

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The present age, in respect to the true Church, terminates with the translation of the Church into the Lord's presence. The doctrine of the translation of the Church is one of the major considerations of the Eschatology of the New Testament (John 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 1:8; 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Cor. 5:1-9). It is one of the questions on which Bible students are most in disagreement at the present time. Interpreters of the premillennial school are divided into such camps as the partial rapturist, who raise the issue of the subjects of the rapture, and the pretribulationist, midtribulationist and posttribulationist, who raise the issue of the time of the rapture in relation to the tribulation period.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

It would be well, at this point, to set forth the various words used in the New Testament in relation to the second advent of Christ: *Parousia*, *apokalupsis*, and *epiphaneia*. John F. Walvoord, in *New Testament Words for the Lord's Coming*, writes:

It is the viewpoint of the writer that all three terms are used in a general and not a technical sense and that they are descriptive of both the rapture and the glorious return of Christ to the earth...

1. PAROUSIA (παρουσία)

The word most frequently used in the Scriptures to describe the return of Christ is [parousia] . . . it occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament in a variety of connections. As its etymology indicates the word means *to be near or alongside* (para near & emi to be or presence). . . It involves all that the English word *presence* connotes . . . It has come to mean not simply *presence* but the act by which the presence is brought about, i.e., by the coming of the individual.

A brief survey of its usage in the New Testament includes...

1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6-7; Philippians 1:26;
2 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Peter 3:12. All must concede that
these instances are general and not technical.

. . . That it is used frequently of the rapture of the Church is clear in the following references (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; James 5:7,8; 2 Pet. 3:4; John 2:29).

The word is also used, however, of the return of Christ to the earth with the Church in a number of passages (Mt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thess. 2:8; 2 pet. 1:16).

The conclusion is inevitable that the same word is used in all these passages in a general and not specific sense. Its contribution to the doctrine is to emphasize the bodily presence of Christ.

II. APOKALUPSIS (αποκαλυψις)

The second important word for the coming of Christ . . . [apokalupsis] occurs . . . eighteen times in noun form, twenty-six times in the verb form. It is obviously from . . . [apo] and . . . [kalupto], the latter meaning *to cover*, or *to veil*, and with the prefix, *to uncover* or *to unveil*, and hence *to reveal*.

A survey of those passages in which the word is used in relation to Christ demonstrates that in a number of instances it is used of the second coming of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13; 2 Thess. 1:7; Luke 17:7,13).

In other passages, however, it is clearly used in reference to the coming of Christ in the air for His Church (1 Cor. 1:7; Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13).

The doctrine that is involved in the use of the word in relation to Christ is an emphasis on the future manifestation of the glory of Christ.

III. EPIPHANEIA (επισηανεια)

The third word used of the return of Christ is, . . . [epiphaneia] . . . [epi] and [phanes]. The root meaning of *to bring forth into the light*, *cause to shine*, *to show* is found from Homer down (Thayer). The addition of the preposition gives it an intensive meaning . . . it is used of the first coming of Christ to the earth in His incarnation (Lk. 1:79; 2 Tim. 1:10).

As used of the return of the Lord, two instances are found where it refers to the rapture of the Church and two instances seem to refer to the second coming of Christ. . . . It would seem sound exegesis to classify 1 Timothy 6:14 and 2 Timothy 4:8 as referring to the rapture.

In 2 Timothy 4:1 and Titus 2:13, however, there seems to be a reference to His second coming.

The emphasis given to the truth in the use of . . . [epiphaneis] is to reassure us that Christ will actually appear, that He will be seen and will be manifested in a visible way. These words, then emphasize three great facts in relation to the *second advent*: Christ will be visibly presented, His glory consequently will be fully revealed, and He himself will be fully manifested.

THE PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE

In the presentation of this precious truth, I have chosen to present first what I believe to be the only position and that is that the true Church, that body of Christ purchased by His shed blood, will be translated into the presence of our precious Lord prior to the Great Tribulation period. If time permits, [and I will include in these notes the error of the other positions] we will discuss the theories of Midtrib and Posttrib positions. My purpose has been to teach you the truth of Scripture and not to engage in unfounded speculation.

