

STUDY NINETEEN – EIGHT VARIOUS VIEWS ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH!

INTRODUCTION

A deep look at much of the writings of Early Church fathers reveals that they held differing views about the timing of the rapture of the Church even back then — there was no prevailing, widely agreed-upon and adhered-to view concerning the timing of the Rapture. But today there are quite a wide variety of views about the timing of the rapture of the Church. In this short study, you will see a brief summary of the eight primary views that are espoused by different groups today about the timing of the rapture of the Church.

VIEW NUMBER ONE: PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

First, we begin with the view that there will be a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church. This is my own view, as I believe this position is clearly presented in the pages of the New Testament, and it is the one that I generally feel most resembles what was espoused by some of the earliest Church fathers.

Those who hold to a pre-Tribulation rapture believe that the Church will be caught away or raptured before the Tribulation and that the Second Coming of Christ will take place at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period. This position is commonly held by dispensationalists, but there are scholars and theologians beyond the dispensationalist view who also hold firmly to this position.

The pre-Tribulation rapture of the Church view teaches:

- At the end of the Church Age, Christ will descend into the lower atmosphere above the earth to resurrect the bodies of the righteous dead and to catch away or to rapture the Church.
- Those who are caught up and raptured will be supernaturally transported to Heaven and will remain there for seven years (the same time frame as the Tribulation period that will be taking place on the earth).
- During the seven years the righteous are in Heaven, they will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and each will give an account of his or her service to Christ and will be rewarded accordingly.
- Also, during the seven years in Heaven, those who were transported to Heaven will joyfully participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
- At the conclusion of those seven years, Christ will visibly return to the earth with ten thousands of His saints to destroy the Antichrist, to bind the devil, and to establish His Millennial Reign upon the earth.

VIEW NUMBER TWO: PARTIAL RAPTURE

Those who believe in a Partial Rapture think that only a certain category of faithful Christians will be caught away or raptured at the end of the Church Age. This view basically holds that only those who are "watching and waiting" will be caught away or raptured before the seven-year Tribulation period begins.

This concept is derived from several New Testament passages that specifically state Christ is coming for those who are watching and waiting. Among these passages are the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13; Paul's final words in Second Timothy 4:8; and Hebrews 9:28. Those who adhere to this view teach that Christians who are not "watching and waiting" will be left behind at the time of the

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Rapture. And because the passages I just mentioned are important to this conversation, we will deal with them in later studies.

If this partial-Rapture position is correct, it would categorically mean that only a certain part of what we call the Church would be raptured, and Christians who are not actively "watching and waiting" would be left behind to live through the seven years of the Tribulation. But what do these passages in Matthew 25:1-13, Second Timothy 4:8, and Hebrews 9:28 really teach? Again, we will return to these in later studies to see what we can glean from these texts that some use as a pretext for a partial-Rapture view of the rapture of the Church.

Those who hold to this position encourage the Church to be spiritually awake and ever looking for the rapture of the Church to occur. Certainly, this is the attitude we should all have, especially in light of what Paul said in First Thessalonians 4:16-17 — that Christ is coming for those who are spiritually living, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous. It is easy to see how some might take this to mean only a partial-Rapture will take place at that time.

Unfortunately, there are those who teach that regardless of how one lives, if a person once simply said "the sinner's prayer," that person will be caught up in the Rapture regardless of how he is presently living his life. This careless view has caused people to think that they are "in" regardless of how they are living. And in contrast, those who adhere to a partial-Rapture view, in essence, say there are no guarantees in Scripture that this will happen and that we must actively "work" to prove our sincerity and readiness to God. This, however, tends to reduce one's salvation to works rather than faith, which is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament.

VIEW NUMBER THREE: MID-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

Those who hold to a Mid-Tribulation Rapture view believe that the Rapture will take place at the mid-point of the seven-year Tribulation (or the three-and-a-half-year mark of the Tribulation), and this view holds that only the last three and a half years of the Tribulation will contain what is called the "great tribulation" (see Matthew 24:21). This view fails to answer the fact that the Bible shows God's wrath will be poured out during the entire Tribulation period and not just for the latter three and a half years — although the last half of the Tribulation will be the worst of the judgments experienced on the earth. Today there are those who rightly say that Christians will endure many hardships before the rapture of the Church, but as I stated previously, hardships are not the equivalent of wrath.

VIEW NUMBER FOUR: PRE-WRATH RAPTURE

Those who hold to a Pre-Wrath Rapture believe the Church will not be raptured before the Tribulation, but that the rapture of the Church will take place about three quarters of the way through the Tribulation. According to this view, the Church will be delivered — or caught away or raptured — at the third-quarter mark in the Tribulation and just before the intense wrath of God is poured out upon the earth.

This view creates numerous and significant linguistic, exegetical, and theological problems. A pre-Wrath rapture of the Church is difficult to back up with the chronology of events that we find in the book of Revelation.

VIEW NUMBER FIVE: POST-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

Those who hold to a Post-Tribulation Rapture essentially believe that the Church will go through the entirety of the seven years of the Tribulation, and that they will experience every seal, every trumpet, and every bowl of judgment right along with the condemned, lost world.

