

## **THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:15-18**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION-**

- a. Tonight I want to talk about the next event that is to happen on God's prophetic calendar...we call this event the Rapture of the church.
- b. Before I talk about the Rapture...I want to talk about where we are now in God's prophetic timeline.

#### **II. THE CHURCH AGE-**

- a. According to the Bible we are currently in what we call The Church Age...or the Age of the Gospel...the Age of Grace...the Missionary Age.
- b. The Church Age began when the church of the Lord Jesus Christ...was supernaturally injected into the course of human history on the Day of Pentecost.
- c. The Church Age will continue until the church is supernaturally ejected from the flow of human history...by the Rapture.
- d. After Israel...God's chosen people...reject Jesus as its Messiah...as far as being His witnessing nation to the world God put the nation of Israel on the shelf...God is now reaching out and witnessing to the world through His church...which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles.
- e. But God is not through with the nation of Israel...individual Jews are still being saved ... and one day God will take the nation of Israel off the shelf...one day Israel will finally fulfill God's call to be His witnessing people to the world.
- f. Israel's rejection of Jesus did not catch Him by surprise...the Church Age is not God's Plan B...God is omniscient...He knows all things...God knew all along that Israel would reject Jesus...He planned and knew all along that there would be a Church Age.
- g. Paul calls the Church Age a mystery...something that is hinted at in the Old Testament...but not fully revealed until the New Testament.

- h. We are now in the Church Age...and the Church Age will continue until the Rapture of the Church.

### III. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH-

- a. The word “rapture” does not occur in the English version of the Bible...it comes from Latin Vulgate Bible which translates the phrase "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 ...with the Latin word *rapir* or rapture.
- b. The Greek word translated “caught up” means to catch or snatch away...it was used of thieves who snatched away what belonged to others...of kidnappers who snatched away their victims...of hunters who trapped and caught away their prey.
- c. The Bible teaches that one day God is going to snatch His people out of this world ... *1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (NKJV) “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*

### IV. WHY THE RAPTURE-

- a. Why is there going to be a Rapture?...why is God going to catch His people out of the world?...because the time will have come for God’s final judgment and His wrath to be poured out on an increasingly evil and rebellious world...in what we call the Great Tribulation.
- b. But before the Great Tribulation can begin...every truly saved person on earth ... the true church (not the professing church) must be taken out of the way.
- c. The church of the Church Age will not go through the Great Tribulation...in this world God chastises His children...and in this world we will have trials and tribulation...but the Bible assures us that the true church will not face the wrath of God that is coming in the Great Tribulation.
- d. *1 Thessalonians 5:9 (NKJV) “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

- e. The Lord Jesus spoke of two instances in the Bible...where God took His people out of the way before He poured out His judgment...and Jesus compared those instances to what God will do for His people the last days.
- f. *Matthew 24:36-39 (NKJV) "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."*
- g. As God's judgment in the flood did not begin until Noah and his family were safely shut up in the ark...so the Great Tribulation...God's final judgment upon the earth will not begin until God's are taken out of the world by the Rapture.
- h. *Luke 17:28-30 (NKJV) "Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; 29 but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."*
- i. As the wrath of God did not fall on Sodom and Gomorrah until Lot and his family were safely out of the way...so the wrath of God in the Great Tribulation will not begin to fall on the earth until God's people are taken out of the world by the Rapture.

## V. CONCLUSION-

- a. With the presence and witness of the church out of the world...and the Holy Spirit's restraint of evil withdrawn...the spiritual atmosphere of this world will dramatically change.
- b. The Bible says that in spite of the Anti-Christ and his persecution...in spite of the horrible evil of that time...in spite of the relentless judgments that will fall upon the earth...people will be saved during the Great Tribulation.
- c. Many will be saved through the witness of a redeemed Israel...which as a nation will finally believe in Christ...and finally fulfill God's purpose of being His witnesses to the world...during the Great Tribulation.

- d. But the Bible also indicates an interesting but sobering paradox...the more an unsaved person was exposed to the gospel before the Rapture and rejected it...the less likely it is that they will be saved after the Rapture.
- e. After the Rapture of the church and the Great Tribulation...Jesus Christ will come again...listen to the Bible's description of that moment... *Matthew 24:29-31 (NKJV) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*
- f. Jesus said when He comes again there will be a cosmic breakdown...heavenly bodies will begin to careen at random through space...the sun will grow black and the moon won't give its light...Rev 6:13-14 says the stars will fall like overripe figs, and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll...Zech 14:6 says that at the moment that Jesus comes again all the lights in the universe will go out.
- g. And then in the darkness of the universe, Jesus Christ in His infinite and undiminished glory and righteousness will light up the universe!...riding the clouds of heaven Jesus Christ will appear in all of His blazing and unveiled glory!
- h. Matt 24:30 says that Jesus will return with power...the power of His return will start the universe reeling and the earth rocking on its axis...by His power He will judge Satan and the demons...by His power He will establish His earthly and everlasting kingdom...by His power He will judge all those who rejected Him.
- i. The Bible says that those who rejected Christ will be overwhelmed with grief and despair... when they see the One whom they had despised, neglected and rejected.  
ARE YOU READY?