

WHAT LIES AHEAD
FOR
THE CHRISTIAN????
Rapture Before Tribulation
Or
Rapture After Tribulation?

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The title of this booklet asks a question of great practical importance for the believer in Jesus Christ. Every Christian will agree that one's view of the future affects not only how he lives now, but it also prepares him for that future revealed in God's Word.

This question can be certainly answered only by the Word of God. As this booklet proceeds one will recognize that the writer accepts the great fact that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and was given by men "moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20-21). The scriptures are the Word of God. It is to these "holy scriptures" we must go to seek an answer to the question, "What lies ahead for the Christian?" The writer is willing to subject his beliefs and thoughts to the test of these scriptures, and he asks the same of the reader.

In addition to this great foundation truth of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the scriptures, the writer holds to the great fundamental teachings of the Word of God. The Deity of Christ, His virgin birth and sinlessness, His substitutionary death for sinners of the cross, His wonderful resurrection from the dead in the body in which He suffered, and His glorious, literal coming again are firmly accepted as the clear teachings of God's Word. Also, the great fundamental doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10) is an expression of the writer's hope for forgiveness of sin and everlasting life.

However, this booklet is not for the purpose of discussing all of these teachings of God's Word. Only one aspect of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ is here under investigation. Plainly stated, will the Christian enter the period called the "great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14), or will the Christians of this age be removed from the world before this great tribulation? Will Christ come for the Christian before the tribulation or after?

Space does not permit us to discuss all aspects of this subject, but it is assumed in this study that on the basis of Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24, Revelation 13, and 2 Thessalonians 2 there will be a period of great tribulation immediately preceding the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says in Matthew 24:29-30 that, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days..." the Son of man will be seen "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The same thing is found in 2 Thessalonians 2 where Christ destroys the man of sin at His coming. This chapter shows that "the falling away" and the revelation of the man of sin occur before Christ's coming. In the book of the Revelation the same is found. The beast reigns with the ten kings in a period of tribulation and the beast is defeated at Christ's second coming (See Revelation 19). This period of trouble is to last

seven years (Daniel 9:27) in the middle of which begins the most severe part. The last 42 months (Rev. 13:5-7) or 1260 days (Rev. 12:6) or 3 ½ times (Rev. 12:14, Daniel 7:25) are "... a time of trouble such as never was" (Daniel 12:1), and in the Greek it is called "the tribulation the great (one)" in Revelation 7:14. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days" Jesus will come in power and great glory. It is then, as we have seen, that "the anti-christ" or man of sin will be destroyed.

The scriptures also teach that at Christ's glorious second coming "the first resurrection" of the saved dead will take place, and Jesus will reign with His saints for a thousand years (Revelation 19-20).

But as was already noted, these things are assumed in this booklet, and the matter under discussion concerns whether or not Christians will enter the period of tribulation mentioned above or whether they will be raptured out of the world to escape it.

A Plea To The Reader

This booklet is not intended to provoke controversy. It is sent forth to encourage study of the scriptures concerning this subject. The writer is willing to be shown the way of the Lord more perfectly, and he merely asks the reader to be willing to do the same. The Bereans were a noble people. They "...searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Reader, please do not lay this book down until you have examined to see if it truly represents the teaching of the scriptures on this subject.

Yes, this subject is practical. Surely, all will agree if Christians do go into this period they would do well to prepare for it. If they do not enter it then their outlook will be different.

Sincere Christians differ on this subject, and it would be good to see them study this subject afresh so that in these last days the church may not sound an uncertain note. Let us seek to take the subject out of the realm of heated debate and search the scriptures in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to find God's truth.

Remember the question is not, "Is there going to be a 'rapture' (catching up)?" but "When is the rapture?" Let us investigate God's Word to see if the time of the 'rapture' is before or after the seven-year tribulation period.

In the study we will look first at various passages of scripture to see if we can determine if Christ comes for the Christian before or after the tribulation. Then we will study the subject under several topics. After this several problems for the view of the "rapture" after the tribulation will be discussed. A few thoughts concerning the history of this subject will be presented, and then a practical conclusion will be made. May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be honored, may the Holy Spirit be our guide, and may God our Father receive all the glory (Romans 11:33-36).