Pretribulation rapturism rests essentially on one major premise -- the literal method of interpretation of the Scriptures. As a necessary adjunct to this, the pretribulationist believes in a dispensational interpretation of the Word of God. The Church and Israel are two distinct groups with whom God has a divine plan. The Church is a mystery, unrevealed in the Old Testament. This present mystery age intervenes within the program of God for Israel because of Israel's rejection of the Messiah at His first advent. This mystery program must be completed before God can resume His program with Israel and bring it to completion. These considerations all arise from the literal method of interpretation.

I have mentioned so often that, the Church age, is an interruption in the program for Israel. We see this particularly in the "Seventy Sevens" of Daniel. That which is to follow the close of this Church age or mystery age, is the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy. This time period is often referred to as "Daniel's Seventieth week." We will be considering the nature of this period in future lessons. I simply want to make the point here, that as the Church age closes, the time clock of God concerning Israel begins to tick again. The Great Tribulation and the Seventieth Week of Daniel is also referred to as "The Time of Jacob's Trouble." God has then concluded His work with the Church and once again turns His attention to Israel. When God begins to deal with Israel again His work with the Church will have been completed. I do not mean that He does not have other things in store for His Bride the Church, but that the Church will be complete. From that point in time no other additions will be made to the Church. There will be those who are redeemed during the Tribulation but they will not be a part of His body The Church. This privilege is reserved for those who respond to the Holy Spirit and by faith believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a distinction between the true Church and true or spiritual Israel. Prior to Pentecost there were saved individuals, but there was no Church, and they were a part of spiritual Israel, not the Church. After the day of Pentecost and until the rapture we find the Church which is His body, but no spiritual Israel. After the rapture we find no Church, but a true or spiritual Israel again. These distinctions must be kept clearly in mind.

It is important to make this distinction here. Not all who profess a faith in Jesus Christ have been "born again." Scripture refers to, "Those who have a form of Godliness but deny the Power there of." John speaks of those, "Who went out from us because they were not of us." Our study of Matthew 13 demonstrated to us that there would be the false along with the true. There will be a professing Church that will go into the tribulation period. This is those "Thyatiran and Laodician" Churches from which Christ is excluded. As a means of effecting the Anti-Christ's plan, it is necessary for him to have a one world Church, so he is preparing that organization now, within the shadow of the true.

What then is the nature of the "True Church"? The very nature of the "True Church" makes it impossible for that Church to be in the tribulation. The "True Church" is made up of those who have been chosen by God, called unto Himself, given faith to believe and in response to that gift of faith have surrendered unto the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That individual has been "born from above" and is now and will be forever a child of God. At that moment of "New Birth", the Holy Spirit takes up his residence in the life of that born again one, and becomes the surety of God's eternal promise. These are those *for whom Christ died*. These are those for whom the penalty of sin is paid. These are those whose *punishment* was borne by Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. These are those whose *bodies are the temple God*. These are those who are the *bride of Christ*. These are those on whose record of sin God has stamped in the in the blood of His son *telesti* paid in full.

Since the Church is the body, of which Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18), the bride, of which He is the Bridegroom (1 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23), the object of His love (Eph. 5:25), the branch of which He is the Root and Stem (John 15:5), the building, of which He is the Foundation and Cornerstone (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:19-22), there exists between the believer and the Lord a union and a unity. The believer is no longer separated from Him, but brought into the closest oneness with Him. If the Church is in the seventieth week, she is subjected to the wrath, judgment, and indignation which characterizes the period, and because of her oneness with Christ, He, Likewise, would be subjected to that same visitation. This is impossible according to 1 John 4:17,

(1 John 4:17 NNAS)

By this, love is perfected with us, so
that we may have confidence in the
day of judgment; because as He is,
so also are we in this world.

for He can not be brought into judgment again. Inasmuch as the Church has been perfected and delivered from all judgment (Rom. 8:1; John 5:24; 1 John 4:17), if she is subject to judgment again the promises of God would be of none effect and the death of Christ would be ineffectual. Who would dare to assert that the death of Christ could fail to accomplish its purpose? While the members may be experientially imperfect and need experiential cleansing, yet the Church, which is His body, has a perfect standing in Christ and could not need such cleansing.

The nature of the testing in the seventieth week, as stated in Revelation 3:10, is not to bring the individual to cleansing, but to reveal the degradation and need of the unregenerate heart. The nature of the Church prevents such a testing.

