

# Rapture and Resurrection

by Anthony Buzzard

The great strength of the so-called Adventist movement of the last century was that it recaptured the massively important doctrine of Christ's Second Coming. The mistaken idea that the Christian goal is to "go to heaven when we die" had reduced the need for Christ's personal return at the end of the age to virtually zero. When the Adventists (Advent Christians, Church of God Abrahamic Faith, Seventh Day Adventists and others) pointed out that Scripture describes the dead as actually unconscious, "sleeping" until resurrection day, the process of recovering lost truth was launched. The Second Coming began to receive the attention it obviously enjoys in the Bible.

Yet error inevitably interfered with this new enlightenment about the events of the end of the age. Regrettable date-setting, which has persisted to this day, tended to attract ridicule of the whole idea of the Second Coming. For example, William Miller confidently predicted that Christ would return in 1844. When Jesus failed to appear, some even abandoned the faith, feeling that the Bible was unreliable. Others later announced (and still announce) that the Advent occurred in 1914, 2520 years from the battle of Carchemish, which was wrongly supposed to have happened in 607 BC. Such calculations have proven false; yet they live on.

All such attempts to compute the end of the age are based on serious misreadings of the biblical data and were always rejected by the more careful students of Scripture. Within the past few years several other confident assertions about the Second Coming have failed, and much uncertainty persists about what the Bible says in regard to the order of events at the end of the age.

## Resolving Uncertainty

There are three very simple keys to resolving this uncertainty.

1. The so-called "rapture" of I Thessalonians 4:13ff occurs, as all agree, at the same time as the resurrection of the faithful believers. If, therefore, we can establish when the faithful dead are to be raised to immortality, we can know where this resurrection/rapture fits into God's plan.

2. Jesus gave his disciples a very precise outline of events which would precede his coming in glory. This material is obviously primary data for understanding the order of end-time events.

3. Paul warned against systems which did not allow that certain events *must occur before* the resurrection/rapture of the Christians. In so doing, he laid out the proper sequence of events clearly.

An examination of these three points will help to dispel uncertainty.

## The Resurrection/Rapture

Firstly: the resurrection and rapture of the faithful to meet Christ as he comes to the earth. It is crucial to remember that difference of opinion about the so-called "pre-tribulation" or "post-tribulation" rapture is in fact a question about the pre-tribulation or post-tribulation *resurrection* of the Christian dead. The

issue is about the moment for the resurrection of the dead. The “rapture” is only an incident within a whole complex of events involving the resurrection. When Jesus returns, he will raise the dead at the sound of the trumpet and catch them up (rapture them), along with the surviving believers, to meet him in the air. The saints will thus accompany Jesus as he descends to the earth. This is the way important dignitaries are escorted to their destination.

Fortunately, Scripture does not leave us in the dark about the place of this great resurrection/rapture event in God’s purposes. In I Corinthians 15:52 we are informed that we Christians shall all be resurrected and changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet.*” Last, of course, means last in a sequence. The faithful will be raised to life when the “last trumpet” blows. When is this?

Using the well-tested method of comparing Scripture with Scripture, we look elsewhere to see when this last trumpet is to occur. Our answer is found in the book of Revelation. Just such a sequence of trumpets is described in chapter 11. The “last trumpet” is very evidently the seventh of the sequence which ends in Revelation 11:15-18. There are no more trumpets in this series. The last is the seventh, and it is then that the resurrection occurs:

“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet... The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth” (Rev. 11:15, 18, RSV).

Just as we would expect, this seventh and last trumpet speaks, in complete harmony with Paul in I Corinthians 15:52, of the resurrection of the faithful, placing it at the moment when Christ intervenes to establish the Kingdom of God. As I Thessalonians 4:16, 17 says, the rapture of the surviving saints occurs at exactly the same time — at the sound of the great trumpet which is the last, or seventh trumpet announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. The suggestion that the last trumpet of I Corinthians 15 is not the seventh trumpet of Revelation fractures the Scripture. There can be only one last trumpet when the Bible speaks of only one sequence of seven trumpets! The last must be that seventh trumpet of Revelation.

