

The Alleged Rapture of Christians before the End of the World

Recently copies of a tract entitled “The Rapture of the Church” by a certain P R Cameron, who styles himself as a “missionary evangelist”, were distributed. It presents the notion that Christ will return invisibly before His Second Coming, and suddenly remove all believers from the earth. A plane flown by a Christian would suddenly be without a pilot, a family would suddenly lose some of its members, and so on. Those “raptured” would escape the coming tribulation, and be presented to Christ as the pure bride after the long betrothal of the New Testament period, and be married to the Lamb.

People who hold this generally also say that, after the believers have been removed to heaven, a great tribulation of seven years will come on the Jewish nation. Half way through the week Antichrist will be revealed, and God will pour out His wrath on the nations so much that Israel will accept Christ. Then Christ will gather all nations, and judge them by their treatment of His brethren, the Jews, and destroy the nations. They say that this is the “first judgment.” Then He will destroy Antichrist, and begin a thousand-year period of peace on the earth. At the end of this thousand-year period on earth, Satan will be loosed for a short period. Then the second resurrection and the judgment will come. Christ will destroy hell and death, and God will make a new heaven and new earth.

A check of the passages of Scripture quoted in the tract, like Revelation 19, Zechariah 14:5, 1 Thess. 4:16-18, and 1 Cor 15 shows that the passages supposed to teach about such a “rapture” simply don’t say this. No wonder Cameron quickly relies on alleged visions of the “rapture” in China, Asia, and the old Communist block to support what he says. The rest shows how these “Premillennialists” also often deal with Scripture passages in a very arbitrary way.

The following comments should be made: Scripture presents the church as hidden under the cross to the end of time. The time of the New Testament period itself is this period of peace, which will be followed by a short period of trouble before the end. Antichrist is the adversary of Christ, rather than of the Jews, and this institution, represented by a succession of men in office, was a tendency already showing itself at St Paul’s time (2 Ths 2), and will continue until Christ’s second coming. There is no scriptural support for two resurrections. When Revelation 20:5 mentions the “first resurrection”, it means either the time when people become believers, or when their souls go to be with the Lord at death. It is obvious what the “second resurrection” is (though not mentioned as such): the resurrection of all the dead together at the end of the world, some to live in heaven and others to live in hell. When Paul says “In this way all Israel will be saved”, the context in Romans 11:25-26 makes it clear that he is not speaking about physical Israel, but spiritual Israel, all believers, from the Jews and Gentiles. Premillennialists are in constant danger of removing the doctrine of salvation through Christ’s death and resurrection from the centre, and substituting a series of earthly events as the centre of their faith.

Those who speak about a “rapture” get the idea from 1 Thess. 4:17: “Then we who remain and are still living will be caught up (Latin: *rapiemur*) with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.” Some people at Thessalonica were only recent Christians, and thought that believers who had died would be at some disadvantage when Christ returned at the end of the world. In verse 15 Paul assured them, “We who remain and are still living when the Lord comes will not arrive ahead of those who have fallen asleep.” Verse 16 says very clearly that this “being caught up” will occur at the end of the world, at Christ’s second coming: “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet sound of God.” The word “first”, which comes next doesn’t mean a so-called “first resurrection”. It simply says that Christ will first raise the dead who are in Him and then the believers who are still living. At the end of the world the dead in Christ will be caught up together with the believers who are still alive, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air as He comes on the clouds on heaven. Both events will happen virtually together. The dead will rise (“first”), and then the living believers will be caught up with them to meet the Lord. Paul concludes, “And so we shall always be with the Lord.”

That the resurrection of the believers and the unbelievers will occur together is clear from a number of passages, like John 5:28-29: “The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live. Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” Compare Acts 24:15.

To summarise: The Scriptures teach that, when Christ comes the second time, at the last day, the first thing He will do, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, will be to raise all the dead, believers and unbelievers. He will reunite the souls of all the dead with the same bodies from which they were separated by temporal death. Their bodies will be adapted to their future state. The bodies of the wicked will rise to shame and torment. He will

change and glorify the bodies of the righteous, the living and the dead, to be like His own body after He was raised. They will rise to an everlasting state of heavenly glory.

Part of the problem of Millennialists is that they try to give a literal interpretation of passages from apocalyptic literature, like Daniel and Revelation. In such books, numbers like 7, 10, and 12 are often used figuratively. "A thousand years" (10 x 10 x 10) is used figuratively for the full time that God has set down for the New Testament, followed by a short season in which Satan will be loosed (Rv 20:1-6). The same picture comes in the 3½ years (42 months, or 1260 days), which are followed by 3½ days of trouble. It is the same picture as Christ presents in Mt 24, Mk 13, and L 19. The Gospel, which binds Satan, will be preached as a witness to all nations. But the time near the end will become so difficult that if it were not shortened, even the elect would be deceived. The love of many will grow cold. Millennialists interpret passages in the OT prophets about the lion's lying down with the lamb, and people's beating swords into plough shares as things to be fulfilled literally on this earth, instead of referring them to the peace of the times of the New Testament, which Christ ushered in.

Some References: Job 19:26; Daniel 12:2; Mt 13:43; Mt 25:31,32,41,46; J 5:21,28,29; J 6:40,54; Acts 24:15; R 8:11; 1 Cor 15:42-53; 2 Cor 5:10; Ph 3:21_ 1Thess 4:16; Revelation 7:16; Revelation 20:12.