

V. Phillip Jellerson

- ◆ ***Before the tribulation?***
- ◆ ***During the tribulation?***
- ◆ ***After the tribulation?***
- ◆ ***This book settles it!***

THE Church RAPTURE

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The Return Of Jesus

We live in a world that is unaware;
Yea, they don't even seem to care
That the day is perhaps very near
When Jesus is going to appear.

We live in a world that has little concern
That one day Jesus is going to return.
They're too busy searching for earth's treasure
And forbidding nothing that brings them pleasure.

We live in a world where there is little fear
Of the day when Jesus will suddenly appear;
'cause their minds are evil and their souls are black,
They couldn't care less that Jesus is coming back.

We live in a world that struggles each night and day;
Each one making a life in his own helpless way.
Their mortal bodies are tired and their spirits sour
Yet aren't consoled by His return at some soon hour.

V. Phillip Jellerson, Composer

Aids And Explanations

I wish to apologize for any mistakes to be found in this book. I wish there were none but that is unlikely. Some mistakes may be mine while others will occur in the production process. I hope that any grammar, punctuation, or typographical errors will not detract from the value of the information or your enjoyment.

Following are the explanations of terms used throughout this book.

Tribulation period refers to the **last seven years** just prior to Christ's return to earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom (1,000 years of earthly rule in Jerusalem).

Pre-tribulation means **before** the tribulation period begins.

Pre-tribulation rapture suggests a rapture which occurs **before** the tribulation period begins.

Pre-tribulationists **are** those who believe that the rapture of the church will happen **before** the tribulation period begins.

The below examples show how to read Bible references used in the book.

Revelation 19 refers to Revelation Chapter 19

Revelation 19-21 means Revelation Chapters 19 thru 21

Revelation 19,21 means Revelation Chapters 19 and 21

Revelation 19:21 means Revelation Chapter 19 verse 21

Revelation 19:21-24 means Revelation Chapter 19 verses 21 thru 24

Revelation 19:21,24 means Revelation Chapter 19 verses 21 and 24

Revelation 19:21-24,30 means Revelation Chapter 19 verses 21 thru 24 and verse 30

Introduction

A Discussion Of The Rapture

The rapture is probably the most arousing prophetic subject for Christians. Regrettably it is one of the most mistaught prophetic subjects. The rapture is always connected to the tribulation period in one of three positions.

1. BEFORE the tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture)
2. DURING the tribulation (mid-tribulation rapture)
3. AFTER the tribulation (post-tribulation rapture)

The question has been asked, "Does it really matter when the rapture takes place?" Yes and No. To those who have passed on it makes no difference. To those who are here when the tribulation arrives it will matter a great deal. It is this author's opinion that many who live today will greet the tribulation period.

We begin by defining the word "rapture." It is widely known that the term "rapture" is not in the Bible. That leads some to question the validity of the rapture but the absence of the word "rapture" is not grounds for its dismissal. "Trinity" is not in the Bible but it is commonly recognized as Biblical. Trinity defines God as existing in three persons: God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The original language of the New Testament is Greek. Later the Greek manuscripts were translated into Latin. In the Latin translation the Greek word "harpadso" was translated "rapture" which was adopted by the English translators. The Greek word "harpadso" means to seize or snatch up which loosely describes what will happen at the rapture. Christians will be snatched up bodily to meet the Lord in the air at the rapture. Paul expressed it as being "caught up" in I Thessalonians 4:17.

The Bible tells of several individuals who were raptured (snatched up or caught up) to heaven. Enoch was the first. He was strolling along one day in communion with God when he suddenly disappeared from earth. The Bible says, *And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.*

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Genesis 5:24 Enoch experienced a rapture in that he was snatched from earth to heaven by God.

Next is Elijah the prophet. He was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire. (II Kings 2:11) This too was a type of the coming rapture - a "snatching up" from earth to heaven. In Revelation we see the rapture of God's two witnesses in Jerusalem during the tribulation period. The Antichrist murdered them but that was not the end. Look at what happened.

And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them. Revelation 11:11-12 Here we have both a resurrection and a rapture. God's two witnesses were revived (brought back to life) and raptured (caught up) to heaven.

There is no need to doubt the rapture just because it is not Biblical language. God performed real life instances of the rapture with Enoch, Elijah, and His two witnesses of The Revelation. Paul wrote an accurate description of the rapture in I Thessalonians 4:16-17. Instead of "rapture" (snatched up) Paul said we would be "caught up" to be with the Lord. There will be a rapture regardless of the terminology used.