(Rev 3:10 NNAS)

'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

(Rev 16:11 NNAS)

and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

(Rev 13:7 NNAS)

It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

This verse makes it clear that all who are in the seventieth week are brought into subjection to the Beast and through him to Satan, who gives the Beast His power. If the Church were in this period she would be subjected to Satan, and Christ would either lose His place as Head, or He, Himself, because of His union with the Church, would be likewise subjected to Satan's authority. Such a thing is unthinkable. Thus it is concluded that the nature of the Church and the completeness of her salvation prevent her from being in the Great Tribulation.

We must address the use of the word "saints" in Rev. 13:7. To the New Testament reader, we tend to think of "Saints" as those redeemed ones in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore members of the "Body of Christ" His Church. However the word "saint" is used of those who worshipped God in the Old Testament as well. We know that those before Pentecost were not in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit nor were they part of the Church. This same point applies to two other verses of Scripture Matt.24:22 and Mark 13:20 which say "For the elect's sake". We often think "election" applies only to the New Testament believers. This is not the case, for Israel is referred to as God's elect. The terms "Chosen" and "Elect" are used interchangeably throughout Scripture. The word "Chosen" is the more common word for Israel but carries the same meaning as the word "Elect." This points out the necessity of maintaining the distinction between Israel and the Church.

Let me direct your attention one more time to this important fact . . . the tribulation is a time for the whole world but specifically for Israel. There can be no question that this period will see the wrath of God poured out upon the whole earth. Revelation 3:10; Isaiah 34:2; 24:1, 4-5, 16-17, 18-21, and many other passages make this very clear. And yet, while the whole earth is in view, this period is particularly in relation to Israel. Jeremiah 30:7, which calls this period "the time of Jacob's trouble," makes this certain. The events of the seventieth week are events of the "Day of the Lord" or "Day of Jehovah." This use of the name of deity emphasizes God's peculiar relationship to that nation. When this period is being anticipated in Daniel 9, God says to the prophet, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (v. 24). This whole period then has special reference to Daniel's people, Israel, and Daniel's holy city, Jerusalem.

THE WORK OF THE RESTRAINER

(2 Th 2:7-8 NNAS)

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. {8} Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

The Thessalonian Christians were concerned for fear that the rapture had already taken place and they were in the day of the Lord. The persecutions which they were enduring, as referred to in the first chapter, had given them a basis for this erroneous consideration. Paul writes to show them in verse 3 that the day of the Lord could not take place until there was a departure. Whether this departure be a departure from the faith or a departure of the saints from the earth, as already mentioned in verse 1, is beside the point here. Second, he reveals there was to be the manifestation of the man of sin, or the lawless one, further described in Revelation 13. Paul's argument in verse 7 is that although the mystery of iniquity was operative in his day, that is, the lawless system that was to culminate in the person of the lawless one was manifesting itself, yet this lawless one could not be manifested until the "Restrainer" was taken out of the way. In other words, some One is preventing the purpose of Satan from coming to culmination and He will keep on performing this ministry until He is removed (vv. 7-8 above). Explanations as to the person of this Restrainer such as human government, law, the visible Church will not suffice, for they will all continue in a measure after the manifestation of this lawless one. While this is essentially and exegetical problem, it would seem that the only one who could do such a restraining ministry would be the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is resident in the bodies of believers, and as long as there are believers (Born again Ones) on this earth the lawless one will not be able to accomplish his purposes. It is only when the Church is removed that this restraining ministry ceases and lawlessness can produce the lawless one. It should be noted that the Holy Spirit does not cease His ministries with the removal of the Church, nor does He cease to be omnipresent, with her removal, but the restraining ministry does cease.

Thus, this ministry of the Restrainer, which will continue as long as His temple is on the earth and which must cease before the lawless one can be revealed, requires that the pretribulation rapture of the Church, for Daniel 9:27 reveals that that lawless one will be manifested at the beginning of the week.

(Dan 9:27 NNAS)

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

PROMISES TO THE TRUE CHURCH

(Rev 3:10 NNAS)

'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance,
I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour*
which is about to come upon the whole world, to test
those who dwell on the earth.

