**Rapture described:**

The Rapture is an end-time event when all Christian believers who are alive, along with resurrected believers (called the dead in Christ), will be “caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” This involves a bodily “translation” of living believers who will not experience death. When Jesus comes at that time He will also be accompanied by the spirits of the Church age saints. The bodies of these Church age saints will be resurrected and reunited with their spirits, just before living believers are “caught up”.

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**Harpazó defined:**

In 1 Thess 4:17 we read the phrase: “Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

The English word “Rapture” does not occur in the English Bible (but then, neither does the word Trinity). The term Rapture comes from the Latin version of the Bible called the Vulgate, translated by Jerome c. AD 383. In the Vulgate, the Latin word “rapiḗmur” (rápere/rápiō) is translated “caught up”.

It is the original Greek, however, that should be our focus. The word in Greek for “**caught up**” is “**harpazó**”.

**Concordance**: G726: harpazó

**Englishman's Concordance** lists 14 occurrences (see Vine’s below).

**NAS Exhaustive Concordance** definition: to seize, catch up, snatch away

**Strong's Exhaustive Concordance** definition: catch, seize, take by force

**HELPS Word-studies:** Seize by force; snatch up, suddenly and decisively – like someone seizing bounty (spoil, or a prize); to take by an open display of force (i.e. not covertly or secretly).

**Thayer's Greek Lexicon** also includes this insightful meaning: “**claim for one's self eagerly**”.

**Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words:**

**Catch** [G726, harpazó]:

“**to snatch or catch away,” is said of the act of the Spirit of the Lord in regard to Philip in Acts 8:39; of Paul in being “caught up” to Paradise, 2 Cor 12:2,4; of the Rapture of the saints at the return of the Lord, 1 Th 4:17; of the Rapture of the Christ child in the vision of Rev 12:5.**

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**Passages and verses:**

1. Key passages:
   1. Order of the resurrection: 1 Cor 15:20-53
   2. The dead in Christ & the day of the Lord: 1 Thess 4:13-5:11
   3. The man of lawlessness: 2 Thess 2:1-12
   4. The Olivet Discourse, which will not be addressed here. Matt 24 & 25; Mark 13; Luke 21
2. Key verses:
   1. 1 Cor 15:51-52 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
   2. 1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.
3. Usage of harpazó:
   1. When reading the words “**caught up**”, it is vital to remember the Greek definition of **harpazó** (previously documented: Concordance, Lexicon, HELPS, Vine’s). Notice the imagery of Jude 23 “…save others, snatching (**harpazó**) them out of the fire…”
   2. All 14 uses of the word harpazó in Scripture indicate some type of active **physical relocation** and movement. In addition to 1 Thess 4:17, the 3 uses of harpazó below are specific to a Rapture.
      1. The Spirit of the Lord “snatched”/“caught”/“carried” (**harpazó**) Philip away to another physical location, the town of Azotus (Ashdod). Acts 8:39
      2. Paul is “caught up” (**harpazó**) to Paradise. 2 Cor 12:2,4
      3. The Rapture (**harpazó**) of the Christ child in the vision of Rev 12:5. Possibly referring to Jesus’ ascension in Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9.

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**Rapture Explained:**

**Intro:**

Though 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is an explicit description of the Rapture (**harpazó**), it’s imperative to understand the context of both Thessalonian letters. Doing so will reveal much more concerning the pre-trib Rapture than simply examining our key verses. “Context, context, context.” I’ve heard this phrase many times regarding the interpretation of Scripture: so let’s being there.

The context of these letters is determined by several things:

1. Paul’s teachings while he was personally in Thessalonica
2. The persecution that the fledging church was experiencing
3. The response of the believers due to their misinterpretation of their circumstances

The context of the second letter is also established by the content of the first letter:

1. It must be remembered that these 2 books have a mutual dependency and pairing not found with 1st & 2nd Timothy, 1st & 2nd Peter and 1st, 2nd & 3rd John.
2. The second letter must be read in light of first letter, and not acknowledging the content of the first can lead to errors in interpretation of the second.

**Contextual Setting:**

Paul was only in Thessalonica for 3 Sabbaths according to Acts 17:2. Yet in a mere 3 weeks with new believers, he thought it important enough to include prophecy in his teaching. In this area of prophecy, he instructed them on the imminent return of Christ, the Rapture, the day of the Lord and the man of lawlessness.