Now, concerning the time of the rapture, it is routinely preached that it could happen at any moment. This is referred to as an "imminent" rapture meaning "any moment" rapture. For there to be an imminent rapture there must be no prophecy which has to be fulfilled before the rapture. In other words, there is no unfinished prophecy keeping the rapture from happening NOW.

The pre-tribulationists say that the rapture can occur at any moment meaning it is imminent. That means that the tribulation period, in a sense, is also imminent because it immediately follows the rapture. That can not be! The tribulation period is scheduled for a specific date on God's prophetic calendar and it will not happen before the planned time.

The truth is there can be no imminent rapture or tribulation period because there is prophecy now in progress and prophetic events yet to come

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which bring us to the tribulation period. Yet we continue to hear of an imminent rapture. Here are some Bible verses which are purported as teaching an imminent rapture.

Matthew 24:36 *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

Matthew 24:42 *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

Matthew 24:44 *Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

The fact that the Lord's return is unknowable does not necessarily translate into His imminent return. All the above warnings refer to Jesus' appearing in Matthew 24:30 which comes AFTER the tribulation period. (Matthew 24:29) Therefore, imminency cannot be ascribed to the Christ's return, the rapture or the tribulation.

The imminent rapture theory finds basis in the apparent truth that Paul and the early Christians expected Christ to return in their lifetimes. That expectancy is seen in the following verses.

Peter wrote: *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.* I Peter 4:7 Do you suppose that when Peter said that the end of everything is *at hand* that he had the year 2008 and beyond in mind? Not likely. Doubtless Peter believed that the *end* would come in his time.

Paul wrote: *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.* Romans 13:11 Notice Paul's use of the plural pronouns *our* and *we*.

It seems certain that Paul and his companions believed that the Lord Jesus would return while they yet lived. Paul's *knowing the time* refers to the spiritual depravity of those days. In light of that spiritual darkness Paul said that their salvation (rapture) was *nearer* than they had believed. Do you think that *nearer* in their minds stretched to the year 2008? No, they expected deliverance from this sinful world by the rapture in their lifetime.

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I Corinthians 15:51-52 *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.* Paul named we three times indicating that he expected that he and his fellow Christians would be alive at the rapture.

I Thessalonians 4:17 *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.* Notice again the use of the plural first person pronoun we.

I Timothy 6:14 *That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul admonished Timothy to keep his commandment until Jesus Christ appeared.

It is obvious from Paul's letters that he and the early Christians believed that the Lord would return in their lifetimes. Of course we know that He did not because we await His return. What happened? It will be explained momentarily but first let us look at Paul's comment about his impending death.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day... II Timothy 4:6-8

Paul declares his readiness to be a martyr for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has convinced Paul that the Roman Emperor, Nero, will soon take his head. He accepted the fact of his death and no longer expected Jesus Christ to return for him and the church beforehand. How could it be that Paul had believed that Jesus Christ would return in his time but now with his death near knows that it will not be so?

The fact is Paul never taught an imminent return of Jesus Christ. Their belief that Christ would return in their lifetimes was not born of any Biblical or church doctrine. In fact, Paul gave an abbreviated outline of prophetic events which discounts an imminent rapture.

II Thessalonians 2:1-4 *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

To understand Paul's prophecy we need to know what *that day* in verse 3 is. *That day* refers to the *day of Christ* in verse 2. Paul explained that the rapture, *our gathering together unto him* (verse 1), in *the day of Christ* (verse 2) would not occur before: (1) a time of *falling away* and (2) *that man of sin be revealed*, which is the Antichrist.

Those two events did not happen in Paul's time so how could he and his Christian brethren believe that Christ would return in their time? Simple, they expected those events to happen in their time. They did not know how far in the future those events were. Considering the oppressive Roman rule and the unchecked Christian persecution of their time it is understandable how they believed that Jesus would come for the church in their time.

Are they of the early church to be faulted for believing that Christ would return in their time? Certainly not. It was this expectancy that motivated and sustained them through serious tribulation. The Bible teaches Christians to live in expectation of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)

We must not overlook the fact that the imminent rapture theory is not without contradiction. Many who teach an imminent rapture also believe that the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 represent seven specific and successive church periods within the Church Age. Ephesus, the first church, represents the first church period. Smyrna pictures the second church period and so on with Laodicea being the last church period.

