

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Week 4 – The Rapture: Comfort One Another With These Words

February 14, 2017

JOHN 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

I CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵² 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. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDY TOOL

Context is key! Know to whom the passage was written. Understand the history/culture, and timeframe.

We are told in the NT:

John 16:33 - *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

II Tim. 3:12 - *all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

Phil. 3:10 - *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings*

As believers in Jesus we expect trials and tribulations.

Rom. 5:3 - *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;*

Rom. 8:35 - *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword.*

James 1:2-3 - *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

The word “tribulation” comes from the Greek word *thlipsis* meaning *pressure* (that which constricts or rubs together). It is used of a narrow place that “hems someone in”; *tribulation*, especially *internal pressure* that causes someone to feel confined (restricted, “without options”). *Thlipsis* is pressure as in a crushing beneath a weight. In the ancient world “tribulation” was the word for an ancient torture where a victim was laid on his back and placing weights on his chest, one upon another, upon another, until the person’s chest was crushed and he could no longer breathe. *Thlipsis* is used in general of any kind of testing, affliction or distress which people experience throughout life, and especially of the Church and her problems in this world (Acts 11:19; Rom. 5:3; Rev. 1:9; 2:9, 10, 22). It is clear that God tells us, as believers, that there will be times of suffering, persecution, troubles, trials, tribulations. There is, however, one period of time, seven years to be exact, that is known as “the” Tribulation.

The FIRST question to ask re: “the” Tribulation is “What is the Tribulation?” The Tribulation refers to a specific eschatological time of trouble. Eschatology is from two Gk words: *last* and *study*. Eschatology is the study of last times/end times.

The Tribulation is a special time of judgment from God that will come upon the entire world. The Tribulation will be unparalleled in its judgment and unparalleled in its evangelism. The Tribulation will be culminated by the personal physical return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

This seven year designated period of time is known as

- “The time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble,” (Jer. 30:7).
- Daniel calls it a “time of trouble” for his people (Dan. 12:1-2).
- Not noted in the text of Scripture by these words but within Biblical circles, the Tribulation has been labeled, “the 70th week of Daniel” – the final week of Daniel’s 70 week prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27). Each week equates to 7 years in this prophecy. The final week – the 70th week – equates to 7 years.
- Rev. 3:10 – the Tribulation is called – *the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

The phrase *earth dwellers/inhabitants of the earth* is used throughout Revelation in reference to non-believers who are against God.

- Many of the judgments of the tribulation are targeted for the *earth dwellers* (Rev. 8:13).
- It is the *earth dwellers* who rejoice and send gifts to one another when the two witnesses are killed in Jerusalem during the middle of the tribulation (Rev. 11:10).
- When the Beast (Antichrist) is introduced in Revelation 13, it is noted that, *all who dwell on the earth will worship him* (Rev. 13:8, 12). Thus, 100% of the *earth dwellers* receive the mark of the beast and will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire.

- During the Tribulation, as followers of the Beast, the *earth dwellers* will be deceived by the false signs and wonders of the Beast and will erect an image of the Beast, likely in the Jewish Temple (Rev. 13:14).
- The target of the preaching of the gospel by an angelic messenger will be *earth dwellers* (Rev. 14:6), not a single one of them will follow the Lamb, instead they will wonder after the Beast (Rev. 17:8).

Therefore, who will be going through the Tribulation?

- Non-believers
- Israel is specifically noted
- NOTE: these are observations at this point.
- AND, we can observe that the Tribulation doesn't look like a picnic!

The second question we need to ask re: the Tribulation is, "If the Tribulation is a specified period of time, what specifically is going on during that time and WHY? What is the purpose of the Tribulation?"

It is a time of God's wrath or indignation (outrage) and the vindication of God's holiness (clearing His name from accusation [Ex. 20:7 - *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*]) (Zeph. 1:15, 18; Rev. 6:17; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 14:7 - *Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.* Rev. 14:10; Rev. 19:2). God's wrath against man's sin and rebellion will be withheld no longer.

- To make an end of wickedness (Isa. 13:9; Isa. 24:19-20). The Tribulation is a time when God will pour out His wrath/judgment on evil and sin in preparation for RESTORING this world to His original plan.
- To bring about a worldwide awakening (Rev. 6:9-11; Rev. 7:1-17). The Gospel will be preached to the whole world (Matt. 24:14).
- The purging of Israel. Dan. 12:5-7- *to break the power of the holy people*, Israel. God will use the Tribulation to prepare Israel for the Millennial Kingdom – to prepare them for the Messiah – Jesus! *To break the power of the holy people* - during the last half of the Tribulation there is going to be great persecution against the Jewish people
 - The Tribulation is the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) when God will purge and cleanse Israel to prepare them for their Messiah – Jesus – and His return to set up His Kingdom that God had promised the Jewish people (Isa. 2; Zech. 12, 13, 14. . . .; Mal. 3:3).

