

# The Rapture Theory

by — Danny Russino

here was an incredible change of conditions brought about by God at the end of the book of Acts. The dispensation of the kingdom on the earth was postponed and the secret of Ephesians 3 was introduced.

It is difficult for us today to appreciate the dramatic changes that had overtaken the believing community back then. The believers to whom Paul wrote in Ephesians and Colossians had been previously living in the powerful Acts period which was a foretaste of the coming millennium. There were prevalent and widespread mighty signs and wonders. The sick were healed, the dead were raised and those believers who sinned were judged, made sick and even died. The expectation that the Lord was going to descend out of heaven to the earth in the foreseeable future meant that they were to avoid marriage and distribute their possessions to the poor as they saw the day approaching.

Among this widespread teaching by all of the apostles of that time came word that Paul had received a new dispensation. God, Who never changes as to virtue and character, changed the dispensation after providing Israel with nearly forty years of opportunity to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. They were "let go" at Acts 28, and the foretastes of the millennial kingdom on the earth ceased and the imminent return of the Lord was postponed.

As Paul wrote and unfolded the new set of conditions, the believers saw differences. Paul now wrote that the young widows were to marry (I Timothy 5:14), he left behind friends who were sick (II Timothy 4:20)

and advised Timothy to take a little wine for his illnesses (I Timothy 5:23). Healing doesn't happen today like it did during Pentecost. No reference to the imminent return of the Lord can be found in Paul's seven post Acts letters, and, in fact, he wrote about a new hope where believers were raised and seated together in the heavenly places in Christ. This hope was completely different from what Paul

wrote about in his Acts-period epistles.

Such a dramatic change of dispensation certainly gave opportunity for Paul's opponents to ridicule further the man and his God-given ministry. Instead of embracing the changes that God had introduced through Paul, believers were confused into retaining elements of the previous dispensation of the Acts period.

We don't need to turn to history to prove that the majority of believers had been moved away from Paul not long after the change of dispensation:

Of this you are aware, that all those in the province of Asia were turned from me, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes (II Timothy 1:15).

These believers were not casting aside their faith in Christ. Many were to die at the hands of the Romans for their faith. They were turned away from Paul and the message for today. When Paul wrote his last letter

(see RAPTURE, page 4411)



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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25):
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
  - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
  - union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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#### **ABBREVIATION KEY**

#### Scripture Version

(Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Bible Student's Version*).

CV: Concordant Literal Version

DAR: Darby Translation

DT: Dabhar Translation

FF: Ferrar Fenton Bible

KJV: King James Version

RE: Rotterdam's Emphasized

Bible

WT: Weymouth Translation

YLT: Young's Literal Translation

#### Reference Sources

AA: Analytical Analysis (Welch)
BDB: Brown-Driver-Briggs

Hebrew Lexicon

CB: Companion Bible Notes & Appendixes (Bullinger)

CC: Concordant Commentary

(Knoch) CKC: Concordant Keyword Concordance (Knoch)

CL: A Critical Lexicon and Concordance (Bullinger)

CWS: Complete Word Study

Dictionary (Zodhiates)

FoS: Figures of Speech

(Bullinger)

SEC: Strong's Exhaustive

Concordance

TGL: Thayer's Greek-English

Lexicon

UR: Unsearchable Riches

VED: Vine's Expository

Dictionary

YAC: Young's Analytical

Concordance

#### Reference Notations

cf. – compare

e.g. - for example

et al. - and others

etc. - et cetera (and so on)

ff. - and the following

i.e., - that is

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#### RAPTURE (continued from front page)

to Timothy he was very concerned that this younger man would hold fast to the truth for today in the face of this widespread apostasy.

You may not be ashamed, then, of the testimony of our Lord, nor yet of me, His prisoner, but suffer evil with the evangel in accord with the power of God, Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian (II Timothy 1:8-9).

Have a pattern of sound words, which you hear from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. The ideal thing committed to you, guard through the holy spirit which is making its home in us (II Timothy 1:13-14).

Those believers turning away from Paul were not faithless, but they were not faithful to the changes that God had made. Indeed, Paul instructed Timothy to seek out these faithful believers and commit the "good deposit" to them so that they could pass it along.

You, then, child of mine, be invigorated by the grace which is in Christ Jesus. And

what things you hear from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who shall be competent to teach others also. Suffer evil with me, as an ideal soldier of Christ Jesus (II Timothy 2:1-3).

When the believing community began to realize that there would be a literal return of Christ to the earth they embraced the hope of the Acts period (I Thessalonians 4), because they had inherited the legacy of confusion left by the majority who had turned away from Paul centuries before. Not noticing the differences in Paul's letters, and to accommodate the

Acts period hope with heavenly places instead of the earth, they developed "the rapture" theory. The "rapture" is misinformation and a subtle misdirection to the wrong hope. Sadly, the rapture theory holds a powerful place in the Christian community today. Returning to the letter of Colossians we read a significant appeal of Paul regarding the new hope. They had heard of this new hope and he wanted them to hold fast to it and be not turned away from it:

since surely you are persisting in the faith, grounded and settled and are not being removed from the expectation [hope] of the evangel which you hear which is being heralded in the entire creation which is under heaven of which

> *I, Paul, became the dispenser* (Colossians 1:23).

