



TRIBULATION OR RAPTURE – WHICH?

WRITTEN BY
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Why did the Lord Jesus conceal the Secret Rapture in Matthew twenty-four? How are we to explain the silence of the Church for centuries concerning it? What about the passages that have been used to support it? Have we been lulling the Church into a false security? Are there any outstanding Christian leaders who believe that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation?

In my first book on Prophecy I asked the questions: "Will the Church pass through the Tribulation or be raptured out of it?" In answering I made this statement: "I have always held the view that the Rapture precedes the Revelation by some seven years, and that the Church, therefore, will not go through the Tribulation, but I do not want to be dogmatic about it and, if God should reveal the contrary to me, I will gladly accept it". Hence, you see, I did not approach the subject with my mind closed to new light and my heart

already prejudiced. I was open to whatever God might reveal.

Now, after years of study and prayer, I am absolutely convinced that there will be no rapture before the Tribulation, but that the Church will undoubtedly be called upon to face the Antichrist, and that Christ will come at the close and not at the beginning of that awful period. I believed the other theory simply because I was taught it by W. E. Blackstone in his book "Jesus is Coming," the Scofield Reference Bible and Prophetic Conferences and Bible Schools; but when I began to search the Scriptures for myself I discovered that there is not a single verse in the Bible that upholds the pre-tribulation theory, but that the uniform teaching of the Word of God is of a post-tribulation Rapture: pre-millennial always. Everywhere pre-millennial, but post-tribulation.

MY FIRST AWAKENING

My first awakening to this important truth came one day in 1925, when I was spending a few days in a cottage at Stoney Lake, Ontario. One of my neighbors, Frank Edmonds by name, simply made the suggestion to me. I opposed it at once. "Why," I exclaimed, "however could that be? What about the Scriptures? The teaching of a pre-tribulation Rapture is clear and indisputable." But he quietly affirmed that I was wrong and emphasized the truth concerning the Last Trump. Of course, I was not convinced. I almost ridiculed the very idea of such a possibility. And there the matter rested.

One day, in the early twenties, I began preaching on Prophecy. I had taken my people through Daniel without difficulty. Then came Mark 13. Luke 21, and Matthew 24 and 25. But. lo and behold, no sooner had I started on Matthew 24 than I got into trouble. I had announced that I would deal with Matthew 24 at the next service. Hundreds had gathered. I was in a maze, for I was perplexed. So I took a verse here and there through the chapter and thus satisfied the people for that hour at least. But now the next meeting was coming. What was I to say?

I need not point out that there is no pretribulation Rapture in Matthew 24. The Second Coming is unmistakably placed "immediately after the Tribulation" (verse 29), and I was forced to the conclusion that if the Rapture was to be "before" the Tribulation, the Lord Jesus Christ would certainly have given some hint of it at least. He was dealing with the End-Time of the Age. It is unthinkable

that He would have spoken so minutely of the Tribulation without stating that the Church would escape. Instead, He purposely led His hearers to the belief that His followers would be in it. Hence, I was staggered, nor could I honestly defend my previous position.

So, when I again faced the people, I said sufficient to let them know that I questioned my former stand and saw evidence of a post-tribulation Rapture. For, as I read Matthew 24 and 25, I saw that many things, as prophesied by the Lord Jesus Christ, simply had to take place before Jesus could come, namely: "All these things" (verse 33), especially the prediction regarding the preaching of the Gospel. See Mark 13:10, and note the significance of the word "first". Thus, since God's future program could not be set aside, there could be no "any moment expectation" of Christ's Return. We are to watch, watch as prophecy after prophecy is fulfilled, ever looking forward to His Appearing; and, in the

End-Time, to watch as never before, and to always be ready, for none can ever know how quickly the events predicted might come to pass and Christ return.

