

## Study Notes:

### Is the rapture biblical?

The Rapture is the teaching that at or before the return of Christ (Matthew 24:30, Acts 1:11) the Christians who are alive on the earth will be transformed into the resurrected bodies and literally be caught up into the clouds to meet Jesus. It is biblical because it is taught in the scriptures (1 Thess. 4:16-5:2).

There is debate as to the timing of the Rapture. The **pre-tribulation Rapture doctrine** says that the Rapture will occur at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period, which immediately precedes the return of Jesus. The **Mid-tribulation Rapture doctrine** says that the rapture will occur 3 1/2 years before Christ returns or halfway through the great tribulation period of seven years. The **Pre-Wrath position** holds that the Rapture will occur sometime during the latter half of the tribulation but prior to God pouring out His wrath in a series of judgments and thus well before Christ descends bodily to the Earth. The **post-tribulation doctrine** says that the Rapture will occur at the same time as the return of Christ or at the end of the seven-year tribulation.

All of these positions fall within the realm of Christian orthodoxy.

The Rapture (from the Latin 'rapio' to seize, to carry away) is the term used to describe the eschatological event where Christians are caught up into the heavens to meet the Lord Jesus. However, those who are alive and remain on the earth at the time of Christ's return, will not precede those who have died in Christ. This latter term "died in Christ" refers to those faithful Christians who have already passed away.

They will be resurrected and join Christ in the heavens prior to those who are raptured. In other words, at Christ's return, those who have died in the faith meet the Lord in the air, and then the Christians who are on earth are taken up into the heavens to meet Christ. The scripture used for this teaching is found in the writings of Paul.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18-** 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 not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul emphasized that this was an authoritative command, though we do not know whether Paul received it by direct revelation or if it was an unrecorded saying of Jesus. One way or another, this came from Jesus and did not originate with Paul.

**We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep:** Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that those who are asleep – Christians who have died before Jesus returns – will by no means be at a disadvantage. Those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede them. God will allow those who are asleep to share in the glory of the coming of the Lord.

“The living will have no advantage over those fallen asleep; they will not meet the returning Christ ahead of the dead, nor will they have any precedence in the blessedness at His coming.” (Hiebert)

**For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout:** When Jesus comes, He will come *personally*. **The Lord Himself will descend** and come **with a shout**. The ancient Greek word for **shout** here is the same word used for the commands that a ship captain makes to his rowers, or a commander speaking to his soldiers. “Always there is the ring of authority and the note of urgency.” (Morris)

Apparently, there will be some audible signal that prompts this remarkable event. It may be that all three descriptions (**shout, voice, and trumpet**) refer to the same sound; or there may be three distinct sounds. The rapture will not be silent or secret, though the vast majority of people may not understand the sound or its meaning.

**Illustration:** When Paul heard the heavenly voice on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:7](#); [22:9](#)), his companions heard the sound of a voice, but they did not hear articulate words. They heard a sound but did not understand its meaning. It may well be that the shout/voice/trumpet sound that accompanies the rapture will have the same effect. The entire world may hear this heavenly sound but have no idea what its meaning is.

**With the voice of an archangel:** This doesn’t mean that the **Lord Himself** is an **archangel**. The only one described as an **archangel** in the Bible is Michael ([Jude 1:9](#)). Paul means that when Jesus comes, He will come in the company of prominent angels.

**With the trumpet of God:** Believers are gathered **with the trumpet of God**. In the Old Testament, trumpets sounded the alarm for war and threw the enemy into a panic, in the sense of the seven trumpets described in [Numbers 10:9](#) and [Revelation 8](#) and [Revelation 9](#). Trumpets also sounded an assembly of God’s people, as in [Leviticus 23:24](#) and [Numbers 10:2](#). Here, **the trumpet of God** gathers together God’s people.

There are three other associations of trumpets and end-times events. One is the last trump of [1 Corinthians 15:52](#), which seems clearly to be connected with this same trumpet of [1 Thessalonians 4](#). The others are the seven trumpets which culminate at [Revelation 11:15](#), and the trumpet gathering the elect of Israel at the end of the age in [Matthew 24:31](#).

As to the trumpet of [1 Thessalonians 4](#) and the one mentioned in [Matthew 24:31](#), we can also observe:

- The subjects are different: Matthew refers to Jewish believers during the great tribulation; Thessalonians refers to the church.
- The circumstances are different: Matthew refers to a gathering of the elect scattered over the earth, with no mention of resurrection; Thessalonians refers to the raising of the believing dead.
- The results are different: Matthew refers to living believers gathered from all over the earth at the command of their Lord who has returned to earth in open glory; Thessalonians refers to the uniting of the raised dead with the living believers to meet the Lord in the air.

**And the dead in Christ will rise first:** Paul's point to the Thessalonians is clear. The prior dead in Christ will not be left out of either the resurrection or the return of Jesus. In fact, they will experience it **first**.