Scriptures Concerning Christ's Coming

All passages cannot be listed here but several will be noted which will help in the study. Statements are underlined which throw light upon the timing of the coming of Christ for the Christian.

Matthew 16:27 – "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." This statement is made after Christ announced the building of His church and the demands of discipleship. Note Jesus in a church setting speaks of coming in glory with His rewards.

Matthew 24:3, 29-31 – "...what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (age)?... Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall...then shall appear the sign of the Son of man...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Matthew 24:40-42 – "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left..." When will one be taken and the other left? At the coming of the Son of man, and this coming is said to be immediately after the tribulation just a few verses before in Matthew 24:29-31. In Matthew 24 Jesus is not talking to the nation of Israel. He is plainly talking to "the disciples." It is Jesus' disciples who are told of His coming after the tribulation. These disciples heard Jesus promise the church in Matthew 16, they heard his discourses in Matthew 24, they heard the upper room discourse in John 13-17, they were present at the first Lord's Supper, and received the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20. These same disciples were told of His coming after the tribulation.

Luke 21:25-31 – "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh...so likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." The things Jesus' disciples will see are mentioned in vv. 25-26 and are ended when the Son of man is seen "...coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

No statement is made in the four gospels which says the coming of Christ precedes the tribulation. But when the time is mentioned it is after the tribulation.

Acts 1:9-12 – "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in the manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet..."

The manner of Jesus' going into heaven is the manner in which He returns. Note the cloud. Note it took place on the Mount of Olives. Compare Zechariah 14:4 where we learn that Christ's second coming will terminate upon the same Mount of Olives. Note also that Acts 1:8 speaks of witnessing to the uttermost part of the earth and then Luke connects with that the promise of Christ's coming, Acts 1:9-12.

Acts 2:34-35 – "...the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." Surely at Christ's glorious second coming anti-christ and his followers will be made Christ's footstool.

Romans 8:18-19, 23 – "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation (revelation) of the sons of God...even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Note how present suffering is contrasted with glory revealed in us at the revelation of the sons of God. This is when our bodies are redeemed at the resurrection. This seems to connect our resurrection with the glorious coming.

Romans 11:25-26 – "...that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer." Note the present time of Israel's blindness is the time when the fulness of the Gentiles is coming in. Verse 26 shows that after the fulness of the Gentiles comes in the Redeemer comes out of Zion. Here no mention is made of the fulness of the Gentiles occurring seven years before the salvation of Israel when the Redeemer comes (compare Zechariah 12).

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 – “So that ye come behind in no gift: waiting for the coming (in the Greek the word is apocalypse, ‘revelation’) of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Note here the church is waiting for the revelation (not secret coming) of the Lord. Also Paul speaks of the “the end” and the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. The end, the day of the Lord, the revelation of Christ – these indicate the coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation and for this the believer waits.

1 Corinthians 15:22-24 – “Christ the firstfruits (of the resurrection): afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming (the ‘rapture’). The cometh the end...”

Here there is no mention of two resurrections of those who belong to Christ. Not one before the tribulation and one after, only one resurrection of those who are Christ’s. Compare Revelation 20. The first resurrection is when He comes to destroy the anti-christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 – “For 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.”

Note carefully – this passage does not say Christ will come before the tribulation. It states that He is coming and we shall meet Him in the air. All believe He is coming – the question we are discussing is when?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 – “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night (v. 2)...But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief (v. 4)...but let us watch and be sober”... (v. 6). Note the coming of Christ in Chapter 4 is connected with “the day of the Lord” Chapter 5. The day of the Lord occurs at the second coming. Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2, “...for that day (of the Lord) shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed (the anti-christ)....” Christ comes at the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord comes after “the apostasy” (falling away) and the revealing of the anti-christ. Read Acts 2:20. “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.” See Matthew 24:29-31. These signs will precede Christ’s coming after the tribulation.

Also Christ’s coming as a thief is taught by Jesus when he spoke of His glorious coming after the tribulation (see Matthew 24:43). John speaks of Christ coming as a thief when he speaks of Armageddon. Read carefully Revelation 16:14-16. Paul also speaks of the rapture like a coming of the thief in the night.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 – “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe...”

