

The Rapture: **part 1.**

The Rapture, the Tribulation and the Millennium: these three are the bulk of what we understand from *Eschatology: the study of last things*. Afterward, they will be followed by the Final Judgment and Eternity... although we are in eternity now: we will live forever, with the Lord Jesus Christ and each other, for all eternity.

The Rapture: At an unknown time, which could be at any moment, the Lord Jesus Christ will come down into the clouds, bringing with Him, all true Christians who have died during the time of the Church; He will gather all their dead physical bodies from all over the Earth. In the next instant, all we true believers, who are still alive, will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. In that moment, all of our earthly bodies, those who had died and those still alive, will be changed, in an instant, into glorious, eternal bodies like that of the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. All of that will happen so quickly that Paul describes it as, 'in the twinkling of an eye.'

This is the time of which Jesus spoke: *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.* ² *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.* ³ *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

This is the time of which Paul wrote: *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep (those who have died), that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.* ¹⁴ *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also, which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.* ¹⁵ *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, (Jesus Christ had personally told Paul these things) that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (go up before) them which are asleep (have died).* ¹⁶ *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:* ¹⁷ *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.* ¹⁸ *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.* 1 Thes 4:13

Paul also wrote: *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *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.* ⁵³ *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* 1 Cor 15:51

Paul referenced the Rapture time and time again in almost every letter to the Churches. To Titus, he wrote: *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,* ¹² *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;* ¹³ **Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.** Titus 2:11

Paul wrote, further, '...and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;' ¹⁰ **And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.'** 1 Thes 1:9 'The wrath to come' refers to the 7-year Tribulation which will happen soon after the Rapture.

And: *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:* ²¹ **Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body...** Phpp 3:20

John repeats the truth that our bodies will be changed into glorious eternal bodies and he makes clear the reason we are told about nearness of the coming Rapture of the Saints: *Beloved, now are we 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.* ³ *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.* 1John 3:2

Paul and John are explaining to us: if we understand that the Lord Jesus Christ could call us up to Himself at any moment, then we are far more apt to *walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we've been called.*

We know that we will be called up, in the Rapture, before the Tribulation begins because Jesus said so when He gave John His message to the Church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3: *Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (the Tribulation)*¹¹ *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.* Rev 3:10

We also know, from Jesus description of His return at the Rapture that there will be nothing unusual about that time: it will be nothing like His return at Armageddon when the entire world's forces will be gathered at Jerusalem, attempting to prevent Jesus Christ's return.

Of the time of the Rapture He said that it would be like the times of Noah and Lot, that the world would be 'just going along as normal:' *For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark,*³⁹ *And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*⁴⁰ *Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*⁴¹ *Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*⁴² *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.* Matt 24 *And: Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;*²⁹ *But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*³⁰ *Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed... I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.*³⁵ *Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*³⁶ *Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.* Luke 17

Clearly, as any honest person can plainly see, the time Jesus describes here is nothing like what the condition of the World will be when He returns at Armageddon. But these are the areas of Scripture which are discounted by those who deny the reality of the Pre-Tribulational, Rapture.

Many today deny the truth of the Rapture. They claim that it was 'invented' in 1828 by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. That is absolutely false! They call it the 'secret' Rapture doctrine. The only thing secret about the Rapture is the day it will occur. Nothing else about it is secret as if done in darkness or the shadows. The understanding of the truth and nature of the Rapture was well known to the Early Church.

Irenaeus (130 A.D. – 202 AD) was a bishop of the church in Lyons, France. He was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, to whom Jesus Christ revealed the Book of Revelation! Irenaeus, in his writings on Bible prophecy, referenced the phrase “a time, times and dividing of times” from Daniel 7 to signify the 7-year Tribulation with the 2nd half being the reign of the Antichrist as absolute king of the World before Jesus Christ returns at Armageddon. Irenaeus also believed in a literal Millennium, the 1000 year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, on Earth, following His Second Coming and the resurrection 'of the just.' He also believed what he'd been taught regarding the Rapture: He wrote: And therefore, **when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up** from this, it is said, “(then) **There shall be tribulation** such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.” This is obviously the writing of a believer who understood the truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture followed by the 7-year Tribulation. Irenaeus was only one generation removed from the Apostle John's writing of The Revelation; he believed and wrote of the Rapture, using the same phrase Paul used, 'caught up!' He quoted Paul in 'caught up' and he quoted Jesus from Matt 24: *“There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.”*

Cyprian (200 AD – 258 AD) – He was Bishop of the church in Carthage. During his time as leader of the church, he shepherded the Church through terrible persecution in the Roman Empire. Several of his writings still exist today. In Treatises of Cyprian he wrote about the Great Tribulation: “We who see that terrible things have begun, and know that still more terrible things are imminent, may regard it as the greatest advantage **to depart from it as quickly as possible. Do you not (Don't) you give God thanks, do you not congratulate**

yourself, that by an early departure you are taken away, and delivered from the shipwrecks and disasters that are imminent? Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, **which snatches us hence, and sets us free from the snares of the world and restores us to paradise and the kingdom.**"

Ephraim (306 AD – 373 AD) was the bishop of Nisibis. He wrote: ... "Woe to those who desire to see the day of the Lord!" ... **For 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..."