MY "ANY MOMENT" THEORY

Then followed the next step. There came into my hands a copy of a book by Dr. Henry W. Frost, then the Home Director of the China Inland Mission. It was entitled "Matthew 24 and the Revelation," a volume of over 300 pages. I fairly devoured it. Portions of it I read through twice. It was most conclusive in its arguments for a post-tribulation Rapture. About the same time I got hold of a book by James H. McConkey, called "The Book of Revelation," and another—perhaps the best of all—by Edmund Shackleton (England), entitled

"Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?" Before I had read them through I was firmly convinced that there would be no Rapture before the Tribulation, and that I had done wrong in promising the Church an escape instead of preparing her for the terrible ordeal that must most surely be awaited. My "any moment" theory could not be sustained. In fact, the very first statement in the latter book, which was written about 1890, amazed me beyond measure and I was fairly staggered as I grasped its significance. Let me quote it verbatim:

All who held the pre-millennial Coming of Christ were, till about sixty years ago, of one mind on the subject. About that time a new view was promulgated that the Coming of Christ was not one event, but that it was divided into stages, in fact, that Christ comes twice from heaven to earth, but the first time only as far as the air. This first descent, it is said, will be for the purpose of removing the

Church from the world, and will occur before the Great Tribulation under Antichrist. This they call "The coming for His saints" or "Secret Rapture." The second part of the Coming is said to take place when Christ appears in glory and destroys the Antichrist. This they call "The coming with His saints."

Apart from the test of the Word, which is the only final one, there are certain reasons why this doctrine should be viewed with suspicion. It appears to be little more than sixty years old; and it seems highly improbable that, if scriptural it could have escaped the scrutiny of the many devoted Bible students whose writings have been preserved to us from the past. More especially in the writings of the early Christian fathers would we expect to find some notice of this doctrine, if it had been taught by the Apostles; but those who have their works declare that they betray no knowledge of a theory that the Church would escape the Tribulation under Antichrist, or that

there would be any "coming" except that spoken of in Matthew 24, as occurring in manifest glory "after the Tribulation." This is all the more significant, because these writers bestowed much attention upon the subject of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. Augustine, referring to Daniel 7, wrote: "But he who reads this passage even half asleep cannot fail to see that the kingdom of Antichrist shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church."

Then when I remembered that the death of Peter, his prediction of corruption and apostasy after his decease, the death of Paul, and many other events had to occur before the Rapture—especially the evangelization of the world (Mark 13:10 and Matt. 24:14)—my "any moment" theory took wings and fled.

Last of all, I ran across "The Great Tribulation: The Church's Supreme Test" by John B. Scruby, the most convincing; the most unanswerable

of all. It deals with every point minutely and proves conclusively that the Tribulation precedes the Rapture.

Recently I got hold of that remarkable book "Tribulation to Glory" by H. A. Baker. in which he wrote: "For eighteen centuries the fundamental principle of tribulation to glory was the universal belief of the truly born-again members of the Church", and then he goes on to show that the new pre-tribulation rapture teaching was first proclaimed as a direct revelation by a woman in Edward Irving's church, and then taken up by John Nelson Darby (and the Scofield Reference Bible) in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Church for eighteen hundred years.

"Beginning with the Irvingite woman, then propagated by John N. Darby about 1830, this new spirit-inspired doctrine during the last century has come down to us until it has become popular. George Muller opposed it; so

did Benjamin Wills Newton; so did Dr. S. P. Tregelles and other Brethren, but all in vain." But now, thank God, large numbers of our leading Bible Teachers are coming back to the original position.

GOD'S WORD

I discovered that no time element is ever mentioned so far as the Rapture is concerned, except as it is related to the Resurrection. And that the Resurrection is always placed at the time of the sounding of the Last Trump (1 Cor. 15:51-54). This Trump, without doubt, closes the Tribulation. There is no eighth. The saints are rewarded (Rev. 11:18). The "mystery of God", is then finished, there is time (delay) no longer (Rev. 10:6 and 7), and the Resurrection, of course, immediately precedes the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16).