When will the church have rest from trouble? Seven years before Christ comes in glory? No. When He comes in glory with His angels the church will have rest.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 – “Now we beseech you, brethren, by (concerning) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by (concerning) our gathering together unto him (‘rapture’), that ye be not soon shaken...that the day of Christ (the Lord) is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed...whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy (him) with the brightness of his coming....he called you...to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The rapture, the day of the Lord, the brightness of Christ’s coming are parallel in this scripture. Did Paul intend his readers to think nothing was to happen before Christ’s coming for the church?

Compare this passage with 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. The coming in 2 Thessalonians 2 much be timed after the tribulation.

1 Timothy 6:14-15 – “That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Does this present a secret rapture before the tribulation?

2 Timothy 4:1 – “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom”.

2 Timothy 4:8 – “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown...which the Lord...shall give me at that day: and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing. Note the crown, that day, his appearing are all spoken of together. Compare Colossians 3:4. “When Christ... shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

Titus 2:13 – “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”. In Greek this reads, “Expecting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory.” Read Titus 2:13 in the New A.S.V. The blessed hope of the Christian at the glorious appearing is what the Christian is expecting.

1 Peter 1:7 – “That the trial of your faith...might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:13 – “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” His glorious revelation is tied to our hope. (See again Titus 2:13).

1 Peter 4:13 – “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also...”

1 Peter 5:1,4 – “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” When will the faithful elder (pastor) receive his crown? Seven years prior to Christ’s appearing? No. When He appears.

1 John 3:2 – “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” See again Colossians 3:4. In 1 John 2:18 John reminds the believers that they had heard that anti-christ shall come. Apparently it is important for Christians to know this.

Revelation 1:7 – “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him...” This is the keynote of the Revelation which was sent to the churches. If no other coming of Christ is specifically mentioned in this Revelation then the coming in 1:7 must be the coming John prayed for, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Topical Study

Here it may be rewarding to investigate several topics related to our subject. Perhaps they will help in determining whether the church meets her Lord in the air before or after the tribulation. May the Lord use these thoughts to encourage further study of these matters.

The Any Moment Teaching

Some believe the scriptures teach that Christ could have come at “any moment” after the day of Pentecost. Others would say Christ could have come at any moment after His ascension. One teacher says, “The translation of the church to heaven is imminent. It can take place at any time. Our Lord may come for his church in our lifetime, this year, even today, however, we do not know that he will... These verses indicate that there are no intervening events between Christ’s going to

the Father's house in heaven and His return to take His own from earth to heaven... He made it clear that He was going away, and that the next event after His departure would be His return to take His own to be with Him..."¹ Along with these interpretations it is often said that the Christian should not look for any signs of Christ's coming and that such are only for the Jews.

If we accept this interpretation of scripture it would, of course, imply that Paul, James, John and the other apostles taught an "any moment coming." But did they do so? Through their experiences and writings do they teach us that Christ could have come at any moment since Christ went back to heaven? Or do they teach us that intervening events would take place, including the great tribulation? Let us note some important thoughts from God's Word.

Jesus said to His disciples in the upper room, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And those things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." (John 16:1-4) Jesus also promised the Comforter's coming – after His departure. Could Jesus have come before the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5)? If not, how could He have come after His ascension before Pentecost? Did Jesus leave the impression that His disciples would be raptured at "any moment" after His departure in Luke 21:2, "...they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kinds and rulers for my name's sake." "...And some of you shall they cause to be put to death." (v. 16).

In this same chapter, Luke 21, Jesus tells the same disciples that Jerusalem will be destroyed and the Jews led captive into all nations, and that the disciples would see this (Luke 21:20-24). Do these passages teach that Jesus' disciples should have expected an "any moment" coming? Much more could be said on this topic but consider Jesus' words to Peter in John 21:18-19 "...when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whether thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God..." In 2 Peter the apostle Peter says, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle even as our Lord Jesus Christ shewed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." Clearly Peter knew that Christ's words would come to pass when he grew old. How then could Peter teach the "any moment" coming?

Briefly consider the following passages and ask yourself, Do these imply an any-moment rapture of Christians?

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Acts 1:8.

Acts 9:15-16 – "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

Acts 27:23-25 – "Saying, fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar... Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

2 Peter 3:3-9 – "...in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were... The Lord is not slack concerning his promise... the day of the Lord will come..." Does Peter speak as though he were teaching the Christians that Christ would come at any moment after Christ left the earth?

