

# Gathering of the Elect (Matt 24:29-31)

By Ed Stevens -- Garrettsville Seminar -- Sept. 16-17, 2011

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*“But immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth his angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”* [Matthew 24:29-31 NAS95 boldface added]

## INTRODUCTION:

- Of all the biblical texts that seem to teach the *rapture*, this one (along with 1 Thess 4:17 and John 14:3) has to be one of the most significant. Yet surprisingly, pre-trib rapture advocates like Thomas Ice reject the rapture interpretation here because this angelic gathering of the elect occurs *after* the tribulation, and therefore does not fit their pre-trib paradigm. Mid-tribbers and post-tribbers, however, use this passage as their flagship text.
- Some folks have said to me, “The word *rapture* is not in the Bible, so why do you use it?” They are surprised to find out that the word *rapture* actually occurs in the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The Latin word *rapiemur* comes from *rapio*, which means to *seize, snatch, or carry away* (*Wheelock’s Latin*). The Greek word *harpazo*, which is translated *caught up* in 1 Thess 4:17, is identical in meaning to the Latin word *rapio*.
- Others have resisted the rapture idea because they heard it was invented by Margaret MacDonald, an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish girl. However, it was only the concept of a *secret pre-trib* rapture that she helped develop, not the concept of a rapture itself. The idea of living saints being caught up into the unseen realm at Christ’s Parousia was originally taught by Jesus (here in Matt 24:31 and Jn 14:3), as well as Apostle Paul (1 Thess 4:17).

## I. Various Explanations of the Gathering in Matthew 24:31:

- A. Regarding this text, Thomas Ice wrote, “Matthew chapter 24 is about a future time when . . . the Lord [will] *gather* His elect (saved Jews at the end of the Tribulation) from around the world and bring them to Jerusalem . . .” (LaHaye and Ice, *The End Times Controversy*, p. 198). So we see that the pre-tribbers do not view this as a rapture text at all, but rather as a regathering of the Jews back to Jerusalem sometime in our future.
- B. Ken Gentry puts a different spin on Matthew 24:31—one with which both Gary DeMar (*Last Days Madness*, pp. 173-177) and John Bray (*Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, pp. 216-226) seemingly agree. Gentry interprets the *angels* as human preachers, and the *gathering* as the building of the church after the destruction of Jerusalem (Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation Past or Future*, p. 64). However, as Don Preston explains, it is not consistent for a Full Preterist to take that approach:

The problem with . . . Gentry is that [he sees] the gathering of Matthew 24:31 as a process that was to *begin* with the destruction of Jerusalem, instead of seeing it as the climax of a process begun on Pentecost. (Preston, *We Shall Meet Him in the Air*, p. 179)

- C. Preston goes further to describe the gathering as “the gathering of the ‘dead’ at the coming of Christ” (*We Shall Meet*, 180). However, he is not referring to the raising of disembodied souls out of Hades and giving them immortal bodies (my view). Instead, he is referring to “a gathering (restoration) into spiritual fellowship . . . with God” and “the transformation from the Old Creation to the New Covenant temple of the Messiah” (*We Shall Meet*, p. 184). This interpretation of the gathering is often described as the *collective body view* of the resurrection.
- D. Surprisingly, Preston does seem to agree with Gentry on the human identity of the *angels* (or *messengers*) who gathered the elect. He refers to them as *the messengers of the kingdom* (*We Shall Meet*, p. 184). That Preston is referring to the apostles and their pre-AD 70 disciples is clearly indicated when he writes, “Those who accepted the message and the messengers were invited to enter . . . ‘into the joys of the kingdom’ . . . (Matt 25:34)” (*We Shall Meet*, pp. 184-185). It is clear here that Preston is talking about the gospel being preached by human messengers (not angels), and that those who accepted that gospel would *inherit the kingdom*. This means that Preston interprets the *angels* here in Matt 24:31 as being human messengers. However, this involves an absurdity: *the elect* (human messengers) were gathering or resurrecting *the elect* (human believers).
- E. Furthermore, it appears that Preston sees this angelic gathering of the elect as the apostolic preaching which occurred during the transition period from Pentecost to the Parousia. However, that approach ignores the timing and sequencing mentioned in Matt. 24:29, which says that the Parousia and its associated angelic gathering would not occur until “immediately after the tribulation,” which was right after the Neronian persecution of AD 64-66. So Preston has not only misunderstood *who* the angels are, but also *when* this gathering was supposed to take place. Let's look first at the identity of the angels:

