

The Illusion of the Rapture By Rachel Mau

Jesus does not lie. What Christian would dispute such a statement? The very basis of Christianity rests in unconditional faith in Jesus' words, recorded in the Bible. Yet there are some among us who are twisting the Teacher's words, taking Scripture out of context to prove the existence of a future event that is anything but biblical. While some believe the rapture can be proven in Scripture, its basis remains in a spirit of arrogance, revenge, and a misinterpretation of God's Word.

First of all, what exactly is this "rapture?" Essentially, it is the belief that Christ will return to earth to take the true believers to heaven. The remaining unbelievers, then, will undergo ten and a half years of persecution and tribulation, after which, if they have converted, they will receive eternal lifeⁱ; if not, they will be slain and judgedⁱⁱ. On Jesus' Second Coming, Judgment Day, Christ will return to the saints (previously raptured) to destroy the unrepentant. This is the rapture, the idea that is leading many astray from the truth.

All through the Bible, and continuing today, man is aware that he is mortal, and that death is imminent. He is aware that he must face some form of judgment, even if he only believes so in the back of his mind. Specifically, Christians, who are aware of God's plans to one day judge the world, are tempted to seek out signs for the Last Days. The Pharisees and Sadducees were not exempt from such a desire. While testing him one day, they asked Jesus to show them "a sign from heaven." Jesus' reply to that? "When evening comes you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red, and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the

appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” (Matt 16:2-4) This is quite a statement! Jesus is expressively stating that there is no purpose in seeking signs for the end of the world.

“The sign of Jonah” is an interesting point. As it says in the book bearing the name of the prophet, Jonah was called to preach to Ninevah, encouraging repentance there. But Jonah thought himself wiser and did not believe such a wicked city to repent, so he ran away from God. Eventually God got him back on course, Jonah preached, and the wicked city repented while Jonah sulked.

The people of Ninevah did not need fancy miracles or wondrous signs to see the error of their ways – all it took was God’s Word. Hearing God’s Will, his Law and his promise of a Savior, melted their stony hearts. Jesus himself emphasized this point in his teaching while on earth, addressing the issue in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, found in Luke 16:19-31. While the earthly poor yet spiritually rich Lazarus went to heaven, the earthly rich yet spiritually poor “Rich Man” went to hell. Desperate that his brothers might not end up there as well, he begs for Lazarus to appear to them and warn them. But his request is denied, he is simply told “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”(Luke16:29) God places his Word above miraculous signs in the conversion of unbelievers. If sinful man cannot accept the very words of God, why should he accept them from a mere mortal?

Yet this “Rich Man” principle, if one will, relies on the same idea. People think that if unbelievers see a mass deliverance of believers to heaven, this would encourage a spark of faith in their lives, and, with the Second Coming, redemption. But again, we

must quote Jesus: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.” God has given the world his inerrant Word for a reason, it is all that is necessary and no sign or wonder could possibly upstage it. In the end, demanding signs for proof is adulterous, “lacking covenant loyalty to God.”ⁱⁱⁱ

There is another common belief held to be true among men: that any evil that befalls a person is the direct result of some evil that they had done. “The final solution to most of these problems according to the Nazareth religion was the threshing sledge, the ax, and the fire. Waste them! Cleanse the Holy Land of all defilements! Let no cripple or diseased person stand before God’s Temple or in his kingdom! Let Israel be reduced to a righteous, healthy remnant, and then the kingdom will surely be present!”^{iv} This idea of annihilating unbelievers in front of the believers in the Second Coming is an arrogant one. It encourages pride amongst believers, an almost sort of bloodlust to see the destruction of the last day. It focuses the believers’ energy on their pride of an exclusive membership, the raptured few, rather than on the evangelism and conversion of those who do not believe.

In addition, “God is not the tyrant who loves only those who obey him, who hates those who oppose his law...This powerful divine love turns nationalistic biases upside down and inverts the preference every chosen group thinks it deserves.”^v It is not good for a group of Christians to turn from their purpose of evangelizing to becoming haughty. Also, “historical wrath comes crashing down like an avalanche, sweeping away innocent and guilty alike.”^{vi} When God pronounces judgment, everyone is affected. Certainly there were Christians who were persecuted in concentration camps or have been innocents who died in wars. Therefore, how can one justifiably say that Christians will

be excluded from severe persecution and the world-wide problems that will ensue towards the end of the world?

