

THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

THE RAPTURE

A. DEFINITION

In 1 Thess 4:17 we read that we will be caught up to meet the LORD in the air. The Greek word HARPAZO is defined by Liddell & Scott as “To ravish away, to carry off, to grasp hastily, to snatch up, to plunder.”
In Latin the verb used to translate HARPAZO is the word RAPTO from which we get our English word RAPTURE, meaning “The act of transporting a person from one place to another (esp heaven). (Con. Oxford Dictionary).
Many question the whole idea of a RAPTURE, but it is a perfectly scriptural concept.

B. TWO STAGES TO THE COMING OF CHRIST?

It is often contended that Pre-tribulationists teach a FIRST SECOND COMING and a SECOND SECOND COMING.
It is of prime importance in the interest of sound doctrine to examine the word of GOD, to see if, in fact, the Bible does teach us that there are two phases to the SECOND COMING.
Let us not neglect to take into consideration that there were TWO PHASES to the FIRST COMING.
JESUS CHRIST ministered to all UNTIL his DEATH.
AFTER his resurrection he APPEARED AGAIN, but now ONLY TO BELIEVERS.
Thus there was a DIVISION in the MINISTRY of the LORD at his FIRST COMING.
The question thus arises, “Does the Bible teach that the RAPTURE is separated from the REVELATION of JESUS CHRIST by the GREAT TRIBULATION?”

C. THE RIGHTEOUS REMOVED – THE WICKED LEFT BEHIND

There are several scriptures which make it very clear that, when the LORD comes to resurrect the dead in Christ, transform the living believers and catch them up to meet him in the air, HE COMES ALONE.
That there is no NEED for angelic assistance is very clear from Luke 20:35-36, where we are told that “They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that age, and the resurrection out of the dead ... ARE EQUAL UNTO ANGELS ...” (EQUAL UNTO THE ANGELS ... ISANGELOS from ISOS (Equal) and ANGELOS (Angels).
Thus we proceed upwards to meet the LORD, unaided and unassisted for we now have bodies which are “Fashioned like unto his glorious body”. Phil 3:21.
Concerning the fact that the LORD COMES ALONE let us note:-

1. JOHN 14:3. Here JESUS said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also."
2. ACTS 1:11. This JESUS, who was received up from you into the heaven, shall so come in like manner, as ye beheld him going into heaven." HE WILL RETURN IN LIKE MANNER. Let us note that he left ALONE from a company of BELIEVERS only. If he returns in LIKE MANNER, surely he must return ALONE, to BELIEVERS only? Only BELIEVERS saw him depart.
3. 1 THESS 4:16. "For the LORD HIMSELF (AUTOS ... He HIMSELF and no other) shall descend from heaven, with a SHOUT, with AN ARCHANGEL'S VOICE, and with GOD'S TRUMP." Correctly read, there is no angel here, for it is the LORD whose voice is like an ARCHANGEL'S, and it is GOD'S TRUMP, sounded by none other than the SON OF GOD to summon his own to a meeting with HIM in the air.
4. HEB 9:28. Thus also the CHRIST, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, without sin, to them that wait for him (AUTON), unto salvation." (PANIN)
To whom does the LORD appear here? The answer is self evident – to the ones expecting him.

D. THE BIBLE IS CLEAR THAT THE CHURCH WILL NOT BE HERE DURING THE GREAT TRIBULATION

1. LUKE 21:36. "But watch at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man."
The literal translation here is "Escape all these things being about to happen."
The Modern Language Bible rendering here is very apt. It reads, "Escape all those IMPENDING events."
The word ESCAPE is EKPHUGO in the Greek. Liddell & Scott have this to say of it. It means "To flee out or away, escape : to flee out of, escape from : to escape from danger."
Notice that we are to escape these impending events.
However, Paul writes in 1 Thess 5:2-4, "For yourselves know perfectly that the DAY OF THE LORD so cometh as a thief in the night. For when THEY say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child and they shall not escape."
(By no means may they escape ... EKPHUGO.)
N.B. MEN CAN PREVAIL TO ESCAPE ... THEY SHALL NOT ESCAPE.

