

Ready for the RAPTURE

A Popular Book and Video Series Has Captured the Attention of Christians Nearly Everywhere. Surprisingly, it is the Rare Individual Who Has 'Searched the Scriptures, Whether These Things Be So'! Isn't It Time We Did That? Are YOU being 'Left Behind' on things you COULD know?

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In most Fundamentalist Circles, it is generally understood and widely accepted that some day soon, each Christian should anticipate being suddenly 'caught up into the air' and taken to heaven. The stated purpose for this unannounced moment in time is to offer protection to True Christians from the impending Great Tribulation.

On an internet website, the following post has: *"The rapture of the church will kick off the tribulation. Make sure you are rapture ready. The rapture is going to strike without warning. The rapture is going to be one of the most astonishing events to ever occur."* This is generally the understanding most religious people have of the event. The **rapture** is the hope of many and the dread of others. Those who dread are those who know they are not even trying to be converted, who know they should. An even greater dread, it seems, is among those who are not really sure of their situation.

It is this anxiety, born of uncertainty that draws at least the oblique interest of many. The Jenkins / LaHaye books and videotape series, featuring the rapture and tribulation as a theme, is titled to point out this anxiety situation: being called the **"Left Behind"** series. No knowledgeable person wants to be among those 'not-quite-christians' that are 'left behind' when the rapture occurs. That would not only be profoundly humiliating, being exposed as only a pseudo-christian, but also would mean being left exposed to the extreme persecutions of the Great Tribulation period.

Predominant among those ascribing to the rapture (some would say rapture theory) are the pre-tribulationists. After all, the event loses its reason for being, as it's represented, if it does not occur prior to the end-time Great Tribulation. If temporary protection were not its purpose, what else would its purpose be? (Of course, a resurrection from the

dead is also associated with the rapture. However, there is no real need for these in their graves to be protected from the tribulation. So, why are they raised at this time? This is just the first of many perplexing questions.)

Among thoughtful Bible students and scholars, a glaring series of questions arises when a person tries to pull all of the scriptures together which deal with the subject and identify its true place in prophetic chronology. So obvious are these 'problems' that many saw need to separate the second coming of Christ into two phases. On that same website referred to earlier is this paragraph in an article entitled: *"Jesus Prophesied the Rapture"* It says, *"For clarity, allow me to define a couple of terms so that I will not be misunderstood below. **"Phase 1"** will refer to the first part of Christ's second coming, which we all call the "rapture" (His return for believers occurring prior to the tribulation period to resurrect and/or glorify the physical bodies of believers and bring them back to Heaven with Him). **"Phase 2"** will refer to the second part of Christ's second coming, which is often called the "second advent" (His return with believers to defeat Satan's armies, rescue His chosen people, and establish His earthly reign at Jerusalem, among other things).* You see, it's commonly recognized that placing the rapture event **before** the tribulation, causes certain 'problems' with what many scriptures plainly say. Thus, the need to explain Christ's Second Coming as happening on actually two distinct and separate occasions. This I recognized as a teenager in the early sixties, that, as many churches explain the rapture, there would need to be what I then called a 'first-second coming' and then later a 'second-second coming' of Christ! The author of the above quote admits as much. Many other pre-tribulation advocates aren't as candid!

What Is First, What Is Last?

That isn't the only 'problem'! In a footnote in an article on post-advent events, titled, "**After the Last Trumpet Sounds**", the following observation is made: *"Associating the Rapture with the Last Trump, as presented in 1st Corinthians 15:52, places the event AFTER the Great Tribulation, rather than before it! Essential to the (rapture) theory is its occurring before the 42 month (some say 7 year ¹) tribulation period. The seventh (Last) Trump of Revelation 11:15-18 is the occasion of the First Resurrection. (Re.20:6) The Rapture is presented as being the occasion of the First Resurrection also. This anomaly places several (seven) Trumpets after the "Last" Trump, and another resurrection occurring before the "First" Resurrection! The Saints are in it described as being taken to heaven for protection before the Tribulation, yet in 1st Thessalonians 4:15-16 we see the dead in Christ rising up from their graves to meet the returning Lord in the air at His Second Coming, AFTER the Tribulation. Such things happen when a prophetic event is mis-placed in time. The Rapture Theory obviously has serious problems when reconsidered in the light of clear Scriptures!*

It is certain that an event something like what is called 'the rapture' by many, is going to happen. The question is, when will it happen, and for what purpose? We should consider what the scriptures say for these important answers.

