

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 7

JESUS'S VISIBLE RETURN

I showed this previously but wanted to show it again because we are going to continue the same thought about Jesus – the Baptist Faith and Message has this to say under the heading “God the Son” about the return of Jesus: “[Jesus] was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into Heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever-present Lord.”

Let’s begin our study in Acts Chapter 1. Speaking of Jesus it says... “He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). So, after His resurrection Jesus spent 40 days (approx. 6 weeks) with His disciples, talking about the kingdom of God and giving final instructions to them. Then what happened? He took His disciples up to the top of the Mount of Olives as He had done many times before. And then He tells them, “‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:8-9).

[Question 6] After He spent 40 days with His disciples, what did Jesus do? **He ascended back into Heaven**

The 11 disciples watched Jesus disappear into the clouds. They strained to catch one last glimpse of Him. You can just see

them looking up into the sky. Suddenly they heard a voice behind them saying, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into Heaven will come back in the same way you saw Him go into Heaven” (Acts 1:11). They turned around and they saw two men in white robes. Whoever these men were (presumably angels), their message was clear – Jesus is coming back again! They recalled what Jesus had told them the night of Passover: “A little while, and you will not see Me, again a little while, and you WILL see Me” (John 16:17). Now they understood what Jesus meant by this. Their hearts were filled with joy and hope and they began to think of His return. They returned to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came, and the rest is history, all recorded in the Book of Acts.

So, let’s talk now about the visible return of Jesus.

One of Jesus’s last teachings to His disciples is about the end times. He is talking in Matthew Chapter 24. These are all really scary passages about judgment and all the things that are going to happen at the end. This is what Jesus says to His disciples: “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:30-31). Of course, Jesus refers to Himself in the third person as “the Son of Man.”

Then we have this passage in Revelation where the Apostle John is speaking about Jesus’s return: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen” (Revelation 1:7). Both of these passages are referring to the Second Coming of Jesus. It was also prophesied about back in Daniel Chapter 7. If we read ahead, we see that it is fulfilled in Revelation Chapter 19 when Jesus comes with the armies of

Heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. There's almost no disagreement in Christian circles as to the reality of Jesus' Second Coming. This is still future for us today. We look forward in faith to it happening someday.

There is almost no disagreement in Baptist or Christian circles as to the reality of Jesus's second coming. He said He was going to come back. The angels said He's coming back. His return is prophesied about. So, we all believe that He will.

So then, based on these passages, *[Question 7]* How will Jesus Christ return to earth? I gave several things to choose from. He will return **C**, visibly for all to see; He will return **E**, in the clouds of the sky; and He will return **F**, with power and great glory.

There is another event that's often confused with the Second Coming, but it is quite different. This is what we call the "Rapture of the Church." Now, the word "rapture" is never used in the Bible (like the word "Trinity"). However, the concept of the rapture, the "snatching out" or "catching up" of the church, IS certainly biblical. So, we are going to look at that now.

In First Corinthians Chapter 15 Paul is writing the church at Corinth and he says, "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Over in Philippians Chapter 3 Paul writes to another church: "But our citizenship is in Heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

[Question 8] Based on these passages, what will happen to the Christian when Jesus Christ comes for him or her? What will

happen at the Rapture? They will be **transformed (changed)** into a **glorified (imperishable)** body. We don't fully understand what that will look like. We can only imagine. But we look forward to it. We know it's going to be a good thing.

Let me read for you Paul's detailed description in First Thessalonians of the Rapture of the church: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, 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, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Here is where people get confused about the Rapture vs the Second Coming. The language of both has some similarities (Jesus in the clouds, angels, trumpet sounds, gathering of the elect). But when you study these two events in detail throughout the New Testament, you see some obvious differences between them. With the Rapture we have the rising of believers to meet the Lord in the air. With the Second Coming Jesus actually comes down to the earth to the Mount of Olives. In the Rapture the dead in Christ rise first and are transformed. As we just read in the Second Coming Jesus comes and sets up His Kingdom on the earth, the Millennial Kingdom. There is judgment that follows the Second Coming. But judgment is not mentioned in association with the Rapture. So, these are two completely different events. We won't

take the time to go into more detail. It makes for an interesting study. My point here is to make you aware of them.

