

RAPTURE – TIMING IS EVERYTHING

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There is a major world wide event that is going to take place in the near future known as the “*RAPTURE*”¹ or catching away of the church. The bible teaches that the body of Christ will be changed or removed from our present bodily existence in a nano-second, the twinkling of an eye². At that moment, the dead in Christ will rise first and then we (the believers in Jesus Christ) will be caught-up³ (our word rapture) with them and meet Jesus Christ in the clouds outside of our present atmosphere⁴. Why? “What is going on and where do you get this stuff,” you might ask. First and foremost, the bible is the authority on this subject since “*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*”⁵. Notwithstanding, Peter warns us that no single Scripture is of “*private interpretation*”⁶ and as such, must be harmonized with all of the Scriptures found on the teaching. This event is taught by Jesus Himself found in Luke 21:34-36, John 14:1-4 and Revelation 4:1-2. Jesus teaches that they (His Apostles and the future church) should “*pray that they may be counted worthy to escape all of the*

¹ “Rapture” is taken from the Latin word raptus, translated “caught up” from the verb rapere, which means “to transport from one place to another.”

² 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 NKJV

³ Strong’s Concordance: our english language word “caught” = word # 726 - Greek *harpazo* meaning to seize, catch away, pluck, pull, take (by force)

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NKJV

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV

⁶ 2 Peter 1: 19-21 NKJV

things which shall come to pass”¹. Paul, by example continues this teaching:

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” 1Thessalonians 5:23-24 NKJV

The things which shall come to pass that Jesus speaks of are found in His teachings known as the Olivet discourse located in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:1-34. Jesus taught that the rapture would take place, but He did not immediately give His Apostles the details of how it would happen until He revealed it to Paul later². Paul then writes the details for us:

“But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.” 1Corinthians 15:23 NKJV

“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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” 1Corinthians 15:51-58 NKJV

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet

¹ Luke 21:36 NKJV

² Galations 1:12 NKJV

of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” 1Thessalonians 4:13-17 NKJV

The timing of Paul’s writings are important because the truths as he taught them had to be verified. We find in the book of Acts chapter 17 that Paul and Silas had come to Thessalonica teaching in the synagogue for three Sabbaths before they were run out of town.¹ During those three to four weeks, they had taught them several significant doctrines: The gospel of Jesus Christ (which is salvation by grace found in the Old² and New Testament³), the immanency of the return of Jesus for His saints at a pre-tribulation rapture (which Paul taught at Philippi prior to this⁴)⁵, the method of how it would happen⁶, that Jesus would present the saints to God holy and blameless⁷ for judgment⁸, how to live a holy life unto God⁹ and what condition the world as they knew it would be in prior to the false Christ being revealed¹⁰. This last doctrine was extremely important to them because the people they were teaching in Thessalonica were Jews and had a full understanding of the tribulation period known as the 70th week of

¹ Acts 17:1-10 NKJV

² Joel 2:32 NKJV

³ John 5:24 NKJV

⁴ 1Thessalonians 2:2 NKJV

⁵ Philippians 3:20-21 NKJV

⁶ 1Thessalonians 4:14-18, 5:1-13 NKJV

⁷ 1Thessalonians 3:13 NKJV

⁸ 2Timothy 4:8 NKJV

⁹ 1Thessalonians 5:13-28 NKJV

¹⁰ 2Thessalonians 2:7-8 NKJV

Daniel¹, the time of Jacobs' trouble.² Many Thessalonians became believers. This truth is verified by Paul as he spends time in his 1st letter to them explaining that he and the other believers with him have heard about them and their belief in Christ from the people of Macedonia, Achaia and all of the surrounding areas.³

Immediately after leaving Thessalonica, Paul & Silas came to Berea. Paul taught in their synagogue proving that the Bereans were also Jewish. They listened to Paul but did not take his word for these doctrines, the same doctrines that he had just taught in Thessalonica:

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These (Berean Jews) were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men." Acts 17:10-12 NKJV

Apparently, the teachings that Paul made could be verified by the Bereans. How? Well, the above passage makes it clear that they searched the Scriptures daily for proof that it was all true. This is essential for our understanding. Paul wrote 1Thesslonians in 52 AD.⁴ The timing of this letter to the Thessalonians is noteworthy for us. The only New Testament Scripture available in writing and circulating at that time was the gospel of

¹ Daniel 9:24-27 NKJV

² Jeremiah 30:7 NKJV

³ 1Thessalonians 1:1-10 NKJV

⁴Johnson, B. W. "Chronology of Acts and the Epistles," The People's New Testament. Blue Letter Bible. 1 Apr 2002. 22 Oct 2005. <<http://blueletterbible.org/study/pnt/pnt02.html>>

Matthew, which was written to the Jews primarily and recorded in 43 AD¹. The Bereans may have used this writing of Scripture as proof text because of the many Old Testament prophecies that Matthew proves were fulfilled by Jesus. The other New Testament teachings of Jesus available in that day were spread by word of mouth from eyewitnesses and disciples of Jesus in that time. That means that the balance of these truths must be able to found and verified in the Old Testament Scriptures which the Bereans had available in their synagogues. The covenant changing², salt and light in the world with neighbor teaching neighbor the gospel³, a new people (the church) that will be God's people from the gentiles⁴, resurrection from the dead⁵ and the glorious appearing of the messiah with the saints.⁶ As we saw in Acts 17:12, not only did they believe Paul, they became believers in Jesus Christ as their Savior!

