

What About The Rapture?

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My assigned topic is "What About The Rapture?" The Greek word ($\alpha\rho\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$) from which the rapturist gets the idea of the rapture is translated "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Since the concept of being caught up is in the Bible, in that sense, I believe in rapture. In a few minutes, you too will believe the Bible teaching on rapture, not because I am a great persuader, but because the Bible, in a particular sense, speaks of rapture.

Here are a few passages for our review. Acts 23:10 teaches a rapture. "And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain ... commanded the soldiers to go down, and to *take him by force* ($\alpha\rho\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$) from among them..." The words "take ... by force" are from the same word that the rapturists get the theory of the Rapture. However, the rapturist objects to our using this passage as a rapture passage, saying, "You have misused the verse. It is not speaking of 'The Rapture.' This man's (Paul) rapture ('take ... by force,' 'caught up') was by humans, not by God. Therefore, it is not the Rapture."

Okay! Philip was raptured *by God*. "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord *caught away* ($\alpha\rho\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$) Philip..." (Acts 8:39). Again, our religious friend objects, "No, no," he says. "You have misused the verse. Having been 'caught away' is not speaking of 'The Rapture.' Philip was not raptured into heaven but to another location on the earth. Therefore, it is not the Rapture."

Okay! God raptured Paul *into heaven*. "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago ... such an one *caught up* ($\alpha\rho\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$) to the third heaven..." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Our religious friend again objects, saying, "You have misused this verse, too. Though these verses speak of a rapture, none of them has in mind 'The Rapture'."

Exactly! And you, my friend, misuse 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Though it speaks of being caught up, it does not have in mind "The Rapture." "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain *shall be caught up* together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Paul is speaking of the second coming.

By now students can see that the rapturist is using the wording "caught up" in a special way—when he wants to. He not only means caught up, which we all believe, but he means an elaborately detailed religious system. Though the Bible speaks of being caught up, no verse teaches the intricate theology thesis of "The Rapture."

What Is the Theory of "The Rapture"?

Since the Rapture theory is not in the Bible, some Bible readers may not know what it is. A basic supposition of the doctrine is that Christians will be snatched off the earth in a secret seizure which will occur a split second before the tribulation begins. The tribulation period will be a time of trouble. After the tribulation, Christ and the saints will return to the earth, and Christ will rule over the nations in a physical kingdom for a thousand years. Then cometh the end.

Besides the *pre-tribulation* rapture, which teaches that Christ will rapture the church *before* the tribulation even begins, a variety of other theories flood the religious market. The *mid-tribulation* theory teaches that Christ will rapture the church in the *middle* of the tribulation. *Post-tribulationists* teach the rapture will occur at the *end* of the great tribulation. Books also teach the *pre-wrath* and *partial rapture*. One writer speaks of *pan-tribulationist*. This is suppose to describe folks who think it will *all pan out in the end*. Differences also exist as to who will be raptured. Some claim that all the born again will be caught up, while others teach that it is only for some of the born again. Some even believe that there will be more than one rapture. Though each of these illusions have their own little details, not a one is taught within Holy Writ.

Why Do People Believe In the Theory of "The Rapture"?

From my study, I see two basic causes for their speculations. The inability of the rapturist to properly distinguish between literal language and figures of speech is at the foundation of their false fantasies. Here is a sampling of how they think:

Now that Israel is back in the land and a "burdensome stone for the nations", Zech 12:3, we can take all the eschatological passages, Old and New Testament, as LITERAL, for the first time in Church history!... There is no longer any need to "spiritualize" the plain and literal meaning of Scripture away, when the Scripture can be taken literally. (Jones)

Notice Mr. Jones' quote of end time phraseology which calls Israel a "burdensome stone." By applying his method of interpretation to this one quote, he would have us believe that Israel is literally a stone instead of a nation of people. No wonder atheists think that Christianity is a religion for those who refuse to think.