2. EPH 5:27. "In order that HE HIMSELF (AUTOS) might present THE GLORIOUS CHURCH to HIMSELF."
When does this presentation of the GLORIOUS CHURCH to the LORD take place? It can only take place BEFORE the GREAT TRIBULATION. A careful scrutiny of Rev 19 shows the LORD JESUS coming to punish the wicked NOT to receive his BRIDE.

3. 1 THESS 1:10. We read we are "To wait for his SON from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even JESUS, the one delivering us from the coming wrath."
According to ERICH SAUER (Triumph of the Crucified, Page 105) the Greek word RUOMAI translated DELIVERING means "A rescue with power". Liddell & Scott give its meaning as "To draw to oneself, to draw out of harm's way".
Peter uses the word of LOT in 2 Peter 2:7 "And delivered just LOT."
How was he delivered? The angel said, "Haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither."

4. 2 THESS 2:3. "(That day shall not come) unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed."
There is much dispute concerning this verse. Some, like Dr Schuyler English and Kenneth Wuest, insist that APOSTASIA can mean DEPARTURE, and, as Paul is discussing the coming of the LORD and our gathering together unto him (2 Th 2:1), THE DEPARTURE refers to the RAPTURE and not to the RELIGIOUS DERELICTION of the END TIME.
According to Dr English Tyndale (1534), Coverdale (1535), Cranmer (1539), The Geneva Bible (1537) and Beza (1565) rendered it DEPARTURE.
Liddell & Scott in their classical lexicon give as the second meaning of APOSTASIA "A departure, a disappearance". (Wuest)
Should these early translators prove to have been correct, the argument in favour of PRE-TRIBULATION would be unanswerable.

5. REV 3:10. "I also will keep thee out of the trial being about to come on all the inhabited earth."
Many are convinced that this is a clear promise to those who are alive at the end-time, that the LORD will deliver them from the WRATH OF GOD which will be manifested against all who take pleasure in ungodliness.
Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, makes it clear that GOD has not appointed us to WRATH, but to obtain salvation by our LORD JESUS CHRIST. 1 Thess 5:9.

E. THE ANGELS ARE SENT FORTH TO REMOVE THE WICKED – THE RIGHTEOUS REMAIN

Just as there are clear scriptures pertaining to the removal of the righteous with the leaving behind of the wicked, so there are others which refer to a removal of the wicked by means of the angels, with the righteous left behind to enter into the millennial earth.

One practical reason for the use of angels to gather the wicked, as well as the elect of this time, is that the devastation of the earth is so complete that there will be no other means of transporting them.

1. MATT 13:41. "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father." Similar words are used in Matt 13:49.
2. As KING OF THE EARTH (Zech 14:9) the LORD JESUS will judge the worthiness of those who survive the Great Tribulation, to enter his kingdom. Matt 25:31-32. When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all the nations."
Notice in this 25th chapter of Matthew that the LORD is referred to as KING only with respect to the RIGHTEOUS. (Mt 25:34, 40)
3. But his ELECT are also gathered by the ANGELS. This is because they are not in glorified bodies.
Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27. "He shall send forth his angels with a great trumpet and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the heavens' ends unto their ends."
This is in fulfillment of the FEAST OF TRUMPETS (Lev 23:23-25) when Israel is regathered into their land.

F. BUT MANY DO NOT SURVIVE THE GREAT TRIBULATION TO BE JUDGED

1. 2 THESS 1:7-8. "The LORD JESUS shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking full vengeance on them that know not GOD."
This is very different from the RAPTURE.
2. JUDE 14-15. "Behold, the LORD cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgement upon all."
It appears as if the glorified saints accompany the LORD back to earth.
3. These MIGHTY ANGELS together with the SAINTS constitute the ARMIES of HEAVEN.

REV 19:11-21. The LORD comes with the armies of heaven to destroy the wicked at the battle of Armageddon.

This is a vastly different LORD JESUS CHRIST from the one described in John 14, Acts 1 and 1 Thess 4.

There will not be so many who will survive to stand before the LORD when he judges the nations, and, at that judgement, the numbers of men will be drastically reduced again.

