

MISUNDERSTANDING THE "GREAT ESCAPE"

by Jack Kinsella



One of the principle misunderstandings concerning the Rapture revolves around its purpose. Critics of a pre-Tribulation Rapture deride it as some pie-in-the-sky 'Great Escape' for Christians living in the last days.

There is no such promise of 'escape' from tribulation, they argue, and (correctly) point out the Bible's promise that 'in this world ye shall have tribulation' so the pretribulation hope of a 'Great Escape' is not only delusional, it is unscriptural.

The fact is, if the pretribulation hope WAS for a 'Great Escape' from tribulation, they would be correct. There is NO promise that the Church will escape

tribulation, but there is an iron-clad promise that the Church will not go through the seven years of tribulation described by Jeremiah as the 'Time of Jacob's Trouble' or outlined by Daniel as Israel's '70th Week.'

There are several reasons for a pretribulation Rapture, not the least of which is the purpose of the Tribulation in God's unfolding Plan for the ages.

The purpose of the seven year Tribulation Period is two-fold. The first reason is to fulfill Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks. The angel told Daniel that:

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." (Daniel 9:24)

Note there are six elements to the fulfillment of this prophecy. First, to finish Israel's sin—the rejection of the Messiah at the First Advent.

Then there is a skip forward in time to His Second Advent, at which time, an end will be made of sin, reconciliation will be made for Israel's iniquity, everlasting righteousness will be introduced to Israel, Israel's Scriptures will be vindicated by the fulfillment of all prophecy and finally, the return of Christ at the conclusion of the war of Armageddon, at which time He will be anointed and will take His seat at the Throne of David.

Between the First and Second Advents there is the Church Age, a 'mystery' unrevealed to the Hebrew prophets. That is why Daniel's outline of 490 years of Israeli history doesn't anticipate a gap between the 'cutting off of the Messiah' at the end of the sixty-nine weeks of years and the confirmation of the covenant by the antichrist at the onset of the 70th. (Daniel 9:27)

From Daniel's perspective, it is an unbroken narrative of what would befall 'his people' (the Jews) and 'his holy city' (Jerusalem), culminating with the 'anointing of the Most Holy' at the conclusion of the 70th week and the ushering in of Isaiah's Millennial Kingdom. There is no role set aside for the Church in prophecy during the 70th Week, since it is reserved for Israel's national redemption and their acceptance of the Messiah.

The Church has, by definition, already accepted the Messiah and was redeemed at the Cross.

The second purpose Scripture gives for the Tribulation Period is that it is a period of judgment against those who reject Christ and embrace the antichrist.

Since Christians who accept Christ were already judged at the Cross, there is no role set aside for the Church in the judgments pronounced because,

"Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."
(Revelation 9:21)

Repentance is a necessary condition of salvation, it is that repentance that causes us to seek forgiveness at the Cross in the first place. Since believers in the Church Age became believers by repenting, there is no purpose for bringing the judgment of an unrepentant world on the Church.

The Rapture isn't a 'Great Escape', contrary to popular belief. The Rapture occurs when the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is removed with the Church to allow the onset of the 7 year period of unrestrained evil that occurs during the Tribulation. (2nd Thessalonians 2:7)

The Rapture is the Blessed Hope of the Church, but it's primary purpose is not so much a 'rescue mission' as it is a necessary function of the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraining evil. Since we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, when the Restraint is withdrawn, so are we, since we are His vessels.

Therefore, it is certain to conclude that the Church won't be here for the Tribulation itself, since withdrawing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit from the believing Church would leave them spiritually defenseless at a time of maximum need, something Jesus promised He would never do.

Jesus said we could trust Him that He would never forsake His Church, and His Church is defined as being composed of believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you FOREVER. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

But there is no reason to conclude the Church will be Raptured for the purpose of providing a 'Great Escape' for, as I said, the Rapture is necessary to withdrawal of the Restraint, rather than a rescue mission to the Church.

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." (John 14:16-18)

Christians have suffered in every generation, and continue to suffer persecution and death for their faith today in places like Vietnam, China, Sudan and most of the Islamic world.

There is no promise to the Church of the last days for a 'rescue' but rather, the Rapture is the fulfilment of an EXISTING Promise Jesus made that the Holy Spirit would Personally indwell believers and guide us in all truth 'forever'.

"In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-3)

For believers, our finite understanding of 'forever' begins with Pentecost and continues to the Rapture, at which point 'forever' takes on its eternal meaning for all believers covered under the Covenant between Jesus and the Church.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18)