It is unusual for authors, such as the one of that website quote given above, to recognize the fact that Christ will return and set-up His Kingdom on earth, ruling from Jerusalem. It is in recognition of many conflicting and explicit scriptures that caused this person, and the denomination he represents to acknowledge Christ's Earthly Kingdom. Not all are sufficiently informed, or willing, to recognize the need to explain certain Second-Coming scriptures that disallow the rapture from happening at the time it's commonly believed and taught that it will occur. Thus their need to pose another post-tribulation Second-Coming, separate of the highly anticipated '**silent swoop**', in which Christ is to

¹ Deduced from the 2520 days prophecy regarding the 'times of the gentiles' in Luke 21:24

take-up His Saints into Heaven for the duration of the tribulation.

Considering the second Second Coming teaching, it's interesting to notice that some allow that Christ and His Saints are to leave Heaven! Now, that is partly correct, (where the Saints come from at this point in time needs to be looked into), but consider what that does to the theological position which poses Heaven as being the eternal reward of the saved!

Then, when we notice that God the Father also, after the Millennial Age, will leave Heaven to come to Earth, and take full possession of the prepared Kingdom from His Son, we find something really astonishing! Paul says in 1st Corinthians 15:24-25, ***"Then comes the end, when He delivers the Kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet."*** Paul knew this! Christ will ultimately surrender the Kingdom into the Father's control. In Revelation 21:3, we read, ***"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.'"*** This is consistent with the Father's declaration in Psalm 110:1, which says, ***"The LORD (YHVH) says unto my Lord (Adonai) Sit thou at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."*** The 'until' indicates that this situation is temporary, that beyond a certain point, there will be some sort of administrative change-over! It isn't that the Kingdom will end, as that is clearly shown to be eternally ongoing. Isaiah 9:7 says, ***"Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever."*** Daniel 7:14&18 adds more: ***"His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, ...But the Saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."***

God's Kingdom and Spiritual Family are Eternal Institutions. Ultimately, the Son AND the Father will be together as the Temple in this New Jerusalem, that final City, one which is seen and

described as *“...coming down from God out of Heaven...”* Rev.21:2 and 22.

Under the rapture scenario, and allowing this rapture advocate's free admission, as well as the Apostle Paul's, the idea of people spending all eternity in Heaven is highly problematical at best!

So, in just these few paragraphs, we see anomalies of there being a necessity for a Last Trump that is succeeded by several other Trumps. Also, a First Resurrection that is preceded by an earlier resurrection and TWO separate 'Second-Comings' of Christ. Are any alarm bells ringing here? Is there any possibility of these 'problems' being a logical result of mis-locating the timing as to when this sudden event will occur?

Key References (NKJ throughout)

Before we go further, it would be good to reflect on the main scriptures from which the rapture theory is derived. First and foremost is 1st Corinthians 15:51-52 *“Behold, I tell you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* Hand-in-hand with this one is 1st Thessalonians 4:13-17 *“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep...God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.”* Now add to this the perspective on Christ's Second Coming found in Revelation 11:15-18 *“Then the seventh angel sounded: ² And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’* In verse 18, *“The nations were*

angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great...” One additional place that is insightful: Philippians 3:20-21 *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

In these, we have a number of important elements. First, we should note that on the 'spending eternity in heaven' idea, Paul states that the dead in Christ will be resurrected at His return, and that 'we' will not precede them into Christ's presence, that our meeting Christ will not be in advance of the dead doing so. What a strange thing to say to people who understood that the dead in Christ had already, from the time of their decease, come into Christ's presence by having gone to heaven. If he thought he was writing to people who believed that people go to heaven at death, why would he see need to clarify such a question. He, and they, obviously, by this statement, are shown as not holding such a belief. Few it seems have noticed this.