"It is only after the faithful departed have taken their place with the Lord that the saints on earth are caught up to be with Him, or more strictly, to be with them and meet Him." (Morris)

**Will rise first:** Many wonder how **the dead in Christ** are raised **first**. Some believe that they now have temporary bodies and await this resurrection. Others believe that they are now disembodied spirits who wait for resurrection. Still others conjecture that the **dead in Christ** experience their resurrection immediately.

There will come a day, when in God's eternal plan, **the dead in Christ** will receive their resurrection bodies. Yet until that day, we are confident that the dead in Christ are not in some kind of soul sleep or suspended animation. Paul made it clear that to be *absent from the body* means *to be present with the Lord*. ([2 Corinthians 5:8](#)) Either the present dead in Christ are with the Lord in a spiritual body, awaiting their final resurrection body; or, because of the nature of timeless eternity, they have received their resurrection bodies already because they live in the eternal *now*.

**1 Corinthians 15:20-23-** <sup>20</sup> But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

**Now Christ is risen from the dead:** In the previous part of the chapter, Paul demonstrated beyond all doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, and the importance of that fact. Here, he simply states the fact: **now Christ is risen from the dead.**

**And has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep:** **First fruits** is the ancient Greek word *aparche*. The first fruits of any harvest indicate that there is more of the crop to come.

Jesus was the **first fruits** of our resurrection in both senses. In the Old Testament, the offering of first fruits brought one sheaf of grain to represent and anticipate the rest of the harvest ([Leviticus 23:9-14](#)).

The resurrection of Jesus represents our resurrection, because if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection ([Romans 6:5](#)).

The resurrection of Jesus also *anticipates* our resurrection, because we will be raised with a body like His. "As in the firstfruits offered to God, the Jews were assured of God's blessing on the whole harvest; so by the resurrection of Christ, our resurrection is insured." (Trapp)

The offering at the Feast of First fruits was a bloodless grain offering ([Leviticus 2](#)). No atoning sacrifice was necessary, because the Passover lamb had just been sacrificed. This corresponds perfectly with the resurrection of Jesus, because His death ended the need for sacrifice, having provided a perfect and complete atonement.

**By man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead:** Here, Paul communicates the same ideas found in [Romans 5:12-21](#). Adam (**by man**) is one "head" of the human race, and all mankind was brought under death by Adam. The *second Adam*, Jesus Christ (**by Man**) is the other head of the human race, and Jesus brings resurrection to all that are "under" His headship.

**In Christ, all shall be made alive:** Does this mean everyone is resurrected? Yes and no. All will be resurrected in the sense that they will receive a resurrection body and live

forever. Jesus plainly spoke of both the resurrection of life and the resurrection of condemnation ([John 5:29](#)). So, all are resurrected, but not all will receive the resurrection of life. Some will receive the resurrection of condemnation, and live forever in a resurrected body in hell.

**Each one in his own order:** It would be strange and inappropriate for us to receive resurrection before Jesus. So He receives resurrection first as **the first fruits**, and then we receive it **afterward... at His coming**.

**QUESTION:** If Jesus is **the first fruits** of our resurrection, does that mean He was the first one raised from the dead? What about the widow's son in the days of Elijah ([1 Kings 17:17-24](#)) and Lazarus ([John 11:38-44](#)), among others? Each of these were resuscitated from death, but none of them were *resurrected*. Each of them were raised in the same body they died in, and were raised from the dead to eventually die again. Resurrection isn't just living again; it is living again in a new body based on our old body but perfectly suited for life in eternity. Jesus was not the first one brought back from the dead, but He was the first one *resurrected*.

**1 Corinthians 15:51-52-** <sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on <sup>[c]</sup>the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

**I tell you a mystery:** In the Biblical sense, a **mystery** is simply a thing to be understood by spiritual, rather than by merely human perception. Paul will tell the Corinthian Christians something they could not have known by reason or research. They could not have known this unless God revealed it to them.

**We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed:** Since **sleep** is a softer way of describing the death of a believer, Paul tells us that not all Christians will die, but there will be a "final generation" who will be transformed into resurrection bodies at the return of Jesus before they ever face death.

**In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed:** In a single moment, Jesus will gather His people (both dead and on the earth) to Himself, for resurrection.

**At the last trumpet:** What is the **last trumpet**? Those who believe that Jesus gathers His people *after* He has poured out His wrath on a Jesus-rejecting world

sometimes argue that it is the last trumpet of judgment, cited in [Revelation 11:15-19](#). But this is not necessarily the case at all.

The **last trumpet** may not refer to the last trumpet of the seven trumpets of Revelation at all, but simply refer to the **last trumpet** believers hear on this earth.

Ironside says that the **last trumpet** was a figure of speech that came from the Roman military, when they broke camp. The first trumpet meant, "strike the tents and prepare to leave"; the second trumpet meant, "fall into line"; the third and **last trumpet** meant "march away." This **last trumpet** describes the Christian's "marching orders" at the rapture of the Church.

