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SPECIAL RAPTURE **EDITION**

General Editor

Brian L. Martin

Copy Editors

Mike Beidler
Kayla F. Martin
J. Scott Martin

Design & Layout

Brian L. Martin
Kayla F. Martin

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How to contact us:

FULFILLED! Magazine
1620 Sequoia St.
Napa, CA 94558

brian@fulfilledmagazine.com

(775) 278-1948

Please leave a message and we will return your call as soon as possible.

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Editor's Update

One of the features of Fulfilled! Magazine that readers enjoy the most is the presentation of different views. We have taken that feature to the limit by devoting the bulk of this special edition to one of the details of Preterism that can be both mysterious and controversial—the rapture. Just what did Paul mean when he wrote, “then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds?” Futurism’s rapture definitions have a built-in “safety zone” since it posits that the rapture, whatever it is, has not yet occurred. Therefore, any number of theories can be presented, and we can just wait and see which one proves to be the most accurate. On the other hand, Preterism’s definitions of the rapture must find their fulfillment in the past, and thus conform to stricter parameters.

What are Preterism’s definitions of the rapture? I am certainly not an expert on the topic, but the various views seem to fall within three categories, which I have labeled the *Spiritual/Covenantal*, the *Process*, and the *Literal* rapture views. We provide a presentation of each view in this issue. Please keep in mind that there are many iterations of each of these views (especially the *Spiritual/Covenantal* view), so that these articles do not necessarily speak for all the Preterists who may fall under a particular category.

Perhaps the most important thing to consider while reading these articles is that we are not offering them as the “last word” on the subject, or as a nicely packaged interpretation for you to adopt. Rather, we offer these articles as launch pads for further study. I encourage you to be a Berean and study these things for yourself. As you may infer from the divergence of these views, it will require some spiritual perspiration.

As I consider the process of developing one’s personal theology I am reminded of a book I read several years ago, $E=MC^2$, which chronicles the development of the physics leading to Einstein’s theory of relativity. Progress was often stymied due to the lack of communication between scientists

living hundreds of miles from each other. It might be decades before their independent findings were brought together and, like fitting pieces of a puzzle together, helped bring the larger picture into focus.

Fortunately, we are not hindered by such lacks in communication. Therefore, I encourage you to interact with the authors—ask them questions, share your comments, and reason with them. As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another, thus we can all play a part in bringing the larger picture into focus. Just remember to let your speech be seasoned with grace.

Another hindrance to the progress of physics was the fact that some of the experiments were

performed by persons considered unqualified to participate in the field—perhaps someone of the wrong gender or class of society. Their findings were not deemed worthy of consideration and were therefore ignored, often for years. Only after the experimenter’s stigma had waned, or the data had been “independently” corroborated by an accepted source, were the findings assimilated into the collective knowledge of physics. This sometimes resulted in a leap forward in

understanding that could have been realized years earlier if only parties involved had been willing to *come, let us reason together*.

Sadly, this can also be true in Christianity and, yes, even within Preterism. Because a particular individual may come from a certain doctrinal background, or lack a certain level of theological education, anything they might offer is suspect and therefore not given the attention it may well deserve. Obviously we cannot afford the time to address every nuance of Christian doctrine that is put forth, or even every nuance of Preterism. We must filter and sort through the stack of what is available. But if, in that filtering and sorting process, we retain only that with which we already agree, are we really sharpening one another? I challenge you to investigate other



Cont. on next page

Mailbag



Hi! I just wanted to thank you for your wonderful magazine, *Fulfilled!* I received my first copy today (July 5th), and have already read it cover to cover. I live in England, and it is very difficult to find any other Preterists. So far, my only contact with other Preterists has been via the Internet. Your magazine is a very useful tool, and I thank you for it. I look forward to the next issue with anticipation!

John, England

I am highly interested in Biblical Prophecy and I believe this magazine will give great insight on this subject. I'm excited about this and will enjoy it very much.

Rochelle, Missouri

This magazine is a very informative writing, bringing spiritual value to its readers.

Floyd, Nevada

We would greatly appreciate receiving all of your quarterly magazines from now on. We are new to Preterism and are eager to learn. Our brother-in-law says your magazine is excellent so we are looking forward to all your issues. Thank you so much.

Loren and Cathi, Connecticut

I have been studying Preterism for 8 years. The knowledge I have received from Preterist websites is tremendous. Scripture passages I have long misunderstood are becoming more and more clear as I study the truth of Preterism. You all are doing a great service to God and His Kingdom.

Holly, Georgia

I have been a devout historicist for 12 years. Never even considered Preterism. Until recently. I am overwhelmed at the time statements of Jesus regarding His coming in the lifetime of His disciples. I responded to your add for the *Parousia* book and was sent several wonderful books. I have been so blessed as I have read. I appreciate the emphasis on the new covenant of the Blood of Jesus! Thanks

From Reader Survey

I love the magazine! The indie writers you use. The 19th century authors you use. It's great finding this theology catching on. I started my quest around '03 and feel it's finally making sense. Keep it up!

From Reader Survey

I AM
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STATEMENTS OF
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REGARDING HIS
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LIFETIME OF HIS
DISCIPLES

Editor's Update (cont.)

views and possibilities. Even if, after the final analysis, you have not changed your position, it will be a stronger and sharper position.

Our heartfelt thanks and gratitude again go out to those of you who are supporting this ministry with your prayers, words of encouragement, and finances. Our readership continues to grow and many write how excited they are to see a Preterist magazine. We have also had several individuals write that they first heard about *Fulfilled! Magazine* from a Futurist ministry. If you are aware of any references, reviews, or comments others are making about the magazine please let me know. We are curious as to what others are saying.

For Christ's Glory,

Brian



Gleanings from “The Parousia”

This ongoing series of articles is taken from *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, by J. Stuart Russell. Originally published in 1878, Russell used an older style of English and the King James Version of the Bible. We have taken the liberty, when it does no harm to the text, to update the English and use the New King James Version of the Bible. In 1999, *The Parousia* was reprinted with a foreword by R.C. Sproul, in which he stated:

“Few books have forced me to rethink ideas or challenged my assumptions as much as this one has.”

THE LIVING (SAINTS) CHANGED AT THE PAROUSIA

1 Cor 15:51 Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

This declaration supplies what was lacking in the statement made at v. 24, and brings the whole into accordance with 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The language of St. Paul implies that he was communicating a revelation which was new, and presumably made to himself. It cannot be said that it is derived from any recorded utterance of the Savior, nor do we find any corresponding statement in any other apostolic writing. But the question for us is, To whom does the apostle refer when he says, ‘We shall not all sleep,’ etc.? Is it to some hypothetical persons living in some distant age of time, or is it of the Corinthians and himself that he is thinking? Why should he think of the distant future when it is certain that he considered the Parousia to be imminent? Why should he not refer to himself and the Corinthians when their common hope and expectation was that they should live to witness the Parousia? There is no conceivable reason, then, why we should depart from the proper grammatical force of the language. When the apostle says ‘we,’ he no doubt means the Christians of Corinth and himself. This conclusion Alford fully endorses: ‘We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord—in which number the apostle firmly believed that he himself should be. (See 2 Cor 5:1 ff. and notes).’