Although the Thessalonians had been taught by Paul in the flesh, they got off track after he had left. Several problems resulted and the Thessalonian letters addressed these concerns. Their struggles were a result of the Thessalonians being so **acutely aware and conscious of Jesus’ soon return**, that the subsequent issues required Paul’s intervention. Thus the 2 Thessalonian Epistles.

**3 Problems:**

The importance of their reactions cannot be underestimated. A critical look at their behavior, when they believed they had missed the Rapture and were in the Tribulation, is incredibly instructive. Their resultant behavior followed by Paul’s response, demonstrates just how earnestly they believed in being “caught up” before the Tribulation. Don’t miss this!!

1. Some thought that Christ’s return was so close that they stopped working. The expectation was pervasive enough that it lead to some believers quitting their jobs. Paul then corrected and exhorted them through his letters. 1 Thess 4:9-12; 2 Thess 3:6-12
2. Persecution was so widespread that it affected even the infant Church at Thessalonica. And because of this persecution identified in Acts 17:1-9 & 2 Thess 1:4-5, they mistakenly thought that they were in the tribulation and feared they had missed the Rapture. They therefore became (according to different translations): unsettled, alarmed, shaken, disturbed, disconcerted, troubled, upset, confused. These words reveal how their world had been turned upside down. They thought the day of the Lord had arrived, and yet they were still here. Talk about a situation that would freak out a believer! Therefore, Paul wrote them and stated that the day of the Lord had not yet come (2 Thess 2:2) and they had been deceived (2 Thess 2:3). He explained that if they were in the Tribulation they would know because they would see the anti-christ (2 Thess 2:3,8). They certainly understood his teaching on the Rapture, so much so, that when they incorrectly believed that the tribulation had begun, and they were left behind, they were deeply and negatively impacted. The reactions of the Thessalonians leaves no doubt that they believed in the pre-trib Rapture as taught by Paul.
3. They were also concerned that if they had missed the Rapture then so did their dead loved ones. Paul instructs them on the resurrection of dead believers (1 Thess 4:13-15), **BEFORE** he speaks of the Rapture (1 Thess 4:16-17). He makes the point that they should not grieve “…as do the rest who have no hope” (verse 13).

**Paul’s Response:**

Some of what follows may seem elementary – but put yourself in their place. New believers, with only 3 weeks of teaching, were experiencing documented persecution. Additionally, they were convinced that they would be Raptured prior to the Tribulation. But now, they were misinterpreting their circumstances, which then eroded that previous conviction, and so they were understandably in a panic. Paul’s answer to this problem was one of rebuilding foundational truths, so please bear with the simplicity of his approach.

1. He reminds them repeatedly that they had received the Gospel and were taught “by the word of the Lord” (1 Thess 4:15). The truths they had heard were from God, not Paul. They were missing the mark and he was re-centering them on the foundation of the Gospel. This was an exhortation to remember the personality of God, “and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thess 1:10
   * Paul refers to the Word or the Gospel 11 times in the 1st book. 9 of those occurred in the first 23 verses.
   * 1 Thess 1:5,6,8; 2:2,4,8,9,13(2xs); 3:2; 4:15
   * 2 Thess 1:8; 2:14; 3:1
2. He confirms that their suffering is real, and does not ignore or minimize their situation.
   * 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3,4,7
   * 2 Thess 1:4(2xs),5,6,7
3. Paul tells the Thessalonians he does not want them to be uninformed or ignorant or deceived on this topic, and he said so multiple times.
   * 1 Thess 4:13: “But we do not want you to be uniformed…”
   * 1 Thess 5:1: “…you have no need of anything to be written to you.”
   * 1 Thess 5:2: “…For you yourselves know full well…”
   * 2 Thess 2:3: “Let no one in any way deceive you…”
   * 2 Thess 2:5: “Do you not remember…”

Why the repetition? Because they had gotten it wrong and believed that they has missed the Rapture. They were believing and acting as if he had not previously communicated these truths to them. In fact, his placement of 2 Thess 2:5 is brilliant. “Do you not **remember** that while I was still with you, I was telling you **these things**?” What things?

* Well, that verse occurs in the midst of 2 Thess 2:1-12, and is a type of list.
  + “our gathering together to Him” (v1)
  + “the day of the Lord” (v2)
  + “the apostasy” (v3)
  + “the man of lawlessness” (v3-4)

He had clearly laid out “these things”. Furthermore, what you will see later on is that “these things” are in a chronological timeline within that passage.