G. THE TIME OF THE RAPTURE

The RAPTURE takes place just prior to the commencement of the DAY OF THE LORD.

Many would place the RAPTURE of the CHURCH between Revelation chapters three and four, seeing in the ELDERS the representatives of the CHURCH.

But this is sheer inference.

Peter quotes from Joel's prophecy and tells us that the sun will be turned into darkness and the MOON INTO BLOOD "Before the great and notable DAY OF THE LORD comes." Acts 2:20.

That DAY is a DAY OF WRATH. Zeph 1:14-18.

In Rev 6:12 we find John records the breaking of the SIXTH SEAL, at which time the sun becomes BLACK as sackcloth of hair, and the moon becomes as BLOOD.

It is here that the inhabitants of the earth recognise that the GREAT DAY of GOD and the LAMB'S WRATH has come. Rev 6:17.

There are THREE PARTS to what JOHN saw when the SIXTH SEAL was broken.

1. Signs in heaven and on earth which cause men to realise that the DAY OF THE LORD is at hand. Here GOD'S WRATH BEGINS.
2. 144 000 Jews are sealed upon earth.
3. A GREAT MULTITUDE which no man could number is seen before the throne. Of them we read, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the LAMB." Rev 7:14.
The words "OUT OF" translate the Greek word "EK".
Of EK Liddell and Scott write, "Radical sense :- from out of, away from."
Of Place :- Out of, From forth.
This GREAT MULTITUDE is the only company in the Revelation who could possibly be the CHURCH and they come "Away from the GREAT TRIBULATION."

H. A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

POST-TRIBULATIONISTS point out that there was a transitional period when, for about 40 years, the JEWS continued with their sacrifices, while the CHURCH was being established. Thus ISRAEL and the CHURCH existed side by side. Thus, they contend, there is no reason why the CHURCH could not go through the tribulation.

It could, however, be contended that this is exactly what has been happening in the world since the STATE OF ISRAEL was re-established in 1948.

That GOD has been active in allowing the JEWS to return to their homeland, albeit in unbelief, no pre-millennialist would disallow.

Indeed, many feel assured that GOD has supplied their needs in the face of persistent efforts to destroy their infant state.

Thus we see on the one hand GOD contending for Israel, but on the other hand we see the TIMES OF THE GENTILES running out.

One day the FULL NUMBER OF GENTILES WILL BE SAVED. Rom 11:25.

Thus the preparation for the future, and the overlapping of Israel and the CHURCH is taking place now.

I. IMMINENCE or EXPECTANCY

Can the LORD come back at any time or are there things that must first come to pass?

While we may not know the DAY or HOUR of the LORD'S RETURN (Matt 24:36), there are certain unmistakable signs which must appear.

Thus we read in Luke 21:5-11, 25-36 we are told that we will see:-

1. False CHRISTs. Luke 21:8; Rev 6:1-2
2. Wars. Luke 21:9-10; Rev 6:3-4
3. Earthquakes. Luke 21:11
4. Famines and pestilence. Luke 21:11; Rev 6:5-8
5. Sights of terror and great signs from heaven. Luke 21:11, 25-26

Jesus then warns, "Now when these things begin to occur, stand erect and lift up your heads because your deliverance is drawing near."

We will certainly see the day approaching. Heb 10:25.

J. THE BLESSED HOPE

TITUS 2:13. "Awaiting the BLESSED HOPE and appearing of the glory of the GREAT GOD and our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST."

It is difficult to comprehend how it can be BLESSED to be a LIVING SAINT, rather than a dead one, if the GREAT TRIBULATION is to come before the RAPTURE.

K. CONCLUSION

There are TWO GREAT DIFFICULTIES concerning POST-TRIBULATIONISM.

1. If the RAPTURE comes after the GREAT TRIBULATION, then ALL the SAINTS, including the JEWS, will be glorified, and all the wicked will be slain.
This causes post-tribulationists like Robert Gundry to place the judgement of the nations AFTER the millennium and, indeed, has turned many to embrace A-MILLENNIALISM.
2. There is a day coming when the EXACT day on which ARMAGEDDON will take place, will be known.