

CHAPTER 2

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF RAPTURE PASSAGES

Introduction and Background

Based on the problem addressed and the terms defined in chapter 1, an exegetical study follows of the primary passages normally attributed to the Rapture of the Church: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-54. Additionally, other passages that relate to these primary passages will be incorporated into the study. Before the exegesis, however, a brief foundational study of the concept of biblical time will be made.

The concept of time was created for humanity by God (Gen 1:14-19). However, God is love, spirit and light (1 John 4:8, 16; John 4:23-24; 1 John 1:5) and exists in/at the speed of light; where, according to Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, there is no time (just eternity, infinity—Ps 90:2). Therefore, the purpose of time rests within God's creation (Eccl 8:5-6; Prov 16:4). Time had a beginning (Gen 1:14), is linear (proceeding since its creation in a line, not a circle—Luke 2:4; 3:23-38; 17:22-30; 21:7-28; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-11), is finite, quantifiable and measurable (Gen 1:14; 8:22; Gal 4:10), is part of the space-time continuum (Dan 2:20-22, 28-45; 9:1-2, 24-27; 12:8-13; 2 Cor 12:1-4; Rev 1:9-19; 4:1-2), and will cease as one knows it when its purpose is completed (Gen 8:22; Rev 21:1-6a). This concept of time is communicated in Hebrew primarily by the word, *et*,¹ which can mean linear time, but more often is associated with specific events and is translated *kairos* in Greek. *Yom* is also used in Hebrew to communicate a

¹Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., "et," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 564-6.

unit of time, most often day or today.² In Greek, the concept of linear or chronological time is communicated primarily by the word, *chronos*—from which is derived the word chronology, the study of time. This concept of time is perceived quantitatively as measured by successive objects, events, or moments.³ However, when God steps into time (or eternity coincides with time as one knows it), it is known as *kairos* time, meaning, “season, opportune time or time of accomplishment.” This concept of time is perceived qualitatively and is affected by influence, prevalence or period of accomplishment. The plural form of *kairos* is translated seasons and means times at which certain foreordained events take place.⁴

The primary example of *kairos* time is the incarnation (spoken of as being in “the fullness of time” by Gal 4:4). Examples of *kairos* time from the Old Testament are: God walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall (Gen 1:27 – 3:24, a coexistent relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* as God originally designed, which separated after the Fall); Enoch’s Rapture to heaven (Gen 5:21-24); Noah’s covenant with God (Gen 8:20 – 9:17); God confusing the people at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9); Job’s conversations with God (Job 38 – 42:9); Abraham’s covenant with God (Gen 15, 17), three visitors (Gen 18), and the sacrificing of Isaac (Gen 22:1-18); Jacob wrestling with the Angel and being renamed Israel (Gen 32:24-32); Moses talking with God in the burning bush (Exod 3 – 4:16), during the Exodus (Exod 5 – 15), atop Mt. Sinai (Exod 19 – 31), and in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exod 40:34-38); Joshua talking with the Captain of the Lord’s Army (Josh 5:13-15); Elijah’s rapture to heaven (2 Kgs 2:1-13); and the

²Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., “yom,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 419-23.

³Zodhiates, “chronos,” *Dictionary*, 1487.

⁴Zodhiates, “kairos,” *Dictionary*, 805.

visions of Ezekiel and Daniel. More examples from the New Testament are: Jesus' baptism, the transfiguration, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and in the future—the Day of the Lord, the Second Coming, and the Millennium. The Garden of Eden, Jesus' life of Earth, and the Millennium all show God's intent for *kairos* time and *chronos* time to coexist.

Biblical time is centered around the purposes of God in relation to humanity and is communicated through the concepts of “Salvation History” and the “Kingdom of Heaven (God).”⁵ In Hebrew, kingdom of heaven, is rendered, *malkut samayim*,⁶ and in Greek, *basileia ton ouranon*.⁷ The kingdom of heaven is viewed as the spirit realm, the supernatural where God is and rules sovereignly. Jesus spent much of his time on earth teaching about the kingdom of heaven and that the kingdom came in and through him.⁸ In the Old Testament, time is viewed as prophetic and looking forward to the kingdom of heaven being restored by the coming of the Messiah (kingdom coming). In the New Testament, time is viewed as apocalyptic (kingdom initiated by Jesus, but not fully realized until his Second Coming). Apocalyptic time is previewed by Jesus' apocalyptic discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). However, apocalyptic time did not actually begin until after the completion of the atonement by the resurrection of Jesus (prophetic fulfillment of the Old Testament Messiah and beginning of the kingdom by Jesus). Apocalyptic time also looks forward to the Second Coming of Jesus and the

⁵Howard M. Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Critique of James D. G. Dunn*, Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), 2-3.

⁶Van Gemeren, vol. 2, “malkut,” 956-63; and Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., “samayim,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 160-6.

⁷Zodhiates, “basileia,” *Dictionary*, 325.

complete fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven on earth by the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ Therefore, it follows that when exegeting eschatological portions of Scripture, one must determine whether the context is prophetic eschatology or apocalyptic eschatology. The Gospels are set in prophetic eschatological time; whereas, the rest of the New Testament is set in apocalyptic eschatological time.¹⁰

Both of the primary Rapture passages were written by Paul in the setting and context of apocalyptic time. The first text was written as part of an epistle to the church at Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) between the years AD 50-52, to encourage the new believers in their faith despite the persecution they were facing. The two epistles to the Thessalonians contain more references to eschatology than any other of Paul's epistles. The second epistle was written within months of the first, as a follow-up.¹¹ The second text was written as part of the epistle to the church at Corinth (also in modern day Greece) around the year AD 55, to address many issues of concern as a result of disputes and factions in their congregation. Chapter 15 specifically addresses the bodily resurrection of Christ and thence of all believers "in Christ" sometime in the future.¹²

⁸Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 146, 199-202, 207-8, 220-1.

⁹Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 1-3.

¹⁰Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism: A Biblical Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 5.

¹¹Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 328-334.

¹²Elwell and Yarbrough, 288-290.

Paul mentions his personal rapture experience in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, when he was taken to the Third Heaven/Paradise. In this text, the word *harpazo* is specifically used by Paul to describe this experience. He also mentions that this rapture experience had occurred fourteen years earlier. Since the Second Epistle to the Corinthians was written around AD 56,¹³ his rapture experience would have occurred around AD 42 (during his silent years and probably in his home town of Tarsus, in modern day SE Turkey or Asia Minor). These silent years of Paul (up to the year AD 47 or 48, when he set out on his first missionary journey), were when most theologians believe Paul established his Christian theology, which would have included his personal rapture experience.

¹³Elwell and Yarbrough, 293.