
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Will There Be a Rapture?

Yes and no! Yes, Christ is coming back and we will meet Him and it will be spectacular and no words or speculations could ever describe it effectively, especially not in the way most books and TV preachers have sensationalized it. There has been a lot of debate over what the rapture is all about. Most Christians today think it is fact and only seek to argue its particulars or just go by feelings. However in fact, it is not a biblical idea or even a word in the Bible. In fact, even the concept is not in the Bible although it seems so from a simple English reading of the 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 passage.

Do you believe in the rapture? “What’s that,” he said? ...*that we are all going to rise up in the air and be taken to heaven?* “Really? Where is that in the Bible,” my professor responded. A seminary professor told me this years ago and I thought he was nuts! At the same time, I was the deer in front of the headlights. So, I did my research and tried for months to prove him wrong—to no avail. After all, most of my mentors on this subject, like Ray Steadman and Walter Martin, were confident and assured that a seven year tribulation and a Rapture would occur; the only debate, as they and I saw it, was what the order and timing was. My other main mentor, Francis Schaeffer, did not consider this a worthy subject; he was an Amillennialist and Reformed and left it there for more effectual pursuits. Perhaps I should have done the same, but I could not leave this alone. It has to be true; if not, why are so many good people teaching this?

So I engaged this subject enthusiastically and aggressively. I wanted to see for myself. I read all the passages and the books on the Rapture I could. I could not find where in the Bible we could get a Rapture. Yes, I know the passages that Hal Lindsey and others like *Scofield* used, the ones taught by so many preachers as dogmatic and even essential. The passages used to support a Rapture and a seven year tribulation said nothing to support this. “Why,” I asked, “were they teaching this? How can they rationalize it?” I came to the conclusion, after a lot of homework, that they just did not do their homework well. I found that the only way to come up with a Rapture was to read it into the Bible, because it just is not there. Yes, I was disturbed and confused. So I spent months in the Fuller Library pouring over all the books—original Greek, scholarly references, and all that anyone had ever said of it. I hunted what is clearly said in God’s Word, using the *Inductive* techniques I taught in seminars at that time. I wanted to find not what was popular in my theological tradition, but what was biblical and effectual for our faith. Yes, this was tough; a lot of sleepless nights and struggle were spent to look at what I thought I already knew so well. And, this did not stop as a paper; I then spent another ten years carefully researching all the popular end-times scenarios.

Rapture: Friend or Foe?

After a lot of careful, biblical, exegetical digging and research, I found out the scary story. The Rapture had gone from a campy hook used by evangelists to grab people's attention to the Gospel to it perhaps becoming a threat to the Church. So many false teachers are gaining so much ground on this and inflecting their misguided influence upon average church members as well as prominent ministers of the Word. Too many people are being duped into false Eschatology, while real, biblical Eschatology is ignored. This has resulted in the local church having a skewed mentality, majoring on the minors and ignoring the majors.

So, let me lay this out for you: all you have to do, if you are honest and you know how to read is to read the Scriptures, pray, and see for yourself.

I have found that a lot of Bible teachers on this subject have no credibility and/or ignore the very teaching of our Lord! They just quote others as fact and do not do the research or else they make grandiose statements without concern for the integrity of the Word. Many on this subject lift themselves up, saying they have a new teaching, when God's Word remains the same yesterday, today and tomorrow! By the way; this is how it all started. While we start coming up with new doctrines not found in the Bible, there has come an assault from the academic world. The Bible has been at siege since the 19th century liberal moment, and now the siege is coming from inside the church, from ignoring truth and common sense in reading the text and seeing the clear meaning in its context. We must deal with attacks from the secular world, but I believe we should not have to deal with it from within.

What About the Rapture?

Where does this all come from? Look at the text:

*According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up** together with them **in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1*
Thessalonians 4:15-17

Let's take a look: the context is Paul being "pastoral" and encouraging his people who were being martyred, and seeing their loved ones killed or imprisoned at worst and at best losing their homes and livelihood. In these extreme tough times, Paul addresses his grieving people with a prophecy to look forward to. He gives a hope to foster them with the consolation of anticipation of what Jesus will do to support them, so they can press on with their persevering faith. The prophecy is real and will come about; the fact of our Lord's return is a reality that no Christian group that adheres to God's Word would deny. The questions and debates center on what is not important, and that is the details of when and how this will come about. One of these details is called the *Rapture* where Christians will be caught up and rise into the air to meet Jesus in the clouds. The

passage in English clearly teaches this, or so I thought until a little research told me otherwise. And now, I was faced with a paradigm shift in my eschatological thinking. What I had always thought was not backed up with facts—only presumptions. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 has been the principle passage for this theory. It is interesting to note that none of the Church Fathers nor any of the Reformers or anyone in Church History taught this “theory” until the 1830’s when heretical groups ignoring the context of the passage, Greek word meaning, and the meaning of the metaphors in question, as what they meant to a first century Jew or Greek.

