The Rapture: Solving the “Missing Persons” Dilemma
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There is an explanation for how the world will react to millions of missing persons at the time of the rapture that has thus far escaped consideration by most scholars of prophecy, despite the fact that it possesses the strongest Biblical support: a global catastrophe that will serve to mask the disappearance of those who are part of the rapture of the church.

What student of Bible prophecy hasn’t pondered the question of how the world will react to the news of the rapture? Will those left behind notice that millions of people have just gone missing? How will it be explained? Will the earth experience a topographical change just after the resurrection and rapture? Will the news networks feature 24-hour full coverage with reports of millions of people suddenly missing all over the globe? Questions like these have spawned dozens of books and movies, hoping to provide answers.

I recall past broadcasts of the Search the Scriptures Daily radio show on which Bible prophecy scholars Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon of The Berean Call attempted to address these questions. Various possible answers discussed during these broadcasts to the inevitable questions about the vanishing of millions of people as a result of the rapture included:

- Abduction by aliens, or “space brothers,” of all those who needed to undergo “evolutionary reprogramming.”
- The New Age has come, and those who did not practice yoga to proceed to Homo Noeticus, the next stage of human evolution, were taken away to learn new age principles.
- The world will be so advanced that human teleportation, or a “Beam me up, Scotty” scenario, will be a possible explanation for the disappearance.

To their credit, neither Mr. Hunt nor Mr. McMahon believed these bizarre explanations will be necessary. During a broadcast entitled, “How In the World Will the World Unite?,” Dave Hunt explained what he believes will be the response to missing persons after the rapture:
If a hundred million people vanish from this planet, the terror that would result is unimaginable. We can’t even begin to think about it. ‘Where did they go? Who took them? Why didn’t they take me?’ I mean, that’s a logical question: ‘Why was I left behind?’ And no one will believe it was the rapture because the Bible says God will give them a strong delusion to believe the lie.

While a “strong delusion” is an interesting possibility for how the world will be shielded from the truth that the rapture has taken place, it is taken from II Thessalonians chapter 2 in the context of the Satanic miracle-working power of a person called the “man of lawlessness.” The coming of this lawless one will feature deceptive powers, signs, and lying wonders, according to Paul, and I believe it is this encompassing scenario to which Paul was referring when he wrote of “the lie” which those who were perishing would believe, not the rapture.

There is another explanation for how the world will react to millions of missing persons at the time of the rapture that has thus far escaped consideration by most scholars of prophecy, despite the fact that it possesses the strongest Biblical support: a global catastrophe that will serve to mask the disappearance of those who are part of the rapture of the church.

The Earthquake Resurrection and the Last Trumpet of God: Global Shaking

It is well established that the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the transformation of their bodies into incorruptible ones, will precede the rapture of the church. There is a pattern found in scripture of the power of a resurrection to an immortal body causing a shaking of the surrounding earth. The pattern is evident with the two recorded historic instances of a resurrection into immortal bodies, Jesus Christ and the “many saints who had died” in Matthew chapter 27, as well as with the future resurrection of the two witnesses recorded in Revelation chapter 11. This pattern of a shaking of the surrounding earth at the resurrection of the dead to immortality, when applied to the future resurrection of the dead in Christ, portends a scenario in which a worldwide surge of supernatural power could cause massive seismic, tsunamic, and volcanic activity.
In addition, this future resurrection of the dead in Christ will be preceded, according to Paul in I Corinthians chapter 15 and I Thessalonians chapter 4, by the “last trumpet,” also known as the “trumpet of God.” A study of the events of Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 19, and Paul’s recounting of the events in Hebrews chapter 12, reveals that the trumpet of God is his voice. Paul stated in Hebrews 12:26 that it was God’s voice that shook the earth at that time, and that his voice will “once more” shake not only the earth but also the heavens. This final shaking by God’s trumpet voice is equivalent to the “last trumpet,” the last time the trumpet voice of the Lord will shake the earth.

Combining the pattern of the power of the resurrection to immortality shaking the earth, and the shaking of the earth when the last trumpet voice of God shakes the earth and the heavens, it can be concluded that the future resurrection of the dead in Christ, followed soon after by the rapture of these resurrected and transformed believers along with those believers who had not yet died, will coincide with a global catastrophic shaking event. An event that will surprise the world and bring sudden destruction for those left behind.

Escaping the Trap?

Many may be resistant to the idea that the resurrection and catching-up event will be ushered in by a worldwide catastrophe that would likely cause the deaths of many people. Yet, that is exactly what both Jesus and Paul stated would be the case. First, according to Paul, the day of the Lord will be introduced with “sudden destruction:”

I The 5:2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come in the same way as a thief in the night. 5:3 Now when they are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden [αιπνίδιος] destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape [ἐκφύγοσιν].

A thief in the night comes when the people are sleeping, unaware of the sudden danger to come upon them. From a spiritual perspective, the coming of the Lord will catch unbelievers in an unprepared state, unable to escape what Paul described as “sudden destruction.” The Greek
words used by Paul in explaining the quick destructive power that introduces the day of the Lord are the same used by Jesus when he was explaining the day of the Lord to his disciples:

Luk 21:34 “But be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day close down upon you suddenly like a trap [aiphnidios]. 21:35 For it will overtake [pagis] all who live on the face of the whole earth. 21:36 But stay alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape [ekphigein] all these things that must happen, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Notice that the same Greek word is used to describe the escape, ekpheitogoi, which was used by Paul in describing the fate of those who will be caught by surprise by the sudden destruction. In addition, both of the passages use aiphnidios to describe the swift and severe manner in which the destruction will come. The Greek pagis is a noun which means a trap set for animals resulting in their destruction and capture. This noun was used to describe the fate of all those who are not ready at his coming.

