

A Response to 'Silence Demands a Rapture'

By Dr. Kelly Nelson Birks

In this review, I have chosen to respond to [Ed Stevens](#) latest work called "[Silence Demands a Rapture](#)", by approaching the subject in a commentary type format so as to best analyze Mr. Stevens view as to how he arrives at his present position regarding the so called "Rapture" of the church.

This commentary is not to be understood as an attack against Mr. Stevens himself, but rather it should be seen as an attempt to understand how he arrived at his conclusions according to his own public teaching on the subject, and in doing so, to demonstrate the fallibility of the position as he has enunciated it by our study of the scripture in order to discover what the Bible really says on the subject. In doing so we will also note the lack of cogent historical documentation for what I call the "Ed Rapture", and to show that holding to such a theory as this, will serve not to advance the cause of Biblical Preterist eschatology, but rather to hinder it.

The "Harpazo"

In Mr. Stevens preface to his article, he states that this issue of the "silence" of a rapture was something that he has grappled with over a period of time. It has been such an issue with Mr. Stevens, that he says it has actually robbed him of sleep. *"I lost sleep over it."* The problem seems to begin with an inadequate understanding of the Greek word [HARPAZO](#) as it is used by Paul in [1 Thess. 4:17](#). Mr. Stevens says it means, "caught up." But while the word does mean to catch, seize, etc., nowhere can it etymologically be understood to physically remove a person or thing towards a specific direction. I am referring to the addition of the word "up" to the word "caught" (catch), in most translations of 1 Thess. 4:17. This word of "direction" (up, away, etc) has been added by the translators to a great many versions of scripture. It is simply assumed that the "harpazo" (commonly referred to as a 'rapture') is something that (in this theory) takes the individual's physical body off the ground and "up" to another place.

However, the only time the lexicons ever define the word as a "catching UP", is when they are offering commentary within their articles concerning the nature of the way the word is used. However, the word itself (harpazo) does not contain within it any notion of a direction. (Up, down, away) Sometimes the Greek word "[anatello](#)" is used for "up", or "raised up", as in Mt. 13:6, Mk. 4:6. The adverb, "[ano](#)" for "up" is used as a separate word in the cases of "above", "brim", or "high." The Greek word, "anoteron" which is a comparative degree of "ano", and is the neuter form of the adjective, "[anoterous](#)", is used in giving motion to something to a higher place, as in Lk. 14:10. The word, "anothen", ("from above"), is used of a "place" as in Mt. 27:41, Mk. 15:38, and is also used of things which come from heaven, as John 3:31, and 19:11. (See Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, MacDonald Pub. Pg. 1199). And yet, none of the forms of these words are at all attached to the Greek word "harpazo", which is the Greek word that is translated into the Latin word from which we derive the English word, "rapture".

Thayer's Greek- English Lexicon of the NT, on Pg. 74 of the 1977 Zondervan printing says, *"to seize on, to carry off by force...to claim for one's self eagerly."*

Then, when commenting on the "meaning" of the word from specific passages that traditionally contain an "up" or "away" idea, Thayer says: *"To snatch out or away', Mt. 13: 19, John 10: 28...Proverbially, to rescue from danger or destruction, Jude 23."* When Thayer comments on Acts 8: 39 regarding Philip's harpazo from the Eunuch, he says, *"...used of divine power transferring a person marvelously (sic) and swiftly from one place to another, to snatch or catch away..."*

Regarding Philip's catching "away" or "flight" from the desert with the Eunuch to Azotus, clearly, it is not necessary for us to understand that Philip was physically transported to Azotus. Why? Because the text does not say that Philip in any way disappeared, or was supernaturally taken from the Eunuch. It simply says that, **"...the Spirit of the Lord "seized" (harpazo) Philip (with the result that) the Eunuch saw him no more..."** (Acts 8:39) The Spirit of the Lord could have "seized" Philip in the sense of giving him fresh direction (as in the sense in which harpazo is used in Mt. 11: 12 for instance), in that he was to then leave the Eunuch and head towards Azotus. It is because of traditionalistic non-etymological understandings that we have assumed this text to be saying that Philip was physically removed from the Eunuch in the supernatural sense. All the text says is that the Holy Spirit "seized" or "caught" Philip in such a way that he simply left the eunuch with the result being that the Eunuch didn't see him anymore after that. It is a prejudiced reading of an idea into the text, (an interpretation) that turns into a translation that is not necessarily the correct point of view.

