

IS IT THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT?

I want to ask a simple question this morning. Are we on the edge of the end of the world? Books and Movies trumpet the end. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins have churned out a series of Left Behind books. Christianity Today described the series as a "seven-volume post-Rapture, dispensational soap opera" [Michael G. Maudlin, "Inside CT," October 5, 1998]. In the fall of 2014 (October 3) the Left Behind remix movie starring Nicholas Cage showed up briefly on the big screen. Cage plays pilot Rayford Steele who single-handedly maneuvers a big jet after one of its pilots and dozens of other Christians on board leave their clothes behind, experience a rapture ejection off the ship. Check it out. [clip] This is what I call rapture mania. Are we right on the edge of history's greatest catastrophe? No Chicken Little, the sky is not falling. Our world still belongs to God! History is in the grip of His Almighty Hands. So then, let's dig in and ask two questions: When and How.

I. WHEN? Let there be no mistake. Jesus, the Messiah is coming back. The question is when? A few years back Edgar Whisenant [retired NASA engineer] wrote a book entitled, 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988. 4.5 million copies of the book had been printed. Needless to say, the book is not selling well in 2016. The book follows the same basic argument found in Hal Lindsey's book, The Late Great Planet Earth. We are living in the terminal generation. According to him, since Israel returned to Palestine in 1948 we can expect Jesus to return approximately within a 40 year generation i.e., 1988 give or take 20 years or so. [1] It should give us great pause that "**every millennial forecast ever made has been wrong**" [Banner, p 23]

Some will argue that we are living in the last days. That's true. But the NT labels the entire period between Christ's first and second coming as "*the last days*." **Hebrews** tells us God has spoken His final Word to us by his Son "*in the last days*" [1:2]. **Peter** announces that in fulfillment of Joel 2 the Spirit was poured out on all people "*in the last days*" [Acts 2:17]. FYI you've heard plenty of buzz in religious circles about the blood moons. But Peter specifies that at Pentecost in May AD 33 [Acts 2:20], "*the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood*." The last days will be terrible times, Paul warns; marked by people who are lovers of self, money, and pleasure rather than lovers of God. Ephesus was full of those kind of people; and so Paul challenged Christians "*have nothing to do with them*" [2 Timothy 3:5]. The whole period from Christ's first coming to His second coming are to be marked by the appearance of...

- ❖ False prophets and False Christs [Mark 13:6; I John 2:18]
- ❖ World Conflicts and Natural disasters [Mark 13:8].
- ❖ The Persecution of Jesus' followers [Mark 13:9-13].
- ❖ Gospel Proclamation to all nations [Mark 13:10]. In fact

Jesus said that the gospel must take a firm hold in every people group before He comes again. "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*" [Matthew 24:14]. Globally, there are 1,800 people groups who could not respond to Christ, because the Gospel has not yet been translated into their own tongue. [Good news is however, that Wycliffe translators expect that many or those ethnic groups will be reached not with written NT, but oral Bibles. This is a more rapid form of translation]. 4 billion people on our planet including multitudes of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists do not know Jesus. We have much work to get done before it can be said that the "*fullness of the Gentiles*" has come in [Romans 11:12, 15]. In the words of Vernard Eller, **we must stop the dating game** [CT, October 25, 1999, p. 75].

The dating game, you see, flies in the face of the very clear statement of the Lord Jesus found in Mark 13:32. "*No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*." Christ will come unexpectedly, Matthew 24:44 "*at an hour you do not expect him*," "*like a thief in the night*" [I Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 16:15]. There will be no distant early warning system to get us prepared for the end. Jesus says, it will be as it was in the days of Noah, "*People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage up the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all*" [Luke 17:26, 27]. In other words, it's business as usual. Christ will come when men and women are going about their normal everyday business, without thought of God. There will be millions of ordinary people guilty of no great crime, except they gave no thought to the most important person in the universe, Christ.

II. HOW? How will Christ return? He will come back **visibly**. This will be a public event. The Apostle John states clearly in Revelation 1:7, "*Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him...*" It was Ascension Day, May 14 AD 33. Jesus was miraculously lifted off the face of the earth on the clouds of God's Shekinah glory. It was a powerful spectacle. The crowd couldn't take their eyes off Him. Suddenly, two angels appeared and chided them, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand here, looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven*" [Acts 1:11].

Many who embrace a rapture theology contend that there are two comings of Christ yet on the future horizon. Jesus is coming first, **invisibly** to rapture the saints and so to rescue them either **before** [left behind], **after**, or **during** the great tribulation and then to return **visibly** later to set up His 1,000 year reign. But people, the NT affirms only one indivisible return of Christ. And when the Scriptures use those technical terms for the coming of Christ [Parousia=presence-I Thessalonians 4:15 "*The word was used as a semi technical term for the visit of a king or emperor or the appearance of a god*." I Th. 3:13], [apokalypsis=revelation or public unveiling-2 Th. 1:7], and [epiphaneia=appearance-Titus 2:11-13] they all point unambiguously to a dramatic, visible, public revelation of Christ.

