

1.2.7 Rapture

All those who hold the premillennial-futurist view of eschatology believe that the Rapture of the Church will occur as part of the *Parousia* and that the primary rapture references in the Bible were written by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-57. Please note the following treatment of the word rapture taken from the author's Master's Thesis:

Rapture does not appear in the text of the Bible; however, it comes from the Latin words *rapere*, meaning "rapid" (Rosenthal 1990:53) and *rapiemur*, meaning, "we shall be caught up" (Ladd 1978:84). These words were taken from the Greek verb *harpazo*, meaning, "to seize upon, spoil, snatch away or take to oneself," especially used of rapture (Acts 8:39; 2 Cor 12:2, 4; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 12:5). *Harpazo* is translated "caught up" or "caught away" the five times (out of thirteen) it appears in the Bible relating to rapture. The other eight times it is translated, "to forcibly seize upon, snatch away, take to oneself or use force on someone" (Zodhiates 1992:257). In Acts 8:39, the Holy Spirit "caught away" Philip, after he ministered to the Ethiopian eunuch, and placed him in Azotus, some 20-30 miles away. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul twice describes his experience of being "caught up" to the Third Heaven. In Revelation 12:5, the man child of the Woman (usually interpreted to mean, Jesus) was "caught up" to God and His throne. And in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the primary text for the Rapture of the Church, "we who are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (together with them refers to the "dead in Christ," who were resurrected immediately preceding the Rapture of the Church) (Hebert 2006c:13-4).

The Rapture of the Church is also addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-2, but within the context of the resurrection of the saints: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed*, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be *changed*." The word translated *changed* in this verse is the Greek verb *allasso*, meaning "to change the form or nature of a thing" (Zodhiates 1992:124). *Allasso* is related to two other Greek verbs that are tied to the rapture concept: *metatithemi*, meaning "to transpose, put in another place and hence to transfer, translate," used in both Hebrews 11:5 and Genesis 5:24 (in the Septuagint) to describe the translation of Enoch to heaven (Zodhiates 1992:973; Lust 1996, part 2:301); and *metamorphoo*, meaning "to transform, transfigure, or change one's form," used to describe

Jesus' appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36) and "which suggests what the bodies of the righteous may be as a result of the resurrection of our bodies (1Cor 15:51f)" (Zodhiates 1992:968-9) – (See Hebert 2006c:14-17, 24-62 for further development of *harpazo* and other New Testament Greek words similar to *harpazo* used in related passages).

The following quote from the Master's Thesis deals with the comparison between the terms "rapture" and "resurrection":

Another term to be defined and placed in juxtaposition to rapture is resurrection (mostly the verb, *egeiro*, meaning "to rise, have risen" and the noun, *anastasis*, meaning "a standing up, a resurrection or recovery" (Zodhiates 1992:496, 159). Resurrection speaks about the same type of raising or taking up as *harpazo*, but in reference to the dead or "sleeping" versus the living. In other words, *raising the dead bodily back to life in a new incorruptible, immortal body compared to transporting or translating the living bodily to heaven*. Jesus is the first example of this resurrection. Then, there will be those who are his (asleep/dead in Christ) at his "coming" immediately preceding the Rapture (1 Cor 15:20-23, 50-52 and 1 Thess 4:16-17). Rapture and resurrection are very closely related, yet still completely separate and distinct concepts. *Therefore, Jesus' resurrection and ascension (rapture) at the beginning of the Church Age, is the type, model, or precedent for the resurrection and Rapture of His Body (the Church) at the end of the Church Age [emphasis added]* (Hebert 2006c:19).

However, the question remains as to when during the *Parousia* will the Rapture of the Church occur? And more specifically, when will that "blessed hope" occur in relation to the seven-year Tribulation and the revealing of the antichrist? As mentioned above in Section 1.2.5, the answer to these questions may be divided into three different categories: pretribulational, midtribulational and posttribulational. The proponents of all three positions agree that the Church (Body of Christ) will not be the target of God's wrath to be poured out during the Tribulation or day of the Lord (addressed in Section 1.2.9 below). However, each position believes that the Rapture of the Church will occur at a different time in relation to the seven-year Tribulation Period. Each of the positions will now be addressed in detail.

