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What You Need to Know About The Rapture of the Church: Part 2

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH (Part Two)

OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS AND THE RAPTURE

It is the view of this book that only those individuals saved from Pentecost to the Rapture (i.e., the body and bride of Christ, the church) will be raised at that time. Thus, all Old Testament saints and those martyred during the Great Tribulation will be raised at the beginning of the millennium. This resurrection is referred to as the first resurrection in Rev. 20:6, contrasting it to the second resurrection (at which time the unsaved dead will be raised) which occurs at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15).

TWO OLD TESTAMENT FORESHADOWS OF THE RAPTURE

While the Rapture is of course an exclusive New Testament doctrine, there are nevertheless two Old Testament events which illustrate it.

Seen in Enoch, who was taken from the world before the flood judgment (Gen. 5:24).

Seen in Lot, who was taken from Sodom before the fire judgment (Gen. 19:22-24).

CONTRASTING THE RAPTURE WITH THE REVELATION

Although these two are inseparably linked together, they are not the same. In essence, the Rapture introduces the Great Tribulation, while the Second Coming will conclude it. Other distinguishing features are:

A. The Rapture:

- 1. Christ comes in the air (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
- 2. He comes for his saints (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
- 3. The rapture is a mystery, i.e., a truth unknown in Old Testament times (1 Cor. 15:51).
- 4. Christ's coming for his saints is never said to be preceded by signs in the heavens.
- 5. The rapture is identified with the day of Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10).
- 6. The rapture is presented as a time of blessing (1 Thess. 4:18).
- 7. The rapture takes place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52).
- 8. The rapture seems to involve the church primarily (Jn. 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- 9. Christ comes as the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16).

B. The Second Coming:

- 1. He comes to the earth (Zech. 14:4).
- 2. He comes with his saints (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14).
- 3. The revelation is not a mystery; it is the subject of many Old Testament prophecies (Psa. 72; Isa. 11; Zech. 14)
- 4. Christ's coming with his saints will be heralded by heavenly signs (Matt. 24:29, 30).
- 5. The revelation is identified with the day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1-12, ASV).
- 6. The main emphasis of the revelation is on judgment (2 Thess. 2:8-12).
- 7. The revelation will be visible worldwide (Matt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7).
- 8. The revelation involves Israel primarily, then also the Gentile nations (Matt. 24:1; 25:46).
- 9. Christ comes as the sun of righteousness with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2).

Prophecy experts Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy have provided a list of those passages referring to the Rapture and those describing the Revelation (Second Coming)—

Rapture Passages

Second Coming Passages

John 14:1 2	Daniel 2:44, 45
John 14:1-3	Daniel 2:44, 45
Romans 8:19	Daniel 7:9-14
1 Cor. 1:7, 8	Daniel 12:1-3
1 Cor. 15:51-53	Zechariah 12:10
1 Cor. 16:22	Zechariah 14:1-15
Phil. 3:20, 21	Matt. 13:41
Phil. 4:5	Matt. 24:15-31
Col. 3:4	Matt. 26:64
1 Thess. 1:10	Mark 13:14-27
1 Thess. 2:19	Mark 14:62
1 Thess. 4:13-18	Luke 21:25-28
1 Thess. 5:9	Acts 1:9-11
1 Thess. 5:23	Acts 3:19-21
2 Thess. 2:1	1 Thess. 3:13
2 Thess. 2:3 (?)	2 Thess. 1:6-10
1 Tim. 6:14	2 Thess. 2:8
2 Tim. 4:1	1 Peter 4:12, 13
2 Tim. 4:8	2 Peter 3:1-14
Titus 2:13	Jude 14, 15
Heb. 9:28	Rev. 1:7
James 5:7-9	Rev. 19:11-20:6

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Rev. 22:7, 12, 20
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1 Peter 1:7, 13 1 Peter 5:4 1 John 2:28-3:2 Jude 21 Rev. 2:25 Rev. 3:10 (*Prophecy Watch*, Harvest House, p. 100)

THE FIVE VIEWS IN REGARD TO THE NATURE OF THE RAPTURE

A. The Partial Rapture View:

This says the rapture will be limited to those spirit-filled believers who are faithfully working and waiting for Christ's return, thus leaving carnal Christians behind to endure a seven-year "Protestant purgatory" of some sort. It is true, of course, that the vast bulk of giving, praying and serving in most evangelical churches is done by 15% of the membership. These are the true spiritual pillars who uphold their church. And what of the remaining 85%? These may be likened to sluggish caterpillars that crawl in and out of the church once every six weeks or so! Thus, according to the Partial Rapture View, only the pillars will be caught up, leaving the caterpillars behind!

Scriptures said to support this view are: Matt. 24:40-51; 25:1-13; Luke 20:35; Phil. 3:10-14; 1 Thess. 5:4-6; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 3:10.