The Greek word Harpazo shows up 15 times in the Greek NT. These can be referenced in the Englishman's Greek Concordance. (Pg. 82 of the Zondervan 1970 edition). Of these that feature a context that makes us to understand that the harpazo is a reference to a physical removal from one point to another, see John 6: 15. There, Jesus is threatened by those who would forcibly make him king. But even this is a reference to having Christ to assume the role of messianic king, not a physical translation. Acts 23: 10, where the Roman Captain feared for Paul's life in the midst of the Jewish mob, and in turn had Paul physically removed from harm. These are the only two, which point to a legitimate "seizing" in order to effect a removal from point A to B (and John 6: 15 does not really refer to this as demonstrated). This leaves Mt. 11: 12. Jesus is speaking about the forceful preaching of the kingdom of heaven since the time of John the Baptist, and that the spiritually violent "harpazo", or seize (the kingdom) by force (harpazo). No idea is presented about the forceful preaching of the kingdom that physically transports someone in a certain direction. It is a spiritual seizing or taking hold of someone's conscience that is in view.

Mt. 13: 9, the devil is pictured as to playing his part in the Parable of the Sower relative to how he "seizes" a person so that they cannot respond to the gospel preaching. Again, no idea of a physical removal from one place to another is expressed by this part of the parable. It is a spiritual seizing or catching that is explained here. Surely no one is to believe that Satan actually removed people physically out of a crowd of those listening to the gospel. (??)

John 10: 12 speaks of the hireling (the Jewish leaders of Jesus day) that forsakes the flock of God and the wolf comes and seizes them in the flock. The idea being expressed here is that they are taken away into error or in some way spiritually harmed by the analogy of the wolf seizing (harpazo) them.

The rest of the examples follow the same kind of analogy within the text. No one is literally and physically removed anywhere.

Probably the most interesting of all is Paul's reference to himself in 2 Cor. 12: 2-4 as being "caught" or seized to the Third Heaven. Paul speaks of a man (himself- V. 7) as being harpazo into the Third Heaven. But was it a physical removal from the planet surface or a spiritual one? Twice he says that this event was not known to him to have been an "in the body" event or "out of the body" event. (V.'s 2-3) He was somehow harpazo, caught /seized to the Third Heaven (Paradise- V. 4) and heard things that were not lawful to utter. It was such an incredible event for Paul that he could not say whether it was or was not a "physical" harpazo. Therefore to point to this passage and say that this situation that Paul describes justifies an understanding of a physical removal, is easily countered by the fact that Paul implies that this harpazo was also possibly a "spiritual" harpazo as he implies that it could have happened either way. This then leaves us with a passage that actually teaches the possibility of a non-physical harpazo. If one were to object to the assertion that the event could have been a NON-physical removal, then we would reply with the Apostle that he himself could not tell if it was or it wasn't. Therefore, one must admit an equal possibility for either. Except for the fact that again, the Greek word harpazo used in V. 4, will only allow for the lexical/ etymological meaning of "seized", "caught", perhaps "taken". Clearly, when the translation adds the word (ADDS the word!), "caught UP" (V. 4), it's adding is from an interpretive sense, and NOT from an exegetical etymological one. For as we have proved, there can be no directional sense "alone" from the word harpazo, as it does not contain any of the Greek words that would be so understood. This taken together with Paul being unable to be emphatic about whether the

event was in or out of the body, it is best not to speculate. Could God have taken him physically? Yes. But what God could have done is not the issue here.

Arndt and Gingrich- *“A Greek- English Lexicon of the NT and other Christian Literature”* on Pg. 109 of the 1979 edition, give the basics of the word *harpazo* as, *“snatch, seize, take suddenly and vehemently. To grasp something quickly, eagerly, with desire.”* The lexicon includes the idea of force in the action: Paragraph 2, a. *“To seize or claim for one’s self”*: Paragraph 2, b.

What stands out so clearly in all of the major (and minor) lexicons is that nowhere is it stated that the word *“harpazo”* contains within it the any additional phrasing for *“up”* (*anotello, ano, etc.*). All we would need to find in order to substantiate the *“up”* or *“away”* sense that traditionally has been added to the meaning, is to locate a word formed like, *“anoharpazo”*, or some such. But there is no such compound word that would verify the *“up”* or *“away”* sense that commentators have assigned to the word. Assigned without lexical *“etymological”* authority apart from the author’s own comments, I might add. Now to the primary text at hand....

