapture Next on God's Calendar? Or Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?

In the Christian community, there have been DIFFERENT viewpoints concerning the time of the rapture. The debate deals with the question—will Christians go through the seven-year tribulation period or be raptured before it? Are Christians to be looking for the any-moment return of Christ and the rapture, or the horror of the antichrist and the Great Tribulation? There are five major positions concerning the relationship of the rapture to the Tribulation period. (See chart).

1. **The Pre-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers will be raptured *before* the seven years Tribulation.
2. **The Partial Rapture:** Only faithful believers who are *spiritually worthy* will be raptured *before* the Tribulation.
3. **The Mid-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers will be raptured in the *middle* of the Tribulation.
4. **The Pre-Wrath Rapture:** All believers will be raptured *five and a half years* into the Tribulation, just *before* God's wrath is poured upon the wicked world.
5. **The Post-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers surviving the Great Tribulation will be raptured at the end of the 7 years, the same time Jesus returns to the earth.

The conviction of this Bible study is that the rapture happens **before** the seven years Tribulation. The any moment return of Jesus Christ to rapture the Church and take her to the Father's house is the believer's **blessed hope** (Titus 2:13).

The Holy Spirit permanently indwells every Christian and they will be raptured when the restrainer is removed from the earth.

Review

1. The Anticipation of the Early Church Concerning the **IMMINENT** (Any moment) Return of Christ.
2. The Promise of **EXCLUSION** from the "Hour of Trial"—Revelation 3:10.
3. The **NATURE** of the Tribulation Period & God's Promise to Keep His People from His **WRATH**.
4. The **REMOVAL** of the **RESTRAINER** Before the Beginning of the Tribulation —1Thessalonians 2.

"6 And you know what is **holding him** [Antichrist] **back**, for he [Antichrist] can be **revealed** only when his time comes. 7 For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until **the one who is holding it back** steps out of the way." NLT

Q1. What indications do you see of evil forces active in today's world?

Q2. Why is the man of lawlessness not revealed yet? (v.6)

Q3. What will happen to allow the man of lawlessness to be revealed? (v.7)

το γαρ μυστηριον ηδη ενεργειται της ανομιμας
The for mystery already is working - of lawlessness

μονον ο καταχων (present participle active masculine)
only the one restraining [He continually]

αρτι εως εκ μεσου γενηται (aorist subj. middle)
at present until out of midst he might be [gone Himself]

2 Thessalonians 2:7

Paul states in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 that the Antichrist is not able to be revealed because there is a restrainer who is "**holding it back.**"

The Greek aorist tense for the verb "**revealed**" (v.6) indicates that this disclosure will be a **decisive act** that will take place at **a definite moment in history**—when the restrainer is removed.

In verse 7, Paul refers to the restrainer in the **masculine** - "**the one**" (NLT) "**he**" (NIV) who will eventually "**steps out of the way.**" That is, remove Himself. The Greek word for restraining is masculine gender.

Q4. What indication do we have that the restrainer is a person? What gender is the restrainer?

The *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* explains: "Though many explanations for 'the restrainer' have been offered...in light of the supernatural character of 'the one holding back,' the use of the masculine article in verse 7 (the neuter article here is because the Greek word for 'spirit' is neuter), it is best to understand 'the restrainer' as the Holy Spirit..."

The best explanation for *the restrainer is the Holy Spirit*. John Walvoord writes: "The ultimate decision on the reference to the restrainer goes back to the larger question of who, after all, is capable of restraining sin to such an extent that the man of sin cannot be revealed until the restraint is removed. The doctrine of divine providence, the evidence of Scripture that the Spirit characteristically restrains and strives against sin (Gen. 6:3), and the teaching of Scripture that the Spirit is resident in the world and indwelling the church in a special sense in this age combine to point to the Spirit of God as the only adequate answer...." *The Rapture Question*, p. 80.

How Does the Removal of the Restraint Point to a Pre-tribulation Rapture?

The Holy Spirit indwells every Christian permanently (cf. John 14:16&17; 1 Cor. 6:19&20).