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. Resurrection is a **must** for the Christian's destiny. In light of all this, how could the Corinthian Christians let go of such an important truth?

## 5 Bible Verses about the Second Coming of Christ

**Mark 13:33** *"Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."*

Commentary from the sermon "[A Wake-Up Call!](#)" by Alistair Begg:

"In Jesus the kingdom *has* come; in the preaching of the Gospel, the kingdom is coming; and in the return of Jesus Christ, the kingdom *will* come in all of its fullness. ...

"Let us be absolutely clear that we are ignorant about the time of Christ's return. ... We ought not to feel bad about that, because we're in good company. Actually, we're in a large company to begin with, because He says that 'no one knows.' ...

"Our ignorance as to timing provides no excuse for being unprepared. Rather, it is our very ignorance of the timing of the event upon which the stress is actually laid by Jesus .... Ignorance, far from being an excuse, is to be an incentive."

**Luke 11:2** *"Your kingdom come."*

Commentary from the sermon "[Your Kingdom Come](#)" by Alistair Begg:

"There is both a *now* and a *not yet* dimension to the kingdom. So, for example, Jesus spoke about conferring a kingdom on His disciples. And we anticipate a day when Jesus will say to the whole of His people—Matthew 25:34—'Come, you who are blessed by my

Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' So, as much as we look for God's kingly rule in the life of an individual who is presently in the dominion of darkness and is transferred into the kingdom of the Son he loves, and as much as we need to live in submission to His kingly rule in terms of the advancement of His reign within all the facets of our lives, so we look forward to a day when God will finally bring to completion this great master plan. ...

"The King is coming, and the full disclosure of His reign, the ultimate establishment of His kingdom, awaits His coming. And when He comes, the visible establishment of God's reign over all of the hosts and powers of evil will be seen. And for all the things that I don't know and understand about the coming of the King, I do know and understand this: that the return of Jesus will be personal, and physical, and visible, and sudden, and glorious, and will usher His people into His everlasting kingdom. And it is the awareness of that *then* which brings transformation into this *now*. So it is only as we're able to live with a genuine expectation of that consummation that we will then be prepared to live in such an expression of submission and we will continue to thank God for the wonder of our conversion."

**Revelation 7:9–10** *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*

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Commentary from the sermon "**The Perfected Kingdom — Part Two**" by Alistair Begg:

"What do we know about the return of Jesus Christ? Well, there are certain things that are absolutely straightforward and about which there is no debate ... The return of Jesus will be personal, physical, visible, and glorious. The return of Jesus is secret, it is sudden, and it brings separation. ...

"When you stand back far enough from the Old Testament and you look at it, you see that it is an unfolding arrow, as it were, scrolling forward to Jesus. And when you stand back from the book of Revelation, you discover that what is being declared, first to these beleaguered saints in the first century, is that they shouldn't be alarmed by all that is taking place because Jesus is actually in control—and that, eventually, the reigning power of Christ will be established when His kingdom comes in all of its permanent fullness."

**James 5:7** *"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord."*

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Commentary from the sermon "**Be Patient, The Lord Is Coming — Part One**" by Alistair Begg:

"The Bible ... not only tells us that our history is broken, but it also tells us what God has done *in time* to deal with that brokenness; that the God who made time, who established the universe, comes ... to sound, as it were, a megaphone down through the centuries concerning the good news of His intervention so that what is broken may be, by His goodness, repaired, fixed, transformed."

**John 14:3** "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

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Commentary from the sermon "[The Return of Jesus Christ](#)" by Alistair Begg:

"In the New Testament, there are literally hundreds of references to the return of Jesus Christ. It has been estimated that one in twenty-five verses of the New Testament in some way relates to this doctrine. ... The range of references should leave us in no doubt whatsoever that the return of Jesus Christ is consistently and progressively pointed to throughout all the pages of Scripture. The first appearing of Jesus Christ was the central point in history, the hinge upon which the whole of history since has swung. It was the decisive moment. It was the *date* from which all other dating has come. ...

"Let men and women say what they will, that fact remains. And He has cut across time in His first coming. In the same way, the reappearing of Jesus Christ will bring to completion that which God has purposed. It will be the hinge which joins the world as we now know it with the world that is to come. ...

"The Christian hope is not related to a timetable of events. It is not related to a series of impersonal happenings. The Christian hope is related to the personal, visible return of Jesus Christ, just as He promised here in John 14. Our gaze is to Jesus. Our eyes are for Jesus. ...

"The cardinal rule in considering the doctrine of the return of Christ must always be this: *Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.*"

When it comes to the end times and Jesus' second coming, there seems to be some questions and confusion about what Jesus' return will be like. Although we will never fully know God's plan for the end times, He has given us promises about that time in His written Word.

Billy Graham once said that the end "will come with the return of Jesus Christ... That is why a Christian can be an optimist. That is why a Christian can smile in the midst of all that is happening... We know what the end will be: the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ."