

# THE RAPTURE DOCTRINE: WHY WE DO NOT ACCEPT IT AS BIBLICAL TRUTH

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## PREFACE



Growing up in a Reformed church environment as we did, there was no exposure to any idea of a Rapture doctrine. In those days Pentecostal or Charismatic groups were considered to be sects and the members people to stay away from in church matters. It was only in our fifties, when we left our Reformed denomination for a journey that would take us through the Pentecostal church and later the Charismatic world in search for the unpolluted biblical truth, that we were introduced to the Rapture ideas. We were slowly drawn into it, a process that was strengthened by charismatic preachers and biblical terminology.

Then followed a series of wake-up calls as we began to read the Bible again, as if for the first time and without using the many books in our library as the primary reader. We now invite you to consider what we write and then to weigh our understanding carefully after the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11. As always we try to refrain from naming names, preferring to accept the sincerity and passion of the Rapture teachers and preachers. If it is deemed necessary in some instances to identify a preacher or author, please accept that our focus is on the content of their material and never on the person.

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**No doubt my doctrine has its own fair share of weakness and imperfection, but I am at least thankful that my face is not covered in another man's theological egg.**

**(John Eglinton)**

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

We believe that much of today's doctrinal errors come from the application of techniques inherited from Greek philosophy, as well as an unwillingness to work with the cultural and historical context within which specific portions of the Bible were written. Bishop John Lightfoot, for example, made a similar plea in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that one could only assure correct interpretation by understanding "(...) *how, and in what sense, those phrases and manners of speech were understood, according to the vulgar and common dialect and opinion of the nation [The Hebrews]; and how they took them, by whom they were spoken, and by whom they were heard. For it is no matter what we can beat out concerning those manners of speech on the anvil of our own conceit, but what they signified among them, in their ordinary sense and speech*".<sup>1</sup>

Consider the example of one of the so-called early church fathers, Origen, who was a gentile Christian from Alexandria. In writing Bible commentaries he regarded the Hebrew text and Hebraic themes as raw data which was to be interpreted using tools of Greek understanding. His approach was that the Bible contained three levels of meaning, in which the literal meaning of the text was supposedly for the more simple minded and the deeper levels for more enlightened readers.<sup>11</sup> We unfortunately find similar views among Bible teachers of today.

This impact was intensified when the Bible books were divided into chapters in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and verse numbers were added three centuries later. Instead of reading and understanding the individual books or

letters in the Bible as units, our learning has been built on fragmented Scripture and the ripping of portions out of its full context. Sadly, much of our modern doctrines have flowed out of this fragmentation. The Rapture doctrine (in all its variations) presents a prime example of how these ‘modern’ developments have derailed biblical truth and replaced it by man-made doctrines created through stringing verses together out of their true contexts, as well as reading into the Scriptures far above what has been written – adding words that are not used where it suits the required content, or omitting/dismissing the words that are actually used.

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**Chapters and verses in the Bible were 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century developments.**

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In short, therefore, we agree with Gary DeMar, that we need to determine what the text says in order to determine what the text means.<sup>iii</sup>

Consider this rapture-related example as an illustration: Criticising aspects of preterist views on Matthew 24, the writer of an article on the Internet (and which a friend confronted us with) stated that:

*“The destruction of Jerusalem [according to preterist view] was the Great Tribulation along with the persecution of believers. Makes one wonder how they justify Matthew 24:21 **which states** that the period after the ‘antichrist’ signs a seven-year peace treaty with Israel will be the worst time in all of history?” [Our accentuation].<sup>iv</sup>*

One may look at that verse whichever way you wish, but it does not make such a statement in any way. You have to read the elements of ‘antichrist’, ‘seven-year’ and ‘peace treaty’ into the text since it is simply not there. This is nothing short of sloppy scholarship.

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**One needs to determine what exactly a text says in order to form accurate understanding of what it means.**

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We read in Acts 2:41-47 how that early community of believers in Christ had favour with all the people (in Jerusalem). One cannot really say the same of Christian communities in the world today. In evaluating the reasons for this situation, it would not be surprising at all if the array of more than 40 000 denominations, built on so many different interpretations and doctrines of the same Scriptures has been a major cause. A Muslim once asked an acquaintance of ours and another Christian colleague of theirs if they were members of the same church. On their ‘no’ answer he commented that he could not understand Christians. The Muslims could go to any mosque and receive the same message and doctrines at all of them.

In one of his blogs, C. Michael Patton of Credo House Ministries recommended three criteria to apply when judging doctrine. In presenting these criteria he was distinguishing between essential and non-essential doctrine. We, however, deem it a good starting point by which to evaluate Christian doctrine overall. Also, we do not suggest the criteria be used in isolation of each other, but as a unit.

These are:

- **Historicity:** Does the doctrine have universal historical representation?
- **Clarity:** Is the doctrine represented clearly in Scripture?
- **Explicitly:** Does the passage of Scripture explicitly teach that a certain doctrine is essential?

We will weigh the Rapture doctrine by these criteria as we progress.

