

PART I

THE RAPTURE

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. 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; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4.15-17)

ONE

THE VALLEY

The Old Testament prophets saw two distinct comings of the Messiah. They saw the first coming in which the Messiah would die for mankind. They also saw the second coming in which the Messiah would establish His physical kingdom on Earth. Between the two comings (mountain peaks) is a valley (the duration between the two comings). They did not know how large that valley is, but they gave some definite hints of its size.

Isaiah 61

The key to Pre-Millennial and Pre-Tribulation eschatology is found in the 61st chapter of the book of Isaiah:

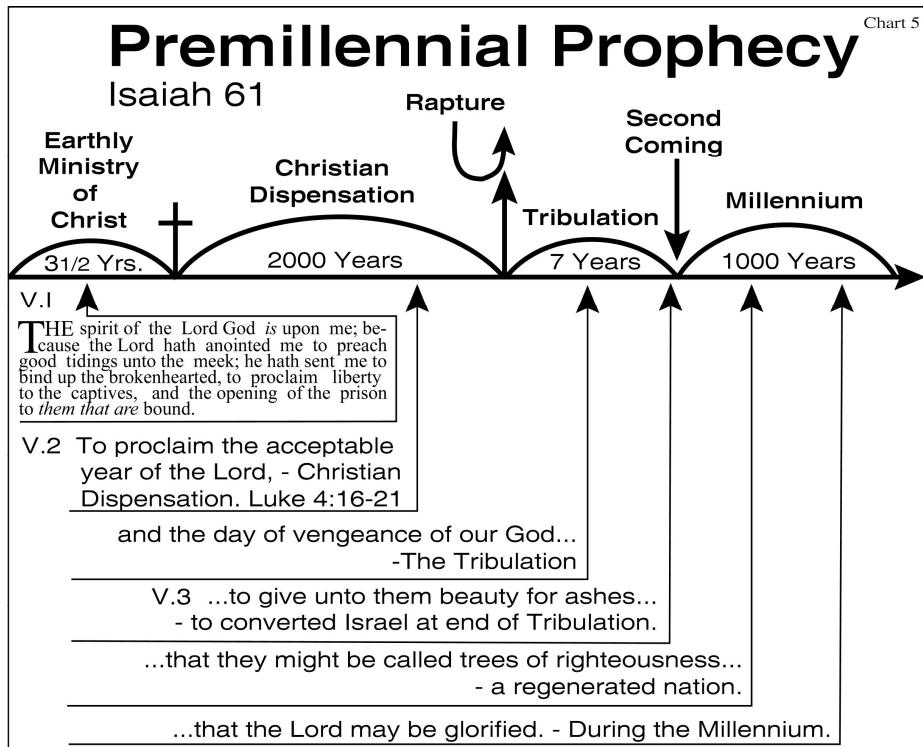
The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners shall be your plowmen and your vine-dressers. But ye shall be named the priests of Jehovah; men shall call you the ministers of our God: ye shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves. Instead of your shame ye shall have double; and instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be unto them. For I, Jehovah, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity; and I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Jehovah hath blessed. I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with a garland, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth its bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Jehovah will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61.1-11)

This prophecy shows the Messiah will usher in three different periods of time:

1. A long time likened to a year (at His First Coming).
2. A short period of time likened to a day (at the Rapture).
3. A time of comfort to all that mourn in Zion (at His Glorious Appearing).

These three periods of time are:

1. The Christian dispensation.
2. The seven-year Tribulation.
3. The Millennial Kingdom.



Jesus began his ministry by bringing in the first period of time – the Christian dispensation (Luke 4:18-19). On the day that He raptures the Church, He will usher in the second period – the Tribulation. Then at the end of the Tribulation with His glorious appearing, He will bring in the third period of time – the Millennial Kingdom.

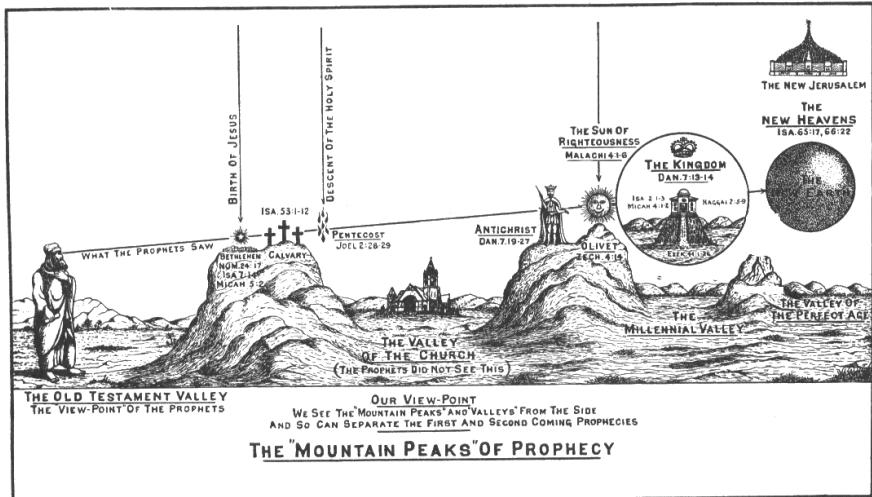
The length of the Tribulation in relation to the Christian dispensation is like one day is to a year. The Tribulation will be seven years in length, so the Christian dispensation would be about 360 times as long, or approximately 2520 years. Remember, it is not an exact relationship, but an approximate one. That means if we took it absolutely literally it would be, but we believe He is showing an approximate period of time.