The entire twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew speaks of events preceding Christ's coming "after the tribulation."

¹ 1. God's Plan For The Future by Lehman Strauss. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1965. Pages 83-84. Underlining is mine. P.D.J.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul says, "The falling away" and the "revelation" of the man of sin will occur before the day of the Lord.

This topic cannot be exhaustively treated here. It is hoped that the reader will pursue this subject on his own at greater length. Remember even Paul anticipated his death (2 Timothy 4:6-8). If Christ and the apostles did not teach an "any moment coming," it is certainly true that the great tribulation could be one of the prophesied events to precede our Lord's coming for His people. We may say Christ may come soon. Scripture did not teach Christ may come at "any moment" as some have understood.

The Judgement For Rewards

When does scripture teach that believers will receive their crowns or rewards? Meditate on the following scriptures:

Mathew 16:27 – "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." Jesus is here talking to His disciples. Verse 18 speaks of the church.

2 Timothy 4:8 – "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." The crown is received at the day of his appearing.

Revelation 11:15-18 – "And the seventh angel sounded (the last trumpet of seven) . . . saying and the nations were angry, and they wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets and to the saints. . ."

Revelation 22:12 – "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." The only coming stated in Revelation is in 1:7. Compare this verse 22:12 with Matthew 16:27. Note Jesus' parables place the judgment of His servants at His coming in glory after the tribulation.

When will Christ reward His saints? When He comes, after the tribulation. There is no specific statement in scripture that Jesus will judge the church before the tribulation ends.

The End of The Age

In the gospel of Matthew "The end of the world" (Greek, "age") is mentioned several times. Consider these statements, put them together, and ask yourself, "Do these help determine whether Christ comes before or after the great tribulation?"

Matthew 13:30 – "Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." Jesus interprets these words in the next scripture.

Matthew 13:39-43 – ". . . the harvest is the end of the world (age); and the reapers are the angels. . . So shall it be in the end of this world (age). The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. . . Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun."

Matthew 13:49 – "So shall it be at the end of the world (age): the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just." This is the parable concerning the net. Remember the harvest is the end of the age. The angels are the reapers.

Matthew 24:3 – "...when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (age)?" Note the disciples connected the coming of Christ with the end of the age. How did our Saviour answer their question? See Matthew 24:29-31.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light... And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man... And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds... with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds..."

Compare these words with those above in Matthew 13. The coming after the tribulation, the end of the age, the angels sent by Christ, the gathering of the elect – all dovetail to bring us to the end of the age at Christ's coming after the tribulation.

But add to this, one other passage.

Matthew 28:19-20 says, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age). Amen."

How long will the risen Christ be with His disciples in the making, baptizing, and teaching of disciples? "Unto the end of the world (age)."

All the statements from Matthew lead one to believe that the coming of Christ in glory with his angels, in the clouds, with the sound of a trumpet, will take place at the end of the age and that Jesus' disciples will make, baptize and teach disciples till that glorious coming after the tribulation. Meditate upon these thoughts about "the end of the world (age)."

Some "Untils" Of Scripture

Christ will sit at the Father's right hand until his enemies are made his footstool. Acts 2:34-35 – "The Lord said...sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." Christ will come in flaming fire to render vengeance on his enemies (2 Thess. 1:7-9). In Revelation 19:15 we see that Christ comes in glory to smite the nations. Christ is in heaven until his glorious coming.

The Jewish nation will be desolate till they shall receive Christ as Messiah and Saviour. They will receive him at His glorious coming (Zechariah 12:9-10). Matthew 23:39 – "Ye shall not see me...till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The spiritual blindness now upon part of Israel will remain until the fullness of the Gentiles come in – then all Israel will be saved at Christ's glorious coming.

Romans 11:25-26 – "...blindness in part...until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in...so all Israel shall be saved...there shall come...the Deliverer..."

"Jerusalem then shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke 21:24

Revelation 11:2 shows that even in the tribulation the Gentiles will afflict Jerusalem. The Gentile supremacy only ends at the glorious coming (read Daniel 2, 7, and Revelation 19.) These "times of the Gentiles" run until the coming after the tribulation.

