



LESSON ELEVEN - THE "RAPTURE" OF THE CHURCH

Text

I Thessalonians 4:13 – 18

I Thessalonians 5: 1 – 10

Introduction

In our study of the “rapture of the church”, we need to start out with a definition. What we mean by “the rapture” is an event in time in which Jesus Christ returns for the express purpose of taking his redeemed out of the world to be with him. In one sense, the “rapture” and the “first resurrection” are one and the same. The first resurrection would properly refer to the “dead in Christ” which are being resurrected for there will actually be those who are alive and remain at the time of Jesus’ coming and that have never died. However, we need to realize that for both the “dead in Christ” and for the “living in Christ”, this event is a time when both shall receive a new glorified body. In this regard, all the saints from the beginning of time until that day will have a “resurrection experience” – and all shall have a “catching away” experience.

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, (that means not everyone is going to die) but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

This is the “rapture” or the “catching away” of the church. The Greek word for “catching away” is “Harpazo”, which interesting enough is the same word meaning “to snatch away” or “to rob”. Did not Jesus say he would come “as a thief in the night?” It means to “catch away violently”. The

real emphasis here is that it will be a very sudden event in which the saints of God shall suddenly be caught up in the air to be with the Lord.

What is interesting is that the word “rapture” is another one of those words that is not found in the Hebrew, Greek, or English Bible in any scripture text. That word probably came from the word “Raptio” which was a Latin word that also meant “caught up”, or the word “rapiemur” which was Latin for “rapture”. As a result, this word was used in the Latin Vulgate text of scripture. Some where in time, theologians started speaking of “rapture” because the origin of the word “rapture” comes from “rapt” [French for “carried away”] and which also means a state of bliss or excitement.

The Comings of Jesus Christ

The rapture of the church is not a part of the coming of Jesus Christ most commonly called the “Second Advent”. Some one coined the phrase, the “second coming”, which of course is not found in scripture. In fact, there are several comings of the Lord Jesus Christ, since the time of his birth upon the earth. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared several times to his disciples. He appeared to Paul, and he appeared to John on the isle of Patmos (Rev 1:10). However, the comings of Jesus Christ that are a part of this discussion include the “rapture” in which the Lord comes for his church (I Thess 4:13 – 18), and then later, he comes with his church to fight the battle of Armageddon and to reign upon the earth for 1000 years. (Zechariah 14:5) These are two separate and distinct events. The Bible however seems to indicate that there is a space of time between the two events that include what is commonly called “the tribulation” or “the great tribulation”.

Matthew 24:21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.



Revelation 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

We will get a lot deeper into the subject of the tribulation period when we study end time prophecy, but the subject tonight is to discuss primarily the rapture itself. The last coming of Jesus (often called the “second advent”) will also be discussed.

The Bible Teaches that Jesus will come for his saints

The rapture of the church and the first resurrection take place together. Notice in this event that the purpose of Jesus Christ is really two fold. First it is to take the church out of the world to a place where they will be given their rewards. Secondly, the rapture is for the purpose of allowing the saints to escape the wrath of God which will be poured out upon the rest of the world. For now we will look at the first reason, and later in this lesson we will look at the second reason for the rapture.

- It is the time when the Lord finally comes to take for himself the church which is called his bride. It is time for the wedding.
 - The church is the bride of Christ – Ephesians 5: 21 – 33
 - Revelation 19: 5 – 10 speaks of the “marriage supper of the Lamb”
 - Revelation 21: 9 – 24 shows how the Lamb’s wife is also called the “New Jerusalem” and in this city are only those whose names are written in the “Lamb’s book of life” (v.27)
 - Ephesians 5:24 – 27: but the Lord will present the church to himself as his bride
- Matthew 25: 1- 13: The parable of the ten virgins is a parable that teaches that there

will be a time when the Lord shall come as a bridegroom for his bride (v6) and the importance of being ready for that coming.

