

Is the Rapture Biblical?

Ask any evangelical whether Matthew 24:40-41 are speaking of the end-time rapture of the saints and almost assuredly he will say that it is.

These verses speaking of people in the last days doing everyday things when suddenly some are taken away, is foundational to the rapture doctrine.

The common understanding of the rapture—a term not in the Scriptures—is that the saints will be instantly transported off for safe keeping in heaven for three and a half or seven years when conditions worsen on earth prior to the Savior's return. A variation of this theory asserts that the rapture will happen in the middle of the end-time tribulation period or at its end. Once the tribulation is past, His saints will return to earth with Yahshua to reign here for a thousand years, many believe.

Is this so? Millions of people are expecting a sudden “lift-off” to take them completely away from all the turmoil and trials prophesied for the time just ahead. They believe that they will leave friends and family down here to suffer and die, while they witness it all from a safe distance in heaven. In fact, millions are, and will be, duped into a spiritual slumber because of this doctrine. When the time comes they may find themselves unable to cope with what they will be forced to undergo.

Let's understand exactly what the Scriptures say. What you know or don't know now could be critical in the years ahead.

Where Do They Go?

Yahshua's answer to the question about where these “raptured” will be taken is the key to the rapture issue. A passage parallel to Matthew 24:40-41 that is a somewhat more complete rendition of the same account, is in Luke 17:34-37 where Yahshua said to His disciples, *I tell you, in that night there shall be two [men] in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two [women] shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two [men] shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, where, Master? And he said unto them, wheresoever the body [is], thither will the eagles be gathered together.*

Other translations render eagles as “vultures,” such as **Weymouth** and **Moffatt**. The **New International Version** reads, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures gather.” These people are taken to a place of dead bodies and vultures. Does this sound like a safe haven in heaven? Far from it!

In another parable about the end-time “harvest” of souls, Yahshua told His disciples that the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed a field and an enemy came later and sowed tares or weeds in it (Matt. 13). The servants asked the owner whether they should go out and pull up the tares, but he told them to wait. *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn,”* Matthew 13:30.

This parable fits perfectly with His other parable about the end. The tares representing the wicked are the ones first taken and destroyed. The righteous remain until the firstfruits harvest. Yahshua Himself spelled out His parable of the tares when His disciples begged an explanation. Matthew 13:37-43 reads, *He answered and said unto them, “He that sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked [one]; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Proper Time Sequence

Most rapture theorists say the saints will be taken away before or partway through the tribulation period.

Matthew 24:29-31 reveals when the saints will in fact be resurrected. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Notice, the elect or the saints will be gathered after the tribulation, not before it. Paul gives us another indication of the time sequence in 2 Thessalonians 2:1: *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Master Yahshua the Messiah and [by] our gathering together unto Him.* We learn here that when the Savior comes, THEN the body of saints will gather with Him.

Yahshua comes *after* the appearing of the wicked one (i.e., the one who is moved by Satan). *And then shall that Wicked [one] be revealed, whom the Master shall [afterwards] consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming,* 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Once Satan has done his work—including the events of the tribulation mentioned in verse 10—then the Savior will come.

A Period and a Conclusion

In His well-known Olivet prophecy, Yahshua talked about the end times. His disciples wanted to know what exactly will happen and asked Him about events at the time of the close of this present world.

Tell us, when shall these things be? and what [shall] be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world? they asked Him in Matthew 24:3. This word “end” is from the Greek word *sunteleia*, which means the combined circumstances surrounding the end. It does not mean the very final event itself.

However, that is not the case later in the chapter, as in verse 13: *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* Here the word “end” is the Greek *telos* and means the actual end as a final limit. In other words, those who would be True Believers will be called on to be faithful all the way to either the end of their lives or to the last event of the whole end-time sequence. This precludes that they would be somehow cut short of the process in a rapture. Again, in verse 14 *telos* is used: *And this Good News of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* The witness will continue to go out to the world all the way up to the final event.

The witness is carried by Yahweh’s True Worshipers, is it not? Has it not always been the prophets and Yahweh’s people who have brought the truth to the world? How can the truth go out to the very last (*telos*) if the saints are raptured away in heaven three and a half or seven years prior?

Of course, the saints will be either changed or resurrected at the final trumpet blast. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, *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.* The last trump refers to the seventh trumpet sound of Revelation 10:7. Each of the seven trumpets announces a certain plague that is prophesied to befall this earth.

Historical Models

If the saints are not raised and changed until the last of the plagues, then they obviously must endure the coming tribulation.