Naturally, I thought of 2 Thessalonians 2:7: "he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way". But then I learned from the Greek that the second "he" is the Antichrist, and that

the Greek does not say "taken out of the way," but "revealed in the midst," or, "born out of the midst." In other words, lawlessness will be restrained until the appointed time for the lawless one, the Antichrist, to appear. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit at all. That is a Scofield Bible assumption. The Holy Spirit and the Church remain to the end of the Age.

Then, too. I thought of Luke 21:36 and of Revelation 3:10. But Noah, I remembered, "escaped" by preservation. Daniel "was kept" and protected in the lion's den. The three Hebrew children were "kept" though in a burning fiery furnace. None of them were taken out. Rather they were kept, preserved, protected while in, and thus they escaped. Why not the Church? Note that 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 finds the saints in trouble, in tribulation, and resting only at the close. In fact the first two chapters of 2 Thessalonians cannot be interpreted in any other way. Chapter two, verse one, is most

explicit. "Now we beseech you, brethren", writes Paul, "by the coming (Revelation) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together (the Rapture) unto Him". There is here no separation between the Rapture and the Revelation. The Coming is the one and only Coming spoken of throughout the two chapters, the Coming described in chapter one, verses seven and eight.

I learned, too, that the word for "meet" in 1 Thessalonians 4: was only used in two other places, and, in both cases, it meant "returning with" and not "remaining at" the place of meeting. When the brethren from Rome met Paul, they immediately returned to the city with him. When the Virgins met the Bridegroom they accompanied Him back to the wedding. When the saints meet Christ in the Air, as He comes to judge the nations and establish His Kingdom on earth, they will return with Him. There is no Scripture that says

they will remain for some seven years in the Air.

In 1 Thessalonians each chapter closes with a reference to the Second Coming, but no distinction is made. As Christ descends with His angels after the Tribulation, the saints ascend, and, meeting Him in the Air, turn and continue with Him back to the earth. How long He remains in the Air, following the meeting with the Church is nowhere revealed. "The Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:13), is unquestionably the Revelation, after the Tribulation, simply because the words, "with all His saints" are added. But why infer another, a previous Coming, in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1:10, or 5:23? It is all one and the same. There is no Secret Rapture. That theory must be deliberately read into the passage. There is no Rapture in Revelation until chapter nineteen is reached.

I had been taught that the Greek word "*parousia*" always referred to the Rapture and that other words were used for the Coming of Christ in glory after the Tribulation. But I found that this is not true. Parousia is used for the latter, too. See 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

While it is clear that the Church must endure the wrath of the Antichrist, it is certain that the Church will not have to endure the wrath of God. When His judgments are poured out on the Antichrist and his followers, the Church will be divinely protected by God even as the Israelites were protected when His wrath was poured upon the Egyptians; not by being raptured, but by being kept.

We might go through all the writers of the New Testament, and we would fail to discover any indication of the so-called "two-stages" of our Lord's Coming. Peter, James and John tell the same story. There is no Scripture for a pre-tribulation rapture. That theory had to be

invented by man. Search and see. There is no verse in the Bible that even mentions it.

I discovered that nearly all evangelical missionary leaders believe that there must be representatives in the Church of Christ from every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation, and not just from the so-called civilized world, and that, therefore, the only way to hasten the Coming of Christ is by evangelizing the remaining unreached peoples of earth. Jesus made it perfectly clear when He said, "the gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10) "and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). Hence, the greatest incentive to missionary work is the Second Coming of Christ.

SPIRITUAL PREPAREDNESS

I am sure that with the true child of God it is not a question of preference but of truth. Does God's Word say so? Why then rebel? Is not His plan best? Besides, what difference does it make so long as we are ready? "Spiritual Preparedness" is the only important factor after all.