Christ will be with His disciples "all the days until the completion of the age." (from the Greek) Matthew 28:20.

By considering these topics one can tell that the various lines of prophecy run to the end of the age at Christ's glorious coming. All this points to the grand climax after the tribulation.

All is tending to this coming of our Lord and Saviour after the great tribulation.

Some Striking Similarities

The Holy Spirit moved the writers of scripture to write what they wrote. We are not surprised to find similarities between their statements in the Word of God. In this section let us note some striking likenesses between the writings of Jesus, Paul, and the apostle John relating to Christ's second coming. Please compare these scriptures, note their similarities, and see if they describe different comings of Christ or one and the same coming. Again we can only seek to encourage the reader to go on with this study where it leaves off.

Matthew 24:29-31 – “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Note the things underlined and compare them with Paul's account of Christ's coming in I Thessalonians 4.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 – “For 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.”

In both passages the Lord comes, clouds are mentioned, angels are involved, a trumpet is mentioned and the people of Christ are gathered.

Do these sound like the same coming? If they are, they take place “after the tribulation”. Matthew 24:29. Note the words in Matthew 24: 31 “gather together his elect.” In 2 Thess. 2:1 Paul speaks of the “rapture” as “our gathering together unto him.” In the Greek the words gather together found in both passages are related Greek words. Note this in a Greek New Testament.

I Corinthians 15:51 – “Behold, I shew 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 shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” Note the resurrection takes place “at the last trump.” Compare this with I Thess. 4:16-17.

Revelation 1:7 – “behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him...”

Compare this with Matthew 24:30. Clouds are again spoken of as attending His glorious second coming. What glory that will be!

Revelation 11:15 and 18 – “And the seventh angel sounded (a trumpet); and there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of his world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ...And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come (Greek, “came”), and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great...” Note the trumpet sound the seventh and last of the series. Note the resurrection is implied – reward is given to the saints.

Here are statements similar to Paul's in Thessalonians and Corinthians. Remember the only resurrection of Christians placed at a specific time in Revelation is after the tribulation when Christ comes in glory. Read Revelation 20:1-7. No such resurrection before the tribulation period is mentioned in Revelation.

Remember to continue this study on your own. The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24-25 is strikingly similar to Paul's in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Here we must end our topical study and pass on to some questions which confront the view that the church is caught up after the tribulation.

Some Questions And Some Answers

Questions have been raised concerning a rapture after the great tribulation. We want to raise these questions here and seek by God's grace to give a scriptural, honest answer. All questions cannot be given, nor can one be expected to give answers which will completely satisfy everyone.

Much positive Biblical evidence has been given in the earlier part of this booklet which sets forth the coming of Christ after the tribulation to gather His people. Let us now set forth these questions and seek to give some Bible answers.

Question: Isn't Matthew 24 for Jews and not for Christians?

Answer: In the last two verses of Matthew 23 Jesus leaves the Jewish nation desolate. In 24:1 He departs from the temple. In 24:3 the rejected King sits on the Mount of Olives with "his disciples." To those disciples who share in His rejection He speaks of the great tribulation, the sign of his coming, the end of the age, and His glorious coming after the tribulation. These same disciples heard Jesus give the promise of the church in Matthew 16:18. They heard his upper room discourse, and they were given the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20. In each case these disciples represented Christians of the present age.

Question: Why did Jesus teach his disciples to pray that their flight would not be "in the winter neither on the Sabbath day" in Matthew 24:20?

Answer: Apparently in Jerusalem the Jews will strictly observe the Sabbath day during the tribulation. Strict Sabbath regulations would hinder a flight to safety. The same would be true of a flight in winter. It would be more difficult to flee at such a time.

Question: Doesn't Luke 21:36 teach that the church will escape the tribulation?

Answer: In this same passage Jesus taught his disciples that they would see the nearness of His glorious coming by means of the signs occurring in the tribulation times. Read Luke 21:25-31. Verse 36 in its context seems to teach that Jesus' disciples should pray that they may escape these things by strong endurance so that they may stand before the Son of man – at this coming in glory (v. 27). The picture here is endurance through these things and eventual standing before Christ at His glorious coming. Remember, in these verses Jesus is talking about His glorious coming not a secret coming before the tribulation.

