

# PROPHETIC TRUTHS FOR TODAY

Unveiling the End-Time Events

by

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### WHEN WILL THE RAPTURE TAKE PLACE?

IN THESE days God's people need to know clearly and with conviction *what the Scriptures teach* with reference to our Lord's return. It seems to me the current theological theories tend to obscure and veil the great hope of the Church. Some fifty years ago the leading evangelical students of prophecy tended to stick together and hence uphold the premillennial view. I could furnish a considerable list of names of men, known all across America, who shared this particular view of our Lord's return. Of late, however, many well known men within evangelical and conservative circles have inclined to pull away from this strong position which was held earlier. In these days there seems to be a great deal of hedging on this vital doctrine of our Lord's return.

Three words occur in the Greek New Testament and they are very important in a study of the doctrine of the Lord's return. They are: *Parousia*, *Apokalupsis*, and *Epiphaneia*. While there are occasions when they are used interchangeably, yet generally they hold an important distinction with regard to the manner of His coming.

- *Parousia* means His coming for His own, that is, our meeting in His presence.
- *Apokalupsis* refers more specifically to His revelation, or His coming in glory to rule on earth.
- *Epiphaneia* means to bring forth light, and is illustrated in His incarnation, that is, His first coming.

The occasional overlapping of these words in their meaning does not cancel out the significant distinction of each. To illustrate, e.g., the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. On a few occasions the Kingdom of God means the same as the Kingdom of Heaven (the earthly rule of the Messiah), but generally the Kingdom of God means *the total sphere of God's rule and spiritual activity*. The Kingdom of Heaven (used only in Matthew's Gospel) means definitely the Messianic rule of the Messiah.

We shall proceed to explain each of the four positions held regarding the manner of the Lord's coming. These views are held by evangelicals, and the test of evangelicalism is not based on which of the views is maintained, although it seems to me the New Testament teaches clearly the premillennial. This logically might be discussed first, but I prefer to close the discussion with a presentation of what I believe to be the right view.

## THE PARTIAL RAPTURE THEORY

This explanation of the Lord's coming is held by a relatively small group. These people teach that at Christ's coming only those who are fully watching and waiting for the event will be raptured; in other words, only those who have attained a certain degree of spiritual stature will be caught up to meet the Lord. The rest will be left behind when Jesus comes.

This explanation might perhaps have the merit of awakening some people, or stirring them up on the subject. But, it seems clear to me that this interpretation cannot be reconciled with the Scriptures. The partial-rapture view denies the unity and the wholeness of the body of Christ.

Paul speaks concerning **"them that are Christ's at his coming."** Obviously we must either be in Christ or in Adam. There is no other classification; that is, we are either saved or unregenerated. Paul further strikes down the partial-rapture theory in the words **"We shall all be changed"** (I Corinthians 15:51-52), and **"All that sleep in Jesus will he bring with him"** (I Thessalonians 4:15). If one should be a weak Christian at Christ's return it would be preferable to have died, because all dead in Christ will be raised at His coming.

I am afraid that these good people who hold the partial-rapture view are *confused on the matter of salvation and rewards.*

There is a vast difference in being just saved or saved victoriously. One may at His coming be saved **"so as by fire,"** or a person may have a rich entrance into His glory. We simply must not confuse law and grace. Salvation is a gift of God and has nothing to do with works. If we are saved, then obviously we are members of His body, and that body cannot be dismembered or broken at His coming.

Passages used to bolster the partial-rapture view are usually wrenched out of context or misapplied. And, either they refer to rewards, or situations confronting the nation Israel at the time of the establishment of the kingdom. Of course, a great distinction will be realized at the judgment seat of Christ, at which time our work on earth will be evaluated. But the question of salvation will not be determined there, for all will have been translated and hence stand in His presence.

## THE MID-TRIBULATION POSITION

This view has gained some considerable following in recent years. Those who maintain this position believe Christ will come in the middle of the seven-year period, hence the church will be raptured at the end of the three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week. These people make much of the first half and the latter division of the Tribulation. The unity of the seventieth week, as it relates to Israel, is clear and unmistakable. It is rather far-fetched, I think, to speak of the seven years as almost two unrelated parts.

First of all, this theory removes the doctrine of Christ's imminence because the church can be raptured only after certain things have taken place, you see.

These people harp on the general teaching of Tribulation, but they confuse the general, or ongoing tribulation with the Great Tribulation. (See Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21). Nowhere does the church fit into the period of tribulation, for the latter concerns Israel and the world, not the church.

Most of the confusion comes, I think, because these people *confuse the trumpet judgment of the angel* (Revelation 11:15), and *the last trump and the trump of God* referred to in I Corinthians 15:52 and I Thessalonians 4:16.

- The trumpet of Revelation 11 is the announcement of God's unprecedented judgment which will fall upon the earth during the terrible day of His wrath,
- The last trump and the trump of God, referred to by Paul, means the summons of the living saints, and those who have died in Christ, to meet the Lord in the air.
- The blowing of the seventh trumpet as depicted in Revelation is not a summons for the church at all, but rather it marks the beginning of the terrible judgment upon an ungodly earth.

Moreover, the mid-tribulation theory is untenable because if the church is raptured in the middle of Daniel's 70th week, then the believers who are alive on earth could count out exactly and precisely the day of the Lord's coming. This could be done simply by associating the time of the false covenant of the Antichrist and the abominations introduced by him in the holy place. The New Testament, however, states specifically that no one knows the day or the hour, and we are admonished to be watching and maintaining a constant readiness. The return of our Lord is a secret coming.

The mid-tribulation rapturists, if they are right, could calculate exactly the time when the Lord returns. But this, I feel, is forbidden in the New Testament. Scripturally we have been alerted, and exhorted to watchfulness, yet we have no magic key with which to determine the exact time of His return.