The revelation, then, which the apostle here communicates, the secret concerning their future destiny, is this: That they would not all have to pass through

the ordeal of death, but that such of them as were privileged to live until the Parousia would undergo a change by which they would be qualified to enter into the kingdom of God, without experiencing the pangs of dissolution. He had just before (v. 50) been explaining that material and corruptible bodies of flesh and blood could not, in the nature of things, be fit for a spiritual and heavenly state of existence: ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.’ Hence the necessity for a transformation of the material and corruptible into that which is immaterial and incorruptible. Here it is important to observe the representation of the true nature of ‘the kingdom of God.’ It is not ‘the gospel,’ nor ‘the Christian dispensation;’ nor any *earthly* state of things at all, but a *heavenly state*, into which flesh and blood are incapable of entering.

The sum of all is, that the apostle evidently contemplates the event of which he is speaking as nigh at hand: it is to come to pass in their own day, before the natural term of life expires. And is not this precisely what we have found in all the references of the New Testament to the time of the Parousia? That event is never spoken of as distant, but always as imminent. It is looked for, watched for, hoped for. Some even leap to the conclusion that it has arrived, but their precipitancy is checked by the apostle, who shows that certain antecedents

by J. Stuart Russell

must first take place. We conclude, therefore, that when St. Paul said, ‘We shall not all sleep,’ he referred to himself and the Christians of Corinth, who, when they received this letter and read these words, could put only one construction upon them, viz. that many, perhaps most, possibly all of them, would live to witness the consummation which he predicted.

But the objection will recur, How could all this take place without notice or record? First, as regards the resurrection of the dead, it is to be considered how little we know of its conditions and characteristics. Must it come with observation? Must it be cognizable by material organs? ‘It is raised a spiritual body.’ Is a spiritual body one which can be seen, touched, handled? We are not certain that the eye can see the spiritual, or the hand can grasp the immaterial. On the contrary, the presumption and the probability are that they cannot. All this resurrection of the dead and transmutation of the living take place in the region of the spiritual, into which earthly spectators and reporters do not enter, and could see nothing if they did. A miracle may be necessary to empower the ‘unassisted eye’ to see the invisible. The prophet at Dothan saw the mountain full of ‘chariots of fire, and horses of fire,’ but the prophet’s servant saw nothing until El-isha prayed, ‘Lord, open his eyes, that he may see’ (2 Kings 6:17). The first Christian martyr, full of the Holy Ghost, ‘saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,’ but none of the multitude that surrounded him beheld the vision (Acts 6:56). Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus saw ‘that Just One,’ but his fellow-travelers saw no man (Acts 9:7). It is not improbable that traditional and materialistic conceptions of the resurrection—opening graves and emerging bodies, may bias the imagination on this subject, and make us overlook the fact that our material organs can apprehend only material objects.

Secondly, as regards the change of the living

saints, which the apostle speaks of as instantaneous—‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye’—it is difficult to understand how so rapid a transition could be the subject of observation. The only thing we know of the change is its inconceivable suddenness. We know nothing of what residuum it leaves behind; what dissipation or resolution of the material substance. For aught we know, it may realize the fancy of the poet—

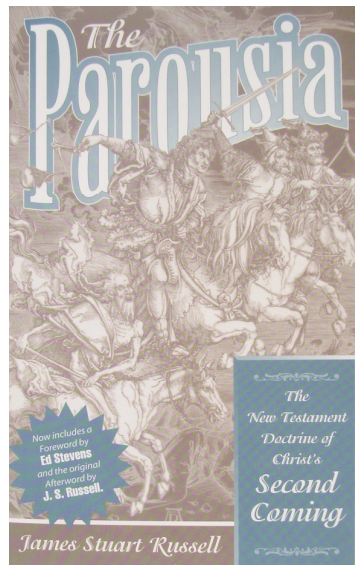
‘Oh, the hour when this material
Shall have vanished as a cloud.’

All we know is that ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,’ the change is completed; ‘the corruptible puts on incorruption, the mortal puts on immortality, and death is swallowed up in victory.’

What, then, hinders the conclusion that such events might have taken place without observation, and without record? There is nothing unphilosophical, irrational, or impossible in the supposition. Least of all is there anything *unscriptural*, which is all we need concern ourselves about. ‘What saith the Scripture?’ Does the language of St. Paul plainly affirm or imply that all this is just about to take place, within the lifetime of himself and those to whom he is writing?

No fair and dispassionate mind will deny that it is so. Right or wrong, the apostle is committed to this representation of the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the transmutation of the living saints, within the natural lifetime of the Corinthians and himself. We are placed therefore in this dilemma—

1. Either the apostle was guided by the Spirit of God, and the events which he predicted came to pass; or,
2. The apostle was mistaken in his belief, and these things never took place. ❧



The Rapture—The Spir



When it comes to what is commonly called the rapture, a problem arises with an inadequate understanding of the Greek word *harpazo* as it is used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The Greek word *harpazo* is translated as the Latin *rapiere*, from which we derive the English word *rapture*. Many Bible versions translate it as “caught up.” While the word does mean to *catch*, *seize*, etc., nowhere can it be understood etymologically as physically moving a person or thing toward a specific direction. The directional indicator (up, away, etc.) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 has been added by the translators. It is simply assumed that *harpazo* is something that takes the individual’s physical body off the ground and “up” to another place. However, the only time the lexicons ever define the word as a “catching up” is when they are offering commentary within their articles concerning the nature of the way the word is used. Grammatically, the word *harpazo* does not contain within it any notion of a direction. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines *harpazo* as, “to seize on, to carry off by force . . . to claim for one’s self eagerly.” Also, when commenting on the meaning of the word from specific passages that traditionally contain an “up” or “away” idea, Thayer writes: “To snatch out or away” (Matthew 13:19, John 10:28) . . . “Proverbially, to rescue from danger or destruction” (Jude 23). When Thayer comments on Acts 8:39 regarding Philip’s catching “away” (*harpazo*) from the Eunuch, he says, “. . . used of divine power transferring a person marvelously and swiftly from one place to another, to snatch or catch away . . .” Regarding Philip’s catching “away” or “flight” from the desert with the Eunuch to Azotus, clearly it is not necessary for us to understand that Philip was physically transported to Azotus. Why? Because the text does not say that Philip in any way disappeared, or was supernaturally taken from the Eunuch. It simply states that, “. . . the Spirit of the Lord “seized” (*harpazo*) Philip (with the result that) the Eunuch saw him no more . . .” (Acts 8:39). The Spirit of the Lord could have “seized” Philip in the sense of giving him fresh direction (as in the sense in which *harpazo* is used in Matt 11:12 for instance), calling him to leave the Eunuch and head towards Azotus. Because of traditionalistic non-etymological understandings we have assumed this text to be saying that Philip was physically removed from the Eunuch in a supernatural sense. All the text says is that the Holy Spirit “seized” or “caught” Philip in such a way that he simply left the Eunuch, with the result that the Eunuch didn’t see him anymore. This prejudiced reading into the text produces a translation that is not necessarily the correct point of view.



