

***Supplemental Notes:***

# **The Rapture**

## **Christianity's Most Preposterous Belief?**

Clearly, the idea of the Rapture can be considered the most preposterous belief in Biblical Christianity: perhaps the only thing going for it is that it is unquestionably correct.

What is the Rapture? Is it different than the Second Coming of Christ? Is the term "rapture" even in the Bible? How should "expecting Him at any moment" affect our daily lives?

Chuck Missler explores the doctrine of the Rapture and addresses the many different views and interpretations surrounding Our Blessed Hope.

## The Rapture: Christianity's Most Preposterous Belief?

We continue to receive many questions concerning the "Rapture" of the Church and its apparent contrast with the "Second Coming" of Jesus Christ. Where does this strange view come from? Is the term "rapture" even in the Bible?

Clearly, the idea of the Rapture can be considered the most preposterous belief in Biblical Christianity. It reminds me of the famous quote by Dr. Richard Feynman, speaking of quantum physics:

*I think it is safe to say that no one understands quantum mechanics... in fact, it is often stated of all the theories proposed in this century, the silliest is quantum theory. Some say that the only thing that quantum theory has going for it, in fact, is that it is unquestionably correct.*

The situation regarding the doctrine of the Rapture is painfully similar.

### The Harpázô

The mysterious event known as the Rapture is most clearly presented in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, in which he encourages the grieving Christians that, at the "great snatch," they will be reunited with those who have died in Christ before them.

*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them*

*which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

In verse 17, the English phrase "caught up" translates the Greek word *harpázô*, which means "to seize upon with force" or "to snatch up."

There are those who claim that the word "rapture" isn't in their Bible. That's because they aren't using the Latin translation:

*Deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul **rapiemur** cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus.*

1 Thessalonians 4:17  
(Latin Vulgate)<sup>1</sup>

The Latin equivalent of the Greek *harpázô* is the Latin verb *rapio*, "to take away by force." In the Latin Vulgate, one of the oldest Bibles in existence, the appropriate tense of *rapio* appears in verse 17. (*Raptus* is the past participle of *rapio*, and our English words "rapt" and "rapture" stem from this past participle.) At the Rapture, living believers will be "caught up" in the air, translated into the clouds, in a moment in time, to join the Lord in the air.

### The Promise

This will be the fulfillment of the promise which our Lord confirmed at the Last Supper:

*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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 14:1-3

This thrilling promise wasn't given to everyone, only to His believers. (Judas had already left by then.) This appears to parallel the promise of the bridegroom in the pattern of the ancient Jewish wedding, where, after the *ketubah*, the engagement, but before the *huppah*, the formal ceremony, the groom departed to prepare a new home for his bride, usually an addition to his father's house. The bride was kept in a state of expectancy pending his return—often in the middle of the night, as a surprise. (The *huppah*, the wedding ceremony, was followed with a seven-day celebration, etc.) More on this later.

## The Process

The anticipation of a bodily resurrection after life on this earth pervades the entire Bible. In the oldest book of the Bible, Job declares:

*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.*

Job 19:25-27

Yet, when our Lord comes to gather His Church, there will be a generation alive at that time. In his discussion of the Resurrection in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul again deals with this astonishing event:

*Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

1 Corinthians 15:51-55

(From quantum physics considerations, I suspect that this transformation, "in the twinkling of an eye," will occur digitally in  $10^{-43}$  of a second.)<sup>2</sup>

## The Imminent Gathering

Clearly, the Bible teaches us to expect Him at any moment. This is called the Doctrine of Imminency: It is next on the program and may take place very soon.

(The word "imminent" should not be confused with "immanent," which, in theological contexts, means that God is not only transcendent, or far above us, but that He is always with us and active on our behalf. Nor should it be confused with "eminent," which is a title of honor reserved for persons of outstanding distinction.)

Imminency expresses hope and a warm spirit of expectancy,<sup>3</sup> which should result in a victorious and purified life.<sup>4</sup> Believers are taught to expect the Savior from heaven at any moment.<sup>5</sup>

Paul seemed to include himself among those who looked for Christ's return.<sup>6</sup> Timothy was admonished to "keep this commandment without spot,

unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> Jewish converts were reminded that “yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”<sup>8</sup>

Some have concluded that the expectation of some were so strong they had stopped work and had to be exhorted to return to their jobs,<sup>9</sup> and have patience.<sup>10</sup>

### Two Events?

There are many that hold to the view that emerged in the Medieval church (Catholic and Protestant) that the “Second Coming” of Christ and the “Rapture” are somehow the same. Yet there seems to be a number of indications that these are distinct and separate. In contrast to the imminent gathering of His Church, there are numerous passages that deal with *precedent* events which must transpire *prior* to the “Second Coming” to establish His kingdom on the earth. (Some of the passages referring to the Rapture and the Second Coming are summarized in the table on the following page.)

