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405 - Will There Be A Rapture

1. Introduction

There have been isolated instances in which God delivered the faithful from a coming catastrophe. As we study accounts of the Lord's judgment on a broader scale we don't find examples of the godly being removed from the situation. What we find is that those who follow God are preserved but may still have to endure the harsh realities they're faced with. But, there are those who teach that God will spare the faithful from one of the worst calamities to fall on the entire world as a sign of the end times and imminent return of Christ.

2. A lingering misconception

As the disciples spoke with Christ for the last time, prior to his ascension, they asked if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. Christ responded, "***It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.***" (Acts 1.7-8). In the three years they had been with Jesus, the disciples, soon to be his apostles, were still in the dark about the nature of the kingdom and the future God had planned. Christ had told them to not to depart from Jerusalem because they would "***...be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.***" (Acts 1.4-5).

The Jews of the first century lived in the shadow of the prophets who foretold of the Messiah who would establish a kingdom. They embraced their national and spiritual pride as God's people the offspring of their father Abraham. Their expectation, and that of Christ's closest disciples, was that the kingdom of David would finally be restored. Their enemies would be driven out and a golden age would appear for them. The only problem was that prophets such as Jeremiah had stated emphatically that wasn't going to happen. For that reason the true nature of Christ's work on Earth and his kingdom wasn't clear to anyone until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the twelve and the Gospel was preached.

I use this illustration to demonstrate that religious people get things wrong and they get them wrong in spite of what the scriptures actually state. Throughout these lessons I've noted that most misinterpretation and error is the result of a failure to understand the structure of the scriptures, keep things in their proper context and accept what the word says about a subject. The defining element however is the human mind. Misinterpretations, erroneous and distorted doctrines have been the result of these things and the added factor of the subjective human consciousness.

From the first century until now there are those who argue that the Law of Moses is still in effect. That the Gospel is not a law and we have the ability to fashion worship and practices to

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fit what we perceive as needful. After twenty centuries plus, the misconceptions have become more refined, appear to be better defended and are embraced by millions. In the final analysis what we find is that if there's a consensus that something is true then it must be true. That's a fatal error in many things but especially in regard to what the Bible teaches.

In the mid-nineteenth century J.N. Darby and Mary MacDonal both proposed that a time was coming when the faithful would be taken from the Earth to escape the ravages of a judgment from God. Arguments have ensued over who originated this and whether this disappearance of the godly would take place before or after the evil about to fall on humanity. Darby's basis for this appears to be a particular perspective he took on interpreting Old Testament and all biblical prophecy while MacDonal's belief was based on a series of visions she had. The problem we need to make note of is that one perspective is based on an opinion, in the case of Darby, and the other is the result of a subjective experience of an individual who believed she was under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The end result is the idea of a rapture, the taking of the godly from the Earth at some point, which has become cemented in the minds and doctrines of many Bible believers.

In this lesson I'll take a look at this idea and the statements it appears to be based on. To get a clear picture of that we'll examine:

- a. Catastrophe, God's judgment & deliverance of the godly
- b. The idea of the rapture
- c. Why there won't be a rapture

Let's take a look at each of these

3. Catastrophe, God's judgment & deliverance of the godly

Anytime we have a question about how God will do something or how he's operated in the past I like to look for precedents in the scripture. In this lesson we're reviewing the idea that at a point in the future God will take the godly from the Earth. As I noted earlier some believe this will happen before a series of global judgments from God are sent on the world while others believe this will take place following this series of actions. I'm going to address the idea that I've heard most often, that the godly will be removed prior to the trouble to come. The principles in the examples I'm going to use will I believe be appropriate for both scenarios.

Has God ever removed someone faithful to him from the world. The answer to that is yes he has. Did God do that in order to spare that individual from horrors coming on the world? I don't believe there's anything to support that idea and I'll explain that as I go on.

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The first example we have of God removing a faithful or godly person from the world in a manner other than death by natural means is recorded in the book of Genesis. We're introduced to a descendant of Seth in chapter five. ***“And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”*** (Gen 5.21-24).