## CORE ELEMENTS OF THE RAPTURE DOCTRINE

There are a number of core elements involved in the typical Rapture end-times doctrine:

- A future world leader known as the Antichrist.
- This Antichrist will make a peace treaty with Israel for seven years, which he will break halfway through the period.
- The Mark of the Beast.
- A seven-year tribulation period of which the second half is called The Great Tribulation.
- There will be a sign of the Son of Man in the sky and He will appear on the clouds.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 5:2 & 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.
- The 'left behind' concept.
- The significance of the modern state of Israel.

Let us consider these elements individually. Please bear in mind that we are trying not to write a 100 page discourse, but to present a relatively concise discussion of an enormous topic about which many books have been written and a substantial number of movies have been made. For those who wish to read more, please see our articles on *The Great White Throne Judgement*, *The New Jerusalem*, *The New Heaven and New Earth*, and our E-Books, *Daniel Without Make-Up And Long Toes*, and *The End-times Prophecy Of Jesus*.

### THE ANTICHRIST

Let us consider everything the Bible has about the antichrist concept. Do keep the **principle of clarity** in mind. We take the relevant verses from The Interlinear Bible edited by Jay P. Green:<sup>v</sup>

- *“Young ones, a last hour it is, and as you heard that the antichrist is coming, even now antichrists many have arisen;”* (1 John 2:18).
- *“Who is the liar, except the (one) denying that Jesus not is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the (one) denying the Father and the Son”* (1 John 2:22).
- *“(…) and every spirit which not confesses Jesus Christ in (the) flesh having come of God not is; and this is the antichrist which you heard is coming, and now in the world is already”* (1 John 4:3).
- *“(…) Because many deceivers went out into the world, those not confessing Jesus Christ coming in (the) flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist”* (2 John verse 7).

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**The term 'antichrist' is only used in four verses and two letters of John in the Bible (1 & 2 John).**

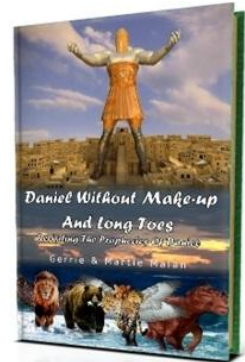
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The term 'antichrist' is used in no other book of the Bible, including the Book of Revelation. It is peculiar to these two letters of John which clearly state that the antichrist was already there at the time of his writing. Note also that his understanding was not limited to a single person. **The Jewish High Priest under whose leadership Christ was crucified can probably be regarded as the first antichrist.** It is important to note too, that John's first Epistle or letter

is a call to believers to walk in the Light – and then he describes four conditions for one to be considered walking in the light. To be on guard against antichrists is the fourth of these conditions. It was therefore not an admonition of futurist dimensions, but of **daily significance at the time of his writing** (as it is for today and time to come).

But what about **Daniel 9:27**, you may ask? Please study verses 25-27 (and may we suggest you look at several Bible versions for this purpose). Verses 26 and 27 form an undivided unit. But for the sake of reference: note that verse 26 describes two actors. One is an **individual**, Messiah, who is clearly the main figure in this whole section starting with verse 24. The next is a **group**, people of the prince that shall come and they will destroy the city and the temple. The 'he' in verse 27 can therefore only be the Messiah, as it cannot be applied to a group. To apply it to the prince (Roman military commander) as an individual is to violently force into the grammatical context something it does not state naturally; he is part of the group.

Some commentators try to build an argument on the fact that 'he' is not written with a capital letter in verse 27 and therefore does not refer to Messiah. This is a very flimsy argument, as the ancient Hebrew language did not use capital letters at all.



- Before we move any further, please note who the so-called seventy weeks prophecy in Daniel was addressed to and what the purpose was: *“weeks Seventy are decreed as to **your people** and as to **city your holy (...)**”* Then the angel continued to describe a six-fold purpose, all six of which were fulfilled by Christ. It was not and is not a prophecy to the nations of the world. In fact, it was not even a prophecy to the old nation of Israel, of which ten tribes that broke away after Solomon and formed the so-called northern kingdom of Israel as opposed to the southern kingdom of Judah had been dispersed throughout the known world long before the prophecy was given (722 BC). They remain known even today as the ten lost tribes. **It was a prophecy to the people of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin**, who were the captives in Babylon.
- Neither the specific word, 'AntiMessiah' nor something remotely similar is found in the Book of Daniel. Those who present the Antichrist doctrines apply an unfounded approach of double prophecy or double meaning to the content in order to force their antichrist idea into the picture. They then describe the biblical person addressed in the Scripture as a type or picture of a second more significant person that was being prophesied about (e.g. Dan 8:9).<sup>vi</sup> In this way whole new and unbiblical meanings are philosophised into the text.

**The modern end-times concept of The Antichrist is therefore not present in the book of Daniel.** It is a concept that was created by assumption, as well as stringing and philosophising all kinds of verses together far beyond and outside of their true contexts.

#### **THE SEVEN-YEAR PEACE TREATY WITH ISRAEL**

According to the popular modern end-times doctrines, the Antichrist (which we have shown to be unbiblical teaching in the sense of which such a figure is presented in these doctrines) will **make** a covenant or peace treaty with Israel (or the nations) for seven years. He will then break this covenant after 3½ years and this will be the start of great tribulation.

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**The Seventy Sevens Prophecy is wholly Christ-centred.**

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This aspect is taken from Daniel 9:27, “And he shall confirm a covenant with the many (for) week one. And in the half of the week he shall make cease sacrifice and offering (...).” It is im-

portant to understand that the so-called seventy weeks prophecy is wholly Christ-centered. We deal with this verse in more detail in our E-Book on Daniel, showing that this is a prophecy about the crucifixion of Christ and not about a future 21<sup>st</sup> century antichrist figure breaking a treaty with Israel. Please note too that the Hebrew word used does not mean ‘make’, but ‘confirm’, or ‘cause to be strong, to prevail’. Neither is there a statement of the breaking of a covenant in this verse. It is a complete and misplaced assumption.

It is also interesting to note how the Rapture-end-times teachers have had to explain new solutions to their theory of the European Union being the revived Roman Empire, as their anxiously awaited union of ten states has long surpassed that number. Currently some have replaced these states with a list of other international organizations. And this is the problem that arises when one does not rightly divide the word of truth throughout. You may create an easy explanation in one biblical situation, but it will always create problems followed by new assumptions in another. More than 40 end-time predictions have come and gone in only our lifetime (i.e. since 1946).

### THE MARK OF THE BEAST

One of the fear inducing aspects of the Rapture doctrine, is the concept of the mark of the beast which is found only in the book of Revelation. Even then there are two very specific alternatives of this mark, viz. **the name of the beast, or the number of the beast’s name** (Rev 13:17). Most people, including preachers, teachers and authors, are seemingly ignorant of this fact (as we had been for many years). Some Bible versions, such as the King James Version, do create an impression of three alternatives, viz. the mark of the beast, or his name, or his number:

*“And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*

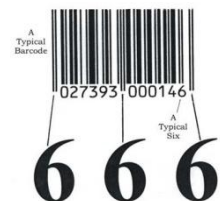
The Holman Christian Standard Bible<sup>vii</sup> and the Complete Jewish Bible<sup>viii</sup> respectively render it as follows:

*“so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark: the beast’s name or the number of his name.”*

*“preventing anyone from buying or selling unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of his name.”*

The Greek word expression translated as ‘or’ is *ē* (pronounced ay). Zodhiates points out that when it is repeated (*ē...ē*), it means either...or.<sup>ix</sup> Robertson agrees, stating the mark may be either the name or the number of the beast. The name and the number are one and the same. They could write the name in numerals, for numbers were given by letters.<sup>x</sup> The Holman and Complete Jewish versions therefore have the correct rendering.

We have no doubt that the statement is a symbolical one expressing allegiance to the ‘beast’ as opposed to God and his word. It is similar to what one finds in Exodus 13:9, for example and was a well-known concept of the era.<sup>xi</sup> This reality has all but disappeared from popular writings and sermons through the years to take on other characteristics. For years we were taught it was the bar code on modern products. Bar codes at the time



(the 70's to the 90's) all seemed to have three sets of double lines, longer than the rest of the code. These were the ones on the far left, centre and far right of the bar code. All three apparently bore the number 6 in the total code even if it was hidden from the eye. More recently, however, it has been replaced in end-times warnings by a microchip people will need to have implanted under the skin of the wrist.

One end-times website even states that the Star of David will be the Mark of the Beast on the forehead so that you thereby acknowledge the future of the false kingdom of god (false future Israel or Palestine) and can take the economic chip. Secondly, the inserted chip in your hand is the Mark of the Beast needed to participate in the economic system. According to this website you need both marks and not only one. Can you see just how far people are philosophising the Bible away from its true context?

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**The Rapture doctrines are creating a system of fear by replacing the Good News of the Kingdom of God with the Bad News of an Antichrist's reign.**

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An anxious acquaintance once phoned us. Her bank card had been damaged and she had that day collected her new card from the bank, where she was told it contained the newest chip technology. Her well-known senior pastor had shortly before completed his annual end-times preaching series. The

lady was in absolute distress that she now carried the mark of the beast. This is what the popular (Rapture) end-times doctrine is doing. The Good News of the Kingdom of God has made way for the Bad News of the reign of Antichrist.

While most modern texts reflect the number of the beast as 666, the earliest known version of the book of Revelation – from the third century – used 616. Many scholars accept that it was a coded way of referring to a **contemporary figure of the time about whom open criticism would have been politically dangerous.**

Depending on which spelling one uses in Hebrew gematria (where every letter has a corresponding number), Roman Emperor Nero yields either 666 or 616. Emperor Caligula also yields 616. By using the short form of later Emperor Domitian's names and titles, the result is 666 too. However, based on the overwhelming evidence for the year 68 AD as the likely year in which the Revelation was written, Nero fits this picture perfectly. And so does his persecution of the Christians. Of course there are many who disagree, but their evidence for a later dating of the book (in Domitian's time, 95 AD) simply does not weigh up. [If you wish to know more about this topic, we recommend the concise and free E-Book by Frans du Plessis, [Dating The Book Of Revelation](#)].

