

# Theological Thievery

By Manfred Kober

## THRUST OF THE BELIEVER'S HOPE

*The support for the believer's hope.* Several passages of Scripture clearly point to the pretribulation rapture. The first classic passage on this subject in the New Testament is John 14:1-7. This deals with the return to the Father's house. Christ promises that the next event for the Church is not a return of the King to rule on earth after a series of signs, but the unannounced return of the Bridegroom to summon the Bride to the Father's house. Posttribulationists are hard pressed to explain away the obvious truth of the believer going to Heaven before the Millennium. The best Gundry can do, for example, is to spiritualize this event:

In order to console the disciples concerning His going away, Jesus tells them that His leaving will work to their advantage. He is going to prepare for them *spiritual abodes within His own person*. Dwelling in these abiding places they will belong to God's household. This He will accomplish by going to the cross and then ascending to the Father. But He will return to receive the disciples into His immediate presence forever. Thus, the Rapture will not have the purpose of taking them to Heaven. It rather follows from their being in Christ, in whom each believer already has an abode.

With clever theological sleight of hand the Father's house becomes the Body of Christ rather than a literal abode in Heaven. According to Zondervan Publishing House, publishers of Gundry's work, this type of interpretation passes for "scholastic competence."

A second passage dealing with the Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, where it is said to be a reason for the Christian's comfort. Pretribulationists have pointed out that if it were true that

believers had to endure a time of unprecedented tribulation on earth, verse 18 should read, "Wherefore, scare ye one another with these words." The saints are to rejoice because they are not in darkness but are children of the light (1 Thess. 5:4, 5) who have not been appointed unto wrath but unto salvation (5:9). The Lord, Who has "delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10), will not permit His own to enter the Tribulation.

A third indication of the any moment return of Christ is found in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, which deals with the *revelation of a consummate truth*. Paul is showing the Corinthians a mystery—something hitherto concealed but now revealed. The resurrection of the dead was no mystery to Old Testament saints. However, that certain saints will not see death but will be translated and receive their glorified bodies is a distinctive Church truth. The event referred to in 1 Corinthians 15 could not be at the end of the Tribulation just prior to the establishment of the Kingdom, at which time the Old Testament saints would be raised, living sinners would be put to death and living saints would enter the Kingdom in their physical bodies. If the translation of 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 occurs at the end of the Tribulation, who are the believers left on earth to populate the millennial earth? This problem has never been satisfactorily solved by posttribulationism. As a matter of fact, the problem of how Church-age saints could receive their glorified bodies at the end of the Tribulation and yet enter the Millennium in their mortal bodies to beget children, to carry on normal human life, is generally ignored. The Biblical text describing the Millennium demands the presence of people in the Millennium who have not seen death and enter this glorious period of time in their physical bodies. If all believers are

**In this second and final article, Dr. Kober explains the Scriptures relating to the pretribulation return of Christ.**



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translated just prior to this period of time, as the posttribulationists would have us believe, who would populate the Millennium?

Perhaps the strongest proof for the pretribulationist rapture is found in Revelation 3:10 where the church is promised a removal from the coming Tribulation: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

The words "temptation" or "trial" are synonyms for "tribulation" (cf. Luke 8:13; Matt. 13:21; Mark 4:17). Here is a reference not to normal trials of believers but to a special time of worldwide tribulation. Three factors point to the truth that the Church will not need to endure this special time of persecution. First, Christ promises that the Church will be kept from the hour. The emphatic phrase "kept from" is used only twice in the New Testament—here and in John 17:15. In the gospel passage the Lord prayed that believers would be kept from the evil one. The answer to the prayer is our deliverance from the power of darkness by transferring us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13).

Second, the most natural meaning of the promise is that the believer will be transferred to Heaven from the earth before the hour of tribulation on earth. The preposition "from" (*ek*) has the sense of "out of." The Church is not promised protection in or during the hour of trial but protection out of this time. This implies a prior removal.

Finally, the reference to "the hour of temptation" can only refer to the time of seven years of tribulation. And the promise is protection from that hour, which can only be true if the Church is not going through any part of that hour or time. It is impossible to be kept from the hour without being previously removed from it. Posttribulationists speak of a preservation in or through the Tribulation but this would make the promise untrue, for God's saints that live on earth during the Tribulation will not be exempt from the judgments or from death (Rev. 6:9, 10; 7:9-14; 14:1-3; 15:1-3).