*"16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will **never** leave you. 17 He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later [at Pentecost - Acts 2] **will be in you.**" John 14:16&17 NLT*

Q5. *What relationship does the believer have with the Holy Spirit? Where does the Spirit reside? When will the Spirit be removed from the believer?*

If the Holy Spirit must be removed before Antichrist's public unveiling then **all believers must also be removed** (raptured) from the world at the same time. Revelation 6:2 indicates that Antichrist will rise to power at the beginning of the Tribulation period. This means the removal of the Holy Spirit and the rapture of the church must precede the Tribulation period.

Q6. *Why does the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer (John 14:16-17) and the restrainer being removed from the world before the Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:7), seem to support a pretribulation rapture?*

Who Is the Restraint?

Four viewpoints:

1. **The Roman Empire**—however, the empire has long vanished and the Antichrist has not yet been revealed.
2. **Human Government and Law**—however, human governments will not end ("*steps out of the way*" v.7) before the Antichrist's unveiling, nor do all governments restrain sin, in fact, some encourage it!
3. **The Church**—The church in herself does not have supernatural power to restrain the Antichrist—only the Holy Spirit has this power. Furthermore, the church is never referred to as "he" (NIV) as the restrainer is in verse 7; the church is the bride of Christ and is always referred to in the feminine gender (Ephesians 5:25-27).
"...Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her 26 to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. 27 He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault."
4. **The Holy Spirit**—The Holy Spirit is the only Person with sufficient supernatural power to restrain the satanically empowered Antichrist. According to verse 7, the restrainer is a "he" (Greek *κατεχων* masculine), which is a pronoun that does not properly describe the other options but is a proper description for the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:16&17).

Q7. *From the four possible identities for the restrainer, which one makes the most sense to you? Why?*

Common Objection to the Holy Spirit Being the Restraint:

"How can the Holy Spirit be removed from the earth when the Holy Spirit is omnipresent—everywhere present (cf. Psalm 139:7-12)?"

There is a mystical sense in which the Holy Spirit is everywhere present and at the same time not present in His full manifestation, power, and presence. Jesus repeatedly referred to the Holy Spirit as one who "*comes*" and He would "*send*" from the Father as if the Spirit was not present. Compare John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-8, 13.

These verses show that there was some sense in which the omnipresent Holy Spirit was not present with the disciples or in the world convicting of sin. **If the omnipresent Holy Spirit can come and be sent, so can He be removed.** It is in this same sense that the omnipresent Holy Spirit will be removed from the world and return to the Father just before the Tribulation.

Theologian John Walvoord comments: "Pretribulationists hold that at the Rapture we have a reversal of what occurs on the day of Pentecost..." p.243 *The Rapture Question*. "While the Spirit will work in the tribulation period, He will follow the pattern of the period before Pentecost rather than this present age of grace. The Spirit of God will return to heaven after accomplishing His earthly work, much as the Lord Jesus Christ returned to heaven after completing His earthly work. In both cases, the work of the second Person and the Third Person continues, but in a different setting and in a different way." *The Rapture Question*, p.81.

Q8. *How would you answer the objection to the Holy Spirit being removed from the earth and also being omnipresent (everywhere present)?*

2 Thessalonian 2 Chronology

John Walvoord explains the sequence of 2 Thessalonians 2 that points to the rapture of the Church before the beginning of the Tribulation. Walvoord writes, "If the Spirit is identified as the restrainer, a chronology is set up that unmistakably places the translation of the church before the Tribulation. The passage teaches that the order of events is as follows: (1) the restrainer is now engaged in restraining sin; (2) the restrainer will be taken away at a future point in time; (3) then the man of sin can be revealed." Walvoord continued to explain that the man of sin is identified with the ruler who will come of Daniel 9:26. Daniel's prophecy shows that the Antichrist will be revealed at the beginning of the Tribulation period when he makes a covenant with Israel (Daniel 9:27). *The Rapture Question*, 80.

Walvoord concluded, "It should also be evident that if the Spirit of God characteristically indwells the church as well as the individual saint in this age, the removal of the Spirit would involve a dispensational change and the removal of the church as well... If, therefore, the restrainer of 2 Thessalonian 2 be identified as the Holy Spirit, another evidence is produced to indicate the translation of the church before the final tribulation period will begin on earth." *The Rapture Question*, 81.

The Holy Spirit permanently indwells every Christian and they will be raptured when the restrainer is removed from the earth.
