

# THE TRUTH ABOUT THE RAPTURE

Dowlan Road, February 22, 2009 PM

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. Hal Lindsey devoted an entire chapter to it in one of his books. He entitled this chapter *The Ultimate Trip*. The *Left Behind* series devotes an entire book to it. I guess the reason I have it on my mind is because it came up in our high school Bible class a few weeks ago. We were talking over some of the religious questions our teens face across the lunch table at school. One of the things their friends want to talk about is THE RAPTURE. As we began to talk about it, the kids acknowledged that one of the difficulties they faced in dealing with this issue was the fact that they really did not know what the rapture is. Before we could examine what the Bible said, we had to know what we were talking about.
- B. This experience reminded me of some important things we need to be doing all the time. We need to be talking about these religious issues and questions that will come up in our conversations with others. We need to read with Bible answers so that, when we join the discussion, we can speak truth and defend truth. With that purpose in mind, let's spend some time this evening thinking about the rapture. What is this event that so many talk about? What does the Bible say about it?

## WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

- A. It will help us to understand that the rapture is just one piece of a much larger puzzle called "Premillennialism."
  1. This is an elaborate theory men have constructed about how the world will come to an end. It is actually very popular in the denominational world. If you talk about the Bible with others, you've probably encountered some aspect of it.
  2. I call it a puzzle because, although it is widely believed, it is one of the most convoluted, confusing theories you could ever study. Even those who believe it sharply disagree about the details. Don't be surprised when you find people who believe the theory contradicting each other.
  3. Let me give you seven quick points to sketch out what they believe.
    - a. The theory is built around one central idea: that Jesus is coming back to establish an earthly kingdom over which He will reign for one thousand years. This explains the term: pre – before, millennial – one thousand; Jesus returns before this one thousand year period.
    - b. Jesus intended to do this the first time He came. However, men rejected and crucified Him. So, the establishment of this kingdom was delayed and the church was established as an alternate plan.
    - c. As the time for His return draws near, there will be a terrible period of suffering on earth – the great tribulation.
    - d. At the end of this period, Jesus will return. He will defeat Satan in the great battle of Armageddon and bind him for one thousand years.
    - e. Jesus will then set up His kingdom. Temple worship and sacrifices will be restored. It will be a time of great peace.
    - f. At the end of this period, Satan will be released and instigate a great rebellion against God. Once again, Jesus will defeat him and cast him into the lake of fire.
    - g. Judgment will follow with the righteous going on to eternal life and in Heaven and the wicked being condemned to hell.
- B. How does the rapture fit into all of this?
  1. The rapture serves as the kick off event – the beginning of the end. Premillennialists believe that those who are faithful will be spared this terrible period of suffering that precedes the return of the Christ. We will not have to go through the Great Tribulation. Christ will secretly come back and steal away His people. It is one of the more fascinating aspects of the theory.
  2. Thousands of people will disappear from the earth. Cars will suddenly be without drivers and begin smashing each other. Football players will disappear right in the middle of a play. Teachers will be astonished as students in their classes suddenly vanish. This will happen all over the world and cause a world-wide crisis. The United Nations will call for a special investigation to determine what happened to all these people.

## WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES TEACH?

- A. The Bible certainly teaches that Jesus is coming back (John 14:1-3, Acts 1:11). We are also told many things about His return.
  1. It will be at an unexpected time, like a thief (I Thessalonians 5:2-3).
  2. It will be a dramatic. Paul tells us that Jesus will descend from heaven with mighty angels, flaming fire, loud voices and a sounding trumpet (I Thessalonians 4:16, II Thessalonians 1:7).
  3. The dead will be raised (John 5:28-29). Note that Jesus mentions only one resurrection. This resurrection includes both the righteous and wicked. They will be raised at the same time.
  4. While discussing this resurrection, Paul tells us that this will mark the end (I Corinthians 15:23-24). When Jesus comes and the dead are raised, this will be the end. We know this because the Holy Spirit revealed it! It is at this point that men and woman will be judged and sent to either heaven or hell (Matthew 25:31-46). It is at this point that the earth will be burned up (II Peter 3:10).
  5. We know that these things will take place because the scriptures tell us about them and describes with some detail.
- B. However, the scriptures DO NOT say anything about the rapture.
  1. Even those who believe in it admit that the word is not used in scripture.
  2. But the larger problem is that the concept is not found. There is absolutely nothing in the Bible about a secret coming of Jesus to steal away righteous people from the earth at any point in time. All of this talk of people suddenly disappearing, the left behind being in a state of panic, world chaos...it's all conjecture. You will not read this in your Bible.
  3. Even the passages used to prove the rapture have two fundamental problems. The theory cannot be found in them and, when studied carefully, they actually contradict the theory.