## II. Angelic Gathering (not human messengers) in Matthew 24:31:

- A. In contrast to Preston, I affirm that the *angels* Jesus sent forth at His Parousia were actual angelic beings, and that the gathering work they performed included both a *resurrection* of the dead and a *change* of the living, so that both groups of saints were *gathered* or *snatched away* together as one group to be with Christ forever afterwards.
- B. Preston connects this *gathering* (Gk. *episunago*) in Matthew 24:31 with the *gathering* (Gk. *sullego*) in the Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13 (*We Shall Meet*, pp. 300-302). Jesus interpreted this parable for us in Matthew 13:36-43, identifying Himself as the sower of the good seed, and the enemy who sowed the tares as being the devil. The good seed were the sons of the kingdom, while the tares were the sons of the evil one. The harvest was the end of the age (AD 70) and *the reapers were angels* (not human beings). In that context (Matt 13), it seems clear that Jesus was talking about real angelic beings at the end of the age doing the gathering work. Notice that the exact word-for-word phraseology (“will send forth His angels”) in both English and Greek is used in both Matthew 13:41 and 24:31 –

**Matt. 13:41** “The Son of Man will send forth His angels [*apostelei ho huioi tou anthropou tous aggelous autou*], and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,

**Matt. 24:31** “And He **will send forth His angels** [*apostelei tous aggelous autou*] with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

- C. The gatherers are angels, not human beings, and the gathering is an *event* that occurs immediately after the tribulation at the end of the age when the Son of Man comes and sends forth his angels. It is not a forty-year *process* of gathering. More about this below.
- D. Even though both Preston and I affirm that the *gathering, change, and snatching away* are closely connected with the resurrection (*We Shall Meet*, pp. 171-193), disagreement surfaces when he suggests that the resurrection has nothing to do with *disembodied souls being raised out of Hades and given their new immortal bodies* (my view), but is instead the collective body of believers (both living and dead) being raised out of sin-death into the eternal life of the New Covenant (his view). We do not differ on the *fact* of those connections (gathering, change, snatching, and resurrection), nor with the AD 70 *time* of their occurrence, but rather on the *nature* of their fulfillment.
- E. If you wish to see the historical support for an actual angelic gathering, look at the references from *Josephus, Yosippon, Eusebius, and Tacitus* that are supplied in *Appendix 1*.
- F. In regard to the angelic gathering here in Matthew 24:31, there are several points we need to remember: the tribulation; the timing and sequencing of the gathering; the question of event versus process; a similar *gathering* teaching of Jesus in Matthew 13; and the nature of this gathering in relation to the resurrection, change, and snatching away. We will look at these issues below:

