

The Second Coming of Christ #3

The Rapture Question

Ken Birks, Pastor/Teacher

I. Introductory Remarks.

The question concerning the second coming of Jesus is an important question for the Church to come to grips with in this hour of its destiny. If the Church is to go on believing that Jesus can return at any time for an unperfected Church, then the Church will continue in its spirit of apathy instead of getting a vision for the glorious church without spot or wrinkle spoken of in the fifth chapter of Ephesians.

- **The Study of the Second Coming is Basic Bible Doctrine.**

The question concerning the rapture is part of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which is one of the foundational stones of the Christian faith; therefore it is very important that the understanding of this doctrine be established in our minds and hearts. It is needed before we can go on to maturity.

***Hebrews 6:1-3** Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of **resurrection of the dead**, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do **if God permits**.*

- **We Are Not To Be Deceived About This Truth.**

The question concerning the rapture or the second coming of Jesus was an issue that the apostle Paul had to address from time to time also. Paul speaks to the Thessalonians here concerning the importance about not being deceived about this issue.

***2 Thessalonians 2:1-3** Now, brethren, **concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. **Let no one deceive you by any means;** for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition...*

II. Eschatological View Points.

Eschatological views fall into categories determined by the relationship of Christ's return and the millennium. The three basic views, with a myriad of adaptations, are that Christ's return will be: 1) Postmillennial, 2) Amillennial, or the 'realized millennium' and 3) Premillennial. ²

1. The Postmillennial View Point.

Postmillennialism is the belief that Christ's return will be after (Post) the thousand years (millennium). The postmillennialists hold the historical view of Daniel's Seventy-Week Prophecy and a future view of the millennium.

2. The Amillennialism, Or 'Realized Millennialism' Viewpoint.

Amillennialism, or 'realized millennialism,' is the belief that the millennial time is now a present reality. The millennium is then the time between the first coming of Christ and the eternal states; it is the church age. Then Christ will return for his church. They do not believe in a set time for the present age or the destiny of 'the triumphant church.' They hold the historical view of Daniel's Seventy-Week Prophecy and a present-tense view of the millennium.

3. The Premillennial View.

The Premillennialists' view is that Christ's return will be before (Pre) the literal thousand years (millennium). They hold a futuristic interpretation of the 70th week of Daniel's 70-Week Prophecy and a futuristic view of the millennium.

• Three Differing Views Amongst Pre-Millennialists.

There are three differing views concerning the timing of the rapture amongst the pre-millennialists: (1) pre-tribulational, (2) mid-tribulational and (3) post-tribulational. There are problems with all three of these views, because they do not fit into the context or the exegesis of other scriptures. Any doctrine that we believe and hold to must fit into the context of the Bible, because no scripture is of private interpretation.

The belief that will be presented in this lesson will be basically Premillennial, but somewhat different even from what they believe. The basic difference being how the 70th week of Daniel's Seventy-Week Prophecy is fulfilled.

The belief presented here is that the last 7 years are divided; 3 1/2 years ending at the crucifixion of Jesus and the final 3 1/2 years ending at the 2nd Coming of Jesus. It is also believed that the Church has a destiny to fulfill as the glorious church, the bride of Christ. (See [Daniel's 70 Week Prophecy](#))

III. The Challenge to Rightly Divide the Truth.

There is a tendency for anyone to twist scriptures to fit their own view and interpretation, but the challenge is to learn how to rightly divide the word of truth. We have a responsibility before God and before each other to rightly divide the word of truth concerning any doctrine.

2 Peter 1:20 *...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation...*

2 Peter 3:16 *...as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

2 Timothy 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

In this lesson and the lessons to follow, the goal will be to accurately get a picture of what God has to say concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ and its timing by comparing the many scriptures on this important study of God's word and by allowing the scriptures to interpret themselves.

- **The Bible says this is a great mystery concerning Christ and His church.**

Ephesians 5:32 *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

The goal in this study will be to approach the subject by looking at all of the various clues that are found in the scriptures. By putting them together you will begin to see a clear picture emerging of the Second coming of Christ and the Church during the Great tribulation.

It will also be important to make sure we major on the scriptures that are clear and not on the vague and unclear. When we focus on the clearly stated scriptures, we find that the vague or nebulous scriptures fit.

IV. Definition of the Word “Rapture.”

The word rapture is not even in the Bible, but is derived from the words "caught up" found in I Thessalonians 4:13-17.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 *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.*

The word "caught up" in the (Greek) is the word "harpazo", which means catch (away, up), pull take (by force).

The word rapture in all actuality refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, if Biblical scholars down through the ages would have left it in the terms of the second coming or the first resurrection there wouldn't be as much controversy surrounding this important doctrine.

V. Key Scriptures, Thoughts and Words.

There are many key scriptures, thoughts and words that will enable us to rightly divide the word of truth concerning the timing of the Second Coming of Christ. As we look at these key thoughts, words and scriptures we will see that the Bible consistently interprets the timing of The Second Coming of Jesus to be after the "Great Tribulation" spoken of in the book of Revelation and other books as well.