- C. Let me give you some examples.
1. I Thessalonians 4:13-18
    - a. This is the passage most commonly appealed to as proof of the rapture. But where is it? There is nothing here about a secret coming of Jesus. There is nothing about the righteous suddenly disappearing. There is nothing about the left behind being confused.
    - b. In fact, what the passage does tell us contradicts rapture theory. Jesus is coming with a shout, the voice of the arch angel and the trumpet of God. Sounds to me like everyone will know He is here. There is nothing secret about it.
    - c. This passage simply describes the second coming of Jesus and offers no support for the rapture theory.
  2. I Corinthians 15:51-52
    - a. Again, we are left wondering where we are to find the rapture in this passage. It's not here.
    - b. In fact, what we are told contradicts rapture theory. We have all this noise again which does not fit what we are told about the rapture. Remember also that the rapture is just the starting point. It is followed by seven years of tribulation, another return of Jesus, Armageddon, Jesus reign on earth for one thousand years. But Paul tells us that what he describes happens at the end (v. 24). He goes on to say that when this time comes death will be no more (v. 54). Rapture theory has lots of death after this (tribulation deaths, Armageddon deaths). This passage contradicts rapture theory.
  3. Matthew 24:40-41
    - a. Again, there is no rapture theory here. They site this passage only because of this idea of someone being taken (they believe raptured), while others are left behind.
    - b. However, note the fuller context (vs. 37-41). I'm not sure that being taken was a good thing; it wasn't in Noah's day.
    - c. At this point in the context of Matthew 24, Jesus is pointing us to final judgment (v. 36), a thought that continues into the next chapter. The idea here is simply this: when Jesus comes again, mankind will be separated. Some will be lost, others will be saved. We see the same idea as we move through this context (25:32-33).
    - d. Remember also that these are events associated with the end. The separation described here is not between those who are raptured and those left behind. It is between those who are lost and those who are saved (25:46).
- D. But those who defend this theory have even bigger problems.
1. Remember that the rapture is not a stand alone doctrine. It is part of a system of teaching about the end known as Premillennialism. This system as a whole stands in conflict with the teaching of scripture.
  2. Let me just offer a couple of examples for now.
    - a. First, the entire theory is built around this single idea that Jesus is coming back to reign on earth for one thousand years.
      - 1) This is not taught in the Bible. It is based on a misunderstanding of Revelation 20:4.
      - 2) Is it interesting that the only place they can find a reference to a one thousand year reign of Christ is in a book loaded with symbolism and written about events unfolding at that time (Revelation 1:1-3).
      - 3) Their basic premise is flawed; it's unscriptural. Jesus is not coming back to reign on earth for a thousand years. When He comes, that will be the end (I Corinthians 15:23-24).
    - b. Second, this theory teaches that Jesus intended to set up His kingdom the first time He came, but He was unable to do it because men rejected Him. There are all kinds of problems with this idea.
      - 1) Just the suggestion that Jesus tried and failed raises questions about the very nature of God.
      - 2) Beyond this, if He failed to setup His kingdom the first time He came, what guarantee do we have that He will be successful the second time?
    - c. Third, while we're on the subject of His kingdom, they claim the Jesus' kingdom still has not been established.
      - 1) However, consider the words of Jesus (Mark 9:1). If they are right, then Jesus is a false prophet.
      - 2) Consider also what Paul said of the Colossians (Colossians 1:13-14). If Jesus has not yet established His kingdom, what is this?
      - 3) The truth is they don't understand the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom. It has been established and we share in it.
    - d. Fourth, they claim Jesus came to setup a kingdom, but failed because men rejected Him and killed Him.
      - 1) If this is so, then it means Jesus did not come to give Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.
      - 2) What are we to do then with the Old Testament prophecies that foretold His death (Isaiah 53)?
      - 3) This theory literally cuts the heart out of the gospel.
  3. My point is this: not only is the rapture theory opposed to scripture, the entire system of which it is a part is in conflict with the Bible. There is no coming rapture...

## **CONCLUSION: BUT, JESUS IS COMING...**

Don't let all of the confusing things being said about the end cloud this key truth. The scripture does promise that He is coming back. When He does, men will be judged. Heaven and hell hangs in the balance. Are you ready for that day to come?

- David A. Banning