The Greek word *harpazo* appears 15 times in the Greek New Testament. Of these, the following passages feature contexts which seem to indicate *harpazo* is a reference to a physical removal from one point to another: John 6:15, Acts 23:10, and Matthew 11:12. In John 6:15, Jesus is threatened by those who would forcibly make Him king. But even this is a reference to having Christ assume the role of Messianic King, not a physical translation. In Acts 23:10 the Roman Captain feared for Paul’s life in the midst of the Jewish mob and had Paul physically removed from harm. These are the only two which point to a legitimate “seizing” in order to effect a removal from point A to B. This leaves Matthew 11:12. Here, Jesus is speaking about the forceful preaching of the kingdom of heaven since the time of John the Baptist, and that the spiritually violent would seize (*harpazo*) the kingdom by force. No idea is presented about the forceful preaching of the kingdom that

physically transports someone in a certain direction. It is a spiritual seizing or taking hold of someone’s conscience that is in view. The other usages of *harpazo* follow the same kind of analogy within their respective contexts. No one is literally and physically removed anywhere.

The most interesting *harpazo* passage is Paul’s reference to himself in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 as being “caught” or “seized” to the Third Heaven. But was it a physical removal from the planet’s surface, or a spiritual removal? Twice he writes that he didn’t know if it was an “in the body” or “out of the body” event (vv. 2-3). He was somehow caught/seized (*harpazo*) to the Third Heaven (paradise, v.4) and heard things that were not lawful to utter. It was such an incredible event for Paul that he could not say whether or not it was a

“physical” *harpazo*. Therefore, to point to this passage and say that this situation justifies an understanding of a physical removal is easily countered by the fact that Paul states that this *harpazo* was also possibly a “spiritual” *harpazo*. This then leaves us with a passage which actually teaches the possibility of a non-physical *harpazo*. If one were to object to the assertion that the event could have been a non-physical removal, then we would reply that even the apostle could not tell if it was or it wasn’t. Therefore, one must admit an equal possibility for either: except for the fact that, again, the Greek word *harpazo* used in v.4, will only allow for the lexical/etymological meaning of either “seized”, “caught”, or perhaps “taken.” Clearly, when the translation adds the word “up” it is adding it from an interpretive sense, and *not* from an exegetical, etymological one. As we have proven, there can be no directional sense from the word *harpazo* alone, as it does not contain any of the Greek words which would be so understood.



Given this fact, along with Paul's inability to be emphatic about whether the event was in or out of the body, we feel it is best not to speculate. Could God have taken him physically? Yes. But what God *could* have done is not the issue here.

What stands out so clearly in all of the major (and minor) lexicons is that nowhere is it stated that the word *harpazo* contains within it any additional phrasing for "up" (*anotello*, *ano*, etc.). All we would need to find in order to substantiate the "up" or "away" sense that traditionally has been added to the meaning, is to locate a Greek compound such as *anoharpazo*. But there is no such compound that would verify the "up" or "away" sense that commentators have assigned to the word. Now to the primary text at hand . . .

1 Thessalonians 4:17: "*Then we which are alive and remain shall be 'caught' (harpazo no "up" "away" etc., indicated in the syntax of the text or in the Greek word itself), together with them in the clouds* (a cloud coming reference to divinity appearing—i.e., Jesus is divine. See Dr. Randall Otto's work, *Coming in the Clouds*), *to meet the Lord* (meet is *apantesis*, Moulton and Milligan in their Greek Grammar, write, "It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary."), *in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" Critical to an understanding of the text at hand is the word "air" from Paul's use of the Greek *aer*. Strong's Greek Dictionary, entry 109, defines it as:

From *aemi*, to breath unconsciously, i.e. respire; by analogy, to blow.

(1) The air, particularly the lower and denser air as distinguished from the higher and rarer air.

(2) The atmospheric region.

Please note Strong's root definition, followed by the primary meaning of the word that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It is in reference to the "place" of respiration. The idea of the exchange of oxygen within one's immediate sphere is the associative understanding. Paul is not saying that we meet the Lord in the *aer*, in our lungs! Understand what Paul is driving at. He is speaking of a spiritual meeting with the Lord, "within" ourselves, within our spirits. Why did he use this particular form of explanation here? So that the Thessalonians, who could not conceive of the nature of the *harpazo* at Christ's Parousia in the least (and we don't do a very good job of it either), would begin to grasp that the meeting with the Lord was to be a personal meeting "within" the believer. Each believer was to have his or her own meeting with the Lord. Had Paul meant to communicate that this meeting was of a physical nature relative to joining the Lord in a place high above the planet's surface, then in all likelihood he would have used the Greek word *ouranos*. This is the primary word for the

sky high above. There would have been no misunderstanding whatsoever if he had used *ouranos*. However, Paul chose the more spiritually descriptive word *aer* in order to communicate the primary definition that Strong provides. Christ would meet the believer *within*. It is analogous to one's spirit that is within their body.

John Noë recognizes this in his work *Your Resurrection Body and Life*, in which he writes:

"For believers alive today, this gathering is still relevant. It takes place in the spirit realm, 'in the air' inside you, that is, your spirit. Rapturists, as we outlined in chapter one, have failed to differentiate this *aer* air inside you from the *ouranos* air up in the sky. Consequently, they have also failed to apply a spiritual sense to Paul's symbolic language. They insist this is a vanishing act by living Christians into outer space. How absurd! This 'air' is the heavenly realm of the spirit. And we are spirits." (p. 52)

Paul's use of the Greek words *harpazo* and *aer* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 clearly render the traditional idea of physical bodies rising off of the planet's surface and into the heavens above unlikely, if not impossible. What about other New Testament usages of the Greek word *aer*? The Greek word *aer* is used seven times in the New Testament:

(1) Acts 22:23, "And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the *aer* . . ." Ever tried to throw dust into the air? Try it and see how high up you can get it. Not very high I assure you. (2) In 1 Corinthians 9:26, Paul writes, ". . . so I fight not as one who beats the *aer*." Here he uses a boxer's terminology for comparing the discipline of athletics with the discipline of the Gospel work of preaching. How far could a boxer swing into the air? No further than the length of his arms—he could only box within his immediate sphere. (3) 1 Corinthians 14:9, As Paul instructs the Corinthians in true and false tongues, he teaches them that without speaking words in a language that everyone could understand, they would merely be "speaking into the *aer*." Paul did not want the Corinthians to think that their words would be heard high above the city, up into the upper atmosphere, but rather, that those within their immediate sphere would be able to hear, those who shared the same *aer*. It was something to be experienced within their immediate sphere. (4) Ephesians 2:2 speaks of Satan being the "Prince and Power of the *aer*." His realm was the arena of the spiritual, not the physical. He related to people within the sphere of their spirit, and not in the physical heavens above. His power was over the unregenerate man's life, not the molecules within the created carbon-based system. (5) 1 Thessalonians 4:17—already covered. (6-7) Both Revelation 9:2 and 16:17 speak in highly symbolic terms concerning the



The Spiritual/Covenantal View (cont.)

fact that in John's vision (which is highly apocalyptic in nature and should only be pressed for literalism when the context demands it) he says he sees the *aer* darkened and the angel pouring out his vial into the *aer* As is typical with the use of the word *aer*, it is a reference to the realm of the spirit.