### **III. Time of the Gathering: Immediately After Tribulation (Matt 24:29):**

- A. Most people assume the tribulation was the whole complex of troubles that fell upon both the Christians and the unbelieving Jews during the war with Rome (AD 66-70). However, when we look at what Jesus says about the tribulation in the whole Matthew 24 context and its parallels in Mark and Luke, we notice that the *tribulation* was something that would come upon the Christians: “Then they will deliver *you* to tribulation and will kill *you*” and “for the sake of *the elect* those days will be cut short” (Matt 24:9-14, 21-22). It was *wrath* that came later upon the Jews after they had persecuted the Christians, but the *tribulation* here in Matthew 24 is upon Christians.
- B. In one of my articles for *Fulfilled Magazine*, as well as in my seminar speech in Kansas City, I showed that *the great tribulation* was the Neronian persecution (AD 64-66). It was cut short by the outbreak of the Jewish war in AD 66. This provides us with a clear framework for dating the Parousia and its associated angelic gathering (i.e., the rapture), since the gathering is supposed to occur “immediately after the tribulation” (Matt 24:29).
- C. In Matthew 24:29-31, the sending forth of the angels to gather together the elect occurs *immediately after the tribulation* at the time of the coming of the Son of Man. The sending forth of the angels to gather the elect can not be talking about the forty-year process of preaching the gospel (AD 30-70), because the angels are not even sent out to do their gathering work until the time of the Parousia, which occurs *after* the tribulation. This means that the *gathering* was not a forty-year *process* after all, but rather an *event* that took place at the Parousia.

#### IV. Sequence of the Gathering (Resurrection, Change and Rapture):

- A. It must be noted here that Preston agrees that the gathering (Gk. *episunago*) in Matt 24:31 is the same gathering (Gk. *episunago*) mentioned in 2 Thess 2:1. Since he also agrees that 1 Thess 4:16-17 and 1 Cor 15:51-52 are closely related to this gathering in Matt. 24:31, then we can use all four passages to construct a sequence of events:

**2Th. 2:1** Now we request you, brethren, with regard to **the Parousia** of our Lord Jesus Christ and **our gathering together to Him**,

**Matt. 24:31** “And He will **send forth His angels** with a great trumpet and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

**1Cor. 15:51-52** Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised imperishable**, and **we will be changed**.

**1Th. 4:16-17** 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**. Then we who are **alive and remain 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.

- B. Here is **the sequence** that we see coming from the four texts above:
1. The Parousia (2 Thess 2:1)
  2. He sends forth His angels to gather the elect (Matt 24:31)
  3. First, the dead are raised at the same time ("in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye") the living are changed (1 Cor 15:52)
  4. Then, both groups (the resurrected dead and the changed living saints) gathered together as one, are caught up (or gathered) to be with Christ. (1 Thess 4:16-17)
- C. Notice what this sequence reveals about the gathering. It appears to include both the assembling of the resurrected dead and changed living together as one group and their being caught up to be with Christ. That matches the language of 2 Thess 2:1 about “our gathering together to Him.” They were gathered together and caught up together.
- D. In other words, first the dead were raised and the living were changed (simultaneously). This was a *resurrection* of the dead saints out of Hades in the unseen realm, as well as a *change* of the living saints into their new immortal bodies in the unseen realm. Then both groups—the *resurrected* dead and the *changed* living saints— now together in the unseen realm, were *snatched away* (or *gathered*) by the angels to be with Christ, where they would *always be with the Lord* (1 Thess 4:17).
- E. Now let’s take a closer look at the gathering mentioned in Matthew 13 (Parable of the Tares)

#### V. The Gathering Included Both the Living and the Dead:

- A. I agree with Preston that the *resurrection*, *change*, and *snatching away* are all closely connected with the *gathering*. Our difference is over the *nature* of the resurrection event itself.
- B. The reason I consider Matthew 24:31 to be a rapture text (and not just a resurrection text) is because it is talking about an angelic gathering at the time of the Parousia, and it does not limit that gathering to only the dead being raised out of Hades.

