

WHAT ABOUT THE RAPTURE?

By Kenneth N Higgs

1. THE WORD 'RAPTURE'

The word 'rapture' does not appear in the Holy Bible. It is derived from the Latin word: 'rapio', which means: "to seize and carry off, to snatch, tear, drag, draw, or hurry away" ⁱ. 'Rapio' is a Latin translation of the original Greek word: ἀρνύζω (*harpazo*), which means: "to seize, catch up, snatch away, etc" ⁱⁱ. Various forms of the word 'harpazo' are used in the New Testament (NT). For example:

- "And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **carried Philip away** [Gk: ἤρπασεν : herpasen], and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:39 ESV ⁱⁱⁱ)
- "and a great dissension having come, the chief captain having been afraid lest Paul may be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiery, having gone down, to **take him by force** [Gk: ἀρπάσαι : harpasai] out of the midst of them, and to bring [him] to the castle." (Acts 23:10 YLT ^{iv})
- "I have known a man in Christ, fourteen years ago -- whether in the body I have not known, whether out of the body I have not known, God hath known -- such an one being **caught away** [Gk: ἀρπαγέντα : harpagenta] unto the third heaven; and I have known such a man -- whether in the body, whether out of the body, I have not known, God hath known, -- that he was **caught away** [Gk: ἤρπάγη : herpage] to the paradise, and heard unutterable sayings, that it is not possible for man to speak." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4 YLT).
- "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be **caught up** [Gk: ἀρπαγησόμεθα : harpagēsometha] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17 ESV).

Thus, 'harpazo' generally means to physically "seize", "catch up" or "snatch away" a person. The NT 'rapture of the saints' is a real event whereby real persons are gathered and caught up out of the **seen, natural** world and carried away to the **unseen, heavenly** realm, to be with the Lord. The rapture includes both living believers and the resurrected souls of dead believers.

Historical Context: What did Jesus and his Apostles say on this subject? And what was the historical context and audience relevance? For instance, when Jesus mentioned the rapture, he was instructing **his disciples** during his earthly ministry (AD 26-30) and encouraging them to abide in the faith. Similarly, when Apostle Paul mentioned the rapture, he was teaching and encouraging **1st Century Christians** in various cities of the ancient world of the Roman Empire. The rapture was for the comfort of 1st Century believers, **not** a vague promise to unknown future generations 2000+ years later.

2. WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE RAPTURE

2.1 RAPTURE DESCRIBED IN GOSPEL OF JOHN

"1 Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself; that where I am you may be also." (John 14:1-3).

Historical Context: This passage is in the context of the Last Supper, where Jesus informed his disciples that one of them would betray him, and that all his disciples would be scattered, before he was taken away and crucified (see: John 13). Adding to that sad news, Jesus said: *"Where I am going you cannot come"* (John 13:33). It must have been quite a shock for the disciples to hear this news: that Jesus was going away and they could not accompany him.

Yet, Jesus *"loved them to the end"* (13:1). He understood their fear and dismay, so he gave them this wonderful, encouraging promise: *"In my Father's house are many rooms... if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself"* (14:1,3). Thus, Jesus promised to come back, **in their lifetime**, to take **them** away to be with him: ie: the rapture. It was to be a once-only, special event **for the benefit of his disciples**, at his parousia return in glory.

2.2 RAPTURE DESCRIBED IN GOSPELS OF MATTHEW AND MARK

"30 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. 31 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).

"26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." (Mark 13:26-27).

Historical Context: Matthew 24 and Mark 13 are parallel accounts of Jesus' description of his parousia return in glory, at the end of the age (ie: the *"last days"* of the Old Covenant). During those events, the *'Son of Man'* (Jesus) would come back *"on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"*, and *"will send out his angels"* and they *"will gather his elect"* (born-again believers) *"from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven"*.

Clearly, these two passages are further confirmation that Christ would return to **take his disciples away to be with him**: ie: the rapture. Note that this event would occur **simultaneously** with his glorious parousia: *"coming on the clouds of heaven"*. Furthermore, *"all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven"*. It would be a **real, visible event** that people would **see and experience**.

Best of all, the rapture would involve angels gathering believers from all over the **physical earth**. It is not some vague religious concept. It's an actual gathering of physical people out of the **earthly** realm to take them into the **heavenly** realm. The timing of the parousia is discussed in my article on Time Statements.

3. WHAT APOSTLE PAUL SAID ABOUT THE RAPTURE

3.1 RAPTURE DESCRIBED IN FIRST THESSALONIANS

"13 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. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 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. 16 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. 17 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Historical Context: This passage is in the context of a letter from Apostle Paul to the church of the Thessalonians (c. AD 51-52¹), instructing and encouraging them during a time of growing persecution. Paul declares to them, *"by a word from the Lord"*, that, even though some believers had passed away (*"the dead in Christ"*), at the parousia they would *"rise first"*. Then the remaining believers (*"we who are alive, who are left"*)... *"will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"*. Thus, writing to real Christians in a real church at Thessalonica in northern Greece, Paul indicates that some believers **might still be alive** at the parousia.

