

# THE RAPTURE

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All Christians will one day be either resurrected or raptured. This is clearly taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first [i.e. resurrection]: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up [i.e. rapture] together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

When the resurrection and rapture take place, all believers will receive their sinless and perfect bodies—no more sin, no more sickness, no more sufferings. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:53-57).

The Bible says that this will happen when Jesus Christ returns to judge this sin-cursed world. This wicked world will one day go through 7 years of great tribulation (Daniel



9:27; Matthew 24:15-21). Will the church go through this period of great tribulation of God's wrath, or will she be delivered from it? If she will be delivered from the wrath to come, then at which point? This is where the rapture comes in, but there are five views:

### **1. Pre-tribulational rapture**

The pre-tribulational rapture view believes that the church will be caught up at the start of the 7-year great tribulation period. This tribulation period, also called Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:27), is described as a time of terrible judgment upon the earth by God (Matthew 24:21), a time of divine wrath. It will last for seven years.

In the book of Revelation, God pours out His wrath at the beginning of the great tribulation—Revelation 6:17, "For the great day of his wrath is come;" at the middle of the great tribulation—Revelation 11:18, "thy wrath is come;" and at the end of the great tribulation—Revelation 16:1, "the wrath of God [is] upon the earth."

Will Christians enter this period of wrath? The Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 tells us that the Lord Jesus has "delivered us from the wrath to come". A second promise of deliverance is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." To be raptured before this time is our blessed hope and comfort (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 4:18; 5:11).

### **2. Mid-tribulational rapture**

The mid-tribulational rapture view believes that the church will be caught up at the middle of the seven-year great tribulation period. This view was taken by J O Buswell. Buswell saw the seals, trumpets and vials

of Revelation to be chronological and sequential. He believed that the seals and trumpets occur prior to the resurrection of the saints at the middle of the 7 years. He believed the seals represent a picture of a stage in the history of the redemption of the church, and the 6th seal refers to the major cosmic disturbances Jesus spoke of in His Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-12). He also suggested that the 6 trumpets fall on the first half of the 7 years, and that the 7th will occur at the 3½ year point. He considered the vials to be the wrath of God poured out at the final half of the 7 years. Buswell thus identified the "last trump" of 1 Corinthians 15:52 to be the 7th and last trumpet of Revelation 11:15. The rapture will happen when the 2 special witnesses are caught up after prophesying for 1,260 days, i.e. 3½ years.

### **3. Three-quarter tribulational rapture**

This is popularly known as the pre-wrath rapture view first propounded by Marvin Rosenthal in his book—*The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (1990). According to Rosenthal, God will pour out His wrath sometime in the middle of the second half (i.e. 3rd quarter) of the 7-year great tribulation period. The rapture will thus occur at this three-quarter point at the beginning of the trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:1-2). He explains, "the Day of the Lord is the time of divine wrath. It will be recognized as about to begin by the cosmic disturbances associated with the sixth seal (Joel 2:10-11, 30-31; Revelation 6:12-17; cf. Matthew 24:29) and will begin with the opening of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1). The rapture of the church will immediately precede the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will begin sometime within the second half of Daniel's seventieth week."

#### **4. Post-tribulational rapture**

The post-tribulational view says that the rapture will only occur at the end of the 7 years of great tribulation. This view is generally held by anti-Israel millennialists who believe that the nation of Israel has been replaced by the church, and so it is the church that will go through the great tribulation since there is no more Israel. The main problem with this view is that Israel despite her unbelief is still very much a nation, very much in existence and very much kept by God according to the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Romans 11:1-32).

#### **5. Partial rapture**

The partial rapture view believes the rapture will take place at different points of the 7-year great tribulation period depending on the spirituality of the believers. Those who are holy will be raptured at the beginning, those not so holy, in the middle, and those really unholy, at the end. This position has some similarities to the Roman Catholic view of purgatory, and of salvation by works.

#### **Which?**

The Bible tells us that the great tribulation is a time of Jacob's (i.e. Israel's) trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). The nation of Israel will have to go through this time of great tribulation, and at the end of it, God will save Israel from her enemies, and make her a great nation (Romans 11:26).

The church is not Israel. The church is saved from the wrath of God to come (1 Thessalonians 5:9). In the light of this, the church will have to be raptured before the time of God's wrath. Scholars disagree over the time of God's wrath: Is it at the beginning of the great tribulation, in the middle, or at the end? If it is at the end, then how is the

rapture considered the church's blessed hope and comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18)? As such, the post-tribulational rapture view ought to be dismissed. The partial rapture view is untenable since the rapture is not described as a multiple but single event at the last trump (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

As I see it, only views 1, 2 and 3 are tenable. Personally, I hold to the pre-tribulational rapture view since "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). As noted above, the whole 7-year great tribulation period is described as a time of God's wrath! (Revelation 6:17; 11:18; 15:1; 16:1).

At any rate, we should not be too caught up with the debate on which view (i.e. 1, 2 or 3) is the correct one. According to the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, the more vital question to answer is this: "When Jesus the Messiah descends from heaven to earth that soon coming Day, where will you be? Some argue that Christians will be caught up to meet Him in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, others say no, it is a Mid-Tribulation or Pre-Wrath or even Post-Tribulation Rapture. But if you have no assurance of salvation, it is like a traveller studying three or four airline flight schedules from Singapore to New York, but has not bought his ticket. Whichever plane is leaving now, this very hour, how can you join the flight? Oh to be stranded when others in your family are gone above!"

Make peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and make sure you are not left behind when the rapture happens!

