



The Rapture and The Grace of God

By

Mark McGee

This Bible study was first presented online almost 20 years ago and is reproduced here in its original form.

Here's a note a reader sent to GraceLife Internet Ministries recently:

“Are there any specific verses to substantiate the belief of a rapture, specifically, a pre-Trib rapture? Those verses I've read, i.e., 1 Thes. 4:16-18; 1 Corin. 15:51-53, don't really say this will happen PRIOR to the Tribulation. I have always believed in a pre-Trib rapture, but the more I dig into the Word, the less convinced I am of it.”

The surest way to find an answer to this question is to approach it methodically and inductively. I appreciate the way the writer posed the question by saying “the more I dig into the Word...” That's how we find answers to the great spiritual questions of life - by “digging” for the answers.

The word “rapture” is not a biblical word. You'll find it no where in the Bible. It comes from the Latin *raptus* and is found in writings as far back as the early 1600s. It means “a state or experience of being carried away by overwhelming emotion, a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things, an expression or manifestation of ecstasy or passion.” The word, “rapture,” came into use among Christians to speak of Christ's return for His Church because it would be an exciting, mysterious event.

The Change

The Apostle Paul uses the term “change” when he writes about what’s going to happen to Christians at the moment they leave earth for heaven. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) The word “changed” is from the Greek *allagesometha*. The word means “to make other than it is.” It is the second future passive indicative *ofallasso*. That means it’s a future event that someone other than the object will cause. We are the objects of this action. God is the subject, or actor of the verb “change.” He causes the change. We are the ones changed. We will become something other than what we were less than half a second before the change occurs. What will that be? How will we change? Paul explains in the next verses:

“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” 1 Corinthians 15:53-55

Paul explained the perishable and imperishable earlier in this chapter as the physical body and spiritual body. In that instant, that “flash,” that “twinkling of an eye” that lasts for less than half a second, God will strip away every Christian’s perishability and give them a new, spiritual, imperishable body. He will “change” our mortality to immortality. We will live forever with perfect bodies, perfect minds! I can see why Christians have chosen the word “Rapture” to embody their excitement and yearning for Christ’s coming for the Church.

The Mystery

The Apostle Paul teaches us that the Body of Christ is a Mystery (Gr.-*mysterion*). It's not something known and taught and predicted prior to the revelation God gave Paul about it. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:4-6:

“In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

As you read the Gospels and the early chapters of Acts, you quickly learn that Christ never taught His disciples (Peter, James, John, etc.) that the Gentiles were heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. Peter and the disciples did not teach nor practice that after Christ returned to heaven. That’s because Paul’s message of a unified Body of Christ was a mystery to them. Jesus knew it while He was on earth but didn’t teach it because He was dealing with Israel according to what God was doing in the Kingdom Age. Christ and the disciples were acting out what the Old Testament prophets had written about the King and His Kingdom. They were operating within God’s Kingdom Dispensation (Gr.-*oikonomia* — “management of the household”). What we find in Paul’s letters is Christ dealing with the world in the Dispensation of the Grace of God, a formerly unrevealed dispensation, a

mystery. The Body of Christ is made up of Jews and Gentiles with no specific regard to the nation of Israel and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. That's because the Old Testament is silent about the Body of Christ and the Age of Grace. Paul continues in Ephesians 3:8-9:

“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration [Gr. – *oikonomia*] of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.”

Notice Paul says the administration of this mystery was hidden (Gr.- *apokrupto*) in God for ages past. The word mystery means a secret. It's something God always knew, but had kept secret until He revealed it through Paul.

The reason I share that background is because it impacts the issue of the rapture in a powerful way. The rapture is part of the mystery surrounding the Body of Christ. The Second Coming of Christ is about Old Testament prophecy. The two are not directly connected. You can find specific information about the Second Coming throughout the major and minor Old Testament prophecies. Christ gave His disciples specific information about His Second Coming while He was on earth. Peter preached about the Second Coming in his early messages to Israel that we find in the Book of Acts. It was all about prophecy, not mystery.

The Second Coming

Christ's Second Coming begins with Abraham and God's promise of land for Israel (Genesis 15:17-21). Israel has never possessed all the land God promised Abraham. That day is a future event when Christ returns to set up His Holy Throne in Jerusalem and gives the promised land to Israel. God repeated the promise of land to Israel through Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). God also promised Israel it would have a mighty King who would lead them to victory against the forces of other nations and would give them their land and establish a kingdom that would last forever (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 33:10-16; Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14). Jesus Christ is the promised Eternal King of Israel. The Gospels make that clear (Matthew 2:2; 27:11; Luke 1:32-33; John 1:49; 18:37; 19:19-22). I especially like John 18:37 where Jesus is standing before Pilate. Pilate asks Jesus if He is a king. Jesus answers, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Jesus makes it clear He was born to the Virgin Mary and entered into Israel's world because He was its king.

Christ's disciples also made clear His position as rightful King of Israel (Acts 2:29-36; 3:17-26). The Israelites of Peter's time could have seen the fulfillment of all prophecy "if" they had confessed their national sins and followed Christ. Peter wrote in Acts 3:19-23:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from his people.’ Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.”

Paul, on the other hand, says the times and events of which he was speaking “was not made known to men in other generations.” He said that God had kept it hidden in Him “for ages past.” Paul said God had given to him “to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery.” Paul’s mission was different than the one God gave to Peter and the disciples.