## **THE POSTTRIBULATIONISTS**

This group is perhaps the most rapidly expanding one among the evangelicals in our day. In general, they believe the Church will continue right on to the end, at which time Christ will come, and we are caught up; but there is no interval between that event and His return to reign. They regard it as one and the same event, you see.

These people *have very little regard for dispensational truth*. In fact, they fail to see the scriptural distinction concerning Israel and the Church. Furthermore, they believe Daniel's 70 weeks are already in the past. And God's specific program as it relates to Israel, and set forth in Matthew 24 and 25, is brought into the Church directly. No clear Bible exegesis is possible when such basic errors are made on clear dispensational passages.

This view, like the previous one we discussed, also removes the imminence of our Lord's coming. It does away with the consistently taught truth of waiting for His return.

With such a view being held, there obviously is no expectancy, no blessed hope or anticipation of the return of God's Son from heaven. These people say tribulation will be ongoing to the very end. Tribulation, by them, is always generalized, and no recognition is given to the time set forth as the Great Tribulation.

It seems to me that their position completely fails to take cognizance of the clear teaching of Daniel and Christ with reference to a specific period. In addition, these people say, there is no gap between the 69th and the 70th week. This is over-simplification going on a rampage. They hold the resurrection and the coming of Christ to take the Church to Himself and the kingdom, are events that are altogether simultaneous.

It is tragic, I think, to give no consideration to such great distinctions in Scripture as Israel, the Gentile nations, the Church, and the Kingdom. The Apostle Paul makes a very clear distinction on these, **"The Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God"** (I Corinthians 10:32). And the apostle gives a very special dispensational treatment of the Jews in his letter to the Romans. It is well to take heed to the Pauline admonishment, **"rightly dividing [handling aright] the word of truth"** (II Timothy 2:15).

### THE PRETRIBULATION RAPTURIST VIEW

This is the view and interpretation that the whole church, or the body of Christ, will be by resurrection and translation caught up to meet the Lord in the air, that is, before any part of Daniel's 70th week is fulfilled.

The first New Testament passage pointing to the homecalling of the church is in John 14:3. This, and similar passages, are taken literally. And, pretribulation rapturists also take literally the scriptural distinction given to Israel and the Church as well as the Kingdom. Indeed, these passages of Scripture should not be fused or confused.

The second New Testament passage which clearly sets forth the pretribulation rapture is I Corinthians 15:51-52: **"Behold, I show 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."** This is the trump of resurrection and transaction of believers, and as already pointed out, it has no connection with the angelic trumpet judgment of Revelation 11.

Thirdly, the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is further illustrated in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. This passage presents the order of the event. **"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; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."** What clearer passage do we need to establish the doctrine?

The pretribulation rapturists, or the premillennialists, hold, very soundly, I think, a view which harmonizes with the doctrine of the imminence of our Lord's return.

No signs are given specifically to the Church, and primarily *the Church is not exhorted to look for signs*, but rather to look for the Son from heaven. The Church believed this truth long before Darby and Scofield clearly systemized the doctrine. The premillennial truth was clearly the great hope of the Church in the first and second centuries as the great Apostolic and Church Fathers taught so clearly. Paul makes clear that the great judgment upon earth, or the great cataclysm of the End-Time, will not come before the **“He that letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way”**; that is, the One that restraineth now be taken out of the way (II Thessalonians 2:8). The context shows the Holy Spirit is that One, and after He is removed, then the flood-gates are opened, and the satanic program will engulf the whole earth. But this final rule of Satan cannot come before the One who hindereth is taken away.

It is interesting to notice that the great judgments discussed in Revelation 6-19 do not begin until first you see depicted the whole redeemed throng in heaven.

In chapter 4 we first see the open door in heaven, and the great throngs there are singing the song of redemption, while simultaneously the unprecedented judgments are inflicting all the earth. If the rapture does not occur before Revelation 20:4, as some believe, how do we explain that the redeemed throng is depicted in glory before the judgment strikes the earth? And it is also very clearly revealed that believers are not to be channeled into the judgment for the earth.

**“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”** (I Thessalonians 5:9). This harmonizes with the Gospel of Luke, **“Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be counted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man”** (Luke 2:36). The same promise is given in Revelation 3:10, **“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth”** (Revelation 3:10).

Lastly, in this connection, we have in Acts these clear truths: **“It is not for you to know the times and seasons.”** If the tribulation came before the rapture we would, of course, know the times and seasons. Let us regard seriously our Lord’s exhortation, **“Watch ye therefore and pray always . . .”** (Luke 21:36).

While there are more passages that point to the pretribulation rapture, these which we have selected are revealing and definitely support our position on the rapture.

Even *Old Testament typology points to the same truth*. While we do not build Bible doctrine on typology, it is rather significant, I think, that typology supports the pretribulation rapture.

- Enoch was translated and taken away before the great deluge came upon the earth.
- Noah was safely tucked away in the Ark before the unprecedented judgment fell upon the earth.
- Lot was snatched out of Sodom before the fire and brimstone rained upon the doomed cities.

Indeed there are some problems in connection with the premillennial position, but they are infinitely smaller than those that loom up when either of the other positions is taken.

In fact, problems become insurmountable when we examine the first three views discussed in the light of Scripture.

The premillennial view harmonizes with the whole of Scripture, and it finds complete correlation with the teachings of Paul, who has written the major portion of the New Testament, and who was the one to whom was given the total revelation concerning the Church.

My friend, if you have commenced to waver on this glorious hope of the Church (the imminent return of your Lord) I urge you to reexamine all the views and let the Scripture be the authority in giving you the right interpretation.

**~ end of chapter 8 ~**

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