Synagoguing the saints

The Greek word for "gathering" is *episunagoges*, an intensified form (*epi*) of our being "synagogued" to Him. To synagogue or to gather together is not the word *harpazo*. The word *sunagouges* is used various places in the New Testament in reference to the Church gathering together to Christ in worship in their various locales. Never once is it used in any sense as a physical removal of individuals to a place where Christ is geographically located. In James 2:2, we read that when the local church came together for worship it was referred to as a *sunagouge*: "For if there come into your *assembly* (*sunagouge*) a man with a gold ring" When writing to the Hebrew Christians, the author of Hebrews says, "Not forsaking the *assembling* (*sunagouge*) of ourselves together" It is true that in Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27 the word *episunago* is used for the angels being sent forth to "gather together the elect" at the Parousia of Christ. But neither the use of *sunagouge*, *episunago*, or *harpazo* (as we have shown) necessarily carries with them the idea of a physical removal or physical transportation as is being suggested. From our close scrutiny of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 we have seen that the meeting of the Lord with His elect was to be in the *aer*, and not in the *ouranos*. The meeting was a spiritual meeting, and so the "gathering together of the elect" in Matthew 24:31 is also the spiritual meeting to which 1 Thessalonians 4:17 was no doubt pointing.

What about Jesus taking us to heaven in John 14:3?

A close reading of this text will show that Jesus *does not* tell His disciples that where He would take them was heaven! The text says, "I will come again and receive you unto myself that *where I am*, there you may be also." If Jesus came back to the *earth* to receive His disciples unto Himself, then where He would be upon His coming was *the earth*, and *that is where* the disciples would be with Him. That is, on the earth in the spiritual realm, not heaven. Remember, the Greek word *Parousia* means "a coming that involves a consequential presence." Christ has been here on the earth in an abiding consequential presence with His New Jerusalem Bride since AD 70 (Rev 21).

So what was the purpose of the *harpazo*?

The purpose of the *harpazo* was for the church to know the glorious truth of a thing, which, prior to the *harpazo*, was not yet experienced. The key to this is located in 1

Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are alive and remain, shall be "caught up" (*harpazo*) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the *aer*, and thus *we shall always be with the Lord*." To *always be with the Lord* is the purpose of the *harpazo*. Prior to Christ's AD 70 Parousia, the individual members of the church did not possess what it meant to *always be with the Lord*. This *harpazo* event was to bring about a special everlasting experience for the church. Not an event of Christ being *with* the believers (she already had that prior to AD 70), but the event of the church (throughout time) herself *being with Christ*! There is a difference. This idea is directly tied to the meeting with the Lord in the *aer*—the believer's spirit. With the *harpazo* event we are able to recognize what only Christ Himself truly experienced with His Church in being present with her. Now He graciously shares that with her! Prior to the *harpazo* event, the Church did not possess the experiential knowledge of being with the Lord as we have since the *harpazo* event. To *be with the Lord* is communicated to us within the Greek word *eimi*, which the United Bible Societies Greek Dictionary defines as: "To exist, to be located in, to remain, to stay, to belong to." Whereas Christ never would leave us or forsake us individually or corporately in the Church, now, as the result of the *harpazo* event, the Church, along with Christ, knows what it means to truly belong to Christ in this experiential sense: to be located with Him and to remain with Him as had never been known before.

Conclusion: Did Jesus ever say anything about a rapture? John 17:15

Perhaps the best thing we could say at this point is that Jesus Himself prayed against the very idea promulgated by so many in the Church today. In John 17:15, Christ intercedes to the Father on behalf of His Church, asking that the Father would in fact *not* physically remove Christ's Church from the earth: "I pray that you would not take them out of the world, but that you would guard them from the evil." We should pay attention to the word that Christ used when asking the Father not to take His Church out of the world. The Greek word that is translated as "take" is the word *airo*, which means "*to take, to lift, to remove*." Think of it—Christ prayed that the Father would not "lift" His Church out of the world! In light of this fact, why would we go against the express will of Christ for His Church and insist that the Bible teaches the very thing in one place that Christ prayed against in another? Let us no longer re-define the biblical *harpazo*. Rather, let us submit ourselves to the true meaning of *harpazo* and rejoice in its Preterist implications. X

DR. KELLY BIRKS IS THE AUTHOR OF "THE COMINGS OF CHRIST" AND "THE END OF SIN." HE CAN BE REACHED AT:

EMAIL: BIRKS10@HOTMAIL.COM

When the Experts Can't Agree

By Brian L. Martin

A lament often heard from the ranks of Christian laity goes something like this: “If the theologians can’t agree on things, how am I supposed to reach a conclusion?” There are a multitude of differing doctrines within Christianity: Calvinism and Arminianism; Pre-Mil, A-Mil, and Post-Mil, and so on, each with seminary graduates and professors supporting them. It is understandable that the average Christian, lacking any formal biblical education, could easily despair of coming to a personal conviction on these matters. After all, if I conclude that Calvinism is a more accurate interpretation of Scripture, am I not claiming to “know more” than all of the Arminian theologians? But do these hurdles excuse us from studying the issues in an attempt to reach a conclusion? Consider the actions of the Bereans:

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (Acts 17:10-11)

Paul was arguably the greatest Christian theologian of his day, yet the Bereans searched the Scriptures to see if what he was saying held up against the Word of God! They certainly didn’t let Paul’s education, or their lack thereof, stop them from searching the Word themselves and reaching a conclusion.

This concept was brought home to me earlier this year when I had the “privilege” of performing my civic duty by serving on a jury. During the initial selection process we filled out a ten-page questionnaire to help the attorneys screen potential jurors. One of the questions asked: “Would you have any problem receiving and processing testimony from expert witnesses, such as psychiatrists or psychologists?” I answered that I would because no doubt both the defense and the prosecution would call their “experts,” and these experts would not agree with each other. If these experts, who were educated, trained, and experienced in these particular fields, could not agree with each other, how was I, who had no formal education or training in these matters, to be expected to reach a decision which would be legally binding—especially when I was not allowed to ask any questions, but had to rely on the questions each counsel provided? I was summarily told that that is how the judicial system works in this country, and was asked if I would have any problem obeying the court’s instructions and coming to a conclusion to the best of my ability? I answered that I could obey the court’s instructions and, to the best of my limited ability, reach a conclusion. And thus began my nine-week stint on jury duty.

