



The Rapture

The English word rapture is derived from the Latin translation of the verb "caught up" in 1 Thess. 4:17 (rapiemur). It refers to the event described in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, namely that all Christians, both dead and living, will be caught up by the Lord to meet Him in the air at His second advent.

Paul mentions the "rapture" in response to a specific problem in the church at Thessalonica. The Thessalonians apparently had grieved over the death of some members of the church because they feared that these dead were excluded from the future salvation associated with Christ's second advent (1 Thess. 4:13).

Paul corrects the Thessalonians' distorted view of the end by informing them that the "dead in Christ will rise" and actually precede the living in being caught up in the air to meet Jesus. As a result, both groups of believers—the dead who will be raised and the living Christians who will be transformed (1 Cor. 15:51-52)—will "always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17; 5:10). The purpose of the "rapture" which Paul describes in 1 Thess. 4:17 is evident from the language he employs in this verse. The word translated "to meet" is a technical term used in the New Testament period to describe a public welcome given by a city to a visiting dignitary. The leading citizens of the city would ordinarily leave the city "to meet" the distinguished visitor and then accompany him into the city (d. Acts 28:15). Paul seems to be saying, therefore, that Christians will meet the Lord in the air to accompany Him in honor to the earth for Judgment Day. Christians will be included in His glorious company of angels as He descends to the earth.

But when will the "rapture" take place? (See the diagram in Appendix I.) All premillennialists believe that it will occur before the "1000 year" rule of Christ on earth. Dispensational premillennialists believe it will occur either at the beginning of the "seven year" tribulation (i.e., "pre-tribulation" rapture) or after the first 3-1/2 years of the tribulation (i.e., "mid-tribulation" rapture). They believe that the "raptured saints" will then go to heaven with Jesus and remain there for 7 or 3-1/2 years, after which they will descend to earth for the millennium. Historic premillennialists believe that it will occur at the end of the tribulation (i.e., "post-tribulation" rapture) but before the millennium.

In light of the clear passages of Scripture on this subject, it is difficult to see how such a speculative approach can be seriously defended. The "rapture" described by Paul will occur at Christ's second coming after the "tribulation" (i.e., at the end of history), at which time there will be the resurrection and judgment day for all. The last day will come "like a thief in the night," bringing destruction to unbelievers but salvation to believers (1 Thess. 5:1-10). The "rapture" will occur after the appearance and work of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3). Christ will gather His elect at the end of the time of tribulation (Matt. 24:29-31). At this time He will judge all people (Matt. 25:31-46). When the believers are raised, death is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26, 51-57). This destruction of death occurs after the so-called "millennium" (Rev. 20:11-15). This indicates that the "rapture" occurs after the symbolical 1000 years of Revelation 20.

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