Obviously, we are reading of several early Church Fathers writing about the pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church followed by the Tribulation.

The early Church Fathers clearly believed the truth of the Rapture. But during these same 'early' years, heresy was sneaking in as well. The understanding of the truth of the Rapture was soon lost along with the clear teaching of Revelation and the Tribulation. Understanding of the End Times began to be seen as allegory; this heresy originated with Origen (185-254 A. D.) and was made much more prominent by Augustine (354-420 A. D.), known as the 'father of Roman Catholicism.' Soon after, the Church endured a millennium of darkness, only beginning to come back to light, and life, with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century.

The understanding of the Rapture was lost to the Church with the growth of Roman Catholicism; the view that Revelation and End Times Prophecy, should be seen as allegory, became dominant. They began to believe, and teach, that the Church has taken the place of Israel and all the promises to Israel are, instead, intended for the Church, the great Mother Church, the Roman Catholic Church. The truth of the Rapture was lost, and so was the truth of our Salvation by God's Grace alone, through our faith in Jesus Christ alone, based on His Word alone, the Bible. Catholicism denied all of this.

The truth of Salvation by Grace was only regained in the 16th Century with the Protestant Reformation just as the re-understanding of the truth of the Rapture was only regained in the early 19th Century with the Plymouth Brethren.

Those who deny the Rapture say that it is not found in the Bible. It most definitely is! Just as we see it taught in the many Scriptures above, we see it most clearly where Paul wrote: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up together** with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air...'

The Greek word Paul used for 'caught up together' was **harpazo**. This same word was used in Acts regarding Philip, after he baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch: '*And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **caught away Philip**, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.'* Acts 8:39 Philip was snatched away by the Holy Spirit and deposited 30 miles away. Very same Greek word.

Paul, writing of himself having been taken up to Heaven, where Jesus Christ personally taught him all our doctrine for the Church, wrote: '*I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, ... such an one **caught up to the third heaven**... ⁴ How that he was **caught up** into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 2 Cor 12:2* Both of these times, Paul used the Greek word: **harpazo**!

Harpazo means: to seize, to carry off by force, to seize on, claim for one's self eagerly, to snatch out or away.

When Jerome translated Bible to Latin in A.D. 402, he translated harpazo with the Latin word: Rapiemur, from rapio, from which we get: Rapture! From this word we have the English: 'raptors:' eagles, hawks, ospreys, owls: birds that snatch their prey and carry it away by force are Raptors. We see videos of eagles flying over lakes; they swoop down and rapture a fish, carrying it away to the place the eagle had prepared for its chicks.

Those who claim that the Rapture is not found in Scripture or that the word used does not mean to be snatched away by force, have refused to do even the simplest research; they are either dishonest or willingly ignorant, choosing to believe lies that comport to their preconceived ideas of Biblical truth. So many, today, simply parrot what their religious heroes have said or written instead of doing their own research... like the Bereans of old.

The truths of the pre-millennial Rapture and Tribulation are not just secondary issues which should be jettisoned for the sake of *unity*. To be sure, we don't shun friends or relatives when they disagree with us and we must always sacrificially love true believers whatever their doctrinal understandings but... but... this truth is, in fact, a primary issue in relation to where we choose to align ourselves with a local church body. If the leadership of a church deny these important and obviously Biblical doctrines then we must wonder, 'What other important doctrines are they choosing to deny, replacing them with a false social gospel of good works while seeking the love and acceptance of a national and world-wide culture which denies and even hates the Lord Jesus Christ and all who truly belong to Him. If a pastor chooses to ignore or disbelieve these obvious truths in God's Word, then he is really no shepherd at all! What is the reason the Lord Jesus Christ gave this truth to Paul, this previously unknown mystery of the Church as the Bride of Jesus Christ and her final removal to the place He has specially prepared for her? He gave these truths to Paul and, by extension, to every true pastor/shepherd who would follow Paul, for the purpose of comfort and encouragement as our loved ones would die and as the culture in this kingdom of darkness would become ever more hostile, hateful and murderous toward His Bride. If a pastor does not embrace this charge, from the Lord Jesus Christ, to teach, lead, encourage and comfort his flock, what use is he?

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. ¹⁸ *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.* 1 Thes 4:17

The Rapture is the culmination of our eternal salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ won for us through His miraculous birth, sinless life, sacrificial death and supernatural resurrection. The Rapture is the moment our sinful physical bodies are finally recreated, in an instant, from sick and sinful into glorified eternal bodies like that of the Lord Jesus Christ, never again to face sickness, death or the temptation to sin. God chose and elected each one of us for Himself, before the foundation of the World; He created us in our mothers' wombs and He revealed Himself to us as He drew us to Himself by His Grace through our faith, unto eternal life. Our souls and spirits became eternal, never to die, at the moment of our salvation and at the Rapture our physical bodies will be recreated to join our souls and spirits into an everlasting trinity, having finally, and truly, been remade in the image and likeness of God.

Next time, we will continue on with more of, the Rapture!