What The Bible Says About ---

Wednesday, October 21, 2015
Part Twelve

What The Bible Says About - THE RAPTURE

The word “apocalypse” is a big scary-looking word. Don’t let it be. It means “unveiling” or “revealing” (or if you will - Revelation).

God is simply saying to us, “I will show you what is going to happen in the world when my Son Jesus comes to rule.” If you know Christ as Lord and Savior, that is not a frightening concept. On the contrary, we cry out, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. [14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. [15] For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. [16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: [17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. [18] Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

In just plain old English, here is what Paul wrote: “I don’t want you to be uninformed, my fellow believers, concerning saints of God who have died. Don’t sorrow as those with no hope for the future. Since we believe that Jesus died and was gloriously resurrected after three days, even also those believers who have died will Jesus bring with Him. The Lord Himself will descend from Heaven. There will be a thunderous shout - with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God will reverberate through the skies. Those believers who have died will come out of the graves, a split second before we who are still alive shall be suddenly caught into the air with them to meet Jesus. And then we will be with Him forever!”

What is the next event in God’s prophetic program? Some are expecting the Tribulation; some are anticipating Armageddon; some are looking for the Beast and False Prophet. Had that been the anticipation of the Apostle Paul, he hardly could have written concerning “the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God
and our Savior Jesus Christ," for it gives no one joy to think of living through the
conflagration of Armageddon, nor is it a blessing to anticipate life under the iron fist of
the Beast. That event set before the believer, for which we are looking, is the
translation of the Church. When God is ready to terminate this age in which we live,
the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in the air to take all believers to Himself.

I am a strong “pre-tribber,” that is, I believe Jesus raptures (catches away) His Church
before the coming of Antichrist and the seven year period of earth’s disaster. There are
any number of biblical reasons why I believe this. Let’s take a brief look at some of
them:

1. Let’s start with the book of Revelation. The Church (represented by the seven
churches of Asia Minor - that is, Turkey) are mentioned 19 times in the first three
chapters. The church is NEVER MENTIONED AGAIN in Revelation until Ch. 19 when
we are found seated in Heaven.

Those intervening chapters tell of the Tribulation period. Again note carefully: the
church is not spoken of one time during those seven years.

There are three chapters the student should read carefully with regard to the Rapture: I
Thessalonians 4, I Corinthians 15 and John 14.

2. Nowhere in Scripture is the Church given a warning to be prepared for the
Tribulation. It only stands to reason that if Jesus knew His Bride, the Church, was going
to be subjected to seven years of hell on earth, He would have given her some instructions
or warnings. But ... there are no such instructions.

3. Now think this through: Those who believe the Church will go through the
Tribulation believe in the Second Coming of Christ, that is, when Jesus actually comes
back to this Earth - accompanied by the Church! Now if the Rapture takes place after
the Tribulation, what’s the point? We would be like a yo-yo, going up only to come
back immediately! Up and down! Flash! Isn’t that concept a bit ridiculous? Why,
we would meet ourselves going up and down.

4. Revelation 3:10 is also an insight to this question of when the Rapture will take place:
Rev. 3:10  Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee
from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that
dwell upon the earth. This was Jesus’ message to the church in Smyrna, a church for
whom our Lord had no denunciation. It was a solid, Bible-honoring, God-fearing, Holy
Spirit obeying church. What did Jesus say to it? I WILL KEEP THEE FROM THE
5. Now let's take a look at John 14, where we find the words Jesus gave His disciples on the last Thursday night of His earthly life the day before His crucifixion: John 14:1-4

**Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. [4] And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.**

This is when Jesus dropped the bomb that He would soon be leaving His men. He would die, He would be buried, He would rise again, and then in 40 days He would be gone. They would see Him no more. Those disciples must have gasped! Jesus is leaving us? But then hear our Lord’s words to them: **“Let not your heart be troubled! I will come again and receive you unto myself!”** All of those disciples would die martyrs’ deaths except John. But Jesus never said to them, “You will be the object of God’s wrath,” (which is what the Tribulation is - God’s wrath.) Instead Jesus informed them that He would come back to get them. The terrible Tribulation does not figure into Jesus’ commitment to His men.

