

The Truths about Rapture (1)

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Acts 1: 7-12 [NKJV]

7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

1. Ascension Rapture of Lord Jesus

We can read of the Lord's ascension to heaven in three places: Mark 16, Luke 24 and Acts 1. The reason why I refer to the Lord's ascension as a rapture event is that the manner of the Lord's ascension to heaven is closely related to the future rapture event as testified by the angels who told the disciples who were watching, *"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."* Also, I firmly believe that the manner of the Lord's ascension is strongly indicative of the manner how the coming rapture of the New Testament church will occur.

Besides the ascension rapture event of Lord Jesus, Bible records two other rapture events, that of Enoch, who lived before the great flood, and another of the prophet Elijah. I wish to examine how these events have occurred to identify common characteristics and apply what we gather from this examination to our understanding of how the future rapture will occur. First, let us look into the above rapture event of Lord Jesus and identify a few outstanding characteristics.

A. Known and prepared event

Lord Jesus knew in advance of His coming trial, death on a cross, resurrection and ascension to heaven [John 13:1, John 17:11, John 17:13].

*[John 17:11-13] Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, **and I come to You**. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of [h]perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But **now I come to You**, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.*

Before His betrayal by Judas, Lord Jesus told His disciples of His desire to spend some days with them in Galilee [Matt 26:32]. At the time of His resurrection the angels at the grave site told the disciples of the Galilee plan as a reminder [Matt 18:7]. The resurrected Jesus finally commanded His disciples to go to Galilee to spend time with Him [Matt 28:10]. In Acts 1 we read that Lord Jesus spent 40 days on earth after His resurrection, when He taught the disciples how God accomplished the plan of human salvation through His life, death and resurrection so as to strengthen their faith and spiritual vision. Most of the 40 days of Jesus' post-resurrection teaching ministry was spent in Galilee as He had planned. The apostle Paul indicates the number of disciples who were taught by Lord Jesus in Galilee was over 500.

[Acts 1: 1-4] 1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. 4 And being assembled together with them, He

commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;

[1 Corinthians 15:6] After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remains to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

Lord Jesus' ascension to heaven took place in Mount Olivet, as it says in verse 12, which was near Jerusalem. This was His final meeting with the disciples. So, He and the eleven disciples must have travelled from their 'convention' in Galilee, where hundreds of believers had gathered for His teaching. During this final meeting Jesus gave them the Grand Mission to preach the gospel to all peoples of the world. Then, while the disciples were watching, He was lifted from among them and went up to the clouds, then disappeared beyond the clouds. While, they were steadfastly watching the Lord's rapture into the clouds, two angels in the form of men appeared and told them that Jesus, whom they watched being taken up to heaven, would return in a like manner in the last times.

Although Lord Jesus had told His disciples in several occasions the sequence of events that would happen to him, that is, the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, they could not comprehend or believe what He was telling them. However, after His ascension and the descent of Holy Spirit, they came to full understanding. Thus, the ascension rapture event of Jesus was a known event about which He knew in advance and told His disciples. The coming rapture of the faithful saints will occur likewise as an event known in advance to those who would be called, not necessarily those who are not called unless the called inform their acquaintances of the Lord's calling of rapture.

B. Not an instantaneous event

In verse 9 we read, "*while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*" This description is far from that of an instantaneous happening. Lord Jesus was lifted while the disciples were watching and they looked steadily as He was lifted to the clouds, then disappear out of their sight. The journey of Jesus and His disciples from Galilee to Mount Olivet was because this ascension rapture had been planned to occur on the mount. This journey took a few days of walking together. During the journey Jesus probably spoke about the planned ascension rapture. Such a journey also occurred in the cases of Elijah's rapture and Enoch's rapture as we will see. In summary, we draw the conclusion that the coming rapture, if its characteristics follow those of the biblically recorded three rapture events, will not be an instantaneous event that occurs without a period of introduction and preparation. But it will be known in advance and a time for preparation will be given.