The "rapture" is a false concept of a past and postponed hope dragged into the present. The "rapture" theory is a human endeavor which mixes the hope before us today with the earthly purposes of God for Israel. The "rapture" takes the hope of Paul's epistles for today, which have nothing to do with the earth, and forces it into an earthly context, thus blinding nearly all of Chris-

tendom to the hope for today.

The Word of Truth has clearly told us that we are to look for His appearing. Our traditions have clouded the issue. The fascination with the "rapture" has obscured the timing of His appearing. Once again, our life is hidden with Christ in God, and on that glorious day when the Head (Christ) appears, then we, the church which is His body, will appear with Him in that place. In other words, we will be revealed with our Lord and Head at the same time and in the same place. The appearing is in the heavenly places far above

the air and clouds of I Thessalonians 4.

When our Lord is revealed or manifested (*phaneroo*), He is seated at God's right hand among the celestials. He is not descending in the clouds with angels. His descent (parousia) in the clouds of I Thessalonians 4 is, which is not the same as His appearing or manifestation (*phaneroō*) of Colossians 3.

When the Lord is revealed He will not be moving at all. He will remain seated at the Father's right hand among the celestials when the light bursts forth and reveals Him throughout His entire kingdom. Our

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Lord's kingdom stretches from the heavenly places (or, the celestials) to the earth beneath.

christ sets up the "abomination of desolation" in Israel's temple.

When we are manifested with Him we will not be meeting Him as He descends "out of heaven," but we will be taken to heavenly places, seated and then manifested with Him there. This takes place before He descends to the earth, before I Thessalonians 4. I hope we are beginning to see the wonder of the differences between I Thessalonians 4, and Ephesians and Colossians.

Now immediately after the affliction of those days the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not be giving her beams, and the stars shall be falling from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Mankind in heaven, and then all the tribes of the land shall grieve, and they shall see the Son of Mankind coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory (Mathew 24:29-30).

#### The Tribulation: Worldwide?

We are led to believe also that the tribulation period is worldwide. This is incorrect. The great tribulation is specifically identified as belonging to Israel and is called "the time of Jacob's Trouble."

Ask now, and see whether a man is giving birth? Why do

I see every man with his hands on his loins, like a woman in labor, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall be in that day, says Jehovah of Hosts, I will break his yoke from your neck and will burst your bonds. And strangers shall no longer enslave him ... (Jeremiah 30:6-8).

This specific tribulation will begin once the Anti-

I bolded "appear" and "coming on the clouds." It seems that He appears first, then comes on the clouds. The Lord clearly says that only after the tribulation of those days in that location, then the Son of Man will appear in the heavens and descend in the clouds. Matthew 24 is not an unfolding of worldwide events,

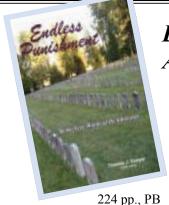
but events in and around Jerusalem in those last days prior to the Lord's return to Israel.

How plain can the Lord be? After the Temple is desecrated after the tribulation, then He returns. The Scriptures are clear. There is no "coming of the Lord" prior to the abomination of desolation and the full days of the great tribulation. Some see Matthew 24 as being about Israel and Thessalonians as being about the church today. [However], the trumpet of Matthew 24:31 is the same Feast of Trumpets as I Cor-

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*by* — Thomas J. Sawyer (1804-1899)

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inthians 15:52, I Thessalonians 4:16 and Revelation 11:15.

If the trumpet of Matthew 24 is for Israel, then how can we change the trumpet of I Thessalonians 4 to

occur at an earlier time and rapture away today's church? The Feasts clearly outline the steps in Israel's history. Passover, Unleavened Bread and Pentecost (Weeks) all have been fulfilled. The next event for Israel is the Lord's coming at the Feast of Trumpets.

The hope before us today is the *phaneroō*, which is the appearing of the Lord. This is not the *parousia*, which is the coming of the Lord in I Thessalonians 4.

Scripture tells us that Israel will suffer greatly during the tribulation which follows the Antichrist's desecration of their temple, but they will be saved despite the horror of that time period. The church which is His body has never been told that they will suffer

the great tribulation. The great tribulation takes place in Israel. Are we beginning to see that we cannot mix the things which belong to Israel with the things which belong to us? Right division is essential.