Many other solutions are presented in contemporary literature, of which the Roman Catholic Pope is a favourite. Authors and teachers of popular modern end-times topics are continually involved in the 'identify the Antichrist or Beast' game. Once we had read it was former USA President Ronald Reagan and later also Bill Clinton. Others have lately become convinced it is Islam. Matthew 24 (and its parallels) has no reference to a concept of this kind. Remember that we are talking about a so-called world leader, an individual.

### THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Although the Rapture teachers cannot agree among themselves whether this event will take place before or after the Great Tribulation that is supposedly to come during their Antichrist's reign, they do have such a tribulation in common. This tribulation is taken out of true context from Matthew 24:21 and its parallels in Mark 13:19 and Luke 21:22 (where it is called days of vengeance).

In Hebrews 1:1-3 we read that, *"In many times and in many ways of old God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, in (the) last days of these spoke to us in (the) Son, whom He appointed heir of all, through whom*

*indeed the ages He made; (...)*.” A note I, Gerrie, made in two of my Bibles alongside these verses states that God’s word through His Son is final. It fulfills and transcends all previous words of God through the prophets. (I suspect it may have come from a book of Andrew Murray). Jesus of Nazareth is the ultimate prophet in the Bible and his Matthew 24 prophecy needs to be clearly understood. We cannot deal with the whole prophecy in this article but wish to highlight a number of aspects that are relevant to the Rapture doctrines:

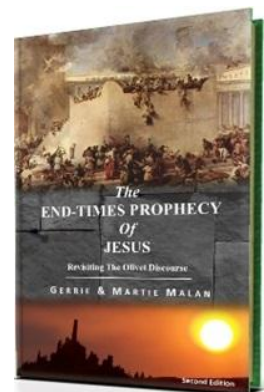
- The prophecy has absolutely no reference to that central figure in Rapture doctrines, which is the so-called Antichrist.
- The prophecy is very clear about the land of Judea and the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem of that generation’s time and surrounding Judea is where the tribulation would occur. People were warned to flee to the mountains to escape it. There is no mention of something remotely likened to a rapture. In fact, the disciples are told (verse 9) that they would be handed over for persecution (which also means anguish and tribulation) and to be killed.
- Jesus stated explicitly in verse 34 that the generation of his disciples would not pass away until that prophecy would be fulfilled. His prophecy does not have any mention of a rapture-like event.

One commenter on a blog stated that Jesus introduced the Rapture in John 14:2-3:

*“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places (...) I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to myself (...)”* (HCSB).

Jesus spoke these words during the last Passover meal He had with His close circle of twelve disciples. Previously, in His end-times prophecy on the Mount of Olives He told them that *“Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you”* (HCSB). This example once more accentuates why it is so critically important to read the Scriptures against the true and correct contextual background. Misplaced philosophisings do not serve the truth.

History, recorded by Josephus and others, confirm that the siege and fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman army in 70 AD was indeed a time of unthinkable tribulation. One cannot hope to fully understand the Matthew 24 prophecy without studying the history of the time and events related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. In order to limit the volume of this article, we will trust that the reader will take the trouble to read that record. Fighting Jewish factions inside the beleaguered city already wreaked tribulation among inhabitants, including the destruction of the grain stores and consequent terrible famine. When the Roman army overran the city, Josephus records that the soldiers eventually became so tired of killing people that they continued to kill only the armed, aged and infirm. The young who could be useful were taken captive.



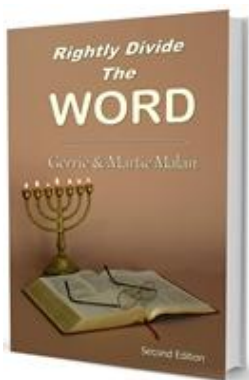
### **THIS GENERATION**

The reference to the generation in whose lifetime these things would occur creates a problem for the popular Rapture teachers. They inevitably have to produce different explanations (or should we say excuses?) to uphold their views. The two best known explanations are that it either means the Jewish race, or the future generation of believers who will see the signs of Matthew 24 happening in the world. Sadly,

even the atheists and sceptics do better Bible study in this regard. One such atheist, Mark Smith for example, quotes 52 Bible versions, five (5) Greek lexicons, 25 Bible dictionaries, six (6) Bible encyclopedias, 16 Bible commentaries, eight (8) Christian scholars and authors on the meaning of the word *genea* in the Matthew 24:34 context, and 13 scholars on the 'Jewish race' argument to show that it meant that specific generation.<sup>xii</sup> Unfortunately he puts his good study to a negative cause, by noting there was no physical or bodily return of Jesus in the generation of the apostles. Consequently Jesus (and the Bible) lied.