1 Thess. 4: 17

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be ‘caught’ (harpazo- no “up” “away” etc, indicated in the syntax of the text nor in the Greek word itself), together with them in the clouds (a cloud coming reference to divinity appearing- i.e. Jesus is divine. See Dr. Randall Otto’s work, *“Coming in the Clouds”*), *to meet the Lord* (‘meet’ is *“apantesis”*, Moulton and Milligan in their Greek Grammar, vol. 1, pg. 14, say, *“It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary.”*), *in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* Critical to an understanding of the text at hand is the word *“air”* from the Paul’s use of the Greek, *AER*. (Pronounced, *“ear.”*)

Strong’s Greek Dictionary, entry 109, defines it as:

From “aemi”, to breath unconsciously, to respire. By analogy, to blow.

1. The air, particularly the *lower and denser air* as distinguished from the higher and rarer air.
2. The atmospheric region.

Please note Strong’s root definition followed by the primary meaning of the word that Paul uses in 1 Thess. 4:17. It is in reference to the *“place”* of respiration. The idea of the exchange of oxygen within ones immediate sphere, is what is the associative understanding. Paul is not saying that we meet the Lord in the *harpazo*, in our lungs! Understand what Paul is driving at. He is speaking of a spiritual meeting with the Lord, *“within”* ourselves. Within our spirits. Why did he use this particular form of explanation here? So that the Thessalonians, who could not conceive of the nature of the *harpazo* at Christ’s Parousia in the least (and we don’t do a very good job of it either), would begin to grasp that the meeting with the Lord was to be a personal meeting *“within”* the believer. Each believer was to have his or her own meeting with the Lord. If Paul had meant to communicate that this meeting was of a physical nature relative to joining the Lord in a place high above the planet surface, which Strong refers to as the place of *“rarer”* air (thinner air, high above the planet), then he would in all likelihood have used the Greek word *“ouranos”*. This is the primary word for the sky high above. The place of rarer air. There would have been no misunderstanding whatsoever if he had used *ouranos*. *“Ouranos”*: *“To lift, to heave.”*- Vines, Pg. 548. Paul chooses the more spiritually descriptive word *AER*, in order to communicate the primary defined meaning that Strong actually gives us. Christ would meet the believer within. It is an analogous to ones spirit that is within their body.

John Noe (a colleague of Mr. Stevens) sees this in his work, *“Your Resurrection Body and Life”*. On Pg. 52 he says, *“For believers alive today, this gathering is still relevant. It takes place in the spirit realm, ‘in the air’ inside you (Strong’s # 109-author), that is, your spirit. Rapturists, as we outlined in chapter one, have failed to differentiate this AER ‘air’ inside you from the ‘ouranos’ air up in the sky. Consequently, they have also failed to apply a spiritual sense to Paul’s symbolic language. They insist this is a vanishing act by living Christians into outer space. How absurd! This ‘air’ is the heavenly realm of the spirit. And we are spirits.”*

Paul's use of the Greek words "harpazo" and "aer" in 1 Thess. 4:17, clearly then places the traditional idea of physical bodies rising off of the planet surface and into the heaven above, into the arena of the unlikely, if not the impossible. Had Paul meant to clearly communicate that believers would rise physically off the planet surface and into the sky above the planet, he would have used the Greek word "ouranos" which has no argument within it whatsoever as to its "the-sky-above", meaning.

What about the NT use of the Greek word AER that we have been alluding to?
The Greek word AER is used seven times in the NT.

(1) Acts 22:23, ***"And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the AER..."***

Ever tried to throw dust into the air? Try it and see how high up you can get it. Not very high I assure you, (especially if there is a breeze). This is the point for Luke using the word AER here in Acts 22: 23 as opposed to "ouranos." The Jews could only get it as high as their immediate sphere. Perhaps a few feet at best. It would have been within the space that contained the air that they themselves were breathing.

(2) 1 Cor. 9:26, Paul says, ***"...so fight I not as one who beats the AER."*** Here, he uses a boxer's terminology for comparing the discipline of athletics with the discipline of the Gospel work of preaching. How far do you think the boxer could swing at the air? No further than the length of his arms, right? He boxed within his immediate sphere. Why did Paul not use the word "ouranos" to describe the actions of a boxers training? Simply because it would have been ridiculous to do so. Neither the boxer nor the participant in the harpazo would reach into nor elevate off into the heavens above the planet. There is a specific reason as to why Paul used AER to describe the nature of the harpazo event.

(3) 1 Cor. 14:9, As Paul instructs the Corinthians in true and false tongues, he teaches them that without speaking words in a language that everyone could understand, they would merely be ***"speaking into the AER."*** Paul did not want the Corinthians to think that their words would be heard high above the city, up into the upper atmosphere. But rather, that those within their immediate sphere would be able to hear. Those who shared the same "aer". That which was a part of their respiration (Strong's #109). It was something to be experienced within their immediate sphere.

(4) Eph. 2:2 Speaks of Satan being the ***"Prince and Power of the AER."*** His realm was the arena of the spiritual, not the physical. He related to people within the sphere of their spirit, and not in the physical heavens above. His power was over the unregenerate mans life, not the molecules within the created carbon based system. His battle was over the lives of men and not over upper ether "real estate." After Paul says that Satan was the Prince of the AER, he speaks that he (Satan) was the spirit, "that now works in the children of disobedience." Again, the arena of Satan's power was over the lives of men in an inner sense.

(4) 1 Thess. 4:17. (Already covered)

(6-7) Both Rev. 9:2, and 16:17 speak in highly symbolic terms concerning the fact that in John's vision (which is highly apocalyptic in nature and should only be pressed for literalism when the context demands it,) he says he sees ***the AER darkened and the angel pouring out his vial into the AER...*** Was the angel "really" pouring out a literal "bowl" containing something physical into the sky above? Of course not. As is typical with the use of the word AER, it is a reference to the realm of the spirit, as Noe points out, that is the arena of the angel's dealings.

"Begging Your Pardon"

Throughout Mr. Stevens' article, there is a continuous stream of what is known as "question begging" that is utilized. Question begging is a technique that is used by authors in order to "massage" the reader into a mindset that is ready to receive the suggested theory (in this case) that the author is espousing. Notice the repetition of phrases that Mr. Stevens uses like, ***"How could it be that some of the apostles and their traveling companions lived through the events of AD 70 without recognizing the significance of it...?"*** Or, "Did it (the Parousia) happen?" "Was it documented?" "Why are these folks...so silent?" What, how, why, when, if, what

about.... The continuous asking of the audience these questions puts them in tune with where the author wants to take them. Pretty soon one can be lulled into a state of ready acceptance to the propositions about to be made. I do not believe that Mr. Stevens is intentionally doing this. (This is probably just the way he writes). I do believe that Mr. Stevens sincerely believes that he has found the “Eureka” and “Fountain of Youth” of eschatology. He believes that this theory of the church being removed physically from the earth during the Parousia of Christ is THE answer for what he believes is the Preterist “documentation problem.”

Mr. Stevens suggests: “But for Preterists it is a critical lack of documentation at the very time when we need significant historical validation of eschatological fulfillment.”

Really? Why? Why is it necessary for us to have “historical documentation” in order for the Preterist proposition to be correct? Why is it that we are being asked to believe this? Is the agreement with this proposition that which is truly necessary for us to begin to accept the “Ed Rapture” that is being espoused? I have never felt a need for any “extra- biblical” historical verification to believe that Christ taught and did in fact return to the earth in AD 70. The scriptures are sufficient in these regards. Why do we “need” historical verification as Mr. Stevens asserts? To please those who oppose the Preterist view? What makes us think that they will ever accept the Preterist proposition even if we provide them with tons of historical documentation? “It is the Spirit that quickens, the flesh profits nothing.” John 6: 63

Spooof Texting

In Mr. Stevens quoting of 1 Thess. 1:6-10, he insists that when Paul says, ***“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, to GIVE RELIEF TO YOU who are afflicted and TO US AS WELL when the Lord Jesus will be revealed...”***, that the idea of God giving “relief” to the Thessalonians as well as to the Apostles, actually involves a physical rapture that supposedly fulfills this. But the context of the verses that are quoted by Mr. Stevens, makes it clear that the “relief” that Paul was speaking of would be the cessation of persecution that the Thessalonians were experiencing as the result of the coming of Christ bringing vengeance on those who do not accept the Gospel. In other words Christ’s Parousia ends the persecution by the Jews as he comes to bring an eternal destruction upon them. The idea of placing a rapture here in the text is a manipulating of the passage. There is no rapture here unless one wants to place the idea there through suggestion rather than through exegesis. (Heck, a direct reading of the context is sufficient to see what Paul is referring to).

As to the nature of a physical “rapture” as supposedly being referred to by Paul in the promise of our “gathering together to him” in 1 Thess. 2:1, Mr., Stevens asserts, “If this isn’t a promise of a rapture, I simply don’t know what else to make of it.”

We should “make of it” precisely what the Greek text makes of it. The Greek word for “gathering” is EPISUNAGOGES. An intensified form (“epi”) of our being “synagogued” to him. To synagogue or to gather together is not the word “harpazo” is it? The word “sunagouges” is used various times in the NT in reference to the church gathering together to Christ in worship within their various locales. Never once is it ever used in any sense as a physical removal of individuals to a place where Christ geographically is. In James 2:2 we are told that when the local church came together for worship it is referred to as a “sunagouge”. “For if there come into your ASSEMBLY (sunagouge) a man with a gold ring....” When writing to the Hebrew Christians, the author of Hebrews says, “Not forsaking the ASSEMBLING (sunagouge) of ourselves together...” It is true that in Mt. 24:31 and Mk. 13:27, the word EPISUNAGO is used for the angels being sent forth to “gather together the elect” at the Parousia of Christ. But neither the use of sunagouge, episunago, or harpazo (as we have shown) necessarily carries with them the idea of a “physical” removal or physical transportation as is being suggested. From our close scrutiny of 1 Thess. 4:17, we have seen that the meeting of the Lord with his elect was to be in the AER, and not in the “ouranos”. The meeting was spiritual meeting, and so the “gathering together of the elect in Mt. 24:31 is also the spiritual meeting that 1 Thess. 4:17 was no doubt pointing towards.

“Muzzling the Moment”

The bottom line is that the lack of historical documentation neither proves nor disproves a “rapture” as Mr. Stevens is suggesting it does. A number of observations can be made as to the reasons for the absence of further extra-biblical testimony as to the events of Christ’s AD 70 Parousia. One does not have to be compelled into the “Ed Rapture” just because there is no preserved documentation commenting on it. The scriptures are supposed to be sufficient for faith and practice. Again why do we supposedly “need” anything more than that? I for one do not. The lack of written accounts by the church post AD 70 of the Parousia event does not in fact mean that nothing was ever written about it outside of the scriptures. Something could very well have been written, but simply not preserved. God makes no promises to preserve anything other than his word. Not all of the writings of the Early Church Fathers have been translated. It is possible that there could be a remark or two (or more) about the coming of the Lord in AD 70 there within the non-translated writings? The fact remains that whether there is or is not, no doctrine should be based upon speculation. And this rapture view is clearly not exegetical, as it is for the most part speculative and is supported by assuming certain things to be true that are in fact not in evidence. One can easily get the impression that the impetus for this current view is proceeding more from the arena of frustration than anything else. Frustration over the continuous battling with non-Preterists. Frustration over the many who are demanding further “proof” for the AD 70 view. These are not valid reasons to go off into what Heb. 13: 9 says are “different and strange doctrines.” “Be not carried about by divers and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established with grace,...” Heb. 13: 9.

More “Spoof Texting.”

As Mr. Stevens continues to build his case for a physical removal of all the saints in the first century, he presses one passage in particular that at first read seems to establish his view. He states, “1 John 3:2 is another example. John clearly says that those who were true ‘children of God’ would definitely SEE CHRIST (authors emphasis) at his Parousia and become like him. This is not apocalyptic language. There is a very real expectation here. He says that they would SEE Christ return and would be made like him at his coming. Did they see him return? Did they remain on earth afterwards? If so, why didn’t they (apostle John especially) tell anyone about what they saw and experienced?”

Once again we notice the overarching emphasis on the return to question begging by Mr. Stevens in order to press his audience into aligning with him. He says “clearly”, “definitely”, “See Christ return”, etc. But is this what the Greek text of 1 John 3: 2 says?

“Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, But we know that WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3: 2 KJV.

The highlighted portion is worth drawing our attention to. The Greek text of John’s statement here does not say in the Greek, “When he shall appear.” Rather it says, “But we know that IF he is revealed, we shall be like him...” (Lit. Version) “The Literal Version of The Holy Bible” (Sovereign Grace Publishers, Lafayette, In.) correctly gives John’s original Greek here. The difference between the two versions is of course, “When he shall appear” KJV. And, “If he is revealed.” Now the literal is not questioning as to whether or not Christ would ever be revealed in his Second Coming. What it is doing is correctly translating the Greek word EAN (KJV: “WHEN he shall appear”. Lit. Ver: “IF he is revealed.”) Here, EAN is a subjunctive conjunction. It means “if”, not “when”.

ASV... *“...if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him.”*

Weymouth’s Trans... *“... if Christ reappears, we shall be like him*

Young’s Lit. Ver. *“...if he may be manifested, like him we shall be.”*

John did not know if all of the audience of his epistle was actually going to live long enough to see Christ in his Parousia. John knew that he most likely would (John 21: 20), but he was not as sure about the life spans of his readers at that time. There is a difference between someone “being revealed”, and “someone appearing.” KJV gives the sense of Christ definitely “appearing” to John’s audience. But the literal places the emphasis on the “possibility” of whether or not Christ would be “revealed” to John’s audience. The Literal Version has so

translated it. So one cannot point to 1 John 3: 2 as Mr. Stevens has, as a proof text for the absolute sureness that John's audience would "see Christ" in an "Ed Rapture" sense. The Greek has it that they "may" see Christ himself appear, or they "may not" see him appear. The Greek underscores the idea that is asserted elsewhere in scripture that it is not necessary for the first century believers to actually "see" the person of Christ with their physical eyes (Ed Rapture) in order to qualify for going through the Parousia when it occurred in the first century.

Another text that Mr. Stevens uses to postulate his theory is his quote of Jn 14:3.

"Besides the 1 Thess. 4 text which clearly teaches a 'catching UP' (sic) of the living and remaining saints at the Parousia, there are other texts which either assert or imply a rapture. Here's another example—John 14: 3. 'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF, that where I am, there you may be also.'"

Mr. Stevens then assumes that where Christ is means that he will take the believer to as well, that is to heaven. He states, "Notice that Jesus promises to return to them after he has prepared a place for them in the heavenly realm (John 14:1-3). He says he will come back and 'receive (them) to himself,' so that where he is (heaven), they would be also. "

A close reading of this text will show that Jesus DOES NOT tell his disciples that where he would take them to at the John 14:3 event, was heaven! The text says, "I will come again and receive you unto myself that WHERE I AM, there you may be also." Question: If Jesus comes back to the EARTH to receive his disciples unto himself, then that tells us WHERE HE IS as a result of his coming to the earth to receive them. Where he would be upon his coming was THE EARTH, and that is where the disciples would be with him. That is, on the earth in the spiritual realm, not heaven. Remember, Parousia means "a coming that involves a consequential presence." Christ has been here on the earth (as the New [Jerusalem](#)/Bride has been since AD 70,- Rev. 21), in an abiding consequential presence. That is where he would be ("where I am") at his coming to receive them unto himself. It is this type of approaching of the text of the scripture with a presupposition in mind that results in a theory of this kind. I submit that the entire treatment of the scriptures that Mr. Stevens is giving here suffers from this type of eisoptical treatment of the Bible in this subject.

"The Emperor's New Clothes: No one noticed he was naked?"

Since it is far more difficult to ask the reader to accept that some 1000's upon 1000's of believers were suddenly and inexplicably removed in an "Ed Rapture", Mr. Stevens must assert the possibility that the actual physical rapture must have been in fact, a very small number. He attempts to substantiate this as a possibility by appealing to certain texts that he thinks may point to this. He says, "It is also possible that the number of folks 'snatched away' might have been smaller than we think. In Lk. 18:8, Jesus said, '...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' " But this text from the lips of the Savior, does not mean what Mr. Stevens is suggesting that it does. He seems to be presenting us with a text that somehow teaches that when the Lord returns, there would not be much evidence of faith (i.e. true believers) on the earth. But the context of the passage tells us that the "faith" that Jesus was there referring to, was a faith that perseveres in prayer and not a faith that is non-existent in some. Lk.18:1..."And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to PRAY, and not to faint..." Christ then gives the parable of the widow seeking justice from the unjust judge, who after perseverance (teaching us about continuous prayer) finally receives her request of the judge. Christ then concludes the parable by saying in this light, "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" It is the faith that is represented by persevering prayer that he is talking about as the introductory remarks of Lk. 18:1 maintain. Mr. Stevens tries to use the vision of Elijah and the chariot of fire/whirlwind and the 50 prophets who he asserts witnessed the event, as an indicator that these 50 prophets were not "spiritual enough" to see into the spiritual realm, and thereby missed the vision itself. As if those who were "left behind" at the Parousia / Ed Rapture, were equally unspiritual, and so were not taken. This is straining of the text to the maximum. A careful reading of 2 Kings 2:7-18 will show that the 50 prophets were not any more, or any less "spiritual" than Elisha who reported what he saw happen to Elijah. This is not a good text for Mr. Stevens to use to prove his case for a "left behind" scenario saying that "some" were not spiritual enough to see it. The fact remains that according to Christ's teaching on the subject of the gathering together

of the saints in Mt. 24:30-31, that ALL of the elect, not “some” of the elect, would be participating in the gathering that was to be done by the angels at Christ’s Parousia. “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together (episunagago) his ELECT (all of them, dead and alive) from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” It does not say that he would only gather “some” of the elect, or only those elect that were “worthy” through some kind of works of holiness, but simply “the elect ones.” (“Eklektous” in the plural form). It is simply assigning a view to the text that the passage itself will not support.

Mr. Stevens continues to assert that these “left behind” Christians had the writings of the apostles in the NT, “to plant in the hearts of men and grow a new crop of Christians. And that is how the church perpetuated itself...” Wait a minute...if the so called “sleeping” Christians (whatever that is) were left behind because they were not worthy or walking in faith, then what makes anyone believe that if they did not notice that everyone was missing (as Mr. Stevens asserts), then why would they suddenly have the spiritual “sight” to notice AFTER the “Ed Rapture”, and thereby repent of their sinful laziness, and begin to repopulate the earth with Christians through their “renewed” witness? Is there something “sanctifying” involved with the rapture if one misses it because they were spiritually lazy?

This is an insufficient hypothesis to explain how the church “kept going.” It assumes that the so-called Christians repented after they realized Christ had come and they missed it. For anyone who knows the Dispensational Pre-Tribulation rapture theory, one can easily see that this is just a rehashing of that same weak theory now dressed up in Preterist garb. Now the Preterist must appeal to old Dispensational theories in order to make their rapture view palatable? Incredible! There is no more historical evidence for the left-behinders “waking up”, than there is for this type of physical rapture taking place in the first century that is being presented by Mr. Stevens. Consider also the inconsistency of the writings by these “left behind Christians” and their followers with their announcing of the Postponement Theory within the writings of Justin Martyr, 2 Clement, and the Shepherd of Hermas. If the left- behinders had realized their sin and repented and began preaching the Gospel again, KNOWING that the “rapture” had in fact taken place in AD 70 (as Mr. Stevens is bound to certainly affirm that they would have had to), then why, WHY did the Postponement Theory developed by mid- Second Century ever get off the ground and ever have an audience? Surely some 100 years from AD 70 there would have been sufficient amounts of believers who had been told that the left-behinders had made a mistake in the first century by not walking by faith, who had subsequently then repented, and began preaching the truth of a fulfilled AD 66 or 70 rapture. It simply makes no sense whatsoever to believe in a literal first century physical rapture as,

- (1) there is no Bible to substantiate it, (as we have demonstrated), and
- (2) there is no historical record of it occurring, and
- (3) the mid-second century writings would NOT have been about an “end-of-the-world Second Coming”, but about a “we missed it”, Second Coming rapture.

If this was the case, surely the second century writers would have been waving the flag of a fulfilled prophecy concerning the rapture in AD 66-70 and not teaching an entirely different one IF they were a part of an inheritance of the post AD 70 repentant ones. This new rapture view falls on it’s own sword. It’s like the end of the “Mission Impossible” message to Mr. Phelps: “This message will self destruct in 5 seconds. Good luck, Mr. Phelps!” Good luck Mr. Stevens!

Redating the Rapture!

Mr. Stevens next asserts that this so-called “rapture” took place in AD 66! The problem with this is that it borrows from the pre-trib Dispensational rapture idea of a Christ coming FOR his saints at the beginning of the tribulation (modified from the Dispensational seven year trib, to a three year trib.), and a Christ coming WITH his saints in AD 70. Mr. Stevens has the rapture taking place in AD 66, with Christ then being abiding and present on the earth during the 3.5 years of the Roman siege on Jerusalem. But then, what do we do with scripture that teaches the Parousia at the conclusion of the 3.5 year tribulation and Christ returning and abiding then? (Mt. 24:29-31) Do we have two returns now? At what point does Christ leave after AD 66, and then return again in Ad 70? This is the embracing of a “Third Coming” which no scripture will substantiate at all.

