

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 46

THE RAPTURE

Most theologians deny this very important doctrine; their theology just won't allow it. Generally, they believe the church will experience the Tribulation and at the end of it, Christ will return, resurrect all people, believers and unbelievers at the same time, and conduct one judgment for all people at the same time and place with believers going into heaven and unbelievers going into the lake of fire.

What is the Rapture? Simply put, at some point in the future, according to God's timing, all those who are born again and alive at that moment will be removed from earth into the presence of the Lord. Immediately preceding the rapture of living believers, all believing dead will be resurrected and receive their glorified bodies and all the living believers will immediately, at the moment of the Rapture, receive their glorified bodies as well. At that point in time, the church will be complete and there will not be one believer left on planet earth. According to the Scriptures, this event must take place before the wrath of God falls on the earth during a time we know as the Tribulation.

One of the objections to the doctrine of the Rapture is a bit of a silly argument and that argument is the rapture cannot be a true biblical doctrine because the word "rapture" is not in the Bible. The word "trinity" is not in the Bible either, but no orthodox Christian denies it as a biblical doctrine just because the word isn't in there. That's not a valid argument because the doctrine is revealed in the Bible and it simply takes a bit of exegetical and historical word study to figure out where it came from.

We get the word "rapture" in a round-about way. The Greek word is ἀρπάζω and it is translated "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up [ἀρπάζω] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

The word means to seize upon, spoil, snatch away. Literally, it means to seize upon with force, to rob; differing from κλέπτω, to steal secretly. It denotes an open act of violence in contrast to cunning and secret stealing. Though generally ἀρπάζω denotes robbery of another's property, it is not exclusively used thus, but sometimes used generally meaning forcibly to seize upon, snatch away, or take to oneself. [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*]. Κλέπτω refers to being a thief by stealth without force; ἀρπάζω refers to being a robber which means to take something from another person by force or threat of force. In terms of ἀρπάζω, the element of force carries more emphasis and that element is important in understanding the Rapture. BDAG's definition of interest in this discussion is "to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away." The interesting nuance of this word concerning a violent

snatching away seems to suggest that most Christians are so rooted and invested in this world that they need to be forcibly jerked out of here in order to go into eternity. There is a number of Greek words that could have been used to refer to this catching up or taking away; the use of ἀρπάζω seems to be a deliberate choice of words.

When Jerome wrote his Latin translation of the Bible, the Latin word he used to translate the Greek word ἀρπάζω is variously identified as *raptus*, *rpto*, *rapio*, *rapere*, *raptura* (Medieval Latin). Just this week I heard Dr. Anderson say the word is *raptizo*. From the Latin, the French developed the word "rapture" which meant a carrying off (dictionary.com). *Raptus* meant a carrying off, abduction, snatching away; or rape. From the Latin, the French derived the word *rapture* which meant the act of carrying off (dictionary.com). One facet of our English definition is the carrying of a person to another place or sphere of existence (dictionary.com). It seems to be unclear just exactly what the root Latin word is, but the English word "rapture" is obviously connected to the Latin out of the Latin Vulgate and not to the Greek, and it is easy to see how we could have gotten the word from these Latin words through French. Although it is true the English word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible, the concept is there and it is discoverable in the etymology of the words used. Anyone using the excuse the word "rapture" is not in the Bible to deny the doctrine is either ignorant of the issue or deliberately denying the origin of the word in order to support their theology and deny the doctrine of the Rapture.

Are there other examples of a rapture in the Bible apart from the Rapture of the church? Yes.

Enoch is the first example of a rapture in the Bible.

Genesis 5:24 ²⁴Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took [קָחַ, μετατίθημι] him.

Hebrews 11:5 ⁵By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK [μετατίθημι] HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Here קָחַ describes Enoch's bodily assumption into heaven. It is used in a heavenly context in other Scriptures referring to removing a believer to God's presence. It means to take; to get; to snatch.

μετατίθημι means to transfer; change the place of; to effect a change of location in space with the implication that the two locations are significantly different; to move from one place to another; to change one's location; to depart; departure.

Psalms 49:15 ¹⁵But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will receive [קָחַ, ἐξαίρειω] me.

Psalms 73:24 ²⁴With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive [πρὸς, προσλαμβάνω] me to glory.

In both of these verses in the Psalms, there is a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. In both cases, the believer is snatched or taken to safety in God's presence as opposed to the destruction of the unrighteous.

ἐξαιρέω means to rescue; deliver; take out of.

προσλαμβάνω means to take; receive besides; grasp; seize to take away; remove.

Elijah was also the subject of a rapture or a taking up.

2 Kings 2:1, 11 ¹And it came about when the LORD was about to take up [πρὸς, ἀνάγω] Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.... ¹¹As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up [πρὸς, ἀναλαμβάνω] by a whirlwind to heaven.

