

What Does the Bible Say about the Rapture?

Introduction:

We have all seen the signs and bumper stickers haven't we? One bumper sticker says, "In case of the rapture this car will be without a driver." I want you to remember this bumper sticker because we will comment on it again later. The rapture, according to premillennial teachings, is supposed to occur at the end of the church age when Jesus secretly comes back to get the church. At that time every living Christian, along with those who have died in the Lord, will be translated off this earth, meet the Lord in the air and go back to heaven. Here is what they say about it in their own writings.

*"The rapture (or 'translation') of the church is often paralleled to the 'raptures' of Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:12). In each case, the individual disappeared or was caught up into heaven. At His ascension our Lord Himself was 'taken up' into heaven (Acts 1:9). The biblical description of the rapture involves both the resurrection of deceased believers and the translation of living believers into the air to meet the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52)" (Edward E. Hindson, *The Rapture and the Return: Two Aspects of Christ's Coming*).*

Well, this is a typical teaching of premillennialism, but what does the Bible say about the rapture? Listen to me: the Bible says as much about the rapture as it does the millennial kingdom—nothing. Absolutely nothing. Yes, the Bible refers to Christians being caught up in the air to meet the Lord, but, as we will see in just a moment, it will not constitute a disappearing act. There won't be anything secretive about it. The idea of Christians being taken secretly into heaven while the world continues to function normally is as foreign to the Bible as a talking dog. So then, what we will be doing for the next few minutes is refuting the rapture doctrine.

Lesson:

I. Refuting the Rapture Theory.

There are two main passages that premillennialists use in an attempt to prove their rapture theory. The key passages are 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:51-53. Let's take a look at these two passages that are supposed to prove the rapture theory.

A. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

This is a great passage that has brought comfort to thousands of Christians over the years. The question is does it teach the rapture theory? The answer is an unequivocal no. Let's look for a moment at what is not found in this passage.

➤ There is no distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

Premillennialists have Paul making a distinction between the righteous and the wicked in regard to the resurrection in this passage. They believe that the righteous will be resurrected first (the rapture), then a thousand and seven years later, after the tribulation and millennial periods, the wicked will be raised from the dead in what they call the "second resurrection." Does the passage in 1 Thessalonians support

this? The millennialists say yes. They see this support in the words of Paul when he said, "...and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16). The question is do the words of Paul refer contextually to a chronological distinction between the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous? The answer is NO! So then, what is Paul teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4?

The Thessalonians had a misconception of the return of Christ. They were led to believe from some false teachers among them that the return of Christ was going to take place shortly (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). Several problems arose from this false teaching, but one was that the Christians who were still alive at Thessalonica were thinking that their dead loved ones would miss out on the return of the Lord. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is assuring the saints that when Christ returns the first thing that is going to happen is the dead in Christ will rise (ver. 16). Second, after the resurrection of the dead in Christ, "those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (ver. 17).

Notice that Paul is not setting forth the order in which the righteous and unrighteous will be raised, but rather the order in which the dead in Christ will rise and living Christians will be caught up to meet the Lord. Paul doesn't say anything in this passage about the unrighteous. This is important because it ruptures the rapture theory. Premillennialists have to get the wicked into this passage in order to teach their so-called "left be-hind" theory. Their idea that many are going to be "left behind" is a crucial piece in their rapture puzzle. Unfortunately for them, Paul does not imply by anything that he writes in 1 & 2 Thessalonians that the wicked dead are not also going to be raised at this time. In fact, as we shall see shortly, the scriptures readily picture the unrighteous being raised along with the righteous. Why doesn't Paul speak of the unrighteous at this time? He doesn't simply because doing so doesn't meet his need 1 Thess. 4. His only concern is comforting the saints (ver. 18). To say that the words "the dead in Christ shall rise first" imply that the wicked shall be resurrected a thousand and seven years later is a gross perversion of the text.

➤ **There is no secret coming of Christ.**

Remember, the rapture, according to premillennial thinking, is dealing with a secret coming of the Lord. Saints are going to mysteriously disappear, leaving behind all who are not Christians. Hal Lindsey, one of the champions of the premillennial cause, once described what a professor might say just after the rapture took place. Here is the fictitious statements in his illustration:

"I was teaching my course in the philosophy of religion when all of a sudden three of my students vanished. They simply vanished! No great loss to the class –however, I do find this disappearance very difficult to explain."

