

]The Rapture, Fact or Fiction

by Ray Hawks

Following a car one day, I happened to see a bumper sticker which read, "Warning: This Car Will Be Driver-less In Case of The RAPTURE!" What is the Rapture? When will it take place? Why will that car be driver-less if the Rapture takes place?

WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

According to a proponent of the Rapture, it is as follows.

"There are many people who do not understand and are confused about the 'RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH.' There are many things God foretold that did not take place when Jesus came the first time. He has to come back the second time to completely fulfill all these prophecies."

"His first coming had to do with His CROSS: His coming the second time with His CROWN (first to die and then to rule). His first coming was for the salvation of our souls; the second will be for the salvation of our body. We get sick, lose hair, break a bone. But when we are caught up with Him to heaven, our bodies will be changed so that no one will ever be sick or die. I John 3:2; Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20. The second Coming of Christ is in TWO PARTS. PART ONE is when He comes IN THE AIR and all those that are SAVED will go up past the dead moon to a live Heaven, I Thess. 4:13-18. PART TWO is when Jesus comes back again, this time WITH His saints to live with Him."

According to the premillennialists, there will be the Rapture followed by the Great Tribulation. At the close of the great Tribulation, Jesus will return to Jerusalem to reign for one thousand years. The Rapture is that time when Jehovah will take the church (saints) to heaven. According to them we are now living in the Church Age. When the Rapture comes the Church Age will end and the Great Tribulation will begin. When that ends the Kingdom Age will commence.

WHAT YEAR WILL THE RAPTURE TAKE PLACE?

Mr. Hal Lindsey has written a book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, in which he gives us a timetable to work out the date of the Rapture. On page 43 he states,

"When the Jewish people, after nearly 2000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the 'fig tree' put forth its first leaves."

"Jesus said that this would indicate that he was 'at the door,' ready to return. Then he said, 'truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place' (Matthew 24:34 NASB)."

Mr. Lindsey believes Matt. 24:34 refers to *our generation*! He believes that a generation is about 40 years (Cf. p.43). He therefore believed the Rapture would transpire around 1988! Mr. Lindsey does not give the date 1988, but he has given the timetable. If the Rapture

had taken place in 1988, we are told to add 7 more years for the time the Great Tribulation will last after which Jesus will return to set up his 1000 year kingdom in 1995! **[his timetable is a failure, it is now 2001; he is branded by the Bible as a false prophet: Deuteronomy 18:22 *when a prophet speaketh in the name of Jehovah, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah hath not spoken: the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.* – my note].**

Those who have bumper stickers, telling about driverless cars in case of the Rapture, believe it was imminent! Many churches have swallowed the imminent coming of Christ preceded by the Rapture and the Great Tribulation. Movies have been made and shown in denominational churches telling of these events. Records have been produced and sold by the millions to sincere, honest folks who look to be Raptured at any moment. In waiting rooms throughout this world talk about the Rapture and long for its coming. What do these good people base their hopes and expectations on?

IS MATTHEW TWENTY-FOUR KNOCKING AT THE DOOR?

Mr. Billy Graham and others use Matthew 24:1-35 as a premillennial passage to prove the Rapture, Great Tribulation, and a 1,000 year reign of Christ upon the earth. Radio and television preachers quote freely from Jesus' statements to show these verses are literally being fulfilled today. A study of the Matthew account will help us see what Jesus is speaking of.

In verse 1 through 3 we find Christ talking about the *destruction of the temple*. The disciples seemed to think the destruction of the temple meant the end of the universe. It would signal the end of the Jewish economy or age, but not the end of our cosmos. Jesus' reply from verses 4 through 35 shows when the temple would be destroyed so that one stone was not left standing upon another.

In verse 4 Jesus said, "*Take heed that no many deceive you.*" Why? Verse 5 and 24 give us the answer, "*For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many,*" and "*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets... insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*" The Jews had been looking for the Saviour, the Messiah, to free them from Roman dominion and restore the kingdom of David. This seems to be the idea of the apostles even as late as Acts 1:6. In Acts 5:34-40, Gamaliel mentions two men, Theudas and Judas of Galilee, as drawing people away after them. Perhaps they proclaimed that they were the promised Christ or Messiah. Jerome, in *The Gnostic Heresies* quotes Simon Magus of Acts 8:9,10 as saying, "I am the Word of God, I am the Comforter, I am Almighty, I am all there is to God." Josephus states Felix put to death many impostors. Perhaps these are the false Christs Jesus warned the apostles against in Matthew 24:5, 24.