## **Jesus’ Great Last Discourse for the Disciples**

Secondly, Jesus outlines for us in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, the sequence of events leading to his return. There is no room for uncertainty about whom Jesus addresses in this famous “Olivet Discourse.” He speaks to the *disciples*, and through them to the *church*. This is a critically important point, sometimes overlooked. No one doubts that Jesus’ instructions to the disciples to preach the gospel throughout the world are instructions to the church of subsequent generations (Matt. 28:19, 20). The case is no different in Matthew 24. We should not forget that the church is founded on the apostles and prophets — that is, on their teaching (Eph. 2:20). In Matthew 24 Jesus addresses “you” (disciples) as the ones who should not be deceived (Matt. 24:4). It is “you” (disciples) who will hear of wars and rumors of wars (described in Dan. 11) (Matt. 24:6). It is “you” (disciples) who will be persecuted and killed (v. 9). It is “you” disciples who are to run away to the hills when the Abomination of Desolation appears (v. 15). Jesus does not foresee an escape to heaven! It is “you” (disciples) who are the elect who must avoid deception during the tribulation: “If anyone says to you [disciples], ‘Lo, here is Christ or there,’ don’t believe it. These false prophets will deceive, if possible, the very elect” (vv. 23, 24). Who are the elect? “Behold, I have told you (disciples) in advance” (v. 25).

According to the ordinary rules of language, the disciples are equated with the elect in the whole discourse. And it is the same elect who are to be present on earth during the time of tribulation and

witness the darkening of the sun just before the arrival of Jesus in glory. When the disciples, those living at the time of Christ's return, "see all these things, you know that he is near" (v. 33).

When do these elect disciples expect to be gathered together to Christ? The text is very clear. "Immediately *after the tribulation* of these days the sign of the son of Man will appear in heaven...and he shall send his angels with a great sound of the trumpet to gather the elect" (Matt. 24:29, 30, 31).

Once again the same trumpet marks the gathering of the faithful, exactly as Paul predicts the resurrection of the Christians at the last trumpet, and Revelation places it at the seventh trumpet, which as all agree, occurs after the tribulation period.

## Paul's Warning Against a Competing System

Thirdly, Paul warned expressly against any disturbance of the simple pattern of events destined to precede the Second Coming and the gathering of the saints. In II Thessalonians 2:1 he centers the discussion on "the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to him." This event Paul equates with the Day of the Lord (v. 2). He then emphasizes that two events *must occur before* Christ returns to rapture and gather the faithful: firstly, the apostasy (rebellion against God) and secondly the appearing of the Man of Sin. The message is simple and clear.

"Don't let any one fool you like that, because the falling away must come first. The lawless man, the son of destruction will be revealed then" (II Thess. 2:3, Simple English Bible).

## Summary

We may summarize our findings as follows:

1. The Rapture/Resurrection event will occur at the last trumpet. Scripture knows of only one last trumpet, the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15. This trumpet sounds after or "post"-tribulation (Matt. 24:29-31). This is "the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14), when all the faithful will be rewarded.

2. Jesus spoke of the "elect," whom he equates with the disciples and their successors in the church. Matthew, who is his own best interpreter, elsewhere means "believers" when he uses the term "elect" (Matt. 22:14): "Many are called, but few are **elect**" (Gr. *eklectos*). It is a basic rule of good exegesis that a writer must be allowed to interpret himself.

3. Paul specifically warned against systems which would encourage belief in the arrival of Christ before the Man of Sin. He definitely stated that the Man of Sin will appear before the arrival of Christ.

The doctrine of the Second Advent, which is the special strength of the adventist groups, must be freed from unnecessary complications. The last trumpet (I Cor. 15:52) really is the last trumpet! Scripture knows of only one sequence of trumpets and the seventh, and last, blows after the tribulation. Therefore the resurrection/ rapture of the saints happens after the tribulation. These simple connections provided by Scripture show a picture of the gathering of all the faithful at the seventh or last trumpet of Revelation 11. What Scripture so joins together should not be torn asunder.

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