

An Outline of Future Events

According to the pretribulational premillennial understanding of the Scriptures.

I. EVENTS SURROUNDING THE END OF THE CHURCH AGE

A. Increasing Apostasy

The term "last days" covers the entire period from the first to the second advents of Christ (Heb. 1:2). Defection and apostasy, among other things, will characterize that entire period (2 Tim. 3: 1). So the presence of apostasy is not in itself indicative of the end of the Church Age, but the increase of it is. Apostasy is both present and future when the climactic apostasy will occur which leads to the religious reign of the man of sin during the Tribulation period (2 Thes. 2:3). We may expect apostasy to become increasingly widespread as we draw nearer to the Tribulation days.

1. The doctrinal characteristics of apostasy. These include at least three: (a) a denial of the doctrine of the Trinity (1 John 2:22-23); (b) a denial of the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In John's day this took the form of denying the true and real humanity of Christ, though it also takes the form of denying the true deity of Christ. Rejecting either the Trinity or the Incarnation denies the existence of the God-Man which is essential to our salvation. If Jesus Christ were not a man He could not have died; but if He were not also God, that death could not atone for sins; (c) a denial of the doctrine of the return of Christ (2 Peter 3:4).

2. The lifestyle characteristics of apostasy. Defection in doctrine always brings a decline in morals. Paul lists eighteen characteristics of such declension in 2 Timothy 3: 1-5. They are: love of self, love of money, a spirit of pride, blasphemy, disobedience to parents, lack of thankfulness, lack of holiness, lack of natural affection, unceasing enmity so that men cannot be persuaded to enter into treaties with each other, slander, lack of self-control, savagery, opposition to goodness, traitors, headiness (rashness or recklessness), high-mindedness, love of pleasure, a pretense of worship without godliness of life.

B. Preparation for the Ecumenical Church

During the first part of the Tribulation days, organized, ecumenical religion will have its heyday. This apostate religious system is described in Revelation 17 under the label, "Mystery, Babylon." It will be worldwide (v. 15), unfaithful to the truth and to the Lord (the term "harlot" appears in vv. 1, 5, 15-16), have extensive political clout (vv. 12-13), be a "whited sepulcher," that is, be inwardly corrupt while outwardly glorious and splendid (v. 4), and will persecute the saints of the Tribulation days (v. 6).

The groundwork for such a system will apparently have to be laid before the Tribulation begins, that is, during the closing years of the Church Age. The preparation will likely include both organizational moves toward unity in Christendom as well as the ascendancy of doctrines to which diverse groups can give support.

II. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

A. The Concept of the Rapture

Our modern understanding of rapture appears to have little or no connection with the eschatological event. However, the word is properly used of that event. Rapture is a state or experience of being carried away. The English word comes from a Latin word, *rapiro*, which means to seize or snatch in relation to an ecstasy of spirit or the actual removal from one place to another. In other words, it means to be carried away in spirit or in body. The Rapture of the church means the carrying away of the church from earth to heaven.

The Greek word from which we take the term "rapture" appears in 1 Thessalonians 4: 17, translated "caught up." The Latin translation of this verse used the word *rapturo*. The Greek word it translates is *harpazo*, which means to snatch or take away. Elsewhere it is used to describe how the Spirit caught up Philip near Gaza and brought him to Caesarea (Acts 8:39) and to describe Paul's experience of being caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-4). The third heaven is God's dwelling place (Paradise). Thus there can be no doubt that the word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4: 17 to indicate the actual removal of people from earth to heaven.

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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 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. I Thes. 4:13-15

The body (not the soul) of the believer who dies is said to sleep during the time between death and resurrection. Death brings us immediately into the presence of Christ – no soul sleep or no purgatory in between (Phil. 1:23).

B. The Components of the Rapture (I Thes. 4:13-18)

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: I Thes. 4:16

1. _____ (v. 16). The Lord Himself will return for His people, accompanied by all the grandeur His presence deserves. There will be a shout of command (whether uttered by the Lord or an archangel is not stated), and the trumpet of God will summon the dead in Christ to their resurrection as well as sounding a warning to those who have rejected Him and thus have missed the Rapture.

2. _____ (v. 16). At this time only the dead in Christ will be raised. This means believers since the Day of Pentecost, for though there were believers before then, none of them were placed "in Christ." The dead in Christ will be raised just

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before the living are changed. Yet both groups will experience their respective changes "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). The entire procedure will be instantaneous, not gradual. The word for "moment" is the word from which the word "atom" comes. Because when the atom was discovered it was thought to be indivisible, it was named "atom." Even though subsequently the atom was split, the word retains its meaning of indivisible. The resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living will occur in an indivisible instant of time.

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. 1 Thes. 4:17

3. _____ (v. 17). Strictly speaking, only living believers are raptured (though we use the term to include all that happens at that time). This means they will be caught up into the Lord's presence without having to experience physical death.

4. _____ (v. 17). The reunion will be with the Lord and with the loved ones who have died.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words: 1 Thes. 4:18

5. _____ (v. 18). The truth of the Rapture both comforts and encourages us (for the word does have both meanings). Paul's descriptions of the Rapture in both 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 give no support to the partial Rapture view which teaches that only spiritual believers will be raptured at several times during the Tribulation period. Paul states clearly that "we shall all be changed" at that time, and he wrote those words to the Corinthians, many of whom could hardly be called spiritual.

III. EVENTS OF THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

Since the Scriptures describe so many events during the seven years of Tribulation, and since I would like to try to put them all together in as nearly a chronological sequence as possible, I think it would be best to do this in the following chapter.

IV. EVENTS AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

A. The Second Coming

At the climax of the campaign of _____, the Lord will return to this earth to judge and to reign. His return is described in Zechariah 14: 1-11 and Revelation 19: 11-16. It is referred to in many other passages, but these two give the most detailed description of it.

B. The Judgments at the Second Coming

V. THE MILLENNIUM

The Scriptures give many details about the future millennial kingdom of Christ. A separate lesson can be devoted to the Millennium and to the events at the end of it.

Reference: 1) Basic Theology, Charles C. Ryrie, pp. 461-463

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Fill in the Blanks

Return of Christ

Resurrection

Rapture

Reunion

Reassurance

Armageddon