Rapturists also demand a literal interpretation of all Revelation passages. However, at the very beginning of the book of Revelation, John made it clear he was going to use symbolic language or figures of speech. He said, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ ... he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (Revelation 1:1). The word "signified" means "to give a sign" (Thayer #4591). Scholar AT Robertson summed up it very well, saying, "[signified] ... suits admirably the symbolic character of the book" (Revelation 1:1). In other words, Revelation is filled with figures of speech. Even in the face of John's introductory remarks and in the face of faulty interpretations of figures of speech, rapturists still maintain that "all the eschatological passages" are to be taken as "literal." And, when they say "all," they mean all. Contrary to the claim of the rapturist, we strongly suggest that each word or phrase—Old Testament, New Testament, book of Revelation—should be taken as the Bible writer meant it. If the writer himself meant that a word or phrase should be interpreted literally, we must

not force a figurative interpretation upon it. Conversely, if the writer himself meant that a word or phrase should be interpreted as a figure of speech, we must not interpret the passage literally.

A faulty method of interpretation is not the only fundamental problem with this theory. Erroneous exegesis (which must be classified as eisegesis) of 1 Thessalonians 4 is a second cause for their elaborate explanation of the text. Rapturists, seeing the phrase "caught up" in the text, quickly jump to a complex carnal or earthly viewpoint and invent and inject all sorts of details to enhance their fantasies. Paul had no intention of conveying what they have dreamed up. They then, in turn, interpret all Bible verses in the light of their newly discovered Thessalonian thesis of the Rapture.

Their erroneous methods of interpretation are the reasons the Rapture has so many differing, contradicting advocates. When students leave sound hermeneutics, proper understanding flees the mind. Faulty misunderstandings have produced the Rapture fallacy. For more details, see Jack Williams' lesson on "Keys To Understanding The Book of Revelation."

The rapturist responds, "You don't believe that Jesus is coming again, do you?" Wait a minute, that is not what we said. We said, "The Bible does not teach the doctrine of 'The Rapture'." Of course Bible students believe in the second coming. To deny that the Bible teaches the Rapture is not a denial of Christ's second coming. Bible writers clearly taught, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 4:15), though not a one said that Jesus will descend again and again (to some, again and again and again). Quoting verses which teach the second coming and then applying them to teach the false theory of the Rapture, as the rapturist does, is misleading, and it is dangerous to the soul.

Simply because a passage contains the words "caught up" does not mean their elaborate explanations are biblical. Call to mind the rapturist's objection to our usage of Acts 23:10; 8:39; 1 Corinthians 12:2-4. In like manner, simply because 1 Thessalonians contains the idea of being caught up does not mean it teaches this disastrous doctrine.

We Need To Know Why "The Rapture" Doctrine is Wrong

Rapturists are wrong because they are inconsistent with plain commonsense. Let's apply what these folks are saying. Remember, according to the theory, pilots, mothers, talk show host ... wait ... mark off talk show host ... rulers, teachers, politicians ... wait ... mark off politicians ... will all of a sudden be missing from the earth. With this in mind, we wonder. When pilots are raptured out of the cockpit, will the child passengers be killed in the crash? What will happen to the babies? Will babies of Christian parents who have been raptured be left without parents? When a Christian mother of a one year baby is raptured out of her car which she is driving at seventy-five miles an hour on the turnpike, will the baby be killed in the crash? Or, will babies be caught up as well? If there are no babies, then the earth will forgo repopulation for the seven year period of tribulation. None of these questions are addressed in the Bible—because the Rapture is an erroneous theory from the fertile imaginations of carnal men.

Rapturists are wrong because Spirit-inspired rapturists tell us that Spirit-inspired rapturists are wrong. All rapturists believe that they are directly guided by the Holy Spirit to understand 1 Thessalonians

4. Yet, each says the other is wrong concerning his so-called Spirit-guided theory of the tribulation. The truth is none of them are inspired. They all speak from their own imagination.