We need to look at the fact that Matthew 24 is not a standalone section of the Gospel according to Matthew. The whole context starts out with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Mat. 21 and continues through to Matthew 26. Addressing the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, Jesus told them too that, *Truly I say to you, will come all these things on – generation this*" (The Interlinear Bible). **In fact, Jesus already told his disciples earlier (Matt 16:28) that some of them would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**

The whole address in Matthew 24 and 25 is given to Jesus' disciples. They are addressed as 'you' throughout. Attempts to give rip '*this generation*' in Matthew 24:34 out of this whole context and assign it some future-friendly meaning is to do violence to the text. If we accept this, then why should we not apply the same approach to the word 'you' and declare that instead of being raptured, you (the 21<sup>st</sup> century's people) will be handed over (by those supposedly bearing the so-called Antichrist's mark) for persecution/tribulation and to be killed?



The clear and unpolluted biblical record in Matthew 24 refers to a tribulation that played out in Jerusalem and surrounding Judea, not the world at large, and not in our future. It was to take place in the generation of those disciples who were listening to Jesus when he gave that prophecy. *Genea* simply means a multitude of contemporaries. There may surely be tribulations in the world we know today, and it is probably physically possible for the earth to be destroyed. But that would not be the fulfillment of a prophecy in the Bible. Those prophecies were directed at very specific people/nations and in very specific situational contexts. [Our free concise E-Book, *Rightly Divide The Word*, discusses the basic principles which helps one to understand the Scriptures correctly. After all, if it is important that we have the Bible, it is important that we understand it (Ephraim Currier, 1841)].

Those who connect the concept of generation to the Jewish nation are not altogether wrong. It is used in the Bible especially of the Jewish race living at one and the same period – in the case of those living at the time of Jesus' ministry among them. See also, for example, this usage in Matthew 11:16; 12:39; 16:4; 23:36; Mark 8:12, 38; Luke 11:29; 17:25; Acts 13:36; and Hebrews 3:10.<sup>xiii</sup> The word 'this' in the context of Jesus' words clearly signified the Jewish generation listening to His voice.

#### **THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN IN THE SKY AND HIS APPEARANCE ON THE CLOUDS**

Although one cannot put the whole blame for the interpretation variations of Matthew 24:30 on translation errors and prejudices alone, it also cannot be ignored. The Holman Christian Standard Bible, for example, renders the verse: "*Then the sign of the son of Man will appear in the sky (...)*." The Interlinear Bible, however, renders it: *And then will appear the sign of the Son – of man in the heaven;*"



There have been different explanations in this regard. Many people's understanding have been formed and cemented by the images and portrayals in modern multi-media. Doctrine is often cemented in the human mind by music too. Throughout the Bible we see the clouds used as a prophetic expression and sign of God's presence and judgment. See Isaiah 13:10 and 19:1; Joel 2:30-32; and Daniel 7:13, for example. But for some reason this prophetic image has been elevated by some to a literal and visible event which is to take place somewhere in our future.

Consider Matthew 26:64, once again bearing in mind the contextual unit of chapters 21-26. *"Yet I tell you, from now you will see the Son – of man sitting off (the) right (hand) of power and coming on the clouds – of Heaven."* At this Messianic statement, the High Priest tore his garments and declared that Jesus had blasphemed. Jesus was addressing the Jewish high priest directly and qualified His statement unequivocally with the words 'from now you will see'.

The 'sign' of the prophecy in Matthew 24:30 underlines that they would know Yeshua MiNatzaret was who he said he was: The Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah. It was not the sign that was in heaven, but the Son of God! The people would have had no doubt when they saw God's judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple fulfilled. There can be no doubt that they fully understood the context. Jerusalem was well-known throughout the Roman Empire and beyond at the time and when it happened, the news of its destruction would have travelled quickly, far and wide.

#### **1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-17; 5:2 & 1 CORINTHIANS. 15:51, 52.**

We now come to the most foundational 'Rapture' Scripture, *"For to you we say by a word of (the) Lord, that we the living remaining to the coming of the Lord, not at all may go before those having slept, because Himself the Lord with a word of command by a voice of an archangel and with a trumpet of God, will descend from Heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise again firstly, then we the living remaining together with them will be caught up in clouds to a meeting of the Lord in (the) air and so always with (the) Lord will be. So then comfort one another with words these."*

In 1 Corinthians 15:51,52 Paul mentions that, *"(...) all indeed not we shall fall asleep, all but we shall be changed in a moment, in a glance of an eye, at the last trumpet;"* (The Interlinear Bible).

Not only do these two portions of Scripture have the resurrection at heart, but they include the Old Testament concept of 'falling asleep'. Also Paul is very clearly not referring to any future generation, but to the generation his letters were addressed to - note his use of the first person, 'we' throughout. Bear in mind that Paul wrote to two specific congregations and not to a wider audience, as he did in the letters to the Galatians and Ephesians. Paul was addressing very specific questions and problems pertaining to those specific groups. **[Note:** By 70 AD there were already many churches spread throughout what we know as Europe and Asia, as well as Northern Africa. In the Bible itself 33 such ecclesias are mentioned, but there certainly were more. Tradition indicates, for example that the apostle Bartholomew may have been martyred in India. Matthew's missionary work and possible martyrdom is placed in Ethiopia and Persia.]

