

The Errors of Zionism and the Protestant “Rapture”

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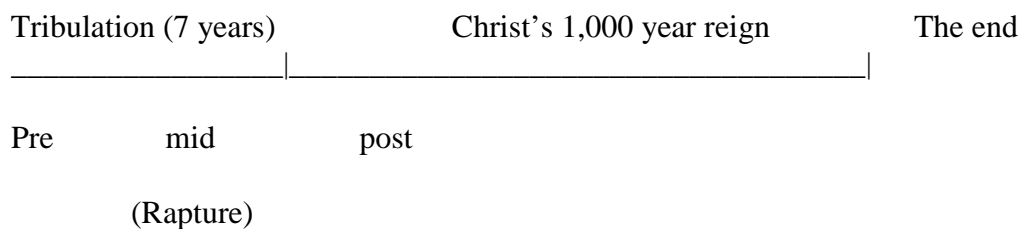
Many Protestant sects have created a cottage industry of books, tracts, TV and radio surrounding the secret “rapture” of Christians up into heaven during the last days. It is generally part of a greater eschatological worldview that sees the restoration of Israel as a sign of the end-times, which is often referred to as “Zionism.” Christian Zionists believe that, once Israel’s land is restored and its ancient borders are secured, Christ will come again to rule with the Jews in Israel for a millennium, based on the “1,000 years” of Apoc. 20:2-6. During His reign, Zionists say that Christ will appoint 144,000 Jewish leaders to rule with Him over the Gentiles until the end of the world (Apoc. 7:4; 14:1,3).

Prior to Christ’s earthly reign from Jerusalem, however, these Protestants believe that Gentile Christians who are still living at this time will be secretly taken up into heaven. This will pave the way for the Jews to rule with Jesus for the millennial period. They call this secret taking of Christians up to heaven “The Rapture,” and base this belief on St. Paul’s revelations to the Thessalonians:

“For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

The “Rapture” (a word that is not used in Scripture) will supposedly occur in connection with a period of tribulation for the Church (based in part on Dan. 9:27). Some Zionists believe the rapture will occur before the tribulation, and are thus called “pre-tribulation” rapturists. Some believe the rapture will occur during the tribulation (“mid-tribulation” rapturists), and some believe the rapture will take place at the end of the tribulation (“post-tribulation” rapturists).

This schema of events can be summarized as follows:



After the period of tribulation and rapture, Christ and the Jews will supposedly rule the Gentiles through an earthly kingdom for 1,000 years. During Christ’s millennial reign, most Zionists believe that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews to Christianity. They base their conclusion on St. Paul’s innocuous statement in Romans 11:26 that “all Israel should be saved,”

even though the “Israel” of the New Covenant is the Catholic Church, not the Jewish people (cf. Galatians 6:16). At the end of the millennial period, Christ is to bring an end to the world and judge the living and the dead.

Needless to say, this Zionist / Rapture eschatology, which is held by most Fundamentalist, Pentecostal and Evangelical Protestant sects, is one of the biggest falsehoods ever fabricated about the end times. As we will see, it is also plainly refuted by Scripture.

1. The Rapture is not a secret event.

Recall that Zionists believe Christians who are living right before Christ comes to rule for the 1,000 year period will be secretly taken up into heaven (although they differ on whether this will happen before, during or after the tribulation period that precedes the millennium). Because Zionists believe the rapture will be secret, it will be accompanied by confusion since unbelievers won't understand what is going on.

However, the very Scripture passages that Protestants use to advance the “rapture” theory say something quite different about the phenomenon. Scripture says that the rapture will be no secret event, but will be accompanied by the Lord's own “cry of command” from heaven, with the “archangel's call,” and with “the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). These cries, calls and trumpet blasts will not be secret, but public, as they will summon all of mankind to the General Judgment of Jesus Christ where He will publicly declare their eternal fate.

2. The Rapture occurs after the Resurrection on the last day.

Zionists believe that the rapture will occur before the millennial reign of Christ (either before, during or after the seven-year tribulation). After the rapture, Christ will rule from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Thus, Zionists separate the rapture from the end of the world by 1,000 to 1,007 years. The end of the world will immediately follow the millennial period, at which time Jesus will raise the living and the dead.

The Scriptures, however, say that the rapture occurs coincident with the end of the world, not a millennium before the end of the world. Again, turning to the “rapture” passage in 1 Thessalonians, St. Paul says: “For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep” (v.15). In other words, those Christians living at the time of the “rapture” are not taken first.

Instead, “the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (vv.16-17). These passages clearly teach that the resurrection of the dead precedes the rapture. Therefore, to know when the rapture occurs, we must first know when the resurrection of the dead occurs.