Do you see the problem? If the seven churches represent seven successive church periods in the Church Age then the rapture cannot be imminent - cannot happen at any moment. It could not happen until the completion of the Laodicean church period which many feel is where the

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church is now. If the rapture is imminent then there can be no seven church periods. If there are seven church periods then an imminent rapture is not possible.

An imminent rapture? Impossible! Jesus, Paul and John all placed the rapture AFTER the tribulation period.

* * * * *

One last word about the rapture before we jump into the main subject. Did you know that the rapture keeps a promise made by Jesus and answers a prayer of His also?

A promise kept - While on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane with the disciples on the night that He was taken into custody Jesus made this promise.

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 an 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

A prayer answered - Later that same evening Jesus prayed to the Father and asked the following.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. John 17:24

Every Christian can take Jesus' promise and prayer as personally. He had YOU and ME in mind when He spoke that promise and prayed that prayer for us to be with Him.

Therefore let us pray, "Come, Lord Jesus....."

PART 1

The Lord's Rapture

The Lord's Rapture

The Lord's prophecy in Matthew Chapter 24 points to one main event and it is a knockout. Jesus prophesied,

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.
Matthew 24:30-31

This is the climactic event of the Lord's prophecy. All that was said before this event points to it and all that follows explains it. In His tribulation prophecy Jesus voiced two urgent warnings: *watch* and *be ready*. verses 42, 44 Both warnings relate to the climactic event.

There are two critically different views concerning the identification of the climactic event which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:30-31.

View 1 The event is the gathering of the Jews from around the world back to Israel. That makes this event the second coming of Christ to earth when He sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

View 2 The event is the rapture of the church at Christ's appearing in the air. He sends forth the angels to gather the church to Him.

This is no petty matter because the two views are different events which occur at different times. Whichever view a Christian holds will affect his/her outlook and expectation of the Lord's return. They will display one of two attitudes depending on their belief of the climactic event.

First attitude - Christians who believe this event to be the gathering of Israel into the Millennial Kingdom assign the Lord's prophecy to Israel. They tend to pay little heed to Jesus' warnings to *watch* and *be ready* because they believe that this event concerns Israel.

Second attitude - Christians who see this event as the rapture of the church realize that Jesus' prophecy is for the church. They understand that the church will experience the tribulation that Jesus preached. They will take seriously His warnings to *watch* and to *be ready* and live expectantly of His coming.

The climactic event will be a thriller for both Israel and the church. We have got to settle in our minds what this climactic event in the Lord's prophecy is. With that as our spur we will carefully study this climactic event to determine its identity.

Israel's Gathering

We begin by looking at the gathering of Israel at Christ's second coming to earth. By many prophets God warned Israel that they would be driven from their land and scattered among the nations if they failed to keep His commandments. Moses issued the first such warning. *And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other...* Deuteronomy 28:64

Foolishly Israel failed to observe God's many warnings. Consequently Israel was taken captive by many nations over a period of time. Foreign powers such as Assyria, Syria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome besieged Israel destroying their land and taking the Jews captive. They have been populating foreign lands for nearly three thousand years. Many millions of Jews never knew their homeland. This is truly a tragic story.

Israel remains a scattered nation but one day they will return to the land God gave them. With each warning of dispersion there was a promise of gathering, such as this one by Jeremiah. *And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord...* Jeremiah 29:14

While it is true that Israel has seen a partial gathering since 1948 it is a prelude to the total gathering promised throughout the Old Testament. The tribulation period will create in the hearts of the Jews an intense yearning for their Messiah. When Jesus Christ comes back to earth and saves Israel at the Battle of Armageddon the Jews will recognize their Messiah. They will

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return to Israel from all over the world to serve their Messiah King.

God spoke of this future gathering of Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. *Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there.* Ezekiel 39:28

When Jesus Christ returns and establishes His Millennial Kingdom (a thousand year reign on earth) all Jews from around the world will return to Israel, their promised land. Not only will they repatriate their land but they will dwell in complete safety as spoken by Ezekiel.

And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. Ezekiel 34:28

IMPORTANT: All the prophecies pertaining to the gathering of Israel will happen when Jesus Christ returns to earth. Jesus Christ does NOT return to earth in Matthew 24:30-31. He only appears in the heaven for the rapture of the church which Paul described in I Thessalonians 4:16-17

When we have finished this book we will know that it is gathering of the church which takes place in Matthew 24:30-31 NOT the gathering of Israel.

