

## **The Rapture of the Church before God's Judgement in this World**

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The first Christians in Thessalonica expected the son of God from heaven, ...*who rescues us from the wrath to come* (1Thes.1,10; NAS).

### **What is the meaning of *the wrath to come*?**

In Rev.6,16-17, the day of God's wrath is described – especially the fear of death in the worldwide population. The 24 elders announce in Rev.11,18 that God's wrath has come and in Rev.15,1 we read that God's wrath is fulfilled in the seven bowls of wrath. From this it is clear that *the wrath to come* means God's direct judgment on this earth.

This direct judgement of God towards people on this earth begins after the absolutely unique silence in heaven (Rev.8,1) at the sound of the first trumpet (Rev.8,7). The Church will be raptured before the beginning of this judgment (1Thes.4,16,5-9). This hope is disputed by many, so let us examine God's judgments in the past to understand principles of divine judgment.

### **What does “the last trumpet” mean?**

Various interpreters of the Bible teach that the last trumpet in 1Cor.15,52 is identical to the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet of Revelation. This opinion is supported by the fact that after the sound of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet a rapture is described: *And she brought forth a male child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne* (Rev.12,5). Here the same Greek word is used for “rapture” as in 1Thes.4,17. Our Lord Jesus did not suddenly disappear on his ascension, as this word implies. Therefore, in my opinion, a rapture will take place at this time (see my article: *The Mystery of Glad Tidings in the Darkest Days*).

But if the rapture of the Church did not take place until then, the Church would be exposed to a considerable part of the judgments of God on this earth. We therefore ask whether “the last trumpet” could be anything other than the 7<sup>th</sup> judgment trumpet.

In 1Cor.15,45 & 47 the “*last Adam*” is also called “*second man*” in contrast to the first Adam or man. Therefore, the “*last*” trumpet could also belong to a pair of two trumpets. Is there a biblical example for this?

In Numbers 10, Moses receives the order to make two silver trumpets. The first trumpet signal was used to gather the congregation in front of the tabernacle and the second was the signal for the congregation to leave.

The signal for the gathering of the New Testament Church has been resounding since Peter's sermon at Pentecost and will go on until the rapture of the Church. This trumpet sound is described by the apostle Paul in 1Thes.1,8: *From you sounded out the word of the Lord*. The second and last trumpet for the rapture will sound as soon as the full number from the nations is gathered (Rm.11,25).

### **Does God carry out judgments on this earth according to principles?**

Before the Flood, Enoch was raptured and Noah was commissioned to build the ark in which he and his family would be kept during the judgment

of the flood. Before God carried out the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, He spoke to Abraham - his friend - about this upcoming judgment (Gen.18,17-33).

In this conversation, God the righteous judge affirms his readiness to pardon the sinful cities even if only 10 righteous people were there. When Lot then asked permission to escape to Zoar, he received the answer: *Haste you, escape there for I cannot do anything till you are come there* (Gen.19,22). So, the judgment is delayed until the righteous (2Pet.2,7) is safe. The same principle applies to God's future judgments, for God is unchangeable.

The future judgment of God is described in the scroll, which only the Lamb is allowed to open (Rev.5,6-9). This judgment can only begin after God's servants are protected: Rev.7,1-3 *And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.*

Only after the sealing of the 144,000 servants of God has been completed can judgment begin. The sealing protects them while the judgment hits ungodly humanity (Rev.9,4; cf. Noah in the ark), while the Church like Enoch will be raptured before God's judgment begins (1Thes.4,15-18). It would be contradictory if God were to protect his servants from Israel by sealing them, but the Church was exposed to the judgments on the other hand.

For believers who know the scriptures and the character of God, it should be clear that the posttribulationistic\*) view is incompatible with the "*sum of Biblical truth*": *The sum of thy word is truth* (Ps.119,160 Darby, NAS).

### **What does "the great tribulation" in Rev 7,14 mean?**

Various interpreters take the view that the innumerable multitudes before the throne of God (Rev.7,9 & 14) come from the same tribulation that is mentioned in Mt.24,21 and Dan.12,1. So let us deal with this question.

Our Lord teaches in Mt.24,21: *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.* The literal translation of Rev.7,14 is: *they come out of the tribulation, the great* (Greek: τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης). In my opinion this is the entire tribulation of the Church from Pentecost to the rapture. This interpretation is supported by the use of the definite article both in Rev.7,14 and in Rev.1,9: *I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation* (Darby & NAS).

At John's time, the tribulation of the Church was not yet referred to as "the great". After the rapture, however, it will be evident that the Church went through "*the mega tribulation*" in the truest sense of the word. It begun with the stoning of Stephen and lasted till the rapture. The apostle Paul said in Act.14,22 that *we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

At all times Christians have been in tribulation in some places of the world, *and whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it* (1Cor.12,26-27). Therefore, the tribulation in Rev.1,9 - well defined by the specific article - is most probably the same tribulation, which after the end of the Church's time receives the addition "*the great*": *They come out of the tribulation, the great* (Rev.7,14).

### **When does the Day of the Wrath of God and the Lamb begin?**

The Day of God's Wrath will not start before Rev.8,1:

# The martyrs under the altar ask for the beginning of the day of judgment of God at the time of the 5<sup>th</sup> seal (Rev.6,10-11).

# The 6<sup>th</sup> seal triggers a panic fear among people on earth of the imminent day of the wrath of God and the Lamb (Rev.6,12-17).

# The beginning of the judgment of wrath is delayed until the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel are sealed (Rev.7,3-8).

God's judgment day, the Day of Wrath (Zeph.2,2), begins on earth with the first trumpet. Directly before that, the praise of God is interrupted by an extraordinary silence in heaven for about half an hour (Rev.8,1).

