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What You Need to Know About The Rapture of the Church: Part 3

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH (Part Three)

POSSIBLE REACTIONS FOLLOWING THE RAPTURE

In his well-known book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsey suggests several possible conversations at the moment of the Rapture:

- “There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy ... cars going in all directions ... and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild! I think we’ve got an invasion from outer space!”
- “It was the last quarter of the championship game and the other side was ahead. Our boys had the ball. We made a touchdown and tied it up. The crowd went crazy. Only one minute to go and they fumbled—our quarterback recovered—and he was about a yard from the goal when—zap—no more quarterback—completely gone, just like that!”
- “It was puzzling—very puzzling. I was teaching my course in the Philosophy of Religion when all of a sudden three of my students vanished. They simply vanished! They were quite argumentative—always trying to prove their point from the Bible. No great loss to the class. However, I do find this disappearance very difficult to explain.”
- “As an official spokesman for the United Nations I wish to inform all peace-loving people of the world that we are making every human effort to assist those nations whose leaders have disappeared. We have issued a general declaration of condemnation in the General Assembly concerning these heads of state. Their irresponsibility is shocking.”
- “My dear friends in the congregation. Bless you for coming to church today. I know that many of you have lost loved ones in this unusual disappearance of so many people. However, I believe that God’s judgment has come upon them for their continued dissension and quarreling with the great advances of the church in our century. Now that the reactionaries are removed, we can progress toward our great and glorious goal of uniting all mankind into a brotherhood of reconciliation and understanding.”
- “You really want to know what I think? I think all that talk about the Rapture and going to meet Jesus Christ in the air wasn’t crazy after all. I don’t know about you, brother, but I’m going to find myself a Bible and read all those verses my wife underlined. I wouldn’t listen to her while she was here, and now she’s – I don’t know where she is.”
(Zondervan Publishers, pp. 136, 137, 1972)

Certainly the believers will be missed. It is evident from the Bible that the sudden disappearance of both Enoch and Elijah (two Old Testament types of the rapture) caused considerable confusion and alarm among their friends.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him" (Heb. 11:5).

Especially interesting are the words, *"and was not found."* Enoch was doubtless the object of a great manhunt!

The Scriptures describe the later translation of Elijah in even greater detail, as the citizens of Jericho ask Elisha about the disappearance of his master:

"Sir," they said, "just say the word and fifty of our best athletes will search the wilderness for your master; perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has left him on some mountain or in some ravine." "No," Elisha said, "don't bother." But they kept urging until he was embarrassed, and finally said, "All right, go ahead." Then fifty men searched for three days, but didn't find him" (2 Ki. 2:16, 17, TLB).

How much more confusion and alarm will come from the sudden and mysterious disappearance of literally millions of men and women, boys and girls.

Many years ago, I (HLW) experienced first hand just a taste of this future confusion and alarm in regard to the rapture.

It all began when a close friend of mine invited me to join him in a vacation to Estes Park, Colorado, which I did. After driving many long and hot (no air conditioning) hours we finally arrived at our destination, nestled high in the Rocky Mountains. Back then (in the mid-fifties) two things could have been said about Estes Park: first, by day it was one of the most beautiful spots in America, and, two, by night it proved to be the most desolate area in the universe!

After grabbing a bite to eat we secured a motel at the edge of the little town and settled down for the night.

Now my friend in those days had two bad habits—first, he smoked, and second, he snored. At any rate, about midnight he began indulging his second bad habit. Never had I heard such snoring. I made several vain attempts to arouse him. Finally, after enduring this for a while, I decided enough was enough! So, I quietly slipped out of bed and clothed only in my Fruit of the Looms, made my way to the back seat of our car and soon was fast asleep. Inasmuch as the night was dark and the car only a few feet from the motel, I had no concern about modesty.

Meanwhile, back in the room, my friend awakened to indulge in his first bad habit. Of course he soon noticed my bed was empty and a quick check revealed that I was not in the bathroom either!

He thought this disappearance was strange indeed, but realizing I was a student at the Moody Bible Institute preparing for the ministry concluded I might have been out witnessing to a hoot owl, for all he knew.