True to form, the defense and prosecution both called their experts—and experts they were! There were so many degrees and credentials appended to their names that between the six of them I would imagine the whole alphabet was represented. Also true to form, the six of them were equally divided in their professional opinions. I found myself in a position not unlike that of the Bereans: I had to examine the testimony for myself and reach a conclusion. I didn’t have the option of saying, “If the

experts can’t agree, how can I decide?” I didn’t have the option of just “leaving that stuff to the experts” and excusing myself from any responsibility.

As you may well imagine, all of the jurors listened intently to the testimonies and took copious notes. The experts often used terms which were specific to the field of psychology—much as theologians use terms specific to theology. The experts often gave basic overviews or used illustrations to convey the gist of deeper concepts—much as theologians do to convey theological truths to those without a formal biblical education. While each one of these experts could have easily talked over our heads, and impressed (or intimidated) us with their knowledge and expertise in these areas, unless they clearly communicated why they reached their particular conclusions, they would have failed in the purpose for which they were called to the witness stand.

The first three experts gave their testimonies and it seemed to me that there was no refuting their conclusion. But I wanted to be fair and open-minded, and waited to hear what the “other side” would say. As the second group of experts testified, I often found myself thinking, “Hmm, that’s a good point . . . that counters what was said earlier . . .,” and so on. However, there was a difference in the testimonies. The testimony of the first group seemed to flow naturally, while that of the second group seemed to take more explaining. As I tried to describe the difference to my wife, I first used the analogy of reading a book in which the text flows very naturally and the author’s points are easily understood. But, from time-to-time, you run across a paragraph that you have to go back and reread in order to get the point. Then the perfect analogy came to me—listening to that second group of experts explain their position was like listening to a group of Futurists trying to explain the Second Coming’s imminency statements!

During this time, never once did I feel that I knew more about psychology than the experts in that second group. And never did I suspect that they were lying, or that they didn’t truly believe the conclusions they had reached. In fact, had the first group of psychologists never testified, I would have undoubtedly sided with the second group because, even though their explanations took a little more “explaining,” there was an explanation provided.

In a similar fashion, reaching a doctrinal conclusion does not mean that one is claiming to know more theology than those theologians who disagree. Nor does it imply that theologians on the “other side” of the issue do not truly believe in their conclusions.

Unfortunately, many in Christendom—like myself prior to jury duty—recognize that the “experts” don’t agree and therefore assume that they can never reach a conclusion. Thus, they never take the time to listen to the various “testimonies.” I’m not saying that all of our doctrinal issues can be worked out in short manner. Rather, that we should be striving to work them out. Just as we have a civic duty to reach conclusions while on a jury, so we have a spiritual duty to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12). X



Read literally, I Corinthians 15:51 and I Thessalonians 4:13-17 suggest that the saints alive at Christ's return would be changed, and wondrously translated to heaven in a manner similar to Enoch or Elijah. We feel this is mistaken, and that the better view is that the only "rapture" taught by scriptures occurs at the believer's death.

Change and Rapture - Not Same Events

The eschatological "change" of I Corinthians 15:51 and the "catching-up" of I Thessalonians 4:17 are generally supposed to describe the same event in different language; *viz.*, those caught-up would be simultaneously changed from a material to an immaterial body, and so borne away to heaven. In fact, because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven" (I Cor 15:50), the idea of a literal change is *essential* to the idea the saints would be translated at Christ's return, as they could not be carried away to heaven otherwise. However, in our view these passages do *not* describe the same event. The approach taken here is that the "change" was *legal and covenantal*, but the "catching-up" *actual and spatial*; the former accrued to the benefit of the church at the eschaton, the latter is experienced by believers one-by-one as they die.

Notion of Literal Rapture Present Among Early Church

Belief in a literal rapture is not new, but was present among first-century believers. Jesus indicated that John would live until his return (Jn 21:23). This prompted members of the early church to conclude John would not die, but would be translated to heaven with other believers at Christ's return. However, John dispels this notion entirely, completely disallowing that this was Jesus' meaning:

"Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Jn 21:23

It is difficult to understate the importance of John's statement as it bears upon the question before us. First, it shows that John would *in fact* live until Christ's return—a thorny issue for futurists if ever there was one! Second, it dispels the notion that those alive at Christ's coming would be translated and not see death. Obviously, the brethren had misconstrued Jesus' meaning. Theirs was a case of bad logic; they reasoned from mistaken premises to a wrong conclusion. Assuming that those alive at Christ's return would be translated, they concluded John would not die. But this was not to be the case. Jesus said elsewhere "There be some standing here that shall not taste of death *till* they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom" (Matt 16:28). Notice Jesus did not say they would not die at all; He merely said they would not taste of death *before* (till) He came in the glory of His kingdom *then* they would die. From Jesus' statements it seems plain that John was to be one of these.

What about the veil of silence that fell in the decades following AD 70? Where did Timothy, Titus, Luke, and others go? The silence of history regarding these men has led some to suppose an actual rapture of some sort occurred. But is there really a veil of silence following AD 70? No, there is not. We do not know what happened to each character named in the New Testament, but some information *has* come down to us. It is true that there is not as much information as we might hope or expect, but this can be explained by the almost *universal martyrdom* of the early church in the persecution under Nero. The imagery of Daniel and Revelation makes very clear that Nero's persecution was world-wide and would witness the death of multitudes of believers. Those that did not suffer martyrdom were driven underground, perhaps literally in the catacombs, where they remained in hiding until the storm of persecution had passed. By the time of Domitian toward the end of the first century, Christians reemerged from hiding, and history records their presence again. Indeed, history is *not* silent about the fate of the apostles and other Biblical characters at all. The church fathers record the tradition that Mark went to Alexandria, Thomas to India, Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom, and John went to Ephesus where he lived until the days of Trajan. Moreover, sacred tradition records that Clement and members of the holy family survived AD 70 and came together after the capture of the city to decide who should succeed James as head of the church, unanimously deciding upon Simon, the son of Clopas. Hence, there is nothing to the idea that these men simply disappeared, and we need not resort to notions about a literal rapture to explain the perceived absence of Christians from history following AD 70. Indeed, the fact that John reportedly lived until the time of Trajan is a full refutation of the literal rapture view.

The Mystery of Marriage and the Eschatological Change

If there was not a literal rapture or translation of believers to heaven at Christ's coming, what does that say about a literal change? Plainly, if the one did not occur, neither did the other, for there could be no translation without there also being a change, and no metaphysical change without a translation. Therefore, proof that one did not occur *ipso facto* will disprove the other. But if there was no metaphysical change, what was there? Clearly, Paul said *something* was to happen. What, then, was it?

Paul said, "Behold I show you a *mystery*, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (I Cor 15:51). A "mystery" is something hidden, something wonderful and almost incomprehensible. In saying that the eschatological change was a "mystery," Paul indicates that spiritual discernment is required to attain a proper understanding. Certainly, there is no mystery in a literal reading, and it requires no spiritual discernment to understand the "change" that way. Hence, if we would understand this mystery, we must think in different terms.

