

# The Rapture: Real or Myth?

---

© 2024 by Jay McCarl

There is an unfortunate myth in Christian circles that the ‘Rapture’ is a recent theological invention of 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian, John Nelson Darby. This allegation is in fact a broad-brushed statement, typically employed to sweep aside the evangelical teaching that the rapture is a real, future event. There are many Christian denominations and individuals who find the idea of the rapture ridiculous on its own merits and wish to distance themselves from it. But Darby clearly did not invent the ‘Rapture’ but rather, in 1827, popularized a ‘pre-tribulation’ setting of that future event.\* The rapture itself, however, was clearly taught and embraced by the infant Christian church.

The swelling number of Christians and denominations who hold the doctrine of the rapture in contempt (or at least at arm’s length) is a more recent development in Christian theology resulting from rationalistic peer pressure and a failure in simple logic (both Eastern ancient-dialectical and Western non-contradictory logics, if you happen to care about such things). Simply put, the rapture, when it happens, will be a miracle—and miracles are frowned upon (if not outlawed) in many progressive denominations. Even personal theological views of miracles are slowly evaporating. Desperate individuals often call on God for miracles, but when they occur, dismiss them as good fortune. But the rapture is a *big* one—the sudden miraculous disappearance of hundreds of millions of Christians sometime prior to the physical return of Jesus to the earth. That’s much harder to swallow in any terms.

Modern church teachings have been shifting—embracing more rationalistic, palatable positions while dismissing many archaic, non-rational beliefs (physical resurrection, hell, etc.) in favor of a more reasonable belief system for a rational, scientific church. This includes the rapture—which is not a recent doctrine at all, but one that was clearly delineated in the New Testament.

---

\* Prior to Darby, many Puritans also held to a pre-tribulation setting, making that view of the rapture nothing new to Christian theology.

## The Essential Doctrine of the Rapture

The doctrine of the rapture in Christianity is inseparably fused to one of its great essential doctrines—the Resurrection of the Dead.\* This doctrine can be observed in the earliest Old Testament record, including Job 19:25-27 (c. 1900-1700 BC), Psalm 16:8-11, 71:20 (c. 1000 BC), Psalm 49 (c. 1400-1300 BC), Isaiah 26:19-20 (c. 732 BC) Isaiah 53:10-11 (c. 690 BC) and in other prominent writers like Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, Solomon and other psalmists.

The New Testament, of course is packed with references to the resurrection of the dead—at least eighty-five—by the apostles Paul, Peter, John, and Matthew. Others who spoke of it include Mark, Luke, the Pharisees and Sadducees and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The final articles of the ‘Apostle’s Creed’ (c. AD 140-AD 450, an encapsulation of the essential Christian doctrines) reads: “[I believe in] the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Simply put, the people of the Bible believed that this event—the coming resurrection of dead—was nonnegotiable true. In fact, it was their great and final hope for eternal life itself.

What does this have to do with the rapture? That was the dilemma that vexed the Thessalonian church. The newborn, largely Gentile church had been misled by some false teachers, saying that the resurrection of the dead had already occurred—that they were all doomed the full force of God’s wrath against the sinful world just prior to the return of Christ. When the apostle Paul, who founded the Thessalonian church, was informed of their confusion and anguish caused by the false teachers, he wrote them a letter to restore their hope and peace of mind...

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> **We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> **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****

---

\* The timing of the rapture (pre, mid, post-tribulation, etc.) is not essential doctrine.

**dead in Christ will rise first.** <sup>17</sup> 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.*** <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words. [5] Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

<sup>4</sup> **But you**, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup> **For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.** <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, **whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.** <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.\*

In other words, the resurrection of the dead could not possibly have occurred simply because they were still on earth:

**“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them** [the resurrected righteous dead] **in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”**

In modern terms, the rapture is the contingency in case you’re alive when the resurrection of the dead takes place.

Paul further addressed the same event and contingency to the Corinthian church as an essential aspect of the Gospel because someone among them had introduced a teaching

---

\* *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (1 Th 4:13–5:11). (1984). Zondervan.

that the resurrection of the dead was a myth. Paul's response was 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. In verse 50 he reaches his doctrinal crescendo:

<sup>50</sup> I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a mystery: **We will not all sleep [die], but we will all be changed**— <sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, **the dead will be raised** imperishable, and **we will be changed**. <sup>53</sup> For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

People and churches who reject the doctrine of rapture have rejected what the Bible teaches about the resurrection of the dead and what happens to a living believer at the time of that coming event. Conversely, the person who embraces the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead by default believes in the rapture.

## Conclusion

Some argue that the word 'rapture' is found nowhere in the Bible. This is true, unless you own a Latin Bible, since its Greek equivalent is ἁρπάζω (harpazō) which is the word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1 Corinthians 12:2 & 4. But this is quibbling about words. The event, whatever one chooses to name it, declares that Christian believers who are alive when the resurrection of the dead occurs, will at the same time also receive a resurrection body, to be caught up with the resurrected to meet the Lord in the air—rescued from the onslaught of coming wrath of God.

The 'rapture' is a Biblical fact. It is unfortunate that so many Christians reject this essential doctrine, perhaps out of fear of being 'caught' believing in such an absurd idea in the modern, rationalistic world, let alone the modern scientific church. But the Bible is all

true, or none of it is—and no human being is allowed to pick and choose what they will or will not believe concerning its content.\*

Much more can be (and has been) said about the rapture, and there are volumes of books and endless internet sermons and rants on the subject. The best anyone can do for further investigation, however, is simply read the Bible.

As modern western Christians, we are experts at doctrinal microsurgery, but those who received the scrolls ‘when the ink was still wet’ understood every word of the message when it was handed to them—because it was meant to be understood. The secret things belong to God, but He has also handed us a revelation of Himself in the Bible—revealing His nature and ways to the extent to which He has chosen to reveal Himself. The ancients would simply tell us, “Read, trust and obey—it’s all true. And don’t put words in God’s mouth...”

### **Post-Script: A Dangling Controversary**

This discussion begs a chronic question: *When will this rapture take place?*

Jesus’ answer was not cryptic—he told His disciples that HE doesn’t even know when His Father will send Him to resurrect the dead and gather His church to Himself. According to Paul, this event will occur before God’s Wrath is unleashed at the end of the world.† To the good saints who insist that there will be a post-tribulation rapture, one question remains: what are they doing today to prepare for the inevitable wrath of God—especially in a time when explosive prophetic events are possibly being fulfilled? If they are not digging bomb-shelters, hoarding food or vigorously preaching the Gospel, then do they really believe that the terror of God’s Wrath is inevitable?

The Bible simply does not teach us to do such things except preach the Gospel as life-or-death whenever possible. Rather, Jesus told His disciples to faithfully be about the Lord’s work of serving His servants until He suddenly, unexpectedly returns to them and for

---

\* (2 Peter 1:20-21) “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit...”

† 1 Thess. 5:9-11

them—and catches them doing as He commanded. His teaching in Matthew 24-25 does not include His church doing combat with itself about the existence of the rapture, much less it's uncertain timing. His sole admonishment was simply, "Be Ready!"