I wonder if we have been lulling the Church into a false security? Can it be that we have been preaching an easy escape? Ought we to prepare the Church for the greatest of all ordeals? Should not our teaching harden her for the fires of the Tribulation? What kind of soldiers are we training? I am afraid that we

have been very guilty and that God will certainly hold us responsible for the type of Christian our preaching is producing. We need men and women today of the martyr spirit. The test of the Inquisition is coming again and woe betide the pre-millennialists who are not ready. The Church must be purified in the fires of persecution.

VOICES OF OTHERS

Now if I were to go into the subject in detail and attempt to deal with the numerous passages, both for and against, I would simply be overlapping. Others have already done this most ably, far better than I can, and so, if you are really interested, I would suggest that you secure the books that have been written on the subject and study them prayerfully and with an open mind before taking sides. A great many have been written by men on both sides of the Atlantic. The following are among the best that have been published in Great Britain and you may procure most of them from THE SOVEREIGN GRACE ADVENT TESTIMONY, I DONALD WAY, CHELMSFORD, ESSEX, CM2 9JB, the organization that publishes the Post-

Tribulation magazine Watching and Waiting, edited by James Payne.

Here are the books:

Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation? (by Edmund Shackleton); Christ's Second Coming (by S. P. Tregelles) [these two are scarce]; Our Lord Cometh (by W. J. Rowlands); The Coming of the Son of Man (by Rev. E. J. Poole-Connor); The Second Advent of our Lord, Not Secret, but in Manifested Glory (by B. W. Newton); One Second Coming of Christ (by W. J. Rowlands); The First Resurrection (by S. P. Tregelles); Touching the Coming of the Lord (by Dan Crawford); The Saints Rest and Rapture (by Frank H. White); The Second Coming of Christ (by George Muller). Send for their catalogue.

The following have been published in North America: The Blessed Hope (by Professor

George E. Ladd). Dr. Ladd teaches in Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena. It is a masterly volume and it goes into both the history and doctrine of both the Pre-Tribulation and the Post-Tribulation Advent. "Will Christ's Coming be in two stages?" (by Norman F. Douty).

I have a list of nearly seventy Bible Teachers who have proclaimed this view of the Return of Christ. Among them, in addition to those who have written the above books, there are such names as W. J. Erdman, Charles R. Erdman. Dr. Campbell Morgan, Bishop Frank Houghton, Dr. A. B. Simpson, Dr. J. W. Thirtle, Dr. Charles T. Cook, Alexander Reese, Dr. Horatius Bonar, Dr. Adolph Saphir, Henry Varley, Dr. Nathaniel West, David Baron, H. W. Soltau, Dr. Bergin, Dr. Harold J. Ockenga, and many others. To ignore the convictions of such spiritual leaders is impossible. Deference must be given to their views.

These views I would sum up by quoting from Watching and Waiting: *"We believe that this was the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. We believe it was held by the Early Church and by all in the Middle Ages who had any light on the Second Advent. We believe, too, that it was the teaching of the Early Brethren and that no other view was generally accepted among them until the Any Moment. Secret Rapture, Pre-Tribulation, or Two-Stage Coming theory was taught by Edward Irving, as a result of a vision received by a woman in his church. Thus, Any Moment teaching is a 'novel' doctrine".*

MY FINAL APPEAL

Beloved, the shadows are darkening. The day is drawing to a close. It is now Saturday night in the history of the Church. The times of the Gentiles have almost run their course. Events are fast shaping for the end. The Antichrist will soon be here.

One fact and one only is important: Christ is coming. Of that there can be no doubt.

One question and one only is vital: Are we ready?

We may differ on minor details of prophecy. We may disagree as to the time of His Appearing. We may not see eye to eye regarding the order of prophetic events. But one thing is certain; He is coming. We will be

with Him. The Millennium is at hand and soon now we shall know all. Therefore, let us love one another sincerely and labour together "till He Come".

If I am mistaken I will know it then. Hence, let us agree to disagree agreeably. God knows our hearts. He knows that we love Him and that is all that really matters. If I love Him and you love Him, we will love each other. Soon the day will break and all the shadows flee away. Meanwhile I am "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2 :13).

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