The partial rapture theory is to be rejected for the following three reasons:

- 1. First, it confuses grace with rewards.
- 1. Second, it divides the bride of Christ. How can the Marriage of the Lamb take place if part of the bride is left on earth?
- 2. Third, it ignores the clear scriptural teaching to the contrary. (See 1 Thess. 1:9, 10; 2:19; 4:14-16; 5:4-11; Rev. 22:12.) Perhaps the most conclusive evidence against the partial rapture theory is 1 Cor. 15:51. This church was one of the most carnal in the history of Christianity, yet Paul declares in this verse that if the rapture occurred in their day, *all* of the saved in that church would be raptured.

B. The Mid-Tribulation Rapture View:

This position holds the entire church will go through the first three and half years of the tribulation and will be caught up with the two martyred witnesses (Rev. 11:12). Here a distinction is made between the wrath of Antichrist (first part of the tribulation) and the wrath of God (final three and half years). Thus,

the first half is described by Jesus as the "beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:5-20, especially verse 21). Scriptures said to support this view are: Dan. 12:6, 7, 11; Rev. 11:3; 12:3, 6, 14.

A common argument of the mid-trib position is: "It is egotistical for us to believe the church in our day will escape suffering and judgment. Where was the rapture for the multitudes of Chinese believers murdered by the Japanese during World War II, or the Russian Christians slaughtered by the godless Communists?" The shallowness of this argument should be immediately evident, for it confuses satanic wrath with divine wrath. Nowhere are we promised we will escape suffering or even martyrdom. But we are assured we will escape divine wrath, for this is the very essence of the great tribulation, when God will punish the world. (Compare Isa. 24:1; 63:3-6; Rev. 6:17 with 1 Thess. 1:20; 5:9.)

The New Testament pictures the church as the body and bride of Christ. If the mid-tribulation or post-tribulation view were correct, then a part of his body would suffer amputation, and a section of the bride would be left behind! In addition to this, one would be forced to conclude that all bodies of carnal departed Christians would likewise be left in the grave. This simply is not the clear teaching of the Word of God.

In addition to this there are two serious problems connected with the midtribulation position.

First, it destroys the imminence of Christ's return, for, according to their view the Savior could not possibly come until at least three and a half years after the time of this writing.

Second, it creates a date-setting chronology, for if it is known when the tribulation begins (usually thought to occur when the antichrist makes his seven-year covenant with Israel) and if Christ appears during the middle of the seven years, then one can know the dates of both the rapture and Second Coming. But Jesus said this information would not be revealed. (See Matt. 24:36.)

C. The Post-Tribulation Rapture View:

This view says the church will have to endure the entire seven year tribulation, arguing that the Bible presents but one general resurrection, and that resurrection occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation as described in Dan. 12:1, 2; John 6:39, 40; 11:23-25; Rev. 20:6. Other scriptures said to support this view are: Matt. 13:24-30; 24:29-31, 40, 41.

Some wag has suggested that if the mid-trib or post-trib position on the rapture be correct, then the words to that beautiful Christian song, *Is It The Crowning Day?*, be changed to read as follows:

Jesus can't come today, sad day, sad day. And I won't see my friend, danger and troubles won't end, For Jesus can't come today.

Chorus

Sad day, sad day, it's not the crowning day!

I'll live for today and anxious be,

The false prophet and antichrist I soon shall see,

Sad day, sad day, for it's not the crowning day.

Personally, I much prefer the original words!

D. The Pre-Tribulation Rapture View:

This view holds that all believers will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air just prior to the Great Tribulation. The author of this book holds to the Pre-Trib view for the following reasons:

- 1. The angel Gabriel explains the prophecy of the seventy weeks to Daniel (9:24-27), connecting this period of time (490 years, with the final seven years being the Great Tribulation) to the nation Israel! Inasmuch as the New Testament Church has not replaced Old Testament Israel (Rom. 11:1, 2, 26, 27; 1 Cor. 10:32), it can be concluded God will use these seven tribulational years to deal with His unfaithful wife (Old Testament Israel, see entire book of Hosea), while the pure, chaste bride of Christ (New Testament Church, 2 Cor. 11:2) will be in the heavenlies, having no need of forgiveness and cleansing (Eph. 5:25-27).
- 2. Paul affirms in 1 Thess. 1:10 and 5:9 that the church is to escape God's wrath.
- 3. Jesus says the same thing in Rev. 3:10.
- 3. John seems to place the Rapture in Rev. 4:1 and the beginning of the Great Tribulation in Rev. 6:1.
- 4. Jesus promised to return and remove His people from the earth

(John 14:1-3), whereas the Old Testament predicts Him returning to the earth (Zech. 14:4), thus indicating there will be two separate appearances in regards to His return.