Question: Isn't the tribulation for the Jews? Isn't it the time of Jacob's trouble?

Answer: Yes, it is for the Jews; it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but it is more. The times of the Gentiles do not end until the coming after the tribulation (Luke 21:24; Daniel 2, 7 and Revelation 19). It is a time which will affect the entire earth. Saved Gentiles will come out of the great tribulation – a great multitude of them (Revelation 7:9,14). The beast makes war with the saints (Rev. 13:7). This time of trouble for Israel will affect gentiles too. God was dealing with Israel in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed, yet the church was on the earth. God can deal with Israel, and the church at the same time. Christ's disciples will make, baptize the teach disciples until the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20.

Question: Doesn't God love the church too much to let her go through the tribulation?

Answer: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation...? nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Romans 8:35-39. The principle stated here by Paul is that nothing can separate us from Christ's love. How then could the great

tribulation? Jesus and His apostles taught that Christians should not expect an easy road. "... In the world ye shall have tribulation". John 16:33. "... And that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22. Paul taught that suffering with Christ comes before reigning with Christ (see 2 Timothy 2:12, and Romans 8:18). Further, will not God love those servants of His who live and die for him during the tribulation? Surely He will. Even some Christians before the great tribulation die for their faith. Does God love them? Assuredly so.

Question: Doesn't the church escape the wrath of God and so it can't go into the tribulation?

Answer: Will those who do serve Christ in the tribulation be under the wrath of God? It certainly is possible for one to be in the midst of God's judgments upon the ungodly and not to experience "the wrath of God." What is the wrath of God to the ungodly may be a chastening or a test for God's child. Besides, the wrath which some scriptures promise deliverance from may be the wrath the Christian escapes when Christ comes in glory in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. See 2 Thessalonians 1:4-11, and in this light note 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

Question: Doesn't 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 teach that the church must be raptured out of the world before the anti-christ is revealed?

Answer: This scripture does not use the word church. Neither does it say that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer, although He may be. One might interpret the passages as teaching that the church is removed from the world by a rapture before the coming of anti-christ, but it does not say this specifically in the passage itself. This scripture does not have a rapture before the tribulation. In the Interlinear Greek N.T. is the following translation: "... Only the one restraining just now until out of the midst it (or he) comes."² Note the Greek does not say as in King James Version, "until he be taken out of the way." It literally says "until out of the midst it (he) comes." What does "it comes" or "he comes" mean? (It is 3rd person singular.) Is it the restrainer or the man of sin? Perhaps the latter. Read the passage with this in mind. Then the passage teaches that the one who restrains, perhaps the Holy Spirit, will hold back the forces of lawlessness until out of the midst the anti-christ comes.

But remember the entire tendency of this passage is to teach the readers that the coming of Christ and the day of the Lord come after the falling away and the appearance of the anti-christ.

Paul says, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." He goes on to say that this man of sin is destroyed "with the brightness of his (Christ's) coming".

2 Thessalonians 2:3,8. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7 he had already said the church would rest when the Lord is revealed from heaven.

Question: Why isn't the word "church" used in Revelation 4-19: Doesn't this prove the church has already been raptured?

Answer: This is an argument from silence. Just because the word "church" is not used does not prove the church is absent. In I John the word "church" does not appear. No one would say it is not

² The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, by Alfred Marshall. Samuel Bagster and Sons Ltd. 2d edition, London, 1967 p. 816. Look up "taken out of the way" in Youngs Concordance and Strong's, and see that the English translation "taken out" should be translated "becomes." Study how the Greek word used here is used elsewhere in the N.T. The thought seems to be not a passive catching out of the world but an arising out of its midst – a becoming – such as that of anti-christ who will come or arise out of the midst of lawlessness.

present in that letter. Neither is the word "church" used in Revelation 20, but surely we believe she is included when Christ reigns for 1,000 years.

Question: Isn't the "rapture" spoken of in Revelation 4:1-2 when John is caught up into heaven?

Answer: Where do we read in the scriptures that this pictures the rapture? Some interpret it in this way, but the Bible does not say so. Besides, it is John who is caught up, not the church. If this pictures the church going to heaven then could we say the church comes back to earth during the tribulation because John is seen on earth in Revelation 11:1-2? Apparently John is caught up to receive the things God wanted him to write. If the rapture before the tribulation can only be proved in Revelation from such passages as this, the evidence is not very strong.

