

The Rapture - Part 19

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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. The fourth reason is that the rapture is an imminent event and only the pretribulation view is in harmony with this doctrine. The fifth reason is that only pretribulationism is in harmony with the New Testament's presentation of the rapture as a comforting event. The sixth reason that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period begins is because the Antichrist cannot even come forward until the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry through the church is first removed. We now move on to our seventh and final argument favoring pretribulationism.

Symbolic Parallels

The seventh reason that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period begins relates to the fact that symbolic parallels mandate that God's people must first be taken out of harm's way before the coming forth of divine judgment. In Luke 17:26-30, Christ says:

And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;

but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

Here, Christ explains that in order to understand God's paradigm or pattern for end time judgment, two historical events must first be studied and comprehended. These two events are the Flood the came in Noah's Day as well as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot. What do both events have in common? In both instances, God's people were removed from harm's way before judgment came. Peter made the identical point in 2 Peter 2:4-9:

For if God ... did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.

Linguistically, Peter's point here constitutes an extended "if-then" clause. The "if" portion states the premise and the "then" portion furnishes the logical conclusion. The "if" portion or the premise is found in verses 4-8. The "then" portion or the conclusion is found in verse 9. Peter's point is that "if" God protected Noah and his family safely in the ark before the floodwaters came upon the earth, and if God similarly removed Lot before Sodom was destroyed, "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." Thus, here Peter re-articulates what Christ already said in Luke 17:26-30. In both historical events (Flood and Sodom), God's people were removed from harm's way before judgment came.

Let's look at these two events from biblical history a little more closely. Before the floodwaters came, God removed Enoch from the earth. The coming of the Flood is narrated in Genesis 7. However, two chapters earlier Genesis 5:24 reports, "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Also, before the floodwaters came, Noah and his family were tucked safely and securely inside the ark. Genesis 7:6-24 says:

Now Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth. Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood. Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground, there went into the ark to Noah by

twos, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. It came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. The rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark, they and every beast after its kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, all sorts of birds. So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life. Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the Lord closed it behind him. Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth. The water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark. The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days.

The pattern of God as revealed by the Flood account is crystal clear. Judgment only came after all of God's people, whether they be Enoch or Noah and his family, were removed from harm's way.

We find the identical pattern at work in the life of Lot just before God rained down fire and brimstone upon Sodom. In fact, Genesis 19:22 records the words of the angel dispatched by God to destroy the city. He tells Lot, "'Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.' Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar." Notice that the angel did not say that he *would not* bring judgment until Lot was removed. Rather, the angel said that he *could not* bring judgment until Lot was removed. In other words, divine judgment was a virtual divine impossibility as long as Lot remained in the city of Sodom.

Interestingly, this statement was made concerning Lot, who was one of the most backslidden and carnal believers who are recorded in the entire Bible. Although Lot is called "righteous" three times (2 Pet. 2:7-8), he exhibited perpetual unrighteous behavior in his daily living. For example, Lot routinely walked by sight rather than by faith (Gen. 13:10-11). Eventually Lot sat at the city gate in Sodom (Gen.

19:1), implying that he rose to a position of prominence and authority in that wicked city. Apparently, Lot was well-accepted in Sodom. Lot was also the one who offered his virgin daughters to the Sodomite crowd for sexual purposes (Gen. 19:4-8). In fact, because of his backslidden condition, when Lot finally warned his own family and relatives regarding the reality of coming divine judgment upon Sodom, his sons-in-law attached no credibility either to Lot or his words of warning. Rather, they only thought that he was jesting (Gen. 19:14). The whole story of Lot concludes with him in a drunken state and in an incestuous relationship with his two daughters. From these unholy unions came forth the Ammonites and the Moabites, who were perennial enemies of Israel throughout the pages of God's Word (Gen. 19:30-38). In fact, if it were not for Peter's the threefold reference to righteous Lot (2 Pet. 2:7-8), there would scarcely be any evidence that this man was saved. Why does Peter refer to Lot as "righteous"? Lot was righteous positionally but not practically. Therefore, his soul was daily vexed or tormented (2 Pet. 2:8) due to the compromise in his life. Thus, Lot serves as a textbook example of the unfortunate reality and possibility of being a carnal or backslidden believer.

Yet, even Lot in his wayward, backslidden, and carnal state had to be removed from Sodom before the manifestation of divine wrath upon that evil city. Lot ultimately belonged to God and God's people are not appointed unto wrath. The story of Lot deals a serious blow to the *partial* rapture position. Recall that partial rapturism contends that only those believers who are earnestly waiting for, seeking, and living for the Lord will be raptured. Those believers in a backslidden state at the time of the rapture will be left behind. According to this view, the purpose of the Tribulation period is to bring the left-behind backslidden believers out of their spiritual slumber and into a sanctified state. As they are each brought out of their carnality, they will be raptured to heaven on an individual basis and at different times as the events of the Tribulation period unfold. However, the notion that carnal believers are left behind at the rapture, violates the paradigm of the Days of Lot. According to this pattern, even a backslidden believer had to be removed before judgment could come.

Some might question the above-described uses of symbolic parallels since the Old Testament also contains examples of God's people going through tribulation (Isa. 43:2; Dan. 3:19-27; 6:16-22). In such instances, believers are not exempted from trials but rather God protects His people in the midst of them. In other cases, God's people experience martyrdom in the midst of tribulation (Heb. 11:36-38). However, notice that all of these examples concern God's program for Israel rather than the church. As explained in prior articles, God deals differently with Israel than He does the church. God's future program for Israel involves the remnant coming to faith in Jesus in the midst of the coming Tribulation (Jer. 30:7; Zech. 12:10). On the other hand, the church will be exempted from the very time of the Tribulation itself (Rev. 3:10). Moreover, none of these examples pay sufficient attention to those two examples that the Lord brings to our attention in Luke 17:26-30 as God's paradigm for end time judgment. Instead of focusing on all of these other examples, the Lord specifically tells us to focus on the days of Noah and Lot in order to understand His pattern of end time dealings.

The bottom line is that of the two events used by the Lord that serve as a textbook paradigm for the end of the age (Luke 17:26-30), they both involve the removal of God's people before the manifestation of divine judgment. Just as Enoch and Noah and his family were removed before the coming of the Flood and just as Lot was removed before the coming forth of fire and brimstone upon Sodom, the church must similarly be removed before God's brings forth His wrath upon the earth in the events of the coming Tribulation.

In sum, having previously answered the question, "what is the rapture?", we noted 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. The **fifth** reason is that only pretribulationism is in harmony with the New Testament's presentation of the rapture as a comforting event. The **sixth** reason that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period begins is because the Antichrist cannot even come forward until the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry through the church is first removed. The **seventh** and final reason that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period begins relates to the fact that the symbolic parallels of the days of Noah and Lot mandate that God's people must first be taken out of harm's way before the pouring out of divine judgment.

In sum, the pretribulation position posits seven arguments in its favor. The other views related to the rapture's timing either ignore or do not handle well these seven arguments. No single argument completely "seals the deal" favoring pretribulationism. However, when these seven arguments are considered cumulatively, a potent case exists that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation period even begins. Now that these seven arguments have been discussed, for the remainder of this series, I will offer some brief interaction with the other rapture positions.

(To Be Continued...)



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