



"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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Mini Study

Will You Be "Left Behind?"

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are 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 which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

For most of us, "rapture" is an excited state of mind, joy at a very pleasant experience. For millions of Christians, however, it's more - much more - than that. For it is believed that they will be "raptured" - caught away from Earth - to escape the coming wrath of God. The term derives from the Latin *rapare: to take or snatch away*. The concept has been popularized in recent years by a series of fictional titles (*Left Behind* series) by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B Jenkins. The implication is that mankind is about to experience a time of terrible suffering - "the Great Tribulation" - and the awesome horrors of "the wrath of God," the "Day of the LORD." Christians, however, will be snatched into heaven to escape, and unless you are "born again" (just 35% of US citizens), you will be left behind to experience them.

While the Scriptures do refer to a form of "rapture," careful study casts doubt on the usual explanation.

- Paul's words to the brethren in Thessalonica (quoted above) contain the elements on which the idea of a snatching away is based
- at the prophesied return to Earth of Jesus, Christians will indeed be caught up [Gk. *harpazo*: seize, be caught away, 1 Thess 4:17] to the clouds to meet him - those Christians who have previously died together with those alive at that time. It is a time of resurrection
- the *Left Behind* series places this astounding and momentous event *before* the Great Tribulation. (It is termed the *Pre-Tribulation* viewpoint by theologians.) The books envisage that, when it happens, pilots will be snatched from their planes, drivers from cars, trucks and trains, millions suddenly disappear from the home, the field, the workplace, clearly with catastrophic consequences for those two-thirds of world's population left behind
- elsewhere, the apostle Paul refers to the same event: "*Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [ie, die], 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 15:51-53). This resurrection, note, is to a state of immortality. Christians are "changed" from flesh to incorruptible spirit
- but *when* does this happen? Paul supplies the clue: "...at the last trumpet." A curious expression, but one which refers to a specific time in prophecy. The last apostle, John, fills in the details in *Revelation*
- unsurprisingly, the "last" trumpet is preceded by others. There are *seven* prophetic trumpets blown by angels - each with reference to successive events on Earth at the end-time. They are unveiled in the book of *Revelation chapters 8-16*. These seven trumpet prophecies culminate in the "last trumpet" and the return of Jesus

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- “the tribulation” will come *before* Jesus returns: “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven:...*” (Matthew 24:29-30). So - Jesus says: tribulation, *then* heavenly signs, *then* the “sign of the Son of man”
- the “heavenly signs” are what Jesus calls “the sixth seal” (Revelation 6:12). This precedes the Seven Trumpets. Recall that the resurrection of Christians is at “the *last* trumpet,” coinciding with the return of Jesus
- the seventh Trumpet welcomes the returning Christ and the resurrection of the saints. It is also the beginning of “the Day of the LORD” - God’s sentence executed upon rebellious mankind in Christ’s presence
- some students stumble by confounding the *Tribulation* with God’s wrath - which is also called, *the Day of the LORD*. Notice what the apostle Peter adds: “*The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before that great and notable day of the Lord shall come:*” (Acts 2:20). That is, *the Day of the Lord* follows the “heavenly signs” which in turn follow the *Tribulation*
- in sum, the resurrection of Christians - called by some “the Rapture” - takes place, says Jesus, *after* the Tribulation and before the Day of the LORD. The implication is that Christians will experience the challenges that the Tribulation will bring. Indeed Jesus warned that some Christians would suffer martyrdom. All of us, of course, must be willing to stand firm in face of persecution (*cf* Luke 17:33)

(All Scriptures are KJV)

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