THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The idea of the Rapture has caused a lot of controversy among Christians. Books have been written to both deny and defend it. Great debates have been waged over the timing of the Rapture. Some preachers and theologians deny the existence of a Rapture at all!

The three classic passages on the Rapture of the Church are 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and John 14:1-3. These three comprise the clearest teaching on the subject in the Bible, but by no means is that all that the Bible says. We cannot dismiss it for lack of evidence. Paul almost camps on it and gives us a very full explanation. Given the evidence only a willful unbeliever could not believe in the fact of the Rapture. The real debate is over its timing!

I. THE IDEA OF THE RAPTURE IS NOT NEW.

Some teachers insist that the Rapture is a recent invention by 19th century dispensationalists such as John Nelson Darby. They say that there is no support in church history for teaching of a Rapture distinct from the 2ND Advent before 1830. Not so!

Matthew Henry commented on 1 Thess 4 in the early 1700’s.

The first care of the Redeemer in that day will be about his dead saints; he will raise them before the great change passes on those that shall be found alive: so that those who did not sleep in death will have no greater privilege or joy at that day than those who fell asleep in Jesus. (3.) Those that shall be found alive will then be changed. They shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, v. 17. At, or immediately before, this rapture into the clouds, those who are alive will undergo a mighty change, which will be equivalent to dying. This change is so mysterious that we cannot comprehend it: we know little or nothing of it, 1 Co. 15:51. Only, in the general, this mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies will be made fit to inherit the kingdom of God, which flesh and blood in its present state are not capable of. This change will be in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Co. 15:52), in the very instant, or not long after the raising up of those that sleep in Jesus. And those who are
raised, and thus changed, shall meet together in the clouds, and there meet with their Lord, to congratulate him on his coming...¹

Thomas Ice, wrote an article entitled “Examining an Ancient Pre-Trib Rapture Statement” as early as the 4 century AD.

“All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.”

Pseudo-Ephraem (c. 374-627)

II. THE BIBLE TEACHES THE FACT OF A FUTURE RAPTURE OF SAINTS

The Rapture (lit. the catching away) cannot be denied. Some claim that since the word “rapture” is not found in the English Bible therefore, it is not a biblical idea. That is an intentional deception! The word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible. Does that make it unbiblical? Not at all!

The word “Rapture” is simply the Latin term for the Greek verb “snatch away” found in 1 Thess 4:17! The Greek word is “harpadzo” and it means “to seize, catch up, snatch away”) The verb is used of a thief who breaks into someone’s house and grabs some item by force and runs out of the house with it.

ILLUS: When Donna and I were newly-weds living in our apartment in Dallas, the neighborhood, at that time, was not the best part of town. We were walking on the sidewalk toward the neighborhood drug store, when a young man holding a large carton of cigarettes came running out of the store directly toward us. As he passed, I said hi, and he replied “hi” back, as he ran by us. Just then employees came running out of the after him yelling- “thief, thief!” He ran down the road and disappeared before they could catch him. What he had done was seize a whole carton of cigarettes and simply run out the door with it.

That is exactly what is going to happen to all believers on earth when Jesus comes in the Rapture. The difference is; Jesus isn’t stealing someone else’s property, He’s coming to claim his own!

A. The verb is a 1st person plural, future, passive indicative. It must be translated, “We shall be caught up.” First note that it is a Future tense. Paul predicts a day will come when we all (plural) Christians will be snatched up and away by some supernatural work of Christ.

B. The passive voice tells us that this is an act done by Christ upon us, rather than something we ourselves do. This text describes a supernatural event of resurrection of the dead and translation of those Christians living on earth at that time.

The context allows no other interpretation. It is not the souls of believers that are snatched away but the actual physical bodies of believers that are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. First the dead are raised and then the living are translated. To call such an idea preposterous is to betray one’s own unbelief in the face of the clear Word of God! The fact that they are said to meet the Lord in the air above planet surface rather than on the ground makes it even more clear! This is “the Great Lift –Off”: “The Snatch Away”: The Blessed Hope. The Resurrection-Rapture of the church.