Rapturists are wrong because the Bible teaches only two comings. The Old Testament taught that the Messiah would come, and the New Testament and other historical documents declare that He came. The New Testament teaches He will come again—not again and again. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). Therefore, since the Bible clearly speaks of a second time and it does not even hint of a third or fourth coming, 1 Thessalonians 4 is speaking of Jesus second, and only other, coming.

Rapturists are wrong because the Bible teaches only one resurrection, not the two or more necessary for the rapture theory. All shall be raised at the same time; that is, "the last day" (John 5:28-29; 6:39-40, 44-45, 54). All shall be judged at the same time; that is, "the last day" (John 12:48). Since it is impossible to have two *last* days, believers and unbelievers will be raised on the same day, one unto condemnation and the other unto eternal life.

Rapturists are wrong because the Bible teaches Christ's second coming will not be silent and invisible (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Paul speaks of a trumpet blast and a shout. Doesn't sound too silent to me! For more details see Perry Cotham's lesson "What Will Happen When Christ Returns?" and Tom Bright's lesson "The Second Coming of Christ - Premillennial, Postmillennial, or Amillennial?"

Rapturists are wrong because the Bible does not teach a seven year tribulation which shelters Christians from harm's way. It does speak of a great tribulation. Jesus predicted, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). According to historians, this was fulfilled. In *Wars*, book VI, Josephus, a first century eyewitness to the events, describes the calamity that befell the Jews. His language sounds very similar to the Lord's. Josephus said, "Jerusalem ... at last fell into the sorest of calamities again. Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were" (Preface, 1264). Later, he repeats the observation, saying, "I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly: That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries ... from the beginning of the world" (1695). The great tribulation is not the end of the world, but the end of Judaism. Jesus' prediction of a tribulation is not something that will be fulfilled in the twenty-first century, but it occurred, as Jesus predicted, in the first century. So says the historian; so says Jesus. To avoid tribulation, we must depart this world, wearing a white robe (John 16:33; Revelation 7:1-14). For more details see Steve Harbison's lesson "What and When Is 'The Great Tribulation'?"

Rapturists are wrong because the Bible does not teach the doctrine of a physical kingdom wherein Jesus physically rules over the whole earth. Actually, Old Testament prophecy precludes the Messiah from sitting on a physical throne, ruling from Judah (Jeremiah 22:30). For more details see Michael Hughes' lesson "Will Christ Have Physical Earthly Reign?"

Rapturists are wrong because the Bible does not teach a literal thousand year reign. For the moment, let us interpret John's words in Revelation 20:1-7 literally. Therefore, John saw a great *chain*, a

bottomless pit, *beheaded* souls and believer's foreheads marked up. Just as these things are not to be interpreted literally, we should not interpret other phrases in Revelation 20 literally. Another important detail to keep in mind is, according to the Bible writer, the beheaded saints lived only as long as they reigned (Revelation 20:4). When the reigning ceased after a thousand years, the meaning of language demands that the living also ceased. Modern versions saw this conflict with their millennial doctrine so they changed what the Bible writer said, incorrectly translating the phrase "lived and reigned" (KJV, NKJV, ASV) to "came to life and reigned" (NIV, NASB, RSV). Furthermore, John did not speak of numerous literal resurrections. For more details see Robert Taylor's lesson "Revelation 20 and the 'Thousand Year Reign'."

Conclusion:

A comparison of the popular concepts of the rapture with what the Bible actually teaches shows the popular concepts within the rapture have no biblical support.

Luke 19:11-14 teaches the proper sequence of events: From the Lord's viewpoint in the time frame of the first century, 1) Jesus would go into heaven, 2) He, while in heaven, would receive a kingdom and reign, 3) some would reject Him as the one to reign over them while He is away, 4) He would then return to reward the faithful and judge the unfaithful.

Listen and study each of the lessons that 39th Street has planned to present. Only then will you have a proper view of "Matters Pertaining To The End Of The World." On the other hand, if you do not listen, ignorance, superstition and doubt will be your only comfort. And that is no comfort!

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