The pretribulational position believes the Rapture will occur prior to the revealing of the antichrist and the subsequent start of the Tribulation Period. This event will be separate and distinct from the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to judge the earth (at the end of the Tribulation Period), as addressed in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and Revelation 19. This position is based on a literal-grammatical reading of the two primary Rapture passages (1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:51-57) and is supported by the following related passages: John 14:2-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 5; 2 Thessalonians 1:7 – 2:17; Titus 2:11-13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 20-23; and Revelation 4:1; 12:5 (For a full exegetical treatment of the Rapture passages, see chapter 2 of Hebert 2006c). This may best be seen by the following paraphrase of John Rea's at the end of his nine-page exegetical study on the primary Rapture passage:

For this we say unto you by a revelation received from the Lord, that we that are alive, that are still surviving *when the parousia of the Lord begins*, shall in no way be ahead of them that are already dead. For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with a shouted command (to the dead in Christ)—in an archangel-like voice—and with God's last trumpet-call (to Israel to deal with them again as a nation): and the dead in Christ shall stand up (be resurrected) first; *then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be snatched away from the people on earth, rescued from the fiery judgments of the tribulation about to begin, and caught up in clouds, to meet the Lord at a glorious reception in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord* [emphasis added] (Rea 1954:90).

Please note the following chart of the Rapture of the Church versus the Second Coming, depicting them as two separate and distinct events (created by Edward E. Hindson):

<u>Rapture</u>	<u>Return</u>
1. Christ comes <i>for</i> His own (John 14:3. 1 Thess. 14:17; 2 Thess. 2:1)	1. Christ comes <i>with</i> His own (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14; Rev. 19:14)
2. He comes in the <i>air</i> (1 Thess. 4:17)	2. He comes to the <i>earth</i> (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11)
3. He <i>claims</i> His bride (1 Thess. 4:16-17)	3. He comes <i>with</i> His bride (Rev. 19:6-14)
4. Removal of <i>believers</i>	4. Manifestation of <i>Christ</i>

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| (1 Thess. 4:17) | (Mal. 4:2) |
| 5. <i>Only His own see Him</i>
(1 Thess. 4:13-18) | 5. <i>Every eye shall see Him</i>
(Rev. 1:7) |
| 6. <i>Tribulation begins</i>
(2 Thess. 1:6-9) | 6. <i>Millennial kingdom begins</i>
(Rev. 20:1-7) |
| 7. <i>Saved are delivered from wrath</i>
(1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9) | 7. <i>Unsaved experience the wrath of God</i>
(Rev. 6:12-17) |
| 8. <i>No signs precede the rapture</i>
(1 Thess. 5:1-3) | 8. <i>Signs precede the second coming</i>
(Luke 21:11, 15) - (Hindson 1995:157). |

After completing the research and writing of the Masters Thesis on the subject, it is the premise of this author that the Pretribulational Rapture of the Church was passed on by Jesus to the Apostles Paul, John, Peter, James, and Jude, then to the Early Church Fathers, who in turn continued to spread it within the Early Church through their writings as a doctrine of the Early Church. This then formed the foundation for “the blessed hope” of the Early Church and the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ.

There is however, an alternate reading (interpretation) of the primary rapture passage, which forms the basis for the posttribulational view. This may be best described by Randolph O. Yeager in his treatment of the passage in *The Renaissance New Testament* (1998). He places the Rapture of the Church in conjunction with the Resurrection of the Just, the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Battle of Armageddon, and the Second Coming of Christ, and in accordance with Revelation 11:15-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51 and Luke 14:14 (Yeager 1998:214). He agrees that the Rapture will occur and the Body of Christ will meet the Lord in the air. However, he compares the meeting of the bridegroom and the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1, 6 and the meeting of Paul and the Roman Christians in Acts 28:15 to Jesus and the raptured saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. He claims that in all these cases, the ones that went to the meeting “retraced their steps and returned” to whence they came. Therefore, since Jesus is coming to earth (at the Second Coming) and the Rapture occurs in conjunction with this eschatological event, the saints will

return to earth with Jesus for judgment and to rule and reign with Him (Yeager 1998:215-6).

This is coupled with the posttribulational view that nowhere in the scriptural text is the Rapture specifically indicated as occurring before the Tribulation (Ladd 1956:88). Additionally, based on the commentary of F. F. Bruce, William Everett Bell, Jr. adds that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 4-5 as an amplification of what Jesus taught the Disciples in the Olivet or Apocalyptic Discourse in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 and therefore, included no mention of rapture separate from the Second Coming (Bell 1967:249).

There are several problems with this posttribulational view. First, as mentioned above, the Rapture and the Second Coming have two completely different purposes. The Rapture is the specific *kairos* event in *chronos* time that will complete the Church Age. And just as Jesus ascended into heaven (after receiving His new resurrected body), the Body of Christ will do likewise, and remain in heaven during the Tribulation on earth to undergo the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:11-14 and 2 Cor 5:10) and partake in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9). Conversely, the Second Coming of Christ/day of the Lord will be for judgment on the earth because of sin and in fulfillment of the Old Testament day of the Lord (*Yahweh*) prophecies. This will occur at the end of the Tribulation, in conjunction with the Battle of Armageddon. At that time, the previously resurrected/raptured saints and the angels will return with Jesus (Rev 19:11-21). Jesus will then carry out the Judgment of the Nations (Sheep and the Goats—Matt 25:31-46) for those remaining alive through the Tribulation. From that point, Jesus will then set up and enter into His millennial kingdom reign (Hebert 2005a).