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**In Paul's letter to the Colossians he asked that the letter also be read in Laodicea. Most of his letters do not have a similar request, for example 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Corinthians.**

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Under the Mosaic dispensation or covenant, to be 'asleep' was the state of death in a **temporary holding place** (Hebrew *Sheol* and Greek *Hades*) that would give up its dead at the resurrection. This resurrection

took place when the judgment, the days of vengeance, fell upon the Jewish nation, upon Judea and Jerusalem in 70 AD. *Hades* gave up the dead that were in it and it was cast into the lake of fire.

During Paul's work among the Thessalonian believers he had emphasized that Christ's coming (*parousia*) would be soon. The Thessalonians feared that those who had died in the meantime would now be missing the kingdom. Paul wrote to clarify their confusion and set their hearts at ease. In similar fashion, he addressed specific aspects in his letter to the Corinthians. After the judgment upon the old Jewish dispensation, those who died would no longer go to the temporary holding place, *Hades*, but would be changed in the twinkling of an eye! The dead would henceforth come face to face with the Lord in His Glory when they died, of which clouds and the air are but concrete symbols for the abstract concepts they were. 'To meet Him in the air' (1 Thess 4:17) is an old Aramaic idiom meaning 'to hasten to greet Him'.<sup>XIV</sup>

Please read our article on the [Great White Throne Judgement](#). If this resurrection has not yet taken place as we understand it, then any mention of someone who has gone to be with the Lord (Paul included) would be unbiblical as all would still be going to *Sheol/Hades* awaiting that resurrection. Of course one could brush aside the Hebraic *Sheol* (or Greek *Hades*) understanding, but then one would have to brush aside the Hebraic resurrection concept as well, for the two are essentially connected.

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**The New Testament is filled with exhortations of an eschatological event expected in the lifetime of the apostles' generation.**

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According to Acts 2:42 the people (in Jerusalem) were devoted to the doctrine of the apostles. While this doctrine would have covered all they were taught by the Master in his time with them, such as the beatitudes of Matthew 5, there can be no doubt that the apostles would have included His end-time prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 in their doctrine. After all, it was not only a matter of life and death, but of everlasting life or death. The New Testament is filled with exhortations of an eschatological event expected in the lifetime of that generation.

In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians he refers to the man of lawlessness (or sin) that would be revealed. Note once again the relevance to the resurrection and judgment to come. And again, Paul's whole frame of reference is that generation and the temple of that time.

A note on the criterion or **principle of explicitness** in judging doctrine would be in order at this point. The New Testament books are not arranged in our Bible according to their accepted date of writing. In the case of Paul's letters they have been arranged from the longest one (Romans) to the shortest (Philemon). Evidence indicates that the letter to the Galatians was his first (written in 49 AD) and 2 Timothy the last (some 15 years later). The second and third letters were those to the Thessalonians. If the Rapture doctrine were true, one would have expected to see a development or at least repetition of that essential doctrine throughout all Paul's letters. After all, it would have been a matter of everlasting life or death for all! Bear in mind that the letter to the Romans (Paul's sixth letter) is regarded as the systematic theology handbook in the New Testament. We would also have expected to see a developing urgency in getting that doctrine out to all. There is no such evidence in Paul's letters. To this one should add the absence of such teaching in the other Epistles.

The Greek word *harpazo* used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is at the centre of many teachings, sermons and books in this 'rapture' or 'catching away' context. One cannot ignore the fact that it is also used else-

where in the New Testament. Paul also used it, for example, in 2 Corinthians 12:2 where he wrote about a man who was caught up to the third heaven, which was a description of spiritual ecstasy he experienced.

### THE LEFT BEHIND CONCEPT

What does the left behind concept that Jesus referred to in Matthew 24:40 imply? Does that not illustrate a rapture of some while some are not taken? Many of us have seen the films showing two people who are together, when suddenly a bright light immerses them, and one disappears in the twinkling of an eye, with his/her clothes all neatly folded up in a pile.

We cannot deny that the Left Behind series of books and the films that flowed from them have taken an important part of the Christian world by storm. Sadly, in our view, it is based on a very unfortunate understanding and presentation of the Bible. The left behind image that Jesus used had a different meaning altogether. In the cultures of the biblical times, during persecutions and wars, the conquering forces would take the strong and young captive and leave the old and weak behind.<sup>xv</sup> The Babylonian exile is one example. Historical records show the reality of just how many young people had been taken captive by the Romans during the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem. The Complete Works of Josephus on the history of the Jews is a must-have resource for Bible study.

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**A resource such as The Complete Works of Josephus on the history of the Jews is a must-have for Bible study.**

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A simple reality of the times was taken by modern end-times prophets and turned into highly spiritualised fiction! Fiction it may be, but sadly it has had a huge impact on the minds of the misled believers. According to the late reverend Jerry Falwell no other book apart from the Bible has had such an impact on Christians than the first book in the *Left Behind* series. What a statement, especially if the book's content were found to be less than biblically well-founded (even if it is so-called fiction).