We would suggest that the conjugal union of man and wife, whereby they become "one flesh," provides a good clue to the

eschatological change of I Corinthians 15:51. It is no coincidence that the Second Coming of Christ is portrayed under the imagery of the marriage of a bride and bridegroom (Matt 25:1ff; II Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7-9; 21:2-20). The marriage of the Lamb and the bride at His coming, like the eschatological change, is termed a *mystery* (Eph 5:32). Both speak to the *same event* under the guise of separate imagery. What is called a “change” in I Corinthians 15:51 is styled a “marriage” in Ephesians 5:32, and elsewhere (II Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7-9; 21:2, 9, 10). Thus, in understanding the symbolism behind the marriage, we can understand the eschatological change.

Contrary to what some believe, the marriage of the Lamb and bride is *NOT* the resurrection of the last day. The mistaken notion that the marriage is the resurrection of the last day is related to the idea of the literal rapture, which has it that the church on earth would be wondrously borne away to heaven at Christ’s coming. However, having dispelled the notion of a literal rapture, we need to also disabuse ourselves of the idea that the marriage is the resurrection. All imagery in the New Testament involving the marriage symbol portrays the Bridegroom coming *to earth*, not descending to Hades to raise the dead. Indeed, Revelation 21:2, 9, 10 shows the bride’s dwelling—the New Jerusalem, the covenantal habitation of the saints—*coming down* out of heaven to earth, not ascending from earth or Hades to heaven. Plainly, rapture and resurrection were not the meaning of the marriage.

The “one flesh” relationship of man and woman is *legal and covenantal*. In marriage, a *legal fiction* occurs whereby the two identities are merged into one under the headship of the husband. The two are not actually “one flesh;” the death of the husband does not cause the death of the wife. They are one flesh merely in *contemplation of law*. The marriage of the Lamb is the *spiritual union* of Christ and His people, and points to the *covenantal relationship* whereby Christ washes and sanctifies the church with His own blood (Eph 5:27). The period from Pentecost to the consummation in AD 70 was the *betrothal*. Paul told the Corinthians that he had *betrothed* them as a chaste virgin unto Christ (II Cor 11:2). The consummation of the marriage would occur at Jesus’ Second Coming (Rev 19:7-9). The sanctifying power of Christ’s redeeming blood—held in abeyance during the interim period of betrothal—would finally accrue to the benefit of the church at the consummation, when Christ was joined to His church in the bond of marriage under the gospel. In the Old Testament, the marriage of God to Israel is couched the same way; it was always covenantal, never of resurrection or rapture (Jer 2:1-3; Ezek 16:1-16). Elsewhere in the New Testament, the basic idea behind the marriage of Christ and the church is presented other ways, including imagery of *redemption*, *adoption*, and *citizenship* (Rom 8:23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:14; Phil 3:20). Redemption frees from the bondage of sin; adoption confers sonship leading to inheritance; citizenship gains admittance into the heavenly city. The common factor in all these cases is the status or condition arising *in law*.

If $A = B$ and $B = C$, then $A = C$. If the eschatological change equals the marriage of Christ and the church; and the marriage was essentially legal and covenantal; then the eschatological change was essentially legal and covenantal, and points to the church’s redemption from the bondage of sin. This is confirmed in the verses following Paul’s announcement of the change, when he says the sting of death was sin and the strength of sin was the law (I Cor 15:57). Surely, Paul appends this statement here to show that the victory over Hades depended in the first instance upon victory over sin, and the victory over sin depended upon Christ’s substitutionary death triumphing over (not annulling) the law. The debt of sin deprived man of immortality; loosing the bond of sin clothed believers with immortality as a matter of law, making them putative heirs of eternal life as the adopted sons of God. *This* was the change Paul envisioned for the church.

Better View of I Thessalonians 4:17

It still remains to explain I Thessalonians 4:17. The view we have settled upon, as the one most cognizant with Scripture, is that the dead would be raised, *then* those alive at Christ’s return would die one-by-one, and be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

“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 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.”
I Thess 4:15-17

The conjunctive “then” in v. 17 shows that the catching up *follows* the resurrection in point of time. How much time is not stated; it is usually assumed that the two are substantially contemporaneous, but this is not justified. The truth is the text is silent; there is absolutely no basis for the conclusion that the catching up is contemporaneous with the resurrection; the whole notion rests upon supposition read into the text; nothing the text actually states. In Revelation 20:12-15, we have a picture of the resurrection. No rapture is presented in the imagery there. Just the opposite; as already noted, the city of the saints is shown coming *down* out of heaven to earth, not the saints going up from earth to heaven. However, there *is* a rapture of sorts in Revelation 14:14-16 where Christ is depicted upon a white cloud, harvesting the souls of the saints (wheat of the earth). The imagery indicates that it is the Lord’s Second Coming, and that He is gathering His saints into the eternal kingdom by death under the beast, even while He is making war against His enemies. This is portrayed by the winepress of the wrath of God trodden without the city, probably signifying Vespasian’s Galilean campaign (vv.18-20). This corresponds with history, for the persecution under Nero (AD 64-68) overlapped the Jews’ war



with Rome (AD 66-70). It also accounts for the simultaneous harvests portrayed in the text, one of salvation, the other of wrath. The word used to describe the harvest of the wheat (Gk. *episynagogue*) has the same root that is used in II Thessalonians 2:1, where Paul speaks of the coming of the Lord and the saints being *gathered* unto Him in the persecution by the “man of sin” and “son of perdition” (Nero). It also occurs in other eschatological passages to describe the *harvest of the saints* into the kingdom of God (Matt 3:12; 13:30). These passages teach that the gathering or harvest was not by rapture, but by *martyrdom* under Nero and the beast. As each saint died, Christ was there to meet Him in the air. If this was true of the martyrs, may it not also be true of every believer? In II Corinthians 5:10, Paul said “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

Read together with I Thessalonians 4:17, the result is clear: as we die we are each caught up to meet the Lord in the air “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” X

KURT SIMMONS IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE BI-MILLENNIAL PRETERIST ASSOCIATION. HE CAN BE REACHED AT:

WWW.PRETERISTCENTRAL.COM
PRETERISTCENTRAL@ZIANET.COM

4409 FERGUSON
CARLSBAD, NM 88220
(505) 261-6111



The Rapture— The Literal View *by Ed Stevens*

The Rapture—Great Expectations

Many of us come from a branch of Futurism (typically Amillennialism) which is strongly biased against the rapture, and have brought these anti-rapture sentiments with us into Preterism. Because a healthy Berean approach to the various interpretations of the rapture will lead us to search the Scriptures to see whether *these things are so*, this study consists primarily of Scripture.

