

Resurrection or Rapture?

In 1827, Rev. J. N. Darby resigned from the Church of Ireland. Darby claimed that he had discovered a secret doctrine in the Bible and called his new teaching the Rapture. This heretical teaching asserts that Christ will rapture, or bodily draw all Christians up to heaven, thereby rescuing them from the suffering and tribulation described in Revelation. According to Darby, when this time of tribulation and suffering on earth is complete, Christ will return a second time to raise up all other people for Judgment Day. Darby's false idea, that Christians will not have to face tribulation because of the Rapture, has influenced numerous sects and cults. But even more disturbing, this heretical teaching is now the weekly focus of preaching in many Protestant churches the world over. The false hope proclaimed by Darby's doctrine is misleading because the book of Revelation never mentions a Rapture! In reality, Revelation teaches that God will *preserve* His people in time of tribulation and, when Christ returns on Judgment Day, He will raise from the dead both believers and unbelievers at the same time (Revelation 11:18; 20:11-15).

Darby's heresy begins with a misunderstanding of Revelation 20. This passage refers to a first resurrection (20:5) and then describes a second time when the dead are raised for judgement (20:12-13). Therefore, Darby wrongly assumed that there must be two bodily resurrections. Darby made a classic mistake: he failed to compare Revelation 20:5 with other Bible passages that talk about the resurrection.

For example, if Darby had studied John 5:25-29, he would have seen that Jesus also describes two resurrections: a spiritual resurrection and a bodily resurrection.

First, Jesus says, "*An hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live,*" (John 5:25). Notice that Jesus says this first resurrection happens now. Since sin has brought spiritual death to each of us, we need new life now. We need to be spiritually raised from the dead! When we "*hear the voice of the Son of God*" in Baptism (Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12) or the preaching of the Gospel (Colossians 3:1), we receive that new spiritual life that Christ now promises. This is our first resurrection, a spiritual resurrection from sin's deadly effects.

Then Jesus describes a second resurrection: the resurrection of the body. This resurrection will happen in the future when Christ returns on Judgement Day and "*all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth,*" (John 5:28-29). At that time, Christ will reward His people for their faithful service but will condemn all the wicked (Revelation 11:18; 20:11-15; see also Matthew 13:40-43; 49-50; 25:31-34, 46; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-5:11).

When you read Revelation 20:5 together with other Bible passages about the resurrection, the meaning becomes clear. Rather than teaching two bodily resurrections like Darby did, Revelation 20:5 teaches that Christ resurrects us now spiritually and will raise us up bodily when He returns for the Last Judgment.

Instead of trusting in Darby's heresy of false hope, we rely on God's sure promises. Yes, we will face suffering before the return of Christ. In fact, more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than at any other time in history! (Revelation 6:9-11; 20:4). Yet God now preserves His church, even in the midst of suffering (Revelation 2:10-11). He is now our *"shepherd, and shall guide [us] to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from [our] eyes,"* (Revelation 7:17).

Although we may face suffering in this life, we rejoice in what Jesus does for us now! Through Baptism, He resurrects us spiritually now (Romans 6:4-5). Through His Word, He encourages and sustains us now (John 15:7). In the Lord's Supper, He even nourishes us with His very body and blood now. Christ does all this now to take away our sin, preserve us in the midst of suffering, and prepare us for His glorious return. Therefore, rejoice! And listen eagerly for that final trumpet, when *"the kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord,"* (Revelation 11:15).