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL

We do not want to dwell much on this topic, but feel it necessary to make a few observations because the establishment of the modern state of Israel is used by some as the basis moment for calculating and predicting a date of the Rapture. In the process they build on the fig tree parable of Matthew 24:32-34. They regard the establishment of modern Israel in 1948 as the budding of the fig tree in the parable. Adding 40 years (regarded as a generation) a prominent end-times prediction of 1988 was made during the 1970's.

The problem with this reasoning and all the attempts afterwards to present explanations and new predictions is that the fig tree has never been used as a symbol of the nation of Israel. One has to force such a meaning into the text. The fig tree that is sprouting new leaves is used here as illustration that a new season, a new *kairos*, is at the door. In similar way, when the apostles saw the events Jesus described, they were to know that He was at the door in judgment upon Jerusalem and Judea. A new season, *kairos*, dispensation was at the door. That was the New Covenant dispensation of the Kingdom of God

In his letter to the Galatians (4:25,26) Paul wrote that, "*For Hagar Sinai Mount is in Arabia, corresponds and to the now Jerusalem, she slaves and with the children of her. But above Jerusalem free is, who is mother of all of us;*" And the writer to the Hebrews (12:22) states, "*But you have drawn near to Zion Mount, and a city God of (the) living Jerusalem to a heavenly (...)*" (The Interlinear Bible). If we believe the New Jerusalem

(Rev 21 & 22) is yet to come, then the book of Hebrews cannot be taken as truth! Please see our articles on the New Jerusalem, and the New Heaven and New Earth.

The Jerusalem of old was known as the holy city because that is where the temple was and God's name was on the city. It was the centre of God's presence among his people and the Jews regarded it as the centre of the known world (Ezek 5:5). It is no longer the case and the Jerusalem of today is no longer the holy city. The Jerusalem Jesus encountered had already turned its back on God to become a city of religion, which housed a temple of religion.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF CLARITY APPLIED

The principle of clarity is found throughout the Scriptures, e.g. Deuteronomy 27:8; Habakkuk 2:2; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 John 2:21; and Revelation 1:4. As we have shown, the Doctrine of the Rapture of the Saints does not meet this criterion remotely. It is a doctrine that has been philosophised into existence and strung together with verses taken from various portions of the Scriptures and out of their true contexts. In the process words and meanings have been added to the various texts and what we have is nothing short of a cut-and-paste result.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF EXPLICIT APPLIED

The very way the doctrine has been created denies this principle or criterion. We have pointed out the fact that such a life and death essential doctrine, if it were true, would not be splattered in bits and pieces over different Scriptures written to people at different places. It would have been at the heart of the apostles' doctrine that the people of their generation were devoted to. We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness. **Yeshua MiNatzaret did not teach this doctrine although he was and is the ultimate Prophet of God.**

If students of Christian doctrine would just place the New Testament books in their proper order to begin with, it would already help to prevent much man-made and philosophised doctrinal confusion.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF HISTORICITY APPLIED

The question is whether the doctrine has universal historical representation? Something that has lacked historic unity among Christians across time is not necessarily wrong, but certainly needs to be approached with great caution.

Because many have pointed out this weakness in the Rapture doctrines, a well-known teacher of the doctrine took up the challenge. Dr. Grant Jeffrey wrote the following: *"During the summer of 1994, **after more than a decade of searching**, I discovered several fascinating manuscripts that contain clear evidence of the teaching of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture in the early church"*.

He then went on to quote a statement from the work of a so-called early Christian writer and poet, Ephraem the Syrian, (who lived from AD 306 to 373) and who was a major theologian of the early Byzantine Eastern Church: *"For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the Tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."*<sup>xvi</sup>

We wish to make the following observations in this regard. It is astounding that someone who had been preaching the rapture concept for a long time acknowledges nonchalantly as if it is of no importance at all, that he had to make a very concerted effort, spanning ten years, to find something resembling the modern rapture doctrine in ancient Christian writings. This in itself does not pass the test of historicity.

Worse, it later came to light that the quote was from a document called *Pseudo-Ephraem*. *Pseudo*, of course, means false. It is regarded to be a document from the 7<sup>th</sup> century or even later (see the following: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse\\_of\\_Pseudo-Ephraem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse_of_Pseudo-Ephraem)). In addition and as the Wikipedia article shows, there are considerable questions as to the correctness of the various text translations involved.

The fact is simply that if the Rapture had been early church doctrine (and the seventh century is certainly not early enough to prove authenticity of doctrine) it would not have been difficult to find such evidence. According to the Bible (Acts 2) the people were taught the doctrine of the apostles and not something else. There is abundant evidence that by the fourth century the pagan influence of converted Greeks such as Origen had already philosophised much of the Scriptures into what it never stated or intended.

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**The Rapture doctrine does not pass the test posed by the principles of clarity, explicitness and historicity.**

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We can therefore confidently conclude that the Rapture doctrine does not pass the principle or criterion of historicity. Today many argue over the doctrine's true time emergence – the early 1800's or further back during the 1700's or so. **This debate in itself is evidence that it was not a doctrine of the Christian church through all the centuries.**

## THE END OF THE WORLD

With all that you have written here, Gerrie and Martie Malan, how then does the end of the world that the Bible speaks of fit in? We understand that this is a question relevant to our views on the Rapture doctrines. Once again, we wish to underline that we cannot cover all the aspects on the biblical references to the 'end of the world' in this article. Nonetheless, we also appreciate that we need to provide some idea of our understanding.

