

The Rapture

Rapture – the word itself

- From the Latin
 - *Rapio*
 - “To snatch or to seize”
 - “To remove by force from one place to another”
 - Latin word used in 1 Th. 4:17 (English, “caught up”)

Its Foundation: an Exegetical Dilemma



Apparent Conflicts

- Passages that indicate Christ’s return will be sudden and unexpected.
- Passages that indicate that certain signs will precede Christ’s return.

Proposed Solutions

- 1) Deny imminency & argue that the signs have not been fulfilled.
- 2) Redefine the signs so you can still believe in imminency.
- 3) Deny that there will be any signs before Christ comes for His church.

The Primary Views

- Three primary views
- Based on their relationship to the Tribulation period
 - Pre-tribulation: before the Tribulation
 - Mid-tribulation: during the tribulation
 - Post-tribulation: after the Tribulation

Its Meaning: a Preliminary Explanation

- First stage:
 - The Rapture
 - Just before the Tribulation begins
 - Christ will come in the air
 - For his saints
 - To take the saints back to heaven
- Second stage:
 - The Second Coming, or the Revelation in Glory
 - After the Tribulation
 - Christ will return to earth
 - With his saints
 - To defeat his enemies and establish his earthly kingdom

Distinctions

- The Rapture of the Church (1 Th. 4:15-17)
 - Christ gathers His own.
 - Resurrection is prominent.
 - Christ comes to reward.
 - Believers depart the earth.
 - Unbelievers remain on the earth.
- The Revelation in Glory (Matt. 24-25)
 - Angels gather the elect.
 - No mention of resurrection.
 - Christ comes to judge.
 - Unbelievers are taken away.
 - Believers remain on the earth.

Its Defense: the Biblical Data

- **General Arguments**
 - Imminency
 - Promise of protection from God's wrath
 - Entire period (The Day of the Lord) will be characterized by divine wrath.
 - Cf. Rev. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:1; 16:1, 19
 - Time of God's judgment (Rev. 14:7; 15:4; 16:5-7; 19:2).
 - Its purpose: to judge those that live on the earth (Rev. 6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:8).
 - A world-wide outpouring of wrath (Is. 24:1-6, 21; 34:2).

Promise of protection from God's wrath

- Rom. 5:9 – Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.
- 1 Th. 1:10 – to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.
- 1 Th. 5:9 – God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2 Th. 2:11-13 – For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. 13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.
- Rev. 3:10 – 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

Its Defense: the Biblical Data

- **General Arguments**
 - Imminency
 - Promise of protection from God's wrath
 - The Absence of the Church on Earth in Rev. 6-18
 - Paul's expression in Phil. 3:11
 - Phil. 3:11 – in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
 - Lit., "the resurrection out from among the corpses" (similar in Luke 20:35-36).

Its Defense: the Biblical Data

- **General Arguments**
 - Definition & use of the Greek word *harpazo*
 - Translated as "caught up" in 1 Th. 4:17
 - 14x in the NT
 - Matt. 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28, 29; Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; Jude 23; Rev. 12:5
 - Literally, "to be snatched away."
 - John 10:28 – I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.
 - Acts 8:39 – When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.
 - Rev. 12:5 – And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Its Defense: the Biblical Data

- **General Arguments**
- **Major Texts**
 - John 14:1-3
 - 1 Cor. 15:51-57
 - 1 Th. 4:13-18

Its Weaknesses: an Honest Assessment

- **The Primary Weaknesses**
 - When: introduced only 180 years ago (Dec. 1826-Jan. 1827)
 - By Whom: introduced by John Nelson Darby, the father of Dispensationalism
 - Not Explicit: the absence of an explicit statement of the pre-tribulation Rapture.
 - The connection of 1 Th. 4:13-18 and 1 Th. 5:1-11
 - Rev. 20:4-6: the resurrection (and therefore the rapture) follows the Tribulation

Some Possible Answers

- When: the concepts and even expressions of the Rapture predate Darby.
 - Imminency: Clement of Rome; Ignatius of Antioch; The Didache; The Epistle of Barnabas; The Shepherd of Hermas
 - Early medieval period (4-6th centuries) sermon:
 - "All the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the Tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."
 - Joseph Mede became the father of English Premillennialism with his work *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627).
 - Peter Jurieu in *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687): Christ will return with his saints to heaven before the end and his final return.
 - John Gill's commentary (1748) and that of Philip Doddridge (1738) both speak of an imminent return and use the term *rapture*.
 - James MacKnight (1763): the righteous will escape the time of judgment upon the earth in heaven.

Some Possible Answers

- **By Whom**
 - Much Augustine and Luther espoused we would reject.
- **Not Explicit**
 - The other views are not explicit either.

Some Possible Answers

- The connection between 1 Th. 4 & 5
 - Paul's use of the Greek phrase "*peri de*" (translated as "now" in the NAS) in 1 Th. 5:1
 - 18x in the NT; in all but 4 it denotes a change in time or topic.
 - Paul uses this expression 8x; all 8 mark a change in topic or time.
 - That's even how he uses it within this same letter (cf. 1 Th. 4:9)

Some Possible Answers

- Rev. 20:4-6: the only ones that John says will be resurrected at that time are those who died under the persecution of Antichrist during the Tribulation.

Weaknesses of the Other Views

- Mid-tribulation Rapture
 - Undermines imminency.
 - 2 Th. 2:1ff refers to events preceding the Day of the Lord, not the rapture of the church.
 - Requires a re-definition of God's wrath.

Weaknesses of the Other Views

- Post-tribulation Rapture
 - Denying or redefining those passages that clearly imply imminency.
 - The dearth of clear Scriptures about a post-tribulation rapture.
 - Weak exegesis of Revelation 3:10
 - Shaky historical argument
 - Ignoring the clear sequence of events in 1 Th. 4 & 5

Its Usefulness: the Practical Application

- Live in expectation of Christ's return.
 - Titus 2:11-14
- Use the rapture to find comfort and to comfort others, when facing the death of believers.
 - 1 Th. 4:18 – Therefore comfort one another with these words.
- Be steadfast in the knowledge of his imminent coming.
 - Jam. 5:8—strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Its Usefulness: the Practical Application

- Treat other Christians with kindness and respect.
 - Jam. 5:9 – “Do not complain, brethren, against one another.
 - For two reasons:
 - 1) God's judgment is impartial – so that you yourselves may not be judged.
 - 2) God's judgment is imminent – behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.
- Pray more in light of the imminent return.
 - 1 Pet. 4:7— The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.

Its Usefulness: the Practical Application

- Be faithful to the assembly of believers.
 - Heb. 10:24-25— let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
- Be diligent to pursue holiness.
 - 1 John 3:2-3— Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Its Usefulness: the Practical Application

- Rejoice that you will never experience the wrath of God.
 - In the Great Tribulation
 - Rev. 3:10 – 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.
 - In eternity
 - Rom. 5:9-10 – Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of *God* through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.