

**THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH**

Episode Thirteen: Revelation 14:1-13

Rapture comes from the Latin word *rapturo*, which means to be caught up. St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian and Corinthian churches, telling them the Bride will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. Will it be prior to the tribulation, in the middle, or after it? Christians have debated this in every age. But, when it happens makes all the difference in the world. The Revelation code gives us the answers that matter most.

1. **The Identity of the 144,000. [Revelation 14:1-3]** We recall them from Revelation 7. In that passage we saw two groups of people.

1. **THE CHURCH.** The number so immense that they are beyond counting. People from every nation, tribe, people, and language on the earth. [Rev. 7:9] They are clearly the saints of all the world who have been gathered to heaven. Most importantly, *“These are those who have come out of the great tribulation…”***[Rev. 7:14]**
2. **THE 144,000.** They have not come out of “the great tribulation.” They are still on the earth. The angels are about to bring God’s wrath upon the earth (that which will be described by the global disaster and death that accompanies the seven trumpets of wrath.) But, as the angels are about to unleash destruction, they are told, *“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the forehead of the servants of our God. Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.”***[Rev. 7:3&4]**
3. **A Common Error When Thinking about the Great Tribulation.** Often people think that the **seven years of trouble** on the earth are the *Great Tribulation.* Your teacher believes differently. Rather, the seven years are clearly divided in Revelation between two three-and-a-half year periods. Each is distinct and different.
* **The Great Tribulation.** The first three-and-a-half years. **[Rev. 13:5]** It is the time when the forces of hell unleash their fury on the saints. **[Rev. 7:14; 12:17, 13:7&8;13:15]** When his disciples asked him when we would know when the end of all things was near, he said, *“For then there will be great tribulation unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.”* **[Matthew 24:21]** When one reads the entirety of Matthew 24, Jesus makes it clear that his followers will go through it, must respond to it in wise and godly ways, and will also know that his return is near. St. Paul also warns us that the anti-Christ will be revealed, unleash his tribulation, and that believers must *“…stand firm and hold past…”* **[2 Thess. 2:12-15]**
* **The Wrath to Come.** The second three-and-a-half years. **[Rev. 11:2]** This is when God pours out his wrath upon the world. **[Rev. 8,9,14:14-19].** We believe that that the Church will not be here then. But the 144,000 Jewish evangelists will. It will be during this time when Paul’s promise of Romans 11 will be fulfilled, and Israel will turn to their Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ. **[Rev. 11:13].** But We will not be on the earth during this time of Wrath.

St. Paul says of Jesus’ appearing: *“Jesus, who rescues us from* ***the coming wrath***.” **[1 Thess. 1:10]** When he writes his first letter to the Thessalonians, he speaks of the rapture that will take believers up—dead Christians first, and then those who are alive—before the “coming wrath.” **We will not be saved from the great tribulation, but from the coming wrath.** Some call this a mid-tribulation view, but that misunderstands the tribulation as being seven years long. Rather, this rapture view should be called the ***Pre-Wrath*** position.

**Here’s a wonderful thought:**  During the *Great Tribulation,* the forces of hell pour out their wrath on the saints of God, but they will not fall. During the *Coming Wrath*,the forces of heaven pour out their wrath on the enemies of God, and they will not stand. The unholy trinity will be smashed by the Holy Trinity.

1. **The fate of the 144,000 [Rev. 3:1-5]** They too will be redeemed from this earth. They have a job to do on earth, and they will have done it. Though we are not to be confused with these 144,000. But there are truths about them that apply to us all, and are given to help us overcome.
2. **With the Lamb on Mount Zion. [Rev. 14:1]** Some interpret *Mount Zion* as the heights of Jerusalem. Certainly, that was the ancient name of Jerusalem, and especially the Temple Mount. This may refer to a look into the future when Jesus returns in triumph and these Jewish evangelists are standing with him there in victory. Others refer to Hebrews 12:22-24 and Galatians 4:25, where *Mount Zion* is referred to as “heavenly Jerusalem” or heaven. So maybe they are in heaven itself, having been caught up there.

We believe, in the context or the whole of the book of Revelation, that they have gone through the wrath, bringing Jews to Christ, and will join him when he comes again in this glory. We distinguish between *Christ’s Appearing* in which the Church will be raptured to meet him in the air at the end of the Great Tribulation, and *Christ’s Second Coming* which will be in Revelation 19 at the Battle of Armageddon. The 144,000 will not go up at his Appearing, but will be on the earth evangelizing during the Great Wrath period.

1. **Father’s Name on their Forehead. [Rev. 14:1]** This is the seal that protects them through the wrath, in the same way God spared the Jews during the wrath he poured out on Egypt. Their forehead bears the name of God, in contrast to those who are destroyed by the Father’s wrath because they bear 666 on their foreheads. A lesson for us all: either we will belong to the Beast or God. There is no middle ground. On that, depends our salvation or doom in the wrath to come.

1. **They receive the praise of heaven** **and return it.** **[Rev. 14:2&3]** Heaven praises us for our faithfulness to our Triune God and we praise heaven for the faithfulness of our Triune God toward us. ***“A New Song”***—it’s in the battles that the new songs of praise are created. Though we are nourished by the old songs of those who battled before us, we must write our own songs as we fight the new battles. ***“Only They Know”***—no one can know the songs we know unless they have shared in the same battles we have. Only the 144,000 know.
2. **Male virgins. [Rev. 14:4&5]** This is the only time in Scripture that males are mentioned as virgins. In all other cases, virginity is applied to women. We believe that this speaks of sexual and moral purity, not literal virginity. To take it literally is to suggest that legitimate intimacy in marriage is somehow dirty. At any rate, the message is clear: those who receive the praise of heaven are morally pure. They obey the commandments of God. In our age of picking and choosing the sins we will commit, or rolling over on issues of pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, pornography, or LGBTQ agendas, we do well to take seriously the warnings of Revelation.
3. **The Three Angels. [Rev. 14:8-12]** Having seen the triumph of God’s people, we now see the destruction of his enemies. There is no middle ground in this war of the ages. Either way there are consequences. We have been given this Revelation to make the only choice that matters now, and for eternity.
* **The Gospel Angel. [Rev. 14: 6&7]** Even when his wrath comes, and even when the people of the earth have closed their ears to him, heaven still continues to preach the gospel. The Church is gone. The 144,000 have finished their work. Even with his people gone, he still sends the angels to call lost sons and daughters to salvation. How can we not do the same, while there is still time for salvation to come to the lost?
* **The Harbinger Angel. [Rev. 14:8]** *“Babylon has fallen.”* The governments of this world, that promised utopia to the gullible, will all collapse.
* **The Second Harbinger Angel. [Rev. 14:9-12]** Woe to those who have taken on the Mark of the Beast. They will be utterly destroyed.
1. **Blessed are the Martyrs. [Rev. 14:13]** *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on…they will rest from their labor…”* We will face persecution for our faith. Pain is inevitable: either we will refuse the Mark of the Beast and die for our faith, or we will wear it and face the full wrath of God. Later **[Rev. 14:9-11]** those who wear 666 will be tormented forever. Those who die for their faith will rest in the glory of God forever. This is the hope that must determine our choices!