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Those who believe in a post-Tribulation rapture believe that Christ will come in His Second Coming at the end of the seven years of the Tribulation — which is true in that Christ will come to the earth and set foot on the Mount of Olives at the conclusion of the Tribulation period. But those who adhere to this position of a post-Tribulation rapture believe that at nearly the exact moment of Christ's Second Coming, believers will be supernaturally snatched up into the heavens to meet the Lord. However, it will really be a U-turn event, for with a post-Tribulation rapture, those who were snatched up will then immediately descend with Christ as He places His feet upon the Mount of Olives. It would be a quick going up and an immediate going down — leaving no space for the Judgment Seat of Christ and Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Heaven.

But again, a post-Tribulation rapture of the Church basically holds that the Church will make a U-turn as it goes up to meet Christ in the air and then immediately turns around to come back down to the earth. But this raises all kinds of unanswerable questions, including why a rapture would be necessary at all in this case? And again, it leaves no time for each saint to appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ or to participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

VIEW NUMBER SIX: POST-MILLENNIALISTS

Post-Millennialists are the eternal optimists of the eschatological world. They believe that the world will gradually get better through the influence of the Church until we enter a golden age of Christian rule, and that is when Jesus will return to the earth to receive unto Himself a ready-made kingdom.

Until then, Jesus waits in Heaven for the world to get better and better, ready for His return. This view is not about Jesus rescuing us from chaos, but about us establishing His Kingdom on Earth before He comes back.

There are post-Millennialists who believe the Millennium will last a literal 1,000 years, but others see those 1,000 years as a figurative term for a long period of time. And rather than believe Christ will bind Satan in a single feat (see Revelation 20:1-6), they believe that the forces of Satan will be gradually defeated by the Church over a long period of time — perhaps even 1,000 years — as the Church becomes stronger and stronger over eons of time. Then, finally, when all evil is defeated and the Church reigns supreme in the earth, that is when Christ will return physically in His Second Coming. And, actually, according to this view, we are currently already living in the Millennium.

Those who are post-Millennialists believe that Christ is establishing His Kingdom on Earth through the Church as it fulfils the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19). They expect that the vast majority of people on Earth will eventually be saved and that this will produce a time in which God will prevail in the affairs of men and nations.

VIEW NUMBER SEVEN: AMILLENNIALISTS

Those who hold the position of Amillennialism believe there will never be a literal Millennial Reign of Christ. Pure amillennialists believe when the book of Revelation speaks of "a thousand years" it is simply symbolic language that means a long period of time. True amillennialists believe this eternal state has already started and that we are living in it right now. In essence, amillennialists reject the idea of a future Millennial Reign in which Christ will reign on Earth.

The following is a simplistic view of what amillennialists believe:

- That Jesus is currently reigning from Heaven at the right hand of God the Father, which is, of course, true.

- That the Millennium began with the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus' ascension to Heaven, or on the Day of Pentecost, which I emphatically don't believe.
- That the task of the Church is to spread the message that Christ's Kingdom is here and is already here with nothing more to be established in a Millennial Reign of Christ.

If this view were true, it would mean that we are living in a world that is growing brighter and brighter as the ages pass.

But, indeed, we are living in a world that is becoming darker as time passes. And according to Bible prophecy, the world will become even darker — "as in the days of Noah" (see Matthew 24:37) — as we speed toward the end of the age. In my opinion, the perspective of amillennialists actually flies in the face of Scripture. We have clearly seen in the pages of this book that the world will eventually become a lawless place that will give rise to an Antichrist who will rule defiantly against God.

VIEW NUMBER EIGHT: PAN-TRIBULATIONISTS

The term Pan-Tribulationist is not a real theological term, but one that has been coined to describe those who say, "Well, it all sounds so confusing to me. I have no idea when the Rapture is going to take place. But I'm sure that in the end, it will all pan' out. So, I'm a Pan-Tribulationist!"

Many people frustratingly throw their hands into the air and say, "I don't have a clue when the Rapture will take place, but I am sure it will all work out in the end." In a sense, this position is always correct, for in the end it really will all work out. But God does not want us to live in uncertainty about the future, and that is why He provides prophetic answers to us in His Word. When the Bible is clearly understood, it brings clarity out of confusion — and clarity always contributes to peace.

An example would be if someone doesn't understand that the appearance of the Antichrist and the mark of the beast are events that will come to pass after the rapture. If he doesn't know that — and worries all the time about who the Antichrist is or what the mark of the beast is — he may be unduly fraught with worry and anxiety. But clearly knowing from Scripture that the identity and appearance of the Antichrist and the mark of the beast are events that will only occur after the Rapture eliminates the need for unnecessary speculation. 'The fact is that no one can know the identity of the Antichrist until after the rapture of the Restrainer, the Church — and since he will be the one to demand that the whole world take his mark, all this cannot occur until after his identity is revealed. And as noted, that will take place after the rapture of the Church.

It's important to note that God has initiated His end-time plan, and only He knows the day and the hour of these events (see Matthew 24:36). Therefore, any debating of "when" on our part has no effect on the unmalleable will and plan of God. In other words, our faith and what we believe or don't believe about this subject won't change the events that will occur according to God's own purposes. They will happen completely independent of what you or I think about it. But God has made clear in His Word what we need to know to cooperate intelligently with Him to fulfil His purposes and to be prepared for the events that will unfold before us.