III. THE RAPTURE INVOLVES BOTH A RESURRECTION OF DEAD SAINTS AND THE TRANSLATION OF LIVING SAINTS OF THE CHURCH

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 “the dead in Christ shall rise first”

When you think this event remember it is Resurrection/ Rapture. Both the resurrected saints and the raptured ones meet the Lord in the air. But there is a specified order. According to Paul the dead saints are physically raised to life immediately prior to the living saints being physically changed. (It may be only a millisecond)

2. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NASB)

🔗 Not all church believers will experience death. Some will be alive at the time Jesus returns.
All believers in Christ will be transformed and glorified. The Rapture includes the whole church – not just a part of it. Therefore the “partial rapture theory” cannot be true.

Dead saints will be raised in glorified bodies, while living saints will be transformed to an imperishable state without dying.

Physical resurrection--transformation is the Christian hope.

The transformation described here is nearly instantaneous requiring only a moment or the blink of an eye. (1/60\textsuperscript{th} of a second)

3. **This is a passage of Comfort for the Believer**

SLIDE: Read 1 Thess 4:13

Note that the dead are not dead in the final sense of that word, but have “fallen asleep in Jesus” indicating that they will rise again. (Neither this text, nor any other, teaches “soul sleep.” At death the soul-spirit of believers is separated from the body until Resurrection Day.

Paul’s purpose here is to mitigate the grief of those believers who have lost loved ones in death. This is a passage of comfort. It answers the question, “What happens to those Christians who die before Christ comes?”

Apparently, Paul had taught and Christians were expecting the imminent return of Jesus Christ! The Thessalonians wondered, “Will those who have died miss out on the return of Jesus?” Paul assures them they are included too! The coming of Christ includes both a resurrection of dead believers and a translation of the living! Dead saints of all the ages will not miss “the blessed hope.” All saints share in it- not just those translated. Don’t misunderstand, The Blessed Hope is not simply being alive at the time of the rapture, but is the return of Christ for his own in which ALL will share!

IV. **THE RAPTURE PRECEDES CHRIST’S PHYSICAL RETURN TO EARTH**

Paul’s point is that this event precedes Christ’s physical return to earth. **The question is “By how much?”** Three positions are defined by the answer to that question.

1) A few seconds or minutes Post-Trib
2) About 3 1/2 years  Mid-Trib or Pre-Wrath  
3) About 7 years  Pre-Trib  

All true Bible believing Christians must accept the literal, physical, bodily return of Christ to planet earth as predicted in Acts 1:11 at the end of this age. The question is the relationship between this snatch-away and the physical return of Christ.

V. THE RAPTURE WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY FOUR DIVINE ACTIONS  
   ⊗ The Lord descends from heaven  
   (although it does not say he comes to earth)  
   ⊗ Christ issues a Cry of Command –  
   like “Lazarus come forth”  
   ⊗ The Voice of the Archangel –  
   angels appear to have a part  
   ⊗ The Trumpet of God sounds  
   The Hebrew Trumpet of Assembly?  
   The Roman Trumpet signaling the army to move out?”

VI. THE RAPTURE IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE 2ND ADVENT  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAPTURE</th>
<th>2ND ADVENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Believers meet the Lord in the air and Jesus does not come to earth.</td>
<td>Jesus comes to earth where he meets believers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possible at any moment (imminent) no signs precede it</td>
<td>Proceeded by signs and a clearly identifiable timeline.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deals with the church</td>
<td>Deals with Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes us to his Father’s House</td>
<td>Establishes his kingdom on the earth</td>
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VII. THE SEVEN BEST REASONS FOR A PRE-TRIB RAPTURE  

1. JOHN CHAPTER 14 IMPLIES A PRE-TRIB RAPTURE
2. **Believers are promised to be kept out of the period of testing not just protected through it.**

Revelation 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 upon the earth.*

3. **The 70 weeks of Daniel 9 refer to Daniel’s people, Israel and the holy city, Jerusalem, NOT TO THE CHURCH. so they should not include the church which is a separate program between the 69th and 70th weeks.** Daniel 9:24-27

4. **A pretribulation rapture is the only position that provides a coming of Christ which could happen at any time (doctrine of imminence).**

*Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.*

5. **The concern of believers only makes sense if they expected the Rapture to arrive before the Day of the Lord. 2 Thess 2:1-2**

“No, now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”

6. **BELIEVERS ARE WAITING (STANDING IN READINESS) FOR JESUS CHRIST, NOT THE ANTICHRIST. 1 Thess 1:9-10**

7. **THE PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE BEST EXPLAINS HOW NON-GLORIFIED PEOPLE ENTER THE EARTHLY KINGDOM**

VII. APPLICATION OF THE TEACHING OF THE RAPTURE