

THE DOCTRINE OF THE "CATCHING AWAY OF THE CHURCH"

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“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:

4:17 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. 1st Thessalonians 4:16 -17

Very familiar verses for all prophecy writers and readers alike, has been the subject of much debate and confusion over the last 150 years. Many critics believe that this verse is talking about the church being taken up in the air at the seventh trump that the seventh angel

blows to signal the bowl judgments spoken of in Revelation chapter 16. That would be a Post-Tribulation model. But are they right?

I had a brother in Christ, who at the very mention of the word “rapture”, became very irate and bellowed, loudly, quote “there is no scripture in the bible that speaks of a rapture.” end-quote. But is he right, or just ignorant of the fact that Paul and many writers pointed to a “catching away” of the church and there are found many instances in the bible that support that doctrine? You can find examples of this teaching in both New and Old Testaments. Let's take a journey through biblical chapters and see what we find, shall we?

Noting the above verse quoted in the start of this message, note the underlined words to “be caught up”. Are there any other verses in the bible with the same words that mean the same thing as this verse does? The Greek word for this phrase is “harpazo” #726 in Strong's Concordance that was translated into the Latin Vulgate as “rapiemur” and came from the derivative of the Greek word #138 in Strong's Concordance “haireomai” which literally means “to seize, catch away up, pluck, pull, or take by force”, hence the modern English word “rapture”, that often maligned word, that many in the conservative church movements equate with some type of emotional display or escape hatch for those who disbelieve the church goes through the Tribulation. Getting back, are there any other verses that use the exact same word used here of “harpazo”? Turn with me now to 2nd Corinthians 12:2,

“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

12:3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

12:4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

Paul is speaking of himself being caught into paradise and heard things, that I believe he shared with the church during his days when he wrote his epistles. He calls it a mystery...what is the word he used....? Correct, it was harpazo. Paul was snatched in the spirit into heaven. Paul uses the word twice. The Old

Testament is full of the prophecies concerning the second coming of the Lord God at the end of the age, but in Paul's epistle, especially in letter to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, Paul speaks of a mystery that would not have been a mystery to those who studied the Torah or the major/minor prophets, but here refers to this mystery, or something that previously had not been known. And further, Paul equated it with the known Feast of Trumpets, referring the last trump that is blown at it's conclusion and not referring to John's description in Revelation, as John had not even wrote the last book of the Bible when Paul wrote these letters to the churches. So even in that respect, they are not the same trumpet and should not be confused with each other.

Now let's turn to another verse that speaks of this same snatching away, but in a different context.

Matthew 11:12 , “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

Matthew 13:19 “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. “

Different context, but same meaning...to be snatched away, by force. Now another, found in Gospel of John it is used four different times.

6:15 “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force , to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.”

John 10:12

12 “But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming , and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth : and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

John10:28-29

28 “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish , neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. 29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”

Again, in Acts 23:10, Jude 1:23, Revelation 12:5 “And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

Let's not forget Phillip the apostle when he had baptized the Ethiopian eunuch,

Acts, 8:39

“And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing

If you've been keeping count, that is 13 times in the New Testament including the ones I didn't quote , but gave reference to, that the word “Harpazo” is used and it means in every instance to be removed by force, without warning being snatched away...not each mention of the Greek word “Harpazo” has to do with with the mystery that Paul speaks of, but it shows that the word was used repeatedly to speak of with the same definition and example.

WHAT ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Good question. Is there anything that can point to a parallel word that has the same meaning used in Greek in these passages found in also in the Old Testament.? Matter of fact, there is. There a examples of men being “snatched up” and removed from this earth. Let's start with the earliest known example.

Genesis 5:23

Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. v.24, “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”

Here the word for the underlined phrase “took him away” is the Hebrew word #3947 in Strong's, “leqach” which means to “receive, reserve, seize, send for, take away, or fetch”.

Paul speaks of Enoch this way, Hebrews 11:5 of the NIV, “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away (translated him). For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.”

The word used for “translated, or taken him away” is the Greek word, metatithemi, Strong's #3346, which means “transport, exchange, change sides, carry over, change, remove”. Scoffers will use the passage in verse 13 of that same chapter,

v:13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

But to use that verse contradicts verse 5, and the bible cannot contradict itself. So Enoch was “snatched away, removed” from this earth alive and did NOT see death, but verse 13 applies to all others who lived by faith. Another example is the prophet Elijah and we will turn to 2nd Kings chapter 2,

2:1 “ And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.”

Reading down:

2:11 “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”

What is the Hebrew word for the phrase “would take up” in verse 1. It's the word and the equivalent word as used in the example of Enoch, as this word is “Leqach” used to describe the snatching away of Enoch. Some will make a convoluted argument that both men are dead and died in faith, but they use logic that is beyond their grasp of the infinite, not believing that God is Sovereign and He can do whatever He wishes to do, apart from their finite analogies. They will use “did not see death” and try to explain the second death. That's stretching the meaning of the text and we have no clue to do so. It's best to take what the Word says literally and not add your own meaning, by adding or subtracting from God's message. They will say that he lived 365 years and no longer, but you can't count eternity, because it's without time. So again, they try to rationalize their preconceived ideas to support their doctrine of “believers in Jesus Christ” not being removed bodily from this earth in an instant....or the bible says, in the “twinkling of an eye.”

Note that we have covered Enoch, Elijah, Phillip, Paul, our Lord and Savior, and finally the Church itself, the bride of Christ being described with the words “snatched up, or plucked by force” from the earth.