- John 14: 1 – 3: It is a time when the Lord shall receive the saints for himself

We learned in our lesson on the resurrection that when Christians die they go a place called “Paradise” while sinners go another place of waiting called “hell”. Neither is the final destination for mankind. Although our spirits will be with Jesus Christ in paradise, we will still be waiting another very important event. During that time, we will not exist in an immortal body. Paradise is a place where Jesus Christ is watching over the spirits of the saints who are one day going to hear the voice of Jesus Christ cry out, and a trumpet is going to sound, the Lord will then appear in the air, and all of those spirits in paradise are going to come out of Paradise with a brand new glorified, immortal, resurrected body. At the same time, the saints who are alive upon the earth are going to also have their bodies changed, and they too will be caught up into the air.

When does the rapture take place?

Most Christians are aware that this is one of the most debated subjects among Christianity. There are some subjects where it is very important that we all take a stand. The Bible is very clear about how to be saved, and so where there are differences in opinion, you can be sure that the Word of God is true – there should be no compromise.

There should be no compromise when it comes to the fact that there is only One God. The Bible is very plain when it tells us that there is “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism”. There should be no compromise.

But one thing the Bible is not very clear on is when the rapture takes place, or when does the Lord come again. Instead, Jesus makes it plain



that no one would know the day or the hour. The Lord very much intended that his return would be like a thief in the night. When Paul wrote the second letter to Thessalonica, there were some who were teaching that the rapture had already taken place, and others were teaching that it was imminent. (2 Thessalonians 2:3) It is interesting to note that Paul dealt with the same issue in his first letter (I Thessalonians 4:13)

For that reason, we should all have a good deal of grace with others of different opinions. It is a matter of concern because none of us should want to miss it. But as I have said many times: “If Jesus doesn’t come, you may go – so either way you have to be ready.” We must first of all understand – THAT NO ONE KNOWS WHEN IT WILL HAPPEN.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Luke 12:40 Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

Since Jesus made it plain that since no one would know the day or time, there is room for honest differences of opinion, and the thing that needs to be stressed by all is the need to *BE READY*. With this in mind, all men should keep an open mind, and it is actually helpful to study each view point before coming to a conclusion. I have tried to study each viewpoint, and my conclusion is that Bible said – “No one knows the day or the hour”. But there are a couple of other things stated in the Bible that help me prepare mentally and spiritually for the coming of Jesus Christ.

We may know the signs of the end

Christians are “children of the Light” (2 Thessalonians 5: 4 – 5) and because of that Paul told us that the day should not overtake as a thief. In being ready, we are instructed to “watch therefore” (Matthew 25:13). In response to His disciples request, Jesus shared with the disciples several signs of the end time that help us to know when we are living close to the return of the Lord.

HERE IS THE PROBLEM - Are the signs given in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 signs of the rapture of the church, or are these signs of the second coming? That is one of the questions that cause there to be different viewpoints on the coming of Jesus Christ, first for the rapture, and secondly His return.

Common Theories About the Rapture

When the rapture takes place depends on which theory a person has about the rapture. The most common viewpoints are:



- **Pre-Tribulation Rapture** - That Christ will rapture the church before the Tribulation begins
- **Mid-Tribulation Rapture** - That Christ will rapture the church at the Mid-point of The Tribulation
- **Post Tribulation Rapture** - That Christ will rapture the church at the end of the Tribulation
- **Pre-Wrath Rapture** - That Christ will rapture the church just before the Battle of Armageddon
- **Partial Rapture** - That Christ will rapture those who are ready and leave the rest to go through the Tribulation
- **Multiple Rapture** - That there are more than one rapture, during which Christ receives those who are ready
- **"Pan-Trib" Position** - No clue about future events, but think it will "all pan out in the end"

Let me be plain with at least my own simple viewpoint – I believe in a rapture of the church, or call it “a catching away” because I believe both Paul and Jesus taught that such an event would happen. I also believe that Jesus Christ will come again after taking the church from here the earth and bring his saints with him to reign as kings and priest upon the earth. I am open to a discussion about when it takes place, but I don’t doubt that it will happen.

The debate about when it will happen depends on which theory you have about the rapture. *BY THE WAY – IT IS OK TO USE THE WORD “THEORY”. When something is not a theory, it is a fact based on proven knowledge – since no one can possibly know according to the Lord, then all discussion must be based on theories. Notice that even Paul the apostle did not try to pretend that he knew when it was going to happen.*

The Basic Source for All Theories

The basic source for all end time prophecy begins in the Old Testament. A real in depth study would have to include several major books of the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, and Daniel. However, there are several significant end time scriptures in both Joel and Zechariah.

