

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



A winter bridge

Fractured Rapture Tales: Revelations of Amazing Grace

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Tale 1 Our Politically Correct Rapture?

It must be a conspiracy of the demons of political correctness. It was only some months ago as I searched my online dictionary, when I found the word rapture had a number of definitions, the first had to do with being in a state of ecstasy or joy. The second had to do with The Rapture of the church into heaven. This definition order agreed with my dictionary from my college days.

With newly upgraded software, the second definition about The Rapture of the church is nowhere to be found in the two dictionaries readily available from my computer desktop. Like period. My Microsoft Encarta College Dictionary published in 2001 has the same one-two order, but now the online sources seemed to have raptured "The Rapture" to the realm of social oblivion. Over the weekend, I looked for The Rapture in a new large dictionary in a bookstore. In this work, The Rapture has slipped to definition number four.

In the light of our age, which thinks, naturally of course, that you can create reality by the magic of your thoughts and actions, and perhaps because of the popularity of the "Left Behind" series of fiction, the best way to keep The Rapture (definition two) from happening, is to rapture (definition one) it out of all media. Therefore, by our enlightened thoughts, "The Rapture cannot happen because of the wishes of our endeavors, and because it is not evolutionarily consistent." In more politically correct philosophical terms, "The Rapture happening in the forest, not only makes no sound, it has no effect."

After finishing with Christmyth last week, this rapture phenomena has some very interesting myth and myth making potential. But I have quickly found this material has replicated like rats,

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quickly producing enough material for more than one week's message, but hardly enough for in depth analysis suitable for Chronicles exploration? Except, for the next raptured tale. Therefore today, we are left with a series of disjointed and uncharted diversity about all forms of rapture. Hence, the title, Fractured Rapture Tales. The only thing that can tie them together, in any semblance of unity, is the Revelation of God's Amazing Grace each short story embellishes.

Come to think of it, in the illumination of worldly enlightened reasoning, if and when The Rapture occurs, it will really be a case to celebrate in rapture by those not taken in The Rapture. "Now for the first time in recorded human history, I can do what I want, when I want, and there is nobody around to tell me what to do, or it is wrong. At last, I can celebrate around an evergreen tree praising Mother Earth and the stars of heaven, and people will not think it has something to do with Christmas."

Tale 2 Rapture Missed & Rapture Found

Only in the religions of man do we find the arrogance of absolute knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 Paul begins a discourse on the idolatry of knowledge.

Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

By our knowledge, even of the scriptures, we think we have wisdom, when all we really have is a store house of information. It was hoped that this Information Age would author in a era of wisdom, but as we are seeing, the contrary seems to be truth. In hindsight, almost all our informed decisions have become paradoxes, at best. To paraphrase Paul, "As knowledge increases and exalts, love is diminished and wisdom perishes. By love only is knowledge recreated into wisdom."

As we will look at future tales we will see some examples of knowledge of scriptures, of theology and their applications, that lead one away from love. But before we get too carried away with the perplexing state by our definitions, of present and historical anathema, in the scriptures we see this manifestations of rapture lost, and rapture found, all in the stories of the birth of Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-12

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

*6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel."*

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Advent is the beginning of the Church Calendar and is celebrated during the four Sundays before Christmas. Depending on how Christmas falls within the regular calendar, the Advent season can be somewhere between 21 and 28 days. In the same way as the wise men, each year it would be a good

thing for us to set aside a special season, as we reflect of our journey to the Messiah, or Immanuel, as foretold in the prophet Isaiah. However, there is really no knowledge in church history just how, and where this season originated, but yet it begins the year of church liturgy.

Whether you believe in the validity of the need to follow the church calendar or not, there is wisdom in anticipating the advent of Messiah. The wisdom is the love associated with His coming. The question is, in your church today, if three wise guys walked up to you, or into your church, and ask, "We see by the signs of the times that the Anointed One is coming, can you give us directions on how to see Him?"

The answers given by the scribes of the religious Jews was correct in the time of the wise men. Messiah would come from Bethlehem in Judah, just a short walk down the road. They had the knowledge of the scriptures as to the place, but they were too religious in their torah knowledge to go and check it out for themselves, especially with a group of goyim. Because of their religious knowledge, they missed the rapture of seeing the Messiah of Israel and to the whole world.

But the band of goyim went the next few miles. For what is just a few more miles after such a long journey. They saw the child, and worshiped Him, they were raptured, for they had seen with their own eyes the prophesied Immanuel.

Like the scribes, are we so religious when ask, "Show me the way to Messiah." That we respond, "Well, all you need to do is ask Jesus into your heart, and then look up, for The Rapture will soon take us to heaven, then you will see Jesus.

But even before the coming of the wise men there were others who received the rapturous privilege to see the advent of Immanuel.

Luke 2:8-20

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

*14 "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Tradition states that these shepherds were Levites who were responsible for raising the sheep to support the temple sacrifices. This Jewish tribe was chosen by God to serve Him in the tabernacle in the wilderness of the Exodus and those duties continued into the temple era. It is from this tribe that the family of Aaron was chosen to be the temple priests. Priests didn't tend sheep, they were far too exalted in their knowledge to serve in this common labor. However, is it any coincidence, that those serving the lambs of God, were chosen to be the first to see the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. The whole experience must have raptured them for the rest of their lives.

Luke 2:21

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

As we learned last week the church has historically celebrated New Years Day as the day when Jesus was circumcised. According to church tradition this circumcision was held at the temple or a

synagogue, but historically this tradition did not begin until later. The circumcision of Jesus was probably held in a private home on the eighth day according to Leviticus 12.

Leviticus 12:1-4

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: “If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. 3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 4 She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

Luke 2:22-38

22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

*29 “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;*

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation

31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

*32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”*

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

So forty days after He was born, Jesus was presented in the temple according to the Levitical law. At that time, again there just happened to be two people present, who were not so puffed up by their knowledge of their religious traditions that they could not see the Divinity of Jesus as the incarnation of God’s salvation. Whether that was their custom to be there, or whether it was a divine appointment, one old man and one old woman, amongst all the temple worshipers, saw in their aging eyes the hope they lived everyday in anticipation to see.

If we were there at that time, when Mary was purified according to the Mosaic law, would we have been able to see Jesus as Immanuel and Messiah, or would have we seen, a well behaved baby, a young mother, and a more mature carpenter father, doing their best to follow their religious obligations. “No big deal, it happens everyday. Just good people doing the right thing. Brother, this sure is a busy place.”

Both Simeon and Anna, did not treat this as any other time. They both had spent years in the temple, but this day was different, they would be raptured by God’s amazing grace to such an extent, that both their names would be written in God’s eternal word. The words of Simeon were also recorded as one of the most rapt revelations of all time:

*“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;*

For my eyes have seen Your salvation

Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

*A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”*

Would we allow the grace of God to so enrapture our lives that we may seek today not only the knowledge of God’s salvation but apprehend the peace that only His loving wisdom can bring?

We know no rapture, because we seek no present rapture, we really don’t seek God, but a god of our understanding.