Secondly, although God could, in His sovereignty, choose to have all these events occur simultaneously, it would appear to violate the historical-chronological-biblical, space-time continuum (which He established for humanity) to do so. In this regard, God would be dealing

with two different groups (saints and sinners), at two different judgments, for two completely different reasons (completion of the Eschatological Gospel of Salvation and rewards versus judgment of sin and disposition of sinners) simultaneously! It may be understandable to follow this posttribulational logic, if one believes that the Matthew 25 judgment will be one great, final judgment of all (saints and sinners alike), instead of a judgment of those that will have just survived the Tribulation (which contextually and chronologically makes better sense). This posttribulation interpretation also conflicts with the Judgment Seat of Christ scriptures for the saints (listed above) and the Great White Throne scripture for Satan, the Beast, False Prophet, and sinners (Rev 20:10-15).

Lastly, by relating the bridegroom and ten virgins of Matthew 25 and Paul and the Roman Christians of Acts 28 to Jesus and the Rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4, Yeager violates the first rule of hermeneutics: “a text without a context is a pretext.” He has taken two completely different contexts (Jesus personally teaching about the kingdom of heaven at the Second Coming in parable format, using a Jewish wedding analogy, and Luke historically recording the meeting of Paul and the Roman Christians on his way to imprisonment) and yoked them together with a third context of Paul teaching about the “mystery” or “revelation” of the Rapture of the Church (to take place in conjunction with the resurrection of the “dead in Christ” and in prophetic fulfillment of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension and the perfect completion of the Eschatological Gospel of Salvation). Again, it is understandable to follow this logic, if one accepts the posttribulational argument that Paul did not receive a “new revelation,” but was just amplifying information about Jesus’ Second Coming (as addressed above). However, in the treatment of the Apocalyptic Discourse (in Section 1.4.2 below), there remains room in Jesus’ words themselves for “two comings” at the *Parousia*; that would include both the Rapture of the

Church and the Second Coming as separate and distinct events (Both these issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 of Hebert 2006c). Therefore, this alternate reading (advocating the posttribulational view) must be rejected as contextually, chronologically and scripturally untenable.

The midtribulational position may be best described by Marvin Rosenthal: “According to mid-tribulation rapturists, the catching away of the church will occur three and one-half years into the Tribulation period, immediately prior to the Great Tribulation. . . . that the wrath of God is to be associated only with the Great Tribulation and that this wrath will be triggered by the opening of the seventh trumpet judgment (Rev 11). Therefore, midtribulationists would view their position as teaching that the Rapture will exempt the church from God’s judgment” (Rosenthal 1990:57). Rosenthal personally modifies this position and moves the Rapture farther into the seven-year period; after the start of the Great Tribulation, but before the pouring out of God’s wrath during “The Day of the Lord.” Rosenthal states that this will occur after the opening of the seventh seal in Revelation 8:1, “about midway through the second three and one half years.” He uses Matthew 24-25, in conjunction with Revelation, to defend his position (Rosenthal 1990:60-61).

Although this midtribulational Rapture occurs at a separate time from the Second Coming, and presumably precedes God pouring out His wrath at the “Day of the Lord,” the issue of the Church remaining on earth at the same time as Antichrist still remains. Scripturally, this is addressed in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, “And you know what restrains him (Antichrist) now, so that in his time he may be revealed. . . . only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.” Traditionally, the “what” and “he” in these verses refer to either the Holy Spirit or the Body of Christ, spoken of in the masculine gender by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4

(House 1995:276-7; Feinberg 1995:306-8). Also, the issue of the day of the Lord being narrowed down to just the latter part of the seven-year period goes against the body of research which relates the day of the Lord to the entire seven-year Tribulation Period (see Section 1.2.9 below). Therefore, the midtribulational view seems to lack the cohesive, consistent testimony of the whole counsel of Scripture and also appears to be untenable.

It appears that after considering all three views of when the Rapture of the Church is to take place, the Pretribulational Rapture of the Church (in complete fulfillment of the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ) holds the most scriptural and contextual credence and will be used for the rest of this thesis. The more refined pretribulational doctrine of dispensationalism, which arose around 1830 with John Nelson Darby, will be discussed next.