

THE RAPTURE?

From theological writings to popular movies to tee shirts and bumper stickers, we are told that “the rapture” is soon to occur. Allegedly, Jesus is coming to take the faithful from the earth for seven years of rapture. At the same time, the wicked will be “left behind” to suffer tribulation. Afterward, it is said, Christ will return with the faithful to vanquish the wicked and reign on the earth for a thousand years.

We have seen previously that the Scriptures debunk the premillennial view of Jesus’ reigning on earth from a literal, earthly throne. But how about this rapture idea?

Several passages are (mis)used to teach it. The one most often appeal-ed to is Paul’s statement found at I Thessalonians 4:13-17. However, the term *rapture* is not found in this passage, nor in any other. Paul was responding to the fear that those who die before Christ’s return have no hope of reward (:13). He assured those Christians that as surely as Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, he would, by the power of his voice, resurrect those who “sleep” in him (:14). Moreover, those who are yet living when Christ returns will have no advantage over the faithful who have previously died. Rather, the dead will be raised first, before the living are taken up, and then both the resurrected and the yet living will be caught up together “to meet the Lord in the air” (15-17a).

But for how long shall these faithful saints be caught up to be with the Lord? The premillennial rapturists tell us, “Seven years.”

To the contrary, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, tells us that this coming when the faithful dead shall be resurrected, and the faithful living shall be caught up with them to be with the Lord, will be for “ALWAYS” (:17b, emphasis added).

In fact, this coming of the Christ, when he will raise the dead, will mark the end of all earthly matters. According to Paul’s I Corinthian letter, “Then comes the end.” Christ will not then begin his reign but will instead deliver up the kingdom to the Father (I Corinthians 15:24). Till then, he must reign to vanquish every enemy (:25). The last of these enemies is death itself (:26). Thus, when Christ raises the dead, when death is thus destroyed, the end of all earthly matters will have run their course. What, then, of a seven year “rapture” at that time? Nothing more than another premillennial fiction (but a financially rewarding one for selling books and movies).
—Jerry F. Bassett