It has been a tradition for more than 2000 years for Jews in every congregation to read the same passage on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath that Jesus went to the synagogue and read the passage in Isaiah 61, that same passage was read in every synagogue in the world. Jesus stopped reading after the phrase, “*to proclaim the year of Jehovah’s favor.*” He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and then said, “*Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears*” (Luke 4.21). He did not read on and say, “*and the day of vengeance of our God*” (the Tribulation) and “*to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion*” (Millennial Kingdom), because those prophecies would not be fulfilled for nearly 2000 years. This is the foundational passage for the doctrine of Pre-Millennialism, which teaches that the Second Coming of Jesus will take place before the Millennial Kingdom.

Isaiah 61 teaches 3 periods of time – a long one like a year (Christian dispensation), followed by a short period of time like a day (Tribulation) and then the Millennial Kingdom.

The Olivet Discourse follows the same pattern. The First Coming of Christ and the Church Age are described in Matthew 24.4-8, and the Tribulation and Second Coming are covered in verses 9-31. The beginning of the Millennial Kingdom is then described in Matthew 25.31-34.

Chapters 1-3 of Revelation describe the First Coming of Christ and the Church dispensation. Chapters 4-5 give the scene in Heaven after the Rapture (“*Come up hither,*” 4.1), and chapters 6-19 describe the Tribulation and the Second Coming. Chapters 20-22 describe the Millennial and Eternal Kingdoms.



The early dispensationalists did not believe the prophets saw the Church Age. They would draw a chart like the one above picturing the prophets seeing the mountain of his First Coming and the mountain peak of his Second Coming, but not the valley of the church age in between. However the following passages show that their position is incorrect, and that prophets clearly saw the valley of the church age and its length.

Peter affirmed the long gap of time between the two comings of the Messiah

Peter explained that Jesus had to return to Heaven until the “*times of restoration of all things*” and he said this was foretold by the prophets:

Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been from of old. (Acts 3.19-21, emphasis mine)

There are four types of Messianic prophecies and the fourth shows there is a gap between the first and second comings of the Messiah:

First – The prophecies that only refer to Christ’s first coming (Deuteronomy 18.18; Psalm 16.8-11; 34.20; 40.6-10; 41.9; 69.13-28; Isaiah 7.14; 52.13-53.12; Zechariah 13.7)

Second – The prophecies that only refer to Christ’s second coming (Psalm 2.48; 72.1-19; Isaiah 2-4; 24; 32; 33; 35; 60; Jeremiah 3.11-18; 23.1-8; Ezekiel 34; Amos 9.11-15; Habakkuk 3; Zephaniah 3.8-20; Zechariah 14)

Third – the prophecies that blend the two comings together (Genesis 49.10; Psalm 22; Isaiah 9.5-7; 11.1-12; 6; Zechariah 6.9-15; 9.9-10)

Fourth – The prophecies giving Christ’s first coming, His second coming, and the interval of time between (Psalm 110; Hosea 5.14-6.3; Isaiah 42.1-4; 61.1-4).

The prophets prophesied two different comings of the Messiah. The first in which the Messiah would die for mankind (Isaiah 52.13-53.12), and the second in which He would defeat the forces of wickedness and establish His Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 11.1-16; 65.17-25). It is obvious that there would be a period of time separating the two comings. There were several hints given by the Old Testament prophets that the valley would be very large as noted previously. Yet the Lord Himself made it perfectly clear that this valley would be very large. His parables of the nobleman (Luke 19.12) and talents (Matthew 25.19) as noted above emphasized this truth. The phrases, “*went to a distant country*” and “*after a long time,*” show there would be a long period of time between the two comings of the Messiah, and that the valley would be very large.