Sandwiched in between the event we call the Rapture and the other slice of bread known as the Second Coming is the seven-year Tribulation period. It's what 13 ½ chapters of Revelation describe in horrific detail. It will not be a pleasant time. Christians and even Baptists are not in full agreement as to when the Rapture takes place. Many, like myself, believe the Rapture will occur BEFORE the Tribulation begins. Others believe it will take place about midway through the Tribulation. A few (not very many) believe the Rapture will occur at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Second Coming.

The reason I believe the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation is that I don't believe the church is going to go through the Tribulation. The Tribulation is God's wrath poured out on evil, unrepentant humanity. If you read other places in the Bible where God's wrath is coming, His judgments fall upon unbelievers (the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Nineveh are just a few examples). God always gives people a chance to repent first and He always spares a remnant of His faithful followers. That will happen at the end as well.

What I see when I study Revelation is that most of the narrative is focused on those who are left behind when the Rapture takes place. When the Apostle John is caught up to Heaven in Revelation Chapter 4, it is a picture of the Rapture. He then observes worship going on in Heaven. But those who are left behind, as you read the subsequent chapters, those who are not saved get a second chance to get saved. And while many of them do, it is not the best time to do so because most of them will end up getting martyred. As we read through Revelation most people do not repent. The majority of people do not get saved and, as a result, they will experience God's wrath.

But we Baptists do not all agree on this. They don't take a firm stand theologically on this issue. There is room in Baptist circles for debate on this. Let me show you what the Baptist Faith and Message says under the heading "Last Things" and notice how general this is: "God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness."

So, we know that there are things that will happen, like Jesus coming, the transformation of our bodies, and so forth. But we can debate WHEN all that will happen and how it will happen because the Bible isn't really clear. There is room for debate. We can formulate our own opinions.

The Baptist Faith and Message mentions Hell and judgment. We looked at this statement earlier. These are realities and I feel we need to discuss them next. We just don't talk a lot about Hell in church anymore. With that said, we Baptists believe in the reality of Hell because it is scriptural.

Paul says this in 2 Thessalonians: "...in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might" (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). This passage talks about God's judgment that will come upon all those who DO NOT know God, who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." What is the gospel of our Lord Jesus? It is how we are saved, which is by faith in Christ. This is what the apostles taught, what most of the Epistles are talking about - our salvation, our faith in Christ. The gospel of our Lord Jesus is what saves us!

Paul says judgment comes on those who do not OBEY the gospel of Christ. Coming to Christ is not an invitation. It is a

command. Jesus is not down on His knees begging us, “Please, please, please!” He is commanding us to repent. If you read Jesus’s teachings, He commands people to follow Him. It is not an invitation. Invitations are optional. I can go if I want or not. It is a command. Either you do it or else. We don’t really like to view it that way, but responding to the gospel is a call to obedience. We are commanded to come to Christ and if you don’t, well, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the passage we just read, tells you what’s going to happen. It doesn’t sound very pleasant at all!

So, what happens to a person who rejects the gospel and is not a Christian? What does the Bible say will be their fate? *[Question 9]* tells us that He (Jesus Christ Himself) will bring **judgment** on them. They will be punished in **everlasting** hell, forever **separated** from the Lord, never to see the glory of His power.

That’s depressing! We don’t like to talk about that a whole lot. We want to be uplifted and feel good. But it’s a sobering reminder that if a person is outside of Christ; if they have not made Him their personal Lord and Savior; the Bible says that they are completely without hope. That’s the message we see in this passage, in the Book of Revelation, and elsewhere. The only promise for unbelievers is that of impending doom. This is why Baptists are so committed to worldwide evangelism. That’s why we spend so much of our time and energies and give so much of our money to missions. Because time is running out! Time runs out not just when Jesus returns, but time runs out for each person when they die. And every one of us will die someday unless the Rapture occurs first. So then, what is the best time to get saved? NOW! Second Corinthians 6:2 says, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” I hope that each one of you has made Jesus your personal Lord and Savior. If not, come talk to me and we will get that issue settled for you today.