But still the critics will not believe. I point them to some passages that mirror each other and tell us why these examples were given to us. First is Isaiah 26:19,

“Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

26:20 Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

26:21 For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”

And her companion verse, spoken of by my Lord, John chapter 14,

14:2 “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

14:4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”

What do these companion verses say to you? They tell me that Jesus will bring us unto Himself and we will be rewarded a mansion in the New Jerusalem, as He promised. There we will wait for the indignation, or His wrath to be over-past or to subside. These verses speak of resurrection, changing from mortal to immortal, and not being present when His wrath comes upon this earth, both the resurrected dead in Christ, and the living who are both changed as Paul spoke of in the very first verses of this message.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE RAPTURE IS A MODERN ONE?

In recent years, many opponents of the pre-tribulation rapture view have made dogmatic assertions that this view was never taught before 1820 A.D. There have been attempts to attribute the origin of this view to John N. Darby.... but this is false and misleading. Ephraem the Syrian wrote, in 373 AD, *"For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."* ... revealing that the early church fathers themselves were indeed teaching this.

This text was originally a sermon called “On the Last Times, the Anti-Christ, and the End of the World.” There are four existing Latin manuscripts (the Parisinus, the Augiensis, the Barberini, and the St. Gallen) ascribed to St. Ephraem or to St. Isidore . Some scholars believe this text was written by some unknown writer in the sixth century and was derived from the original Ephraem manuscript.

The sermon describes the events of the last days, beginning with the rapture, the Great Tribulation of 3 1/2 years duration under the Antichrist's rule, followed by the Second Coming of Christ. In Ephraem's book “The Book of the Cave of Treasures”, written about 370 A.D., he expressed his belief that the 69th week of Daniel ended with the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah. Although this does not prove that the doctrine of the Rapture is correct, it does show that even early Church Theologians were teaching this and it is NOT a modern device of an immature girl and John Darby, as some claim, but a doctrine of the early church.

The glorified Jesus, the Great I AM, that I AM spoke of this in the His precious Word, as Ephraem the Syrian did, when our Lord spoke in Revelation 3:10,

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

Paul echoes what Jesus spoke to John years later, when he penned these verses, But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

5:9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

5:10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

POINT AND COUNTERPOINT!!

The Church is a specific group of believers in Jesus Christ. It is not a building ... nor is it any particular denomination or religion. It is also known as the Body of Christ. The Living Church of God is a living organism that began at Pentecost -- see [Acts 2:1-4](#) and culminates at the rapture -- see [1 Thessalonians 4:16-18](#). It does not include anyone who was a believer prior to or after the two above-mentioned events. The terms saints or elect refer to another specific group of believers. This group includes all the Old Testament saints, as well as those who become believers in Christ after the rapture. I've made many references in past messages that the Tribulation is designed for two things, and two things only and that is:

-Pouring out of God's wrath on an unrepentant, and rebellious world,

-refining Israel as silver is refined in the fire....and we are NOT included in that refining. Why? Because there is no need, as Jesus paid it all at the cross, and to think otherwise smacks of "catholic purgatory" that Jesus blood and sacrifice just was not sufficient to fully save the sinner. A serious mistake by a past ruling Theocracy.

There is a marked difference in the Bible when you look at references to the Church compared with references to the saints or the elect. The Church is always referred to in very narrow and distinct terms, whereas the saints or the elect are always referred to in very broad terms. More pointed, however, is the fact that the word Church never appears again after Revelation 3:22 -- you'll only see the words "saints or the elect" mentioned throughout the rest of the book -- and this is directly after a very significant reference to this "catching away by force", in [Revelation 3:10](#)

ASSESSMENT and CONCLUSIONS

What is the tribulation? It is the wrath of God. When does it start? When the first seal is broken in chapter 6 of Revelation by our Lord, Jesus Christ. What are not appointed to? We are not appointed to wrath, but salvation through Him. How will the tribulation begin to commence? When the Church of God is removed out of the way. Isaiah 26:19, and 2nd Thessalonians

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let (the Holy Spirit), until he be taken out of the way.

[2:8](#) And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

[2:9](#) Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

[2:10](#) And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

But forewarning to those who belong to a "church"...these bible verses who speak of the removal of the CHURCH will not be everyone who sits in pew, or says some "hail marys" in some repetitive fashion, or think their priest or their pastor can usher them into God's Kingdom. It's not about being Catholic, or Protestant or something somewhere in between. It is solely dependent on the application of the blood of Jesus Christ to your life and clothing your spirit with His righteousness. There are many verses that point solely to Jesus Christ being the "Way, the Truth and the Life". No man can come to the Father in Heaven except through Him. All roads do not lead to eternal life, but believing in your heart of hearts and accepting His free pardon for your sins through Grace and faith in the only Begotten Son of God.

"For God so loved the world, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"
John 3:16

God has given us example after example. He has given us story after story to show the TRUE children of God being removed out of the way. He has given us words to show that HE WILL remove the TRUE, blood washed church before His wrath is poured out on this earth. How much more clear does He need to be? When someone remarks, “the rapture is not found in the bible”, then my reader, you can direct them to passages that show they misunderstand. And if they still don't get it, then that's Ok...you can explain it to them on your way up to meet the Lord in the air.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved” Don't be left behind when all hell breaks loose on this earth in the coming Tribulation, which may be sooner than anyone cares to think of....maybe even this year???

This is Pastor Mike Taylor, praying God's salvation in your life and to ready for the soon return of our King of kings, and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ, our Savior. If there is anything I can help you with, pray with you about, or just listen, email me at realteam1999@sbcglobal.net. Or visit me online at www.churchofgod-usa.com, for more messages based on the Word of God. God bless you all,

Till we meet at Jesus' feet.