

# *MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 314*

## **Clearing the Clouds: Rapture Realities**

By Andrew Brown

“Perhaps today!” As a young man in the faith, this word of encouragement was often on my lips. When I entered the quest of a dedicated Bible student, I believed I would participate in an event called “the rapture.” This is a popular idea in modern theology wherein it is thought that believers will be secretly and mysteriously transported to heaven while chaos ensues on earth. Rapturists openly debate whether this event happens pre, mid, or post tribulation, and many passages are cherry-picked in support. The passage central to the debate is 1 Thessalonians 4:17 which reveals a group being **caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. Early in my studies I was aware that the term “rapture” for “caught up” is found only here, and only in the Latin Vulgate. At that time in my studies of the Word that was good enough for me and so I was a believer in the pre-tribulation, pre-millennial rapture known in the Darby-Scofield belief system and portrayed in the popular Left Behind series. As my studies in the Bible continued, my understanding regarding this event was reshaped on the anvil of God’s perfect Word.

Before the “rapture” discussion begins, some facts must be set forth. The Lord Jesus Christ will come back. **This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven** (Acts 1:11 NASB throughout). Regarding Christ’s return, note that it happens at the end of the tribulation period: **then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming [parousia]** (2 Thess. 2:8). Christ destroys the anti-Christ at His return and literally reigns for 1000 years (Rev. 20).

Scripture clearly connects “the rapture” of the Vulgate to the *Parousia* of the Lord, and so understanding what *Parousia* means is crucial to grasping the rapture. *Parousia* is usually translated “coming”; however, the Greek word for

“coming” is *erchomai*. Simple analysis of both words reveals they have different meanings. *Parousia* is a compound word consisting of *para* (with, beside) and *ousia* (being). Thus we get “being-beside” or “being-with” equaling “personal presence.” Realizing the Greek word *pareimi* means “personal presence” and comparing the usage of *pareimi* with *parousia* teaches us that *parousia* means more than simply an actual presence. The usage bears out that *parousia* is a technical word that means one is present for who he is and what he does. A *parousia* is similar to a *pareimi* in that there is a physical presence but goes beyond that, requiring the one present to have their purpose or position enacted. Like Bible students at a Bible conference or a plumber (not a dentist) at a plumbing job.

The translators of the *King James Version* performed a disservice to the understanding of *parousia* when they rendered it “coming” in 20 out of 22 occurrences. It appears they may have translated with a bias in all but two occurrences where they were forced to supply a more accurate translation: **His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence [parousia] is unimpressive and his speech contemptible** (2 Cor. 10:10). In this verse the Corinthians were unimpressed with the personal presence of God’s apostle compared to their cultural standard. It is clear that “coming” would not convey the meaning. The other verse provides similar evidence: **“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence [parousia] only, but now much more in my absence”** (Phil. 2:12). *Parousia* is translated as “presence” because it is used in opposition to Paul’s absence (*apousia*). “With-being” (*parousia*) is an obvious contrast to “from-being” (*apousia*). It is clear that *parousia* does not mean coming.

The very first occurrence of *parousia* demonstrates the above definition. The disciples asked, **Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming [parousia], and of the end of the age?** (Matt. 24:3). Keep in mind that the disciples did not think Christ was leaving them, thus they were not asking about His coming back. The disciples were still clueless and distraught when Christ mentioned leaving later just hours before He was crucified in John 13. Jesus was personally present before them and they did not know of his departure. This establishes that *parousia* means more than “coming” and more than “personal-presence.” Jesus had just informed them, **not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down** (Matt. 24:2). Aghast at the thought, they

asked about His *Parousia*, and they meant “when are You going to start acting as the Messiah and King we know You are?” They were speaking of His millennial reign.

As the disciples traveled down the mountain after the transfiguration, Jesus advised, **Tell the vision to no one** (Matt. 17:9). Later as Peter recalled this under inspiration, he described himself as being an eyewitness of the *Parousia*. “**For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty**” (2 Pet. 1:16). Peter saw the Lord’s *Parousia*, not just Christ’s coming or return, but Christ’s *Parousia* when He is personally present on Earth as the reigning Messiah. At the transfiguration Peter had received a glimpse of what would be happening during Christ’s millennial reign. “Millennium” is man’s term for this future time and is based on Revelation 20 demonstrating that the length of the period is one thousand years, whereas *parousia* refers to the character of these days upon the earth. The Lord has only one *Parousia*.