But suddenly he spotted my trousers, shirt, shoes, watch and wallet. Suffice to say my friend got his trousers on pretty fast and began looking for me. Leaving the motel room he peered into the car but for some reason, did not see me.

According to his testimony, the next hour and a half were the most terrifying 90 minutes of his entire life!

After leaving the car he walked the entire length of Estes Park, a distance of some two miles, attempting to find me. He said later there was absolutely no one on the street, no service station open, not a single car that drove by, and, not a dog that barked.

Upon reaching the edge of the city he turned to retrace his steps and was suddenly struck with a paralyzing fear—the rapture had taken place and he had been left behind! What would he do? What should he do? Indeed, what could he do? In his own words:

“I thought the best thing for me to do was to get back to the motel room as quickly as possible and call my godly wife in Quincy, Illinois. If she didn’t answer the phone, I knew I was in big trouble!”

So, he began to run, shaking, shivering, and sweating, all at the same time. But as he stumbled past our car he looked in again, and this time, saw me. Of course, I was totally unaware of what had just transpired, but I vividly recall the car door opening, and being seized by two big hands, and hearing both a desperate and pitiful cry:

“ALL RIGHT, HAROLD, LET’S SETTLE THIS THING RIGHT HERE AND NOW!”

I got out of the car utterly stunned. What on earth was he babbling about? Was I just dreaming? I would soon find out a few minutes later as we sat on the edge of my bed. No, I was not dreaming, but he slowly related to me the details of his very real nightmare:

“Harold,” he began, “I have been suffering the torments of the damned for the past 90 minutes. I honestly believed the rapture had happened and that I was doomed!”

With shaking voice he continued,

“Even though being raised in a Christian home, I’m not sure where I stand before God. But I do know I want to get things straight right now! So, you explain what has to be done. Go back to Adam and Eve if you must, but I’m not leaving this room until I know I’m ready for the rapture!”

So, as briefly and clearly as possible, I explained God’s simple plan of salvation. All the above transpired over fifty years go. But how could I possibly forget kneeling beside that bed in a darkened motel room in Estes Park, Colorado and hearing my dad ask Christ to come into his heart!

VARIOUS VIEWS IN REGARDS TO AN UNSAVED PERSON BEING ABLE TO ACCEPT JESUS FOLLOWING THE RAPTURE

- A. Yes, based on Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 7:9-14.
- B. No, based on 2 Thess. 2:8-12.
- C. Conditional. Advocates of this view would distinguish between those who, for whatever reason, had simply neglected to receive Jesus as Savior to those who had categorically rejected Him! See 2 Pet. 3:5.

THREE VIEWS IN REGARD TO BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN AT THE RAPTURE

As you might imagine, this question is frequently asked by parents with small children. Believing parents want to know if their young children who have not yet trusted Christ will be left behind at the Rapture.

It is important at the outset to note that there is no specific scripture that addresses this subject. Nevertheless, I believe we can find an answer that is both biblically sound and satisfying for loving parents. Theologians have developed three main views on this issue.

View #1: No children will be included in the Rapture

Those who hold this view would emphasize that the Rapture is only for believers and that if a person has not personally believed in Christ, he is not eligible for the Rapture. They would point out that in both the flood of Noah’s time and the destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan during the conquest, small children were not excluded from the judgment.

View #2: All infants and young children will be raptured before the Tribulation

Those who hold this view point out that Scripture implies that when young children die they go to heaven. Several passages in the Bible seem to support this position: 2 Sam. 12:20-23; Matt. 19: 1-15; Mark 10:1-16. Since, as many believe, all young children go to heaven when they die even if they have never put saving faith in Christ, many would argue that all children alive at the time of the Rapture will likewise be taken so that they may be exempted from the horrors of the Tribulation.

While I agree that infants and small children who die go to heaven to be with Christ, I do not believe that this necessarily means that they will participate in the Rapture. These are two different issues.

View #3: Infants and young children of believers will be raptured to Heaven before the Tribulation

This is a mediating view between the first two positions. While it's wise to avoid dogmatism on this issue, I (Mark Hitchcock) believe this is the best view for two reasons.

First, Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 7:14 that in a Christian family the children are "set apart for Him" (NLT). It seems inconceivable to me that the Lord would rapture believing parents to heaven and leave their defenseless children alone in the world for the tribulation period. Parents are commanded to raise and protect their children (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8). If God were to rapture the parents and leave the children behind, He would be preventing the parents from obeying His own command.

Second, I believe there is biblical precedent for this view. When the Lord sent the Flood on the earth during the days of Noah, it is true that all the world was destroyed—including unbelieving men, women, and children. But God delivered Noah, his wife, and his three sons and their wives.

When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He destroyed all the inhabitants of the cities, including the children of unbelievers. The only ones to escape were Lot and his two daughters.

In Egypt at the first Passover, the homes of the faithful—including their young children—were protected from the judgment of God by the blood of the lamb on the doorpost.

In each of these cases, the believer and his children were delivered from the time of judgment. Only unbelievers and their children were destroyed.

While I recognize that Noah's three sons and Lot's daughters were not infants or small children and were probably believers themselves, I believe that these incidents provide biblical precedent for the position that when God sends cataclysmic judgment, He rescues both the believer and his children but allows unbelievers and their children to face judgment.

I believe that during the Tribulation the young children of unbelievers will have the opportunity to believe in Christ as they come of age. Those who die during the Tribulation before they are old enough to understand the claims of the gospel will be taken to heaven to be with Christ.

Regardless of which view we hold, the one fact we can all rest in is that God is a God of love, compassion, mercy, and justice. Whatever He does when the Rapture occurs will be wise, righteous, and just.

God loves our children more than we do. They are precious in His sight.

I (HLW) would concur with Mark in regard to View Three and offer the following summary:

A. Concerning the unborn:

These scriptures clearly teach that God views the unborn as true human beings! See Psa. 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5; Lk. 1:41-44; Gal. 1:15.

B. Concerning babies:

David testified to the salvation of infants. Compare the last phrase of 2 Sam. 12:23 with the last phrase of Psa. 23:6.

C. Concerning young children:

Jesus both recognized and praised the spiritual perception of little children. See Matt. 18:1-6, 10; 19:13-15; 21:15, 16.

Thus it can be concluded all three classes of individuals will be taken up at the Rapture!

FOUR COMMANDS TO KEEP WHILE AWAITING THE RAPTURE

Believers in the early church were consistently told to be on the lookout for the coming of Christ. They were also given clear, practical instructions on what they should be doing in light of this imminent event. The most straightforward passage in the New Testament concerning what we should be doing if we believe Jesus is coming soon is in Peter's first letter:

"The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each

one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”(1 Peter 4:7-10).

Notice the word *therefore* in verse 7. Peter is saying that the end of the world is coming, *therefore* here’s what we should be doing. This passage emphasizes four things we should do if we believe that the end is coming soon.

KEEP YOUR HEAD CLEAR: PRAY FOR OTHERS

As we approach the coming apocalypse, more and more people are going to get caught up in the prophetic frenzy. People will be tempted to quit their jobs, sell all their possessions, and go wait on a mountaintop in their pajamas for Jesus to come.

But the Word tells us that in view of the end of all things we are to be “earnest.” This word literally means “not drunk.” In other words, we are to be sober-minded, clearheaded, and mentally alert for the purpose of prayer. Believing that Christ could come back today should spur us on to a sober, disciplined prayer life.

KEEP YOUR HEART WARM: LOVE OTHERS

The badge of Christianity is love (John 13:34-35). As we see the end approaching we are to love one another with a “deep love.” The word translated *deep* was used in ancient times of a horse at full gallop when its muscles were stretched to the limit. Peter is saying that our love for one another is to be stretched out but never reaching its breaking point.

KEEP YOUR HOME OPEN: SHOW HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS

One of the signs of the second coming of Christ according to Jesus is that *“the love of many will grow cold”* (Matt. 24:12, NLT). In light of this, believers are called to show their love in a concrete way by reaching out in Christian love to strangers.

This beautiful Christian virtue is mentioned specifically six times in the New Testament (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:9-10; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:1-3; 1 Peter 4:9). As this world becomes a colder and more isolated place, we are to keep our homes open and show the warmth of Christ to strangers.

KEEP YOUR HANDS BUSY: USE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Every believer in Jesus Christ has at least one spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are supernatural empowerments that God has given to His children to serve the body of Christ.