Mal. 3:1-3 - *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.*

Israel, as a nation, offered offerings during OT times, NOT in righteousness. They will do so during the Millennial Kingdom. The Millennial Kingdom will be the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

A few verses concerning the purging of Israel during the Tribulation:

Zech. 13:8-9 - *And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the LORD, That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: ⁹ I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.*

Eze. 20:37 - *I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;*

Eze. 22:19-21 - *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. ²⁰ As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you. ²¹ Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst.*

What is the rapture of the Church?

What is the Church? The Church is the body of Christ (Col. 1:24). The members are baptized into the body of Christ. I Cor. 12:13 - *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.* The members are comprised of Gentile believers and Jewish believers (Eph. 3:6 - *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body,* (with the Jews) - *and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...*)

What is the rapture?

The supernatural removal of the Church out of this world. The WORD “rapture” is not in Scripture! The term “rapture” comes from the Latin Vulgate Bible – “raptizo/rapturo”. This is the Latin translation of the Greek verb “caught up” which is found in I Thess. 4:17. The Greek word for “caught up” in I Thess. 4:17 is harpazo which means to seize, to carry off by force; to snatch out or away. Harpazo is speaking of a sudden, irresistible act of carrying off by force.

When will the rapture occur in relation to the Tribulation and Christ’s physical Second Coming? The four basic theories concerning the timing of the rapture:

Pretribulationism places the rapture before the seven-year Tribulation

Midtribulationism places the rapture at or near the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation – after the first 3.5 years.

Posttribulationism places the rapture at the end of the seven-year Tribulation

Pre-wrath view places the rapture before the “great day of...wrath” (Rev. 6:17) which they place near the end of the Tribulation.

Scripture doesn’t *defend* the teaching of the Rapture. It states it as a fact! YET, of Protestant Pastors (1,000 interviewed via a telephone conversation conducted by LifeWay re: their views on end times theology), 25% believe that the concept of the rapture is not to be taken literally!

JOHN 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus isn't described as coming to earth with saints to establish His kingdom. Jesus is described as receiving believers to Himself...as taking believers from the earth to be with Him. Jesus is taking believers to the place that He has prepared for us in His Father's house. Since no judgment coming upon the unsaved is described in this passage, we can conclude that this passage is not speaking of Jesus' physical return in glory and power to destroy the wicked (Matt. 13:36-43, 47-50). John 14:1-3 speaks of Jesus' coming to gather His own. SEE APPENDIX: JEWISH WEDDING FEAST

I CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵² 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. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Behold, I tell you a mystery – a mystery was something hidden in past ages and revealed in the NT. The Church wasn't revealed in the OT. Paul calls the Church (Gentile and Jewish believers in the same body – the body of Christ) a mystery. The rapture is for the Church. Thus, the rapture wasn't known in the OT; it was also a mystery as we see here in I Cor. 15. (NOTE: The OT does tell us that God's plan of redemption is for the world – for both Jews and Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:5-6).

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – this passage concerns both those who have died and those who are alive.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye speaks of the speed at which believers will be translated.

The trumpet will sound – making an announcement. This is the *last trump*. Could it be that this trumpet is heralding the end of the Church era?

The dead will be raised – according to I Thess. 4:16.

And we shall be changed – and the living saints will follow (I. Thess. 4:17).

I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The believers in Thessalonica had come to believe in and hope for the reality of Jesus' return (I Thess. 1:10; I Thess. 2:19; I Thess. 5:1, 2). Paul is answering their question concerning what happens to believers who die before Jesus returns. Do they miss His returning? Clearly, the Thessalonians had an imminent view of Christ's return. And, Paul had left the impression that His coming to meet them in the air could occur in their lifetime.

To meet the Lord in the air – this passage does not speak to our returning with Jesus to the earth on horses (Rev. 19:11-14).

Comfort – notice that there is no judgment in this passage.