This is how premillennialist picture the rapture. In a twinkling of an eye, Christians are going to be gone. No explanation will be given. No one will have a clue about what is going on or where all the people have gone. Jesus will secretly snatch all the saints away. Does this theory fit the picture of 1 Thessalonians 4? The answer is no. Read the passage again. It doesn't indicate secrecy. Paul writes of Jesus coming with a shout and with the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16). That doesn't fit the premillennial doctrine of Christ coming secretly does it? Premillennialists must think

that this trumpet is going to sound like one of those dog whistles that no one can hear but dogs. However, the truth is this passage suggests that when the Lord returns, it will be known to all, both the alive and the dead who are raised.

➤ **There is no one left behind.**

B. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

This is the second passage that is most often used by premillennialist to prove their rapture theory. They deny that this passage is referring to the second coming of Christ, something they say is totally distinct from the rapture. You see, in the premillennial scheme of things, the rapture and the second coming of Christ takes place seven years apart. The rapture is supposedly only the first stage of the second coming.

Let me pause right here for just a second and tell you that premillennialism has all kinds of problems with their eschatology, that is, their doctrine concerning the end times. Within premillennialism you have five resurrections and three comings of Christ. This is what happens, ladies and gentlemen, when you espouse a man-made doctrine—you start adding to the Word of God. Well, let's get back on tract. The truth is the passages that premillennialists use to support their rapture theory, are in reality referring to the second coming of Christ. How do I know that 1 Cor. 15 doesn't teach the rapture theory? I know it because of what is found in this passage before us. In 1 Thess. 4 we looked at what is not found there to refute the rapture theory. Now in this passage let's look at two things that are found there to refute the rapture theory.

1. The last trump is found in 1 Cor. 15.

This doesn't fit the premillennial doctrine, even as it is espoused by premillennialists themselves. In premillennial theology, seven trumpets are going to sound after the rapture. Listen to Hal Lindsey on this:

“We've seen that Revelation 6 and 7 describe the Tribulation period, the seven-year reign of terror on earth which precedes Christ's final return to earth. We've examined the successive breaking of six of the seven seals of the rolled-up scroll, and we've seen that each broken seal ushers in a specific judgment of a holy God on a Christ-rejected world” (Hal Lindsey, *There's A New World Coming*, p. 126).

Notice that Mr. Lindsey says that Revelation 6 and 7 describes the tribulation period, which of course comes after the rapture. In Revelation 6 and 7, Christ is pictured opening a book that was sealed with 7 seals. In chapter 8, after the seventh seal is opened, seven angels appear before God and they are given seven trumpets. Revelation 8-11 reveals the sounding of those trumpets. Now, premillennialists teach that the trumpets chronologically follow the seals. The Scofield Reference Bible says, “the seven trumpets follow chronologically the opening of the seventh seal (8:1).” What does all this say? It says that after the rapture, according to premillennialism, seven trumpets are going to sound. The problem is that the passage in 1 Corinthians 15, one used by premillennialists to support the rapture, refers to the last trumpet being sounded at that time. How can there be seven more blasts of the

trumpet after the last trumpet is sounded? If there are going to be seven trumpets blowing during the tribulation period, the trumpet sounded at the so-called rapture cannot be the last trumpet. The premillennial doctrine is again showed to be inconsistent and contradictory.

2. 1 Corinthians 15 speaks of the conquering of death.

That 1 Corinthians 15 is speaking of the end of time as we know it rather than a secret rapture can be seen by Paul's teaching of the conquering of death at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:24-28, 54-57). Whatever return Paul is speaking of in the context of 1 Corinthians 15, it will mark the end of death. In the premillennial theory, however, they have death still having its sting after this secret return of Christ. Righteous saints are said to die during the tribulation period. How could Paul say that "death is swallowed up in victory" if righteous saints, as well as the unrighteous, continue to taste death? It is clear to the unbiased reader of 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul was speaking of a time when Christ would return and death would be totally conquered. 1 Cor. 15:51-53 does not teach what premillennialism needs it to teach and yet this is one of their key passages in proving the rapture.

Is there going to be a secret rapture of Christians? No, we've seen that this notion is false. It is true that Christians are someday going to be caught up in the air to meet Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 teaches this clearly. And yes, the Greek word for "shall be caught up" (harpazo) means, "to seize or snatch away." However, when Christians are caught up to meet the Lord, no one is going to be left behind. In both 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is describing what is going to take place when the world as we know it comes to an end. When Jesus next returns, it will be His second and last return, at which time there will be a general resurrection of all the dead, not just members of the church.

