

Chapter 8 Biblical Rapture

Many Christians believe in and teach a future end-times event when all true believers will be physically taken from the earth into heaven, much as Enoch or Elijah was, to escape a cataclysmic tribulation period prior to the return of Jesus Christ. The question being raised in this chapter is whether or not the Bible actually teaches this evacuation of the church in a first stage of Christ's second coming. Given the considerable influence this teaching has had in shaping the doctrinal paradigm in Christian culture, and the central position this doctrine has taken in the minds of many evangelicals, an examination of this teaching is warranted.

The transformation from mortals to immortals at Christ's coming can accurately be termed the rapture, though the word rapture is not used in common translations. The biblical terminology is “caught up” and comes from the Greek word *harpazo*, while the word rapture comes from the Latin *raptura*. The goal here is not to disprove rapture, but rather to define it in a more accurate way.

Common Proof Texts for the Escape View

Let's start by looking at a few passages of scriptures that are often cited as proof texts for an escape or a physical removal of the church prior to a tribulation period and Jesus' return to establish His Kingdom. Probably the most commonly used passage is found in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4.

(1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 KJV)

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 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.

16 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:

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.

This passage does indeed say when we will meet Jesus in the clouds; it is after the dead in Christ are raised from their graves, which is the first resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20. [1] But what is often overlooked is that this meeting with Jesus in the clouds is in the context of His descent from heaven. Nothing in this passage speaks of Him turning around and returning to heaven after we meet Him. It simply says He is descending. [2] Neither is there any mention of Jesus returning to heaven in Revelation 20. It does say however that the purpose of this first resurrection was so they could *live* and *reign* with Christ for 1000 years which implies activity on earth.

Presupposition is precisely what causes many Christians to assume certain passages are talking about a removal of Christians from the earth when in fact they do not. Scriptures that promise God's protection are good examples.

Revelation 3:10 (KJV)

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.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NKJV)

10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Daniel 12:1 (KJV)

1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

The three passages above are wonderful promises of protection from times of trouble, promises that I gladly embrace. But none of them say anything about leaving the planet as a means of protection from a time of trouble on the earth. God is certainly able to rescue us from trouble, even while trouble is all around us, just as the children of Israel in Egypt were protected in Egypt when the plagues were all around them. [3]

Another passage commonly used to support the escape rapture is found in Luke 17 where Jesus compared His coming to the days of Noah.

Luke 17:26-30 (NKJV)

26 "And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

27 "They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 "Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built;

29 "but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 "Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

This passage, along with its parallel passage in Matthew 24 (which we will examine later in this chapter) is often used to teach that the church is taken out of the world. But we see that those who were taken out or removed were the wicked. [4] Some might assume that the phrase “on the day that Lot went out of Sodom” is a parallel to the righteous being taken to heaven, and those left behind and destroyed a parallel to the tribulation, but that is a stretch. What actually happened is that God judged the wicked while Lot remained on earth. [5]

Texts that Oppose the Escape View

But if we are to disprove the escape rapture view and establish a new position, we must do more than point out the lack of explicit language describing a departure from earth at the rapture. Otherwise this issue is simply a matter of personal interpretation or opinion. We must show that the scriptures in fact teach the opposite, that we will *not* leave.

The scriptures actually give us several passages that not only cast doubt upon the escape view, but do indeed show just the opposite. Let’s look at some scriptures that make the escape rapture view very difficult to believe and then we will look at some that directly refute it.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

In the parable of the mustard seed (Matt 13:31-32), Jesus compared the Kingdom to the mustard seed.

Matthew 13:31-32 (KJV)

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Though the mustard plant starts out small, very small, it will grow and grow until it is the greatest of all the garden herbs. This does not present a picture of the Church abandoning a hopeless situation on earth and escaping to heaven. Here we see the Kingdom of God (within the church) portrayed as growing among the other kingdoms until it is ready to rule the whole earth (at Jesus' return). This is the same idea given by Isaiah: "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from hence forth [from the time Jesus was born] even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" (Is. 9:7).