- C. We know that the gathering included the living saints, since it says that the angels gathered *the elect*, which in the context were those saints who remained alive after the great tribulation was cut short:

**Matt. 24:22** “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of **the elect** those days will be cut short.

**Matt. 24:24** “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even **the elect**.

**Matt. 24:31** “And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

**Mark 13:20** “Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of **the elect**, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

**Mark 13:22** for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, **the elect**.

**Mark 13:27** “And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.

**Luke 18:7** now, will not God bring about justice for **His elect** who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

- D. It is obvious from the above verses that the angelic gathering in Matt 24:31 included the living elect saints who survived the tribulation and remained alive until the Parousia. The question is, did the gathering also include the dead saints? To answer that question, we will need to dig a little deeper into the closely related text of Matt. 13 which explains the parable of the Tares for us. Note the objection Preston raises to my rapture interpretation of this parable:

**1. PRESTON'S OBJECTION To The Rapture Interpretation Of Matthew 13:** If the gathering of the good wheat means they were raptured to heaven, then the gathering of the tares means they were raptured to hell. Don Preston says it this way: "The wicked and the saints were both to be 'gathered' (from SULLEGO); the same word is used to describe the gathering of the elect and the wicked. ...It can hardly be argued therefore, that the saints were miraculously raptured, disappearing suddenly, but that the wicked were not likewise caught away to their doom. No distinction other than fate can be maintained between the nature of the gathering. If therefore, the literal rapture theory cannot explain how it is that the wicked did not disappear, yet they were to be gathered just like the righteous, then the concept of a literal rapture is falsified. Patently, the wicked, whether Jewish or Roman, did not miraculously disappear in AD 70. However, they were 'gathered' if we are to believe the Lord. Likewise, the righteous were 'gathered,' but that does not demand that they were supernaturally removed from planet earth." [Don K. Preston. *We Shall Meet Him in the Air*. Ardmore, Oklahoma: JaDon Management, 2009. pp. 300-302]

**2. ED'S RESPONSE:** I commend Don for this reasonable objection. However, I believe it fails to notice the fact that both gatherings were accomplished by angels, making them both de facto supernatural. We can easily understand the supernatural nature of the gathering when we realize that the angels took each group to their final destiny in the

unseen realm. The angelic gathering of the wicked into Gehenna was every bit as supernatural as the gathering of the righteous into heaven. We have already shown that the wicked were indeed gathered out of the field (the world) when they came back to Palestine from all over the Diaspora (the world) to participate in the war effort. They were bound in bundles in their fortress cities throughout Israel. Those fortress cities were defeated and burned later as the war progressed. Well over a million Jews were killed in the war, more likely close to two million if we include all those outside Palestine in the Diaspora who perished during and immediately after the revolt. Their disembodied souls were surely gathered by the angels and taken before the judgment seat of Christ, to be judged and cast into the Lake of Fire (Gehenna) for eternal conscious punishment outside the gates of the heavenly city. The righteous elect had been gathered by the angels into the heavenly presence of Christ, there to reign with him forevermore. All the events involved in the angelic gathering for both the righteous and wicked were supernatural, and have been fulfilled literally and historically in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, both in the SEEN realm, and in the UNSEEN realm. Preston's objection simply fails to consider the supernatural character of the angelic gathering of both the wicked and the righteous, as well as the historical evidence which supports the idea that this very kind of gathering actually took place. See that evidence listed in Appendix 1 at the end of this lesson outline.

## **VI. Additional Comments on the Gathering in the Parable of the Tares:**

### **A. Faulty Assumptions Lead to Misinterpretations**

One of the reasons we have misinterpreted the sequence of endtime events is because of our failure to understand the harvesting procedures in first century Palestine.

1. We have assumed that ALL of the tares were gathered up before ANY of the grain was harvested.
2. And we have assumed that the tares were BURNED before the grain was all GATHERED safely into the barns.
3. These two false assumptions made correct exegesis of this text absolutely impossible.

### **B. Understanding the Grain Harvest in Palestine Helps Us Interpret the Parable Correctly:**

1. In an actual grain harvest, the grain is gathered in very quickly, usually within a matter of days after it ripens. Every available laborer that can be found is summoned and hired to help gather in the grain before the storms or fires can destroy it, and before the thieves can steal it.
2. In the case of the angelic harvest (the rapture), this process could have been accomplished "in the twinkling of an eye." The separating of the tares from the grain could have occurred during the Neronian persecution, and the binding of the tares into bundles to be burned later could have occurred when the Zealots began fortifying their cities for the war. The separation and bundling of the tares had occurred by the time the war began in AD 66.
3. The tares were bundled up in their fortress cities, and would be burned later as the war progressed. But the good grain had to be gathered into the heavenly barns before any of those fortress cities were burned. This means that the angelic gathering of the elect had to occur before any of the cities were burned. The Zealots did some burning of Gentile

- cities just as the war began (summer of AD 66). The rapture would have occurred before that (late Spring or early Summer, at the time of grain harvest in Palestine).
4. This is, in fact, what we see in the historical record of Josephus. He gives the very day and hour of the appearance of the angelic armies in the clouds above Palestine, surrounding all the cities. It was at the time of Passover (AD 66), right when the war began. Just weeks later at Pentecost, a host of people in the unseen realm were heard by the priests to be leaving the temple. That certainly would fit the idea of an angelic gathering of the elect. See those historical statements in the Appendix 1 below.

## VII. CAUGHT UP TOGETHER (both resurrected dead & changed living)

- A. Here is one more resurrection text we could look at, which tells the rest of the story about what happened to all those dead and living saints who were raised and changed at the Parousia. That text is 1 Thess. 4:13-17.
- B. **1 Thess. 4:13-17** -- Critics of the rapture have tried very hard to avoid taking a careful exegetical look at this text. I think I know why. It is the same reason I avoided it for many years. The rapture idea rides on the surface of the text. It is impossible to miss.
- C. Critics often find themselves saying something like, "Well, I know that is what the text says, but it simply cannot mean that, because we all know that no **rapture** occurred in AD 70." Do you see the fallacy of that argument? Replace the word "rapture" with the word "Parousia" and say it again: "...we all know that no **Parousia** occurred in AD 70."
- D. No Preterist would accept that second statement. You see, if it is okay to let **history trump the rapture**, then it is also okay for **history to trump the Parousia**. But we all know that history cannot falsify scripture. It does not matter what history does or does not say as long as Scripture speaks to the issue. So our only concern must be what scripture actually teaches about a rapture. History only serves to explain how the events were fulfilled, not as proof that they did or did not occur.
- E. Since I have already put together a lengthy exegetical study of this text for my rapture book, it is available as a separate PDF document, entitled: *Exposition of 1 Thess. 4:13-17*. You will want to read that document along with this one.
- F. Some points to ponder as you look at 1 Thess. 4:13-17 –
- The rapture was **not a "physical" rapture** of the saints in their physical mortal bodies. Their bodies were "changed" first, before they were caught up. When they were changed, they became invisible like Enoch did. Then they were caught up in their immortal bodies. So, the rapture was not a "physical" rapture of "physical" bodies, but rather a catching up of saints in their new immortal bodies after their mortal bodies had been changed to immortal.
  - However, **it was a "literal" rapture** in the sense that the living and remaining saints at the time of the Parousia were literally (i.e., actually) caught up to be with Christ in the unseen realm, and no longer on earth afterwards.
  - **The sequence** of events here: the dead are raised first, and the living were changed at the same time as the dead were being raised, and then the changed living were reunited together with the resurrected dead as one group to be caught up together to meet Christ in the air (in the unseen realm).

- **The theme of reunion** is critical to understanding 1 Thess. 4:13-17. The living saints at Thessalonica grieved the loss of some of their fellow saints in the recent persecution, and worried that their dead loved ones might not be reunited with them at the Parousia. Paul reassures them that the living saints would not precede the dead into the presence of Christ, but that the dead would be raised first, and then the (changed) living saints would be reunited together with them to be caught up as one group into the presence of Christ. This reunion idea was of tremendous comfort and encouragement to the living saints. But if Paul was talking about a collective body resurrection here, this reunion idea would not make sense in this context.
- The catching up is something that **happens to both the living and the dead** together as one group at the Parousia, not separately years later as the individual living saints eventually died. This catching up of the whole group at the same time occurred when Christ descended from heaven at His Parousia, not years later to them individually as they died.
- The bodies of **the living saints had to be changed**, since flesh and blood bodies cannot dwell in the spiritual realm (1 Cor. 15:50-52). This bodily change enabled them to avoid physical death, and then they were caught up as one reunited group with the resurrected dead to be with Christ forever afterwards. As we saw in 1 Cor. 15:52 above, the change occurred in the twinkling of an eye at the same time the dead were raised out of Hades and given their new bodies. Then both were snatched up together as one group to meet Christ in the unseen realm above.

G. There are many other texts which teach the idea of a rapture at the Parousia. The clearest and most explicit are **John 14:3** and **1 Thess 4:17**. A rapture is certainly implied in both the Parable of the Tares and the Parable of the Ten Virgins. In my rapture book, *Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture* (pages 6-15), there is a list of the major texts which identify what the pre-70 saints were expecting to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia. One of the things that emerges from a study of those "expectation statements" is the idea that the saints were not expecting to remain on earth after the Parousia. They were expecting to be rescued, relieved, and rewarded for their faithfulness, and "enter into" the kingdom of heaven, NOT left in tribulation on earth without a clue about what had just happened.

H. For more info about the rapture, see the list of Recommended Books and Media down below. I especially recommend the PDF lesson outlines on the *Parable of the Tares* (Matthew 13), *John 14 and the Dwelling Places* ("receive you to myself"), *The Gathering of the Elect* in Matthew 24:31, and *Did John Live Beyond AD 70?* You may receive these PDF's by sending your email request to: [preterist1@preterist.org](mailto:preterist1@preterist.org)

## CONCLUSION

1. In our previous lessons, we have looked at Genesis, and let it define for us the kind of death that needed to be overcome by Christ.
2. As we noticed, the death was both physical and spiritual. The physical death disembodied them, put their souls in Sheol, and returned their bodies to dust.
3. Christ was the Son of Adam (i.e., the Son of Man) who redeemed their souls from Sheol and snatched them out of Satan's control.



4. Christ gave the dead their new bodies, and changed the living into their new bodies, and caught them both up together to be with Him forever.
5. Because of His Return to raise the Dead and Change the Living, we now have heaven and our new immortal bodies available to us immediately after death. That is the whole point of the resurrection event. Since the resurrection of the dead out of Hades has occurred, saints no longer have to go to Hades at death. They instead ascend to heaven where their new immortal bodies are reserved for them.
6. That is indeed a far better hope than the deferred hope of the futurists. The futurists believe that we do not get our new immortal bodies until the future resurrection event. Plus, they are not sure whether their disembodied souls go to Hades or some part of heaven.
7. Which would you rather have, a deferred hope like the futurists, or a fulfilled hope? Notice what Proverbs 13:12 says -- "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life."
8. In the next lesson, we will look at the generation of time immediately after AD 70, to see what historical issues that raises for us.

## Appendix 1 -- Historical references to Resur. and Rapture

*See especially the boldfaced, underlined, and highlighted material down below (following pages). Note what the priests in the temple on Pentecost (AD 66) heard and experienced. Who were those folks in the unseen realm, whose voices were heard saying that they were leaving the temple? Where had they come from, and where did they go? What was this event, if it was not the resurrection and rapture?*

**Josephus *The Wars*** (Whiston, Book 6, Chapter 5, Sections 2 and 3) [AD 66]

**War 6:286** (6.5.2) Now, there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God: and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes.

**War 6:288** (6.5.3) Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see, or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them.

**War 6:289** (6.5.3) Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year.

**War 6:290** (6.5.3) Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus [Nisan], and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which light lasted for half an hour. [notice "the day and the hour" are given]

**War 6:291** (6.5.3) This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskillful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes, as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it.

**War 6:296** (6.5.3) So these publicly declared, that this signal foreshowed the desolation that was coming upon them. Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the twenty-first day of the month Artemisius [Jyar],

**War 6:297** (6.5.3) a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it,

**War 6:298** (6.5.3) and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, **before sunseting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen** [notice "the day and the hour" are given]

**War 6:299** (6.5.3) **running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities.** Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, **they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise,**

**War 6:300** (6.5.3) and after that **they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence."**

**Sepher Yosippon: A Mediaeval History of Ancient Israel.** Trans. from the Hebrew by Dr. Steven B. Bowman. Excerpts from Chapter 87 "Burning of the Temple" [AD 65-66]

For one year before Vespasian came, a single great star shining like unsheathed swords was seen over the Temple. And in those days when the sign was seen it was the holiday of Passover and during that entire night the Temple was lit up and illuminated like the light of day, and thus it was all seven days of the Passover. All the sages of Jerusalem knew that it was a malevolent sign, but the rest of the ignorant people said that it was a benevolent sign.

**...Now it happened after this that there was seen from above over the Holy of Holies for the whole night the outline of a man's face, the like of whose beauty had never been seen in all the land, and his appearance was quite awesome.**

**Moreover, in those days were seen chariots of fire and horsemen, a great force flying across the sky near to the ground coming against Jerusalem and all the land of Judah, all of them horses of fire and riders of fire.** When the holiday of Shavu'oth came in those days, during the night **the priests heard within the Temple something like the sound of men going and the sound of men marching in a multitude going into the Temple, and a terrible and mighty voice was heard speaking: "Let's go and leave this House.**

**Pseudo-Hegesippus.** Translated from the Latin by Wade Blocker. This excerpt taken from Chapter 44 in the Latin critical text edited by Vincente Ussani.

Also after many days **a certain figure appeared of tremendous size, which many saw, just as the books of the Jews have disclosed,** and before the setting of the sun there were suddenly **seen in the clouds chariots and armed battle arrays,** by which the cities of all Judaea and its territories were invaded. Moreover in the celebration itself of the **Pentecost** the priests entering the interior of the temple at night time, that they might celebrate the usual sacrifices, asserted themselves at first to have **felt a certain movement and a sound given**

forth, afterwards even to have heard shouted in a sudden voice: "we cross over from here."

### **Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 8, Sections 1-6**

- 1 Taking, then, the work of this author [i.e., Josephus], read what he records in the sixth book of his History. His words are as follows: "Thus were the miserable people won over at this time by the impostors and false prophets; but they did not heed nor give credit to the visions and signs that foretold the approaching desolation. On the contrary, as if struck by lightning, and as if possessing neither eyes nor understanding, they slighted the proclamations of God.
- 2 At one time a star, in form like a sword, stood over the city, and a comet, which lasted for a whole year; and again before the revolt and before the disturbances that led to the war, when the people were gathered for the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth of the month Xanthicus, at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone about the altar and the temple that it seemed to be bright day; and this continued for half an hour. This seemed to the unskillful a good sign, but was interpreted by the sacred scribes as portending those events which very soon took place.
- 3 And at the same feast a cow, led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.
- 4 And the eastern gate of the inner temple, which was of bronze and very massive, and which at evening was closed with difficulty by twenty men, and rested upon iron-bound beams, and had bars sunk deep in the ground, was seen at the sixth hour of the night to open of itself.
- 5 And not many days after the feast, on the twenty-first of the month Artemisium, a certain marvelous vision was seen which passes belief. The prodigy might seem fabulous were it not related by those who saw it, and were not the calamities which followed deserving of such signs. **For before the setting of the sun chariots and armed troops were seen throughout the whole region in mid-air, wheeling through the clouds and encircling the cities.** [AD 66]
- 6 And at the feast which is called Pentecost, when the priests entered the temple at night, as was their custom, to perform the services, **they said that at first they perceived a movement and a noise, and afterward a voice as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us go hence.'** [AD 66]

### **Tacitus, *Histories*, Book 5**

Prodigies had occurred, which this nation, prone to superstition, but hating all religious rites, did not deem it lawful to expiate by offering and sacrifice. **There had been seen hosts joining battle in the skies, the fiery gleam of arms**, the temple illuminated by a sudden radiance from the clouds. **The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly thrown open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the gods were departing. At the same instant there was a mighty stir as of departure.** Some few put a fearful meaning on these events...