Taking this promise at face value, one can certainly conclude that Christ has promised His Church deliverance from the time of tribulation by prior removal to the Father's house. No intervening events can occur before this; therefore, the Rapture can be said to be at any moment as far as the believer is concerned. The view of the posttribulationist rapture completely destroys the idea of imminency and watchfulness. Only the pretribulationist rapture position retains both the any moment aspect and the eager expectancy aspect so prominent in the New Testament. The

#### QUOTATION QUIZ

"Liberalism is not so much a matter of scholarship as an attitude of mind; a spirit, a temper, a set refusal to admit the supernatural in Christianity."

Do you think the statement above was made by (a) J. Gresham Machen; (b) J. Sidlow Baxter; or (c) Martyn Lloyd-Jones? Answer on page 30.

Lord may return today!

*The stand for the believer's hope.* The writer to the BAPTIST BULLETIN deplores the fact that the pretribulationist rapture has been made an official part of the Articles of Faith of the GARBC. He calls this "the ultimate in logical and ecclesiastical suicide." But is it? The Bible is clearer on this point of the pretribulationist return of Jesus Christ than even most pretribulationists would admit. Let us first review the position of the GARBC on the matter of the Rapture and then remember some relevant passages which reveal whether this doctrine should be made a test of fellowship. Article XIX of the doctrinal statement of our Fellowship reads:

#### XIX. Rapture and Subsequent Events

We believe in the premillennial return of Christ, an event which can occur at any moment, and that at that moment the dead in Christ shall be raised in glorified bodies, and the living in Christ shall be given glorified bodies without tasting death, and all shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before the seven years of the Tribulation (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 51-54; Phil. 3:20, 21; Rev. 3:10).

We believe that the Tribulation, which follows the Rapture of the Church, will be culminated by the revelation of Christ in power and great glory to sit upon the throne of David and to establish the millennial kingdom (Dan. 9:25-27; Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 1:30-33; Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-9; Acts 2:29, 30; Rev. 20:1-4, 6).

Now let us consider two significant passages in 2 Thessalonians 3: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (vv. 6, 14).

Most forcefully Paul commands separation from those who do not follow the doctrines he taught them in person and by this epistle. What were the main problems that perplexed the believers at Thessalonica? What is the main doctrinal content of 1 and 2 Thessalonians? It is obvious that the main doctrine of the Thessalonian epistles is the return

of the Lord in its twofold aspect: the Rapture at which Christ returns for His saints and the Revelation at which He appears with His saints. Each chapter in 1 and 2 Thessalonians mentions the return of the Lord. It is described as a deliverance from wrath (1 Thess. 1:10); a crown of rejoicing (2:19); an incentive to holiness (3:13); the rapture of the Church (4:13-18); a hope of salvation (5:8, 9); a rest for the godly (2 Thess. 1:7, 8); an encouragement for steadfastness (2:1, 2); a cause for patience (3:5).

Paul insists that believers separate from those who are incorrect in their view of the return of Christ. Twice he assures believers that they are not appointed to the wrath which will come upon the entire earth (1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Thess. 5:9; cf. Rom. 5:9). He calls this truth of the Rapture a comforting hope (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11). A posttribulationist return is not a cause for comfort but for concern and consternation. But if the Bible taught this, we would believe it. Our view is not based on an escapee mentality. Since the Bridegroom promises to deliver His Bride before the Tribulation, we gratefully believe His promise. The promise constitutes the greatest hope the Lord left with His own. What the Resurrection of Christ is for the foundation of the Christian faith, the Rapture of the Church is for the future of the Christian faith. One is the crucial cornerstone for correct doctrine, the other for correct decorum. Because of the centrality of this truth, we are commanded to separate from every brother who errs on this doctrine. We do not quibble with anyone's interpretation of the identity of the two witnesses or twenty-four elders in the Revelation, but we do question the doctrinal orthodoxy of those who deny the any moment pretribulationist return of Christ.

For almost two thousand years now the Church has received comfort and courage from Christ's promise to return for His Bride, to rapture her and rejoice with her at the wedding. Although thieves and robbers have penetrated the sheepfold in an attempt to steal that which is the believer's fondest hope, we still believe this truth. Let us declare it and defend it. It was Martin Luther who put our obligation ever so well:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

It is the truth of the any moment return of Christ which is presently under attack. We delight in this truth and will defend it.