5. Paul reaffirms Jesus' promise in 1 Thess. 4:16, 17, saying we will be caught up in the clouds.

Perhaps the strongest proof of this statement is the fact that up to chapter 6 of Revelation the church is mentioned many times, but from chapter 6 to chapter 19 (the period of the tribulation) there is no mention whatsoever of the church on earth. In fact, the only godly group Satan can find to persecute is the nation Israel. (See Rev. 12.) In Rev. 4:1 John declares, "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, "Come up hither ..."

Consider an illustration from U. S. History at this point:

On Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, inflicting great damage upon American forces stationed there. On Monday, Dec. 8, President Franklin Roosevelt delivered his "Day of Infamy" speech before Congress, which body then declared war upon Japan, Germany and Italy. On Tuesday, Dec. 9, F.D.R. sent telegrams to the U.S. ambassadors serving in Tokyo, Berlin, and Rome, ordering them to leave for home immediately. It is of course standard procedure for a king or president to call his ambassadors home before waging war. With all this in mind, it may be said that some day God will declare an all out war on planet earth, known as the Great Tribulation! But, before He does, He will call His ambassadors home!

"Now, then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

"For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:20).

CHALLENGES OF THE BELIEVER IN LIGHT OF THE RAPTURE

- A. He or she is to attend the services of the Lord regularly.
 - "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).
- B. He is to observe the Lord's Supper with the rapture in mind.

- 1. Question: Why do most evangelical Christians observe the ordinance of baptism only once, but partake of the Lord's Supper many times?
- 2. Answer: Because of what these ordinances stand for. Baptism depicts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, all of which only occurred but once (Rom. 6:3-5). But what of Communion? Did not Paul also connect it to Christ's death? He did indeed, then added three all important words.

Note: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death TILL HE COME." (1 Cor. 11:26). In other words, the Lord's table should serve as a reminder of both the historical cross and of the prophetical crown!

C. He is to love believers and all men.

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men ... To the end he may stablish your hearts ... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:12, 13).

We note Paul does not admonish us to like all believers, but to love them. Love may be defined as that act of one Christian seeking the highest good for another Christian. Thus, it is possible to love those we might not especially like!

An unknown poet has observed:

To live above with those we love, Oh, that will then be glory. But to live below with those we know; Well, that's a different story!

D. He is to be patient.

"Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (Jas. 5:8).

Patience is a virtue, Possess it if you can, Rarely found in women, And never found in man.

But in light of the rapture we can well afford to be patient, for we know the story has a happy ending—the Bridegroom gets the Bride (Rev. 21).

E. He is to live a separated life.

"... we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself ..." (1 John 3:2, 3).

"... denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13).

"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28).

I (HLW) began smoking at the age of 12 and continued on even after my conversion four years later in August of 1948. Back then it seemed to me that everyone smoked. After all, this was southern Illinois, tobacco country! The pastor of the church I attended smoked a pipe and I thought one of the requirements for being a deacon was to smoke—(well, not really).

But soon after accepting Christ I became increasingly convicted of my habit, in part after hearing for the first time a powerful sermon on the Rapture! How terrible I imagined would it be to go up blowing smoke! I did honestly attempt to stop, but tobacco had too much a hold on me. However, things would soon change. One day, immediately after lighting a cigarette I heard my name being called from a nearby car. It was my godly Sunday school teacher who had led me to Christ. How embarrassed I was. Not able to drop the offending object without him seeing it, I kept both hands behind my back as we talked. Well, the more we conversed, the more uncomfortable I became. In fact, I think he may have smelled burning flesh for he soon ended the conversation and drove away.

Even though this all happened nearly 60 years ago, I can still remember standing there on that street corner in Mt. Vernon, Illinois, thinking:

"This is crazy! Here I am, desperately attempting to hide my dirty little habit from my Sunday school teacher, when Jesus my Savior sees every single time I light up!"

Needless to say, this event would soon play a big part in abandoning tobacco!

F. He is to refrain from judging others.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5).

In practice this means we are to refrain from judging the <u>motive</u> of another believer who may have done something we could not fully accept, or hold some theological view slightly different from our own view. An example of this might be the mode of baptism.

"When you get to heaven, you will likely view, Folks up there whose presence will be a shock to you. But, keep it very quiet, do not even stare, For, there will be many folks surprised to see you there!"

Allow me (HLW) to offer another personal illustration at this point. Over the years it has been and continues to be, my theological position that the gift of tongues, along with the other sign gifts (prophecy, healing, miracles, etc.) has been phased out with the completion of the perfect gift—the Bible itself.

Why, though, do many sincere Christians feel these gifts are for today? I simply do not know, but I have long since determined <u>never</u> to question the <u>motive</u> of those dedicated believers who do!

And the bottom line? Simply this—we are to give the same benefit of doubt to those we disagree with that we would expect from them!

G. He is to preach the word.

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word ..." (2 Tim. 4:1, 2).

"Feed the flock of God ... And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:2, 4).

H. He is to comfort the bereaved.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven ... Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16, 18).

I. He is to win souls.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire ..." (Jude 21-23).

J. He is to be concerned with heaven.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).