1. When He Returns He Shall Come On The Clouds Of Heaven.

When Jesus ascended into heaven the disciples were told by two men in white apparel that Jesus would return in the same manner. A cloud took Him away.

Acts 1:9-11 *...He was taken up, and **a cloud received Him** out of their sight... two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will so come in like manner** as you saw Him go into heaven."*

- **Jesus said that He would come again (speaking of His second coming) on the clouds of heaven.**

Matthew 26:64 *Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to*

you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Luke 21:27 *"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

Matthew 24:29-31 *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **Then** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.***

These passages of Scripture place the timing of Jesus' coming on the clouds of heaven after the tribulation. It says, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven..."*

The thought I want to bring out here is that in each one of these passages of scripture, when the disciples were told to look for the second coming of Jesus, they were told to look for Him coming on the clouds of heaven.

This scene of Jesus returning on the clouds of heaven is without a doubt placed at the end of the tribulation. If there is to be a secret appearing of Jesus that takes place before this, why weren't the disciples of Jesus told to wait for it or told what to expect?

2. Jesus Referred To The Timing Of His Second Coming.

The disciples came to Jesus and asked Him point blankly, "What will be the sign of your coming?" In response Jesus gave them a very direct answer.

Matthew 24:3 *Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"*

Notice in verses 4, 5 & 23, He warns them about being deceived as to when His second coming would be. Jesus is telling them very clearly that people will try to deceive them concerning the timing of His coming. I believe Jesus wants us to have a clear understanding of when we can

expect Him to come, so that we won't get deceived into thinking that He has already come. Verse 36 just says, "*that no one will know the day or the hour.*" It doesn't say anything about the year or season that He will come.

Those who advocate a pre-tribulation or a mid-tribulation rapture say that if He is going to come at the end of the tribulation we will know when He is coming, so then they say that it is a contradiction of scripture, because we are not supposed to know that. It is not a contradiction because you are still not going to know the day or the hour. Don't make the scripture say something it does not say.

Jesus gave a direct response to the question that had been posed to Him in verse 3, where the disciples asked Him, "What will be the sign of His coming?" He said it would be immediately after the tribulation. Notice that it also says that His appearing shall come with the sound of a great trumpet. This is another one of those key words to this great mystery of which we will discuss a little later in the lesson.

Matthew 24:29-31 "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven...*

The question we must ask ourselves is, "If there is to be a rapture or a secret appearing of Jesus before this event, as both those who advocate a pre-tribulation and mid-tribulation rapture say, why didn't Jesus speak of it?" But instead, Jesus warns us against those who say, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'there!' do not believe it.

3. The Apostle Paul Referred to the Timing of The Second Coming.

Paul also writes by the Holy Spirit concerning the Second Coming of Jesus and exhorts his followers not to be deceived into believing that He will come before the second coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:2-4 *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (See vss. 1-4)*

When Paul speaks here of the Second Coming of Christ he is obviously

referring to the same time sequence as Jesus was, because he says it cannot happen until the lawless one is revealed and destroyed by the brightness of His coming. When Jesus returns at His second coming, Satan and all of his cohorts and those who do not obey the gospel are going to be destroyed. (See 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 also).

Again, we must ask ourselves the question, "if there is to be a rapture or secret appearing before the Second Coming of Jesus, why didn't Paul mention it to these believers?" He instead warns them not to be soon shaken or deceived by any means, because that day is not going to come until the falling away comes first and the man of perdition is revealed.

4. Luke Referred To The Second Coming of Jesus in Acts.

Acts 3:20-21 "and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, "whom heaven must receive (retain - NIV) until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

This scripture makes it very clear that Jesus is literally being bound to heaven and cannot be released until all that the prophets have foretold comes to pass. (*There will be more about this later in the study*).

This also shows us that the gospels, the Book of Acts and the Epistles are all in agreement concerning The Second Coming of Christ. This is an important point to consider

VI. Summary.

- The word rapture is not in the Bible, but is derived from the words "caught up" found in 1 Thessalonians 4:12-17.
- The rapture is all actuality refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- When Jesus returns He shall return on the clouds of heaven. It is at the end of the "Great Tribulation" that Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven.
- When the disciples asked Jesus when His Second coming would be, He stated specifically it would be at the end of the "Great Tribulation". He did not speak of any other appearing.
- The apostle Paul said that the "falling away" and the revealing of the antichrist must come before the second coming of Christ, when warning the Thessalonians about being deceived about His return.

End Notes

1. The three viewpoints of postmillennial, amillennialism, and premillennial were also taken from the Book, "A Summary of Contemporary Doctrines of Abbott Loop Christian Center, Conference Edition", pages 100-102.

2. The doctrinal position that has been communicated in this study is a result of the wonderful input I have had from people like apostles, Dick Benjamin and Jim Feeney and also from the teachings of W.H. Offiler, W.W. Patterson and Kevin Conner.