

"Upon this rock I will build my church"

Matthew 16:18

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WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

“The next great event predicted for God’s prophetic program is the rapture of all those Jews and Gentiles who are trusting Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. This will be an epoch-making and revolutionary event. It is declared in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18” (Prophecy and the Seventies, page 180, Charles Lee Feinberg, Moody Press 1972).

The theory of a “Rapture” is very prevalent in the religious world today and has been for many years as evidenced by the above quote. The theory is part of a larger body of belief called Premillennialism. The Rapture is supposed to precede the thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth by seven years. The religious world may vary in some of the points of this theory, but it basically shapes up thusly:

1. Jesus will secretly return in the air and snatch away or “rapture” the church out of the world and carry it off to heaven. In that hour believers all over the world will vanish from homes, businesses, recreation, worship, and every other imaginable situation in which they find themselves. As a result, there will be great calamity due to an out of control world for the moment. This will be followed by the tribulation period.
2. The “tribulation period” will last for seven years. Peace and prosperity, promised by Him Who will be in control, will characterize the first three and one-half years. The last three and one-half years will be a period of divine judgments, great persecution, and suffering upon the ungodly brought on by the Gentiles.
3. Following the “tribulation” the Lord will come “with” His saints, and the thousand-year reign of Christ begins on the earth.
4. Supposedly the support for this theory is taught in such passages as Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; and Revelation 13.

There are many other details associated with the rapture theory that vary among religious groups. They gather into camps of pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation, and pre-wrath followers. Followers of this theory claim we are currently in the Church Age, that period of time between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27, between the cutting off of the Messiah and the announcement of the anti-Christ confirming a covenant with fleshly Israel.

The question for us to answer is, “Does the Bible teach the rapture theory?” Does it have the support of the word of God? Why does it have such a tremendous following among sincere, religious people? If

so many seem to believe the rapture theory, could it have some truth connected with it?

Ironically, the word “rapture” is not found in the English Bible. It is based on the phrase “caught up” in I Thessalonians 4:17, where Paul by inspiration says, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” The phrase “caught up” in this verse is the Greek word “harpazo,” and means to seize, catch away, pluck, pull, take, force, spoil. As an interesting experiment we should ask of those who believe the rapture theory where we are to find the word “rapture” in the Bible.

I. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER A FEW BASIC PRINCIPLES WHENEVER WE BEGIN A STUDY OF A BIBLE TOPIC.

- Accept the statement as literal unless the context demands a figurative or symbolic meaning.
- Interpret difficult passages in light of easy passages.
- Examine the topic or passage in its immediate context, then the remote context, and then the entire word of God.
- God’s word never contradicts itself, nor is God the author or cause of man’s confusion.

According to what the Bible teaches regarding the Second Coming of Christ, the rapture theory is false. Neither the word nor the theory is found in the Holy Scriptures. No part of the rapture theory is true. It is false in all of its parts and those who hold to it believe a lie.

Let’s look at the theory in light of what the Bible really teaches about the return of Christ. That the Lord Jesus came the first time to die for the sins of man, all will agree (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10). He lived here upon earth about thirty three years. In His earthly ministry, He engaged Himself in those things that left no doubt that He was the divine Son of God (John 20:30,31). He taught about the spiritual nature of His kingdom on earth, which Peter calls the church (Matthew 16:18,19; John 18:36; Romans 14:17; Colossians 1:13). During the time He was on earth, Jesus prepared the disciples for His death and taught that He was going to prepare a place for them. He said, “I will come again and take you where I am” (John 14:1-4). After His death on the cross of Calvary, He was buried, and was raised back to life on the third day. The apostles were commissioned to preach the gospel of the kingdom to every accountable creature (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus taught His followers that He would return in judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).

II. THE RAPTURE THEORY IS IN CONTRADICTION TO MANY

OF THE STATEMENTS OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES.

A. Matthew 24:21 reads: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Because a period of “great tribulation” is here predicted to come upon the earth, Premillennialists completely disregard the context and imagine this to be the tribulation of their theory. The events of Matthew 24 through verse 34 are a detailed discussion of the events to accompany the destruction of Jerusalem, and therefore have no reference to the end of the Christian age.

1. In Matthew 24:16 the faithful are told to “flee into the mountains” during this time of persecution for their own protection. But if this were true, it is evidence that the faithful have not been raptured to heaven as their theory supposes.