Graham and others quote verse 6 through 8 every time there is an earthquake, war, or famine and cry, "The end is near!" However, verse 9 shows these things would happen during the lifetime of the apostles for the context states, "*Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you*" In fact, we find the fulfillment to verses 10 through 12 in such passages as 2 Tim. 4:10 when Paul relates, "*Demas hath forsaken me, having*

loved this present world.” John records, *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10). These passages refer to the times of the apostles, not ours. In Matthew 10:16-23 Jesus shows that will happen to them before he returns in judgment upon Jerusalem. We know the coming of the Son of man in Matthew 10:23 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem because (1) the apostles are his audience (10:5), (2) it was during the period when inspiration was given, (10:19, 20), (3) they would not finish preaching in the cities of Israel before Jesus came again (10:23) and (4) they would still be alive when this event took place. This makes it parallel with Matthew 24:1-34.

Verse 14 of Matthew 24 is a passage that has thrown false teachers into their dilemma. They believe the gospel has not been preached to the entire world. When it is, they believe the end is eminent. However, Christ was talking about the end of the temple, not the end of the universe. In fact, in A.D. 64 Paul wrote, *“Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven”* (Col. 1:23). The gospel was preached in all the world before the end of the temple came about.

In verse 15 Jesus said, *“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:).”* In Luke 21:20, 21) we have a parallel passage to help us understand what Matthew recorded. Luke states, *“And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.”* For the temple to be destroyed, the city of Jerusalem would have to be attacked by an army. In A.D. 70 the Roman army under Titus laid siege to the city and finally overthrew it. The city and temple were destroyed. The premillennialists use the book of Daniel and Revelation with Matthew 24 to prove their doctrine on the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, and the one thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Actually, the book of Daniel shows the Jews in captivity would return and rebuild their city and temple. Afterward the Messiah would come and be cut off from among the people. After the Messiah’s crucifixion, the desolation would come (Dan. 9:25-27). Jesus spoke of that desolation when the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. The book of Revelation reveals what Daniel was told to seal up (Dan. 12:9). John was told of things to *“shortly come to pass”* (Rev. 1:1 3; 22:6, 10). The premillennialists have accurately put Daniel, Revelation, and Matthew 24 together, but have arrived at the wrong time for the fulfillment of the statements given.

When we understand that Jesus is speaking of the destruction of the temple by an army Matthew 24:16-22 is not hard to understand. If the world being destroyed is under consideration, **why** would Christ command those who are in Judea **to flee to the mountains**? Can the mountains protect us when the world ends? Hardly. But, if Christ is speaking of an army descending on Jerusalem, we can see the merit of fleeing from Judea and going to the mountains to get away from the coming conflict. If Jesus is speaking about the Rapture taking place at this time, why flee into the mountains? If the doctrine of the Rapture is true, saints will not need to flee for they will be taken into heaven. Those who are left would not need to flee, for the mountains will offer no protection to those not Raptured! The words of Jesus are meaningless for those who believe in the Rapture. It takes on meaning when we see Jesus warning saints about the Roman army come to

Jerusalem to destroy it. When they see the signs of this coming army, they are to flee to safety, although the flight will involve some hardships for mothers of small babies” [**and if it came about on the “Jewish sabbath”, travel would be limited** – my comment].

Jesus mentions the Great Tribulation in verse 21. But, this is not an event which will take place in our generation [1988 is past]. But an event before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70! In Revelation, John wrote about things which were “at hand” (Rev. 1:3) and saw those who had come through the great tribulation (Rev. 7:14). It was during this period that Josephus [the Jewish Historian] tells us false Messiahs were heard from as Jesus warned in verses 23 through 26.

Verse 27 bothers the premillennialists and makes them think Jesus is speaking of the end of time. However, in Matt. 10:23 Jesus told his disciples, “*But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*” When you take such passages as Acts 6:14; Rom. 13:11, 12; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:7, 8; 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-13; Heb. 2:26-29; James 5:7-8; and 1 Pet. 4:7 with Matt. 24:27 you can see the passages refer to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. This is spoken of as the “coming of the Son of man.” This type of language is not new. The prophets used it to indicate God’s judgment upon a nation. In fact, if you compare Matt. 24:29 with Isa. 13:1-13 you will find the same kind of language employed by Isaiah that Jesus uses. Isaiah speaks of the destruction of Babylon by the Medes (Isa. 13:17) whereas Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple by the Romans which took place in A.D. 70.

Mr. Graham and others believe Matt. 24:30, 31 is speaking of the second coming of Christ and the judgment. This would not fit their premillennial theory! According to them, when Jesus comes he will not come to judge, but to rule over a 1,000 year kingdom on earth. It is not until **after** that 1,000 year reign that the judgment will take place according to their teaching! So, Matt. 24:30, 31 is not their passage. Notice, Jesus himself does not appear, but “*the sign of the Son of man in heaven.*” This is the same thing Jesus spoke of when he confronted the high priest in Matt. 26:24. Jesus would sit and come at the same time. How could he sit on the right hand of power and come in the clouds of heaven? The same way Jehovah came in judgment through the Assyrian army as Jesus came in judgment upon Jerusalem through the Roman army of Titus.