### Why So Many Views?

There are, of course, many differing views, especially regarding matters of eschatology—the study of “last things.” This diversity derives from several factors: the disciplines associated with *hermeneutics*—the theory of interpretation—as well as the need to integrate an understanding of the entirety of God’s revealed plan of redemption: “the whole counsel of God.”

### Pattern is Prologue: The Wedding Model

All through the Gospels, Jesus relies on the ancient Jewish wedding pattern for many of His parables,<sup>11</sup> climaxing in His promise in the Upper Room in John 14. Many of us miss the full import

of these allusions if we aren’t familiar with the model of the ancient Jewish wedding practices.

### Jewish Wedding

The first step, the *ketubah*, or betrothal,<sup>12</sup> was the establishment of the marriage covenant, usually when the prospective bridegroom took the initiative,<sup>13</sup> negotiating the price (*mohair*) he must pay to purchase her.<sup>14</sup>

Once the bridegroom paid the purchase price, the marriage covenant was established, and the young man and woman were regarded as husband and

### Rapture & Second Coming Passages

Rapture	Second Coming
Jn 14:1-3	Dan 2:44-45
Rom 8:19	Dan 7:9-14
1 Cor 1:7-8	Dan 12:1-3
1 Cor 15:1-53	Zech 14:1-15
1 Cor 16:22	Mt 13:41
Phil 3:20-21	Mt 24:15-31
Col 3:4	Mt 26:64
1 Thess 1:10	Mk 13:14-27
1 Thess 2:19	Mk 14:62
1 Thess 4:13-18	Lk 21:25-28
1 Thess 5:9	Acts 1:9-11
1 Thess 5:23	Acts 3:19-21
2 Thess 2:1 (3?)	1 Thess 3:13
1 Tim 6:14	2 Thess 1:6-10
2 Tim 4:1	2 Thess 2:8
Titus 2:13	2 Pet 3:1-14
Heb 9:28	Jude 14-15
Jas 5:7-9	Rev 1:7
1 Pet 1:7, 13	Rev 19:11-20:6
1 Jn 2:28-3:2	Rev 22:7, 12, 20
Jude 21	
Rev 2:25	
Rev 3:10	

wife.<sup>15</sup> From that moment on, the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified—set apart—exclusively for her bridegroom.<sup>16</sup> As a symbol of the covenant relationship that had been established, the groom and bride drank from a cup of wine over which the betrothal had been pronounced.<sup>17</sup>

After the marriage covenant was established, the groom left his bride at her home and returned to his father's house, where he remained separated from his bride for approximately 12 months.<sup>18</sup> This afforded the bride time to gather her trousseau and prepare for married life.<sup>19</sup> During this period of separation, the groom prepared a dwelling place in his father's house, to which he would later bring his bride.

At the end of the period of separation, the bridegroom came—usually at night—to take his bride to live with him. The groom, the best man, and other male escorts left the father's house and conducted a torch-light procession to the home of the bride.<sup>20</sup> Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the time of his coming.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout,<sup>22</sup> which announced her imminent departure to be gathered with him.

After the groom received his bride, together with her female attendants, the enlarged wedding party returned from the bride's home to the groom's father's house,<sup>23</sup> where the wedding guests had assembled.

Shortly after their arrival, the bride and groom were escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber (*huppah*). Prior to entering the chamber, the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face.<sup>24</sup> While the groomsmen and bridesmaids waited outside, the bride and groom entered the bridal chamber alone.

There, in the privacy of that place, they entered into physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted approximately one year earlier.<sup>25</sup>

After the marriage was consummated, the groom came out of the bridal chamber and announced the consummation of the marriage to the members of the wedding party waiting outside.<sup>26</sup> Then, as the groom went back to his bride in the chamber, the members of the wedding party returned to the wedding guests and announced the consummation of the marriage.<sup>27</sup> Upon receiving the good news, the wedding guests remained in the groom's father's house for the next seven days, celebrating with a great wedding feast.<sup>28</sup>

During the seven days of the wedding feast, the bride and groom remained hidden in the bridal chamber<sup>29</sup> (Cf. Gen 29:21-23, 27-28) for the seven days of the *huppah*.<sup>30</sup> Afterwards, the groom came out of hiding, bringing his bride with him, but with her veil removed, so that everyone could see her.