And, whether physically alive or dead, **those saints** would all be *"caught up together... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"*. The original Greek word is ἀρπαγησόμεθα (*harpagēsometha*), from *'harpazo'*, which means: *"to seize, catch up, snatch away"*. Clearly, Paul is describing an actual *"catching up"* or *"snatching away"* gathering of real individual believers from out of the **earthly, visible** realm, to take them to Christ in the **unseen, heavenly** realm. He is talking about the rapture, **not** a vague religious concept or some vague *'collective body'*.

3.2 RAPTURE DESCRIBED IN FIRST CORINTHIANS AND PHILIPPIANS

*"50 I tell you this, brothers: **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be **changed,** 52 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.** 53 For **this perishable body must put on the imperishable,** and **this mortal body must put on immortality.**" (1 Corinthians 15:50-53)*

*"20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 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)*

Historical Context: These two passages are in the context of letters from Apostle Paul to churches at Corinth (c. AD 57) and Philippi (c. AD 62-63). He informs **them** about the events of the coming parousia (*"at the last trumpet"*). He exhorts **them** to *"press on toward the goal"*, *"hold true to what we have attained"*, walking according to his example (Philippians 3:14, 16 & 17). He says: *"our citizenship is in heaven"*, and when the Lord returns in his glorious parousia, Christ would *"transform"* **their** natural, physical bodies (*"our lowly body"*) and change them from *"perishable"* into *"imperishable"*, from *"mortal"* into *"immortal"*. The original Greek word is μετασχηματισεῖ (*metaschēmatisēi*), from *"metaschēmatizō"*, which means: *"to change in fashion or outward appearance, to transfigure"*. At the parousia, **those 1st Century believers** would experience a **real transformation of their physical mortal bodies**, resulting in actual change from *"perishable"* into *"imperishable"*... from *"mortal"* into *"immortal"* bodies to be like Christ's glorious body.

This bodily change was absolutely necessary, because *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"*. The perishable bodies of mortal people must first transformed to be like Christ's glorious body so that they could then enter the **unseen heavenly realm** and be with Christ forevermore. (*It is **not** a vague religious concept or some vague 'collective body'*).

This amazing transformation would occur *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet"*, ie: at the glorious parousia return of Christ. It is the rapture.

3.3 RAPTURE DESCRIBED IN ROMANS

*"18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed **to us**. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ... 23 And not only the creation, but **we ourselves**, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as **we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**" (Romans 8:18-19, 23)*

Historical Context: This passage is in the context of a letter from Apostle Paul to 1st Century Christians in Rome (c. AD 58), exhorting **them** to persevere in the face of suffering. This perseverance would soon be even more urgent during Emperor Nero's brutal torture and murder of thousands of Christians (c. AD 64-66). Paul declares that **their present sufferings** *"are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed **to us**".* The original Greek says *"the glory **about to be revealed**"* [Gk: μέλλουσιν : mellousan - from "mello" which means: *"to be about to"*]. Soon, **their bodies would be redeemed**, and **they would be adopted as sons**, children of God. As he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 & Philippians 3, Paul is again describing the amazing transformation of believers' bodies in the rapture event, during the parousia of Christ. *(It is **not** a vague religious concept or some vague 'collective body')*.

3.4 RAPTURE DESCRIBED IN SECOND CORINTHIANS

[Chap 4]

*"16 So **we** do not lose heart. Though **our outer self** is wasting away, **our inner self** is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for **us** an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as **we** look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

[Chap. 5]

*1 For **we** know that if the tent that is **our** earthly home is destroyed, **we** have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent **we groan**, longing to put on **our heavenly dwelling**, 3 if indeed by putting it on **we** may not be found naked. 4 For while **we are still in this tent**, **we groan**, being burdened — not that **we** would be unclothed, but that **we** would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (2 Corinthians 4:16 to 5:4).*

Historical Context: This passage is in the context of Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth (late AD 50s), when those 1st Century believers were suffering persecution and affliction, often resulting in death or painful suffering. As the letter begins, Paul empathises with **them** and reminds **them** of his personal experience of the same sort of near fatal suffering and affliction. He assures **them** that God *"comforts **us** in all **our** affliction"* (1:4), and that these things happen *"to make **us** rely not on **ourselves** but on God who raises the dead"* (1:9). Thus, Paul brings up the issue of the resurrection of the dead.

He acknowledges that *"**our outer self** is wasting away"* (4:16). The original Greek is ἀνθρώπος (*anthrōpos*), which means: *"man, human being"*; he is talking about their bodies that die, decay and waste away. He exhorts them: *"Do not lose heart"*, because *"**our inner self** is being renewed day by day"*. Even if some of **those believers** die (*"the tent that is **our** earthly home is destroyed"* 5:1), God has prepared new bodies for them in heaven... *"**we** have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (5:1) and they are *"longing to put on **our heavenly dwelling**"* (5:2).