The prophets said the Messiah would come to Earth, go back to Heaven and then return a long time later? David, Isaiah and Hosea:

Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until (the entire Church Age) I make thine enemies thy footstool. Jehovah will send forth the rod of thy strength out of Zion: Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. (Psalm 110.1-2)

Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not

cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. A bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench: he will bring forth justice in truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till (the entire Christian dispensation) he have set justice in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law. (Isaiah 42.1-4)

To proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor (Church Age), and the day of vengeance of our God (Tribulation); to comfort all that mourn... (Isaiah 61.2)

For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and there shall be none to deliver. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly. Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him. And let us know, let us follow on to know Jehovah: his going forth is sure as the morning; and he will come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth. (Hosea 5.14-6.3, emphasis mine)

Peter noted this in his sermon under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The phrase “even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until times of restoration of all things” is the key. The times of restoration would not be a few decades, but will be nearly 2000 years.

According to Hosea 6.2, “*After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him*” we understand there is two days between the resurrection of Jesus and His return. Remember a “day” in some instances can be 1000 years (2 Peter 3.8).

It should also be noted that some theologians argue the Lord offered the kingdom to the Jews at His first coming. This hypothesis is not valid because, as shown, Scripture specified there would be a *gap* between the two comings. Jesus also said this *gap* would be a very long period of time.

If Jesus intended to offer the “kingdom” to the Jews that offer would have been recorded in the Bible. Instead, He made an offer to Jews and Gentiles alike to believe in Him. When Nicodemus, a high-ranking Pharisee, came to Jesus secretly early in His ministry, He made the offer of salvation to him and to everyone (John 3.1-16). This meeting took place at the beginning of His ministry. He prophesied that He would die for the world:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.” (John 3.14-15)

We know from other statements by Jesus that He came to die for all the people of the world (Matthew 20.28; 26.28). We also know from the Old Testament that the Messiah would die for the world (Isaiah 52.13-53.12). It is pure speculation to declare that Jesus intended to make the offer of the “kingdom” to Israel, and if accepted then offer Himself as the Passover lamb, followed by His resurrection from the dead and the establishment of His “kingdom.”

The idea that the Lord offered the “Kingdom of Heaven” to the nation of Israel is

not biblical. Those who spend time arguing that there is a difference between the terms, the “Kingdom of Heaven” and the “Kingdom of God” are wasting their time. The Lord Himself said:

And Jesus said unto his disciples, “Verily I say unto you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19.23-24)

Since the Lord used the two interchangeably, it is a serious mistake to claim they are different. There is no difference between the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of Heaven.” There is only one gospel as Paul boldly declared, and any other gospel is a false gospel (Galatians 1.6, 9). At the end of his ministry Paul was preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 28.30).

Conclusion

The apostles and early Church fathers may not have guessed how long the Church Age would be, but we now that it will be almost 2000 years. Thusly, the understanding that the valley between the two mountain peaks of the first and second comings of Christ is a long period of time of approximately 2000 years is the only acceptable understanding.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

1. Which period did Jesus usher in?

2. Which period will He bring in next?

3. What is the third period that He will inaugurate, and when will He do it?

TWO

THE RAPTURE

The “Rapture” is a word that refers to the catching away of all believers from Earth to meet Jesus Christ in the air when He returns. The Greek word, *harpazo*, that is translated “caught up” (1 Thessalonians 4.17), means to “snatch or catch away” with “forceful seizure” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary, p. 174). The Rapture of believers from Earth is not a point of disagreement among Christians; it is the timing of the Rapture that is not agreed upon.

The Blessed Event

Paul described this event in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, Greece:

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4.15-17)

The announcement of the catching up from Earth of all believers, dead and alive, takes place in a matter of several moments. The archangel shouts the command, “Come up here!” (Revelation 4.1), and then the trumpet of God is blown. We do not know how long the trumpet blast is, but it could be from several seconds to a minute or more because more than one trumpet is blown. Paul said believers will be changed “at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15.52).

The dead in Christ are raised first, and then the bodies of all living believers are transformed from mortal bodies to immortal ones. Once they are transformed they are “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air.

Paul gave more information in his first letter to the church in Corinth:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15.51-52)

The entire Rapture event will take several moments to as long as a few minutes. It will not take place in the “twinkling of an eye,” as most teach.

According to many eschatologists, the entire Rapture event will take about one-thousandth of a second. It is hard to imagine how the shout from the archangel, the blowing of the trumpet blasts, and the resurrection and rapture of believers can take

place in just one-thousandth of a second.

Hal Lindsey believes the entire Rapture event takes place in the “twinkling of an eye”:

Someone said that the twinkling of an eye is about one-thousandth of a second. The Greek word is *atomos* from which we get the word atom. It means something that cannot be divided. In other words, the Rapture will occur so quickly and suddenly that the time frame in which it occurs cannot be humanly divided.

