

# RAPTURE- as seen through the Holy Bible

Many professed Christians in these last days constantly express with vigor and zest their belief in rapture or what they call a 'rapturous meeting' with the Lord on that great day of his coming.

Though they differ in details, the advocates of the rapture doctrine essentially believe that Jesus Christ will return in person, in flesh and blood to the earth, at an unknown future date when all the faithful will at the blast of an angelic trumpet ascend to meet the Lord physically in the air. Unbelievers however shall be consigned forever to the fiery furnace of hell.

The term 'rapture' is said to come from the Latin word '*rapturo*' meaning 'caught up' in the sense used by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17. The Greek equivalent is '*harpazo*' which means to catch away. Rapture, therefore, refers to the belief among many professed Christians that during the Lord's second presence he will 'catch away' the resurrected and living believers from earth to heaven. Interestingly the proponents of the rapture doctrine acknowledge that the word is not in the Bible. Roger P. Daniel in his book *FROM RAPTURE TO REIGNING: myth or reality?* States: "*Although the word is not directly used in our English Bibles, many believe it expresses a Scriptural thought*"

The mistake many people make is that they do not understand that Christians are divided into two distinct classes –the Little Flock (who will go to heaven Luke – 12:32; 22:28-30) and the other sheep who will be blessed in God's Kingdom here on earth. – John 10:16,27-29; Matthew 5:5

Now let us look into 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 which lies at the heart of the rapture teaching. It says: "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 prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel 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."

The first person plural "we" used by St Paul in that text refers to people of the Little Flock or Apostles or Saints class. He was talking of the first resurrection by which the apostles shall be changed into spirits and taken to heaven. St Paul is explaining here that the ascension to heaven of the apostles who are alive at the second presence of Christ shall not precede the resurrection of those who had died earlier. ("Prevent" is old English for precede). Jesus Christ himself is the archangel glorified and enthroned in heaven. He will not take flesh and blood to come to this earth anymore. From heaven, he will give the command and the saints will be resurrected to meet him in heaven. The phrase "in the air" stands for heaven. It is of course unreasonable to believe that the resurrected saints will ever remain suspended in the air with the Lord Jesus. Rather they will be with him in heaven from where he has called them. (John 14:1-3; Revelation 14:1-5).

St Paul threw more light on this in 1 Corinthians 15:49-52. "And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (i.e. in heaven) neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 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.

The absurdities inherent in the rapture doctrine become more manifest as one probe further into the Scriptures. For one thing, it teaches a bodily or fleshly return of Christ with fanfare to be seen by all the inhabitants of the earth. Christ never taught so. Rather he told his apostles "Yet a little while, AND THE WORLD SEETH ME NO MORE: but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19). Here Christ made it clear that he will never appear for the world to see him again physically. But at his second presence, the apostles shall see him. (1 John 3:2) Our Lord's declaration that the world will not see him physically prompted a question from one of his disciples "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifests thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" – John 14:22.

In line with the foregoing, Christ charged his disciples in Matthew 24:23,26,27 "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there; believe it not. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert, go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the son of man be."

This is a clear attestation to the fact that Christ will not be coming in a bodily form for anyone to see. And St. Paul declared "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea though we have known Christ after the flesh, YET NOW HENCEFORTH KNOW WE HIM SO NO MORE" (2 Corinthians 5:16 Emphatic Diaglott). This knocks out the question of the bodily appearance of Jesus Christ.

That Christ was raised a spirit person is evident (1 Peter 3:18); and during his ascension, he was seen only by his immediate disciples, the apostles. His ascension was quiet and was unnoticed by the world. His Second Coming will be in like manner. (Acts 1:9-11) And he has promised to come as a thief in the night (Revelation 16:15). Only those of the apostles class will know of his presence and then go forth to proclaim the good news which will spread gradually to the entire world as the sun "cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west." – Matthew 24:27

If Christ were to appear physically for the world to see it would ordinarily be impossible for all the earth's inhabitants to see at the same time, considering the shape of the earth. And in what part of the earth will the throne of Christ be placed to enable all earth's people – sheep and goat appear before him, one after the other for judgment? The truth that cannot be gainsaid is that Christ has already come in spirit as signs particularly the World War of 1914-1918 clearly show (Matthew 24:3-8; Luke 17:26-30; 2 Timothy 3:1-5) The entire world is before him in judgment now being effected through the preaching of the truth of the scriptures by which the people are

divided into sheep (humble, teachable ones who support the truth) and the goats (the willful opposers of the truth) – John 12:28; Psalm 96:13; 1 John 4:17; Isaiah 26:9.

From a Scriptural standpoint, it is absurd to teach that human beings will be taken to heaven with earthly bodies for the very reason that the human body made up of flesh, blood and bones cannot subsist in the heavenly realm meant only for spirit beings who by their nature do not need air, water, and food to live. The Holy Bible says “The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord’s; but the earth hath he given to the children of men.” – Psalm 115:16; see also 1 Corinthians 15:49-50

A text often misunderstood is Revelation 1:7, which reads: “Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindred of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.” Many Bible readers fail to realize that the text is figurative. The word “see” in the text bears synonymity with the Greek word “Optomai” meaning to discern, perceive, comprehend or understand. The cloud is a symbol of invisibility (Acts 1:9-11) In Ephesians 1:18 St. Paul spoke of the “eyes of understanding”. In other words, people will discern the Lord’s presence through physical signs that would be manifest at that time. The phrase those who pierced him refers to the enemies of Christ in these last days. They shall suffer anguish or torment before they shall be destroyed as signified by the statement “they shall wail because of him.” See 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

The purpose of Christ’s coming in the flesh during the first advent in order to “taste death for every man” “once for all” has been fulfilled. (Hebrew 2:9-14; 10:10-12). He has taken immortality – the divine nature or the body of God, which no man can see and live. (John 17:4,5; Exodus 33:20; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 Peter 1:4) It is inconceivable therefore to expect the glorified Lord to take flesh and blood and to come again to the earth to be seen of men. The rapture doctrine is wrong and spurious and should be rejected by true Christians. It is the truth Christ said that should make us free. Blessed are all those who follow the truth for their salvation in God’s glorious kingdom. Amen.