

The Rapture - Part 22

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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. 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. Now that we have dealt with these two questions, we began to explore some of the weaknesses associated with the other competing views that seek to answer the question, "when will the rapture take place relative to the coming Tribulation period?" At least five differing perspectives exist. We noted at the onset that it is important to understand that all of the non-pre-tribulation positions have a difficult time handling the seven arguments favoring **pre-tribulationism** previously discussed in this series. In the last two articles we noted the problems associated with **mid-tribulationism**. In this article, we will begin to scrutinize **post-tribulationism**.

Post-Tribulation Rapture

Post-tribulation rapture theory 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. Those adhering to the post-tribulation rapture typically rely on at least one of the following *four* arguments to support their position.

1. *According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, the rapture will take place at the sounding of the last trumpet which, according to Matthew 24:30-31, will take place upon Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation period.* First Thessalonians 4:16 associates the rapture with the trumpet of God. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15:52 teaches that the rapture will take place at the sounding of the last trumpet. The post-tribulation rapture proponent believes that this trumpet is described in Matthew 24:30-31 and will be sounded upon Christ's bodily return at the end of the Tribulation period. Matthew 24:30-31 says, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

Those who hold to a post-tribulation rapture interpretation of this passage point to the numerous similarities between the coming of Christ in Matthew 24:30-31 and other rapture passages given by Paul, such as in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Examples of such similarities

include Christ's coming in a cloud (Matt. 24:30), the sounding of a trumpet, and the world-wide gathering of believers (Matt. 24:31).¹ On account of these similarities, many are confident that the rapture is in view in Matthew 24:30-31.

However, the last trumpet mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 is not the same trumpet mentioned in Matthew 24:30-31. In fact, the trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 is described much differently than the trumpet of Matthew 24:30-31. While it is possible to draw superficial points of similarity between Paul's depiction of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58) and the events of Matthew 24:30-31, it is a logical fallacy to assume that similarity is the same as equality. For example, two cars can look the same. Both have seat belts, four wheels, a steering wheel, etc.. However, it is fallacious to assume that these two different cars are one and the same automobile merely on account of some similarities. Whatever simplistic points of similarity that may exist between Paul's depiction of the rapture and Matthew 24:30-31 are outweighed by vast differences between these sections of Scripture.

For example, while the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 will be sounded while Christ is in the process of returning to the earth from heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18), the trumpet of Matthew 24:30-31 will be sounded after Christ has already returned to the earth. The trumpet of Matthew 24:30-31 mentions Christ returning with His angels. The trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 mentions only the trumpet call of an archangel. Upon the sounding of the trumpet in Matthew 24:30-31, the angels will gather the elect. The trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 does not mention the angels gathering the elect.

Ice also observes, "In 1 Thessalonians 4 believers are gathered in the air and taken to heaven, while in Matthew 24 they are gathered after Christ's arrival to earth."² Sproule similarly queries:

Where does Paul mention the darkening of the sun (Matt. 24:29), the moon not giving its light (Matt. 24:29), the stars falling from the sky (Matt. 24:29), the powers of the heavens being shaken (Matt. 24:29), all the tribes of the earth mourning (Matt. 24:30), all the world seeing the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:30), or God sending forth angels (Matt.24:31)?³

Feinberg further notes:

¹ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 135.

² Thomas Ice, "Matthew 24:31: Rapture or Second Coming?," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 19 March 2014, 2. I am indebted to Ice's article for making me aware of the sources cited in this article.

³ John A. Sproule, "An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism" (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 53.

Notice what happens when you examine both passages carefully. In Matthew the Son of Man comes on the clouds, while in 1 Thessalonians 4 the ascending believers are in them. In Matthew the angels gather the elect; in 1 Thessalonians the Lord Himself (note the emphasis) gathers the believers. Thessalonians only speaks of the voice of the archangel. In the Olivet Discourse nothing is said about a resurrection, while in the latter text it is the central point. In the two passages the differences in what will take place prior to the appearance of Christ is striking. Moreover, the order of ascent is absent from Matthew in spite of the fact that it is the central part of the epistle.⁴

In order to equate Matthew 24:30-31 with the Pauline rapture passages, a reconciliation of all of these differences is needed rather than merely highlighting a handful of similarities.

Also, Showers explains how the imagery of Matthew 24:30-31 has more in common with what the Old Testament predicts concerning Israel's eschatological regathering rather than the church's rapture.

First, because of Israel's persistent rebellion against God, He declared that He would scatter the Jews "into all the winds" (Ezek. 5:10, 12) or "toward all winds" (Ezek. 17:21). In Zechariah 2:6 God stated that He did scatter them abroad "as four winds of the heavens." . . . God did scatter the Jews all over the world. Next, God also declared that in the future Israel would be gathered from the east, west, north, and south, "from the ends of the earth" (Isa. 43:5-7). We should note that in the context of this promise, God called Israel His "chosen" (vv. 10, 20). . . Just as Jesus indicated that the gathering of His elect from the four directions of the world will take place in conjunction with "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Greek text of Mt. 24:21), so Isaiah 27:13 teaches that the scattered children of Israel will be gathered to their homeland in conjunction with the blowing of "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Hebrew). . . Gerhard Friedrich wrote that in that future eschatological day "a great horn shall be blown (Is. 27:13)" and the exiled will be brought back by that signal. Again he asserted that in conjunction with the blowing of the great trumpet of Isaiah 27:13, "There follows the gathering of Israel and the return of the dispersed to Zion." It is significant to note that Isaiah 27:13, which foretells this future regathering of Israel, is the only specific reference in the Old Testament to a "great" trumpet. Although Isaiah 11:11-12 does not refer to a great trumpet, it is parallel to Isaiah 27:13 because it refers to the same regathering of Israel. In its context, this passage indicates that when the Messiah (a root of Jesse, vv. 1, 10) comes to rule and transform the world as an "ensign" (a banner), He will gather

⁴ Paul D. Feinberg, "Response: Paul D. Feinberg," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulational*, ed. Richard R. Reiter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 225.

together the scattered remnant of His people Israel “from the four corners of the earth.”⁵

In fact, contextually, the regathering spoken of in Matthew 24:30-31 harks back to Matthew 23:37. There Christ expressed a desire to gather an unwilling first-century Israel. He clearly identifies His audience as Israel in verse 37 with the twofold repetition of the word "Jerusalem." However, although first-century Israel was unwilling to be gathered by her Messiah, a future generation of repentant Jews will be regathered by Christ upon His return at the conclusion of the Tribulation. Matthew uses the same verb "gather" (*episyngō*) in both Matthew 23:37 and Matthew 24:31 in order to draw this connection.

When Paul mentioned the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, he had in mind the rapture occurring with the last trumpet of the Church Age. He was not referring to the final trumpet of the Tribulation period described in Matthew 24:30-31. This is the trumpet Christ will sound upon His bodily return to the earth as He gathers the Jewish survivors of the Tribulation period. All of this leads to the obvious conclusion that Paul's description of the rapture (1Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58) and Matthew 24:30-31 are speaking of two different trumpets.

In sum, having previously answered the question, "what is the rapture?", we noted at least seven reasons that affirm the pre-tribulation rapture view. We then began interacting with the other positions on the timing of the rapture. **Post-tribulationism** errs in superficially connecting Paul's depiction of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58) with the events of Matthew 24:30-31.

(To Be Continued...)



Source: SpiritAndTruth.org

⁵ Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Isrel, 1995), 182-83.