

Indirect References to the Rapture by the Fathers

Clement of Rome (30-100) spoke about the Rapture in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*. And, following the logical flow of his teaching from chapter to chapter yields the result of a pretribulation Rapture of the Church. As Irenaeus did, Clement first gives Enoch as an example and then mentions the Lord saving/delivering Noah (chap. 9). He mentions the Lord saving Lot (chap. 11) and Rahab (chap. 12) also. Then, he speaks specifically to the Church in chapter 23, [emphasis added] “Compare yourselves to a tree: take [for instance] the vine. First of all, it sheds its leaves, then it buds, next it puts forth leaves, and then it flowers; after that comes the sour grape, and then follows the ripened fruit. Ye perceive how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, ‘*Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;*’ and, ‘*The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look.*”¹ And following directly after this in chapter 24, “Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a *future resurrection*, of which He has rendered the *Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead.*”² Putting these two quotes together with the previous examples of the Lord delivering the righteous ones (Enoch, Noah, Lot, and Rahab), and interpreting “His temple” to mean, “His body” (Body of Christ/Church) from his reference to “first-fruits” as in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, speaks to the Rapture of the Church. This is confirmed in chapters 34 and 35 by Clement addressing the rewards for those “who may be made partakers of His great and glorious promises”³ and “Let us therefore strive to be found in the number of

¹Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 23 (ANF 1:11).

²Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 24 (ANF 1:11).

³Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 34 (ANF 1:14).

those that wait for Him, [emphasis added] in order that we may share in His promised gifts.”⁴

This logical process of thought by Clement is further expounded upon in the article by Michael G. Mickey, “The Pre-Tribulation Rapture: A new idea?”⁵

The next inference is contained in Polycarp’s (65-155) *Epistle to the Philippians*, where he connects the resurrection of Christians (in conjunction with the Rapture) directly to the “judgment seat of Christ” (occurring in heaven during the Tribulation). Polycarp was the direct disciple of John the Apostle. In chapter 2 he says, “He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead. His blood will God require of those who do not believe in Him. *But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also*, [emphasis added] if we do His will, and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved.”⁶ The exclusionary “But” separates the phrase about the resurrection (which occurs in conjunction with the Rapture) from the phrase about the judgment. Again, in chapter 5, “If we please Him in this present world, we shall receive also the future world, *according as He has promised to us that He will raise us again from the dead*, and that if we live worthily of Him, ‘we shall also reign together with Him.’”⁷ This talks of a separate resurrection just for Christians and is followed by the purpose of this resurrection in chapter 6, “and ‘we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and must every one give an account of himself.’”⁸ The judgment seat (or *bema* in Greek) of Christ is a separate judgment just for

⁴Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 35 (ANF 1:14).

⁵Michael G. Mickey, “The Pre-Tribulation Rapture: A New Idea?” 2004, <http://www.rapturealert.com/pretribnewidea.html> (6 September 2005).

⁶Polycarp, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 2 (ANF 1:33).

⁷Polycarp, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 5 (ANF 1:34).

⁸Polycarp, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 6 (ANF 1:34).

Christians (for rewards or lack thereof). It is conducted in heaven after the Rapture, during the Tribulation of earth, and before the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25 and the first resurrection, after the Second Coming.⁹

This is followed by *The Epistle of Barnabas* (100), which refers to the writings of Enoch about the End Times and places the resurrection of the Church before the “retribution.” It states [emphasis added], “For this end the Lord has *cut short* the times and the days, that *His Beloved may hasten*; and *He will come to the inheritance*,”¹⁰ and “the *Church being the spiritual temple of God*,”¹¹ (similar to the description by Clement). In conclusion, “It is well, therefore, that he who has learned the judgments of the Lord, as many as have been written, should walk in them. For he who keepeth these shall be *glorified in the kingdom of God*; but he who chooseth other things shall be destroyed with his works. *On this account there will be a resurrection*, on this account a retribution.”¹² Notice the order and separation of events: resurrection first (in conjunction with the Rapture) and then retribution (either from the Tribulation or the Judgement).

The next inference is made by Tertullian (145-220) in his *A Treatise on the Soul*. In chapter 55, speaking of the soul of a Christian after death not going to heaven before the resurrection of Christians at the Rapture of the Church, he says, “How, indeed, shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father’s right hand, when as yet the

⁹Pentecost, 219-226; and Geisler, 612, 618.

¹⁰*The Epistle of Barnabas* 4 (ANF 1:138).

¹¹*The Epistle of Barnabas* 16 (ANF 1:147).