Just think of it...in the flash of a second every living believer on earth will be gone! Suddenly, without warning, only unbelievers will be populating Planet Earth. (*Vanished Into Thin Air*, pp. 56-57)

Timothy LaHaye also believes that the entire Rapture event takes only a fraction of a second:

Through the years some have tried to discredit the pre-Trib Rapture theory by calling it the *secret rapture*. Of course, nowhere in Scripture is the term *secret* applied to this event. However, anyone who does not participate in the Rapture will not actually see it, for it will occur in the *twinkling of an eye*. The word twinkling has been defined as a *gleam in your eye*, which is faster than the eye can see. The occurrence would much better be labeled the *sudden rapture*. (*No Fear of the Storm*, pp. 33-34, emphasis T.L.)

One may argue that God could snatch believers off the planet in the “*twinkling of an eye*,” but that is not what the Bible says.

Some say that only Christians hear the shout and the trumpet blasts. That is a guess, but it does not explain how an event, that must take a minute or more, can take place in one-thousandth of a second. When the archangel shouts, “*Come up here!*” (Revelation 4.1), he does not say it in less than one-thousandth of a second. The duration of the trumpet blasts are also not less than one-thousandth of a second.

Most prophecy teachers do not explain the various parts of the Rapture. Instead, they teach that the entire event takes place in a fraction of a second. They do not break down the four primary parts, and they never go into detail on how long it will take. Here are the four major parts of the Rapture event:

1. The descent of Christ with a shout of the archangel and the command, “*Come up here!*” (1 Thessalonians 4.16; Revelation 4.1)
2. The blowing of the trumpets (1 Corinthians 15.52; 1 Thessalonians 4.16)
3. The resurrection and catching up of dead believers (1 Thess. 4.17)
4. The changing of the bodies of living believers from mortal to immortal, and their being *caught up* to be with Christ in the air (1 Cor. 15.51-54).

The Rapture must take longer than a fraction of a second because Jesus commanded those on the housetops and in the field to not return to their home to get anything (Luke 17.31). It is common sense that if the Rapture takes a split second no one could even think of going back to their house.

Partial Rapture doctrine

Some pastors teach the Partial-Rapture doctrine, and when they were asked if backslidden Christians who miss the Rapture might take the mark of the Beast, they said they were not certain and hoped none would.

We do not believe the Partial-Rapture doctrine is biblical. All Christians will be “caught up” when Christ returns, as Paul said (1 Corinthians 15.51). Even if a Christian is in the middle of committing a sin he will be “caught up.”

The Resurrections

There are two general resurrections. The second resurrection, of the unsaved, takes place at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20.5). The unsaved are resurrected, judged, found guilty and cast into the Lake of Fire where they will spend all eternity (Revelation 20.11-15).

The first resurrection is divided into four parts. The resurrection of Jesus and a select number of Old Testament saints (Matthew 27.52-53) was the first part. They were the first fruits (1 Corinthians 15.23). The second part is the resurrection of all believers of the Church Age (1 Thessalonians 4.15-17). They will be the harvest. The third part is the resurrection of the two witnesses (Revelation 11.11-12). The final part of the first resurrection is that of believers who are martyred during the Tribulation, and the Old Testament saints (Revelation 20.4). The two witnesses, the Tribulation martyrs and the Old Testament saints will be the gleanings.

Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 4.16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15.51-53 teach that the entire Rapture event will take from several seconds to a minute or more. The announcement of the catching up of believers takes place in a few seconds as the archangel shouts the command, “*Come up here!*” (Revelation 4.1).

Next the trumpet of God is blown more than once. The duration of the blowing of the trumpet could take several seconds to several minutes, depending on how many trumpet blasts there are. (If the Rapture takes place on Rosh Hashanah, and forty trumpets are blown, it will take more than several minutes to blow them all. They will be blown by angels, not men.) We do not know the duration of the trumpet blasts, because more than one trumpet blast is blown. Paul said believers will “*be changed in a moment, at the last trumpet,*” (1 Corinthians 15.52). The trumpet blasts could be similar to the blasts that were blown to prepare the people to move out. When the first trumpet was blown the tribes on the east side set out, and the tribes on the south side set out on the second blast (Numbers 10.5-6). There may be just two blasts. The dead in Christ will rise on the first blast, and the living Christians will be caught up when the second blast is blown.

Dead believers will be resurrected and “*caught up*” after the trumpet is blown. The living believers will then be changed from mortals to immortals in the “*twinkling of an eye,*” and be “*caught up*.” The transformation of living Christians from mortals to immortals takes place in the “*twinkling of an eye,*” not the entire Rapture event.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 2

1. Will the entire Rapture event take place in the “*twinkling of an eye*,” or will it take a few minutes or more?

 2. What are the four things that happen during the Rapture event?
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.

 3. What are the four parts of the first general resurrection?
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.