Are we as believers told to look for Christ or for the antichrist? Is Jesus' coming imminent? Is His coming at any moment? Imminent means upon us, in the process of occurring, about to occur. Jesus is not coming "soon;" His coming is at any moment. There is nothing more in Biblical prophecy needs to happen before Jesus comes again. We, as believers, remain on alert 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The rapture could occur at any moment (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54) and can rightly be called "imminent." We need to know that the Rapture of the Church is to be distinguished from the Second Coming of Jesus. The Second Coming of Christ, when He defeats His enemies and sets up His kingdom, will not occur until after the Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-30; Revelation chapters 6–18). Therefore, the Second Coming is not imminent.

THE RAPTURE AND THE SECOND COMING

A careful study of all Biblical references to the Second Coming clearly shows that the Rapture and the physical return of Jesus to the earth are two separate phases of His Second Coming.

RAPTURE

Christ comes FOR His own in the Air (I Thess. 4:17)

Christians are taken to the Father's house; "I will receive You to Myself (John 14:1-3)

The Church will be in heaven

PHYSICAL 2ND COMING

Christ comes WITH His own to the earth (Rev. 19:14); Jesus will stand on the Mt. of Olives (Zech. 14:4)

Resurrected saints remain on earth (Rev. 19 & 20)

Christ sets up His kingdom on earth

(John 14:3)

(Rev. 20:4-6; Isa. 2:1-4; Zech. 14:4ff)

It could occur at any moment (I Thess. 4:1-18; I Cor. 15:50-54)

It cannot occur until the end of the seven-year Tribulation period (Matt. 24:29-31)

There are no signs preceding it (Rev. 22:20)

There are numerous signs preceding it (Matt. 24:3-33)

It affects believers only (I Thess. 4:13-18)

It affects all humanity (Rev. 19:11 – Rev. 20:15)

It is a time of joy (I Thess. 4:18)

It is a time of mourning (Rev. 19:11; Rev. 20:15) and judgment (Matt. 25:31ff)

It occurs before the day of wrath (I Thess. 5:9)

It occurs after the Tribulation (Dan. 9:24-27)

At the Rapture believers receive glorified body (I Cor. 15:51-53)

No one is said to receive a glorified body; no reference to the translation of the living saints

At the Rapture all believers will be removed from the earth (I Thess. 4:16-17)

At the Second Coming all unbelievers will be removed from the earth (Matt. 24:37-41), as in the days of Noah!

There is no mention of Satan

Satan is bound in the abyss for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3)

The judgment seat of Christ occurs after the Rapture (I Cor. 3:9-15; II Cor. 5:9-11. See Rev. 4 – the 24 elders have rec'd their crowns/rewards. Tribulation begins in Rev. 6.

There is no mention of the judgment seat of Christ at His physical second coming

There is the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7)

His bride descends w/ Him to earth (Rev. 19:9, 11-14)

Only Christ's own will see Him (I Thess. 4:13-18) Every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7)

The Rapture occurs some time before the Tribulation

The physical second coming occurs prior to the Millennial reign of Christ

QUESTIONS

Is this new information to you?

What is the Tribulation?

What is the purpose for the Tribulation?

Who will go through the Tribulation?

What is the Church?

What is the rapture?

What is your view regarding the timing of the rapture and why?

HOMEWORK

Read Week 4's handout and look up the cross references.

Attempt to write your view of the Tribulation and the rapture with Scripture verses noted.

Read II Thess. 2

APPENDIX: JEWISH WEDDING FEAST

- The Father of the bridegroom negotiates a price for the bride.
- The bridegroom travels to the bride's house.
- Betrothal symbol – drink from a cup of wine.
- From that moment the bride was declared sanctified or set apart.
- Bridegroom would leave the bride's home and return to his father's home. The Bridegroom would speak these words to the bride before his departure: "Let not your heart be troubled. . . I go to prepare a place for you. . .and. . .I will come again". We note two comings on the part of the bridegroom.
- The bride did not know the exact day or hour the bridegroom would return. She needed to be prepared at all times.
- Bridegroom would add onto his father's home – bridal chamber.
- At the father's command, the Bridegroom and the groomsmen (Judges 14; John 3) would travel to the bride's home. The Bridegroom himself didn't know the exact time. Note Matt. 24:36.
- The bride would be beckoned from the street by a shout.
- The entire bridal party traveled to the father's home for a marriage feast (Mat. 25:1-6).
- The Bridegroom and bride went into the bridal chamber to consummate the marriage (Judges 14:12).
- When the marriage was consummated, there was a seven day marriage celebration during which time the bride remained hidden in the bridal chamber.
- At the end of the seven days, the Bridegroom brought his bride out for all to see.