This theory simply gets worse and worse, and forces us to constantly rework and rethink all which the scripture has taught regarding a single Second Coming. "...and unto them that look for him, shall he appear the SECOND time, without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9:28) Not, "appear a third time." There is only one Second Coming. There was only one harpazo in the spiritual realm. A gathering of the living and the dead saints in the spiritual realm. Mr. Stevens seven-year period that he introduces is not in compliance with the 70th Week of Daniel at all. – Dan. 9:24-27. (See my book "The Comings of the Christ: A Reformed and Preterist Analogy of the 70th Week of the Prophet Daniel", soon to be released by 1st Books Library.)

"Let's play, the name-game!"

Finally, Mr. Stevens attempts to "name drop" in a final attempt at supporting his view. He says, "*So far the only thing that has been forthcoming is what those four scholars (Russell, Terry, Weymouth, Hampden-Cook) suggested a century ago—a rapture!*"

Our response to this is simple: If those scholars had enough documental, historical, grammatical, and contextual information to come to a "suggestion" of it, then why did they simply not develop it themselves? If these scholars could have developed it (and certainly they could have done so at least to the degree that Mr. Stevens has), then why didn't they? We may never know the answer to this question, but we do not need to know the answer to it. Perhaps they themselves felt that a "suggestion" was all they could really do. Perhaps they knew that there really was not enough concrete evidence within the scripture or history in order to demonstrate even the possibility of such a view. Clearly, if there were "enough" Biblical evidence, one of them (if not others after them) would have done so long before now.

Mr. Stevens titles his work here "Silence Demands a Rapture." Does the "silence" on the matter of a physical first century rapture as suggested by these men, give evidence to the fact of a "rapture", or does it give evidence to the fact that there really was not enough credible information in order for them to substantiate such a rapture? You decide.

A Conclusion to this Rapture-Delusion

In conclusion, we offer three major comments that affect the nature of the church by the view of a physical first century rapture.

(1) This view truncates the apostolic and successive nature of the New Covenant within the church.

Simply put, there is no ongoing and uninterrupted development of the NT church on the earth if all the true Christians were removed from the planet in the first century. The New Covenant is essentially truncated by the removal of those who were regenerated and brought into the Covenant in the first century. The answer that Mr. Stevens offers as to how the church "kept going" is insufficient as we have pointed out, and frankly one of the hardest things to believe in this entire view.

(2) This view cancels the Biblical promises regarding the Holy Spirit continually abiding in the church.

Since the church is made up of individual believers that make up the Body of Christ on the earth, and if the Holy Spirit abides unceasingly within the believer, then if the believers are removed, the Holy Spirit must of necessity be removed as well. There are no texts that teach that The Holy Spirit will come to the earth, and leave the earth. That he will come and go between true and "sleeping believers." This is the implication as suggested by this new rapture view. Consequently, the Holy Spirit is not here to regenerate anyone after AD 66, and the view that Mr. Stevens takes, mandates the re-grouping, and re-forming of the church post departure of the "real" church. This post rapture "church" of Mr. Stevens dies of it own self-inflicted wounds.

(3) This view mandates a massive redefinition of the nature of the church.

A new ecclesiology is now needed if this view is true. What we have now, if this view is correct, is not in fact the church of Christ on the earth at all. What we have since Mr. Stevens AD66- pre-trib rapture, is a sort of

“hybrid church.” It is actually a fleshly attempt at continuing a “philosophy of Christianity” that is not Christianity at all. If the true church was removed in AD 66, then the Holy Spirit is also gone as well. If the Holy Spirit is gone, then people since AD66 have not been being regenerated, and no one is able to understand the scriptures as the Holy Spirit is necessary for this.

The implications of this rapture view presented by Mr. Stevens are of mammoth proportions. Ultimately, it presents a view of Christianity and the Bible that is foreign to the original intentions of the authors of the books of the Bible and of the Lord himself.

This view of the rapture if embraced by Preterists, will set the cause of Preterism and the development of it back years in the church. If in the view of some, we stink in the nostrils of our anti-Preterist brothers and sisters now, what will the development of a view that is anti- Bible and anti- historical, and anti-reasonable smell like?

Silence does not “demand” a rapture. Silence demands precisely that...“Silence.” The scriptures remain “silent” concerning the rapture view that is presented by Mr. Stevens. We should be too.