He also acknowledges **their** fear of dying: *"4 For while **we** are still in this tent, **we groan**, being burdened — not that **we** would be unclothed"* (5:4). They are longing to receive their heavenly bodies without suffering death (*being "unclothed"*). He says that: *" **we** would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life"* (5:4). Thus some **1st Century believers** may still be alive (*"still in this tent"*) and their mortal bodies may be *"further clothed"* by immortal, heavenly bodies.

This is further evidence that Paul expected that some 1st Century Christians would still be alive at the rapture event. It would be a real event, that they would see and experience, **not** a vague religious concept or some vague *'collective body'*.

4. WILL THERE BE A FUTURE RAPTURE OF THE SAINTS?

Some people claim that the rapture has not yet occurred, and they are still waiting for it to come at some vague future date. However, those ideas seem to ignore the NT scriptures we examined above, as well as the historical context of NT teaching. The rapture was **not** a promise given to people in the 21st Century. It was a comforting promise given to early Christians in the 1st Century. The rapture was always intended as a once-only event, to deliver the early Christian church **out of their** dreadful suffering during times of persecution and tribulation under the Jews and Romans (c. AD 30-70). It would involve the *'catching up'* of living saints, taking them out of this world, and carrying them away to heaven, along with the resurrected souls out of Hades.

The rapture event happened during the parousia return of Christ (c. AD 66-70), and since that time there is no longer any need for a rapture or a resurrection. When a believer dies, their soul is no longer sent into Hades... so no need to be *'resurrected'* out of Hades. Deceased believers receive a new heavenly, imperishable, immortal body, which is like Christ's glorious body, fit for heaven. Then the deceased soul is taken away to heaven, with a new glorious body, to live eternally with Our Lord. Hallelujah!

CONCLUSION:

There are many different views and ideas about the rapture, but let us not be distracted from the **truth** by fallible traditions of men. In this article, we have focussed on the words of Jesus and his Apostles, in order to find the truth about the rapture. In those scriptures, we find that *'rapture'* is an actual event in history, which believers would see and experience... not just a religious concept or vague *'collective body'* thing.

Jesus clearly said that the rapture is an angelic gathering of the saints... catching up, snatching away real persons, including both the living and the dead... taking them out of this world and into the heavenly realm. And he prophesied that this event would occur when he returned in glory from heaven:

- *"if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself..." (John 14:3).*
- *"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..." (Matthew 24:30-31).*
- *"he will send out the angels and gather his elect..." (Mark 13:27).*

Clearly, the rapture event coincides with the glorious parousia return of Christ at the of the age.

Apostle Paul also wrote about the rapture, such as his letter to the Thessalonian church, encouraging them and assuring them that even dead believers would be raised from out of the dead and gathered up in the rapture:

- *"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..." (1 Thessalonians 4:17).*

He explained that the rapture was necessary, because *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"*. First, the bodies of those 1st Century believers would be *"changed"*, *"transformed"* from *"perishable"* into *"imperishable"*... from *"mortal"* into *"immortal"*... to be like Christ's glorious body (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:50-53 and Philippians 3:20-21) and then they would be taken up into heaven.

He expressed his personal longing to experience the rapture, saying: *"we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."* (Romans 8:23); and *"Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day... For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Corinthians 4:16 to 5:4).

And so we see, from all of these NT passages that the rapture is not a *'still to come'* future event. It was intended for the benefit of early Christians in the 1st Century. In my article: "Time Statements", we discuss the timing of the 'Second Coming' return of Christ, and show that, Jesus fulfilled his promise to return (c. AD 66-70) with his angels in power and great glory at the parousia; and he fulfilled his promise to rescue his suffering elect saints, gathering them up, transforming their bodies and taking them to heaven. And so they *"will always be with the Lord"*. All glory, honour and praise to Christ our Lord. Amen.

[MORE INFORMATION AND FEEDBACK: please email Ken Higgs => info@parousiafulfilled.com]

ENDNOTES

ⁱ - The Latin-English Dictionary by Lewis & Short (digital version), viewed online 23 January 2020 at <http://alatius.com/ls/index.php?met=up&ord=rapio>

ⁱⁱ All Greek translations in this article are derived from Strong's Definitions as viewed on BibleHub at <https://biblehub.com>

ⁱⁱⁱ ESV - English Standard Version, 2016.

^{iv} YLT - Young's Literal Translation, 1898, by Robert Young. This is an extremely literal translation that attempts to preserve the tense and word usage as found in the original Greek and Hebrew writings. Viewed online 22 January 2020 at <https://www.biblegateway.com>.

^v Estimated dates of NT scriptures are based on the book "Final Decade Before The End" by Edward E. Stevens, 2014, International Preterist Association, Inc., Bradford PA. Ed has written extensively on the parousia and the rapture... see his website: <https://www.preterist.org>.