Question: Don't the twenty-four elders in Revelation represent the church?

Answer: No where do we read that the elders represent the church. Even if they do, this does not prove that the rapture and resurrection have already taken place. "Twenty-four" would seem to include Old Testament saints, and Daniel 12:1-3 places their resurrection after the tribulation. (Compare Revelation 20:1-6). Certainly there are saints in heaven already, and perhaps these are represented by the elders. White robes were given to martyrs before the resurrection in 6:9-11. However some hold that the elders are angelic beings. Apparently speaking of angels Paul calls them "thrones," (Colossians 1:16). Note the elders sit on thrones. In 15:6 the seven angels are clothed in pure linen. Also note in the Greek N.T. that in Revelation 5:9-10 the elders do not say "you redeemed us" and "you made us" kings and priests. In the Greek they speak in the third person – "you made them" and "they will reign." These elders do not prove a rapture before the tribulation.

Question: Doesn't Revelation 3:10 say that the church will be raptured out of the world before the tribulation period? "...I also will keep thee from the hour..."

Answer: The promise is to "keep" not to take out of the world. Is it possible for Christ to keep His own from something without removing them out of the world? Read John 17:15. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Jesus indicates here through John's gospel that he can keep us without removing us from the world. Yes, this is a wonderful thought. "Kept" in the midst of judgements, trials and difficulties. Kept by our wonderful Saviour. Nothing can separate us from His love. We see that this scripture does not prove the rapture before the tribulation.

Question: Doesn't Paul teach that we may be caught up "any moment" and that we will escape the tribulation when he says, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thessalonians 4:17)?

Answer: Note 2 Corinthians 4:14 where Paul also says, "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." The hope of Christians is a corporate hope. Those living at Christ's coming will share in it, and those who have died in Christ will also share in it. So Paul, whether living or dead, shall enjoy the blessings of the coming. The same is true of all believers.

Question: Do not the types of the O.T. teach that believers will escape the tribulation? What about Enoch? What about Lot and Noah?

Answer: We cannot build up a Bible doctrine upon types alone. Types should illustrate a doctrine clearly taught somewhere else in the Word of God. Enoch is nowhere said to be a type of a rapture before the seven-year tribulation. Apparently Enoch was translated 669 years before the flood (See Genesis 5, 9).

As for Lot's escape from Sodom being a type of the church's escape from the seven-year tribulation, one should note carefully Luke 17:30. Jesus spoke of Lot as a type but not as a type of a rapture before the seven-year tribulation. "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed (apocalypse)." Noah is spoken of in the same way in Matthew 24:36-42. Jesus is speaking of His coming in glory after the tribulation (see vv 29-31). Although the events in the world will show His coming is near, no one will know the day or the hour. He tells us it will be as in Noah's days. The Lord says, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. . . . And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." Noah does not picture a secret rapture before the tribulation. Jesus speaks of both Noah and Lot in a setting which concerns His coming in glory. So the rapture pictured by Noah and Lot occurs at the close of the tribulation when believers escape the wrath of the day of the Lord.

There are things in the Old Testament which could be viewed as types of believers going through the tribulation. Think of Israel protected through the plagues of Egypt and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. But we are not dependent upon types to learn about the time of the rapture. We believe the scripture passages presented earlier in this booklet confirm that the coming of the Lord to gather His people and His coming in glory are one and the same coming. Yes, we believe Christ will come, and we will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and we believe this will occur "immediately after the tribulation."

History Of This Subject

When one investigates the history of this question: "Will the church be raptured before or after the tribulation?", he discovers some interesting information. He learns first, that recorded in the writings of some of the early Christians there is found the concept that the church will go through the tribulation. This is an interesting study in itself, but one or two quotations is all we have time for here. Irenaeus (died 200 A.D.) in his treatise "Against Heresies" in chapter twenty-six, paragraph one said, in speaking of the anti-christ, ". . . he who is to come shall slay three, and subject he remainder to his power, and that he shall be himself the eighth among them. And they shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and shall give their kingdom to the beast, and put the Church to flight. After that they shall be destroyed by the coming of our Lord."

