



The Pretribulation Rapture: The Jewish Connection

By Richard Hill

Since its founding in 1977, Ariel Ministries has not shied away from teaching on eschatology, meaning the doctrine of future things. One important aspect of eschatology is the

question of when the rapture of the church will take place. There is a very good reason to believe that it will occur before the tribulation, and it has to do with God's chosen people.



In the prophetic timeline, the most anticipated event in the history of the body of Messiah is probably the rapture.

There is much controversy concerning its timing. Instead of the great hope that Messiah intended it to be, there is great confusion and division. Some believe in a pretribulational rapture, while others believe that the rapture will occur in the middle of or after the tribulation. Then there are some who believe in a rapture that precedes the wrath of God (prewrath) and some who do not believe in a rapture at all. The purpose of this article is to encourage and comfort believers that our Lord Yeshua *is* coming back for us! The “us” includes Jewish believers and thus makes the rapture a prophetic event in Israel’s history too. We should praise the Lord, knowing that He loves us so much that He is willing to rapture us to be in heaven with Him.

The first passage to look at in this context is Titus 2:11-15:

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Yeshua Messiah, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special



people, zealous for good works.

¹⁵ Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

Verse 11 recaps the good news that by God’s grace, Yeshua came to save all people. In verse 12, we are instructed to deny worldly desires and live godly, righteous lives. In this process of growing in godliness, verse 13 encourages us to wait for the blessed hope of Messiah Yeshua. I believe this means that we are to wait for and anticipate the blessed hope of the rapture. The Greek word for “wait,” *prosdechomai*, is in the present tense, indicating that our waiting and expectation for the rapture should occur on a continuous basis.

The Jewish Connection

Not too many believers of Yeshua know or understand that the rapture has a wonderful connection to the Jewish people. The first is the Messianic Jewish prophetic fulfillment, and the second involves the prophetic aspects of the ancient Jewish wedding. In this article, only the first point will be discussed. For the explanation of the second point and many other reasons to believe in a pretrib rapture, please see

my book *Israel in Prophecy: A Chronology*.¹ Regarding the first point, the rapture fulfills *Yom Teruah*, the Feast of Trumpets. Nowadays, this feast is also called Rosh Hashanah and designates the beginning of Israel’s civil year. Biblically, however, the feast is a day for blowing the *shofar* (ram’s horn) to remind Israel to assemble and prepare for repentance on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), as Leviticus 23:23-25 shows:

²³ ADONAI spoke to Moses saying:

²⁴ “Speak to *Bnei-Yisrael*, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you are to have a *Shabbat* rest, a memorial of blowing [*shofarot*], a holy convocation.

²⁵ You are to do no regular work, and you are to present an offering made by fire to ADONAI.”

In this passage, God tells Israel to have a worship service on the first day of the month of *Tishri*. They were to perform animal sacrifices and have a *Shabbat* rest. They were not to perform laborious work (v. 25) but were allowed to prepare and cook food on this day. So, this day of rest was not a “true” *Shabbat* (Sabbath day) because the Israelites were allowed to do some work, whereas on the weekly *Shabbat*, all work was strictly forbidden.

More importantly, the Israelites were to blow (*teruah*) the shofar on this day as a memorial or reminder. They were to be reminded that the most important day of the year, *Yom Kippur*, was coming and that they should congregate in the area of the Tabernacle/Temple and prepare their hearts for repentance. In the Temple, the *shofarot* (ram’s horns)

¹ This book by Dr. Hill is available at www.ariel.org.



were to be blown all day long (Num. 29:1) in order to assemble the congregation, worship the Lord, and prepare to repent on Yom Kippur.

The Shofarot and the Rapture

With this in mind, let us take a look at some New Covenant verses that discuss the timing of the blowing of the shofarot and the rapture. First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of only a few passages in the Bible that specifically document the rapture:

¹³ Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, so with Him God will also bring those who have fallen asleep in Yeshua. ¹⁵ For this we tell you, by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall in no way precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the blast of God's *shofar*, and the dead in Messiah shall rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left behind, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air—and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians so that they would not grieve for those believers who had already died (v. 13). They should take comfort in the fact that the Lord will rapture all of His fam-

ily someday in the future, whether they have already died or are still alive (v. 14). In verse 14, there is a fascinating clue showing us that the rapture definitely occurs *prior* to the second coming of Yeshua. God will bring those who have already died in Yeshua *with Him* when He comes. The key to understanding this verse is knowing that only those who have died in Yeshua will accompany Him in the rapture. Those who have already died in Yeshua have been separated from their bodies. At their deaths, their souls and spirits went to be with Yeshua in heaven and their bodies were left on earth. So, when Yeshua comes to rapture believers, He will bring with Him those who have died in Him and will reunite their spirits with



their bodies. He will then transform the bodies into resurrection bodies. I believe this is the reason why the dead in Messiah rise before those believers who are still alive at the time of the rapture. Yeshua needs to complete the dead in Messiah before He translates those who are still alive on earth.