Sudden Destruction: The Days of Noah and Lot

Most popular books and movies about the future catching-up event feature a globe in basically the same physical condition after the event as before it. But one need only examine Luke chapter 17, where Jesus himself warned that the time of his revealing would feature destructive events patterned after those in the days of Noah and Lot, to see that Jesus also warned of a destructive event at the time of his coming. He began a discourse on prophetic events to his disciples with a reference to his appearance in the sky, comparing it to a flash of lightning from one side of the sky to the other.

In contrast to those who will be looking for the Lord to first appear on the earth, Jesus stated there will be an appearance in which he comes just as quickly as the lightning flashes through the sky. This description is in agreement with Paul’s description of the resurrection and transformation event taking place in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, in which Jesus will
return in the sky to catch up all believers who are resurrected and transformed. Jesus continued the discussion by providing two dramatic, historic examples of what to expect on the earth at the time of this lightning-flash appearance:

Luk 17:26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. 17:27 People were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage—right up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

First, he compared the time of his coming to the days of Noah. Up until the day Noah entered the ark, the unbelieving world had no reason for panic. However, on the day the flood began, they quickly realized their predicament. The violent changes that took place on the earth destroyed all of them. The day overtook them as a thief, and the planet underwent legendary changes. Jesus stated it would be the same when he returns in the sky, but in what way? It will be a surprise just like the flood, but it will also cause destruction on the earth.

More proof of a destructive event coinciding with the Lord’s return at the rapture is found in the next verse when Jesus reminded the disciples of the conditions during the days of Lot:

Luk 17:28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building; 17:29 but on the day Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. 17:30 It will be the same on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

The sudden destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as chronicled in Genesis chapter 19, resulted from the cities being pelted with supernatural fire and sulfur from the sky. Jesus then stated it will be “the same” when he returns. Not only will earth’s inhabitants be shocked and taken by surprise, but they will experience a destructive event when Jesus Christ appears, just as those who experienced the events of the days of Noah and Lot.
Masking a Global Disappearance

The global destruction caused by the power of the resurrection of the dead in Christ to immortality, in concert with the trumpet voice of God shaking the earth, will provide a masking effect such that it is possible that millions of missing persons will not even be noticed. How so? Recall the devastating December 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Southeast Asia. In addition to the deaths of over 200,000 people and the injuries of many more, there were an estimated 164,000 people that could not be accounted for and were labeled “missing persons” among the disaster and chaos. After a certain amount of time, these missing persons were added to the number of the dead.

Imagine the chaos that would ensue at the resurrection of the dead in Christ if the effects of the Southeast Asian catastrophe are multiplied many times over on a worldwide basis. Many millions could be missing in the rapture, and as such, those believers who were living and remaining prior to the event, but could not be found afterward, may simply be declared by those who survive the event as part of a massive group of missing persons, and would eventually be declared dead in the catastrophe.

If this scenario proves to be correct, flash newscast reports of millions of people disappearing around the earth would be severely hampered, if not impossible, due to damage to technological infrastructure. This was clearly seen in previous disasters, such as the Southeast Asian tsunami and a recent earthquake in Taiwan disrupted Internet access of millions of people across Southeast Asia for several weeks. Multiply this many times over at the resurrection of the dead in Christ worldwide, and imagine the destruction and chaos to the world’s communication systems.

Conclusion: A Rapture Explanation that Agrees with Scripture

The speculation about how the left behind world will attempt to explain the disappearance of millions of people at the rapture of the church – alien abductions, Star Trek-like
transportation, New Age reprogramming, or even a strong delusion from God – is no longer necessary. The global catastrophe model agrees with the words of the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostle Paul who all foretold a sudden destructive event accompanying the coming of the Lord Jesus and the day of the Lord’s wrath. In addition, it is supported by the reaction to missing persons in the aftermath of previous natural disasters, such as the powerful 2004 Southeast Asian earthquake and resulting tsunami.

The rapture will truly be a sudden catching up, a snatching out of harm’s way, just as the meaning of the Greek verb *harpazo* conveys. In the midst of a global disaster, those who survive will have much greater worries than the whereabouts of missing persons. Indeed, while they will have survived perhaps the greatest global disaster since the flood, they will be ushered into the day of the Lord’s wrath in the midst of a globe in chaos and ruin. Let us warn unbelievers and exhort fellow believers with the strongest of Spirit-led convictions until the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

Learn more about the global catastrophe model for the resurrection and rapture of believers at the author’s site [www.earthquakeresurrection.com](http://www.earthquakeresurrection.com), or by reading *Earthquake Resurrection: Supernatural Catalyst for the Coming Global Catastrophe* © 2005 and *Then His Voice Shook the Earth: Mount Sinai, the Trumpet of God, and the Resurrection of the Dead in Christ* © 2006.