Scripture teaches that the resurrection of the dead occurs on the “last day” of the world (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48). Because the resurrection of the dead occurs on the “last day” of the world, and the rapture follows the resurrection, this means that the rapture also

occurs on the “last day” (there can be no day after the “last day”). Since the rapture occurs on the “last day,” it cannot occur on any other day (that is, there is no “pre-millennial” rapture as Protestants contend).

3. *The Rapture is the raising of the righteous and the unrighteous at the same time.*

As we have seen, the Zionist / Rapture eschatology holds that believing Gentile Christians will be taken up into heaven before the millennial reign of Christ to clear the way for the Jews. Christ will then choose 144,000 Jewish evangelists to rule with Him from an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem for 1,000 years. This reign supposedly brings about a mass conversion of the Jews by the end of the millennium period.

But we have already seen that the “rapture” occurs on the “last day” (John 6), and immediately follows the resurrection of the dead (1 Thess. 4:16-17). This necessarily means that the righteous and the unrighteous will be raised at the same time, because there is no day that can follow the “last day” where the unrighteous could be raised. Scripture confirms this conclusion. In John 5:28-29, the Lord Jesus says: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.”

Hence, both those who have done good and those who have done evil will rise at the same time. The good will be raised to life, and the evil will be raised to judgment. There is simply no exegetical basis for inserting a millennial period between the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust. Thus, Scripture teaches that the rapture of the living occurs coincident with the resurrection of all of the dead, both the good and the evil, at the same time, on the last day of the world.

4. *The Zionist / Rapturist eschatology requires at least “three comings of Christ.”*

The Protestant scheme of a rapture preceding the millennium and final coming requires “three” comings of Christ. First, Christ came at the Incarnation. Second, Christ would come at the “rapture” to take Gentile Christians to heaven. Third, Christ would come to rule with the Jews for the 1,000 years until the end of the world when He will judge the living and the dead. This scheme is absolutely false and contradicts the perennial teachings of the Church. It is also refuted by Sacred Scripture. For example, St. Paul says in his letter to the Hebrews: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment: So also Christ was offered once to exhaust the sins of many; the second time he shall appear without sin to them that expect him unto salvation (Heb. 9:27-28).

St. Paul says that Christ will “appear a second time.” This second appearance of Christ is nothing short of His second and final appearance at the end of the world, when He will judge the living and the dead. Because this Second Coming of Christ refers to the end of the world, St. Paul says Christ “shall appear without sin” to those who expect His coming because He will have already rendered His judgments upon the wicked. In other words, at Christ’s second and final coming, there will be no millennial rule or mass conversion of the Jews, for the fate of all humanity will be sealed. For those who have done evil, it will be too late to repent. Those who

rejected Christ during their lives will lament their damnation, as Scripture reveals: “Behold, he cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth shall bewail themselves because of him. Even so. Amen” (Apoc 1:7).

Closing

The Church has condemned this pre-millennial eschatology which was previously known as Chiliasm. Although Chiliasm was denounced by the early Church during the first few centuries of her existence, pre-millennialism came back in the 19th and 20th centuries with the wave of Protestant evangelicalism which started in Protestant England and was perpetuated in America by Cyrus Scofield. As a result, the Holy Office, on July 21, 1944 under Pope Pius XII, decreed:

“In recent times on several occasions this Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has been asked what must be thought of the system of mitigated Millenarianism, which teaches, for example, that Christ the Lord before the final judgment, whether or not preceded by the resurrection of the many just, will come visibly to rule over this world. The answer is: The system of mitigated Millenarianism cannot be taught safely” (Denzinger 2296).

The traditional Catholic view is that the millennium of Apocalypse 20 began with the First Coming of Christ and symbolizes Christ’s reign during the age of the Church. This view holds that the Rapture occurs at the Second Coming of Christ, which is the end of the world. At this time, both the living and the dead will be resurrected to receive their reward or punishment. Because there is no millennial period between the Church age and the end of the world, the Catholic and Scriptural view is often called the “amillennial” view. This view was held by Saints Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Rufinus, Venerable Bede, Justin Martyr, Eusebius, Theodoret and Thomas Aquinas. Because the theory of a mass conversion of the Jews at the end times was based on the condemned view of Chiliasm, the “mass conversion” theory of the Jews is also erroneous, or dubious at best.

In summary, Zionism and the Rapture are part of an anti-Catholic movement that attempts to remove the Catholic Church as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies, and the only authoritative voice for interpreting those prophecies. This, of course, is the case for the rest of the errors of Protestantism. Such Protestant eschatology stems from a false understanding of Scripture, which “the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction” (2Pet 3:16). Ultimately, these and all errors against the Faith are borne from a prideful refusal to submit to the Church of Jesus Christ which He established in His own blood. And because the Head cannot be separated from the Body, the Protestant rejection of the Church is a rejection of Jesus Christ Himself – a sin worse than the sin of unbelief of the pagans.