C. Multiple witnesses

Only a few days after the Lord's ascension rapture, the apostle Peter spoke to the Jewish people in Jerusalem after the Holy Spirit descent, representing all of the believers present, witnessing the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

*[Acts 2:32-33] This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore, **being exalted to the right hand of God**, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.*

Peter is here testifying as a witness of both the resurrection and the ascension that Lord Jesus has been lifted up to the right hand of God in heaven and He is the One who poured out the Holy Spirit from heaven to the believers. God has raised Him up and God lifted Him up to heaven. This miracle, which defied the law of gravity, will be the manner of the future rapture event that all living true Christians will experience and be lifted up supernaturally into the clouds, where they will meet the Lord and enter into heaven together with Him.

D. Jesus entered into the clouds

The disciples watched the Lord being lifted up from among them into the clouds, then disappear beyond the clouds. And the angels told them, "*This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like*

manner as you saw Him go into heaven [v. 11].” The apostle Paul foretells the coming rapture event as the living Christians would be caught up into the clouds, where they would meet the Lord Jesus.

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

As the angels told the disciples, Lord Jesus will come back in the clouds to gather the faithful, both already dead in graves and the living on earth, to the clouds. Paul states that they will all be caught up, that is, raptured, to the clouds where they will meet the Lord in the air. Paul, thus, adds details of the rapture event to the angels’ statement of the manner of the Lord’s return.

E. He left with His clothes on

In the popular movie about the rapture, *Left Behind*, based on the novel by Pastor Tim LaHaye, we see that the raptured Christians leave behind the clothing they wore and are caught up instantaneously as naked bodies, which are not seen. However, the disciples of Jesus did not see their Lord going up to the clouds as a naked person. When He comes back to call the faithful at the coming rapture event, Lord Jesus will come back in a glorified body with heavenly clothing on, but not as a naked person if we believe the saying of the angels.

Some may interpret the scene of leaving the old clothing behind as leaving behind what is no longer needed because the raptured Christians now wear glorious robes provided by the Lord. However, based on the descriptions of the biblical rapture events, we know such a conjecture is a far-fetched one. What is clear from the scriptural description is that, when Lord Jesus was being lifted up, the disciples did not see dropping off the clothes He had been wearing. We will examine the issue of the change in our clothing when we are raptured in a later study.

F. Journey to heavenly glory

Through the rapture event Lord Jesus transitioned from the earth, where, He fulfilled the mission He had received from God the Father while living as a full human, to the glorious place of sitting on the throne at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, it was a very simple and unpublicized event attended by only His close disciples. However, two of God’s angels were there to usher up God the Son, who was coming home. In spite of the seeming humble appearance of this rapture event, I am sure there was a very great welcoming ceremony in heaven where all members of God’s heavenly family were gathered to welcome the returning Lamb of God upon successful completion of His earthly mission of human salvation.

The apostle John was invited to come up to heaven to witness the glorious heavenly kingdom and the glorious appearance of Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, surrounded by angels, heavenly officers and elders, who were all giving glory and honor to Him as John describes below.

[Revelation 5:9-14] And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood, Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.” 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!” 13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!” 14 Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

While He was on the earth, Lord Jesus was ostracized, misunderstood, despised, ignored, hated and suffered the cruel death on a cross just like one of the worst criminals. But now He ascended to heaven through this rapture event and came to be honored and glorified as ‘the Lamb of God sitting on the throne’ by all members of the heavenly kingdom. Such will be the destiny of the coming rapture event of all faithful Christians, a journey

from earth to heaven where heavenly rewards and glory will be waiting for us after our translation. Just as such a great transition occurred to Lord Jesus, we earnestly look forward to this glorious transition event with a living hope in our hearts because it will be a wonderful journey from the earthly life of affliction and godly labor to the glorious presence before our bridegroom Jesus, the Lamb of God.