1. Jesus’ coming is reiterated throughout both books.

* 1 Thess:
  + “…to wait for His Son from heaven…” 1:10
  + “…in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?” 2:19
  + “…at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.” 3:13
  + “…God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” 4:14
  + “…until the coming of the Lord…” 4:15
  + “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven…” 4:16
  + “…to meet the Lord in the air…” 4:17
  + “…the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 5:23
* 2 Thess:
  + “…the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ…” 2:1
  + “…the appearance of His coming…” 2:8

1. Paul emphasized that Jesus is coming back physically. In 1 Thess 4:16 we read the words “the Lord Himself”. The word “Himself” is capitalized, personal and physical. It should not be spiritualized. Reading the plain text shows it is not an allegory (story with a hidden meaning) or a metaphor (not literal). This can be verified from Luke 24 and other verses.
   * In Luke 24 Jesus appears to 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus and later ate with them.
     + “Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them.” Luke 24:15
     + “While He was reclining at the table with them, He took bread, spoke a blessing and broke it, and gave it to them.” Luke 24:30
     + He physically walked, talked and reclined with them.
   * He then appeared to the 11 Apostles and others in Jerusalem according to Luke 24.
     + “…He Himself stood in their midst...” Luke 24:36
     + He ate fish in verse 42.
   * Other verses support this:
     + 1 Peter 2:24 states “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.”
     + “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins…” 1 John 2:2 tells us.

He physically walked, talked and ate after His resurrection. And when He comes for His Church, it will be “He Himself” who will physically descend from heaven.

1. In 1 Thess 4:18, immediately after his description of the Rapture, Paul tells them: “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” What words? Words concerning the Rapture in verses 16 & 17. How do we know that?
   * First, from a relational perspective, it is comforting to think of seeing Jesus face to face. Being caught up to meet Him in the air is certainly encouraging, whereas being caught in the middle of the “the day of the Lord” (5:2) would be discouraging.
   * Second, grammatically speaking, the English word “but” or “now” in verse 5:1 indicates a transition from one subject to another. Just as 10 verses earlier, the same Greek word “de” (G1161) was used in the exact same way in 4:9. So in plain text reading, the words that are to be used to comfort one another are found **before** verse 18 describing the Rapture, and not **after** verse 18 defining the day of the Lord.
   * Third, coincidentally (if you believe in such a thing), the exact same Greek words (except for verb conjugation) are used in both 4:9 & 5:1.
     + “…you have no need for anyone to write to you…” 4:9
     + “…you have no need of anything to be written to you.” 5:1

Identical usage in unrelated passages further supports a clear shift from one topic to another. This strengthens the case for the “comfort” of verse 18 being a product of the previous verses about the Rapture, and not linked to the following verses about the day of the Lord.

* + Fourth, is the spiritual component of the words comfort (4:18) and encourage (5:11). They are both the same Greek word: parakaleite (G3870). Look familiar? It comes from the root paraklétos (G3875) which occurs 5 times in the NT. 4 times it is used of the Holy Spirit, and once of Jesus Christ. This means that root of the words comfort and encourage consists of 2 members of the Trinity.
    - In verses 5:2-9 we read of things that are not of Holy Spirit or Jesus (other than the wrath of the Lamb during the tribulation). Such as: the day of the Lord, a thief in the night, destruction, darkness, drunkenness, wrath.
    - Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, comfort, encourage, parakaleite and paraklétos are the antitheses of the above list.
    - Which grouping of words would you use to exhort a discouraged believer?

1. The subject of wrath in 1 Thess 1:10 & 1 Thess 5:9 was dealt with last week.
2. The passage in 1 Thess 5:1-11, speaks about the day of the Lord and identifies two distinct groups. You, we and us are related to the light. They and them are related to the darkness.
   * In verse 3, who does destruction come upon? **THEM!**
   * In verse 9, who is not destined for wrath? **US!**

Two separate groups, with two different characteristics and 2 opposing destinies.

1. A look at 2 Thess 2:1-12 indicates a timeline that strengthens a pre tribulation rapture. Let’s end this section while maintaining our original focus: “context”. Examining this passage is done so in light of all the prior information given so far.