πρὸς means to go up; to ascend; to take away; to lift. There is a connotation of upward motion. Theologically, it means to go up to a holy place or to stand before God. The Jews went up to the Temple. Moses went up on the mountain of God.

ἀνάγω to ascend; to lead up; to lead out; to bring up; to cause to rise.

ἀναλαμβάνω to lift up; to carry away; to carry off; to remove.

After His resurrection, the Lord was taken up to heaven.

Mark 16:19 ¹⁹So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up [ἀναλαμβάνω] into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

Acts 1:9, 11 ⁹And after He had said these things, He was lifted up [ἐπαίρω] while they were looking on, and a cloud received [ὑπολαμβάνω] Him out of their sight.... ¹¹They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up [ἀναλαμβάνω] from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

ἐπαίρω means to raise; to lift up; to cause to move up.

ὑπολαμβάνω means to take up; to ascend.

In Revelation 12:5, the word ἀρπάζω is used to describe the rescue of the child from Satan as he is taken up to God's throne.

Revelation 12:5 ⁵And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up [ἀρπάζω] to God and to His throne.

This word is also used in Matthew 11:12 where it refers to violent men taking the Kingdom by force and in Matthew 13:19 where the evil one snatches away what has been sown. When Philip came up out of the water after baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, he was snatched away (Acts 8:39). Paul used the word to say a man was caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2).

The last biblical record of anyone being taken up concerns the two witnesses of Revelation.

Revelation 11:11–12 ¹¹But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. ¹²And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up [ἀναβαίνω] here.” Then they went up [ἀναβαίνω] into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.

ἀναβαίνω means to go or come up, to ascend, to cause to ascend from a lower to a higher place.

Obviously, there is a number of words in the Greek used to refer to taking up, lifting up and so on. The point is, ἀρπάζω has a more forceful, violent aspect to the taking up

Why is the doctrine of the Rapture important? First and foremost, it is a biblical doctrine and since it is biblical, it is our duty to properly understand it. Beyond that, it gives believers hope that Christ is coming back for them to take them to where He is and it provides incentive to live the Christian life such that one will not be ashamed when He appears for them.

Titus 2:11–14 ¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹²instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

1 John 2:28 ²⁸Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

The doctrine of the Rapture is denied in various ways.

Barbara Rossing, a Lutheran pastor, wrote a book called *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* in which she seriously attacked premillennial

dispensational theology. What she really presents in this book is a feel-good doctrine of liberal biblical revisionism. She caters to what she thinks people want to hear.

"I was asked to say in seven seconds why I consider *Left Behind* theology so dangerous. "God is coming to heal the world, not to kill millions of people."... In every appearance in the media, I have tried to emphasize the message of hope that is at the heart of the Bible.... In contrast to these graphically violent descriptions of Jesus killing all unbelievers, I have underscored the central image of Jesus as the nonviolent Lamb, who triumphs not by killing people but by giving his life in love. When I lecture at churches or colleges people tell me how grateful they are for this interpretation. Love and healing—not Armageddon and war—are the messages people of faith must keep lifting up as God's vision for our world. The message of the biblical book of Revelation is not of despair or war, but of transformation and justice. Its tree of life and river of life give hope for each one of us and for our whole world. Revelation's urgent message to us is one of ethics, not escape. We must re-claim the heart of the Bible as a story of God's love for the world—a world that will not be left behind." [Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, pp. vii-viii]. Rossing seems to come dangerously close to being a universalist.

Rossing, a self-described "New Testament scholar" [p. 54] used just about every unproven or disproven argument against dispensational theology and the Rapture that has ever been formulated. In police terms, we could say she threw the book at us. Many of these issues will be discussed as we develop this doctrine. Rossing accused dispensationalists of being Manicheans, that is, those who divide the world into good and evil [p. 12]. However, she can't even correctly define this pagan system. In Manichean dualism, anything material is all evil and the Light or spiritual is good. This is ironic because, as a Lutheran, her theology is heavily influenced by the former Manichean pagan Augustine who never completely divorced himself from some of it, especially the doctrine of election, so she is probably the theologian holding some Manichean doctrines and not dispensationalists. She attached some importance to the fact the Bible never uses the word "rapture" [p. 21]. She assassinated the character of C. I. Scofield and claimed he put dispensational theology into the Bible thus elevating it to the same level as biblical authority [p. 23] (this is a common accusation made against Scofield and the reference Bible). Rossing claimed Darby fabricated dispensational theology and said it is a false system of theology [p. 30]. Daniel's Seventy Weeks were fulfilled before New Testament times [pp. 25-27]. She claims the doctrine of the Rapture is only about two hundred years old and that some sixteen-year-old Scottish girl had a vision of it which caused Darby to believe it and propagate it [p. 22]. She denied the fact of the antichrist and the Tribulation. God's program is not to judge the world but to love the world. Christian Zionism is a heresy and the Arabs around Israel are the good guys in the Middle East. She got very spiritual when she wrote about the Dome of the Rock [p. 59]. She established the dynamic equivalence of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in terms of containing strands of religious violence [p. 73]. Abraham's Bosom is not a literal place [p. 86]. The purpose of Revelation is to show believers that Roman imperialism will be