2. Elijah's Rapture Event

Elijah was a prophet of God who labored in the northern kingdom of Israel in about 9th century B.C. during the reign of King Ahab. He is well known as the victorious servant of God who had some 850 priests of Baal killed on Mount Carmel by proving the power and supremacy of God. His time of ministry was coming to a close and God planned to bring him up to heaven. The record of Elijah's rapture event is the second rapture event recorded next to Enoch's. This event was witnessed by Elisha, Elijah's chief disciple who would take over his teacher's ministry, as well as some 50 other disciples as follows:

[2 Kings 2: 1-3] And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So, they went down to Bethel. 3 Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master [a]from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

Here, let us examine the major characteristics of this rapture event and identify the similarities with those of Jesus and Enoch, to be introduced in the next study.

A. Rapture plan known in advance

Through some unknown channel God's rapture plan of Elijah was known in advance to Elisha as well as disciples of other prophets. Thus, Elijah's rapture plan was not a secret nor was it something that happened suddenly without prior knowledge or anticipation by Elijah himself, his chief disciple Elisha and other men of God. God allowed this plan to be shared among His servants in the area so that the rapture event was witnessed by many and thus came to be recorded in the scripture for our benefit.

Likewise, the coming rapture of the New Testament church will not be a sudden, unexpected event that happens in a shocking manner. At least a few days in advance, all true children of God will be notified of the Lord would know the imminent rapture event and be told to make preparations. However, they will not know the exact date or time of the planned rapture event.

B. Multiple witnesses

Elijah was with his disciple, Elisha, when he was caught up to heaven by River Jordan. Across the river some 50 other student prophets watched this event and became its witnesses. They clearly saw how Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and the event has been recorded in the Bible as follows.

*[2 Kings 2: 6-11] Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to the Jordan." But, he said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So, the two of them went on. 7 **And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance**, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. 8 Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. 9 And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." 10 So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." 11 Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*

Just like the Lord Jesus' rapture into heaven, many disciples were witnesses of Elijah's rapture event. It did not happen unexpectedly or without anticipation. Therefore, the coming rapture event of true Christians will be known in advance, perhaps a few days in advance, so that they would be raptured while their families and

acquaintances are watching them be changed instantaneously and supernaturally raised up at the call of the archangel to meet Lord Jesus in the clouds.

C. Elijah's coat and search afterwards

As Elijah and Elisha crossed the River Jordan just before the rapture event, Elijah took hold of his outer coat and smote the river left and right to open the water, then both walked on dry river bed to the other side. This was the last supernatural act of Elijah. When he was caught up to heaven, his coat dropped from his hand. Elisha picked it up and used it to strike the river water this way and that way to open the water for his crossing to the other side where the 50 disciples were watching, just as Elijah had done.

Some of the 50 disciples who witnessed the rapture scene did not quite believe that Elijah had been caught up to heaven. They thought God might have dropped him from the air some place nearby. So, they urged Elisha to form a search party to look for the body of the fallen Elijah. This was an act of doubt and disbelief in God's plan and work. Elisha objected to this proposal but yielded because the demand was too strong to squash. The search result was obvious, they did not find anything in spite of thorough search in the entire neighboring area.

Likewise in the coming rapture event, those who are left behind, although they will have observed with their eyes how the true Christians were caught up to the clouds right before their eyes, some of them will insist that it was a deception by Satan or aliens and organize search parties all over the world to look for the bodies of the raptured Christians to prove their disbelief.

Elijah left behind his coat, which he had in his hand, as he was being caught up. But he went up with his clothing on. If he had gone up leaving behind his entire clothing, most certainly we would have record of what Elisha did with it. Instead, we read nothing about his clothing other than the dropped coat. Likewise, when we are raptured in the coming rapture event, we will go up with the clothing we wear at the moment, which I believe, will be changed supernaturally into heavenly clothing that will be fitting to our heavenly living. This must have been the case with Lord Jesus and with Elijah.

[To be continued]