

3. The Biblical Order of Events

Where Does the Rapture Fit In?

It is very important that we have a Biblical view of the events surrounding the Rapture. It does not stand on its own and cannot be isolated from other events with which it is inseparably connected. We need to keep the Biblical scheme in mind.

Things happen in a certain order, and therein the Rapture has its own, very significant place. Removing the Rapture from its Biblical time slot leads to a totally wrong view of the event itself and of what it means in the life of the believers.

In this chapter, therefore, we wish to ascertain the order of the events that take place in the last days and precisely where the Rapture fits in.

To simplify matters as much as possible, it may be best to outline the events as writers like Jenkins and LaHaye see them and to compare this with the Scriptural revelation concerning the events in the earth's last days.

Jenkins and LaHaye adhere basically to the following scheme:

FIRST RETURN OF CHRIST
RAPTURE 1
MILLENNIUM
THE GREAT TRIBULATION
SECOND RETURN OF CHRIST
RAPTURE 2
FINAL JUDGMENT
ETERNAL PEACE

LaHaye in particular sees the Rapture as taking place *before* the great tribulation comes. He therefore instituted a PreTrib Research Center. After all, people who will fall under the great tribulation need to be properly prepared and counseled and thus a research center was deemed necessary.

I snuck in a second rapture in the above list. I did so because there are millennialists who see the Rapture as taking place *after* the great tribulation. It would seem logical that if there are two returns of Christ, there should be two Raptures as well. (But I may be thinking outside the box here.)

We must keep in mind that these things are not easy to understand and may be somewhat intimidating at first. But it does make a difference whether one is a “pre-trib millennialist” or a “post-trib millennialist.” Pre-tribs are generally more optimistic about the immediate future because when the great tribulation does come, they will have already exited the scene. Post-tribs, however, know that the outcome will ultimately be okay, but that they and the generations after them will have to go through the great tribulation first. It is not easy, then, to be optimistic. Many will be saved, but more will be lost. These millennialists dig in for the long haul.

All this can be especially confusing for people who do not know the Bible and depend on novels and movies for their information. It can also be confusing for Reformed Christians who are inundated from every side by millennialist thinking which has also permeated the evangelical world. Hence that question posed to the elder on a family visit: do we believe in the Rapture?

The Biblical Scheme

When we consider what the Word of God reveals about the events in the last age, we get quite a different picture than the one painted in bold colors by Jenkins and LaHaye.

The Biblical order can be illustrated as follows

THE MILLENNIUM (Rev 20)
THE GREAT TRIBULATION (2 Thess 3)
THE RETURN OF CHRIST (Acts 1)
THE RAPTURE (1 Thess 4)
JUDGMENT (Rev 20)
ETERNAL PEACE (Rev 22)

In the scheme of most millennialists, there are two returns of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Biblical instruction, however, we learn that there is only *one* return of Christ. In that case, there can be only a single Rapture. The return of Christ coincides with the Rapture. Those who are “left behind” are the ones who rejected Christ and lived a life of sin. They do not get another crack at salvation, for final judgment takes place immediately after the Rapture. We will demonstrate this from pertinent Bible passages.

There is only one return. Let us consider what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:24. “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.” The resurrection and Rapture will take place *once* when Christ returns. To suggest otherwise means doing violence to Scripture.

In the Biblical sequence of events, there is no time remaining for those “left behind” to pursue and receive salvation. I am reminded here of the parable about the rich man and the poor Lazarus.

Thus the whole foundation under the books of Jenkins and LaHaye crumbles. These books are nothing more than fictional novels that tell interesting tales, but have no biblical basis.

The Importance of a Proper Time Frame

Someone might wonder if it is really so important to follow a specific time frame. Are not more and different scenarios possible? Is the doctrine of the last things so clear and rigid that it does not allow for varying opinions?

I hear now and then that the exact doctrine of truth is not as important as the deeper experience of faith. As long as we all look forward to the return of Christ, who cares whether we have all our expectations in line with each other? *Orthopraxis* is more important than *orthodoxy*, some say. Christian walk is more important than Christian talk.

I think the above-mentioned is a false dilemma. We must do both: think and talk in a Christian way and then also walk in a Christian way. What we believe concerning the Rapture and when it takes place is an important

teaching in Scripture that has great meaning for our daily walk. We need to keep in step with the Lord Jesus all the way.

In the following chapters, we will look at where the millennium fits into the Bible's teaching about the last days or the end of time. Then we will focus on the expression "the great tribulation" and what we are to think of it in terms of content and duration. We will also have to consider the Bible's teaching about the coming of "the lawless one." Who is he? What will be the duration and extent of his rule? In what way does the coming of the lawless one impact the rapture? Lastly, we will look at what the Bible says about Christ's return and the accompanying Rapture. Then the way is open to consider the meaning and function of Judgment Day. And this leads us to the eternal peace that Christ has promised to all his saints.

In all this, we will first seek our reference points in the Bible itself. This is important because many do not know the catholic and Reformed creeds. We will also draw lines to the Reformed confessions, however, to show that these accurately (not perfectly, but truthfully) reflect the teaching of Scripture.