As we see the curtain about to rise on the final act of history, we hear the Lord calling us to keep our hands busy, using for His service the gifts He has given us.

AN EVENT WHICH COULD WELL TRIGGER THE RAPTURE

Does anything have to happen before the Rapture can take place?

The surprising answer seems to be yes! One final event must transpire and that event is the adding of the last repenting sinner into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Thus when the body is complete, the Head will appear, or, to use another scriptural analogy, the Bridegroom will come for his beloved bride. The entire book of Ephesians seems to suggest this. See especially 1:10, 22, 23; 2:21; 4:4, 13, 16; 5:22-33.

A very practical truth may be seen here. According to Acts 2, the first convert was added to the body of Christ at Pentecost. What an occasion that must have been, with 3,000 answering Peter's "altar call." And God had provided 120 "personal workers" to deal with them (Acts 1:15; 2:1). We know that God himself keeps all records. Perhaps someday at the judgment seat of Christ one of these 120 will hear the Master say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You led the first individual into that spiritual body!" If this be true, and if Christ's coming is at hand, it is entirely possible that a soul winner reading these very words might one day hear similar words from Jesus: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You led the last individual into that spiritual body!" At any rate, someday a soul winner will point some seeking sinner to the Savior and it will all be over!

A GRAND AND GLORIOUS CONCLUSION IN REGARD TO THE RAPTURE

In closing, this section on prophecy, consider the words of a godly German theologian and those spoken by a godless German tyrant.

- The godly theologian—Erich Sauer:

The present age is Easter time. It begins with the resurrection of the Redeemer (Matt. 28), and ends with the resurrection of the redeemed (1 Thess. 4; 1 Cor. 15). Between lies the spiritual 'resurrection' of those called into life (Rom. 6:4-11; Col. 3:1). So we live between two Easters, as those who have been raised between two resurrections, as burning and shining lights ... And in the power of the first Easter we go to meet the last Easter. The resurrection of the Head guarantees the resurrection of the members. The tree of life of the resurrection bears fully ripe fruit." (*The Triumph of the Crucified*, Eerdmans, 1955, p. 101).

- The godless tyrant—Adolf Hitler:

Here is the background—

There are 774,747 words in the Bible. The greatest single word among these is the word *maranatha*, used but once in the Scripture (1 Cor. 16:22). It literally means, “the Lord cometh.” Keep this in mind as a World War II event is related. The place is Nuremberg, Germany, where a gigantic Nazi victory rally is being conducted. Nearly a quarter of a million party faithfuls have assembled to hear their great Fuhrer speak.

The time is June, 1940. German troops had defeated France only the week before, meaning that practically all of Europe lay at the feet of Hitler. The only feeble pocket of resistance was located on a tiny island, separated by a few miles of North Atlantic water from Hitler’s mighty empire. At that time the entire world was absolutely certain that Great Britain (occupying that little island) would soon be invaded. The only question was when. This was the background as the German dictator approached the microphone. He began: “I hear the British are asking, ‘when is he coming, when is he coming?’ Well, tonight I say to the British, be patient, for I AM COMING!”

Hitler screamed out the final phrase, “I am coming,” no less than three times that warm June evening in Germany. According to witnesses, when he said it the first time there arose a growl from the throats of 250,000 people. The second time turned that growl into a mighty roar. But the results of the third time were as a bomb had exploded, causing those thousands of Nazis to leap to their feet and scream out until many actually lost their voices: “SIEG HEIL, SIEG HEIL!” Nearly 2,000 years ago, Christ ascended to heaven (Acts 1). Since that (apart from a few Bible apostles), no one has seen or heard from him. The skeptics and infidels sneeringly remind us of this, demanding to know, “When is he coming? When is he coming? He’ll never come!” (See 2 Pet. 3:3, 4). But if the believer listens carefully, he can hear that still, small voice witnessing to the heart, “I say to you, my child, be patient, for I AM COMING!”

When this great, and grand, and glorious truth becomes a reality to us, there should proceed from our spiritual throats a growl, then a roar, and finally that exhilaration causing us to jump to our feet and shout for all the world to hear: ‘MARANATHA! MARANATHA! MARANATHA!’