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?” (Matt 23:33) These are Jesus’ words to the Pharisees, a religious sect that believed in their salvation simply because of their heritage. But Jesus was reminding them that their fathers also persecuted prophets, just as they were. It is never good to put too much stock in labels. Those who believe in the rapture place more hope in their being Christians than they do in Christ.^{vii} It does not matter if one misses his chance the first time around – hey, there is always next time, right? Again, this is comparative to Jonah’s desire to see Ninevah get destroyed. “As the bumper stickers proclaim, “In case of Rapture, this car will be unoccupied.” In other words: You other drivers on the interstate who have scorned the New Apocalypticism will soon be dodging giant hailstones and nuclear mushrooms...When you face the Tribulation, you will wish you hadn’t been so critical...We are taking our blows now, but you’ll soon get yours. And so the succession of blows moves on, presumably into eternity, unaltered by the reconciling feast.”^{viii}

Another problem with the rapture theory, as it can only be called since it has not yet been proved, is the idea that believers will meet up with Christ in the clouds on the day the rapture occurs. As it is written, “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thess 4:17) Rather than referring to a rapture, this is simply detailing the events of the Last Day, the only Judgment Day. For “neither do the Scriptures know anything about a double return of Christ, one being secret and a second one visible a number of years later.”^{ix}

Actually, that passage, written by Paul, was to comfort living Christians who were afraid they would never see their dead brothers and sisters in Christ again – not to propose a new doctrine. “The ultimate irony of the doctrine of “The Rapture” is that it alters what was originally intended as a metaphor of togetherness into a theology of separation and escape.”^x When a key passage “supporting” the rapture crumbles, it causes doubts to the credibility of other “supporting” passages.

One cannot simply declare an idea as falsehood unless it is properly refuted. That is where Scripture comes in. Another one of the major passages used by those believing in the rapture is found in Daniel 12:1-2.^{xi} It reads: “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

“...A millennial doctrine cannot be based on Old Testament prophecies but should be based on the New Testament alone.”^{xii} This reference is very apocalyptic, meaning, among other things, that the language is somewhat cryptic. These Bible verses never directly refer to the rapture, they simply speak of the Last Days, and, finally, Judgment Day. It speaks of the turmoil predicted in the last days and how every soul will have to face God for judgment, one final judgment deciding that soul’s eternal destination.

Another, more major source of rapture theology, is found in Matthew 24:40-42. “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be

grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” There are numerous, more modern adaptations of this scenario, pamphlets handed out to warn and ready those for the rapture. It is even believed by some that this gives an actual proportion of those who will be suddenly raptured, about 50%.^{xiii} This belief is even held despite the fact that no such rapture time frame is given – there is no mention of Christ’s first coming. No mention of a great tribulation following thereafter is given. There simply is no concrete evidence that this supports the idea of a rapture. Just before this passage, the time of Noah is referred to, how people were eating and drinking – basically, not expecting judgment. But it came anyway, swiftly, through a flood – God’s people were saved, and the immoral were destroyed. There was no second chance for those who were drowning; they had rejected God. God did not first take away Noah and his family, and then return to see if any unbelievers had repented. God was merciful, giving the people ample time to repent, as he gives people today, but in the end, God will not be trifled with – he has warned of his judgment and will deliver it, once – as in the story of Noah.

Continuing on in Matthew 25:1-13 is the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Supporters of the rapture claim it warns of the suddenness of the rapture when it actually points more to disproving its existence. In the parable, five virgins were prepared for the bridegroom and five were not. The five that were ready were taken into the wedding banquet while the five who were not prepared were left out onto the streets. The last part of the story should be noted: “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ They said. ‘Open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (Matt 25:11-13) And that is how the

parable ends. No “to be continued...” is found, there is no additional “- and then the second time the bridegroom arrived at the wedding, he let them in.” To add such a thing would be ludicrous, just as the rapture is, ultimately, ludicrous.

The rapture spreads a blanket of illusion over the preparedness of a Christian. It gives the false impression of second chances and the promise of finding out if Christianity is a real thing before one subscribes. It has no biblical basis; the only end times passages found remind a Christian to be ready at all times, for the day of judgment could be at any time. The certainty man needs, the proof of judgment sans rapture, lies in the Bible.

ⁱJohn W. Tomblor and Hubert J. Funk. *The Raptured: A Catholic View of the Latter Days and the Second Coming*. (East Orange: Trumpet Press, Inc. 1977) 65.

ⁱⁱ Tomblor and Funk, *Raptured*, 173.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jewett, *Jesus Against the Rapture: Seven Unexpected Prophecies*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979) 70.

^{iv} Jewett, *Jesus* 61.

^v Jewett, *Jesus* 63.

^{vi} Jewett, *Jesus* 92.

^{vii} Jewett, *Jesus* 100.

^{viii} Jewett, *Jesus* 139.

^{ix} Wilbert Gawrisch, *Our Great Heritage III*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) 730.

^x Jewett, *Jesus* 139.

^{xi} Tomblor and Funk, *Raptured* 74.

^{xii} Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Meaning of the Millenium: Four Views*. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977) 32.

^{xiii} Tomblor and Funk, *Raptured* 70.