

The Rapture

I. God Has a Plan

There are seven main dispensations God planned from the foundation of the world. When Adam fell, God already had a plan. The plan of redemption was already in force. God is the author of the answer, never the problem. God was here before Satan, therefore, the answer was here before the problem ever existed. This means there is no problem we face that God hasn't already made provision for. Our way of escape was made before the problem ever existed.

Each one of the dispensations ended in failure; not God's failure, but man's failure. However, when man fell, God was right on his heels with a new dispensation.

II. God's Dispensations

Dispensation of Innocence: God began with this dispensation after the creation of Adam. It ended with the fall of Adam.

Dispensation of Conscience: During this time, man started erecting the Tower of Babel in their attempt to get to God. They thought they were as powerful as God.

Dispensation of Human Government: Sin prevailed throughout mankind, leading up to the Flood. Man was destroyed and God started a new dispensation with a new race from Noah.

Dispensation of Promise: God gave Abraham the Abrahamic Covenant, of which we still walk in today. After this time, the children of Israel went into Egyptian captivity.

Dispensation of the Law: God set up the Ten Commandments and gave them to the Israelites through Moses. The Law ended at the cross with man's failure to keep the Law. The Law was a bondage that no man could keep. Peter spoke of this in Acts 15. Jesus was the only one who could keep the law the entire time He was here. Since He could keep the Law, He was the only one who could take it out of the way by nailing it to the cross. (See Colossians 2:14.) The Law has been removed once and for all and we are no longer under the Law. When the Law ended at the cross, fifty days later on the day of Pentecost, a new dispensation began.

The Dispensation of Grace: Also called the Dispensation of the Church, this is where we are at today. The Church Age will end with man's failure.

III. The Final Dispensation

The tribulation will come in after the Church Age is over and we will have all-out war on this planet as Satan acts in rebellion against God. But God will be the winner, not the devil. The devil may seem like he is prevailing, but he won't. Man, backed by the devil, has tried to overthrow God for years. But every time man pushes against God, God shows Himself stronger. Man pushes a little harder and God shows Himself stronger again. Man can push as hard as he wants; God will always prevail and receive more glory. Man might as well surrender and join God.

God is arising and His enemies are going to be scattered. One of these days, when it looks like Satan has won the final victory, Jesus Christ will descend from the clouds. Satan will be bound up for one thousand years, along with all his demons, and the earth will have a one thousand-year party called the millennium. We're all going to be invited!

IV. Dispensation of the Church

We are currently living in the Dispensation of the Church, or the Dispensation of Grace. The church age was a mystery in the Old Testament. The writers and prophets of the Old Testament did not know the church age was coming. Only a few inferences about the church age are found in the Old Testament.

Jesus was born, lived, died, resurrected, and ascended into heaven under the Dispensation of the Law. The Church was a mystery even during Jesus' time. When Jesus spoke about the Church, he spoke in parables. When Jesus said, "I'll build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," His disciples probably looked at each other and said, "What's the Church?" Jesus spoke of the pearl of great price; that's the Church. He talked about the treasure that was hidden in a field; that's the Church. We are the pearl of great price. We are the treasure. We are hidden in the world today, but Jesus Christ, just to protect us, bought the whole world. Jesus went to the cross and paid the redemption price for all of mankind. We have been here all the time, and suddenly we have been resurrected right in the middle of it.

When Solomon built the temple in the city of Jerusalem, he didn't let anyone know the temple was going to be built. They went into Lebanon, where they cut the cedars down. They went into stone quarries, where they shaped and molded the stones in secret. When it was time for the temple to be built, they brought it all to Jerusalem and it was built without the sound of a hammer. Everything fit perfectly into place and the whole temple went up without a sound. That is the Church today.

For years, the Holy Spirit has been shaping and molding living stones and in these last days, it's all coming together without any human sound. One of these days, the last stone is going to be put into place and Jesus Christ is coming back to take His Church into heaven.

V. Waiting for the Millennial Reign

The disciples knew the millennial reign was coming. This is what the earth has been waiting for. Nature is groaning and travailing, waiting for its redemption when Jesus Christ returns and the curse is removed from the land and animals. We don't have to wait until then because we have already been redeemed through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The tribulation is only going to last for seven years. The earth is not waiting for the tribulation; it is waiting for the millennial reign, which will last for a thousand years. At the end of the tribulation, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

VI. Members of the Body of Christ

Colossians 1:24:

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.