6. The coming Tribulation has nothing to with the Church. As clearly stated in Jeremiah 30:7: **Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.** References to Jacob mean Israel or the Jews. God states for us here that the coming Tribulation is a time of JACOB’S trouble, not that of the church.

7. Revelation 4 and 6 teach that the church will be around the throne when the Tribulation hits Earth: Rev. 4:2-6 **And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. [3] And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. [4] And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.**

**These elders are significant because they are SEATED, they are ROBED, and they are CROWNED.** These significant things suggest that these twenty four are the symbolic representation of the Church. In Ephesians 2:6 we read that God has “made us SIT together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” In Revelation 19:8 it is stated, “And to her was granted that she be ARRAYED (robed) in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Again Paul testifies in 2 Timothy 4:8,
“Henceforth there is laid up for me a CROWN of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.” These considerations seem to identify the twenty four elders as the CHURCH. Now when are they seen in heaven in their glorified position? At the very outset of the Tribulation as described by John in Revelation 4 - 19.”

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Note carefully now what happens in Revelation SIX, two chapters later: Rev. 6:1-2

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. [2] And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. Who is this rider? None other than the Antichrist – arriving well AFTER we find the Church already in Heaven.

For these preceding seven reasons, plus others in Scripture, we are strong in our belief of a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. It is true that many Christians today are being persecuted, murdered, for their faith; however, this is MAN’S wrath against mankind; it is not God’s wrath over the whole world.

WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN THE RAPTURE?

1. Jesus told His followers that He would return to get us.

Matthew 24:42-51

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. [43] But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. [44] Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. [45] Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? [46] Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. [47] Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. [48] But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; [49] And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; [50] The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, [51] And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The disciples were taught by Him that this present age will end as we know it when He
returns: Matthew 24:3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And as already noted on page 3, lines 5-19, Jesus comforted His disciples (apostles) by assuring them He was coming back for them.

2. The New Testament Epistles emphasize the fact that our Lord would return - both at the Rapture to take His Church home to Himself and at His actual physical return to this Earth (the second coming of Christ).

A key word to our study is IMMINENCE - or that which is next to happen. The theme of imminence runs through all the passages of Scripture dealing with this subject. Though there would be a period of time BETWEEN the first and second coming (we are living in that time - Luke 19:11 And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.) the whole body of teaching concerning the return of the Lord emphasizes that it will happen suddenly, without warning. Scriptures warn that believers should be in a state of continual readiness: Philip. 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Hebrews 10:37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. James 5:8-9 Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. [9] Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Rev. 22:10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

Believers in the early days of the Church lived in this state of expectancy. 1 Cor. 1:7 So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: 1 Thes. 1:9-10 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; [10] And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. Paul clearly showed in his writings that he thought he could be alive when Jesus returned. It turned out instead that he was martyred.

BELIEVERS WILL BE REMOVED FROM THE EARTH

Scriptures show that some of them speak of a visible event seen by all mankind and involving the judgment of sinners. This is the SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. But other scriptures tell of a coming known only to believers and resulting in their deliverance from Earth.
The is referred to as THE RAPTURE. It is true that the phrase “the Rapture” is not in
the English Bible, but has been used so widely that one of the definitions of “rapture” in
Webster’s Third New International Dictionary Unabridged is “Christ’s raising up of His
true church and its members to a realm above the earth where the whole company will
enjoy celestial bliss with its Lord.” The word “rapture” could well be used to translate
the expression “caught up” of I Thessalonians 4:17. Jesus said His coming will result in
one individual being taken from a location while another is left. This indicates a sudden
removal of believers from the earth, with unbelievers left to face tribulation (Matthew
24:36-42) But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven,
but my Father only. [37] But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the
Son of man be. [38] For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating
and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into
the ark, [39] And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall
also the coming of the Son of man be. [40] Then shall two be in the field; the one
shall be taken, and the other left. [41] Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the
one shall be taken, and the other left. [42] Watch therefore: for ye know not what
hour your Lord doth come.

