

320 Near of Time and Place – 3

We are currently using a few Weekly Reflections to consider, as far as we can tell under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, where the Lord is up to in terms of the various prophecies within His Word which are yet to be fulfilled. We know directly from Jesus Himself that “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21.24b); and we can see that Jerusalem is indeed now no longer trodden down by the Gentiles, this freedom from Gentile control coming in stages in 1917, 1948 and 1967, though as yet still fraught with political tensions concerning the Temple Mount. It is no surprise therefore that we should keep watching events closely, focussed as these events now so clearly are on Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount – just as foretold.

There is confusion over, and neglect of, the event foretold in I Thessalonians 4.13-18 and I Corinthians 15.51-52 known as “the rapture”, a word not found in Scripture but based on the Latin verb “rapio”, “I seize”. The rapture thus involves the “seizing away” by Christ of both “the dead in Christ” and the “those-still-living-then-on-earth-in-Christ”, with both of these groups, their bodies being “changed, in a moment, in a blink of an eye” (15.51-52, Literal), being “caught up together with him (Christ) in the clouds to a meeting of the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord” (4.16-17). What a promise! What a prospect! What a comfort! No wonder Chapter 4 finishes with – “So, then, comfort one another with these words” (4.18).

Yet some reject the rapture by arguing that this belief was only “invented” in the 1830s by a few members of the Plymouth Brethren; (but how can something be invented that has sat there in plain sight in the Scriptures since the first century AD?!). As a result, the rapture and those who accept it tend to receive “a bad press” these days. The current and prevailing view, if this event is ever mentioned in church teaching, is that the rapture is to occur simultaneously with the visible return of Christ in glory that is to take place “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (eg., Matthew 24.29-31). But a simple comparison of the various scriptural references plainly shows that the rapture and the return of Christ in glory are two separate events which simply cannot be at the same time.

We have space here to mention only a few examples to demonstrate this separation. In each case the ‘a’ refers to the rapture and the ‘b’ to the coming of Christ in glory: 1a Christ comes to the air (I Thessalonians 4.17) / 1b Christ comes to the earth (egs., Zechariah 14.4 / Acts 1.11); 2a He comes FOR His saints / 2b He comes WITH His saints (eg., Jude 14-15); 3a Those removed are for a blessing (I Thessalonians 4.13-18 & 5.9-10), but those remaining undergo the tribulation / 3b Those removed are reserved for judgment (Matthew 24.37-39 & 25.31-33, 41-46a) but those remaining “inherit the kingdom prepared” for them (Matthew 25.31-40, 46b); 4a The rapture occurs BEFORE the “man of sin” is revealed, and is followed by satanic activity (II Thessalonians 2.1-12) / 4b The Second Coming occurs AFTER satanic activity, and is followed by Satan being bound for the duration of the earthly Kingdom of Christ (Revelation 20.2).

These comparisons, along with further examples, show that the rapture and the Second Coming must be two distinct events within the overall victories of Christ. When all is said and done therefore, the “pre-millennial view” of these future

prophetic events, which held sway in the Church from earliest days and for centuries thereafter, still stands firm, with its expected sequence of events as follows: the rapture (the removal of the true Church from the earth); the 7-year “great tribulation”, a dreadful time of judgment upon the Jews, the Gentile nations and the apostate Church, for their rejection of Christ (Revelation 4-19); the visible, triumphant return of Christ in glory and the gathering of His “elect”, in this case meaning the surviving, believing Jews and Gentiles who have been saved during the tribulation (Matthew 24.29-31); the millennial kingdom on earth (Revelation 20); the final judgment before the great white throne (Revelation 20.11-15); and the advent of the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22).

These are clear, solemn promises in God’s Word concerning future events, involving wonderful times for all in Christ, but dreadful times for the Christ-rejecters. Do we believe these things? Would we wish for anyone to be left behind when the Lord comes, on each occasion, for His own? Because the Jews are back in their land, are we not convinced that the leaves on that fig tree of which the Lord spoke (Matthew 24.32-33) are now well-sprouted?

We worship Almighty God for His abundant mercies in Christ; we watch and pray; and we witness to these solemn truths. God is not mocked (Galatians 6.7), and these things shall surely come to pass.

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