Another key point is to note that the instantaneous transformation of our physical bodies into His glorious state occurs AT the Seventh Trump, which is that trumpet at which it is announced that Christ has taken over all nations. These two concurrent things are tied together as a single operation in Philippians 3:21. There is a resurrection which occurs at the 'Last' (Seventh) Trump, occurring moments before the flesh-to-spirit change of those alive and remaining at the time. The declaration of Christ having taken all power and authority over the nations is also seen as generally concurrent with that same resurrection (though implicit) in the account in Revelation 11:18. A resurrection occurring as this Last Trumpet sounds is cross-confirmed by the clear reference in 1st Corinthians 15:52.

This resurrection is the First Resurrection, as Revelation 20:5 very plainly states. Now, where in time do we place this event? If it occurs before the First Resurrection, then which resurrection is it? If it occurs AT the Last Trump, then why is it called the

² Rev. 8:2 Seven angels were given seven trumpets.

“Last”, knowing that there are seven more to sound leading up to and just before the time Christ returns in power to assume all authority over all the earth’s kingdoms? Do you see the obvious problem with a pre-tribulation rapture event?

These aside for the moment, let’s consider another question. The stated reason for the ‘rapture’ is to offer **protection** for God’s Saints through the Great Tribulation period. We see the Saints, (both living and dead) changed from physical form into Spirit existence. Two questions: 1.) Why are the dead in Christ raised* at this point? Aren’t they already in heaven anyway? Do they need protection from the tribulation? Doesn’t the grave afford them protection? 2.) If the Saints are changed to their ‘immortal form’, why do they need to be taken anywhere for protection?

How Many First Resurrections?

Beyond these, is the question of who it is that will be raised-up at what the rapture advocates call the ‘Phase 2 event’? When Christ returns in power, visibly, what is called the First Resurrection³ is to occur. His **Saints only** are to be raised-up at this time. Is this the ‘Phase 1’ or the ‘Phase 2’ event? If it is ‘Phase 1’, then who are those to be raised at the ‘Phase 2’ occurrence? And, does their explanation of events contradict the clear Bible prophecy stated in Revelation 20:5?

One explanation offered for there being a pre-tribulation and post-tribulation resurrection is that these raised under ‘Phase 2’, concurrent with Christ’s visible return, are those left who become converted during the Great Tribulation period.

What is curious is that all these anomalies go away when we regard the event of the Saint’s instantaneous change from flesh to Spirit as being a post-tribulation event, rather than a pre-tribulation one! This is generally how the Church of God understands the matter. Under a post-tribulation explanation, those glaring inconsistencies evaporate!

³ Revelation 20:5&6 “*But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the **first resurrection**. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*”

It is also interesting to note Paul’s use of the term “we”. “We who are alive and remain...” he says in both the 1st Cor. 15 and 1st Thess. 4 references, that “**we**” shall be changed (to Spirit) at the time of His visible return. If there were a Phase 1 and Phase 2 event, each involving a resurrection, then he would certainly be in the ‘Phase 1’ one, and thus would have said “they” when referring to those additional people to come-up under a Phase 2 resurrection!

Then the Matter of Faith

The overwhelming majority of believers in this age remain expectant that the rapture is to occur at any moment in the near future. It’s a major component of faith with these, that they’ll be kept from having to endure the extremes of persecutions and death under Great Tribulations by means of it. That they will pass these few years in heaven, far removed from those trials of faith so many others will have to endure.

What we need to consider is what impact the ultimate reality of the realization of their theory being mis-configured will have on their faith. When the rapture, which according to their explanations, by then **should have already happened**, has not, and year after year, it becomes all the more apparent that it will not happen at the time put forth, what impact will that have on their faith? Who will ‘be there’ to review the scriptures on the subject once again with them, and explain the true scenario?

In Daniel, speaking of the end-times, God inspired him to write: “***And He said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand.’ ... “but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. (Where, in heaven?) “And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; (Who?) yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering.”*** Obvious from the context is that this is in the time-frame of the very end, and not up in heaven!

Our readiness for the event of being caught-up to meet Christ in the air needs to be tempered with this awareness. Lest we be found ‘sleeping’! Ω

* Request additional articles on the Resurrections.