The Thessalonians however are more like us. They believed Paul and Silas, but then started to listen to anyone who had good sounding doctrine that was close to what they thought might be true, but did not check it with Scripture. Such things as; Paul & Silas were traveling preachers looking for

¹ Johnson, B. W. "Chronology of Acts and the Epistles," The People's New Testament. Blue Letter Bible. 1 Apr 2002. 23 Oct 2005. <<http://blueletterbible.org/study/pnt/pnt02.html>>.

² Jeremiah 31:31-33 NKJV

³ Jeremiah 31:34 NKJV

⁴ Hosea 2:23 NKJV

⁵ Job 19:25-27

⁶ Zechariah 14:5-9 NKJV

financial support¹, living a holy and blameless life is not possible in their time² and that sexual relationships were normal and acceptable.³ They were experiencing much conflict and persecution, which they did not think would happen now that they were Christians.⁴ Lastly, they had people teaching that there was no resurrection from the dead.⁵ This was a very real concern for them because Paul had taught them that Jesus could come at anytime for His church and they had relatives that were dying either during persecution or natural deaths. They believed what others were telling them that they should have all been raptured before they died! As Paul heard about this, he sent his first letter to them to correct their doctrine to bring it back inline with what he had originally taught them. (*1Thessalonians*) In this letter, he gives them the details all over again. He further admonishes them about the timing of the Day of The LORD:

*“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. **For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.** For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. **For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our***

¹ 1Thessalonians 2:1-12 NKJV

² 1Thessalonians 3:9-13 NKJV

³ 1Thessalonians 4:1-9 NKJV

⁴ 1Thessalonians 2:14-19, 3:1-7 NKJV

⁵ 1Thessalonians 4:13-14 NKJV

Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." 1Thessalonians 5:1-10 NKJV

Paul believed that this letter should do it so far as correcting doctrine. By going through each of these items point by point, it would appear that the teachings were clarified. In his admonishment to them in chapter 5, he wastes no time correcting them about things that they as Jews should have known all along! However, about 9 months later, Paul has to write another letter¹ of correction about their doctrine and life style. They had brothers in Christ not working anymore or helping because they thought from Paul's last letter that the work was finished and they were waiting for rapture causing great dissension in the local church. The persecution of the Jewish Christians by other Jews and the Romans had increased significantly. Again, they believed other false teachers that claimed that the persecutions and killings were proof that the tribulation period had started. In 2Thessalonians, Paul corrects them once again. He knows that they are growing in their faith, but they keep listening to false teachers and reading phony letters about his teachings. Some of the most compelling items are found in chapter 2:

"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, (rapture) we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either

¹ Johnson, B. W. "Chronology of Acts and the Epistles," The People's New Testament. Blue Letter Bible. 1 Apr 2002. 23 Oct 2005. <<http://blueletterbible.org/study/pnt/pnt02.html>>.

by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he(antichrist) may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” 2Thessalonians 2:1-12 NKJV

Paul makes it clear to them to not be shaken about the things they are hearing. Why would they be shaken? Because they were taught that the rapture precedes the tribulation period and false teachers were telling them that it had already arrived. They thought they had missed the rapture! He also clarified the order that the events must take place; there will be a “falling away” that must come first. The Greek word used here for “falling away” is *apostasia*¹ or apostasy meaning “defection from the true religion.”² That means that there is going to be a defection from God’s Law and the way of the truth by people in the church. There will be deceivers teaching

¹ Strong's Concordance: our English words “falling away” = Strong's # 646 *apostasia* meaning, a falling way, defection, apostacy. (from the root word # 647 *apostasion* meaning divorce, repudiation, bill of divorce)

² Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for 'apostasia (Strong's 646) ' ". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2002. 23 Oct 2005. <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-bin/words.pl?word=646&page=1>>

doctrines that are contrary to God's Law being taught by people in the church.

Lawlessness was (and is) at work, just look around. But this is restrained lawlessness. Paul makes it clear that the lawless one (antichrist) cannot be revealed until the restrainer removes himself. The lawless one practices lawlessness on earth. That is, everything opposite and contrary to God's Law. Who is restraining Satan and his plans right now? How is lawlessness being prevented right this minute? It is the Holy Spirit indwelling the believers in Jesus Christ.¹ Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit will be "*given as the Helper that would convict the world of sin*"² and would "*abide with you forever*".³ Forever seems like a long time. Because of the presence of the body of Christ (the church), there is a restrain on moral and ethical issues like abortion, stealing, murder, rape, or anything else contrary to God's Law. It is easy to see in countries that are opposed to Christianity or Judaism lawlessness, anarchy or dictatorship that seems to us to go unchecked. It does not mean that there are not Christians or Jews living in these Nations. These Nations rulers are under a different spiritual influence.