Is Paul speaking of something totally new and previously hidden in God in Thessalonians? Not at all. He is talking about the same second coming of the Lord as embedded in the Feasts and written in Daniel, Matthew 24, Luke 21 and the book of Revelation, along with other prophecies. Note the exact same details in the following passage regarding the Lord's "coming" and "their" (not our) gathering together to that glorious meeting in the air as He descends to the earth:

Now we are asking you, brethren, for the sake of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to Him, that you be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be alarmed, either through spirit, or through word, or through an epistle as through us, as that the day of the Lord is present. No one should be deluding you by any method, for, should not the apostasy be coming first and the man of lawlessness be unveiled, the son of destruction, who is opposing and lifting himself up over everyone termed a god or an object of veneration, so that he is seated in the temple of God, demonstrating that he himself is God? (II Thessalonians 2:1-4).

Notice, that "day" shall not come until after the apostasy and deception (II Thessalonians 2:9-11). This deception is not in Christianity, but for Israel. After this, then the Antichrist and his desecration of Israel's temple are seen, and after that the Lord descends to the earth in the clouds with a trumpet blast.

There is reserved the crown (wreath) of righteousness for those who love His "appearing" (II Timothy 4:8), which is not the "rapture." The hope before us today is the *phaneroō*, which is the appearing of the Lord. This is not the *parousia*, which is the coming of the Lord in I Thessalonians 4.

- God's Truths Recovered: Beyond the Reformation¹ (Chapter 6: Acts 28:28 - The Great Dispensational Divide) (edited & abridged)

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## Reader's Question Box #13

## "How do I show that the Bible is the Word of God?"

I have tried to show someone that the bible is God's Word by showing them that so many prophecies have already come true. But the person is telling me that he believes that it was written after the fact. Of course I know this is not true. But how can I explain it to him in a more effective way?

The short answer is that either your friend
• is not going to be called to be a member of the Body of Christ, or that God is not yet ready to make him a member. The long answer follows:

First, we need to understand God's purpose in this age in which we are now living - that is, the dispensation or age of grace, during which we receive our learning and understanding from our apostle for this age: Paul. All of the teaching that applies directly to

us for this age is found in Paul's letters, from Romans through Philemon.

God is working with a called-out group of people to whom He has given faith, and this group is called the Body of Christ by Paul. It is not the Christian churches that you see around you, or Christianity at large. This group, the Body of Christ, is relatively small compared to the vast numbers of those who don't YET believe. Paul said that "not many" are called (I Corinthians 1:26). Those who are called are those to whom God gave the faith to believe the gospel preached by Paul.

Second, I say all of this to let you know that you can't say the right thing to the wrong person, and you can't say the wrong thing to the right person. Our Father

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knows whom He will call, and we can do nothing to force the issue. Therefore, either someone has been called and God will give them the faith to believe what they're being told, or they will believe at some later time; or someone is not going to be called and they will not be given the faith during this age.

Yet know this: EVERYONE will be saved at some point after the ages are completed. As Paul tells us, God is the Savior of ALL men, ESPECIALLY those who believe (I Timothy 4:10). This indeed is not just good news, it's GREAT news! It removes all pressure and guilt from us because we know that it's all in Fathers hands, and His will will be accomplished.

God will impart faith (it's a gift: Ephesians 2:8; Romans 12:3; Philippians 1:29) to whose whom He will call during this age; but eventually, everyone will believe. This gift of faith is imparted on the basis of the Word of God. We are Father's vessels of mercy and grace to those around us, used by Him to accomplish His purposes of providing this Word. Note that Paul likens the process to the agricultural process: planting, watering, increase (or, bearing fruit); but only "God gives the increase" (I Corinthians 3:6). He uses us for the other part of the process.

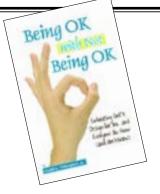
Another thing we need to realize, based on Romans 1:16, is that the gospel of Christ (preached by Paul) "is the power of God to salvation to everyone who be-

lieves." We find in II Corinthians 4:4 that Satan, the god of this world during this age, is being used by God to blind the minds of the non-believer, "LEST the light of the glorious gospel of Christ ... should shine unto them" and they should believe. You see, the amazing principle is that the gospel of Christ is so powerful that, without God's intervention, EVERY-ONE who heard it would believe. God is blinding the minds of the unbeliever in this age and opening the minds of those whom He has called and giving them the faith, so that He may build the Body of Christ and prepare them for their role in the celestials when He brings us home at the end of this age.

So don't worry, or feel guilty, or feel any pressure at all about whether or not someone believes. If it's going to happen, it will be if/when God decides that it's the right time; but eventually everyone will be brought to faith/belief, at the "end" (or what is called "the consummation") of the ages (I Corinthians 15:24), when God will become "All in all" (I Corinthians 15:28).

A great book to read is <u>The Salvation of All</u> by Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr. It covers the above information (and more) in greater detail. You will find many other resources also at <u>www.studyshelf.com</u>.

— André Sneidar
 Managing Editor, Bible Student's Notebook™



134 pp., PB

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## Being OK with Not Being OK-

Embracing God's Design for You ... and Everyone You Know (and Don't Know)

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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