* Verse 1: Now we request you, brethren, with regard to **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** and **our gathering together to Him**…
  + The subject is Paul’s Rapture teaching from 1 Thess 4.
  + The importance of understanding the dependency of this 2nd book on the 1st book is now in play.
  + Paul begins this passage about the man of lawlessness by speaking of the Rapture. A reflection of 1 Thess 4:16 - 5:11. First the Rapture, then the trib.
* Verse 2: …that you not be quickly **shaken from your composure or be disturbed** either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.
  + Another example of Paul addressing the misinterpretation of events that caused the Thessalonians to be “shaken”.
  + They had been fooled and were basing their disappointment on false assumptions. How did this happen? Verse 2 answers this question.
    - * “a spirit”: someone claiming to have had a divine revelation or prophecy
      * “a message”: a false teaching, perhaps claiming it was from Paul
      * “a letter”: the distribution of a bogus letter supposedly written by Paul
  + Verse 3: Let no one in any way **deceive** you, for **it** will not come unless **the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction…
* Paul commands them: “Let no one in any way deceive you”, because they had been fooled.
* He makes it simple. No, you haven’t missed the Rapture because the day of the Lord has not arrived. The day of the lord has not arrived, because the man of lawlessness has not yet come on the scene.
* There’s no doubt that they certainly understood the Rapture comes first!

Having set the chronology for this passage in the first 3 verses we can now summarize:

V1-4: Covers the Rapture to mid trib.

* V1: our gathering together = the Rapture comes first
* V2: the day of the Lord = the tribulation comes after the Rapture
* V3: “it” (the tribulation) will not come until the apostasy (falling away); comes first
* V3: and the man of lawlessness (the son of destruction) is revealed; comes next
* V4: the abomination of desolation by the antichrist (mid trib)

V5-V8: Here a parenthetical section occurs, describing a different sequence of events, from Paul’s visit to satan’s defeat.

* V5: when Paul was with them he had told them “these things”
* V6: they already know “what” restrains the antichrist (Holy Spirit – either directly or through the Church or both)
* V6: the antichrist will be revealed at the appropriate time
* V7: “he who now restrains” will be “taken out of the way” (when the Church is Raptured)
* V8: “and then” the antichrist is revealed “whom the Lord will slay”

V9-V12: Another parenthetical section is inserted, further describing the tribulation.

* V9: details the activities of the antichrist and his relationship to satan
* V10: describes the influence of antichrist over “those who perish”
* V11: God’s response
* V12: resulting judgement

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**The whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27):**

From Genesis to Revelation, types and shadows, patterns, purpose, and structure of Scripture cannot be dismissed. This is why we previously examined the Doctrine of Imminence, Jewish Wedding parallels, the purpose of the Tribulation, and the object of God’s wrath. Here are several more considerations.

1. **OT types & shadows of the Rapture:**

Note the change in geographical location, of an actual human body, by physical movement from one place to another. These examples provide an OT precedent for the Rapture.

* 1. Enoch was **taken up**. Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5
  2. Elijah **went up** by a whirlwind to heaven. 2 Kings:1,11

Although Noah and Lot were not physically transported or relocated (Rapture), they were warned, protected and removed from God’s wrath by divine intervention.

* 1. Noah was **lifted above** the flood that came on the **whole world**. Gen 7
     1. God made a covenant with Noah. “But I will establish My covenant with you…” Gen 6:18
     2. Jesus made a covenant with us. “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.” Luke 22:20; Mt 26:28
  2. Lot was **geographically** moved out from Sodom **before** fire rained down. He and his family were literally “brought” out of the city by the hands of 2 angles. He was **removed** from the coming destruction. “…and they **brought** him out, and **put** him outside the city.” Gen 19:16

1. **NT examples of the Rapture:**

Note the change in geographical location, of an actual human body, by physical movement from one place to another. These examples provide a NT precedent for the Rapture.

* 1. The ascension of Jesus. Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:9-11
  2. The Spirit of the Lord “snatched”/“caught”/“carried” (**harpazó**) Philip away to another physical location, the town of Azotus (Ashdod). Acts 8:39
  3. Paul in being “caught” up to Paradise. 2Cor 12:2,4 (**harpazó**)
  4. John was told to “come up here” (heaven). Rev 4:1
  5. The Two Witnesses of Revelation “went up to heaven in a cloud”. Rev 11:12
  6. The Rapture (**harpazó**) of the Christ child in the vision of Rev 12:5. Possibly referring to Jesus’ ascension in Mark 16:19;Luke 24:51;Acts 1:9.