## The Ultimate Bride

New Testament portrays the Church as the Bride of Christ: Eph 5:22-33. (Paul even quotes Gen 2:24 as the union at the *parousia* of the Bridegroom in v.31! Cf. Romans 7:4; 2 Cor 11:2; James 4:4). In the opening verses of John 14, the marriage covenant is confirmed.<sup>31</sup> Paul continually reminds us of the purchase price,<sup>32</sup> and the covenant<sup>33</sup> by which we, the Bride, are set apart—sanctified.<sup>34</sup>

## Ecclesiology vs. Eschatology

It is this distinctive nature of the *Church* that is often overlooked by students of prophecy: it is more a matter of *ecclesiology* than *eschatology*. One thing which seems to highlight this distinctiveness

is the strange remark that Jesus made regarding John the Baptist:

*Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

Matthew 11:11

What does that mean? Jesus goes on to explain,

*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*

Matthew 11:13

It is John the Baptist that closes the Old Testament, not Malachi.<sup>35</sup> A profound distinction appears to be drawn between the saints of the Old Testament and those of the New. One of the challenges in fully appreciating Paul's epistles is the need to understand the staggering distinctive advantages afforded the Church, in contrast to those of the Old Testament.<sup>36</sup> And it is this role as the Bride of the Bridegroom that is emphasized in the parables and in the Book of Revelation.<sup>37</sup>

### The Departure of the Bridegroom

The Bridegroom has departed, and His return to gather His Bride is imminent.<sup>38</sup> He has gone to prepare a place for you and me! (and He has been at it for 2,000 years! It must be a spectacular abode!) This very doctrine of "imminence" is taught throughout the New Testament and is a cornerstone of the "pretribulation" view: there is *no* event which is a prerequisite condition for His gathering of His Bride.

### The Great Tribulation

There are those who believe the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. In exploring this is-

sue, it is essential to distinguish between persecution, which clearly has been the lot of the Church for 19 centuries, and "the Great Tribulation" of eschatological significance. The persecution—and tribulation—of the Church was clearly promised to us:

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

John 16:33

The source of this tribulation is the world and, of course, Satan. However, "the Great Tribulation" of eschatological significance is quite another matter.

*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

Matthew 24:21

The context here is clearly Israel.<sup>39</sup> Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament:

*And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.*

Daniel 12:1

Note that "thy people will be delivered." The focus of the "Great Tribulation" is *Israel*. That is why it is called "the time of Jacob's Trouble":

*Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.*

Jeremiah 30:7

Jesus (in the Old Testament) explains:

*I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly.*<sup>40</sup>

Hosea 5:15

To “return,” He must have left His place! The offence referred to is singular and specific: their rejection of Him. In “their affliction” they will ultimately repent and He will respond.<sup>41</sup>

The Great Tribulation also involves more than the wrath of the world or the wrath of Satan: it involves *the indignation and wrath of God.*<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, the church has been promised:

*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,*

1 Thessalonians 5:9

And,

*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

Romans 5:9

And, specifically,

*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour [time] of temptation [trial], which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*

Revelation 3:10

Peter also emphasizes,

*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*

2 Peter 2:9

Here Peter is using the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah “as an example,”<sup>43</sup> as Jesus also did,<sup>44</sup> in

which the *prior removal* of Lot was a precondition before the angels could do their work.<sup>45</sup>

A complete study of this issue involves careful and diligent study of both the Church (ecclesiology) as well as the eschatology (end-time aspects) of the Great Tribulation, which, of course, far exceeds the focus of this brief review. It requires precise definitions of the terms used, and great care to understand how each of the elements of the revealed truth relate to each other.

But the fundamental doctrine of imminence has to be forfeited with any view that requires the Great Tribulation—or any other precedent event—to occur prior to the Rapture.

*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

Luke 21:36

Are you going to escape these things that shall come to pass? If so, How? Or are you relying on the notion that the Lord is “delaying His coming?”<sup>46</sup> This could be a very dangerous presumption.

\* \* \*

### Seven “Raptures” Mentioned in the Bible

Philip	Acts 8:39
Paul (“3 <sup>rd</sup> heaven”)	2 Cor 12:2-4
Enoch	Gen 5:24 Heb 11:25
Elijah	2 Kings 2:1, 11
John	Rev 4:1
Jesus	Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; Rev 12:5 (“Body”? GH Pember)
Two Witnesses	Rev 11:3, 11-12

## The Church vs. the World

“Gates of Hell”: Gates are defensive, not offensive. It is the *Church* that is on the offensive. The entire world is Satan’s kingdom and is against *you*.

The Divine Counter is almost full: Romans 11:25. (“in” where?) Israel unblinded *after* “fullness come in”!! Technology of our “Translation” (1 John 3:2; 2 Corinthians 5:2).