The first thing I want to point out is that there are two Enochs in the book of Genesis. One is the son of Cain (Gen 4.17). The Enoch we're discussing is descended from Seth and is the father of Methuselah, who has the longest lifespan recorded. There's little we know about Enoch. Part of the information we can draw on comes from the brief mention in the book of Genesis, but there's another statement made about him in the New Testament.

Jude wrote an epistle encouraging the defense of the Gospel against false teachers who were attempting to pervert the doctrine delivered by the Holy Spirit. Describing the character and dangers of false teachers, Jude noted that as far back as the beginning these individuals presented themselves. Jude the states, ***“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*** (Jude 14-15).

Let's take a closer look at what we can conclude about Enoch and then we'll discuss the prophecy Jude records. The first thing we know is that Enoch was righteous. Moses records that ***“Enoch walked with God”*** as we read a moment ago. This was the patriarchal dispensation. God spoke to heads of households, patriarchs, who would then lead their families spiritually. From Genesis 4 onward we see the trend to violate God's laws and forget him entirely. Enoch is an exception to this and for reasons known only to God, he was taken by God. The story of Enoch is a unique event and the absence of information explaining why the Lord did this is a reminder that any explanation we offer is pure speculation. We don't know the circumstances under which this took place. We don't know why God chose to do this, and most importantly, we don't know how he was taken. We have to leave things as they are. We know that Enoch was faithful to God which implies that he followed God's instructions just as all the faithful did that we have records of.

The statements recorded by Jude may lead us to think that Enoch was given a vision of the last days and therefore was speaking of the false teachers Jude referred to in his epistle. That doesn't fit the nature biblical prophecy and it violates other limitations we see on prophetic statements found in the Old Testament. As I noted in earlier lessons, the last chronological event spoken of by an Old Testament prophet is that of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by

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Daniel. I also pointed out that we know this because Christ clearly states that (**Matt 24.15-16, Mk 13.14**). Enoch's statements are consistent with depictions of God's judgement against the ungodly which has taken place many times in the biblical record. We have to accept the story of Enoch as a unique event that took place for reasons that God knows and not extend that to create a precedent we can apply to other situations. There just isn't any basis for doing that.

The second exception that we find in the Old Testament is the prophet Elijah. He stood against the evil of Ahab and Jezebel in a nation that, for the most part had abandoned God and the Law of Moses. After an epic showdown with 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, Elijah fled for his life and hid in a cave until God spoke to him, sent an angel to strengthen him and instructed him to anoint the next king of Israel and his own successor. After the selection of Elisha the Tishbite, Elijah was taken up from the Earth in an event that almost everyone is familiar with.

Elisha refused to leave Elijah as he prepared to be taken. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit to which Elijah told him, "***Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.***" (**2 Kng 2.10**). As they traveled together, "***behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.***" (**2 Kng 2.11-12**). Elisha indeed received a double measure of the spirit of Elijah and went on to stand as a faithful prophet of the Lord in Israel.

Elijah feared for his life and asked God to let him die (**1 Kng 19.4**). God fortified the prophet and led him to find his successor, Elisha. There's no reason why God intended to take Elijah in the way that he did. The stress Elijah was under and his human frailty may have been a factor but as we read through the scriptures we see that there's a higher purpose.

A class of prophecy that exists in different forms is a type. A type is the embodiment of certain characteristics that are unique and identifiable. In previous lessons I've discussed types of Christ in figures such as Moses and how objects in the Tabernacle represented things to come under the new law when the Messiah came into the world. Elijah was taken from the world during a period of extreme spiritual corruption in the Northern kingdom of Israel. He was tiring mentally and emotionally, and, in a way, he was granted a great blessing from God. But relief from human stress and suffering wasn't all that came of it.

Since he didn't die physically but was translated by the Lord, Elijah effectively stands as an immortal being. The figure of the prophet later becomes a sign of the coming of a messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Malachi writes, "***Behold, I will send you Elijah the***

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prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” (Mal 4.5). We know that this was fulfilled as Christ identifies John the baptizer as that fulfillment. As Christ spoke of John, following a visit from two of his disciples, he adds, “*And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.” (Matt 11.14).* John was the messenger who taught repentance and the need to return to God in preparation for the Messiah, Christ.