The most significant scriptures that pertain to the time of the rapture, the tribulation, and the millennial reign are the following:

(1) A Tribulation Period shall take place upon the earth. It is covered in detail in the book of Revelation

Isaiah 57:1 The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men *are taken away*, none considering that the righteous is *taken away* from the evil to come.

Daniel 12:1-2: And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: *and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time:* and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

(2) There will be a seven year span of time in which the Anti-Christ will be revealed, make an alliance with Israel, then set himself up in the temple, desecrate the temple, break the covenant, and cause God to bring judgment (tribulation) upon the world



Daniel 9: 26–27: And after three-score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week (seven years): **and in the midst of the week (3 ½ years) he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate**, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (i.e. tribulation upon the world). (This is the scripture teaching that the Anti-Christ shall be revealed in the middle of the tribulation)

Daniel 12: 8–12: And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. **And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.** (3 ½ years and one month) Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. (Here it appears that perhaps the saints will be here until

the end of the 3 ½ years which is one scripture used for the post-tribulation theory).

2 Thessalonians 2:1 – 9: *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.*

The big debate is over verse 6 and 7. First the Bible says that the Lord won't come until the Anti-Christ is revealed (v3), but then it says the Anti-Christ won't be revealed until



after “he who now letteth” is taken away (v.6 -7) which many believe refers to the church.

The Pre-Tribulation Theory

The most commonly taught theory about the rapture is called the Pre-Tribulation theory which teaches that the church is caught away prior to the beginning of the tribulation period. One thing to consider is that when the book of Revelation teaches about the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials, there is not really any indication that all of this takes place within the seven year period. It is assumed to be the case. The first time that the “great tribulation” is mentioned in the book of Revelation is Revelation 7:13-14 and it speaks about saints who came out of “great tribulation”. Whether this is the “tribulation” spoken of by Jesus is assumed, but one thing is interesting. These saints are mentioned *after* the first six seals of the tribulation are given in scripture.

The Pre-Tribulation theory has the following several points that lend support to those that believe in it:

- No wrath of God upon the Christians
- No wrath of Satan upon the Christians
- Jesus can return at any time
- The prophecies in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 only apply to Israel
- No U-Turn (that is being caught up to turn around and come right back

There are primarily two major scriptures references used for the pre-tribulation theory. One is 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-9. The part of this text most often used is verses 6 – 8:

2 Thessalonians 2:6-8: And now ye know what with-holdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth

already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

The belief is that the “he who now letteth will let” refers to the Holy Spirit which resides in the church. Since the Holy Spirit is thus “taken out of the way”, therefore the church must be “taken out of the way” before the Anti-Christ can be revealed. Others believe however, that since the scripture is talking about the restraining power of the Holy Spirit, that when it says, “until he be taken out of the way” – that it refers to the removal of the restraining power of the Holy Spirit. The scripture did not say, “until he be taken out of the world.” The interpretation of the scripture should be considered in the light of other scriptures since it could be interpreted either way. Some contend that it could not refer to the church, because the church is never referred to with a “he” in the scriptures. It is always spoken of in the feminine.

The other primary scripture reference used is Revelation 4:1-2 when a door in heaven was opened and John was told to “come up hither”.

Revelation 4:1-2 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

Some believe is that the Lord is actually speaking to the church and calling them up in the rapture, but since the scripture said “I looked” and the voice was “talking to me” – I personally believe



that it is stretching the scripture to say that it is talking to the church when the personal pronoun is being used by John.

Who Are The Elect and Who Are The Saints?

As I mentioned, it is very difficult to get a clear concise understanding of Bible prophecy, and particularly it is Biblically impossible to know the day or hour that Jesus Christ will come. I tend to see more evidence for the idea of a Post-Tribulation rapture based on the following scriptures, just using the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. In each of these scriptures, the Bible tells us that “the elect” will be gathered from the four corners of the earth *after* the tribulation period.