The word *rapture* is not in the Bible, which is not a problem since many theological terms are not in the Bible such as *Trinity* or essential ministries such as Youth Ministry. But, the concept of a rapture cannot be found either. It is, at best, a misunderstanding, and at worst, a cynical, sinister pawn to distract us—the Church—from that to which God is calling us. As a word, *rapture* is originally from a Latin word meaning “caught up” or “caught away”, and is based on 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. The exegetical problem is our being “caught up” with Him as air being lifted up in the sky. Is this what the text actually says? In reality, it was a Greek military term set in Jewish judgment language that is used here; John and His readers would have laughed at our theories! Let’s look at this word-by-word in the Word.

- *Word of the Lord* means Jesus is telling us all that He indeed is coming and when He does it will be loud and clear. This was a term used in other ancient texts for a special visiting king who was celebrated (Matt. 24:27; Luke 22:61; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 7:10).
- *Shout/loud command*, refers to a command or a stern summons, and in connection with *Trumpet* (1 Kings 1:34; Rev. 1:9-20; 9:13; 11:15-19).
- *Trumpet* means God is calling like a war cry, of impending danger, and for us to pay attention (Ex. 19:16; Psalm 47:5-9; Isa. 31:4; 42:13; Amos 2:2).
- *Caught up*. This is a metaphor for meeting, as in catching up to the party with whom you are meeting. Heed this; an important emissary or king is coming such as one of the Caesars coming to join him and/or to escort Him, or He will escort those who show. Here it indicates that Christ has come, and His angels escort us as we meet Him. This does not mean to rise up in the air, although God can certainly do this if He chooses, but this is not what the text says. This is about the excitement and ecstasy of the event.
- *Clouds*. This means *judgment is coming or hear and the end is here, time is up and the coming of the son of man from Daniel*. This also means a spectacular event, such as numbers of angels testifying to God’s glory. It could also mean an extraordinary storm of clouds (Ezek. 30:3; 32:7; Joel 2:2; Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 16:28; 24:30-31, 34; 26:64; Rev. 1: 1-8).

- *Meet the Lord in the air* means two opposing armies who meet in the middle of a battlefield to discuss terms. *Meeting in the air* was also a way to say *dignitaries are here* (which was a great honor), from a city and are meeting with emissaries from another city to escort them to a meeting. Sometimes this meant meeting halfway, like diplomats or generals of opposing armies at a village as a neutral zone. This also meant gathering people to join and/or meet. Here, it is with Jesus when He comes back as a “royal coming” (Matt. 24:27-31; Acts 17:7). *Rapture* is the Latin rendering of the Greek word “harpazo.” The Latin rendering of “raptus” is where we get the word *rapture*. It is not from the Bible. This does not mean we get to fly up into the air; we may, but the passage and the others people use to support this theory in the contexts clearly states otherwise.

The object of this passage is Christ; *He is coming* is one of the themes of this Epistle, Matthew 24, and Revelation. This passage is basically announcing to us that Christ is coming back. This was comfort for the suffering Christians at that time, but chastisement for those who were evil and rejected Him (Deut. 33:2; Isa. 19:1; Zech. 1:16; Mal. 3:1-2; Matt. 10:23; Rev. 2:5; 3:20). Various first century Jewish groups saw that at the end of the age there will be a resurrection of the dead and a judgment, basically what Jesus taught too (1 Thess. 2:12; 5:3; Acts 17:7). The application can denote the assembled Church will come together to meet with Jesus physically or in some supernatural way that is yet undesignated.

In Mathew it is called, *the Coming of the Son of Man!* A spectacular rising into the air to meet Him! (Matt. 24:29-35). This passage is also used to show the belief that the entirety of true believers of Christ as Lord—the Church—will be suddenly taken up into the sky to meet Him in mid-air in the clouds. This is a fun theory and many people are so very dogmatic about it that fights occur as to when and how this will happen. Very few people actually look at the text to see what it really is saying.