Another event that takes place underscores the importance of Elijah as a figure in God’s plan. “*And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.” (Matt 17.1-3).* When Peter desired to build tabernacles for the three they heard a voice that told them, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” (Matt 17.5).* This statement demonstrated that Christ was greater than Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the famous prophet who stood against one of the most evil kings of Israel.

These events are the only incidents of their kind recorded in the scriptures. Later we see God’s people facing a number of judgments such as the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem following a series of invasions in 606, 597 and 586 B.C. The first of these, in 606, saw figures such as Ezekiel and Daniel taken from the land. Throughout the period of exile, and later control by foreign powers, God was with the faithful, helping and blessing them. In periods of persecution of the early church God allowed Christians to die, beginning with Stephen (**Acts 7.1-60**) and others. God didn’t intervene and lift them out of trouble. He was with them however and strengthened them so that they would remain faithful even through death.

There’s no indication anywhere in the New Testament that implies that God intends to take the faithful from the Earth before exacting judgment on evil nations. So how is it that this belief came to be and what is it based on? That’s another misinterpretation that we can examine beginning with Matthew’s Gospel.

4. The idea of the rapture

Is there a scriptural basis for believing in the rapture. Some think there is. One place that’s cited is a brief statement made by Christ in Matthew 24. “*Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” (Matt 24.40-41).* This statement falls between two descriptions that we’ve identified as referring to the second coming. These are **Matthew 24.36-39** and **Matthew 24.42-44**. So how do we determine what verses forty and forty-one are referring to. This is where we have to be careful with the interpretation, and I’ll get to that in just a

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minute, but first let's take a look at the second passage I hear most often to prove there will be a rapture.

The church in Thessalonica was being assaulted by ideas about the second coming and those who had already died. Some were saying that the Lord's return was about to happen (**2 Thess 2.1-2**). Others appear to have been teaching that when Christ returned only those who were alive would receive a reward (**1 Thess 4.13-15**). Paul answers these things and states that Christ would not return before an apostasy took place that would mature over the next few centuries (**2 Thess 2.3-4**).

Just as he did for the Corinthians (**1 Cor 15**) Paul describes what will take place at the time Christ returns. One of those statements is interpreted as proof of a rapture. Paul states, *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (**1 Thess 4.17**). I've deliberately left the preceding verses out to isolate the information contained in verse seventeen. That's exactly what I've heard, read and seen done by teachers and preachers who attempt to prove that there will be a rapture. The image of the living taken from the Earth and united with Christ is the bit of information some will seize on to prove their point. But if we look at both **Matthew 24** and Paul's statements to the Thessalonians we have to ask, will there really be a rapture?

5. Why there won't be a rapture

We have a body of evidence that we've collected in the last several lessons. We now have an idea about the second coming. Now we have additional statements concerning events that when isolated or misinterpreted appear to teach something else. The way to sort this out is to place things back in their context and compare them to what's being taught.

I listed the facts about the second coming in the second lesson of this series. What we know about the second coming is

- a. Only God knows when this will happen
- b. There won't be any sign or warning
- c. The second coming will take place like a thief in the night
- d. People will be just as unsuspecting as those were at the time of the flood
- e. The trump of God will sound
- f. Christ will be revealed in the clouds with his angels
- g. The dead in Christ will rise first and be gathered
- h. Those who remain alive will then be gathered to Christ
- I. The judgment takes place

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- j. The physical universe is destroyed
- k. Christ presents the saved to God
- l. Christ assumes his place with the Father & is subject to God
- m. The second coming occurs as quickly as a lightning flash or blink of an eye

Now from the lesson on **Matthew 24**, I noted that the things Christ told his disciples were in answer to three questions. Like other prophecies, such as some in Isaiah, the prophetic elements are interwoven and must be studied so that we know what part of the answer is associated with which question. We came up with this list ...