This fascinating passage destroys the post-trib rapture viewpoint, which

claims that the rapture occurs while Yeshua descends from heaven in the second coming. "Post-tribbers" should have a very difficult time trying to reconcile this point that the dead believers in heaven come back with Yeshua in the rapture!

To exhort believers further, Yeshua reveals an order to the rapture. Those who are alive and remain at the time of the rapture will not go before those who have already died in Messiah (v. 15). However, in verse 16, we find a few events that have to occur before the dead in Messiah rise. First, the Lord descends from heaven. Second, the voice of the archangel performs the military command to leave heaven. Third, the trumpet of God is blasted. The trumpet of God is the shofar. Once these three events occur in heaven, then the dead in Messiah will rise first, followed by those believers who are alive on Earth at the time of the rapture (v. 17). We shall all meet the Lord in the clouds, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. We are to take comfort in knowing this truth rather than divide the church with our differing opinions concerning the timing of the rapture (v. 18)!

Three Points of Clarification

There are a few special points that need to be clarified concerning these verses. First, the word "rapture" is not used in this verse (nor in any other Scripture for that matter). Instead, "caught up" (*harpazo*) is used to mean "snatching away." The idea here is that the Lord is physically snatching us away from Earth to meet Him in the clouds. We have a great example of Philip, who was snatched away in Acts 8:39-40.



After Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, the *Ruach Kodesh* (Holy Spirit) snatched him away so that the eunuch no longer could see Philip. Philip then found himself at Azotus (aka Ashdod), a town about thirty miles away. I believe that the *Ruach* instantaneously delivered Philip from the road leading to Gaza to Ashdod. This instantaneous rapture is also substantiated by 1 Corinthians 15:52.

The second special point of clarification is found in question form: “Where do we go after we meet the Lord in the air?” Verse 17 gives us the answer: “and so we shall always be with the Lord.” So, wherever the Lord goes, the raptured believers will go with Him. Presumably, He returns to heaven to perform the Bema Seat Judgment upon the believers since they are not spiritually ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb or the second coming. At the heavenly bema seat, Messiah will judge all of the good works that believers performed in their earthly lives. He will judge whether these works were performed in love and faith or whether they were accomplished in human fleshly desires.

The third clarification concerns the shofar blast of the rapture. Verse 16 teaches that the shofar is sounded in connection with the rapture. But this verse does not shed any light on when this shofar blast occurs in prophecy. However, 1 Corinthians 15:50-53 does. Paul starts this section by stating that believers cannot inherit their eternal destiny with the Lord in human bodies. Their bodies must take on a different form for them to survive in the

presence of the Lord. This is another wonderful reason for the rapture. Our bodies must be transformed into resurrection bodies. When will this occur?

Verse 52 states that the rapture will occur in the “twinkling of an eye.” The twinkling of an eye is a whole lot faster than the blinking of an eye. Twinkling can occur in a fraction of a second. Paul’s idea here is to show how quickly the rapture will occur. At one moment, believers shall be on earth; in the next fraction of a second, they will be flying toward the clouds to meet the Lord Yeshua in the air. It will definitely be an exciting flight!

The Last Shofar Blast

This rapture of all believers occurs at the “last shofar” blast. The “last shofar” (*eschatos salpinx*) blast is distinguished from the first shofar blast, and thus there is a series of trumpet blasts that are occurring in this verse. Some believe that this trumpet blast is also described in Matthew 24:31. However, in Matthew, Yeshua will have already returned to Earth in His second coming (presumably having performed His attack on Israel’s enemies), and now His angels are gathering the elect from around the world at the shofar blast.