Another passage that is used for this *rapture* is in Revelation 4:1-5: *a trumpet said*. This means God is preparing to give a command or the pronouncement of His Word (Ex. 19:16). Here, many misguided interpreters read into the text a “rapture,” and string together other passages out of context to create a grand theology out of injudicious reading and inserting ideas that are not in these passages at all, such as 1 Cor. 15:51-54.

This practice of using these texts and others for a *Rapture* is called “isagesis” which is inserting into the text something that is not there or a personal interpretation of a text from one’s own ideas. However, we are called to read His Word with “exegesis,” or a right explanation and analysis of the text from what it actually says. Also, in the Revelation 4:1-5 passage, the word “church” does not appear until Revelation chapter 22. Many think this means the church is not on earth during the last days. Again, this is reading into a text our ideas and not God’s. We are never to stretch or construe Scripture according to our whims and/or opinions. Rather, we are to plainly seek what He has for us from what He has clearly revealed to us.

This does not diminish the excitement and wonder when Christ does come back and we get to meet with Him. That will be far more excitement and hope than any convoluted theory could ever produce! The main point is this: we are called to join Him or be whisked away to judgment. We meet Christ on His terms to receive our rewards for being in Him and for those who reject Christ to receive judgment; it is simple as that. No elaborate esoteric theories are needed (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:31)!

Is there a “Secret Rapture?”

Some misguided Bible teachers have even been teaching there will be a secret rapture or a second rapture or mutable raptures. They claim each shout of the trumpet from relation is a new rapture. This is ridiculous, as a shout of a Trumpet means God is preparing to give a command or a pronouncement of His Word (Ex. 19:16). God’s way of making this spectacular and public then to be in secret misses God’s point and power. This will be very public; everyone will see the Coming of our Lord—both the dead and the alive, and that is no secret!

The History of the Rapture

This doctrine is new; it was never taught or even discussed prior to the 1830’s. It seems to have first come from a “prophetic vision” by Margaret Macdonald, a woman in 1830, who was a part of the cult group the “Irvingites,” while having an emotional experience. Through a “mingled prophecy and vision” (breakdown), and saying “the power of the Holy Spirit,” she came up with this. She was very ill and delusional according to physicians and learned observers at the time. How, how, how did this get to doctrinal status? In spite of her condition, people believed her. Not ministers trained in the Word, not those who were pious Christians, not those with discernment, but those seeking a new fad and emotional experience, just as so many do today. By the way, she was a cultist! Then another cult group in England picked this up by the name of “The Catholic Apostolic Church,” headed by Edward Irving (1792-1834). After that, another cult group called the “Millerites,” predicted the return of Christ on October 22, 1844. It did not happen; that should have been a clue, but this would not die.

At the same time, this belief was then picked up by Irish born minister, lawyer, evangelist and author, John N. Darby in 1830, who took this new fad to America in 1862 to 1877. He was looking for a “hook” in his motivational Bible speeches to attract crowds in England and on his visit to the Americas, USA, and Canada. People who knew him said he was not well schooled in the Bible or original languages, read into the Bible all kinds of ridiculous ideas. Many people today still believe in him, especially Baptists who love this guy; he is a favored son. I have his commentaries and find them insightful in places and they are also posted in our sister site www.withtheword.org. But you have to be very discerning and know the Bible before reading them, so you can filter out the garbage to get to the pearls. He was, in fact, a failed lawyer who was very “intolerant to criticism” and prideful. This should be another clue. He managed to become an Anglican priest in 1826 and his theories were rejected by all in his denomination. He then developed a poor method of biblical interpretation called *dispensationalism*

(<http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=32332&columnid=3844>) —another clue. But he is a testament on how God uses our foolishness. He founded the Plymouth Brethren Church and has been very popular amongst fundamentalists. The very popular commentary of the Bible he produced has many great insights and with great financial backing, he was able to give free copies to just about every preacher and minister in England and America who were starved for resources. Many only had a Bible and that was it. A well-done commentary, or so they thought, was received with open arms. And this spurred on countless sermons. But he did not do his homework in the Bible. It is filled with errors and illogical content amongst the good stuff, as he put in many of his not so well thought out ideas as fact. Then his theories were picked up by another great reference, the very first study Bible, given out to just about every preacher and evangelist beginning in 1909, and one we still have today, *The Scofield Study Bible*.

