

Greg Laurie: Why the Rapture Hasn't Happened (Yet)

When I first became a Christian back in 1970, lots of people were talking about the return of Jesus Christ. The top-selling book of that entire decade was *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey, which spoke in depth about Bible prophecy and the signs of the times.

Driving around the roads and freeways, you would see bumper stickers with slogans like "Maranatha," "Jesus is coming" and "In case of rapture, this car will be left unmanned."

There was a sense of expectancy among so many of us that we could be the generation that would see the return of the Lord.

That was 40 years ago. I've gone through quite a few "Jesus is coming" bumper stickers since those days.

Was my hope displaced?

Did I get it wrong?

Did we misread the signs of the times?

Not at all.

God is not late, and the Lord will return to this earth at the appointed hour that has been predetermined in the councils of eternity. But there may be a reason why Jesus didn't come when we were hoping He would in 1970.

Consider this: Millions and millions of men and women, boys and girls have come to Jesus since 1970.

The Bible reminds us: "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so

he is giving more time for everyone to repent" (2 Pet. 3:9, NLT).

It's all in the Lord's hands, of course, but I do believe that somewhere on this planet, there is a particular man or a woman for whom the Lord is waiting, and when that person finally places faith in Jesus Christ, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, in what we call the rapture of the church.

Why do I believe this? Because all around me there are signs of the times. One of the "super signs" of the last days was the regathering of the nation of Israel in their ancient homeland.

That happened against all odds. It was an event without precedent in human history that a nation and a people who had been scattered throughout the four corners of the earth would gather again where they had once been and form a nation.

Jesus says the generation that sees this happen will not pass away until all these things have been fulfilled (see Matt. 24:34, Luke 21:32). Once the Jewish people returned to their homeland and became a nation on May 14, 1948, the prophetic clock started to tick. This is a very important date in Bible prophecy.

But the Bible not only says the Lord will gather the Jews back to their homeland again, it says Jerusalem will end up being a source of conflict in the end times. What's interesting to me is that on May 14, 1948, Israel did not possess all of Jerusalem. In fact, that didn't happen until the 1967 war, when Israeli forces captured the Old City and reunified all of Jerusalem, so the city was under Jewish control for the first time in centuries.

Of course, this is where the rub comes in. Jerusalem remains at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with many Arab leaders worldwide insisting that Jerusalem and the entire West Bank are rightly Palestinian territory and must

ultimately be given back as a condition of peace.

But here's the problem: God gave Israel and the city of Jerusalem to the Jewish people. He made them that promise, and they're not going to give their land up again. Nor should they.

Israel's Future

The Bible is the one book that dares to predict the future. Not once, not twice, but hundreds of times. We can look back now and see that many of those prophecies have already been fulfilled—but not all of them. Some remain to be fulfilled, and we may be the generation where that begins to take place.

It's not a big stretch for God to predict the future. He can speak to future things as easily as you and I might discuss the past or present. In fact, God can predict the future far more accurately than you and I can recall the past. He sees the past, present and future simultaneously. Tomorrow is like yesterday to God. Every day lies before Him with equal clarity. The Lord does not forget things, nor does He learn new things.

He literally knows everything—past, present and future. So let's just take out our checklist of events and see what has already transpired.

The Bible says Israel will be scattered to the four corners of the earth. Did that happen? Yes. Check.

Israel will be regathered as a nation. Did that happen? Yes. Check.

Israel will regain the city of Jerusalem. Has that happened? Yes. Check.

Israel will be isolated from the other nations of the world. Is this happening? Yes. Check.

Israel will be attacked by a nation to her north, bent on her destruction. Has that happened? Not yet. But we could easily envision such a scenario.

Jerusalem—not Rome, Paris or New York City—will be at the center of the conflicts of the world. We read in Luke 21:20: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you know that its desolation has drawn near.”

In Zechariah 12:2-3, God says, “I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling before all the surrounding nations. And when there is a siege against Judah, it is also against Jerusalem. And it will be on that day that I will set Jerusalem as a weighty stone to all the peoples. All who carry it will surely gash themselves, and all the nations of the land will be gathered against it.”

John Walvoord, a respected expert on Bible prophecy, made this statement: “The prophecies about Jerusalem make it clear that the holy city will be in the center of the world events in the end time. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs will focus more and more attention on Jerusalem. In all of the situations Jerusalem is the city to watch as the city of prophetic destiny prepares to act out her final role.”

Israel is so tiny. At one point, the nation is only nine miles wide. Yet God says it will be at the center of the end-time events. And this is happening just as the Bible promised it would.

In Ezekiel 38, the Lord speaks of a large and powerful nation to the north of the newly established Jewish homeland, along with a number of this nation’s allies, invading Israel. This has not yet happened. So let’s see what Scripture says.

“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, set your face against Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshek and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say: Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, O Gog, the prince of

Rosh, Meshek and Tubal. And I will turn you back and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses, and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armor, even a great company with buckler and shield, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet" (Ezek. 38:1-5).

Drop down to verses 8-11: "After many days you shall be called. In the latter years you shall come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered out of many peoples, against the mountains of Israel which had been always a waste. But its people were brought out of the nations, and they, all of them, are dwelling safely. You shall ascend and come like a storm; you shall be like a cloud to cover the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you. Thus says the Lord God: It shall come to pass on that day that things shall come into your mind and you shall think an evil thought, and you shall say, 'I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls and having neither bars nor gates.'"

Many believe "Magog" refers to modern-day Russia. The reasoning goes like this: Magog was the second son of Noah's son Japheth who, according to the ancient historian Josephus, settled north of the Black Sea. Tubal and Meshech, also mentioned here in Ezekiel 38, were the fifth and sixth sons of Japheth, whose descendants settled south of the Black Sea.