1. **Additionally:**

* Ambassadors are recalled home before a war. We are ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20) and will be withdrawn (to return home) before the war breaks out.
* 1 Cor 15:51 states that the Rapture is a mystery, indicating that perhaps we cannot fully understand it at this time.
* The Church Age began quickly with the Holy Spirit being given at Pentecost. The Church Age will end quickly when the Restrainer (Holy Spirit) and the Church are removed at the Rapture.
* After His resurrection, Jesus was only seen by His followers. At the Rapture only believers will see Jesus.
  + “The Lord does not come to the world at the time of the Rapture, but only reveals himself to the members of His Body. At the time of his resurrection He was only seen by those who believed on Him. So it will be at the time of the Rapture. The world will not know that He has been here, and will have no knowledge of Him until He comes with the members of His Body, at the close of the Tribulation.” Billy Sunday

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**Compare Rapture & 2nd Coming:**

Though we are not discussing the 2nd Coming (Rev 19:11-16) at this time, these charts provide a helpful visual comparison. When you examine these two groups closely they can seem contradictory in places, and that’s because they are 2 different events. The coming of Christ can be considered to take place in 2 phases or stages and each event has different characteristics.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Rapture Passages** |  |  |
| John 14:1-3 | 1 Thessalonians 2:19 | James 5:7-9 |
| 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 | 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 | 1 Peter 1:7,13 |
| 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 | 1 Thessalonians 5:9,23 | 1 Peter 5:4 |
| 1 Corinthians 16:22 | 2 Thessalonians 2:1 | 1 John 2:28-3:2 |
| Philippians 3:20-21 | 1 Timothy 6:14 | Jude 21 |
| Philippians 4:5 | 2 Timothy 4:1,8 | Revelation 3:10 |
| Colossians 3:4 | Titus 2:13 |  |
| 1 Thessalonians 1:10 | Hebrews 9:28 |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Second Coming Passages** |  |  |
| Daniel 2:44-45 | Mark 13:14-27 | 1 Peter 4:12-13 |
| Daniel 7:9-14 | Mark 14:62 | 2 Peter 3:1-14 |
| Daniel 12:1-3 | Luke 21:25-28 | Jude 14-15 |
| Zechariah 12:10 | Acts 1:9-11 | Revelation 1:7 |
| Zechariah 14:1-15 | Acts 3:19-21 | Revelation 19:11-20:6 |
| Matthew 13:41 | 1 Thessalonians 3:13 | Revelation 22:7,12,20 |
| Matthew 24:15-31 | 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 |  |
| Matthew 26:64 | 2 Thessalonians 2:8 |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Rapture/Blessed Hope** | **Glorious Appearing** |
| 1. Christ comes in the air for His own | 1. Christ comes to earth with His own |
| 1. Rapture and translation of all believers | 1. No one Raptured, no one translated |
| 1. Christians taken to the Father’s house | 1. Resurrected saints do not see Father’s house |
| 1. No judgment on earth | 1. Christ judges inhabitants of earth |
| 1. Church taken to heaven | 1. Christ sets up His kingdom on earth |
| 1. Imminent – could happen any moment | 1. Cannot occur for at least 7 years |
| 1. No signs – sign less | 1. Many signs for Christ’s physical coming |
| 1. For believers only – the Church | 1. Affects all humanity |
| 1. Time of joy | 1. Time of mourning |
| 1. Before the “day of wrath” (Tribulation) | 1. Immediately after Tribulation |
| 1. No mention of Satan | 1. Satan bound in abyss for 1000 years |
| 1. The judgement seat of Christ | 1. No time or place for judgement seat |
| 1. He claims His Bride | 1. His Bride descends with Him |
| 1. Only His own see Him (secret) | 1. Every eye will see Him (public) |
| 1. Before the day of wrath | 1. Concludes the day of wrath |
| 1. Tribulation begins | 1. 1000 year kingdom of Christ begins |
| 1. NT saints resurrected | 1. OT saints resurrected |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The Rapture** | **The Return** |
| Christ comes in the air (1 Thess 4:16-17) | Christ comes to earth (Zech 14:4) |
| Christ comes for His saints, the Church  (1 Thess 4:16-17) | Christ comes with His saints  (1 Thess 3:13; Jude 14) |
| Movement from earth to heaven | Movement from heaven to earth |
| A sign less event, no signs – it is imminent | Warned by many signs (Matt 24:4-29) |
| Involves believers only  (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15:51-55; 1 Thess 4:13-18) | Involves Israel and Gentile nations  (Matt 24-25) |
| Will occur in the blink of an eye, to only Christ’s own (1 Cor 15:51-52) | Will be visible to the entire world  (Matt 24:27; Rev 1:7) |