## Rapture vs. Second Coming (see also p. 7)

### Rapture

Translation of believers  
Translated saints go to heaven  
Earth not judged  
Imminent, any moment, signless  
Not in the Old Testament  
Believers Only  
Before the Day of Wrath

### Second Coming

No translation involved  
Translated saints return to earth  
Earth judged  
Follows definite predicted signs  
Predicted in the Old Testament  
Affects all men on the earth  
Concludes the Day of Wrath

## Old Testament Hints

- Enoch and the Flood of Noah (Gen 5:24):  
Three Groups Facing Flood of Noah
  - Those that *perished in* the Flood
  - Those *preserved through* the Flood
  - Those *removed prior* to the Flood
    - Enoch Born: *Hag Shavout*
    - Enoch Translated: *Hag Shavout*

[Enoch was “pre-flood,” not “mid-flood” or “post-flood”]

Church Born: *Hag Shavout* \*

\* = Feast of Weeks, Harvest, Pentecost

- Isaac’s absence after his offering (Gen 22:19- 24:62)
- Ruth in the threshing floor scene (Ruth 3:7-9)
- Daniel’s absence from the Fiery Furnace (Dan 5)

Other Possible Old Testament Allusions include Isa 26:19-21; Zeph 2:3; and, Psalm 27:5.

## The Return of Christ to Rule

- 1,845 references in the Old Testament
- 17 books give prominence to the event
- 318 references in the New Testament
- 216 chapters
- 23 of 27 books give prominence to the event
- For every prophecy of Christ’s First Coming there are 8 of His Second Coming!

## The History of Amillennialism

- Origen: Allegorization of Scripture
- Augustine: Amillennialism
- Roman Catholic Eschatology
- Reformation failed to address...
  - Most Protestant denominations today are Amillennial and Post-Tribulationist in their eschatological views.

## Amillennial Problems

- Messianic Promises throughout the Old Testament
- Destiny of Israel in God’s Covenants
- Promise given to Mary by Angel Gabriel
- Numerous reconfirmations in the New Testament

## Post-Tribulation Views

- Classic Post-Tribulationism (Payne, et al.)
- Semi-classic Post-Tribulationism (Alexander Reese)
- Futuristic Post-Tribulationism (George E. Ladd)
- Dispensational Post-Tribulationism (Robert H. Gundry)

- Missler, Chuck, *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours* book and CD-ROM, *From Here to Eternity, Thy Kingdom Come, The Next Holocaust and the Refuge in Edom* briefing packs, *Expositional Commentaries* on the books of *Corinthians, Daniel, Thessalonians* and *Revelation* (tape and CD-ROM).
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- Tipler, Frank J., *The Physics of Immortality*, Doubleday, New York NY, 1994.
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#### Notes:

1. Bonifatius Fischer, *Biblia Sacra : Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, Ed. quartam emendatam., Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1969.
2. For a discussion of the physics of immortality, see our briefing package, *From Here to Eternity*.
3. 1 Thess 1:10.
4. 1 Jn 3:2,3.
5. Phil 3:20; Titus 2:13; Heb 9:28; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:18; 5:6; Rev 22:20; et al.
6. 1 Thess 4:15,17; 2 Thess 2:1.
7. 1 Tim 6:14.
8. Heb 10:37.
9. 2 Thess 3:10-12.
10. James 5:8.
11. Cf. Mt 22:1-14 and Mt 25:1-13 for notable examples.
12. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isaac Landman ed., Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., Inc. New York, 1948, 7, 372.
13. David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1953, p.167.
14. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.372.

15. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isidore Singer ed., Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1907, III, pp.126,127. Cf. Mal 2:14; Mt 1:18-19.
16. George F. Moore, *Judaism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1946, II, p.121.
17. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.373.
18. *Ibid.*, p.372.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *The Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr ed., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI, 1957, III, p.1998.
21. Emma Williams Gill, *Home Life in the Bible*, Broadman Press, Nashville TN, 1936, p.20.
22. James Neil, *Everyday Life in the Holy Land*, Cassell and company, Limited, New York, 1913, p.251.
23. J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol IV, ed. By Gerhard Kittel, trans. And ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI, 1967, p.1100.
24. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isaac Landman, Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., Inc., New York, 1948, 10, 399.
25. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.373.
26. Cf. Ps 19:5; John 3:29.
27. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.5, 504.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. 1 Cor 11:25.
32. 1 Cor 6:19-20.
33. 1 Cor 11:25-26.
34. Eph 5:25-27; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Heb 10:10; 13:12.
35. Lk 16:16.
36. Eph 3:3ff.
37. Mt 22:1-4; 25:1-13; and Rev 18:23; 19:7-9; 21:2, 9; 22:17.
38. Cf. Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19, 20; Lk 5:34, 35; Jn 3:29; Rev 18:23.
39. Mt 24:16, 20.
40. KJV: early. The word is שָׁחַר *shachar*, "to seek, seek earnestly, look early or diligently for."
41. See our briefing pack, *The Next Holocaust and the Refuge in Edom*, for a detailed review of Isaiah 63, et al.
42. Rev 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 17; 16:1, 19; 19:15.
43. 2 Pet 2:6.
44. Lk 17:28-37.
45. Gen 19:22.
46. Mt 24:48-51.



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