The Parable of the Dragnet

In the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50), Jesus told of fishermen who cast a net and brought in a catch. They began to sort the fish and keep the good and throw out the bad.

Matthew 13:47-50 (KJV)

47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Notice that Jesus said, "So shall it be at the end of the world," so we are clearly talking about His return. We see the judgment of the wicked (the severing of the wicked from among the just) taking place on the earth with no mention of the righteous leaving. In fact, Jesus taught that the meek would inherit the earth (Matt 5:5). Isaiah also foretells this event; Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He shall exterminate its sinners from it (Is. 13:9 NAS).

The Parable of the Tares and the Wheat

The parable of the tares and the wheat (see Matt 13: 24-30) confirm the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the dragnet.

Matthew 13:24-30 (KJV)

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

In Jesus' explanation of this parable to his disciples, He said the burning of the tares represented the end of this age when the angels of God would gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The escape rapture teaching says that the righteous are removed first, before the wicked are judged, but Jesus taught that the tares (unrighteous) are removed first.^[6] Neither is there any indication that the wheat (the righteous) were ever uprooted, but continued to grow and even become more prominent. This confirms the passage from Matthew 24 which says "...as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:37). In the days of Noah the wicked were removed, not the righteous. This is when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev 11:15).

The Parable of the Leaven

In the parable of the leaven (Matt.13:33) the subject again is the Kingdom of God and Jesus describes how the kingdom is like leaven hidden from view yet spreading till the whole was leavened. The kingdom will spread throughout the earth, like leaven (yeast) spreads through dough. This fits with the understanding that the kingdom of God is spreading, but is hidden and will not appear as the literal government of the earth until King Jesus appears.

I am aware that there are different interpretations of these parables, but in light of certain scriptures like the ones below, which directly refute the idea of the church leaving the planet, the evidence against the escape view becomes difficult to question.

Proverbs 2:21-22 (KJV)

21 For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.

22 But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

Proverbs 10:30 (KJV)

30 The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.

John 17:14-15 (KJV)

14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

These three passages are perhaps the clearest and most direct statements addressing this issue. This is particularly true of John 17:15 because of the context in which Jesus was acknowledging the hatred that the world has for us, and prayed that we would *not* be taken out of the world, but that we be protected from evil. The church has an important part to play in the earth during times of tribulation and Jesus wants us to be here. It seems clear to me that the escape rapture view is not something that Jesus believes in. ^[7] According to Proverbs, Christians will never be removed from the earth but we will rule and reign on this planet with Him. The

heavens belong to the Lord, but He has given the earth to the children of men (see Ps. 115:16).

Where Did the Escape View Come From

In light of these things we have to ask: “How did this doctrine get started and how did it become so popular? Its origins are difficult to track down, but its modern popularity seems to be rooted in an utterance given by a woman named Margaret McDonald in the church led by Scottish clergyman, Edward Irving (1792-1834). The utterance was supposed to be prophetic but the whole idea was denounced in 1864 by Dr. S.P. Tregelles. However it was promoted by the teachings of an Anglo-Irish evangelist, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who is known as the father of dispensationalism. It gained wider acceptance through Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921), who published this view in the notes of his Scofield Study Bible. Study bibles with commentary inserted were not new, but the Scofield Bible was very popular in its day and is still used today.

What Will the Rapture Really Look Like?

The point has been made that the rapture is certainly a valid biblical event. But given the information presented, how it will take place may be quite different from what many have imagined. Jesus said His coming would be as it was in the days of Noah. This passage from Matthew has also been used as a proof text for the escape view. But let’s take a closer look.

Matthew 24:37-42 (KJV)

37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

In the days of Noah, the earth was filled with wickedness and only Noah and his family were considered upright before God. Noah entered the ark and the wicked were all destroyed by the flood. So when we read in verse 39 that the flood came and *took* them all away, it is referring to those taken away in judgment, while Noah and his family stayed on the earth and inherited it. This will happen to the wicked when Jesus returns.