Paul writes in I Thessalonians 4:13 "*Brothers we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope*." The believers at Thessaloniki were perplexed and confused. Jesus was coming and soon. They figured that all believers would live until Christ came back. But Jesus didn't come back and the tears began to flow. They grieved and so Paul wrote this letter to comfort the flock: "*You don't have to grieve as those who have no hope*." The King is coming back. And He's not coming alone. Millions of saints who fell asleep, they're coming back too. It will be a staggering spectacle. Just imagine!

From **above** [2 Th. 1:7] there will be the Lord Jesus revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. The sky will erupt with triumphant sound [vs. 16]; the battle cry of Christ Himself, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, which means perhaps the indescribable, piercing and powerful voice of the living God. Earth's final wake-up call. Remember at Mt. Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments we read "*and the sound of the trumpet grew*

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louder and louder" [Ex 19:19]. This does not sound like a private, secret, invisible coming of Christ.

From **below** bodies will bust through cemetery sod and skyrocket up from the ocean depths [vs. 16b]—*"the dead in Christ will rise first."* Vs. 17 goes on, that the next in line are those who are alive at Christ's return. Our bodies will be clothed with life imperishable and we shall be changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [I Corinthians 15:52]. Vs. 17 says more. *"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."* You've heard the hype. Tom Brady (New England Patriots) hurls the deflated football down field, but there's no one to catch the ball [the end has vanished]. Airlines crash, cars collide in record numbers. There's millions of missing bodies. The rapture has taken place.

What about this rapture theology? You can search the early church and reformation Fathers and you won't find a whisper of it. Not Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, not Thomas Aquinas, not Augustine. The whole idea of a rapture, was never thought of before a Rev. Morgan Edwards preached it (1742) & wrote about it (1788). Then later Charles Darby developed the idea [1830] and it was promoted in the footnotes of the Scofield Reference Bible [1909].

So how then should we understand I Th. 4:17? *"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."* I urge you to try to read this text as the Christians in Thessalonika would read it. Before you can apply a text to the here and now, you **must** understand it in the then and there. So, true, we will be lifted up temporarily to greet the Lord *"in the air"* but to welcome Him as He returns with the saints, just like the triumphant return to a city of a great Roman general and His army after a mighty victory. Such a **Roman Triumph** would be a figure of speech both Paul and the Christians at Thessalonika would be familiar. The song isn't *"when the saints go marching" out. But when the saints go marchin' in!* Reformed Christians believe in an arrival rapture [upper airport deck], not a departure rapture [lower deck] [cf. I Th. 4:17, II Cor. 2:14; Philip 3:20 **"from there"**; Acts 1:11; H. Ridderbos, Paul, pp. 535-536, R. C. Sproul, The Rapture Question in Coram Deo; David Hubbard, Thessalonians, p. 38, Ernest Best, I Thessalonians, p. 199, TDNT, I, pp. 380ff], *apantasis=meet=t.t. in Hellenistic world re the arrival of dignitaries*. Just like all New York City came out to give Charles Lindberg a ticker tape parade when he returned from his 1st transatlantic flight, **[image/film]** so we will rise to meet the Lord and His triumphant saints in His victory march back to the city of God and the new earth.

So let's stop the dating game. Let's be diligent at our posts. [MN Lutheran territory-100 mile journey] Luther said, *"If Christ should come tomorrow, I'll plant a tree today."* Jesus in Luke's version of the Parable of the Talents says an astounding thing. With whatever gifts, talents, strengths you have: *"Occupy until I come!"* [Luke 19:13]. A couple of years ago, across this globe people were caught up in what has become known as the Occupy movement. Let me give that movement an biblical spin. Let us in a redemptively positive way let us occupy Wall Street and occupy the streets of Willmar Raymond and Clara City; be wise and prudent stewards with the resources God has given us. Let us Occupy our homes with godly Dads and Moms who are

students of the Word and who pass on the Christian worldview to their children. Let us Occupy our schools: both Christian and public and home schools with teachers who know their stuff and are zealous to take every thought make it captive to Jesus Christ. Let us occupy until Jesus comes. We need not sell our homes and possessions, quit our jobs, drive our motor homes to mountain tops and sit on our hands until Christ returns. Let us tell the good news of Jesus' death, resurrection and glorious return, until no more breath comes out of our nostrils. Remember God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son for that world. Not to escape the world; not world-flight, but to fix this broken world. It's a global mission. There's a world to be won. We will occupy until He comes!



[1] There are plenty of end time predictions that missed. **Harold Camping** former CRC layman radio broadcaster from California has prophesied that the Lord told him He will return on May 21, 2011. He had prophesied in the past that the Lord would return in September 1994 (Jewish Rosh Hashanah) or thereabouts. Oops, he missed. **The Jehovah's Witnesses** predicted Armageddon and Christ's return for October 1874, then 1914, and then again in 1925. Whoops! Mormon, **Joseph Smith**, foretold Christ's return to happen in 1891. **Louis Farrkhan** of the nation of Islam thought the War of Armageddon, the final war to engulf the entire planet would start with the Gulf War in 1991. **William Miller** who launched the 7th Day Adventists predicted the end of the world in 1843. *"When that date passed with the expected Second Advent, he recalculated and set the date in 1844. Followers sold good and properties and sat on a hill, waiting for an event that never occurred"* [Richard Foster, Renovare, No '95].