The primarily cited passage in “rapture-teaching” deserves detailed examination. **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming [parousia] of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep** (1 Thess. 4:15). The events presented in this verse clearly occur at the *Parousia*. Paul states through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **we who are alive**. The pronoun “we” reveals an important aspect of truth. Paul (and his co-authors) must be alive and remaining at the *Parousia*. (This does not refer to Paul’s anticipation of the rapture happening at any moment, for then the Holy Spirit’s perfect Word is wrong! Paul did not need to include himself.) This truth cannot be overemphasized for Paul distinguishes himself as NOT being among the dead when this event happens. Paul is contrasted to the dead with the words “those” (v.15) and “them” (v.17). Having been resurrected at the start of the premillennial Kingdom, Paul will be alive at the presentation of Christ in verse 14, and will remain alive when the anti-Christ is destroyed and the Lord takes up His reign on earth. The Holy Spirit emphasizes these pronouns for a specific reason!

1 Corinthians 15:50-52 is also frequently cited in the cloudy rapture teaching. The context of this passage is resurrection and **inheriting the Kingdom** when **the perishable inherit the imperishable** (1 Cor. 15:50). In this passage, Paul provides an

amazing revelation that those living when the Kingdom takes over will experience instant transformation into their immortal/imperishable bodies! Others resurrected at this point (such as Paul) will also rise changed. The events described here will be fulfilled BEFORE those **who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air** (1 Thess. 4:17).

Indeed a group will be airborne at Christ's return to earth, however, this does not affirm the mainstream teaching called the "rapture." They do not fly away to be in heaven. The Greek word for meet is *apantesin* and ALWAYS means going out to meet someone and accompany him back with you to his journey's end. The virgins in Matthew 25:1, for example, went out to the bridegroom and accompanied him back to the wedding. The Romans went out to meet Paul and accompanied him back to Rome in Acts 28:15. The LORD is not going to heaven at the start of the *Parousia*, rather He is coming to be personally present on earth. A group will rise into the air to meet the Lord and accompany Him back to earth.

This event is not a mysterious vanishing of believers into the air. **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** (1 Thess. 4:16). This event is manifested by trumpet blasts, war shouts, and resurrections. Additional passages testify of this sudden and dramatic event, "**For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of Man be**" (Matt. 24:27). There is nothing secret about it.

Those who hold to the idea that believers will be taken up into the air and removed from the earth emphasize that God **rescues us from the wrath to come** (1 Thess. 1:10) and that **God has not destined us for wrath** (1 Thess. 5:9). Since Revelation speaks of God pouring out wrath in the Day of the Lord, they conclude we must be raptured from the earth prior to these events. This has instilled fear in many, and deserves consideration. Scripture provides numerous examples of God rescuing and protecting His people in the midst of danger. The Egyptians, just before the time of the exodus, experienced God pouring out His wrath on them in the plagues. The Lord did not miraculously take the Israelites away to protect them. God sheltered them in the midst of many perils, **that you may understand how the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel** (Exod. 11:7). God's wrath has pinpoint accuracy, so that you could stand in an onslaught

of arrows and have them whiz by you without a hair of your head being disturbed as they hit His target, and you would stand in awe of Him. He doesn't need to remove any from the Earth in order to save them. **A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you** (Psa. 91:7).

**Therefore comfort one another with these words** (1 Thess. 4:18). The Thessalonians would certainly receive comfort from Paul's teaching them of these similar times of resurrection. If a believer is dead before the Kingdom, they will be raised for the Kingdom. If a believer dies in the tribulation, they will be raised for the *Parousia*. Thanks to the Lord's wonderful plan of resurrection, death will not separate his believers from the blessings God has in store! All Scripture will be fulfilled! God's perfect Word, including pronouns, is maintained!

Examination of "the rapture" passages and understanding them in the context where Scripture places them clears the clouds of inconsistency and reveals a more complete picture of what is to come. "Perhaps today!" If we are to encourage each other with this phrase we should be certain we are not speaking of a mysterious transport through the clouds but our sure expectation of the government of God that will cover the world with the knowledge of God's glory and all its wondrous benefits. Indeed, perhaps today!

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