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Old Testament prophecy repeatedly declares that one day all Jews will be gathered to Israel but that is not the event Jesus related in Matthew 24:30-31. Many believe that it is but it cannot be for these reasons.

1. Jesus does not come to earth at this event. Therefore He cannot set up His earthly kingdom and receive the Jews back to Israel.
2. Jesus dispatches angels to gather the elect and bring them to meet Him in the air. The Jews will be gathered to meet Jesus in Israel not in the air.
3. No Jews will come from heaven at the gathering of Israel. To explain that we read Mark's parallel writing to Matthew's 24:30-31.

Mark wrote, *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.* Mark 13:26-27

Jesus will send the angels to gather His elect from all of earth and all of heaven. That will not happen with the gathering of Israel. The Jews will migrate to Israel from all over the world but none from heaven. At Christ's appearing all Christians on earth and in heaven will be gathered together to meet the Lord in the air. (I Thessalonians 4:13-17)

The climactic event of Matthew 24:30-31 becomes clear if one understands the prophecy before and after it. Here is a simple outline of the Lord's prophecy leading up to the climactic event.

- verses 4-8 world tribulation
- verses 9-14 Church tribulation
- verses 15-21 Israel's tribulation
- verse 22 the promise of deliverance
- verses 23-26 false religion, false Christs and false hope
- verses 27-28 the manner of Christ's appearing
- verses 29-31 The Climactic Event**

The following outline explains the climactic event.

verses 29-31 the Climactic Event

- verses 32-35 explain how to know the nearness of the event
- verses 36-39 explain the lack of awareness of that event
- verses 40-41 explain a separation that will happen at that event
- verses 42-44 explain the need to watch and be ready for that event
- verses 45-51 explain the faithful and unfaithful servants

In verses 30-31 Jesus described the climactic event as a "gathering." We will learn that this gathering is the rapture of the church. At this gathering some will be taken to be with Jesus Christ and some will be left behind. In verses 45-51 Jesus explains that the faithful will be rewarded while the unfaithful will be punished.

We will now show that the event in Matthew 24:30-31 is the gathering of the church at the rapture. We will do that by comparing language of the text with other accepted rapture verses. We begin with:

The "clouds" Of The Rapture

Clouds are associated with the Lord's return at the rapture a number of times. Interestingly this truth has its beginning with the Lord's ascension into heaven after His resurrection.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Acts 1:9-11

After giving the apostles their final instructions on the Mount of Olives Jesus returned to heaven. The apostles watched as He rose and disappeared into a cloud. How shocked they must have been. As they stood eyeing Jesus ascend to heaven two angelic men adorned in white robes suddenly joined them. They informed the apostles that Jesus will return in the same manner in which He left.

That means that Jesus will return from heaven bodily and visibly. Also, whereas Jesus disappeared into a cloud at His departure He will appear from the clouds at His return. Here are four more verses which agree.

Matthew 26:64 - *...nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Mark 13:26 - *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*

Mark 14:62 - *...and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Luke 21:27 - *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

Perhaps Paul gave the best presentation of Jesus returning in the clouds of heaven in this most cherished description of the rapture. He wrote:

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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. I Thessalonians 4:16-17

These are cornerstone verses for the rapture of the church. What Christian does not know these verses? Jesus Christ will appear from the clouds of heaven and perform the resurrection and the rapture. We will be escorted by angels to meet the Lord in the *clouds*. Paul's description of the rapture compares with that of Jesus in Matthew 24:30-31. They gave us two different views of the same event - the rapture.

The Apostle John greeted the seven churches of The Revelation with Jesus coming back with clouds. *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.* Revelation 1:7

Behold, he cometh with clouds can only be the rapture of the church. Some have declared this to be Christ's return to earth but that is prophetically improper. Surely John and all the Christians he wrote to were looking for the rapture. The church still waits for His appearing in the clouds at the rapture. Christians are not waiting to COME BACK with Christ. They are looking TO GO to Him at the rapture.

John saluted the seven churches with *Behold, he cometh with clouds...* That is what Jesus said of His appearing ...*they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven...* Matthew 24:30 It is unshakeable that John greeted the seven churches with the hope of the rapture not Christ's return to earth.

Daniel wrote prophesied of Israel in the coming tribulation period but did you know that he too wrote about Christ coming in the *clouds of heaven*? In Chapter 7 Daniel related his vision of four beasts representing four Gentile world kingdoms which would be ruled by Christ.

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him:

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