

THE AMAZING TRUTH OF THE RAPTURE

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

When one sits back and contemplates the great truths contained in God's plan for history as revealed in the Bible, it is truly amazing to contemplate such reality. A partial list would include the following: God's creation out of nothing; God's creation of angels and their role in history; man's fall into sin; Noah's Ark and the Flood; the tower of Babel; the call of Abraham; the Exodus and foundation of the nation of Israel; the up-and-down history of Israel, Christ's first coming; His death, resurrection, and ascension; the founding of the church; and Christ's promise to return to take His bride to heaven with Him at the rapture. These real, historical events are greater than any fictional account that the most creative moviemaker could conceive. So one day the Father will tell the Son to go and get His bride and at that moment every living believer, no matter where they may be, will be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord, in order to be taken to heaven. This will truly be an amazing event.

THE IMPACT OF THE RAPTURE

Romans 11:25 indicates that the trigger point for the rapture will be when "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." The leading Greek lexicon of our day says the noun translated fullness in this passage means "that which is brought to fullness or completion; full number."¹ Also, Acts 15:14 says, "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name." Thus, when that last Gentile convert comes to faith in Christ, the Church, the Body of Christ, will be complete and the rapture will take place. The full number of Gentiles will have come in and then our Lord will turn His attention to the salvation of all Israel (Rom. 11:26) during the subsequent tribulation period.

The rapture of the church will be a truly amazing event that will confound the world. Just think about it for a moment. How will the world who rejects the possibility that a God who does miracles is out there, explain the sudden disappearance of hundreds of millions of people all over the world in an instance of time? People that are left behind will generally not be open to the possibility of the rapture, even though all of those taken will be Bible-believing Christians. Whatever the explanation by the authorities will be, it will be a big lie that they will propagate. However, I believe that the rapture will be a wake-up call for many of those who were close to Christians before the rapture.

Spouses, children, relatives, neighbors, and friends that heard those wacko Christians talk about their impending sudden disappearance will certainly take note concerning this global event. Many will start coming to faith in Christ after the rapture and before the seven-year tribulation even begins. After all there will be an interval of time between the rapture, which ends the church age, and the start of the tribulation, that begins with the signing of the covenant between the Revived Roman Antichrist and the nation of Israel (Dan. 9:24-27). That interval could be days, weeks, months or even years, as the restrainer will be removed at the rapture, the Holy Spirit indwelling the church (2 Thess. 2:6-8), enabling the rise of the man of lawlessness or the antichrist. Daniel 7 and 11 outline the rise of the beast or the antichrist to power and it will take some time. First, there will be the need for the ten-nation Revived Roman Empire to arise because it will be from within that federation the little horn will arise (Dan. 7:20)

who is the antichrist. This will take some time. Then the antichrist will either negotiate or impose the seven-year covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27) and the tribulation will begin.

The interval between the rapture and the start of the tribulation will likely be a year or more for all of these events leading up to the start of the tribulation to begin. I believe that God the Holy Spirit will be drawing many to belief in Jesus as the Messiah even before the tribulation begins. It appears to me that the rapture event will spark a great ingathering of souls to faith in Christ since it will be an amazing display of God's miraculous power in conjunction with a move of the Holy Spirit drawing individuals to faith in Christ by opening their minds to receive the gospel message (Acts 16:14). Also, it appears hundreds of millions of people will be saved during the tribulation itself as noted in Revelation 7:9, "I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands."

A PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD THE RAPTURE

What is the proper attitude that believers should have as the bride waits for her Groom? First, it is not a proper attitude to want the amazing rapture to occur so that we can escape responsibilities here on earth. I recall in Seminary, right before a Greek exam, one of my fellow students declared as follows: "I don't have any problems the rapture would not solve right now." The rapture is an escape from the wrath of God, but it is not meant to be an escape from responsibility. It is true that "the anxious longing of creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). And that "we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). This is true because we experience the pain of living under the curse in a fallen world and daily hope for the redemption of the body at the rapture.

Woven throughout the New Testament Epistles are the present motivational messages about how the any-moment return of the Bridegroom for His bride enables us to persevere in the faith at this present time in order to please Him. I am especially struck by what the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter chapter one. Peter repeatedly encourages his fellow Jewish believers to endure present hardships in light of their future inheritance they will receive in Christ. He tells us that our inheritance is "reserved in heaven for you" in verse 4; that it is "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" in verse 5; and that this salvation "may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him" in verses 7 and 8. Peter continues in chapter one to admonish Jewish believers as follows: "Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). We see that Peter's basis, like the other writers of the New Testament Epistles, is to encourage believers to persevere in the present by maintaining a focus on our future with Christ. This goes against the thinking of many within the church today, who think that we cannot talk about Bible prophecy and the future because we are dealing with issues in the present. This is incorrect! The inspired writers of the New Testament Epistles knew that God's plan for the church is to have a firm grip on where we are going in the future so that believers will have a great confidence and hope in the present.

The Apostle John has the same mentality that we found in Peter when he says the following: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what

we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). Notice that both Peter and John admonish their flocks to “fix” their attention upon the future return of Christ resulting in godly living in the present (1 Pet. 1:13; 1 John 3:3). When a believer knows who he is in Christ, is properly oriented to our amazing destiny in Christ, and thinks through the implications; how can they not live for Christ in the present? Part of the problem is too many believers, including pastors, do not think through the implications of what the New Testament teaches in these areas. New Testament logic on the future is that it will impact believers in the present. At least it will impact those who realize the implications of this teaching that is woven throughout the teachings of the New Testament Epistles.

CONCLUSION

What an amazing day the rapture will be for all living believers, even those who do not think it can occur at any-moment. It will be amazing because our salvation will be complete as the church realizes everything we have hoped for, including seeing our Saviour face-to-face for the first time. The amazing hope of the rapture for the church should be something that is real in the life of all believers, since the Epistles apply to us today as much as when they were first written. Such an amazing hope is one of the major reasons why we gladly live for Christ today and prioritize our life in view of eternal values knowing that we have “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ W. F. Arndt, F. W. Danker, F. W. Gingrich, & Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 830.