

The Rapture

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When it comes to the popular end-time concept of the *supposed* rapture, prophecy authors abound with sensationalistic, fictional accounts of what might occur. With great literary flare, they write of millions of Christians suddenly vanishing from the earth. They describe the chaos and confusion that will arise at the time of the rapture, as those left behind wonder, “Where did everybody go?”

The opening chapter of highly successful book (and soon to be rebooted movie, starring Nicholas Cage), *Left Behind*, plays on this chaotic theme, as it describes the shock and confusion among those “left behind.” The scene takes place on board a 747 bound for London’s Heathrow Airport. During the flight, the rapture occurs and many of the passengers suddenly disappear. Throughout the plane, the only thing left behind among those who were raptured is their clothing. As those who remain wonder where everybody went, and what strange event has happened, there are screams of terror and confusion.

Hal Lindsey has called the rapture, “The ultimate trip.”¹ Of course, that was using the hip language of 1970’s when his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* was so popular. Today, the rapture is more cleverly referenced as “The Great Snatch” or “Operation Evacuation.”²

Appealing to Scripture, proponents of this false doctrine often refer to the rapture as “The blessed hope,” citing Titus 2:13 as a proof text. In this way, Hal Lindsey wrote of the rapture, “Here is the real hope for the Christian, the ‘blessed hope’ for true believers.”³ This is completely contrary to the teachings of the New Testament! Even a casual observation of Titus 2:13 will reveal no mention of the rapture. The subject of the verse is the Second Coming of Christ, at which time the dead will be raised (1 Cor. 15:50ff; 1 Thess. 4:13ff). The resurrection is “the blessed hope” of the church.

The resurrection was a constant and consistent theme in the preaching of the New Testament church. The examples of this focus in teaching are repeatedly seen in the book of Acts (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; 17:31; 24:15; 26:8, 23).

Sadly, however, through the popular teachings of men like Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and other advocates of the rapture, the great hope of many today has become the rapture, and not the resurrection! While the early church preached the hope of the resurrection, the word primarily being proclaimed today is the rapture.

For those unfamiliar with the rapture, this is the belief that one day, Christians all over the world will suddenly be “caught up” by the Lord into heaven. The rapture will include those who are living, along with the resurrection of the saints who have passed on from this life.

Our English word “rapture” comes from the Latin word, *rapturo*. In the New Testament, its Greek equivalent would be the word, *harpazo*, which means: to seize, to catch up, or to snatch away. Paul uses this word in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, in a passage that rapture advocates say is describing the rapture.

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

This is the main proof text used to teach the rapture. Based on this verse and the surrounding context, it is taught that Christians will be caught up (raptured) at some point relative to what is known as “the great tribulation.”

There are three primary positions regarding the timing of the rapture. A pre-tribulation rapture position would have the rapture occurring prior to the tribulation period. A mid-tribulation rapture would see the rapture at the midway point of the tribulation period. A post-tribulation Rapture would obviously occur after the seven years of tribulation. Of these three positions, the pre-tribulation rapture is the most commonly taught, although, not one of the three can be found in the Bible. In his book *No Fear of the Storm*, Tim LaHaye wrote of the pre-tribulation rapture position (which is the basis for his "Left Behind" books):

“One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture is that no one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of His Second Coming separated by the Tribulation. This is true. But then, no one passage teaches a post-trib or mid-trib Rapture, either.”⁴

This is a startling admission! If no one verse of Scripture teaches a pre-trib rapture, why do so many Bible teachers continue to teach it? The rapture (as taught in dispensationalism) is another fictional end-time theory that is nothing more than the sensationalistic product of misapplied Scriptures. Interestingly, despite his admission, LaHaye entitles the last chapter of the book: “The Pre-Trib Rapture: Believe It!”⁵ Yet, if no one verse of Scripture teaches it, why should anyone believe it?

The lack of Scriptural support for a pretribulation rapture is also seen in John Walvoord’s book, “The Rapture Question.” Walvoord wrote:

"It is therefore not too much to say that the rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology.... Any answer to the rapture question must therefore be based upon a careful study of the church as it is revealed in the New Testament."⁶

Walvoord cannot produce a single verse of Scripture that explicitly teaches the pre-tribulation rapture! He seeks to establish his position based on his definition of the church. This is interesting considering Walvoord views the church as an after-thought in the plan of God.

As mentioned earlier, the main proof text offered in support of the rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Tim LaHaye says the rapture is “taught clearly” in this text. But where? This passage is clearly describing the Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. This is when the being “caught up” occurs. There is nothing here about the church being raptured prior (pre) to a period of tribulation, in the middle (mid) of the tribulation, or even after (post) the tribulation. No mention is even made of a time of tribulation. Neither is there any mention of the church returning to earth at the conclusion of the great tribulation. The apostle Paul says we will “meet the Lord in the air, and so (in this way) we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17). Any type of pre, mid, or post tribulation rapture scheme must be read into the text. What Paul is describing takes place at the final judgment, not at the start of a seven year tribulation period on earth.

When it comes to the dispensational teaching of the rapture, be it pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib, the only thing “left behind” is the truth!

Notes:

1 Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 124.

2 “The Great Snatch” appeared in Lindsey’s *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973), 77. “Operation Rescue” appeared in his work, *Planet Earth* 2000, 281.

3 Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 127.

4 LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, 69.

5 LaHaye, p. 217.

6 John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 16.