

THE RAPTURE — WHEN?

by Anthony Buzzard

We all believe in the "rapture" — the event by which living Christians will be caught up into the air ("raptured") to meet Christ as He descends to the earth at His Coming (I Thess. 4:13-18). However, in the 1830s a brand new view of the Second Coming arose. It was suggested by some of the Brethren (Plymouth Brethren) that the Second Coming will happen in two distinct stages:

- 1) Christ will arrive to take away (rapture) the church for seven years.
- 2) Christ will arrive seven years later with the church to punish the world and set up the Kingdom of God on earth.

From the start this new view of the Second Coming caused sharp division. Over the past 150 years it has created a great deal of conflict. The chief exponents of the so-called "pre-tribulation rapture" are the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary. The teaching has spread into many American fundamentalist churches.

A number of scholars have written books to refute the pre-trib rapture which they were taught as children. Since the question has to do with God's timetable, it is important. We are urged to speak with one mind on these issues (1 Cor. 1:10).

When the pre-trib rapture was introduced into the Brethren movement in England in the last century, it must not be supposed that all the Brethren accepted the new views. The following extract from the writings of George Muller, the "apostle" of faith and founder of orphanages in England, is significant. Asked shortly before his death whether Christians are to expect our Lord's return at any moment, or whether certain events must be fulfilled before He comes again, Muller replied as follows:

"I know that on this subject there is great diversity of judgment, and I do not wish to force on other persons the light I have myself. The subject, however, is not new to me; for having been a careful, diligent student of the Bible for fifty years, my mind has long been settled on this point, and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Scriptures declare plainly that the Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostasy shall have taken place and the Man of Sin (the Antichrist) shall have been revealed, as seen in II Thess. 2:1-5. Many other portions of the word of God distinctly teach that certain events are to be fulfilled before the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ" (cited in *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, by Alexander Reese, Grand Rapids: International Publications, p. 27).

A leading London preacher, Cambell Morgan, the "Dwight Moody" of England, was asked the following question during a course of public lectures:

"After your long study and extensive expositions of the Bible, Dr. Morgan, do you find any warrant for the distinctions which many Bible teachers draw between the second coming of the Lord for his own (The Rapture) and the coming of the Lord with his own (The Revelation), with a time period of three and a half or seven years between these two events?"

"Emphatically not!" Dr. Morgan replied. "I know that view very well, for in earlier years of my ministry I taught it and incorporated it into one of my books entitled *God's Method with Man*. But further study so convinced me of the error of this teaching that I actually went to the expense of buying the plates of that book from my own publisher and destroying them. The idea of a separate and secret coming of Christ to remove the church prior to his coming in power and glory is a vagary of prophetic interpretation *without any biblical basis whatever*" (*Background to Dispensationalism*, by Clarence Bass, Baker Book House, p. 17, emphasis added).

No student of Scripture need be in any doubt about the order of events described by Paul:

- 1) The Apostasy (falling away from the faith) (II Thess. 2:1-3).
- 2) The Man of Sin (Antichrist) revealed (II Thess. 2:1-3).
- 3) Christ arrives to gather the church (II Thess. 2:1, 8).

Contradicting Paul, Dispensationalism and the pre-trib rapture theory since 1830 teaches:

- 1) Christ arrives secretly to gather church.
- 2) Man of Sin is revealed.
- 3) Christ arrives publicly with the church.

Paul specifically warned against teachers who promised that the Day of the Lord and our gathering together to Jesus would come before the Antichrist and the tribulation (see II Thess. 2:1-3). In the interests of a clear understanding of the Bible, the reader is urged to reread Matthew 24 and II Thessalonians 2:1-10:

First the Antichrist and the tribulation (Matt. 24:15ff.)

After the great tribulation, the arrival of Jesus to gather the saints (Matt. 24:31).

Note also: Christians will continue to undergo trouble until the public, spectacular arrival of Jesus to punish the world. Paul could hardly have written II Thessalonians 1:7 if he had believed in a prior "coming." In that verse he states that Christians will be granted relief from suffering, "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not obey the Gospel." Until Christ comes in power to set up the Kingdom of God on earth, believers must endure the hardships which accompany life as a Christian. There is no relief from trouble seven years before the public arrival of Jesus.

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