It would be easy to assume that the word *took* in verse 39 and the word *taken* in verses 40 and 41, are forms of the same word. If so, it would naturally follow that the fate of those whom the flood took would be the same as those taken from the field or the mill. But as a friend of mine once pointed out, these are very different words. The word *took* in vs 39 is the Greek word *airo*, which, as expected, means to take up, take away, or remove. This refers to sinners being taken away in judgment. But the word *taken* in verses 40 and 41 is the Greek word *paralambano* which means “to receive near, i.e. associate with oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy to assume an office. It is also translated take unto or take with. This refers to the righteous being joined closely with the Lord at His return and given a place of authority in Christ’s kingdom. [8]

So we can see that this passage is describing the fate of both the wicked and the righteous. First Jesus describes the wicked being taken away in judgment. Then He explains that

during this same time, the righteous will be received near and associated closely with Him, even receive an office as He promised His disciples in Matthew 19:28, and in the parable of stewardship where the servants were given authority over cities (see Luke 19:17-20).

So, for those who believe that the man taken from the field and the woman taken at the mill are raptured, that is correct. But there is nothing here that indicates they are leaving the planet to escape trouble. They are instead taken into a close association with Jesus, probably given a position of authority in His kingdom. This is when the righteous are changed in a moment, put on immortality, and begin to rule with Him.

In the Twinkling of an Eye

Paul describes the rapture in his first letter to the Corinthians and in his first letter to the Thessalonians. In the Corinthian Letter he describes it as taking place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54 (KJV)

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Please allow a moment for some “sanctified speculation.” Could it be that at Christ's return, we will meet Him in the air and immediately be transported to the Mount of Olives? We know that He ascended into heaven from the mount of Olives as His disciples watched. When He had disappeared into the clouds, two angels spoke to them saying, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (see Acts 1:9-12). Zechariah prophesied of His return saying, "And in that day, His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives..." (Zech.14:4).

Could it be that, after we meet Jesus in the air, we will land on the Mount of Olives and follow Jesus as He ascends the temple mount through the eastern gate to attend the conference of all conferences? The Speaker at this conference will of course be King Jesus and His theme will no doubt be The Kingdom of God on Earth. He will appoint those who will be in authority to rule and reign with Him for a thousand years and we will see the complete fulfillment to our prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" I believe we have moved from sanctified speculation to strong scriptural probability.

Many rapture theorists have envisioned mass chaos at the rapture with Christians floating into the air leaving many automobiles and airplanes to crash with no one at the controls, etc. But it is probable that all this could happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, with no passage of time as we know it. Such a transport through time and space is not without precedent. Was not Philip caught away (*harpzo; the same word used in 1 Thess "caught up" to meet the Lord in the clouds*) by the Spirit and found instantly at a different place (see Acts 8:39)?

Having an experience that seems to happen over a long period of time, but actually takes place almost instantaneously is common to all of us. It is called dreaming. Researchers have discovered that we dream most during that stage of sleep known as the REM cycle. REM stands for Rapid Eye Movement (twinkling of the eyes?). And wouldn't you know, the scripture says that those who came back to Jerusalem were like those who dream! [9]

The Song of Ascents from Psalm 126 starts like this: "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream." When the Jews came back to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, they ascended mount Zion with songs of joy. Psalm 126 is "A song of Ascents" that they sang. This is a prophetic shadow of the return of Jesus when He too will lead a great company, set free from the bondage of corruption and the limitations of mortality, to enjoy the glorious liberty that comes with the redemption of our bodies (See Romans 8:18-23).

I pray this information will be prayerfully considered reate a clearer vision of our purpose and thus motivate us to be more zealous in preparing the way for the coming kingdom of God.

Paradigm Builders

The Bible does not say that the Church is going to be removed from the earth. Though we do indeed meet the Lord in the air at His return, nothing indicates that He then turns around and goes back to heaven with Christians in tow.

Before reading this chapter, how would you describe your position regarding this concept?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

How would you describe your position regarding this concept after reading this chapter?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree