

THE RAPTURE: A VALID CONCEPT?

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Alexander Campbell once said:

"We choose to speak of Bible things by Bible words, because we are always suspicious that if the word is not in the Bible, the idea which it represents is not there; and always confident that the things taught by God are better taught in the words and under the names which the Holy Spirit has chosen and appropriated than in the words which man's wisdom teaches."

Words are vehicles of thoughts or concepts. To our knowledge, the word "rapture" does not appear in any acceptable translation of the Scriptures. We therefore approach the study of the concept of the rapture with extreme suspicion.

What is the concept of the rapture? In Latin it means, "to snatch out." To those who believe in the rapture concept, it means a secret "snatching out" of both the living and the dead saints to meet Christ in the air. The key word to notice in this definition is the word "secret." Many believers of the rapture theory, but not all, believe there are other wonders which will occur before or shortly after this startling event. These are:

1. The return of the Jews to Palestine to fulfill the alleged land promise.
2. The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the supposed promise of this event.
3. The rising up of an anti-christ with whom the Jews will reportedly make a treaty.
4. The great tribulation, which some call "Jacob's trouble."

It is ironic that those who believe the concept of the secret rapture, disagree violently as to when these four events will occur.

1. There are those who believe the Jews' return to Palestine will precede the rapture. Others hold that the return of Israel will follow the secret exit of the church.
2. Some propose that the temple must be rebuilt before the rapture, others insist that the construction will occur after the 'snatching out' of the believers.
3. Some expect the anti-christ before the church is taken out of the world. Others place the anti-christ after the church is raptured.
4. As for the time of the tribulation, you will find what prophecy students call "pre-trib", "mid-trib," and "post-trib." They all agree that there is to be a tribulation, but cannot agree as to when it will occur in regard to the rapture.

Let us review what we have said so far:

First, we have a word (rapture) that is not found in Scriptures, but is supposed to express a Scriptural concept.

Second, it is not certain as to what events are supposed to occur in this concept.

Third, those who hold to this concept are in great disagreement as to when the happenings which are supposed to surround the event are to occur.

These things make one feel like a person on a jury who is asked to convict a man of murder when: no motive has been established for the crime, the victim's corpse has not been found, the weapon used cannot be produced, and the witnesses' testimony is contradictory to the prosecuting attorney's allegations against the accused. How could we possibly find the accused man guilty? How can we possibly believe the rapture concept?

Is the concept of a "secret rapture," or "snatching out" of the righteous taught in the Scriptures? Should we expect a secret rapture of believers! Will there be driverless cars, pilotless aircrafts, and unmanned trolley cars? Are the bumper stickers true?"

The Apostle Paul, in writing I Thessalonians 4:16, is used to prove the theory. The verse states: "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." Is this verse speaking of a secret coming of Jesus, or of His Second Coming? Is it Scriptural to speak the language of those who say this is the "first phase" of the Second Coming? Is this concept a Biblical truth, or is it merely mental gymnastics? Should we quote "The dead in Christ shall rise first" to show a rapture of the "righteous dead" from among the "wicked dead"? The Scripture should be kept in its proper context. The Scripture is contrasting the "dead in Christ shall rise first" before the "righteous living," not the "wicked dead."

Can all these alleged occurrences that are supposed to surround the rapture occur and still have Jesus "coming in an hour we think not"?, or "as a thief in the night"? It seems to me, that when He comes "as a thief in the night," it is not a secret rapture of the church from a world that continues to exist. It appears to be a destroyed world that is left behind. Peter says. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with a fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein, shall be burned up" (II Peter 3:10). In light of this, the bumper sticker that states, "In case of rapture, this seat will be unoccupied!". appears as a humorous understatement.

Is the rapture true? We are not obligated to believe the concept without the testimony of the Scriptures. We can avoid all the problems of interpretation it has engendered. It is an unproven theory with faulty assumptions at best The Second Coming of Christ is called by three Greek words These nouns are:

1. **Apocalypse** (revelation)
2. **Parousia** (coming or presence)
3. **Epiphany** (appearing)

Is any one of these words used exclusively to describe a "secret rapture"? Shall we make one of these words describe a coming "for His saints," and the other "with His saints"? Are dispensationalists justified in this distinction? Let us compare these words, and see what happens at Christ's Coming.

1. *Parousia* (coming)

- A. I Thessalonians 3:13 – The saints are shown to be unblameable. His saints will come with Him.
- B. II Thessalonians 2:8 – In the day of His Coming there will be a slaying of the wicked and a time of judgment.
- C. James 5:7-8 – It is the day for which Christians are to look with patience.
- D. I John 2:28 – It is a day of which we are not to be ashamed. We are to have confidence.
- E. I Corinthians 15:23 – It is a day of resurrection.

2. *Epiphanoia* (appearing)

- A. II Timothy 4:8 – It is the day of the giving of a crown to the righteous.
- B. II Thessalonians 2:8 (brightness) – It is a day of judgment and destroying of the man of sin.
- C. II Timothy 4:1 – It is a day of judgment for the living and the resurrected dead.
- D. Titus 2:13 – It is the day Christians are to look to with hope.

3. *Apocalypse* (revelation)

- A. II Thessalonians 1:7 – It is a day of judgment, when Christ is revealed with his angels and takes vengeance on those who have not obeyed the Gospel.
- B. I Peter 1;13 – It is the day Christians are to look to with hope. C. I Peter 4:13 – It is a day of Christ's glory and the saints rejoicing.
- C. I Peter 4:13 – It is a day of Christ's glory and the saints rejoicing.
- D. I Corinthians 1:7-8 – It is the day of the Lord.

It is obvious the secret rapture is not synonymous with any of these words. Notice that these are all descriptive of the same day. The context of all of these verses shows what takes place at His Coming.

1. There is judgment of the wicked that day.
2. The saints are vindicated that day.
3. The saints are to "look in hope" to that day.
- 4 The saints (angels) come with Christ that day.
- 5, The Christians are rewarded that day.

6. The words *epiphany* and *parousia* are used in the same verse in II Thessalonians 2:8.
7. It is the day of the Lord's glory among His saints.
8. The dead will be raised that day.

From these facts it is very obvious there are not two phases to the Second Coming. Neither one of these particular words is used to describe a "secret rapture."

The thing of which we are to warn men is not a secret rapture of the church, but the day of Christ's coming and judgment, What happens in the day of the Lord?

1. It is as unexpected as a thief (I Thessalonians 5:2-4).
2. The resurrection of the wicked and of the righteous will occur that day (not a thousand years apart) (John 6:28-29).
3. The dead in Christ shall rise and the righteous living will be caught up together with them (not a resurrection at His coming, and another at His third coming, or after the millennium) (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).
4. The Lord comes with His angels for His saints (not with the resurrected saints for those who were faithful during the tribulation) (I Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 14).
5. It is a day of saints being rewarded and sinners punished (Daniel 12:2-3; II Timothy 4:8).
6. It is a day of judgment (not years later) (II Timothy 4:1).
7. The world will be destroyed (not continued for a literal thousand year reign) (II Peter 3:3-13).
8. The wicked in Hades will be cast into Hell (Revelation 20:14).
9. The righteous will be with God forever (Revelation 21-22).

Are you ready for His coming? There is no second chance. NOW is the day of salvation.