Due to space limitations I did not give the full context of each passage and therefore urge you to examine each context on your own. I also highly recommend the three books listed at the end of this article, which examine these things in greater detail. There is a detailed, phrase-by-phrase analysis of the primary rapture text (1 Thess 4:15-17) in my book, *Expectations Demand A First Century Rapture*. We urge you to get that book and read the section on pages 91-134, to see how we interpret that text. If you are unable to get the book, but wish to read its explanation of 1 Thessalonians 4, please email me (preterist1@preterist.org) requesting the eText version, and I will send it as an email attachment.

The following six questions focus on some of the central issues regarding the rapture. As you read each question and study the related verses, try to imagine how the first-century Christians who remained alive until the Parousia would have responded. We know that the dead saints were raised out of Hades and given their new immortal bodies at the Parousia, but what about the saints who were still alive at Christ's return? *What does Scripture say they would see, hear, and experience at the Second Coming?* Read each question and search the following Scriptures and their contexts to find the answers (all Scriptures NASB95, except where otherwise noted):

1. What did Jesus say the living saints would see, hear, and experience at His return?

Matt 16:28 . . . some of those who are standing here who *will not taste death* until they *see the Son of Man coming*

Matt 24:30-31 . . . they will *see the Son of Man coming* on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a *great trumpet* and they will *gather together His elect*

Luke 21:36 . . . that you may have strength to *escape* all these things that are about to take place, and to *stand before the Son of Man*.

John 14:3 . . . I will come again and *receive you to Myself*, that *where I am, there you may be also*.

2. What did the apostles say the living saints would see, hear, and experience at His return?

1 Thess 5:23 . . . may your *whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved* blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

Rom 8:18-25 . . . the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory* that is about to be [Gk. *mello*] *revealed to us*. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for *the revealing* of the sons of God . . . for our *adoption as sons*, the *redemption of our body*

1 John 2:28 . . . abide in Him so that *when He appears* we may *have confidence* and *not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming*

2 Thess 1:7, 10 . . . the Lord Jesus will be *revealed* from heaven with His mighty angels . . . when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be *marveled at among all who have believed* . . .

1 Cor 15:51-53 . . . we will not all sleep [die before the parousia], but *we will all be changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the *trumpet will sound*, and the dead [Gk. is plural] will be raised imperishable, and *we will be changed*. . . . *put on the imperishable . . . put on immortality*.

1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with *a shout*, with the *voice of the archangel* and with the *trumpet of God*, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then *we who are alive and remain* will be *caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*.

3. What rewards did Christ and the apostles say that the living saints would receive at His return?

Matt 19:28-29 . . . you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, *you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. And everyone who has [forfeited property or relationships] for My name's sake, *will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life*.

Jude 1:21 . . . waiting anxiously for . . . *eternal life*.

1 Thess 1:10 . . . wait for His Son from heaven . . . who *rescues us* from the wrath to come.

1 Thess 5:9-10 . . . God has not appointed us to wrath, but for *obtaining salvation* . . . and to await His Son from Heaven . . . the One *delivering us from the coming wrath*.

2 Thess 1:7-10 . . . *give relief to you* who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. . . . when He comes to be *glorified in His saints* on that day, and to be *marveled at among all who have believed* . . .

1 Pet 1:7 . . . so that the proof of your faith . . . may be found to *result in praise and glory and honor* at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Pet 5:1, 4, 6 . . . partaker also of *the glory that is about to be* [Gk. mello] *revealed* . . . when the Chief Shepherd appears you will *receive the unfading crown of glory* . . . *exalt you* at the proper time . . .

Rom 8:17-23 . . . if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be *glorified with Him*. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory that is about to be* [Gk. mello] *revealed to us*. . . . *the revealing of the sons of*

God. . . creation itself also will be *set free from its slavery to corruption* into the *freedom of the glory of the children of God*. . . . we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our *adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*.

2 Tim 4:8 . . . in the future there is laid up for me the *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will *award to* . . . all who have loved His appearing.

Rev 3:10-11 . . . I also will *keep you from the hour of testing*, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world . . . hold fast what you have, so that no one will take *your crown*.

4. How intense were the expectations and emotions of the living saints?

Heb 9:28 [Christ] . . . will appear a second time . . . to those who *eagerly await* Him.

Rev 6:10 . . . *How long, O Lord*, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging . . .

1 Cor 16:22 . . . *Maranatha* [Aramaic expression meaning, *Our Lord, Come!*].

Rev 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

Rom 8:19-25 For the *anxious longing* of the creation *waits eagerly* for the revealing of the sons of God . . . we ourselves *groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly* for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body . . . we *hope* for what we do not see, with perseverance we *wait eagerly* for it.

2 Cor 5:2-4 For indeed in this house *we groan, longing to be clothed* with our dwelling from heaven . . . while we are in this tent, *we groan*, being *burdened* . . .

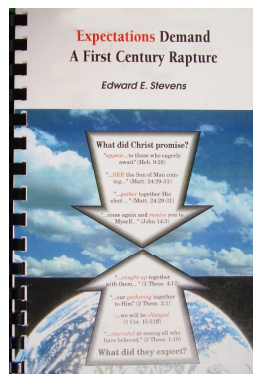
2 Tim 4:8 . . . the crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . will award to . . . all who have *loved His appearing*.

Jude 1:21 . . . *waiting anxiously* for . . . *eternal life*.

1 Cor 1:7 . . . *awaiting eagerly* the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 21:36 But *keep on the alert* at all times, *praying* that you may have strength to escape . . . and to stand before the Son of Man.

2 Pet 3:12-14 . . . *looking for and hastening* the coming of the day of God . . . according to His promise *we are looking for* new heavens and a new earth . . . since *you look for these things*, be *diligent to be found by Him* in peace, spotless and blameless . . .



1 Pet 1:13 Therefore, *prepare your minds* for action, *keep sober* in spirit, *fix your hope completely* on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Pet 4:13 . . . but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, *keep on rejoicing*, so that also at the revelation of His glory *you may rejoice with exultation*.

1 John 2:28 . . . abide in Him so that *when He appears* we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming . . .

5. What was supposed to happen to the bodies of the living saints at the Parousia?

1 Cor 15:37-38 . . . that which you sow [the seed], *you do not sow the body which is to be* . . . But God gives it [the seed] *a body* just as He wished, and *to each of the seeds a body of its own*. [note the plural number of bodies here, not one collective body]

1 Cor 15:51-53 . . . we will *not all sleep* [die], but *we will all be changed* . . . the dead ones [plural] will be raised incorruptible, and *we will be changed*. . . *put on incorruption* . . . *put on immortality*. [Correct translation of the Greek—note the plural number of dead ones, and the distinction between living and dead saints. The dead saints are raised, but the living saints are changed. So the resurrection is not of a collective body of both living and dead saints. The resurrection applies only to the dead saints.]