With this interpretation, Revelation 7 has a uniform meaning as a consolation for:

1) God's 144,000 elect from Israel, who are protected in the trials by the seal (cf. Noah in the ark) and

2) the Church that was raptured at an unknown time before the beginning of the Day of Wrath (cf. Enoch).

### **What did the early Christians hope for?**

Already in the 1<sup>st</sup> century the congregation expected the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ: Joh.21,23 *Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you?*

1Thes.1,9-10 *For they themselves show of us what manner of welcome we had unto you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.*

From these biblical passages together with 1Thes.4,16-17 it becomes clear that the first Church expected the Lord Jesus to come at any time for the rapture of his Church. So, there is no prophecy to be fulfilled before the rapture can take place.

This conclusion from New Testament teaching has been misunderstood by some to mean that no prophecy at all would be fulfilled before the rapture. However, this misunderstanding was refuted by the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

According to New Testament teaching, we can expect our Lord coming at the rapture any time. How much the Church will witness of the fulfillment of other prophecies is hidden from us. - Regardless of this, however, we have the secure promise that the Church will be raptured before the beginning of God's direct judgment - i.e. before the Day of Wrath.

### **How far has prophecy been fulfilled for Israel?**

At the turn of the year 1947/48 my father gave a lecture on the topic: "Israel, the hand on God's world clock". The reason for this title was the UN resolution 181, which provided for the establishment of a Jewish and an Arab state in what was then the English mandate of Palestine. This resolution was celebrated with great enthusiasm by the Jews but was rejected by the Arabs. On May 14, 1948, Ben Gurion read out the declaration of independence of the State of Israel. With this declaration, the statelessness of the Jewish people, which had lasted for around 2500 years, was ended. With this, one part of the prophecy from Hos.3,4 was fulfilled: *For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim.*

Since May 1948 the children of Israel have a head of state again - but no sacrifices yet. (For the restart of the sacrificial service, see my article: *The future of the Temple in Jerusalem*).

In Ez.37,12 Ezekiel receives the instruction: *Therefore, prophesy and say unto them, thus says the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.*

In verses 4-6 the next commission follows: *Again, he said unto me, Prophecy to these bones, and say unto them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.*

Ezekiel then writes (v.8): *And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them over: but there was no breath in them.*

In my opinion this prophecy was fulfilled with the founding of the state of Israel.

The next commission to Ezekiel has not yet been fulfilled (v.9): *Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.*

The future fulfillment is described in verse 14: *And I shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, says the LORD.* (Compare my article: *Ezekiel's Vision of Israel's Future*).

### **What happens after the rapture of the Church?**

After the rapture of the Church, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached by the 144,000 sealed people from the 12 tribes of Israel. The people who believe the gospel of the kingdom and do not worship the beast will live on earth in the Messianic Kingdom. This applies both to the people who survive the coming, most intense tribulation (cf. Dan.12,1 & Mt.25,31-45) as well as to the risen martyrs who died in this time (Rev.20,4-6).

The survivors of this most intense tribulation have mortal bodies and therefore cannot stand before God's throne (1Cor.15,50-54). Their

temporal and mortal bodies are the prerequisite for having children (Mt.22,30). The descendants of the survivors will be put to the test at the end of the millennium, whether they want to follow God or Satan (Rev.20,7-8).

According to Dan.9,27, the appearance of the Coming Prince/Man of Sin will take place at least 7 years before the coming of Messiah/Jesus Christ in power and glory.

The "*Coming Prince*" announced in Dan.9, whose people destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in the year 70, will initially enable the Jews to re-establish the sacrificial service in Jerusalem as part of a 7-year covenant (cf. my article: *The Future of the Temple in Jerusalem*). This event at the latest gives those who know the Scriptures the opportunity to recognize this Man of Sin, who will then demand to be worshiped as God 3½ years later. After his period of power for 42 months (Rev.13,5 and Dan.12,7), Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, will defeat him and cast him into the lake of fire (Rev.19,11-20).

### **What is our hope today?**

The apostle Paul writes: *I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ* (Phil.1,23). His longing is directed towards fellowship with his beloved Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. But he would rather achieve this goal without physical death, because death is the last enemy (1Cor.15,26). He describes his mortal body as a tent and wishes not to be undressed but covered with the eternal body: *Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life* (2Cor.5,4). In his first letter to the Corinthians he had already written about the mystery that not all children of God have to die: *Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, 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* (1Cor.15,51-52).

We know that the joyful sound of the second and last trumpet will sound when the full number from the nations (Rm.11,25) are gathered and ready to march, and we ask our Lord: *Amen, come Lord Jesus!*

H. G. Spafford expresses his hope for the rapture in the last verse of the song, "When peace with God pervades my soul", in the following words:

Oh, hurry, my lord, and let the day come, my faith already sees it  
from afar;  
the clouds pass, the trumpet sounds. Hallelujah, I am with the Lord.

\*) Midtribulationists accept that the first Christians expected the return of Jesus Christ at any time - but - in their opinion - not at a "pre-rapture" but at an encounter with the Lord in the air - right before His visible second coming. This view, however, contradicts the teaching of the apostle Paul, who had already orally instructed the congregation in Thessalonica that the rapture of the Church would take place before Day of God's judgment of wrath. Since this teaching was opposed in Thessalonica with the argument that there could be no "pre-rapture" because the Day of Wrath was already present, Paul corrected this error in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Thessalonians 2,1-4: *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That you be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come the falling away first, and that*

*man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

This Bible passage is one of the key verses through which J.N. Darby was led to rediscover the "pre-rapture doctrine" in 1830.

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