A Christian leader once responded to us that *"There will be a rapture there will be a mark of the beast and there will be end times there are over 300 references to this. And there have been many good men and woman who have interpreted many of the parts (not all) but many of the parts right."* There can be no doubt that many Christians throughout the world will agree with this viewpoint - and so did we for a good part of our life. But that does not necessarily prove truth!

**To understand when the 'end of the world' would be according to the Bible, we first need to understand what the 'world' is in terms of the specific context of the Biblical record.** It is poor interpretation of the Bible if we define the expression 'the world' in any other way or sense than its Biblical context. The Bible should be used first to interpret the Bible.

After Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple (Matt 24:2) His disciples asked: *"Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* Jesus reacted with the discourse on wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes, describing them as **the beginning** of sorrows. He included the warning that they should not be deceived.

Then, in verse 14 Jesus stated that this gospel of the kingdom would be preached in **all the world** for a witness unto all nations; after which the end would come.

Let's consider relevant descriptions in the New Testament of **'the world'**. **Luke 2:1** states that a decree went out from Ceasar Augustus that **all the world** had to be taxed. According to **Acts 2:5** people from **every nation under heaven** were found in Jerusalem at the time. A complete list of the nations is then given in verses 9 through 11. Note that they represent all the nations in the Roman Empire.

When Paul writes to the Romans (**Rom 1:8**) he states that their faith is spoken of **throughout the whole world**. **Revelation 3:10** records that the **Philadelphian Church** will be kept from the hour of temptation that would come on the **whole earth**. Then they are told to hold fast, for Jesus would be coming soon. In **Colossians 1:6** Paul notes that the gospel **"is in all the world"**. He continues in verse 23 that the gospel had been **preached to every creature under heaven**.

Different Greek words are translated "world" and "earth" in the English New Testament. These are:

- **Kosmos** which means the orderly arrangement of the earth's inhabitants (Mat. 24:21; Rom. 1:8 and Col. 1:6).
- **Oikoumenē** meaning the inhabited earth, and specifically the Roman Empire (used in Mat.24:14; Luk. 2:1 and Rev. 3:10).
- **Aion** (129x) which refers to a period; eternity; a dispensation; age ; or era.

The concept of the world used in these core "end-times" Scriptures are therefore clearly referring to the known world of the time when these things were said or written; which was the Roman Empire. Jesus therefore prophesied the end of the dispensation of the Mosaic covenant and the temple in Jerusalem as the centre of human relationship with God. He introduced a New Testament, a dispensation of Grace for all nations. His "coming" (Matt 24:3) is the Greek word *parousia* and referred to his nearness or presence, and in this sense more specifically his presence to execute judgment over Jerusalem. (And just to bring contextual balance, the world in the Pentateuch, for example, is even more limited than the Roman Empire).

When Jesus died on the cross, he cried out **"It is finished"**. He did not cry out **"I am finished,"** or **"We are halfway there!"** His prophecy over Jerusalem was fulfilled in 70 AD, when the city and the temple of religion were destroyed by the Roman army under Titus. It was preceded by a terrible tribulation during the siege of the city. There was such famine that cannibalism occurred. Christian believers, however, left the city earlier when they could and so escaped the slaughter. When Roman general Titus entered the city he declared only God could have made it possible.

***"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ"*** (Gal. 4:4-7, King James Version).

Instead of living in the fear of the end-times heresies, we need to manifest our sonship that we **have received in Christ's finished work on the cross!** We need to live the Kingdom life! And **the kingdom life in**

**God's eyes has always been to do what is right and just** (Gen 18:19). It is not a utopian environment of people in white clothes relaxing beside a tranquil pool as some multimedia have illustrated.

*"He entered the holy of holies once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12).*

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we noted all along, it is simply not possible to cover the topic(s) in the space of a single article. We have tried though, to give a clear idea of our understanding of the Scriptures without allowing popular books or films to interpret it for us. And we have tried to show why and how we believe the original generation in whose time these Scriptures were given would understand it.

We understand that many readers would also immediately describe us by the label of preterism. Personally we don't care much for labels. We will read the viewpoints of all –isms, including the so-called Torah-observant groups and the Sacred Names only groups, for example. And we are willing to weigh all viewpoints after the Berean example and do our best to rightly divide the word of truth. We will test as best we can the viewpoints against the Scriptures and not the other way round. Then we decide what we believe to be the correct interpretation and take responsibility for our decision. After all, it is the truth that will set one free, not religion's doctrines.

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**It is the truth that sets one free and not some or other doctrine of religion, however sincere the spirit it may have been created in.**

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The stubborn stains of Greek philosophical techniques have robbed the community of believers of Christ of the fullness of living the kingdom life Jesus of Nazareth came to announce. And the world sadly is not a better place for much of the man-made 'Bible' doctrines, however sincere the spirit it may have been created in.

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The Hosea Connection

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