¹ John 14:16-17

² John 16:8 NKJV

³ John 14:16 NKJV

Until antichrist is revealed, the tribulation period cannot start.¹ It should be noted that the revealing of the antichrist is not what triggers the tribulation period. It is the “*confirming of the covenant with Israel*”² that begins the tribulation clock for the 70th week of Daniel. Antichrist cannot be revealed until the Holy Spirit removes Himself. Now, Paul is not saying that the Holy Spirit will not be present during the tribulation period because Revelation proves that there will be a “*great multitude which no one could number*”³ that “*have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*”⁴ during the tribulation period. Only the Holy Spirit can convict men’s hearts the same as He does now. How does He remove Himself? In order for Him to remove Himself, there has to be a period of time when there are no believers of Jesus Christ on the Earth. How is that possible? The believers will have to be removed or translated. He removes Himself when the church is raptured.⁵ The Thessalonians knew this, which is why they were so upset at the fact that the rapture may have already taken place and they were not included. According to Paul’s teaching, if the rapture had taken place (as they were being told by others) then they were

¹ 2Thessalonians 2:6-8 NKJV

² Daniel 9:27 NKJV

³ Revelation 7:9 NKJV

⁴ Revelation 7:13-14 NKJV

⁵ “Rapture” is taken from the Latin word *raptus*, translated “caught up” from the verb *rapere*, which means “to transport from one place to another.”

not really believers in Jesus Christ and their eternal salvation had not taken place. Paul clears this up for them too in verses 13 through 15:

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” 2Thessalonians 2:13-15 NKJV

Paul warns them over and over again not to be deceived. Check the teacher and the teaching to see how it squares with the Word of God. Jesus had the same warning found in Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24:24, Mark 13:22, Luke 6:26. Peter and John also warn us in 2Peter 2:1 as well as 1John 4:1. There are other verses concerning rapture found elsewhere in the bible. Jesus’ half brother James and the Apostles John and Peter confirm this in James 5: 7-8; 1 John 2:28; 1 Peter 5:4.

So how does this prove that rapture is still coming? The two key events Paul wrote about in 2Thessalonians have not happened yet; the *“falling away”* and the *“revealing of antichrist.”* Concerning a falling away, just look at the last century alone. Since about 1870, new belief systems that are contrary to God's teaching have abounded including: socialism, communism, agnosticism, atheism, secular humanism, universalism, scientology, and liberal Christianity (meaning you can interpret the bible as you sit fit or not use bible doctrines at all and still call

yourselves the church). You do not have to go very far to find that many of these belief systems have made it into what we would call our churches. There is much bible prophecy written concerning the time we are living in right now. The major key to all prophecy is Israel and what God is doing with them. In approximately 1400 BC, it was predicted in the Old Testament that Israel would turn away from God and be scattered around the world¹ hundreds of years before it happened. God gave this vision first to Moses in Deuteronomy and then Ezekiel hundreds of years later. In 70 AD, Israel was scattered around the world. Ezekiel writes that Israel will be re-gathered² as a nation and proceeds to give us all of the details in advance. It happened on May 14, 1948. In order for the prophecies of the bible to be completed, Israel had to be a nation once again for God is still going to be dealing with them as well as a Christ rejecting world. Antichrist is going to set up an image of himself in the temple in Jerusalem and declare himself God.³ In order for any of this to take place, there has to be a temple in Jerusalem and there has to be a Jewish Nation worshipping at that temple. Israel had been scattered as a people around the world without a nation since 70 AD, but are now in existence again. There is an organization in Israel known as the Temple Institute that has already completed creating all of the

¹ Deuteronomy 28:64 NKJV, Ezekiel 11:16 NKJV

² Ezekiel 36:24 NKJV

³ Daniel 9:27b NKJV, Matthew 24:15 NKJV, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 NKJV

implements required of Jewish Temple worship including the training of over 500 priests to serve in the temple.¹ So, if these prophecies are being fulfilled before our eyes, why hasn't rapture taken place yet? It is God's patience, grace, and mercy for anyone who has not yet received His Son as Lord and Savior. Peter explains it best:

*“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, **knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”** For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, **do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**” 2Peter 3:8-9 NKJV*

Peter makes the issue clear that in the “*end days*” scoffers would show up saying “I have been hearing about this nonsense for years and nothing has ever happened. My grandmother used to tell me about the rapture and she is dead and gone.” Peter writes:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2Peter 3:9 NKJV

¹ <http://www.templeinstitute.org/main.htm>

Jesus wants all of us to be saved from eternal separation from Him after we die and He gives us this truth; that anyone can come to Him. Hear how Jesus explains it to the highest and most scholarly teacher of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus:

*“Nicodemus answered and said to Him, **“How can these things be?”** Jesus answered and said to him, **“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** John 3:9-21 NKJV*

The Scriptures are clear that when the rapture happens, everyone will be surprised: *“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.”* Matthew 24:44 NKJV

Please, do not take my word for it. Be a Berean and check my Scriptures and references to find out whether these things were so. If they are as I have written, then please do as the Bereans did next: *“Therefore many of them believed.”* Acts 17:12 NKJV