

The Rapture - Part 15

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My previous articles commenced a series on the rapture of the church. We began with the question, "What is the Rapture?" This question can best be answered by noting ten truths about the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. In previous articles from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we saw that the rapture is an important doctrine and not something that can be marginalized or explained away as a secondary doctrine. We also noted that the rapture is an event that is distinct from the Second Advent of Christ. We further observed that the rapture will involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air, and that the rapture will involve a reunion between living and deceased Church-Age believers. We then began to examine several more points from 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. We noted that the rapture will be a resurrection, will exempt an entire generation of believers from death, will be an instantaneous event, is a mystery, is an imminent event, and is also a traditional doctrine now being recovered.

We then moved to a second main question, namely, when will the rapture take place relative to the coming seven-year Tribulation period? We offered the contention that believers can develop certainty that they will be raptured before the Tribulation period occurs for at least seven reasons. First, the Tribulation period's purpose concerns Israel rather than the church. Second, there is no reference to the church as being on the earth in Revelation 4–19. Third, the church has been promised an exemption from divine wrath. We now move on to our fourth argument favoring pretribulationism.

The Rapture is Imminent

The fourth reason that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period even begins relates to the fact the rapture is an imminent event. As noted in prior articles, the rapture is an imminent event. In other words, the rapture could happen at any moment. Since no prophetic sign must first transpire before the rapture can occur, the rapture is a sign-less event. The term theologians typically employ in order to describe this reality is "imminency." We noted several New Testament passages that substantiate this notion of imminency. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:51 says, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: *We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed...*" (italics added). First Thessalonians 4:15 similarly says, "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 not precede those who have fallen asleep*" (italics added). In both of these passages, note Paul's use of the pronoun "we." As Paul was unfolding the concept of the rapture to both the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, he anticipated that this event could have taken place in his own lifetime. Thus, Paul maintained that the rapture could happen at any moment. No prophetic sign had to first transpire before the rapture could occur.

In fact, the New Testament routinely depicts the coming of Christ for His church through the rapture as the very next event on the prophetic horizon. This event has the potential of taking place within the

next split second. Note the imminency language found in the following New Testament texts. James 5:8 says, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." First Thessalonians 1:10 teaches, "and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." First Corinthians 1:7 similarly notes, "so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." According to Philippians 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." All of these verses indicate that at any moment Christ could break back into history to rescue His church from God's coming wrath. Consequently, the church is to live in eager expectation of the any-moment return of the Lord.

What does this notion of imminency have to do with the doctrine of pretribulationism? Recall the various views on the timing of the rapture relative to the impending Tribulation period. At least four differing perspectives exist. **First**, *pre-tribulation* rapturism holds that the rapture will occur before the Tribulation period even begins. **Second**, *mid-tribulation* rapture theory asserts that the rapture will take place in the middle of the coming Tribulation period. **Third**, *post-tribulationism* contends that the rapture will take place at the end of the coming Tribulation period. This view typically sees no distinction between the rapture and the Second Advent and thus seeks to harmonize all references to Christ's return as taking place at the end of the future Tribulation period. **Fourth**, *pre-wrath* rapturism maintains that, because the wrath of God does not begin until the final twenty-five percent of the Tribulation period, the church will be present for the first three quarters of the Tribulation period only to be raptured to heaven just before the wrath of God is poured out during the Tribulation's final twenty-five percent.

Notice that only pretribulationism is in harmony with the doctrine of imminency. Unlike pretribulationism, all of the other rapture positions convey a list of prophetic events that must first transpire before the rapture can occur. Only pretribulationism teaches that the rapture is a sign-less event, which can take place today. For example, according to mid-tribulationism, can the rapture take place today? The answer to this question is **no** since the first 42 months or three and a half years of Daniel's Seventieth Week or the first-half of the seven-year Tribulation must first occur before the rapture can take place. According to post-tribulationism, can the rapture take place today? The answer to this question is again **no** since seven years of Daniel's Seventieth Week or the entire seven-year Tribulation must first occur before the rapture can take place. According to pre-wrath rapturism, can the rapture take place today? The answer to this question is again **no** since three quarters of Daniel's Seventieth Week or seventy-five percent of the seven-year Tribulation must first occur before the rapture can take place. According to pretribulationism, can the rapture take place today? The answer to this question is an emphatic **yes** since no part of Daniel's Seventieth Week or the seven-year Tribulation must first occur before the rapture can take place.

Thus, only pretribulationism teaches that the rapture can take place today. Therefore, the slogan "perhaps today" only applies to pretribulationism in contrast to the competing positions. Only the idea that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period even begins makes any sense of the

plethora of New Testament passages that teach that the Lord's coming for His church is right at the door, the next event on the horizon, a sign-less event, or imminent.

In sum, having previously answered the question, "what is the rapture?", we noted the first four of at least seven reasons that affirm the pretribulation rapture view. The first reason is that the Tribulation's ultimate purpose concerns Israel rather than the church. The second reason relates to the concept of the missing church not only from Revelation 4–22, but also from all central and critical Tribulation texts. The third reason is that the church has been promised an exemption from divine wrath. The fourth reason is that the rapture is an imminent event and only the pretribulation view is in harmony with this doctrine.

(To Be Continued...)



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