Actually, Matt. 24:34 is the passage that destroys the premillennial contention of this prophecy. Jesus said, “*Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*” The premillennialists believe the expression “*this generation*” refers to our generation! This is not how Jesus used the expression. First, he was speaking to the apostles. Therefore, he was referring to their generation, not ours! Some argue that the word “generation” may be translated as “race.” Since the Jewish race still exists, they believe these events refer to our day. However, when one checks Jesus’ use of the expression “generation” throughout Matthew, he finds Jesus using it to mean a 40 year period or generation; not as “race”.

Jesus said the temple would be destroyed and gave visible signs the disciples could see to know the time was approaching. Those signs do not refer to his second coming, but to the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70.

THERE WILL BE NO [WAS NO] RAPTURE IN 1988

On pages 126-134 of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Mr. Hal Lindsey tells us what he thinks the Rapture is. He admits that the term “rapture” is not found in our Bible. To give it a scriptural meaning, he uses the word “translation”!

“The word ‘rapture’ means to snatch away or take out. But whether we call this event ‘the Rapture’ or the ‘translation’ makes no difference – the important thing is that it will happen.” Lindsey makes a fatal mistake here! He calls the Rapture “the translation.” The word “translation” is found in Col. 1:13. Here Paul says to the Colossean church of Christ, “Who hath delivered US (the church at Colosse and Paul) from the power of darkness, and hath translated US into the KINGDOM of his dear Son.”

According to Lindsey, the translation will take place in our near future. According to an **inspired apostle** the translation took place in the first century! According to Lindsey, the translation happens just before the second coming of Jesus to set up his kingdom.

According to an inspired writer, the kingdom was set up in the first century and people were being translated into it **then!** According to Paul, one was translated into the kingdom which was the church. According to an uninspired Hal Lindsey, the translation will not be into the kingdom, but into heaven! There are far too many contradictions already between the Bible doctrine and Hal Lindsey’s Rapture theory. If a doctrine is not based upon the Bible, Paul calls it the doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1).

WHEN WILL CHRIST ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM

According to Scripture, it has already been established! In Dan. 2:31-44 we see Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Daniel shows that God will set up the everlasting kingdom during the fourth empire of the dream he interprets. The empires were the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and the Roman. It was during the time of the Roman empire that Jesus’ kingdom would be established. Jesus was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), and began his public ministry in the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1). When he ascended into heaven, Jesus fulfilled Daniel 7:13, 14, (Acts 1:9, 10). That Old Testament prophet shows when Jesus would receive his kingdom! It was not, as the premillennialists say, at the second coming of Christ TO earth, but when he ascended TO the Father! Notice the preposition in Dan. 7:13, “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 there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.” Most people read Dan. 7:13 with the following changes, “... the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came TO the earth ... and there was given him ... a kingdom.” But, that is not what the scriptures teach!

In Mark 9:1 Jesus told his disciples, “*Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.*” Those disciples would see the kingdom come before they died! They lived in the first century. Therefore the kingdom came in the first century before they died!

A further announcement of the power which would usher in the kingdom is given in Luke 24:49. It would come with the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. On Pentecost, that power came, (Acts 2:1-4). After Acts 2 we find the church or kingdom in existence. In fact, in Col. 1:13 Paul speaks of the church as the kingdom. John wrote in Rev. 1:9 that he and those he wrote to were "*in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.*" If the kingdom was going to be established in 1995, how could John, Paul, the Colossean church, and other saints be members of it in the first century?

Premillennialists teach Jesus came to establish his kingdom in the first century. They say the Jews rejected Jesus as king and the kingdom was postponed. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Jews tried to take Jesus by force and make him a king over physical Palestine, (John 6:15), However, he did not come to rule over a physical kingdom, but a spiritual one (John 18:36). The premillennialists of today have the same mistaken idea about Jesus' kingdom held by first century Jews!

Today, one may become a member of Christ's spiritual kingdom by being born again, (John 3:3, 5). The new birth consists of believing the gospel (Mark 16:16), repenting of past sins (Acts 2:38), confessing Jesus as God's Son (Acts 8:37); Rom. 10:9, 10), and being immersed into Christ (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27). God adds the obedient to his Son's body, the church (Acts 2:47) which is the same as translation (Col. 1:13).

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

When Jesus left his apostles, the angels said he would come back in like manner (Acts 1:9-11). When he returns, it will not be to establish his kingdom for he has already done that. It will be to bring vengeance "*on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Thess. 1:8). This is the judgment for the wicked, (Matt. 24:46). When Jesus comes the graves will opened and the dead shall rise first, (1 Thess. 4:13-17) and the living saints with them will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, and thus always be with the Lord.

You may become a citizen of God's kingdom today. We encourage you to investigate the scriptures given in this article and decide for yourself the truth about God's kingdom.

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done." Rev. 22:12