

No confusion on the Pre Trib Rapture

We continue to receive many questions concerning the "Rapture" of the church and its apparent contrast with the "Second Coming" of Jesus Christ. Where does this strange view come from? Is the term "rapture" even in the Bible?

Clearly, the idea of the Rapture can be considered the most preposterous belief in Biblical Christianity. It reminds me of the famous quote by Dr. Richard Feynman, speaking of quantum physics:

I think it is safe to say that no one understands quantum mechanics... in fact, it is often stated of all the theories proposed in this century, the silliest is quantum theory. Some say that the only thing that quantum theory has going for it, in fact, is that it is unquestionably correct.

The situation regarding the doctrine of the Rapture is painfully similar.

The Harpázô

The mysterious event known as the Rapture is most clearly presented in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, in which he encourages the grieving Christians that, at the "great snatch," they will be reunited with those who have died in Christ before them.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. -1 *Thessalonians 4:13-18*

In verse 17, the English phrase "caught up" translates the Greek word *harpázô*, which means "to seize upon with force" or "to snatch up."

There are those who claim that the word "rapture" isn't in their Bible. That's because they aren't using the Latin translation:

*...deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul **rapiemur** cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus..* -1 Thessalonians 4:17 (Latin Vulgate)

The Latin equivalent of the Greek *harpázô* is the Latin verb *rapio*, "to take away by force." In the Latin Vulgate, one of the oldest Bibles in existence, the appropriate tense of *rapio* appears in verse 17. (*Raptus* is the past participle of *rapio*, and our English words "rapt" and "rapture" stem from this past participle.)

At the Rapture, living believers will be "caught up" in the air, translated into the clouds, in a moment in time, to join the Lord in the air.

The Promise

This will be the fulfillment of the promise which our Lord confirmed at the Last Supper:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. -*John 14:1-3*

This thrilling promise wasn't given to everyone, only to His believers. (Judas had already left by then.)

This appears to parallel the promise of the bridegroom in the pattern of the ancient Jewish wedding, where, after the *ketubah*, the engagement, but before the *chuppah*, the formal ceremony, the groom departed to prepare a new home for his bride, usually an addition to his father's house. The bride was kept in a

state of expectancy pending his return-often in the middle of the night, as a surprise.

(The *chuppah*, the wedding ceremony, was followed with a seven-day celebration, etc.)

The Process

The anticipation of a bodily resurrection after life on this earth pervades the entire Bible. In the oldest book of the Bible, Job declares:

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me. *-Job 19:25-27*

Yet, when our Lord comes to gather His church, there will be a generation alive at that time. In his discussion of the Resurrection in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul again deals with this astonishing event:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? *-1 Corinthians 15:51-55*

(From quantum physics considerations, I suspect that this transformation, "in the twinkling of an eye," will occur digitally in 10^{-43} of a second.)

The Imminent Gathering

Clearly, the Bible teaches us to expect Him at any moment. This is called the Doctrine of Imminency: it is next on the program and may take place very soon.

(The word "imminent" should not be confused with "immanent," which, in theological contexts, means that God is not only transcendent, or far above us, but that He is always with us and active on our behalf. Nor should it be confused with "eminent," which is a title of honor reserved for persons of outstanding distinction.)

Imminency expresses hope and a warm spirit of expectancy,³ which should result in a victorious and purified life. Believers are taught to expect the Savior from heaven at any moment.

Paul seemed to include himself among those who looked for Christ's return. Timothy was admonished to "keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jewish converts were reminded that "yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Some have concluded that the expectation of some were so strong they had stopped work and had to be exhorted to return to their jobs, and have patience.

Two Events?

There are many that hold to the view that emerged in the Medieval church (Catholic and Protestant) that the "Second Coming" of Christ and the "Rapture" are somehow the same. Yet there seems to be a number of indications that these are distinct and separate.

In contrast to the imminent gathering of His church, there are numerous passages that deal with precedent events which must transpire prior to the "Second Coming" to establish His kingdom on the earth. Some of the passages referring to the Rapture and the Second Coming are summarized in the table below.

Rapture	Second Coming
John 14:1-3	Dan 2:44-45
Rom 8:19	Dan 7:9-14
1 Cor 1:7-8	Dan 12:1-3
1 Cor 15:1-53	Zech 14:1-15
1 Cor 16:22	Matt 13:41
Phil 3:20-21	Matt 24:15-31
Col 3:4	Matt 26:64
1 Thess 1:10	Mark 13:14-27
1 Thess 2:19	Mark 14:62
1 Thess 4:13-18	Luke 21:25-28
1 Thess 5:9	Acts 1:9-11
1 Thess 5:23	Acts 3:19-21
2 Thess 2:1 (3?)	1 Thess 3:13
1 Tim 6:14	2 Thess 1:6-10
2 Tim 4:1	2 Thess 2:8
Titus 2:13	2 Peter 3:1-14
Heb 9:28	Jude 14-15
James 5:7-9	Rev 1:7
1 Peter 1:7, 13	Rev 19:11-20:6
1 John 2:28-3:2	Rev 22:7, 12, 20
Jude 21	
Rev 2:25	
Rev 3:10	

Why So Many Views?

There are, of course, many differing views, especially regarding matters of eschatology - the study of "last things." This diversity derives from several factors: the disciplines associated with hermeneutics - the theory of interpretation - as well as the need to integrate an understanding of the entirety of God's revealed plan of redemption: "the whole counsel of God."

The need to relate the various elements of end-time events, such as the Great Tribulation, the events surrounding the Seventieth Week of Daniel, the Millennium, and other related issues, requires precise definitions and diligent study. We will address many of these in our subsequent articles in the hopes that they will prove helpful in understanding these issues and assisting you in formulating your own views regarding these challenges. (We will discover that some of the principal controversies are more an issue of ecclesiology than eschatology! But more of this next time.)

These are not "peripheral" issues (as they may have seemed in the past). We believe we are being plunged into a period of time about which the Bible says more than it does about any other period of human history-including the time that Jesus walked the shore of the Sea of Galilee and climbed the mountains of Judea! It is the most exciting time to be alive! But if we are to be diligent stewards, we need to carefully revise our priorities to match His!