Can we find any instance in history that parallels what will happen in the end of the age? Yahshua tells us we can, in Matthew 24:37-41: *But as the days of Noah [were], so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 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.*

Just as the flood “took” all the wicked away and drowned them while Noah and his family were preserved in an ark on earth, so first wicked ones will be “taken” to a place of death, where vultures are gathered around dead bodies.

Many of the righteous will be protected here on earth, just as Noah was. Remember, Noah’s circumstances are a paradigm or model of what will occur at the end of the age. Revelation 12 tells us that the woman, which typifies the Assembly, fled into the wilderness where Yahweh had prepared a place for her (them), nourishing her for 1,260 days or three and a half years, else the man of sin, a civil leader, would make war with the saints and even overcome them (Rev. 13:7). This would be impossible if all the saints were already gone, raptured away in heaven.

Trials Endured, Not Removed

We read that Joseph was “delivered out of all his afflictions,” but we also learn that his feet hurt with fetters and that he was laid in iron until the Word of Yahweh tried him and the king loosed him (Ps. 105:17-20).

Israel had to suffer the first three plagues in Egypt—the blood, frogs, and lice—before they were protected from the last seven (Ex. 7:19-8:23).

When Daniel’s friends refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (probably an Asherah) they were thrown into a burning furnace. There, they were protected from the destruction of the flames of the fiery furnace.

Daniel himself, in another account, was cast into the lion’s den and escaped death by Yahweh’s dispatch of a messenger which shut the lions’ mouths (Dan. 6:16-22).

Far from being removed from the world in a rapture, Yahshua prayed that the righteous be delivered, and asked specifically that they not be taken out of the world (John 17:15). “Sanctify them through your truth,” He prayed (John 17:17). “Sanctify” means to set apart. We are set apart by His Word while living in the world, and not separated by physical removal. “Persecution, afflictions, which came unto me... I endured: but out of [them] all Yahweh delivered me,” (2 Tim. 3:11). Although delivered by his faith, Paul still had to undergo the trials.

Revelation Reveals Trials

Specifically, how can we know that many saints will need to endure the coming tribulation? Is there a passage that shows in no uncertain terms that this will indeed be the case? Yes, there is. As each of the seven seals is opened in Revelation 6, various plagues are unleashed on the earth: false ministers, wars, famines and death from diseases, war, and wild animals make up the first four seals. The fifth seal is opened in verse 9: *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of Elohim, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Yahweh, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they [were], should be fulfilled.* This indicates at least some saints will be martyred.

Now notice in Revelation 7:2-3: *And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living Elohim: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our Elohim in their foreheads."*

This is after the first six seals are opened with various plagues accompanying each. Just as with Israel in Egypt, those at the end of the age will undergo the first part of the tribulation period. The 144,000 will be sealed with Yahweh's Name (Rev. 14:1). There will be protection for them, but they will still be tried.

How Many Resurrections?

In Revelation 7:13 one of the elders asks about the identity of a great multitude standing before Yahweh's throne. Verse 14 tells us that these came through the great tribulation and through their works of obedience ("washed their robes") had been approved.

Revelation 20:4 tells us that there will be souls beheaded for the witness of Yahshua. These saints will reign with the Messiah for a thousand years. Had they been beheaded before the tribulation, they would have risen with the rest of the dead in the supposed rapture and would not have had the opportunity to refuse to worship the Beast.

Most rapturists maintain that the righteous living and righteous dead will be raptured off to safety in heaven before the tribulation. This being the theory, the next verse presents another problem: *But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This [is] the first resurrection,* Revelation 20:5. Had there already been a rapture, this would in fact be the second and not the first resurrection!

How Many Second Comings?

Another problem arises with the rapture theory. How many second comings will Yahshua make? Is there a second and a third coming?

The rapturists believe that Yahshua will come to pick up the saints but not touch down on earth. Then He will go back to heaven with the righteous ones. After either three and a half or seven years of the tribulation He will come back again with His heavenly army (and the raptured saints) to set up His rule for a thousand years.

The rapture doctrine maintains that Yahshua will come in two stages: "for" His saints, represented by the Greek word *parousia*; and the second stage, "with" His saints, as revealed in the Greek word *apokalupsis*.

In fact, the Bible makes no distinction between these two Greek words. For instance, Matthew 24:37 and Luke 17:26 and 30 describe the same thing—saying that the days of Noah foreshadow the time before the Savior returns. The first account uses *parousia* in reference to the Messiah's "coming," while the second employs *apokalupto* in "revealed." No differentiation is made in the circumstances, however. Similarly, *parousia* is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, the passage many use in support of a rapture. Recall that *parousia* is supposed to indicate only a coming "for" His saints.