Justin Martyr (100-166 A.D.) in his "Dialogue With Trypho" in chapter 110 says, ". . . two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonored, and crucified; but the other, in which He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the most high, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians. . . ."

The writer has studied extensively the history of the teaching that the church will be raptured before the tribulation. The writer has found that it was only around 1830 that this view of a rapture before the tribulation began to be taught as we know it in our day. If this is the blessed hope of the church it is strange indeed that beginning only in 1830 was it taught. Some of the Plymouth Brethren in England and Ireland taught it, and apparently through J.N. Darby and others it spread to America where those who were already pre-millennial added it to their views.

Through the Scotfield Reference Bible it was spread until today it has taken the field among pre-millennial teachers. Surely this is partly due to the fact that the other and older view has not been given a fair hearing. May the Lord use this feeble effort to challenge further study of the question of the time of the rapture. The reader is also encouraged to study further the history of this question.

Practical Conclusion

Is the subject discussed in this booklet practical? The writer firmly believes that it is. If the church escapes the tribulation by being raptured out of the world, then at "any moment" Christ may come, and the Christian will be at rest. But on the other hand if the churches will enter the tribulation it is imperative that we be ready for such a conflict. It is imperative that we put on the whole armour of God so that we may stand in such an evil day as that shall be.

Enter the tribulation the church has hope for the glorious appearing of her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13-14). The church would pray for strength to endure even to the end. She would know that whether one dies in Christ or is alive when He appears all shall share in the glorious coming. She may claim the promises of God's Word, overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of her testimony, and remember "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Romans 8:35-37.

In speaking to His disciples of the tribulation Jesus said in reference to Daniel's prophecy, "...whoso readeth let him understand: Matthew 24:15. Let us all commit ourselves to the study of God's prophetic Word, and seek the light it throws on both the present and the future.

If the Christian is raptured out before the tribulation, what a blessed thing it would be! But reader, if he is not, what a spiritual shock it would be to find that indeed the church must enter this tribulation! If you and I should be called to enter it would we have prepared ourselves spiritually for those difficult days?

I believe the church will enter it. I hope you will investigate God's Word anew to see if you agree.

One thing is sure our hope is in the coming of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Finally, ponder the words which follow: "Are we to expect our Lord's return at ANY MOMENT, or that certain events must be fulfilled before He comes?"

This was one of nine questions answered by the late Mr. George Muller at a public meeting held on the 12th December, 1897, at Shaftesbury Hall, Toronto, Canada. His answer was: "I know that on this subject there is great diversity of judgment, and I do not wish to force on other persons the light I have myself. The subject, however, is not new to me; for having been a careful, diligent student of the Bible for nearly fifty years, my mind has long been settled on this point, and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Scripture declares plainly that the Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostacy shall have taken place, and the man of sin, the 'son of perdition' (or personal Antichrist) shall have been revealed, as seen in 2 Thess. 2:1-5. Many other portions also of the Word of God distinctly teach that certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not, however, alter the fact, that the coming of Christ, and not death, is the great Hope of the Church, and, if in a right state of heart, we (as the Thessalonian believers did) shall 'serve the living and true God,' and wait for His Son from Heaven." Extracted from "Missionary Tours and Labours" by Mrs. Muller, pp. 148, 149.³

³ The Saints' Rest and Rapture: When and for Whom? By Frank H. White, Stephen A. Toms, 1 Donald Way, Chelmsford, CM2 9JB Essex.

Other Books And Booklets

For more material presenting the rapture after the tribulation send to Secretary, Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1 Donald Way, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 9JB England. Ask for a catalog.

Three small booklets will be helpful.

Tribulation or Rapture – Which? By Oswald J. Smith

The Saint's Rest and Rapture: When and for Whom? By Frank H. White

The Second Coming of Christ by George Muller.

Inquire concerning the above books at the address given above.

A larger book, The Great Tribulation Debate, by Norman F. Douty may be obtained by writing the author. The address is Norman F. Douty, Swengel, Penn., 17880.

The Rapture When? By Arthur D. Katterjohn, 220 East Union, Wheaton, Illinois, 60187. This has a good treatment of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Why I Believe the Church Will Pass Through The Tribulation. By Dave MacPherson, Jewel Book, P.O. Box 4333, Greenville, S.C., 29608.