

Uses of *Harpazo* and Related Terms by the Fathers

First, an exploration of the uses of *harpazo* by the Fathers, and then of other Greek terms related to it (*allasso*, *anabaino*, *analambano*, *apostasis*, as a departure, *ekpheugo*, *epairo*, *episunagoge*, *metamorphoo*, *metatithemi*, *poreuomai*, and *sozo*) will be conducted. Of the uses of *harpazo*, the only concern is with the ones relating to rapture. There are five other uses of *harpazo* by the Fathers relating to: (1) snatch, seize and carry off, (2) claim, take, (3) met, claim, appropriate, (4) overpower, rule, and (5) rescue.¹ The citation for “rescue” will be addressed after the ones for rapture.

The first three citations have to do with Paul’s reference to his personal rapture in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Caesarius Nazianzenus (4th century) makes reference to Paul being raptured to Paradise in his *dialogi.142*. Didymus Alexandrinus (d. 398) makes reference to Paul’s humility in explaining his rapture experience in his *fragmenta in 2 Cor*. Finally, John Chrysostom (d. 407) discourages speculations on its exact nature and addresses the reason for it (to justify Paul being an Apostle) in his *homiliae in 2 Cor.26.1*.² There has been further conjecture about the purpose for Paul’s rapture and subsequent revelations. Hicks believes that the Lord caught Paul up to heaven to reveal to him about the Rapture of the Church, which he then outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15.³

The next set of citations address other raptures. Macarius Aegyptius (Magnus, d. 390), in a direct reference to the Rapture of the Church, speaks of the bodies of the saints, “which will be

¹G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 228-9.

²Lampe, 1:229, par. 6a.

³Hicks, 24-26.

caught up into heaven by glory which is in their souls on earth,” in his *homiliae spirituales*.6.11. Didymus Alexandrinus mentions the rapture of Elijah in his *fragmenta in 2 Cor.12.2*. Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399) speaks of reaching a rapturous state of being while in prayer in his *de oratione*.52. Philoxenus (d. 523) speaks of the rapture of Ezekiel in his *epistula*.3. Finally, Maximus Confessor (d. 662) speaks of the rapture of the mind while in prayer in his *capitulum de caritate quattuor centuriae*.2.6.⁴ The one citation dealing with the Rapture as a “rescue” is addressed next. Georgius Pisida Poeta (7th cent.) says that to your way of understanding, he is willing to rescue you from the bloody tribulation, in his *carmina in edita*.3.50.⁵

Episunagoge is mentioned as the eschatological gathering of the faithful to Christ by: Dionysius Alexandrinus (d. 264) in Eusebius’ *historia ecclesiasticae*.7.24.5, Eusebius (d. 399), himself, in his *demonstratio evangelica*.2.3, and Cyrillus Alexandrinus (d. 444) in his *commentarius in John*.3.4.⁶ *Metatithemi* (to translate persons) is used to address rapture by: Clement of Rome (1st cent.), to describe Enoch’s rapture in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.9.3; Irenaeus (d. 202), who says, “Enoch was translated, thus pointing out by anticipation the translation of the just and that those who were translated into Paradise, as a prelude to immortality will remain there until the completion of the age,” in his *Against Heresies*.5.5.1; Methodius (d. 311) in his *de resurrectione mortuorum*.3.5, and Hippolytus Thebanus (8th cent.) in his *fragmenta*.8c5 (both said that a Christian’s immortality was to begin

⁴Lampe, 1:229, par. 6b.

⁵Lampe, 1:229, par. 5.

⁶G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 536.

when their body was translated like Enoch's); and finally, Eusebius spoke of God figuratively translating Christians at the end of the age in his *preparatio evangelica*.7.8.⁷

Analambano (to take up into heaven) is used: in reference to Jesus' ascension by Justin Martyr (d. 165), Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (5th cent.); in reference to Elijah's ascension by Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), Origen (d. 254), Methodius and Athanasius again; in reference to John the Apostle's ascension by Hippolytus Thebanus (8th cent.); in reference to the ascension of the souls of Christians by Justin Martyr, Methodius, and Palladius Monachus (d. 431); and in reference to the ascension of Paul by Palladius Monachus again.⁸

Anabaino (to ascend or rise up to heaven) is used in reference to the ascension, ascending to the cross, and the transfiguration. This word is also used to speak of ascending from the earthly sphere to the heavenly sphere by Clement of Alexandria in his *stromateis*.4.1, Origen in his *Contra Celsum*.3.47, 6.6, and 7.46, referring to Romans 1:20, and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in his *de divinis moninibus*.5.7.⁹

Ekpheugo is used to mean escape, especially avoidance of eternal punishment, by Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110) in his *Epistle of Trallianeos*.2.1 and Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho*.138.3 and *First Apology*.68.2.¹⁰ *Apostasia* is used as meaning departure by the apocryphal apocalyptic book of *Domitio Mariae*. *Apostasis* is used to mean departure by

⁷G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 862, par. B2.

⁸Lampe, 1:109.

⁹Lampe, 1:94-95.

¹⁰Lampe, 2:442.

Clement of Alexandria in his *stromateis*.4.22.¹¹ The Greek words relating to rapture not used at all by the Fathers are: *epairo*, *poreuomai*, *allasso*, and *sozo*.

As can be seen from the above citations, the Fathers had an understanding of the concept of rapture, referred to the Old Testament raptures of Enoch and Elijah and the New Testament raptures of Paul, John, and Jesus, and even made eight specific references to the rapture of Christians (four of which could be construed as referring to the Rapture of the Church). Next, to see if any direct references to the Rapture of the Church can be found in their writings. But before that, a brief word must be said about the Fathers' use of the Greek word *parousia*, as compared to *erchomai*, in relation to the Rapture, Second Coming or both.

¹¹Lampe, 1:208.