What we find in the Book of Revelation is also the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Apostle John saw the detailed completion of events Old Testament prophets saw in sometimes veiled messages. The Book of Revelation covers how the world hates and attacks the tiny nation of Israel. It covers how Satan hates and tries to destroy Israel. Revelation is the record of how God deals with Satan and the world in their attempts against Israel. Revelation shows how Christ fights and defeats the enemies of Israel and sets up a throne of power that lasts forever. Revelation is the

culmination of the Old Testament prophecies about Israel's land and its King. It has nothing to do with the Church, the Body of Christ, because that was a "mystery" the prophets knew nothing about. Christians, members of Christ's Body, will already be with Christ prior to the beginning of the events John writes about in Revelation. Christians will be witnesses to it and may even participate in some ways, but the Revelation is about God's making Israel the greatest nation on earth, His final judgment of Satan and all disobedience and giving to Israel a King and Kingdom that would last forever.

This is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT to our interpretation of information about the rapture. The rapture is for the Body of Christ. The Second Coming is for Israel. The rapture is at the end of the Age of Grace. The Second Coming is at the beginning of the establishment of the Kingdom Age.

Some of the most in-depth teaching about Christ's Second Coming for Israel came from Christ Himself. In Matthew 24, we see His disciples asking Christ about the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Here's how Jesus answered:

"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to

death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So, when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that our flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.”

Jesus paints a very dark picture of what Israel and the earth will face just before He returns to rule the world. It is a picture consistent with Old Testament prophecy and John's Revelation.

“Immediately after the distress of those days, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels

with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

This is consistent with John’s Revelation. Look at Chapter 19:11-21 -

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried with a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.’ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed

with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)”

The Difference

Notice that all of this is very public. Everyone in the world sees it. It's all fulfilled prophesy. There's no mystery here. Many prophets, including Christ Himself, spelled out specifics about what and how the end would happen. Christ destroys the armies of the earth in a very public way. His followers who were beheaded during the Tribulation because of their testimony for Jesus and the Word of God rule with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead do not come to life until the thousand years are ended. On the other hand, the "rapture" is not public. It happens in secret. The Christian's "change" happens so fast (in less than half a second) that the world will not see it happen. ALL of the dead in Christ will rise "first." That's certainly a major difference with the Second Coming where most of the dead remain dead until after the thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Another difference is that Paul says nothing about Israel or the beast or the false prophet or Christ's fighting a war or setting up a Kingdom or anything else that is part of John's Revelation. Why? Because the "rapture" of the Church (the Body of Christ) and the Second Coming of Christ to Israel to set up a Kingdom are two separate events!

I personally believe the rapture will occur prior to Christ's Second Coming. I also believe the rapture will occur prior to the Tribulation period. The Age of Grace, which is responsible for you, me and other Gentiles and Jews being allowed to know God through Christ Jesus, will come to an end some day. That's what Paul wrote about in I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4. Christ calls for His Body with a loud command, with the voice of the

archangel and with the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ rise first, then the living Christians are caught up to meet with Him in the atmosphere. We'll be with Him forever. Those are encouraging words indeed.

Once the Age of Grace comes to an end with such a remarkable event like millions of living Christians caught up into the skies to be with Christ, the world will be left without any witness for Christ. Everyone who loves Christ will be gone. What happens next? I believe God's prophetic clock for Israel will start up again. He will pick up where He left off centuries before when Israel rejected Christ's offer to be their King. But the next offer will be different. God will not give Israel a choice. He's not going to allow them to say "no" to Messiah again. He's going to send upon Israel the last seven years of promised prophetic judgment. He is going to do to Israel all that He promised thousands of years ago. That's what the Book of Revelation reveals.

I do not believe God will begin His judgment of Israel until the Age of Grace is complete and He has caught up every Christian believer. Our judgment as Christians before Christ is different than the one promised Israel. Christ will judge our works on earth. Christ will judge the world later for its sins against Him. There is no Biblical reason for Christians to go through one day of what God intends for Israel and an unbelieving world. Once we are out of the way and safely in the presence of Christ, God will perform His final work: The Tribulation, The Second Coming of Christ, the binding of Satan for 1,000 years, Christ The King on the Throne of David in Jerusalem, Christ's Millennial Rule on earth, Satan's release and final battle with God, God's final judgment of mankind, the destruction of the first

heaven and earth, the New Heaven and Earth, the New Jerusalem and Eternity.

Paul shares insight into this in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians.

“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” 1 Corinthians 15:22-28

Notice that Paul puts everything in chronological order:

- 1 Adam dies and all humanity die in him.
- 2 Christ dies and believers are made alive.
- 3 Christ is the firstfruits through His resurrection.
- 4 Christ returns to raise those who belong to Him.
- 5 Then the end comes.
- 6 Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He:

- Destroys all dominion, authority and power.
- Reigns until all His enemies are under His feet.
- Destroys death.

Paul makes it clear that the end occurs AFTER the Rapture. The end begins with the resurrection of Christians, which is a vital part of the Rapture. It is after that event that Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father. The process of handing over the kingdom includes the Tribulation, Millennial Reign and final disposition of all of God's enemies.

The Hope

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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