Matthew 24 - verses by context		
	Subject	Verses
Group 1	Developments in the world including preaching of the Gospel & persecution	4-14, 23-26
Group 2	Prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem	15-22, 28-29, 32-33, 34-35, 40-41
Group 3	The Second Coming	27, 36-39, 42-44, 45-51

Matthew 24 - verses grouped by subject / context

Group 1: a description Christ provides regarding developments in the world in general. This includes the preaching of the Gospel and reactions to it as well as complications that will arise. This group includes the rise of false Christ's and deceivers in **Matt 24.4-5 & 23-26**, wars and conflicts in verses **6-8** and persecution against believers in verses **9-14**. These conditions are closely connected to the event described in the second group and will take place during the lifetime of those to whom Christ was speaking.

Group 2: is a prophecy of a specific event in **Matt 24.15-22 & 28** marked by the sign of the "*abomination of desolation*" spoken of by Daniel. The result of this event is noted in verse **29** detailing it's impact on political and social structures. Christ also noted that the disciples should be diligent in watching for specific signs preceding this event in **Matt 24.32-33** and adds a somewhat cryptic note about those who will heed these warnings in **Matt 24.40-41**. Once again I draw attention to Christ's statement that all these things will be fulfilled during that generation in verses **34-35**.

Group 3: **Matt 24.27** refers to the speed at which the second coming will take place, and verses **30-31** describe the appearance of Christ with his angels at the end. In **Matt 24.36-39** Christ states that only God knows when this will happen and compares that to the days of Noah in which the flood came on an unsuspecting population and destroyed them. In **Matt 24.42-44** Christ emphasizes the need for diligence since they won't know when he will return. With that warning in place, Christ presents the characteristics of faithful and unfaithful servants in **Matt**

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24.45-51 and their fate in judgment.

Now let's use the evidence to determine what's being described in **Matt 24.40-41**. We can eliminate the idea of a sign of the second coming. If someone were to be taken as stated in these verses while another person is left behind that would constitute a sign and alert us to what's taking place. Christ stated in the verses dealing with the second coming that there won't be a sign. We have a problem understanding the concept of none or nothing. The reality is, the taking of one person and another left behind doesn't refer to a rapture. We might be able to apply this to the overall warning about the coming destruction and in that sense there would be those who would remember and heed the warnings while others would ignore them and be caught up in the destruction that was to take place. Another application that wouldn't be entirely incorrect but would go beyond the scope of Christ's prophecy is that in the day of judgment when Christ returns there will be individuals who are friends, related, married or together and one will be saved and another lost. That wouldn't be an incorrect thing to conclude but it would be a violation of the overall context of Christ's warning about A.D. 70.

What about Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians. Is that describing a rapture, or carrying away of the faithful. Let's take the verses I cited earlier and put them back in their context to get the whole picture.

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thess 4.13-18).

This passage is Paul's answer to assure and comfort the Thessalonians that those who had died in the Lord hadn't missed out. He let's them know that the departed faithful will be with Christ at his return as will the living who, as Christ stated in **Matthew 24**, will be gathered from the four corners of the world by his angels. This is not a limited rescue to take the faithful from the world in avoidance of a great calamity. This is a statement about the same second coming Christ spoke of in **Matthew 24**, that Paul details in **1 Corinthians 15**, that Peter describes in **2 Peter 3** and that Paul deals with in **2 Thessalonians 1.7-9**. When the saints are gathered, it will be the end. The judgment of all for all time. The destruction of the world and the eternal home of the faithful. There won't be a rapture. When we read what the Bible says. Accept it and limit any idea or opinion that conflicts with the scriptures we'll arrive at the truth.

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Acceptance of doctrines like this denote a rejection of the word that's been recorded and delivered. I believe in a God who inspired writers to record the message he wanted saved. I believe that same God preserved that message in a form that we can read and understand today. I also believe that when the inspired writers finished their work there was no more revelation. From the time of the early church until now false teachers have risen with visions, prophecies and interpretations that originated in their own minds, not the Lords. I'm reminded of what Paul told the Galatians as he dealt with false doctrine being presented to them.

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Gal 1.6-9).

6. Next

What disaster would be so horrible that God would take the faithful from the Earth before they had to endure it? In the next lesson we'll take a look at **The Great Tribulation** and try to determine what it is, was or will be, and what we need to learn from it.