

## Rapture (from Latin Rapturo; to be caught up)

The time of the rapture for Christians is included as an event in the second coming of Christ. The second coming is heralded by the brightness<sup>1</sup> which comes from the east and shines even to the west (Mt. 24:27); "...so shall the **coming** of the Son of Man be." The rapture follows (Mt. 24:30-31) in which believers are caught up to be with the Lord in the air. "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."; i.e., to **meet** him at his **coming**. (I Thess. 4:17). On that same day<sup>2</sup> God's period of wrath begins on earth followed later by our descent with Him onto the earth<sup>3</sup> at the time of the battle of Armageddon.

The question of what defines the chronological timing of the second coming of Christ seems to hinge in clarity on the written explanation given by Paul to the Thessalonian church which needed written clarification because, although he taught it verbally<sup>4</sup>, the specific meaning of verbal teaching can become uncertain or distorted after a time among a large group of people. When looking at Paul's letter in II Thess. 2:1,2 he begins by giving the context of this clarification by saying "Now, brethren, concerning the **coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him**, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ<sup>5</sup> had come." The context is clearly **His coming** and the **rapture**. He goes from there to say "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day **will not come** unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition." He goes on to describe the 'man of sin' in vs. 4 which aligns with no other person in the New Testament than the antichrist of Mt. 24:15, Mk. 13:14 which refers back to Daniel 9:26-27 as the 'prince who is to come' who will break the 7 year covenant (of peace) after only 3-1/2 years. He is **revealed** to be the **antichrist** when he sets himself up as God while sitting in the temple of God. ("who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."; II Thess. 2:4).

Paul's emphasis to the Thessalonians is that until the man of sin is revealed, the rapture will not come, and they did not miss it. Also the wrath of God had not begun because we believers are not appointed unto wrath. The revealing of the antichrist before the rapture means that the church is still on earth,<sup>6</sup> still witnessing to the unsaved as commissioned all along. The startup of a covenant for one week<sup>7</sup> starts Daniel's prophetic 70th week (of 7 years). This includes the "beginning of sorrows" and "the great tribulation". Chronologically, there is the onset of a 7 year covenant, the breaking of the covenant after 3-1/2 years, antichrist is revealed to believers, then great tribulation (Mt. 24:21), then a

---

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 24:27 Lightning here is astrapé in the Greek, defined as lightning or brightness. (Strong's Greek Concordance).

<sup>2</sup> Twice Jesus makes reference to same-day events where the believers are saved and exempted from the judgment that immediately follows. "But **the same day** that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."; "And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. **In the selfsame day** entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. 19:11-14

<sup>4</sup> "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?" (II Thess. 2:5)

<sup>5</sup> The day of Christ as inferred by Paul, in my mind, is the catching away of the saints to meet the Lord in the air and ends when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father (I Cor. 15:24). Contrast this with the great and terrible Day of the Lord in eschatology which refers to the time of God's wrath on his enemies (immediately following the rapture). See Joel 2; a day of darkness and gloominess.

<sup>6</sup> Many will be confused and scared; unable to buy or sell unless they take the "mark of the beast". Believers who understand the times and seasons will have opportunity to give witness that Christ's coming is near, at the very doors and above all to **not** take the mark.

<sup>7</sup> Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

darkening of the sun and moon (Mt. 24:29), an end of the tribulation (being cut short), after which is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.

Why does Paul first gently console his readers in this letter by asking that they "not be soon shaken in mind or troubled" and then with a greater urgency places the emphasis on "Let no one deceive you by any means..."? It is like in today's vernacular he is saying 'Let no one **deceive** you; I repeat, Let **no one** deceive you.' Their first consolation was probably the fact that Paul himself is then still on earth as evidenced by the letter. Paul asserts that he had already preached this truth but now finds it necessary to put it into writing so that the deception would lose its strength. No one wants to face the prospect of Great Tribulation by the Antichrist. Yet, it is to come as a climax of Satan's deceptions and persecutions upon God's people. So a question arises; were the erroneous ideas circulating among Christians in Paul's day due to mistaken understandings or purposeful or both; did some want the Great Tribulation to be defined as God's wrath so that Christians would supposedly be gone prior; and was it because our mutual enemy wants believers to be off guard and questioning what they were taught by revered teachers when that future time comes?

Again from Paul; "Let **no one** deceive you by **any** means." Let no one at the time of the antichrist convincingly proclaim "Oh, this cannot be the mark of the beast **because** the rapture has not yet occurred." If the rapture of all believers were to occur prior to the appearance of the antichrist, then to whom is Paul giving a warning to be not deceived?

Paul saw the situation as serious enough as to clarify, with certain predecessors to that event, the unmistakable revealing of the Antichrist which, for believers, should actually greatly increase their faith in God's prophetic word and fortify them to stand firm and faithful when they find themselves in that time period (as opposed to a fear that would cause their hearts to fail).

Those who hold to a pretribulational rapture chronology will suggest that the teaching of an imminent unheralded rapture will inspire Christians to live a more holy life day to day. Prewrath believers could counter with the persuasion that a forthcoming Great Tribulation would be as inspirational if not more so. (See the reference to Luke 21:36 below). If one can find a scriptural reference to imminency, it would be these: in Matthew 24:33, Mark 14:29 and Luke 21:28. Jesus warns that his coming is near, at the very doors, when **all** of certain specific signs take place. We are instructed then to look up, to watch.

Regardless of which view one takes, the day of the rapture is known only by God. I am particularly critical of the presumptive and cavalier statement that "we will be out of here" before the tribulation. This thinking presumes that 'the tribulation' or 'the great tribulation' is God's day of wrath. The pretribulational teaching of a 7-year tribulation period is vacuous in its insistence that Daniel's final 70th week for Israel **is** the time of God's wrath from which Christians are exempt. Our journey here is a continuum of tribulations which will be climaxed by the Great Tribulation; all of these are because of a world dominated by sinful man and are not the wrath of God. The bible clearly teaches that the Great Tribulation is in the latter half of Daniel's 70th week and is so severe that it must be shortened for the elect's<sup>8</sup> sake to the extent that it will last **less than** 3-1/2 years. Only this view is in agreement with Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians as mentioned above.

When tribulations come, even the great one, God's words will still hold true to strengthen us.

Be still and know that I am God. Ps. 46:10

Watch therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the son of man. Lk. 21:36

For God has not appointed us to wrath. I Thess. 5:9

What I say to you, I say to all; Watch. Mk. 13:37

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. Jn. 14:1

<sup>8</sup>Matt. 24:21,22; Rom. 8:29-33