

The Rapture

by Pastor Paul F. Nolting

The living will be “caught up” or “raptured” on the last day when our Lord comes. So the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and so believers have understood these words to this day. But in March 1830 a certain Margaret McDonald claimed that she had seen a vision of a “new rapture.”

The New Rapture

This is believed by many to be the next great event in the history of mankind. At any moment the Lord will come FOR His Church in contrast to His later coming WITH His Church. All believers will be “caught up” or “raptured.” All unbelievers will be left behind. Believing pilots will be snatched from their cockpits, believing motorists from their vehicles. A husband or wife or entire family will mysteriously disappear. Believers will suddenly and secretly be snatched from Christian congregations, leaving only the hypocrites behind.

Alleged Bible Basis

The key passage cited is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: ***“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. 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.”*** This is believed to be ***“the blessed hope,”*** of which Paul wrote in Titus 2:13: ***“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”*** In the great resurrection chapter in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul is believed to be speaking of the same rapture: ***“Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (15:51-52).*** So also our Lord allegedly spoke of this same event in His Olivet Address when He said that at the coming of the Son of Man ***“Then two men***

will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left” (Matthew 24:40-41). It is also affirmed that when our Lord spoke of His going to prepare a place for us and coming again to receive us (John 14:3), He was speaking of the secret “rapture.”

Second Coming A Multi-Faceted Event

When our Lord comes in glory, there shall be the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of the living believers, the destruction of the present heaven and earth and the creation of a new heaven and earth, the final judgment with the eternal separation of the believers and unbelievers, and the final triumph of the Kingdom and destruction of all anti-Kingdom kingdoms of this world.

Second Coming A Series of Events

The “rapturists” believe that when the Lord comes again, He will snatch all believers from off this earth to meet Him in the air. All unbelievers and hypocrites shall be left on this earth. Then follows a seven year period during which the Antichrist will be revealed. He will give the Jews permission to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, but after three and a half years he will break his promise and institute a three and a half year reign of terror known as the “great tribulation.” That will be followed by the coming of the Lord WITH His saints to destroy His enemies in the Battle of Armageddon and set up the Millennial Kingdom. At the end of the millennium there will be another revolt against the Lord, yet another victory of the Lord over His enemies, and the institution of the Eternal Kingdom of Glory.

Warning! Don’t take the above series of events as THE doctrine of the “rapturists.” There is little agreement among them. How can there be, since much of the above is fiction? If you have read any of the flood of literature produced by the “rapturists” or listen to them on TV or radio, be prepared to hear of multiple comings, multiple resurrections, and multiple judgments.

The Apostolic Creed

What has the church confessed down through the centuries?

That our Lord after His resurrection ascended into heaven and is now sitting on the right hand of God the Father who has put His Son in charge of the history of mankind. At some day, unknown to man, the Lord will come again *“to judge the quick (or living) and the dead.”* Of all the facets of that multi-faceted event of our Lord’s coming the Christian Church emphasizes one - the coming of our Lord for judgment, for that event will determine the eternal weal or woe of all.

The traditional view, as expressed in the Apostolic Creed, focuses the attention of the child of God on The Day. That will be The Day of final judgment. That will therefore be The Day of final separation - eternal salvation for believers on the Lord Jesus Christ and damnation for unbelievers who reject Jesus as their Savior. Whenever the Lord has come in times past, He has always come with salvation for His people and destruction for His enemies. Thus survival for Noah in the ark and death for the world in the flood; escape for the children of Israel through the sea and death in that same sea for Pharaoh and his elite mobile corps; and destruction for Jerusalem, the temple, and the nation that rejected their promised Savior in 70 A.D. until the end of time and salvation for the Israel of God from 70 A.D. until the end of time. Wherever Christ comes, there is either a fall or a rising (Luke 1:34).

The Rapture

Those who teach and believe that the rapture is The Great Coming Event direct people to look for the golden age of the millennium. The rapture is the escape mechanism for believers. They will be with the Lord while those on earth suffer through the great tribulation. After seven years of bliss with the Lord, the believers will return WITH the Lord to establish the millennial kingdom. Jesus will establish Jerusalem as His capitol. The Jews will occupy all the positions of authority. But wait! The Fundamentalists teach that the Jews will be in charge. But Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, and other groups claim they will be in charge of everything during the millennium.

The final judgment is The Great Coming Event, not the rapture. The rapture simply tells us how believers living on earth on the last Great Day will get to the judgment seat. They will be

snatched from this earth, doomed to destruction. They will meet the Lord in the air and accompany Him to the Great White Throne of Judgment. That will be the great event witnessed by every person born on this earth, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10)*. The cry, “Prepare to meet your God,” is a call to prepare yourself for the Final Day of Judgment. How are we to prepare for that decisive Day?

Listen to the apostle Paul: *“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28)*.

Second Look

- at the key Thessalonian passage. Paul wrote that *“the Lord Himself will descend with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”* In the Corinthian passage Paul wrote, *“The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”* The shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet will sound forth through the universe. Everyone, including the stone deaf will hear. Yet the rapturists speak of a secret, silent rapture of the saints. How can this be reconciled with the words of Paul quoted above?

On the Last Day the raptured will meet the Lord in the air. *“And thus we shall always be with the Lord,”* not for seven years, then for a millennium, and finally for eternity, but eternally beginning the Day the Lord comes. The living will have no advantage over believers who have been dead for centuries. The dead will rise first, the living will be raptured, and all this in a moment!

Conclusion

A second look at the key Thessalonian passage reveals that this chief proof passage of the rapturists condemns their interpretation of the passage. There will be no rapture of believers followed by a seven-year period of tribulation which is to be followed by a millennium during which our Lord will rule on earth. All this is fiction, a distortion of the words of the apostle Paul.