There is no discussion in Matthew 24:31 of meeting the Lord in the air nor of the transformation of bodies into resurrection bodies. The verse does not describe the gathering of all believers since the time of Yeshua’s earthly ministry but only the gathering of those Jewish believers who will make it alive through the tribulation. In addition, this trumpet blast is described as being

“great” but is not explained as the “last” trumpet blast. Therefore, Matthew’s trumpet blast is not the same shofar blast as Paul’s.²

Furthermore, some believe that the last trumpet blast of 1 Corinthians 15 is connected with the seventh trumpet blast of Revelation 11:15-19. The problem with this understanding is that the book of Revelation nowhere describes the rapture. The passage only speaks of voices in heaven praising the Lord and announcing Yeshua’s eternal, kingly reign. There are indications that Yeshua’s second coming is close, that believers’ rewards will be given out in the future, and that God’s enemies will be destroyed. But all of this has not occurred yet in the narrative.

In addition, there is no indicator of a rapture or transformation of bodies. The only connection between these two selections of Scripture is that there is a shofar blast. That is not enough evidence to suggest that the rapture will occur at the seventh trumpet blast some time close to the middle of the tribulation period. So, to what could the “last trumpet” blast of 1 Corinthians 15 refer?³

Remember that we are discussing Yom Teruah, the Feast of Trumpets. This was the fifth feast of the year, the one where the Jewish people were to blow the shofar all day long to signal the people to come to worship the Lord and prepare to repent on Yom Kippur. The very last shofar blast of the day is called *tekiah gedolah* (“longest blast”). *Tekiah gedolah* is the longest and loudest blast of the day, signifying the final appeal to call the Jewish people to sin-

² Matthew 24:31 harks back to Isaiah 27:12-13, where the blast announces Israel’s final regathering and restoration.

³ At the time that Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians, nothing was known about the seven trumpets because the book of Revelation had not yet been written.



cere repentance. The mention of a last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15 suggests that there must be a series of shofar blasts. Hence, Paul was speaking of the tekiah gedolah—the longest, loudest, and final blast of the feast.

The Timing of the Marriage of the Lamb

There are multiple other Scriptures that I addressed in my book. One last passage I would like to discuss in this article is Revelation 19:5-9:

⁵ Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you His servants and all who fear Him, both the small and the great!” ⁶ Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude—like the roar of rushing waters or like the rumbling of powerful thunder—saying, “Halleluyah! For ADONAI Elohei-Tzva’ot [Lord God of Hosts] reigns! ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready, ⁸ She was given fine linen to wear, bright and clean! For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the *kedoshim* [holy ones].”



⁹ Then the angel tells me, “Write: How fortunate are those who have been invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb!” He also tells me, “These are the true words of God.”

This passage focuses on the marriage supper of the Lamb and sets up for the second coming found in verses 11-21. Verses 5-6 reveal a great multitude of bondservants singing praise to our God. These bondservants are believers in Yeshua and are engaged in the Bema Seat Judgment of the Lord.

Verse 7 declares that the bride of Messiah has made herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb. It certainly looks like the wedding of the Lamb with His bride has occurred in heaven before the second coming. However, first, the believers have to prepare for the wedding by putting on their wedding clothes.

Verse 8 tells us that they clothe themselves with bright and clean fine linen (robes). The fine linen represents the righteous acts of the believers. This shows us that the Bema Seat Judgment has occurred in heaven. All believers are now wearing their wedding garments of clean linen and are ready for the wedding ceremony.

Verse 9 finishes this section by showing that all believers who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are truly blessed. It looks as though the marriage supper is going to occur on earth after the second coming.

The main point that needs to be brought home is that there will be a great multitude of believers in heaven who have gone through the Bema Seat Judgment and have been married to Messiah—all *before* the second coming of Yeshua! “Post-tribbers” should

have a very difficult time reconciling this truth with their viewpoint, especially since Yeshua has yet to leave heaven for Earth in the second coming. The issue is this: How does the church get to heaven prior to the second coming? Obviously, the rapture has to happen *before* the second coming! In light of these Scriptures, the post-trib rapture view is greatly damaged.

Conclusion

I believe that the Messianic Jewish fulfillment of the rapture will occur on the Feast of Trumpets sometime in the future. The blowing of shofarot all day long on this feast is a compelling argument for the rapture occurring on the last, longest blast of the day. It is a day of preparation to get ready for repentance on Yom Kippur. I also see it as a day of preparation to get ready for the second coming.

Furthermore, the pretribulation rapture ends the church age. This age began with the fourth feast of the Jewish calendar, *Shavuot*, almost two thousand years ago and will end with the fifth feast, Yom Teruah. The first four feasts of the Jewish calendar have already been fulfilled in Yeshua in temporal order. Yom Teruah is the next feast to be fulfilled in prophetic time. Hence, one great reason to believe in the pretribulation rapture is the wonderful Jewish connection with the Feast of Trumpets.



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