defeated by God's slain Lamb [pp. 108-109]. She denied that the purpose of the biblical prophets was in any way predictive, rather, it was to speak God's Word of salvation and justice for God's people and to set God's vision before people so they could see it and live it. Prophets simply condemned injustice and greed and acted as advocates for the poor, for widows, and for orphans [p. 89]. Judging by the content of her book, Rossing is probably an amillennial preterist who certainly does not like premillennial dispensational theology. She also used the accusation that premillennial dispensationalists simply want to escape any sort of persecution or tribulation; therefore, they invented the Rapture to accommodate their fears. The difference between the way she savaged Scofield, a great Christian man, and reverentially and worshipfully wrote about the Dome of the Rock and Islam is quite striking.

Theologians who deny the doctrine of the Rapture of the Church try to denigrate the concept and create doubt about it in the minds of people. One way they do that is by referring to it as a "secret" rapture. In that way, they try to create doubt in people's minds about the doctrine because, if it is a secret, the Bible doesn't disclose it and it is therefore just a made-up doctrine. The problem is, contrasted with the amount of indignation the concept of a "secret" Rapture creates, no dispensationalist every says the Rapture is some sort of secret. I have never seen that claim made by any dispensational theologian. The doctrine is the product of literal hermeneutics and it is clearly revealed in Scripture and no one who claims it ever says it is a secret.

Hanegraaff employs this deceptive trick. He will quote Tim LaHaye and in the quote, he will insert the word secret in brackets which means the word wasn't in LaHaye's work but Hanegraaff wants people to think it was. Here's how he works this little hermeneutical scam. "First, the very notion of a *secret coming* is without biblical precedent. As LaHaye has acknowledged, 'no single verse specifically states, "'Christ will come [secretly] before the Tribulation'" to rapture the church. Nor is there a collection of verses that can be construed to communicate a secret coming prior to the second coming of Christ. Instead, the notion of a secret coming, as pretribulationist rapturists readily admit, is a 'deduction from one's overall system of theology.'" [Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. 60, 246-247].

Hanegraaff inserted the word "secretly" into LaHaye's work and he used it twice in addition to that. He is simply bludgeoning people into thinking the Rapture is some sort of a secret no one knows about except premillennial dispensationalists; therefore, strongly implying it cannot possibly be sound doctrine. We will see that LaHaye actually wrote that the Rapture cannot be a secret when it happens. It is false that no "collection of verses" proves the Rapture; that is simply Hanegraaff's preterism having priority over biblical revelation. It is simply untrue that there is no collection of verses to support the doctrine of the Rapture and we will examine them in due course. Hanegraaff cites Dr. Ice who he claims admits that the Rapture is a deduction from theology. Actually, if you read the article Hanegraaff cites, you get the full sense of what Ice actually wrote, and it gets twisted a bit in the retelling by Hanegraaff. Ice identifies the presuppositions he

brings to the text but since Hanegraaff rejects them, he denigrates using them. They are literal interpretation, premillennialism, futurism, and a distinction between Israel and the church and Hanegraaff agrees with none of them but Hanegraaff's disagreement doesn't invalidate them. I think Dr. Ice overstated his case and he could have simply relied on literal hermeneutics alone. What is interesting is that he criticizes Dr. Ice for saying the Rapture doctrine is the product of systematically integrating the Scriptures. Dr. Ice mentioned the Trinity which must be developed from a number of Scriptures and Hanegraaff did that himself by using four Scriptures. That's no different than what Ice said the Rapture requires. Ice also said the doctrine of the Incarnation needs to be developed from a systematic integration of various Scriptures which is true. Hanegraaff changed the subject to the fact of the Incarnation at the Lord's birth and even then, he used two Scriptures to prove it. It is not unusual or wrong to systematize Scripture in order to inform a doctrine.

As mentioned, Hanegraaff continually accused LaHaye of propagating the doctrine of a "secret" rapture. The problem with that accusation is it is false. Over a decade before Hanegraaff's book was published, LaHaye wrote it would be impossible for the world not to know about the Rapture because millions of people would suddenly disappear and that would be impossible to remain "secret." He does say people won't actually see it happen because it will happen so quickly take place; people will be here one second and in less than a second they won't be here. Suggesting that LaHaye claims a "secret" Rapture is simply untrue; he actually does the opposite. LaHaye wrote, "The world will somehow have to come to terms with *millions* of missing Christians. The ensuing outcry of sorrow, loss, and confusion will make the Rapture a well-publicized event, dominating the media for weeks and weeks.... The world will recognize the Rapture...but too late to prepare for it." [Tim LaHaye, *Rapture [Under Attack]*, pp.40-41]. It is also true the Rapture is not a secret in the sense the Bible never mentions it because the doctrine is developed in the Scriptures.