1 John 3:2 . . . We know that when He appears, *we will be like Him* . . .

Phil 3:20-21 . . . eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will *transform our lowly [mortal] body* that it may be *conformed to His glorious body* . . . (NKJV)

2 Cor 5:2-4 . . . *in this house* we groan, longing to be *clothed with our dwelling from heaven*, inasmuch as we, having *put it on*, will not be found naked [disembodied]. . . . *in this tent*, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be *unclothed* [disembodied by death] but *to be [clothed upon with our immortal bodies]*, so that what is *mortal will be swallowed up by life*. (cf. Weymouth and NIV)

Rom 8:17-23 . . . if indeed we *suffer* with Him so that we may also be *glorified* with Him. For I consider that

the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory* that is about to be [Gk. *mello*] revealed to us. . . . the revealing of the sons of God. . . . creation itself also will be *set free from its slavery to corruption* into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. . . . we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the *redemption of our body*.

1 Thess 5:23 . . . may your *whole spirit, soul, and body* be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [NKJV]

1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then *we who are alive and remain* will be *caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air* . . .

[Note that the catching up is something that happens to living people while they are still alive, not after they die. The dead are raised and caught up, but the living are changed and caught up. The bodies of the living saints had to be changed, since flesh and blood bodies cannot dwell in the spiritual realm (1 Cor. 15:50-52). This bodily change enabled them to avoid physical death, and then they were caught up in their new immortal bodies along with the resurrected dead to be with Christ forever.]

6. Where was Christ, and where were the living saints at the time of the Parousia?

Matt 19:28 And Jesus said to [the twelve] . . . in the regeneration when the Son of Man will *sit on His glorious throne*, you also shall *sit upon twelve thrones*, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Luke 22:30 that you may eat and drink *at My table in My kingdom*, and you will *sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. [cf. Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28-29; 14:15; and Enoch 62:14]

Matt 24:30-31 . . . they will see the Son of Man coming *on the clouds of heaven* with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will *gather together His elect* . . . from one end of the heavens to the other.

2 Thess 2:1 . . . the coming [Gk. Parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ and *our gathering together to Him* . . .

John 14:3 I will come again and *receive you to Myself*, that *where I am, there you may be also*.

2 Thess 1:7-10 . . . the Lord Jesus will be *revealed from heaven* with His mighty angels in flaming fire . . . when He comes to be *glorified in His saints* on that day, and to be *marveled at among all who have believed*

Col 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is *revealed*, then you also will be *revealed with Him in glory*.

Luke 21:36 . . . *stand before the Son of Man*.

Jude 24 . . . *stand in the presence of His glory* blameless with *great joy*

1 John 2:28 . . . abide in Him so that *when He appears* we may have confidence and *not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming*

2 Cor 4:14 . . . knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and *will present us with you*.

1 Thess 2:19 . . . *in the presence* of our Lord Jesus at *His parousia*.

1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will *descend from heaven* . . . caught up together with them in the clouds to *meet the Lord in the air*. And so we *will always be with the Lord*.

Conclusion

From the above, it is apparent that the saints living at the time of the Parousia were anxiously awaiting His return, groaning within themselves, longing to be clothed with their immortal bodies. They were looking for and hastening the day. They had fixed their hope completely upon it. It was not something they would let pass by unnoticed.

They were told they would not only be consciously aware of Christ's return, but they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, and Christ would send His angels to gather them. He told the apostles that all twelve of them (including those still alive) would be received to Him and sit on twelve thrones and dwell in the places He had prepared for them in His Father's house (heaven).

Before the saints could be caught up into the spiritual realm where Christ and the angels were, their lowly (mortal) bodies had to be changed (transformed) from mortal to immortal to be like Christ's glorious body. The dead were raised first, then the living were changed, and together as one group they were caught up to be with Christ.

They would not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming, but would draw near and glorify Him on that day and marvel at Him in the presence of all who had been gathered. They would rejoice with exultation when they stood before the Son of Man in the presence of His glory at His Parousia, and from that time forward they would always be with the Lord.

These were their great expectations, and if they were not realized in the experiential way these Scriptures indicate,

then they would not only have been disappointed, but outraged. These expectations were given to them by Christ and the apostles. What the *time statements* do for the *time* of fulfillment, the *expectation statements* do for the *nature* of fulfillment. It is not enough to affirm that the *time* of Christ's return was fulfilled accurately. The *nature* of that coming (as defined by these expectation statements) must also be fulfilled exactly the way Christ and the apostles promised it would, or the credibility of the Christian faith is forfeited. The *expectation statements* demand our attention just as much as the *time statements*.

I would love to hear from you if you have questions or comments about anything that was presented here. Please email me (preterist1@preterist.org). X

Recommended Books

All three of these may be obtained from *International Preterist Association* by calling our toll-free order line (888-257-7023), or by ordering on our secure website (www.preterist.org).

1. *Taken To Heaven in AD 70 . . . blessings expected at the Parousia*—by Ian D. Harding
2. *The Parousia, A Critical Inquiry Into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*—by James Stuart Russell
3. *Expectations Demand A First Century Rapture*—by Edward E. Stevens

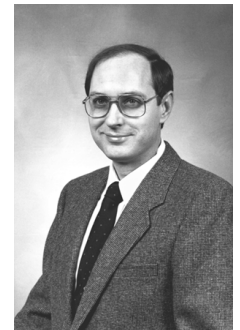
ED STEVENS IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRETERIST ASSOCIATION. HE CAN BE REACHED AT:

EMAIL: PRETERIST1@PRETERIST.ORG

WEB: WWW.PRETERIST.ORG

PHONE: (814) 368-6578

IPA
122 SEAWARD AVE.
BRADFORD, PA 16701



THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE
 AND REMAIN WILL BE CAUGHT
 UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN
 THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE
 LORD IN THE AIR

FULFILLED

MAGAZINE

Prophecy Quiz

*For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by **this generation**. (Luke 17:24-25)*

In the above passage, the “generation” to which Jesus was referring is:

- A. The generation to which He was speaking
- B. A generation in His distant future
- C. Not a particular generation, but a particular race of people, i.e., the Jews

We would be hard pressed to find anyone who believes that the generation which rejected Christ was also the generation to which He was speaking. In fact, of the sixteen times the phrase “this generation” is found in the NKJV New Testament this would seem to be the natural interpretation. Unless, that is, the passage refers to Christ’s Second Coming:

*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon **this generation**. (Matt 23:36)*

*Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation** will by no means pass away till all these things take place. (Matt 24:34-35)*

Mysteriously, in the above passages “this generation” now means anything but the generation to which Christ was speaking! Yet the language, the speaker, and the audience are still the same. Has Christ suddenly changed the meaning of this phrase without informing His audience? Or have modern prophecy experts changed the meaning?

Preterism . . . *it’s about time!*

It’s about the time Jesus told His disciples that He would return—*this (His) generation!*

It’s about the time the New Testament authors told their readers Jesus would return—*soon, near, at hand, shortly!*

It’s about time for a scriptural explanation other than delay!

It’s about time for a “last days” view that doesn’t conjure up gaps and parenthetical ages!



Preterism . . . *maybe it’s about time you looked into it!*