"I will keep thee from the hour of temptation (trial)." John uses the word $\tau\epsilon\rho\rho\hat{\omega}$ (terro). Thayer says that when this verb is used with $\epsilon\nu$ (en) it means "to cause one to persevere or stand firm in a thing"; while when used with $\epsilon\kappa$ (ek) it means "by guarding to cause one to escape in safety from." Since $\epsilon\kappa$ (ek) is used here it would indicate that John is promising a removal from the sphere of testing, not a preservation through it. This is

further substantiated by the use of the words "the Hour." God is not only guarding from the trials but from the very hour itself when these trials will come on those earth dwellers.

Thiessen comments on this passage:

. . . why should the Apostle write *ek tes horas* (from the hour), as he did, when he might easily have written *en te hora* (in the hour), if that is what he meant to say? Surely the Spirit of God guided him in the very language he employed.

(1 Th 5:4-10 NNAS)

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; {5} for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; {6} so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. {7} For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. {8} But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. {9} For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, {10} who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

The contrast in this passage is between light and darkness, between wrath and salvation from that wrath. 1 Thessalonians 5:2 indicates that this wrath and darkness is that of the Day of the Lord. A comparison of this passage with Joel 2:2 Zephaniah 1:14-18; Amos 5:18 will describe the darkness mentioned here as the darkness of the seventieth week. A comparison with Revelation 6:17; 11:18; 14:10, 19 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19 will describe the wrath of the day of the Lord. Paul clearly teaches in verse 9 that our expectation and appointment is not to wrath and darkness, but rather to salvation, and verse 10 indicates the method of that salvation, namely, to "live together with him."

(1 Th 1:9-10 NNAS)

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, {10} and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Again Paul clearly indicates that our expectation is not wrath, but the revelation of "his Son from heaven." This could not be unless the Son were revealed before the wrath of the seventieth week falls on the earth.

These are only some of the evidences of the teaching of Scripture that causes us to believe in the pretribulation rapture of the believer. There should be no doubt in the mind of any as to when the Church will be translated, It will certainly be before the Tribulation begins.

THE PARTIAL RAPTURE THEORY

The first theory associated with the translation of the Church is not concerned with the time of the translation in relation to the tribulation period, but rather with the subjects to be translated. It is contended that not all believers will be taken at the translation of the Church, but rather only those who are "watching" and "waiting"

for that event, who have reached some degree of spiritual attainment that makes them worthy to be included. Thomas Waugh, in *When Jesus Comes* states it this way:

But there are not a few - some of them deep and prayerful students of the Scriptures - who believe that only a prepared and expectant section of believers will be then translated. They believe that a clear inference from Luke 21:36 is that those Christians who do not "watch" will not "escape all those things that shall come to pass," and will not be accounted worthy "to stand before the Son of Man." They gather from such passages as Phil. 3:20, Titus 2:13, 2 Tim. 4:8, Hebrews 9:28, that those only will be taken who "wait," "look for," and Have loved His appearing."

THE DOCTRINAL ERROR WITH THIS THEORY

The partial rapturist position is based on a misunderstanding of the value of the death of Christ as it frees the sinner from condemnation and renders him acceptable to God. This doctrine is bound up in three New Testament words: propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption.

In regard to propitiation Chafer writes:

Christ by having His own blood sprinkled, as it were, over His body at Golgotha, becomes the Mercy Seat in reality, He is the Propitiator and has made propitiation by so answering the just demands of God's holiness against sin that heaven is rendered propitious.

In the death of Jesus on Calvary's cross, all the demands of a Holy God were satisfied. Jesus became the "mercy seat", the place of satisfaction, between God and man. Man cannot add value, merit, or satisfaction to this work of Christ.

In regard to reconciliation:

Reconciliation means that someone or something is thoroughly changed and adjusted to something which is a standard, as a watch may be adjusted to a chronometer . . . By the death of Christ on his behalf, the sinner is thoroughly changed in his relation to God . . . The sinner is so adjusted in his position respecting the holy judgments of God through the cross of Christ.

Reconciliation is a work performed in the heart of man, by God, because of and through the death of God's Son.

(Rom 5:10-11 NNAS)

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. *{11}* And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. We cannot by our own righteousness add to that work or make it more effective. It is of absolute importance that we realize that the redemptive work of God begins and ends with God and man cannot add to or take away from His complete redemption.