- Matthew 24: 21-31
 - The Bible tells us that the days are shortened for the “elects” sake after the “great tribulation” (v21). Since the scriptures that follow give warning about false Christ deceiving the very elect – it would seem to apply to Christians and not just to Jews.
 - Some think that the “elect” refers only to Jews, but in v.31 – the Lord sends his angels to gather his elect from the four winds (or from all directions of the earth). Since the number of Jews are basically a limited number, it would seem that the elect would have to be Christians living all over the world
 - This gathering of the elect takes place after the tribulation signs of v29 which possibly refer to the same signs in Revelation
- Mark 13: 14-27
 - V14 refers to the middle of the week (the same incident mentioned

in both Daniel and in 2 Thessalonians when Satan shall desecrate the Temple

- The scriptures that follow again talk about the elect being saved. Again is the elect Jews only or Christians all over the world
- V27 again says that the elect is from the four corners of the world.
- Luke 21:25-28. This is one of the more convincing scriptures that the saints will see at least a part if not all of the tribulation.
 - V25 – 26 is the same scripture used in the other passages which indicate a tribulation period, or end time global signs
 - But, v28 tells us to “lift up our eyes because our redemption draweth nigh”. That scripture has always been used to refer to the saints

The Bible indicates that the elect are people that will gathered together “after” the tribulation of the signs of the sun being darkened and the moon turning into blood. It is interesting to note that this same language is used in the book of Acts 2:19-21 when it talks about the “day of the Lord” (a reference to his coming – I Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10). Notice that there is a reference to salvation during the time or about the time of the day of the Lord.

In the Bible, the word “elect” is used for the Jews 3 times (all in the book of Isaiah), while it is used for the church 6 times, not counting the additional times in the Olivet discourse (if it refers there to the church). The word is also used for the angels once and for Jesus Christ

Will the Saints be upon the earth with the Anti-Christ?

Regardless of which theory a person may have, it is possible that the saints will see the coming of



the anti-Christ. The fact that Christians will receive persecution in the world is pretty plain from the Olivet discourse, but that doesn't limit it to just the tribulation period. Christians from the very beginning of the church have been persecuted from the time of Stephen who was stoned in Acts 7 through out the early church period, during the dark ages, and even to this time in different parts of the world. However, part of differences in rapture theories is that in the Pre-Tribulation theory, it is taught that the church will leave the world before the anti-Christ desecrates the temple which happens in the middle of the tribulation (Daniel 12:11). Since the Pre-tribulation theory uses 2 Thessalonians to teach that the church is taken away before the anti-Christ is revealed, it contends that the church will not suffer persecution from the anti-Christ.

Many then believe that all the references to the "saints" in the book of Daniel refers only to the Jews. First of all let us look at the scriptures that indicate someone called the saints, whether it be the church or the Jews, will be persecuted by the anti-Christ and be living upon the earth during the tribulation period:

Daniel 7:15 – 22: I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. **But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.** Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the oth-

ers, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet; And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. **I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them;** Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.

Daniel 7: 25 - Daniel 7:25 And he shall speak great words against the most High, **and shall wear out the saints of the most High**, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. (Note: This scripture very specifically states that the saints shall be given to the anti-Christ for 3 ½ years)

Revelation 13:3-9 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he



opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. **And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them:** and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear.

Revelation 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

It is very evident through all of these scriptures that there will be those who will have lived during the time of the anti-Christ. Some will die for refusing to take the mark of the beast (Revelation 20:4). For those that believe in the Pre-tribulation rapture, all of these scriptures refer only to the Jews.

Why I believe the church will go through at least a part if not all of the tribulation?

I personally do not know whether the rapture will take place in the middle of the tribulation or at the end of the tribulation. Actually the anti-Christ may very well be revealed BEFORE the tribulation period. He may give the nation of Israel peace for 3 ½ years while having Christians persecuted elsewhere. The mark of the beast can come before the tribulation and very well may. The 7 years and the 3 ½ year issue only has to do with the covenant that Satan will make with Israel, but his spirit is already in the world, and he himself is probably already in the world.

So if the church did go in the rapture before the tribulation, it still does not mean that the church will escape persecution from the anti-Christ. However, here is one of the questions I must ask:

Will there be a second rapture for those who are persecuted and die during the tribulation period if the rapture takes place before the tribulation? When will they receive their first resurrection? If it is only the Jews, will they have a rapture all for themselves?

Conclusion

No one knows the day or the hour. We are told to watch and be ready. If we do that it won't matter which theory is right because we will be saved – and if we don't do it – it also won't matter which theory is right because we will be lost.