The Rapture Compared To Christ’s Second Coming to Earth

We find a study on the Second Coming in Matthew 24:30: Matthew 24:30 And then
shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the
earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with
power and great glory. Note it: Jesus’ second coming is a VISIBLE event. Paul
spoke of this time as a period of judgment and wrath upon the wicked: 2 Thes. 1:7-10
And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed
from heaven with his mighty angels, [8] In flaming fire taking vengeance on them
that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: [9] Who
shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and
from the glory of his power; [10] When he shall come to be glorified in his saints,
and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was
believed) in that day.

But let’s contrast that episode with the Rapture, yet another aspect of the Second Coming.
1 Thes. 4:13-18 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning
them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. [14]
For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in
Jesus will God bring with him. [15] For this we say unto you by the word of the
Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not
prevent them which are asleep. [16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven
with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the
dead in Christ shall rise first: [17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be
captured together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall
we ever be with the Lord. [18] Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Nothing is mentioned in this clear passage about wicked humanity or of anyone seeing the
Lord’s quick return. Nothing is said of Jesus’ feet actually touching the ground; rather,
we meet the Lord IN THE AIR. This is the moment when 1 John 3:2 will be revealed:
Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be:
but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as
he is. We shall be like Him - what a wondrous revelation!

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul called the Rapture “our gathering together unto Him.” The
Greek word for “gathering” is the same as the one used for “assembling” in Hebrews
10:25: Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the
manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the
day approaching. A hundred years ago, the forefathers of our fellowship noted that and
hence we were known as THE ASSEMBLIES (the Gathering) OF GOD.

How will this “lifting” be accomplished? The same Greek word used in I Thessalonians
4:17 is used in Acts 8:39: Acts 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water,
the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he
went on his way rejoicing. The passage teaches that THE SPIRIT OF GOD, the Holy
Spirit, caught Philip away - identifying the source of the power that will remove believers
from Earth at the Rapture.

IS THE RAPTURED WITHOUT PRECEDENT? NO.

The outstanding event in the life of Enoch was his miraculous disappearance from Earth
after years of walking with God: Genesis 5:21-24 And Enoch lived sixty and five
years, and begat Methuselah: [22] And Enoch walked with God after he begat
Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: [23] And all the
days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: [24] And Enoch walked with
God: and he was not; for God took him. The writer to the Hebrews called Enoch’s
experience a translation, bypassing death: Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was
translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had
translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.
Although some aspects of Elijah’s translation differed from Enoch’s, it also involved the sudden removal of a believer from the world without experiencing death. 2 Kings 2:1-13

And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. [2] And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. [3] And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. [4] And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. [5] And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. [6] And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. [7] And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. [8] And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

[9] And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. [10] And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. [11] And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

[12] And Elisha saw it, and he cried. My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. [13] He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;

First Corinthians 15:51-54 deals with the same event as I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Here also Paul spoke of the changes that will take place in both living and dead believers at the Rapture. He called this a mystery: 1 Cor. 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, or a truth previously unrevealed but made known by the Holy Spirit

Philip. 3:21 ... Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things
unto himself. Here Paul connected our Lord’s coming to the time when “our vile
body” will be changed, another reference to the Rapture. Col. 3:4 When Christ, who
is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. This speaks of
believers appearing with Christ at His coming. Jude 14 also foresees the Lord’s return
with His people to execute the judgment referred to in many other passages relating to His
public appearing.

ARE WE GOING THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

Although God’s people may endure severe trials before the Lord comes, the Church will
be raptured before the period called the Great Tribulation. I have already covered this
earlier in this paper.

It is consistent with God’s dealings with His people in the Old Testament to believe that
the Church will be removed from the world before the Great Tribulation. God did not
send the flood until Noah and his family were safe in the ark. He did not destroy Sodom
until Lot was taken out.

The weight of Scripture supports a pre-Tribulation Rapture.

While Christians are looking forward to the coming of the Lord, it is well to remind
themselves of Paul’s words to Titus: Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, [12]
Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,
righteously, and godly, in this present world; [13] Looking for that blessed hope, and
the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; [14] Who
gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto
himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

What a powerful admonition! May we so live in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Next week: What The Bible Says About Marriage And Divorce