I've cited Rossing and Hanegraaff simply to show you how the arguments are made against the doctrine. They are often very disingenuous, if not outright dishonest, and they are full of *ad hominem* attacks on the character of dispensationalists and on the system of dispensational theology itself.

The primary argument relied on to attack the doctrine is a claim that some young Scottish girl had an ecstatic vision of the Rapture that John Darby adopted and spread around the world. In 1830, two women named Campbell began experiencing ecstatic utterances in Scotland. The Brethren asked Darby to investigate the issue. He realized these charismatic manifestations were not from God. For one thing, any time these people expounded on prophetic Scripture, they replaced Israel with the church and all the Jewish blessings were removed from Israel and transferred to the church. Darby also determined that all the ecstatic sounds and speaking in tongues he heard were not foreign but were based on Latin grammar. Finally, there was no interpretation of these utterances as the Bible commands. Darby then witnessed the MacDonald family,

friends of the Campbells, speaking in tongues and he determined it too was not Spirit inspired and even demonic, delusional, and unbiblically humanistic in nature.

What Margaret MacDonald actually thought she was predicting was a posttribulational return of Christ with the saints rising to meet Him in the air to face a purifying judgment, which Darby never believed. Her account is very unbiblical. She expects Christians to undergo a purging judgment. Her account really doesn't make a lot of sense when held up to the light of biblical truth. It certainly does not represent either a pretribulational Rapture of the church or Darby's pretribulational dispensational theology. What no one who opposes the Rapture doctrine will say, is that in Great Britain during the 1820s and 1830s there was a lot of pretribulational Rapture talk already present. Darby didn't need this girl to inform him of the Rapture. It is entirely possible and even likely, Darby came to the conclusion as a result of his own personal Bible study. Margaret MacDonald's own account of her ecstatic utterances may be read in a book authored by Paul Richard Wilkinson entitled *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*, pp. 262-263.

A man named Dave MacPherson has made a lot of money selling books by claiming that Darby stole the revelation contained in Margaret MacDonald's utterances concerning the Rapture and made them his own thus fooling all the pretribulational dispensationalists who have followed him. [Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up: The True Story of the Pre-Trib Rapture*]. Since Darby didn't report that MacDonald supposedly prophesied a pretrib Rapture, MacPherson accused Darby of covering it up on purpose in order to steal the concept from her. The problem is, by her own account, she didn't predict a pretrib Rapture and Darby, another fine Christian man, would not have "stolen" from someone in the first place.

Even though this account of how the pretrib Rapture began has been thoroughly disproven, it is still used by many opponents of the Rapture doctrine. Here's how Rossing put it citing MacPherson as her source. "The Rapture has its origins in the nineteenth-century—beginning according to one critic, with a young girl's vision. In 1830, in Port Glasgow, Scotland, fifteen-year-old Margaret MacDonald attended a healing service. There, she was said to have seen a vision of a two-stage return of Jesus Christ. The story of her vision was adopted and amplified by John Nelson Darby, a British evangelical preacher and founder of the Plymouth Brethren." [Barbara A. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, p. 22].

Hanegraaff repeated the charge [Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, pp. 45-46]. Postmillennialist Mathison alludes to it by writing the Rapture was unheard of before 1830 which, not coincidentally, is when MacDonald spoke (Keith Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* p. 115]. I suspect Mathison knows this has been disproved but it's too good to pass up so he refers to it in a camouflaged manner. Witherington repeated it and embellished it. He admits MacDonald might have been referring to a posttribulation Rapture, but he uses it anyway even though that was not

Darby's position. He claims her prophecy would have been forgotten except "John Nelson Darby heard the story and spread it far and wide." [Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism*, p. 94].

Another frequent criticism of the Rapture is that it is a cowardly, escapist mentality. In other words, we are just too cowardly to go through the Tribulation and its persecution of believers; therefore, the Rapture is a doctrine made to order for cowards. "Note carefully the dates of these trips [meaning Darby's evangelism trips to America]. Darby showed up on the brink of the Civil War, during the war, and after the war, right when many Americans were quite vulnerable to an escapist theology that promised they would not have to go through the great tribulation. The timing could not have been better for promulgating such a theology." [Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism*, p. 94]. He just made this up in order to affirm his anti-Rapture stance and to convince people of his position because this sounds reasonable.

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