2. Matthew 24:20 informs us that the disciples were told to pray the Father that their flight from the city be not in winter, neither on the Sabbath day while the tribulation was on. The weather would pose a hindrance in the first instance and the locked gates of the city in the second. But if the faithful disciples have been raptured to heaven, the theory has contradicted itself (as well as the Bible) and has already begun to crumble.

B. John 5:28,29 reads: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Note that Jesus said all the dead, both the righteous and wicked, will be raised in the same hour. The rapture theory alleges that the righteous will be raised one hour, raptured off to heaven for seven years, a thousand-year reign on earth fitted in, and then the wicked will be raised. This is an extreme example of perverting the scriptures to fit a theory and not adhering to proper rules of Bible study. The hour or moment spoken of by Jesus has been stretched into several years by Premillennialists. That alone should be enough to cause people to be suspect of this idea.

C. 2 Timothy 4:1,2 reads: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word...” The apostle Paul admonishes Timothy, the young preacher, to do the one thing that will help men the most in view of the coming judgment, and that is to preach the word of God. Paul warns that the judgment will take place at the Lord’s appearing and entrance into His eternal kingdom. This truth is also taught in Hebrews 9:27, where we are told: “And as it appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment...” The rapture theory has the Lord not coming in judgment, but snatching away the righteous to heaven. It is not difficult to see that the rapture theory clearly contradicts the Bible.

D. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 reads: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” The rapture theory seeks support for its “catching away” of the saints in these verses. Ironically, close examination of these verses disproves the rapture theory. It is evident that the Thessalonian Christians were concerned that their dead loved ones would be left behind at the coming of the Lord. The inspired apostle Paul pens these words to dispel any such notion. But note the contrast between what Paul said and what the rapture theory alleges:

1. It claims a secret coming but the scripture teaches there will be a trump loud enough to wake the dead.
2. It claims Jesus will return to the earth to reign after seven years but this scripture teaches that Jesus will never put His foot on this earth again. Rather, we will forever be with the Lord. Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 3:10-13 that there won't even be an earth on which to stand because it will be burned up. Jesus taught He was going to prepare a place for the saints, i.e., the new heaven and new earth (John 14:1,2).
3. It claims only the faithful will be raised but nowhere in this passage does it state such. Rather Paul was focusing on the issue at hand--their righteous loved ones who were asleep in Jesus. Concerning the unrighteous dead, he did address their resurrection in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”
4. It claims two second comings of the Lord (in reality a third coming). But this passage, along with the rest of the New Testament, teaches only one (John 14:2; Acts 1:11). In Hebrews 9:28 we read: “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

III. THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER QUESTIONS WE COULD ASK REGARDING THE RAPTURE THEORY.

A. What happens to all the children of believers and unbelievers at the rapture who are not yet accountable? Will they be taken? Will they be left here on earth to be raised by unbelievers to live a life of sin since no saved people will be around to show them the right way?

B. With all the believers taken from earth for seven years, who will evangelize the lost?

C. If men will be saved apart from God's ordained plan, won't that make God a respecter of persons?

D. Why was sinful man able to thwart the plan of God to establish the kingdom and cause Him to establish the church instead? Never in the entire Bible has so much credit been given to sinful man except by this theory. In all other instances God was able to carry out His will regardless of man's reaction.

CONCLUSION

I believe this is enough to show that the rapture is in no way taught nor supported by the word of God. The theory continues to find a place for fleshly Israel and so-called unfulfilled prophecies in God's plan for the ages. The theory is popular and will continue to be until men decide to study God's word objectively and for themselves. More books will be written, web sites will be set up, and prophecy seminars will cover the earth, but God's word alone is true.

We ought to be aware of words that are not found in the Bible. And when men build false doctrines around those non-biblical words, we should be doubly cautious. Regarding the rapture theory, the words of Brother Guy N. Woods are very appropriate at this point:

"It is the fevered figment which once issued from the labored imagination of a future kingdom advocate, an airy will of the wisp of current Premillennialism, of which there is not only not the faintest hint in the Scriptures but which is therein easily shown to be utterly, completely and forevermore false!" (Questions and Answers, Volume II, Guy N. Woods, Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, TN, 1986; p. 176).

Amen and Amen!

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