Notice that the body of Jesus is called the Church. We are a part of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. We make up the Church. We were reserved for the Dispensation of Grace. The body of Christ did not exist until the day of Pentecost, when Jesus Christ went to heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father and He became the Chief Cornerstone. The Holy Spirit came to live in us on the day of Pentecost and turned us into living stones, and we have been made part of the Church of Jesus Christ.

You can be a stone in the corner of the wall, in the middle of the wall, or at the top of the wall. You can be the toe, the finger, or the elbow; you are part of the body of Christ. Jesus is the head and all things flow from Him. All praises flow back to Him. He is the head of the Church. Jesus is part of God and since we're part of His body, we are also part of God. We've been put on a level with the Lord Jesus Christ; heirs with God the Father and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

VI. Completion of the Mystery

Colossians 1:25:

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.

Whereof refers to the Church. The *dispensation of God* is what we live in today, the Dispensation of Grace. One thing happened during our dispensation that has never happened before: the Word of God was completed.

The word *fulfill* here is the Greek word *pleroma*. It means to fulfill to completion. The Word of God was fulfilled to completion after the day of Pentecost when men like Paul, Peter, James, and Jude were filled with the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of God wrote and completed the Word of God. Isaiah and David could never hold the completed Word of God in their hands like you and I can. No man can add to it or take away from it. However, there is still a part that needs to be fulfilled.

Colossians 1:26-27:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The mystery, which God knew from the foundation of the earth, is now complete during our dispensation. What was hidden under the old dispensation has now been revealed to us, His saints. Under the old covenant, Gentiles could not be part of the Body. The fact that we are the body of Christ, the fact that we are the Church, the fact that we have completed revelation, the fact that we have Christ in us, the fact that the Gentiles are part of this Church is all part of the mystery, which David

knew nothing about. The prophets wrote about these things, but they never understood them.

Even the disciples did not understand the mystery. When they were with Jesus, they continually asked Him when the kingdom was coming. They thought Jesus simply came to dismiss the Roman Empire and establish His kingdom immediately. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted, "Hosanna" and "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," because they thought Jesus was going to whisk His finger at any moment and do away with the Roman empire and establish the millennium. However, when He did not perform according to their expectations, a few days later those same people were yelling, "Crucify Him."

When Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were still primarily concerned with the coming of the kingdom. He instructed them to go to the Upper Room and not leave until they were endued with power from on high to be His witnesses. But "it's not for you to know the times or the seasons." (Acts 1:6-7) Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples went to the Upper Room where they were filled with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit brought back to their remembrance everything Jesus had said. At that moment, they realized they were in a whole new dispensation.

VIII. The Rapture of the Church

We are in the final closing moments of the Church Age. The Church is doing feats it has never done before. It is rising up and setting people free around the world in spite of governments and politicians. The harder the world persecutes us, the bigger we get because Christ lives in us.

At the same time, we see economies of nations failing and we know the stage is set for the antichrist to come in. However, the antichrist can't come in until we're gone. We (the Church) are keeping the power of Satan back. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church. (See Matthew 16:18.)

There is much confusion today about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and most people don't understand there are two comings mentioned in the Word of God. Those who are born again will partake in both of them.

The first coming of Jesus Christ is the rapture, where Jesus Christ comes back and takes us into heaven. That could occur at any time. The second coming will take place seven years later, when Jesus Christ returns to this

earth with us. Those seven years in between will be the tribulation period. We won't be here; we will be in heaven before the Throne of God where we'll be going through the Judgment Seat of Christ and be rewarded before Him for our deeds done in the flesh.

The rapture is for the Church. The Church is the mystery; therefore the rapture is the mystery. It wasn't prophesied about in the Old Testament; it was discussed in the epistles. Jesus never spoke about the rapture of the Church; He spoke about the Second Coming where He will usher in the millennial reign, a thousand years of peace. The disciples knew Jesus would usher in the millennial reign, but they thought He would do it right then and there.

The rapture of the Church is just another sign pointing to the Second Coming. The rapture is not going to cause things to change that much on the earth. It is the opening of the door for the tribulation to come in. The radical change will take place when Jesus Christ comes back on His Second Advent and the millennial reign is opened up.

2 Thessalonians 2:1:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.

This verse is referring to the rapture of the Church where we will rise to meet Jesus in the air. He will appear for us in the sky and we will all go up to meet Him. Not some of us; all of us. Keep in mind the Church Age has been going on for two thousand years. Probably ninety-seven percent of the Church is already in heaven waiting for the Judgment Seat of Christ.