These tribes intermarried and became known as Magog. They settled to the north of Israel. In Ezekiel 39:2, God says to them, "I will turn you back, drive you on, and take you up the north parts and bring you against the mountains of Israel."

So all Bible directions are given in relation to Israel. And if you look to the extreme north of Israel today, you will find the mighty nation of Russia.

Now here is where things really get interesting. Look at the allies that march with Russia. We have Ethiopia (modern-day Sudan), Libya and Persia, which is modern-day Iran. These are all Islamic cultures, and they are all anti-Israel. Russia has had arms deals with Libya. And Persia? It wasn't until March 21, 1935, that Persia changed her name to what we now call Iran, a recent ally of Russia.

So here is the alliance God says will form against Israel, and there's nothing about it that surprises us. It's already taking shape before our eyes.

Consider this: When Magog and her allies attack Israel, God will intervene and decimate her army and the armies of the allies as well. And because of this, the Jewish people will give glory to God.

When you go to Israel today, you may be surprised to learn that most Israelis are not believers in God. Many of them are atheistic. Certainly, you will find very few Jewish people who believe in Jesus as their Messiah. There are some, thank God, but not many.

But when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Israel after He drives back the invading armies of Magog, there will be a revival in Israel, and many Jewish people will come to believe *Yeshua Hamashiach*, Jesus [is] the Messiah.

This outpouring of the Spirit on Israel, however, can't happen until the full gathering of the Gentiles is accomplished. What does that mean? Most people who read these pages are Gentiles, not Jewish by birth. As Paul explains in Romans 11, we have been effectively grafted into the promises God originally offered to Israel. Now is the time when God is working with the non-Jews, the Gentiles. But this time will come to a close, and then the Spirit will be poured out again on the land and people of Israel. But before that can happen, God needs to wrap things up with us.

In Romans 11:25, Paul says, "For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, lest you be wise in your own estimation, for a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."

In other words, the "partial hardening" will endure until the last Gentile person finally believes in Jesus—and then we will be gone. Raptured. We will meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever.

So that means when we see these events in the world beginning to happen, we need to look up, for our redemption is drawing near (see Luke 21:28).

Rapture's Reality

When we speak of the rapture of the church, there are some who will say, "The word 'rapture' isn't even in the Bible." Maybe not, but the event certainly is.

First Thessalonians 4:16-17 says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call 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 so we shall be forever with the Lord."

Over in John 14:2-3, Jesus says, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, you may be also."

That phrase "receive you" means "to take you by force."

And then in Matthew 24:40-42, Jesus says, "Two will be in the field; one will be taken, and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord

will come.”

John addresses it as well in 1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now are we children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Paul speaks of this same event in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Now imagine this for a moment. In an instant, all over the world, millions of believers are caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Let’s just briefly consider some of the effects the rapture will have on each of us.

The rapture means no death. There is a generation that will not see death. These believers will go straight into the presence of God.

The rapture is instantaneous. It has been said that the twinkling of an eye (mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:51-52) is about 1/1000 of a second. How fast is a second? And this is a thousandth of that? If we have the privilege of being raptured, there will no real sense of departure and arrival; we will simply be there, in the Lord’s presence.

The rapture is a transformation. In that moment, God will give you a brand-new resurrection body. Perhaps you struggle now with the effects of old age, disease or some other physical difficulty or problem. All of that will be gone in an instant. Age melts away. Disability disappears. Sorrows are replaced by pure joy.

Philippians 3:20-21 gives us these glorious words: “But our

citizenship is in heaven, from where also we await for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our body of humiliation, so that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working of His power even to subdue all things to Himself."

The rapture will be a rescue operation. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul writes, "They themselves declare ... how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come."

From what is He rescuing us? The wrath to come. What does that refer to? The tribulation period, inaugurated by the emergence of the Antichrist and lasting for seven years. So God is sending his special operations team of Michael and His angels to evacuate the church—to get us out of here before the Tribulation begins. Sometimes there is confusion about the Second Coming and the rapture. Some people think it is one event. But the Bible is very clear; it speaks of two distinct events.

The rapture will be a stealth event; the Second Coming will be a very public one.

In the rapture, we meet the Lord in the air; in the Second Coming, He returns to the earth.

In the rapture, He comes for His church; in the Second Coming, He returns with His church.

In the rapture, He comes before judgment; in the Second Coming, He comes with judgment.

So how should this affect us today? How should I respond to these truths? Very simply, I need to walk with God.

We have a great Old Testament prototype of these things in the life of a man named Enoch. Enoch had what we might describe as

a solo rapture. Genesis 5:24 says, "Enoch walked with God, and then he was no more because God took him." That phrase "God took him" could be rendered, "God translated him." In other words, God carried him over or across. Enoch didn't have to die like everybody else. He just took a walk one day and didn't come home. He started on one shore and ended up on another.

He walked with God.

Are you walking with God? Notice it doesn't say, "Enoch sprinted with God." He walked with God.

Many people have a burst of energy and say, "I love the Lord so much. I'm really going to follow Him." But all too soon, they crash and burn. Then they get up again and go for a while—only to crash and burn again.

"As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6).

Here's the thing: Just walk with God.

Don't be in a big hurry. Be regular, be consistent and stay at it. Be disciplined enough to maintain that relationship. Walking implies steady effort and speaks of regularity—doing something over and over. You just stay with it, day by day, hour by hour, step by step, and seek to be consistent in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is coming back, and it could happen at any time. This year. This month. This week. Today. And when He comes, I want Him to find me walking with Him. Isn't that a great thought? You could take one step on earth, and then find that your next step is into His presence.

Come soon, Lord. Come soon.

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