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**Criticisms:**

**New Teaching:** One of the most often cited objections to the Rapture is that it is a relatively new teaching in Church history, having only come on the scene in the 1830s, via John Nelson Darby. Though it might have been popularized or re-invigorated by Darby, that condemnation holds no water at all. Here is a partial list of known Post-Apostolic scholars and writings that acknowledge either the imminent return of Christ, the Rapture, or both. Why go to such lengths? To demonstrate that this is no short list of unknowns, nor are these men fringe, radical, or extremists.

* 1. ***The Didache*** (did-a-kay) (c. AD 70-AD 100), also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*. “Remember, Lord, your Church, to save her from every evil, and to perfect her in your love, and **to gather her together** from the four winds, the sanctiﬁed into your kingdom which you have prepared for her.” (10:5)
  2. **The Epistle of Barnabas** (c. AD 70-AD 150), places the resurrection of the Church before the “retribution”. Chapter 4 (titled: *CHAP. IV. – ANTICHRIST IS AT HAND: LET US THEREFORE AVOID JEWISH ERRORS*.): “For this end the Lord has cut short the times and the days, **that His Beloved may hasten; and** **He will come to the inheritance**.” Chapter 21 (titled: CHAP. XXI. – CONCLUSION.): “For he who keepeth these shall be glorified in the kingdom of God; but he who chooseth other things shall be destroyed with his works. **On this account there will be a resurrection, on this account a retribution**.” Notice the order and separation of events: resurrection first (in conjunction with the Rapture) and then retribution.
  3. ***The Shepherd of Hermas***, a 2nd-century Christian writing (c. AD 170), speaks of the pretribulation concept of escaping the tribulation. “You have **escaped** from great tribulation on account of your faith…” & “If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to **escape** it...” [*The Shepherd of Hermas* 1.4.2.]
  4. **Irenaeus**, in about AD 180 wrote *Against Heresies*. Quoting from Book V, Chapter 29, Section 1: “And therefore, when in the end **the Church shall be suddenly caught up** from this, it is said, “There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.””
  5. **Victorinus** proclaimed it in about AD 260 in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. [Translated by Robert Ernest Wallis. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7.] 6:14, “And the heaven withdrew as a scroll that is rolled up.” For the heaven to be rolled away, that is, **that the Church shall be taken away**.” 15:1, “For the wrath of God always strikes the obstinate people with seven plagues, that is, perfectly, as it is said in Leviticus; and these shall be in the last time, **when the Church shall have gone out of the midst**.”
  6. **Ephraim the Syrian** (of Nisibis, Ephrem, Pseudo-Ephraem), (AD 306 – AD 373), in his sermon *On the Last Times, the Antichrist and the End of the World* said all the saints would be gone before the tribulation. “**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.” [*On the Last Times, the Anti-Christ, and the End of the World*, section 2. English translation of the Latin by Cameron Rhoades.]
  7. Following the thousand years known historically as the Dark Ages, **Brother Dolcino** (c. 1250-1307) of Novara declared it once again. This citation is taken from *The History of Brother Dolcino*, written in 1316 by an anonymous notary in the diocese of Vercelli, Italy. “And that the Antichrist was coming into this world within the bounds of the said three and a half years; and after he had come, then **he [Dolcino] and his followers would be transferred into Paradise**, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist.”
  8. The pre-tribulation Rapture was preached by **Hugh Latimer**, who was burned at the stake for his faith in 1555. He said, just before he died, that Christians would miss the tribulation. “Peradventure it may come in my days, old as I am, or in my children’s days…**the saints shall be taken up to meet Christ in the air** and so shall come down with Him again.”
  9. **Cotton Mather** (1663-1728) supposedly “invented” the Rapture in the 1680s. That’s 150 years before Darby was credited with it.
     1. See article as of 7/7/2020: *Cotton Mather Invented the Rapture* at: https://ncc1707c.wordpress.com/2015/09/07/cotton-mather-invented-the-Rapture/. Quote: “The foundations of this idea [Rapture] **originated** in New England in the 1680s with Increase and Cotton Mather, father and son pastors who are the founders of modern day Christian Fundamentalism.”
     2. See article as of 7/7/2020: *Concept of Rapture recent, discredited (6/2/11)* at http://www2.readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=311564. Quote: “The concept of the Rapture is a rather recent American invention first expressed in the 17th-century Puritan writings of Cotton Mather.”