When Jesus comes back, all those who are dead in Christ are going to come back with Him. They will all receive resurrected bodies. We which are alive and remain will also get our resurrection bodies at the same time and rise to meet Him in the air.

If part of us had to go through the tribulation, the part of those who died before us should also have to go through the tribulation. When the rapture occurs, God is not going to amputate the toe and make it stay here, nor is He going to cut off a bit of a toenail and make it stay here. We are all going to heaven and be judged at the same time for our deeds done in the flesh.

Does that give us a license to live however we want to? No! We will all

be rewarded differently for our deeds done in the flesh. Some will shine as the moon; others will shine as the sun and some will shine as the stars. I want to be a supernova when I get to heaven. I want to have the magnitude of the sun. Our full reward won't be when we get to heaven; it begins now. I want to have an abundant entrance when I go to heaven as Peter spoke about.

2 Peter 1:11:

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

IX. The Tribulation

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3:

*Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.*

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

The Thessalonians thought they had missed the rapture and were in the tribulation because of all the persecution going on in Rome.

If it doesn't come from the Word of God, weigh it closely. Let no man deceive you.

We've taken the term *falling away* to mean *turning away from the Lord Jesus Christ*. However, the Greek word is *apostasia*, where we get the English word *apostasy*. The word means *to depart*.

In Acts 21:21, the disciples were blamed for helping people to apostasies from the Mosaic Law. The same word is found in Hebrews 3:12, "Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The Greek word *apostasia* is also used there.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and insert the word *depart* for *falling away*. If you read it in the Amplified version, it makes a note in parenthesis that says, "the departure of the Church." *The tribulation will not come until the*

great departure occurs first and the departure is the Church rising to meet Jesus in the air.

Kenneth Weust says that word can only mean the rapture of the Church because the word *apostasia* has nothing to do with it. It doesn't say, "departing from evil" or "departing from good." The departure is the rapture of the Church and the tribulation cannot come until the departure. We are holding back the devil today.

There is no point in trying to figure out who the son of perdition is. He won't be revealed until after we are gone.

2 Thessalonians 2:4-7:

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

The word *letteth* means *hinders* or *restrains*. Many have said that he who restrains must be the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit will be removed once the Church is gone because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. That's not true. The Holy Spirit is not stopping the antichrist from coming on the scene today because Satan is running rampant throughout other parts of the earth and the Holy Spirit is not stopping him. *Believers using the name of Jesus stop the antichrist from coming into power today. He who hinders is the Church, the body of Christ!*

When the Church is gone, the Holy Spirit will still be here. He will still be drawing men to Christ during the tribulation. The tribulation will be one of the greatest times of evangelism the world has ever seen because sin will be at its highest during the tribulation, and where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

2 Thessalonians 2:8:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Verse one speaks of a coming and verse eight speaks of a coming. These are two different occurrences. The coming in verse one is the rapture and the coming in verse eight is where the antichrist is destroyed by the brightness of His coming. One coming is *for* the Church, and one coming is *with* the Church.

X. Bringing Home the Ambassadors

The question is often posed about whether or not all believers will be taken up into heaven. The Bible calls us *ambassadors*. (See 2 Corinthians 5.) An ambassador is a person who lives in another country, but is not a citizen of that country. An ambassador does not live off the economy of the country they are in. They live off the economy of their home country. They can't go under unless their home country goes under. Our home country is heaven. We are in this earth, but not of this earth. Our economy is based on His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

When one country declares war on another country, the first people returned home are the ambassadors. One of these days, heaven is going to declare war on a Christ-rejecting world, but the ambassadors will be brought home first and the devil will know something is up. All ambassadors — good and bad — will be brought home and judged at home.

XI. Joining Those Who Are Asleep

I Thessalonians 4:13-15:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others [unbelievers] which have no hope:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

Next to the gifts of the Spirit, the biggest subject Christians are ignorant on is the rapture and end time events. We escape ignorance by getting into the Word and studying.

Them which are asleep are the rest of the Church that have died and gone

on to heaven. He didn't say they have been annihilated, or that they disappeared to never come back again, they are simply *asleep*. They are at rest. Their bodies are in the grave, but they are relaxing in heaven. If Jesus died and rose again, they are going to rise again because they are in Him.