Where are the Bible passages for this? Is this not clear in Scripture? Many people think so, but take a look for yourself. The most popular Bible references are John 14:2–3; 1 Corinthians 15:49–55; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–7. The best thing to do is read the passages in their context and you will clearly see for yourself what they say. If you “read into” them, you can make them say anything as you “feel” the words. But God calls us to faith and to reason, as these texts also state!

What happened? How did this get all mixed up? *Scofield* took the Latin word, *raeptius*, which is an equivalent of the Greek word *harpazo* used in the 1 Thessalonians 4:17 passage. *Harpazo* means “caught up” as we previously saw and the Latin means more like “taken away”. It is believed he anglicized it to be the first to use the term *Rapture*. By the way “caught up” and “taken away” are used in most newer English translations of the Bible. The word *caught up* or *taken away* is correctly placed. But in the English, not knowing what this means may cause all sorts of runaway thinking.

Then this was further popularized the book, *Jesus Is Coming* by evangelist William Blackstone, who also sought hooks to motivate people and not so much the Lord, or it seems so from his writings. This work sold more than one million copies. Then the rapture gets a new day by in 1957, when respected Theologian from Dallas Seminary, Dr. John Walvoord, wrote a book called, “The Rapture Question.” He has done great work in Romans and I love what he did with Hebrews, but it seems he did not check his facts and read into the passage a presumption he saw as fact because it was in his favorite work, *Scofield Study Bible*. But he did not declare it a dogmatic fact, but left it open for further research and debate. Apparently he did not “exegete;” he “isogeted.” (By the way, his one volume commentary, *The Bible Knowledge*, is very well done, except he tends to read in ideas that are not there and he gets Revelation completely wrong.) Then, the rapture gets popular with the publication of Hal Lindsey’s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which sold over 15 million copies; his other works and even other popular authors keep spinning this tail.

Some proponents such as Hal Lindsey have taught that Early Church Fathers such as Clement and Origen even Augustine taught the dogma of a Rapture. This is just

very bad scholarship at best or lying at worst. I poured over their writings trying to prove a rapture and I never found it. Now with modern software it is easier to search, still not there. Then I asked for the references from the people who think the Church has taught this before; I looked them up; not there either. The emperor has no clothes; they never said it or even alluded to it. So if someone insists this is a valid doctrine, ask for the Scripture references, then ask for any solid biblical scholarship on it. You will find none as I did not. Yes, many great people think this is true and teach it passionately. They get so caught up in it, pun intended, they do not look it up. Many have made grievous errors by thinking like this such as one of my heroes, Chuck Smith who dogmatically predicted that Jesus would return in 1981. Smith recanted and feels ashamed and forgiven.

I personally went to Hal Lindsey to interview him for this article, which in 1991 was a seminary paper. I was for the rapture view then. However, following that meeting, I knew it was as wrong as my professor had said. Hal was prideful and condescending; he also was not able to answer any of my questions, such as to exegete the key words in the 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 passage, and refused to look at the references he said taught this. I had copies with me. I was there to prove him right, but he proved himself wrong. So the history of a rapture started out as a prophetic vision inspired by the emotional breakdown of a cultist, that then was picked up by emotional zealots and more cultists unconcerned for biblical truth. Furthermore, it was used as a hook by a prideful preacher who only wanted to give out his nonsensical theorems, then by other evangelists not concerned or trained in the Word. Afterwards, it creeps into the first study Bible, then popular books, and now it is in the landscape of popular Christian thought.

It is not from the Bible, and not from valid sources; so why do so many people buy into it? It was not accepted by any denomination or godly theologian, or anyone who knew biblical languages and the Bible. Why? I think it was because it was exciting and people like a bit of excitement, especially if they do not know or get into the Bible. They do not know the excitement an intimate relationship with God gives, so they look for substitutes by making up their own stuff or following others who do. By the way: every denominational and Christian group outside the Pentecostals rejected this doctrine until the 1980's. It has only gained popularity recently in the 1970's when churches stopped teaching what's in the Bible, solid doctrine, and how to study the Bible. Instead, "feel good" messages have filled our pulpits and airways as the sheep get fat on junk food and miss the main meals Christ has for us. Many of these proponents seem to just quote other people who promote their views who quote other people and so forth. But the bottom line is this: no credible evidence in the Bible or in scholarship can be found. So where did it come from? Not from God!