Concerning redemption,

Redemption is an act of God by which He Himself pays as a ransom the price of human sin which the outraged holiness of God requires. Redemption undertakes the solution of the problem of sin, as reconciliation undertakes the solution of the problem of the sinner, and propitiation undertakes the problem of an offended God.

The redemption provided for and offered to the sinner is a redemption from sin. This divine redemption is provided by the shed blood of God's own Son Jesus Christ, that was the ransom price paid by God to remove the redeemed from the slave market of sin. Again you could not obtain your redemption . . . you cannot add to the price paid for your redemption to make you more valuable than any other. God's work is complete and perfect.

The result of this threefold work is a perfect salvation, by which the sinner is justified, made acceptable to God, placed in Christ positionally, to be received by God as though he were the Son Himself. The individual who has this perfect standing of Christ can never be less than completely acceptable to God. The partial rapturist, who insists that only those who are "waiting" and "watching" will be translated, minimizes the perfect standing of the child of God in Christ and presents him before the Father in his own experiential righteousness. The sinner, then, must be less than justified, less than perfect in Christ.

Here are additional errors of those who hold this position:

1. He must deny the New Testament teaching of the unity of the body of Christ. (1 cor. 12:12-13; Eph 5:30)
2. He must deny the completeness of the resurrection of the believers at the translation. (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:14)
3. He confuses the distinction between law and grace, between works and grace. (Eph. 2:8-10)
4. He must deny the distinction between Israel and the Church.
5. He must place a portion of the "body of Christ," "His Church without spot or wrinkle," in the tribulation. IMPOSSIBLE!

THE POSTTRIBULATION RAPTURE THEORY

A theory coming into greater prevalence at the present time to explain the time of the translation of the Church in relation to the tribulation period is the posttribulation rapture theory. This theory holds that the Church will continue on the earth until the second advent at the end of this present age, at which time the Church will be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord who has come into the air on His way from heaven to earth for the second advent, to return immediately with Him. Alexander Reese, in *The Approaching Advent of Christ* states his proposition this way:

The Church of Christ will not be removed from the earth until the Advent of Christ at the very end of the present Age: the Rapture and the Appearing take place at the same crisis; hence Christians of that generation will be exposed to the final affliction under Antichrist.

The errors of this position:

1. It must be based on a denial of dispensationalism and all dispensational distinctions.
2. It denies the Scriptural distinction between Israel and the Church.
3. It denies the Scriptural teaching concerning the nature and purpose of

the tribulation.

4. It denies the Scriptural distinctions between the rapture and the second advent, making them one and the same.
5. it denies the doctrine of imminence. (that Jesus may come at any time)

THE MIDTRIBULATION RAPTURE THEORY

A theory gaining in popularity in recent years is the Midtrib theory. According to this interpretation the Church will be raptured at the end of the first three and one-half years of the seventieth week of Daniel. The Church will endure the events of the first half of the tribulation, which, according to the mid - tribulation rapturist, are not manifestations of divine wrath, but will be translated before the last half of the week begins, which, according to this theory, contains all the outpouring of the wrath of God. The rapture is said to occur in connection with the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the catching up of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. The midtribulation rapture view is essentially a compromise between the posttribulation rapture and pretribulation positions. It concurs with the pretribulation view in holding that the Church will be raptured as an event distinct from the second advent, that the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2 is the Holy Spirit, that the Church is promised deliverance from wrath. In common with posttribulationism it holds that the Church is promised tribulation on the earth and is in need of purging, that Scripture does not teach the doctrine of imminence, and that the Church is seen on the earth after Revelation 4:1.

The false bases of Midtribulation Rapturism

1. They must deny or weaken the dispensational interpretation of Scripture
2. They must deny the strict distinctions between Israel and the Church.
3. They must divide the tribulation into two separate and unrelated halves,
4. They must deny the doctrine of imminence.
5. They must deny the doctrine of the mystery of the Church.
6. They must forsake the literal interpretation of Scripture.
7. They fail to grasp the complete and full redemption provided by Jesus on Calvary.
8. They fail to understand that sin is forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ and that the Church is to be cleansed by the washing of the water by the Word and not by tribulation.