The word *prevent* in verse 15 means to *come before* or to *precede*. Those of us who are alive on Earth will not precede or come before them which are asleep. Those who have gone on before us will come back with Christ and get their resurrection body the same time we do, and we will join them in the Great Gathering together and be with Jesus forever and ever. No wonder he says to comfort each other with these words.

XII. The Day of the Rapture

I Thessalonians 4:16-17:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Jesus is personally going to come back and escort us into heaven. He is so excited for us to come that He will leave heaven, meet us in the air on the way up, and accompany us to heaven.

What is the *shout*? For two thousand years, Jesus hasn't even known the day of His coming — only God the Father knows. Each day I get up in the morning and say, "Lord, if this is the day You're coming, I'm ready." That must tug on Jesus' heart. He turns to the Father and asks, "Is it today?" and the Father says, "No, not today." That has been the answer for two thousand years, but there's coming a day when the Father's answer will be, "Yes, today is the day." Hallelujah! Jesus will be shouting all the way down.

XIII. Receiving a Resurrection Body

Jude 9

Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, the Lord rebuke thee.

Michael contended with the devil about Moses' body, not his spirit

because the body has not been redeemed yet, but the spirit has. The last enemy to be put under foot by the Lord Jesus Christ is physical death. Because of the cross, we are going to live forever inwardly before the presence of God, but we are still bound by this natural body that is going to die one of these days.

When Jesus Christ descends from heaven, He will also come with the voice of the archangel Michael. Jesus is coming back to claim our bodies and Satan is going to put up a fuss. Michael is going to say, "The Lord rebuke you," and the devil's mouth will be shut.

Jesus Christ can take us out of this earth legally because He's going to change our bodies into resurrection bodies. The devil can't contend one moment because our bodies will be fashioned as that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our bodies will be changed instantly into a resurrection body.

Right now, the only one with a resurrection body is Jesus. Earth couldn't hold Him in the grave. His resurrection body shot up right through the atmosphere. It is capable of traveling through space. It doesn't need air. It doesn't need to eat; although it can eat. It can travel through walls; it can go up, down, or sideways. It can teleport itself anywhere it wants to at the speed of thought. It doesn't need blood; it's just bone and flesh because blood is only needed here on Earth to keep us alive. In heaven, we'll be kept alive by the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will all have a perfect body. Jesus will be the only one with a marred body because forever He'll have holes in His hands and feet, marks on His back, and thorn marks across his brow. It will forever be a reminder of what it cost to purchase our redemption.

IV. Invading Enemy Territory

I Thessalonians 4:16-17:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

This angel is Gabriel with the trumpet. Michael and Gabriel work together. In the book of Daniel, we find that Michael and Gabriel were the angels who came to Daniel with the answer after he had interceded and fasted for three weeks.

The dead in Christ will rise first because they are six feet lower than we are, and by the time they get to ground level, we'll get our resurrection body and all rise to meet Jesus in the air together.

The words *caught up* means *to take by force*. Jesus is literally going to come take us by force out of this earth so we will rise to meet Him in the clouds. This isn't referring to physical clouds; this is the Glory Cloud — the Shekinah presence of the Holy Spirit. We will disappear into that Glory Cloud with Him and go on back to heaven.

The Greek word for *air* is the same word used in Ephesians 2:2, where it calls Satan the prince of the power of the air. This means that Jesus is going to penetrate the air, which is permeated with devils and demons, and invade enemy territory and take us by force.

Only believers will hear Jesus shout at the rapture. Only believers will see the angels. Only believers will hear the trumpet and suddenly disappear. Unbelievers won't see or hear anything, except that we will be with them one moment and gone the next. This is not the case at the Second Coming seven years later because at that time, every eye will see, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. The second time He comes will be with the brightness of His coming, as lightening from the east to the west.

How fast will the rapture happen? There's going to be the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trump, the clouds, and believers taken by force into the air — perhaps five minutes?

I Corinthians 15:51-52:

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...

We will not all die a physical death, but we will all be changed — in a moment. The Greek word for *moment* is *atomo*, where we get the word *atomic*. An atom is the smallest structure that cannot be further divided. *Atomo* is the smallest measurement of time that cannot be further divided. At the rapture, believers will be gone in an atomic moment. That will be the end of the Church Age. Just like the new birth takes place in the fastest measurement of time, so will the rapture. And just like the rapture will happen this quickly, so can one be born again for eternity.