The word *rapture* itself is not a good word to use for this event. That is why it was never used in church history by the greatest thinkers and expositors. Perhaps of the words used by Scripture, *to be caught up* is best; if you must have a term, "quickenings" from the Old Irish seems best. Keep in mind that if you insist this is a true doctrine, this term came from false teachers who held a callous disregard to solid biblical doctrine and the rules of biblical interpretation. It is not a part of our Church thinking because

most people today are not being disciplined; they do not know the Word and thus buy this non-sequential thinking hook, line, and sinker because they do not know the difference. Others just go along with the rest of the non-thinking sheep, “bawing” to peer pressure. And shame on us preachers for not being more careful in presenting the Word of God!

The Purpose of the Rapture

Yes, there will be a *rapture*, as in “caught up together to meet the Lord” as the Scriptures tell us. But for us to argue its sequence and manner is just silly and misses the point. The purpose of “a rapture” from the Scriptures is not to vacate the earth, but to show Christ’s glory! It is not about us, it is about Him! The Church is not removed, rather is to participate in Him, to live in Him, to be marked in Him, to be identified in Him for His Lordship and lead here on Earth. Baptism means to be identified in Christ, yet so many Christians do not understand that either and thus fight over trivial meanings that baptism is not about. We do this with the Rapture too! We miss the point just as the Apostles did when they walked with Christ. But His Word is clear. Baptism is to be identified with Christ; mode and means are irrelevant. Faith and action that lead to our obedience to be identified in Him is relevant. There is no way out of that if you read the Bible; the Rapture of the Church is all about Christ and His glory. It is not about us, our theories or a seven year tribulation or whatever ridiculous conjecture of the day might be. Christ is Lord; Christianity is about Him and how He seeks and saves us. It is not about us, our views or agendas. When we get away from our selfishness and pride and really surrender ourselves to look to Him, our Church will flourish and we will get the point of what He saves us for! This is what Biblical Eschatology is all about.

Why so much rebuttal to a nonessential, theological concept?

Our critics and retractors use our foolishness against us in a big way. We give our enemies the bullets for our own downfall in reason, the relevance of faith, and the impact of the Church. To the thinking critic, who may have embraced Christianity if it was explained effectively and modeled effectually, sees religion as harmful. So say the secular humanists and contemporary philosophers from Bernard Russell to Kant Russell (1872-1970 British philosopher and atheist), who said “*He (Jesus) thought His second coming was to come before the death of people living at that time in clouds of glory.*” His criticism was that it did not happen as Jesus (Matt. 10:23) said it would, or as preachers have interpreted. Thus, he argued that the Bible has no credibility. And on to Niche and the current attack on the Pledge of Allegiance. The secular view is fueled by our unreasonable, irrational, ever-changing trends and infighting. This premise from our waywardness is we cannot know God, and Jesus did not exist or at best was a good teacher. Thus religion is destructive. Opponents point to the fanatic movements and wars over the century, ignoring the fact that it was not God but evil people using God’s name for their prideful gain. If they had proper instruction of what the Bible was saying, biblical Eschatology may have won the day.

Thinking that there will be rapture as taught by the TV preacher crowd and popular books is not unorthodox or heretical. Believe it as you may. I will keep buying

cars with sunroofs as I used to call them “rapture roofs,” because if God wants to take us up in that way, He certainly may and can. If so, I hope it is when I am in traffic. A rapture is even not worth debating. There are far more important subjects to look at such as godly church leadership, effectual discipleship, and biblical literacy. But what it does is bad, just the same. Because it gets us, as Christian communities, continued infighting and/or focused away from what is really important, and that is the development and deployment of our faith. Focusing on the minors and forgetting about the majors just creates a major hole of personal and spiritual growth and very minor faith in our churches.

You may be as upset over this as I was; sorry. I do not want to be a party-pooper on end times. Yes, there will be a rapture of sort, but not the one from TV preachers; rather, it will be one far, far more magnificent. One where Jesus Christ is truly glorified as He is coming back and we will be caught up in whatever way He sees fit. I firmly believe this will be far, far more impacting and spectacular than any wild, speculative theory that usually misses the main point. The main question is this: *are you ready for His return?*

If you disagree with me on this subject, we are still friends. I suspect this will be controversial. But as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can agree to disagree on these minors; let’s focus on the majors such as sharing the gospel and building up our faith. By the way, I will not respond to any emails or letters on this; I do not have the time. I have laid out my thoughts, references, and arguments in the best way I can. You can post your thoughts on my blog, intothyword blog, where I will read them. But my answer is this to any replies: *Just got to the Word and remember context, context, and context; and it helps to look up words we may not understand.*

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