The problem is, the same word *parousia* is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 8, verses that speak of Yahshua's "coming" after the reign of the man of sin—at the END of the tribulation—to destroy the man of sin. This is not rapture but war! We find *parousia* also used in 2 Peter 3:4 and 12. These verses, as well, show a Savior coming (*parousia*) in vengeance, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Again, this is no indication of a rapture before the tribulation begins.

Major Problem No. 3

Aside from Matthew 24:40-41, the other main support presumably holding up the rapture theory is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *For the Master himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the*

voice of the archangel, and with the trump of Elohim: and the dead in Messiah shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Master in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Master.

This, then, is the first stage of Yahshua's coming, rapture theorists maintain. Some say it will be in secret when Yahshua comes the first time to rapture the saints. But there is nothing secret about a shout, an overpowering voice of an archangel, and a trumpet blast!

A real problem for the theorists in using this verse is in the word "meet." Do we meet Him in the air and then reverse direction and go back to where He came from? If I meet someone arriving at the airport, do I get on the plane and go back with him to the place he just left, or do I pick him up and take him to his final destination?

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the word "meet" is the Greek *apantesis*. This word is used in only two other references in the New Testament. One is Matthew 25:6. Here the bridegroom is met by the virgins and continues on to the wedding feast. He does not reverse direction and go back to where He came from. (This meeting is called in verse 13, "the day and hour when the son of man comes." This phrase joins this parable with the Second Coming.)

The only other instance where *apantesis* ("meet") is found, is Acts 28:15. Here Paul is headed to Rome. He is met by a delegation of Roman brethren who have come as far as the Three Taverns to meet him. From there they proceed on to Rome. Just as with Yahshua's Second Coming, Paul approaches, is met, and continues forward to his destination.

Yahshua doesn't reverse direction. But the saints do, exactly as some did here in Acts 28:15 and at His Second Coming, the saints will return with Him.

Nothing Secret or Quiet

Why? Partly, because of an ear-shattering shout, the disquieting voice of an archangel, and a loud trumpet blast. As we have also read, the anti-Messiah will be destroyed with the brightness of Yahshua's coming (2 Thess. 2:8). Nothing in the Scriptures gives any indication that the Savior will come quietly to snatch away His elect.

Some may point to 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 4, maintaining a secret first return of Yahshua. The passage reads: *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of Yahweh so comes as a thief in the night... But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

Here we see clearly that the day is what can come unexpectedly to the unprepared. We are not to let the day overtake us as a thief, but to be prepared for it. Nothing is said or hinted that the Messiah will sneak down and snatch away people. The day of His return may come as a surprise, but He will not.

The day He comes He will stand on the earth, not head back to heaven. The prophet Zechariah wrote: *Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, and your spoil shall be divided in the midst of you... And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and [there shall be] a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south, Zechariah 14:1, 4.*

Rapture: a Dangerous Teaching

The teaching that the saints will be secure in heaven during the coming tribulation is nothing short of sinister. Instead of spiritually preparing people for the trials and even death to come, they are taught not to worry, they will be delivered out of it all.

Many people have conjured a picture of peace and safety in their minds. They have been removed from the trials of life while the earth is torn apart by storms, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, convulsions of the earth, fires, floods, wars, and whatever catastrophe comes to mind. Revelation 6 teaches there will be earthquakes, the sun will be blackened, the moon will become as blood.

Asteroids and comets will fall to earth, the mountains and islands will be moved out of place. This is the great day of Yahweh's wrath and verse 17 asks, who will be able to stand?

Instead of fostering a dream of escape, our goal should be to do as did the Old Testament heroes (Heb. 11) and "occupy until He comes" (Luke 19:13). Our attention should be focused on the Bible so that we can be a bulwark against doubt, but a kindly help to others who will need encouragement and strengthening of their resolve to carry on, knowing that, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy [cometh] in the morning" (Ps. 30:5).

Remember, the tribulation is sent by Yahweh, and He certainly will not target those who are striving to obey Him, but instead promises to spare those striving to please Him. *Then they that feared Yahweh spoke often one to another: and Yahweh hearkened, and heard [it], and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith Yahweh of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,* Malachi 3:16-17.

Just as ancient Israel was spared from the final seven plagues, we are promised similar protection: *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with dissipation, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man,* Luke 21:34-36.

Not only are we to watch, but we also are to pray that we will be accounted worthy: *Seek ye Yahweh, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Yahweh's anger,* Zephaniah 2:3.

Thou [art] my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble. Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance, Psalm 32:7.

May you find salvation in the truth and escape the destruction that follows the misguided doctrines of man.

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