     3. Wikipedia entry as of 7/7/2020: *Rapture* at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapture. Quote: “The concept of the Rapture, in connection with premillennialism, was expressed by the 17th-century American Puritans Increase and Cotton Mather.”
  10. **John Asgill** (1659-1738) wrote a book in 1700. “AN ARGUMENT Proving, That according to the Covenant of Eternal Life revealed in the Scriptures, Man may be translated from hence into that Eternal Life, without passing through Death, altho the Humane Nature of CHRIST himself could not be thus translated till he had passed through Death.” 130 years before Darby.
  11. **Morgan Edwards** (1722-1796) founder of Brown University. He wrote about his pre-trib beliefs in 1744 (86 years before Darby) and later published them in 1788.
      1. “The distance between the first and second resurrection will be somewhat more than a thousand years. I say, somewhat more, because **the dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ's “appearing in the air”** (I Thes. iv. 17); and this will be about three years and a half before the millennium, as we shall see hereafter: but will he and they abide in the air all that time? No: **they will ascend to paradise, or to some one of those many “mansions in the father’s house” (John xiv. 2), and disappear during the foresaid period of time**. The design of this retreat and disappearing will be **to judge the risen and changed saints**; for “now the time is come that judgment must begin,” and that will be “at the house of God” (I Pet. iv. 17).”
      2. Edwards clearly separates the Rapture from the second coming by three and a half years. He uses modern pre-trib Rapture verses (1 Thess 4:17 and John 14:2) to describe the Rapture. He, like modern pre-tribulationists, links the time in heaven, during the tribulation, with the “bema” judgment of believers.
  12. **John Gill** (1697-1771) wrote his *Bible Exposition* between 1746 and 1763. Gill's Bible Commentary is among the very first verse-by-verse commentaries of the Bible. It is the largest Bible commentary written by a single person, and his New Testament Exposition was completed in 1748. That’s 82 years before John Darby’s supposed ‘invention’! It is one of many commentaries that are available at both Bible Hub & Bible Study Tools, along with other respected classic study tools. He is in good company with: The *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, the *Geneva Study Bible*, *Matthew Henry Commentary*, *Schofield Reference Notes*, and *Wesley's Explanatory Notes*, to name a few. Following are Gill’s comments on 2 phrases from 1 Thess 4:17.
      1. **shall be caught up**: suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and with force and power; by the power of Christ, and by the ministry and means of the holy angels; and to which **Rapture** will contribute, the agility which the bodies both of the raised and changed saints will have: and this **Rapture** of the living saints will be…
      2. **in the clouds**: the same clouds perhaps in which Christ will come, will be let down to take them up; these will be the chariots, in which they will be **carried up to him**; and thus, as at our Lord's ascension a cloud received him, and in it he was carried up out of the sight of men, so **at this time will all the saints ride up in the clouds of heaven**…

To this list we could also add: Joseph Mede in 1620, Peter Jurieu in 1697, James Macknight in 1763. (I have not verified these.)

**It is important to note:**

The above list includes: Apostolic Church Fathers, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Nicene (325) and Post-Nicene Fathers. (The Apostolic Fathers were core Christian theologians among the Church Fathers who lived in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, who are believed to have personally known some of the Twelve Apostles, or to have been significantly influenced by them.)

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**Conclusion:**

This topic of the Rapture is said to be one of the most divisive and contentious doctrines among Bible believing Christians today. Unfortunately, as a result of my research, I would agree. However, I don’t believe that it should drive a wedge between members of the Church. In fact, it should have no bearing on how we are to treat one another in the body, our obedience to the Word, our compassion for the lost, and our efforts to live holy and separate from the world. As the Scriptures state, we should absolutely live in expectancy and hopefulness, watching for the imminent return of our Savior – no matter what our view is concerning the timing of His return.

He is our Blessed Hope. Maranatha!!