¹²*The Epistle of Barnabas* 21 (ANF 1:149).

archangel's trumpet has not been heard by the command of God-when as yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming, in company with the dead in Christ, who shall be the first to arise?"¹³ This is a clear reference to the Rapture, but it does not place it within the End Time sequence of events.

The next inference is contained in the *Treatises of Cyprian* (200-258), where he speaks of the dead in Christ, the Rapture of the Church, Enoch being an example for the Church and then speaking of the Rapture as deliverance from the Tribulation to come. Cyprian was the disciple of Tertullian. In Treatise VII, chapter 21, he sets the tone for the successive five chapters by quoting 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which are asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."¹⁴ Then in chapter 22, a direct reference to the Rapture:

"... since Paul the apostle announces and says, 'For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change the body of our humiliation and conform it to the body of His glory?' Christ the Lord also promises that we shall be such, when, that we may be with Him . . . he prays to the Father for us, saying, 'Father, I will that they also whom Thou has given me be with me where I am' . . . He who is to attain the throne of Christ . . . ought not to mourn or lament, but rather, in accordance with the Lord's promise, in accordance with his faith in the truth, to rejoice in *this his departure and translation* [emphasis added]."¹⁵

In the following chapter, Cyprian mentions why Enoch was translated as an example for the Church, "To have been pleasing in the sight of God was thus to have merited to be *translated from the contagion of the world*. [emphasis added] And moreover, also, the Holy Spirit teaches

¹³Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul* 50 (ANF 3:231).

¹⁴Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.21 (ANF 5:474).

¹⁵Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.22 (ANF 5:474).

by Solomon, that they who please God are more early taken hence, and are more quickly set free, lest while they are delaying longer in this world they should be polluted with the contagions of the world.”¹⁶ Then, he weaves in the timing of the Rapture in chapter 25, [emphasis added] “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 . . .* Lo, the world is changing and passing away, and witnesses to its ruin not now by its age, but by the end of things. And do you not give God thanks . . . *that by an earlier departure you are taken away, and delivered from the shipwrecks and disasters that are imminent?*”¹⁷

The final inference to the Rapture of the Church is contained in the *Works of St. Chrysostom* (347-407), *Homilies on Ephesians* and *Homilies on Thessalonians*. In Homily III on Ephesians, he clearly speaks of the Rapture, using both 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, but does not place it into the End Time sequence of events. Later in the same Homily, he speaks of raising up the Church to the throne of God, “for where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval to separate between the Head and the body; for were there a separation, then were it no longer a body, then were it no longer a head.”¹⁸ From this statement it appears that the “spiritual” Rapture occurred with Jesus’ ascension and the “physical” Rapture will take place in the future at the end of the Church Age. This logic appears to be confirmed by a statement later in his Homily VIII in Thessalonians, “If He is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor . . . For He received Him up in the clouds, and ‘we

¹⁶Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.23 (ANF 5:474-5).

¹⁷Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.25 (ANF 5:475).

¹⁸Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 3 (NPNF 13:61-62).

shall be caught up in the clouds.’ (Acts 1:9) Seest thou how great is the honor? And as He descends, we go forth to meet Him and, what is more blessed than all, so we shall be with Him.”¹⁹ Again, however, there is no mention of timing in the End Times chronology. Yet, he goes on to make reference to the state of the souls “left behind” who have seen others taken up and likening it to the fate of those “left behind” in the days of Noah.²⁰ Then, later in Homily III in Second Thessalonians, he mentions the Rapture again, in light of chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, saying, “Here he is discoursing concerning the resurrection and our gathering together. For these things will happen at the same time.” He then treats the confusion about the Day of the Lord as a subsequent matter in verses 3 and 4 (just as Paul did), by saying, “Here he discourses concerning the Antichrist and reveals great mysteries. What is the falling away? He calls him Apostasy . . . And he calls him ‘the man of sin.’”²¹ From the way in which he treats these subjects, it appears that he is agreeing with Paul that the Rapture occurs first and then comes the appearance of the Antichrist.

The above inferences all seem to confirm that even more of the Fathers understood Paul’s teaching on the Rapture of the Church and most inferred, if not directly stated, that it would occur before the Tribulation or the appearance of the Antichrist. Combining these inferences with the direct references, outlined by the previous section, lends much credence to the statement: the Early Church Fathers, especially of the first two centuries, believed in the imminent, pretribulational Return of Christ for His Church and taught it accordingly in their writings. Before moving on to the post-Nicene Church, two citations found by the author that

¹⁹Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Thessalonians* 8 (NPNF 13:356).

²⁰Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Thessalonians* 8 (NPNF 13:356-7).

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seem to place the Rapture at the end of the Tribulation and/or in conjunction with Jesus' Second Coming must be addressed.

²¹Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Thessalonians* 3 (NPNF 13:386).