## Recommended Works

for more info about the Rapture  
(most of these avail. from the International Preterist Association website)

### Books:

- Harding, Ian. *Taken To Heaven in AD 70*. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2005. <http://preterist.org>
- Russell, James Stuart. *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Christ's Second Coming*. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture*. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>

### Articles and Papers:

- Stevens, Edward. *Christianity After the Rapture*. Focuses on the effect of the rapture upon the continuity of the church, and how the church restarted itself afterwards. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Cosmology of the Rapture*. This shows how the rapture fits into the sequence of cosmological events in the plan of redemption, and explains how the rapture occurred cosmologically in the unseen realm. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Did John Live Beyond AD 70? A study of Matthew 20, Mark 10, John 21, and the history of Apostle John, showing that Jesus predicted his death before the arrival of the Kingdom at the Parousia*. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Examining the "Apostles-Only" Rapture idea*. An exegetical examination of 1 Thess. 4:13-17, showing the fallacies of the Partial Rapture idea, and proving that all the saints were raptured, not just the Apostles or some limited subsection of saints. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Expectations of the Pre-70 Saints*. A survey of the major expectation statements, showing what the pre-70 saints expected to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Exposition of 1 Thess. 4:13-17*. An excerpt from the exegetical section in the *Expectations* book, dealing with 1 Thess. 4:13-17. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *The Fall of Adam*. A research paper for one of the courses taken for his Masters degree. Available in PDF by request. Talks about the Tree of Life, mortality vs. immortality, the kind of death they died, the probation period, and the ultimate destiny of redeemed mankind. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2010. <http://preterist.org>

- Stevens, Edward. *Gather Together His Elect*. An article published in *Fulfilled Magazine*, dealing with Matt. 24:31, showing that the angelic gathering immediately after the tribulation was the rapture. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2008. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *John 14 and the Dwelling Places*. A nineteen-page paper, analyzing John 14:3 contextually and grammatically, showing that it is indeed talking about a rapture of the apostles at the Parousia. There are two MP3 audio tracks available for this (see in the Media section below). Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Parable of the Tares*. The lesson outline PDF from my audio series on the eschatological parables. I interact with Preston's misrepresentation of the rapture interpretation of that parable. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2010. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *The Rapture – Great Expectations*. An article published in *Fulfilled Magazine*, which lists nothing but excerpts from scripture categorized under various topical headings related to what the pre-70 saints expected to happen at the Parousia. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Rapture in the Old Testament*. The lesson outline from my speech on this subject at the 2010 Garrettsville seminar. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Sequencing the Rapture*. The lesson outline from my speech on this subject at the 2010 Garrettsville seminar. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *The History of Eschatology*. The lesson outline of my 2002 North Carolina seminar speech, explaining the documentation problem and the silence of Christians after AD 70. Available in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2003. <http://preterist.org>

### **Media:**

- Stevens, Edward. *Garrettsville Seminar 2010*. This seminar focused exclusively on the First Century Rapture. Available in both video (DVD) and audio (MP3), including the PDF lesson outlines. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2010. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *John 14 and the Dwelling Places*. A detailed analysis of the usage of the Greek word MONE in John 14. Two audio presentations, plus a twenty-page lesson outline in PDF format. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2010. <http://preterist.org>
- Stevens, Edward. *Parables of the Tares and the Ten Virgins* (audio MP3 lessons plus the PDF lesson outlines). Two of the eschatological parables of Jesus which portray the rapture using the harvest and wedding analogies. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA: International Preterist Association, 2010. <http://preterist.org>