

Pre-tribulation Rapture (part 2)**1 Thessalonians 4:13—18**

One of the more important points to remember when discussing the Rapture is that it pertains only to the Church, the Body of Christ. God is no longer dealing with Israel as a nation because they have been temporarily set aside due to rejection their Messiah (Romans 11:1—2, 17—26). If God were to continue working with Israel He would do so through the 12 Disciples. God not only put the nation of Israel aside but also the 12 Disciples replacing them with the Apostle Paul. The Disciples certainly could have expanded their ministry to include the Gentiles but because God's Prophetic program with Israel came to an end, He no longer used the Disciples but chose a special apostle to go to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:7). The prophets proclaimed the Second Coming (Daniel 7:13—14; Zechariah 14:4), Jesus taught the Second Coming (Matthew 16:27—28; 24:27—31) and Peter wrote about the Second Coming for his people the Jews (2 Peter 3:10—13) while Paul focused on the Rapture, an event when WE will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15—17) while THEY will experience the Lord as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Timing of the Rapture

Our past lessons outlined a number of theories about when people think the Rapture will take place. My thesis is that a pre-Tribulation Rapture is the only time possible for the Rapture. The first bit of evidence for this is that the Rapture is found only in Paul's writings who wrote only to the Church, the Body of Christ. The Rapture thus marks the end of this Age of Grace or the Church Age. Obviously this "proof" is valid only if God actually separated Israel's program from the Church's program. I believe past lessons have adequately made this case.

Another reason for a pre-Tribulation Rapture has to do with the church going through a time of God's wrath or purification. Most of the other theories acknowledge we will not go through God's wrath then proceed to define God's wrath to begin at various times during the actual Tribulation. Demonstrating God's wrath covers the entire seven years of the Tribulation would prove a pre-Tribulation Rapture.

First let's set the number of years the Tribulation will last. Many people believe the Tribulation will last 3-1/2 years by seeing a reference to the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:21. Revelation also mentions this 3-1/2 year period using 1,260 days (12:6), 42 months (13:5) and time, times and half-a-time (12:14; Daniel 7:25; 12:7). This ignores Daniel's prophetic timeline that laid out Israel's history for the next 490 years (70 weeks of years). Everything has already been fulfilled according to this prophecy except for the last seven years. This means that Israel still has seven years of prophecy to go through before Christ takes the throne in the Millennial Kingdom. This last seven years is the Tribulation.

Imminence

If something is imminent, it could happen very soon or at any time. When the Rapture is in view many say it is imminent because there is nothing in the way to delay Christ's return to catch up believers. This means there is no prophecy to be fulfilled before His return.

Paul tells us that the Rapture is part of the Mystery as revealed to Him by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11). He actually believed he would be among the living when it happens. Notice how he uses the word *we* when speaking of those who would be alive in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17. This shows that he fully expected to be "caught up" with the rest of the living believers when Christ comes back for the church.

The Second Coming cannot be said to be imminent because there are still things on Israel's prophetic timeline that need to be fulfilled. Those waiting for the Second Coming will know it is close because they will be going through the Tribulation, counting down the months and years remaining before He returns. This is possible because they will be able to read the signs as given to the Disciples in Matthew 24. According to Daniel 9:27 the Tribulation will begin with the signing of a peace treaty. Three and a half

years later the Abomination of Desolation will transpire with the antichrist taking over the temple and setting himself up as God (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15). Using these signs alone will be enough for them to know how near the Second Coming is. They will be able to watch (for the signs) and wait (for the coming of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom)(Isaiah 25:9; Mica 7:7; Luke 12:36—40).

We, on the other hand, have been waiting for over 2,000-years for the return of Jesus Christ. There are no specific signs given to us as Jesus gave the Disciples concerning the Second Coming. We could be waiting for another 2,000-years if the Lord so chooses. This is because we are living in a completely new program separate and distinct from the prophetic program for Israel. If there were no change in God's program, the Tribulation would have happened at the stoning of Stephen as indicated by Jesus standing, ready to pronounce the end of His grace and the beginning of His wrath upon the world.

Jesus standing

Studying instances of when Jesus is shown standing can shed light on events surrounding Israel, especially pertaining to the Tribulation. According to Ephesians 1:20 and Romans 8:34 when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven he is shown as being seated at the right hand of God. This shows that, unlike the priests who continually sacrificed animals, Jesus Christ was the perfect sacrifice that only needed to be done once then sat down, His work being completed (Hebrews 10:11—12). Verse 13 continues this train of thought with some interesting insight saying that He will maintain this sitting position until His enemies are made His footstool. So, there will be a time in the future when His enemies become His footstool and this will happen when Jesus arises.

Psalms 110:1 is quoted in Hebrews showing the Father (The LORD) speaking to the Son, Jesus Christ (my Lord) stating that He remain seated until His enemies are subdued at which time He will be given the Kingdom and rule over these enemies. Notice these enemies will be subdued and not necessarily extinguished (verse 2). Other verses support that when Jesus Christ is seen standing that the earth will be judged (Psalms 82:8; 94:2) and God's wrath will be poured out (Psalms 7:6; Zephaniah 3:8).

By keeping these things in mind, it's possible to understand why the religious leaders of Israel dragged Stephen out of the city when he looked heavenward and said that he could see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. The Pharisees were very much aware of this verse because Jesus confronted them with it in Matthew 22:41—46. They were not irate because Jesus was standing up to welcome Stephen into heaven, their anger was directed at Stephen for daring to point out that God was about to pour out His wrath on Israel. Deep down inside they understood that they were being called out as objects of God's judgment and wrath. This was to be the beginning of the Tribulation, the next event on the prophetic timeline. This rejection of Stephen's message was actually a rejection of the Holy Spirit who had filled Stephen. Their blasphemy (rejection of the Holy Spirit) was not forgiven as it was when they rejected the Father (John the Baptist, John 5:36) and the Son. It was Israel's last call to accept their Messiah before the Tribulation.

Jesus is shown standing at the door knocking to gain entrance into the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:20. Many interpret this as Jesus knocking at the door of an unbeliever's heart pleading with that person to open the door of their heart to Jesus to be saved. This is a complete twisting of the context for verse 19 makes it clear He is there to rebuke and chasten. James 5:9 is a parallel passage that shows Jesus Christ as Judge standing at the door. This goes along with the parable of the wedding in Matthew 25:1—12. Those who rejected their Messiah are now shown on the outside knocking to get into the Kingdom.

One final note, Jesus is shown walking in the midst of the seven churches (candlesticks) of Revelation (2:1). This is a position of judgment and therefore cannot have anything to do with the churches in this Age of Grace. These are churches formed during the seven-year Tribulation.

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