II. The General Resurrection.

Before I close, allow me to elaborate a little on the general resurrection of both the good and the bad according to the Bible. Why is this important? It is important because, as we alluded to earlier, the rapture theory demands that some are left behind and will ultimately be resurrected later. So we have a case of one false doctrine leading to another. You see, if no one is left behind, there will be no one left to resurrect and what you are left with is a scriptural view of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. Now, let's see one more time what is taught by those who espouse premillennialism. I said earlier that premillennialist are forced into believing in too many resurrections. They actually believe that there are five resurrections. Dwight J. Pentecost writes the following concerning the five stage resurrection program advocated by Dispensationalists.

"The order of events in the resurrection program would be: (1) the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the resurrection program (1 Cor. 15:23); (2) the resurrection of the church age saints at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16); (3) the resurrection of the tribulation period saints (Rev. 20:3-5), together with (4) the resurrection of Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19) at the second advent of Christ to the earth; and finally (5) the final resurrection of the unsaved dead (Rev. 20:5, 11-14) at the end of the millennial age. The first four stages would

all be included in the first resurrection or resurrection to life, inasmuch as all receive eternal life and the last would be the second resurrection, or the resurrection.”

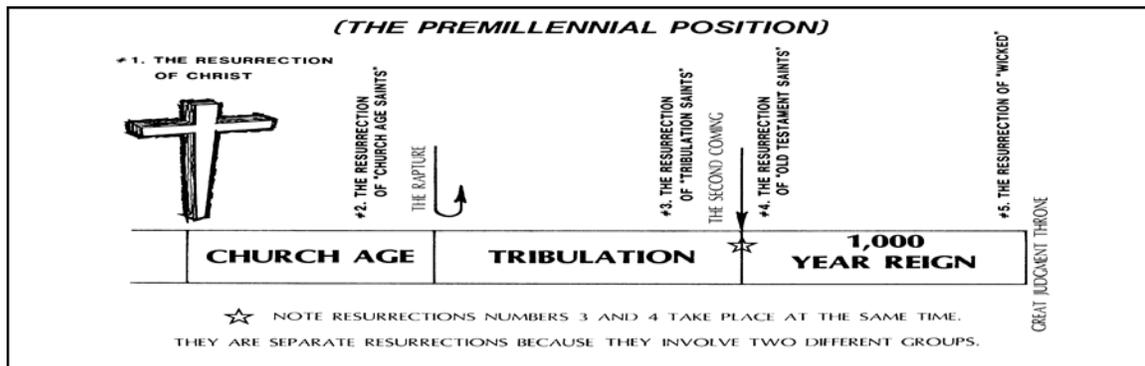


Chart by Rodney Miller, *The Lion & The Lamb On Planet Earth*, p. 150.

Now, Premillennialists claim to advocate just two resurrections by lumping the first four together. Nevertheless, two is still too many. The Bible only speaks of one resurrection so far as the end time is concerned. The Bible knows nothing of two separate resurrections of the righteous and the unrighteous, separated by a thousand year period of time. Let's see what Jesus says about the resurrection of the dead.

John 5:28-29 - "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

In reference to the resurrection, Jesus said the hour is coming. He clearly didn't mean a literal 60-minute period of time, but rather He, as Thayer suggests, was referring to a definite point in time. What would happen at this definite point in time? According to Jesus "all that are in the graves will hear his voice and shall come forth." Where is there room for a thousand year separation between the resurrection of the good and the wicked here? There is no room for that theological muddle.

Consider how different the teaching of Jesus is from that of the premillennialist. Premillennialist say that Jesus is wrong for not all will hear His voice when He comes. Only the righteous will hear it. In fact, all of the righteous will not even hear His voice; only righteous members of the church will hear it. The righteous Old Testament saints will not hear it for another seven years according to premillennialism. And the unrighteous dead will not hear His voice for another thousand years after that. It boils down to who we choose to believe – Jesus or the premillennialists.

John 5:28-29 is not the only passage that gives premillennialists a problem. Jesus also spoke of raising the righteous at the last day (John 6:39-40, 44, 54). Like the word hour, the last day isn't a reference to a literal twenty-four hour period of time. It points to a definite period in time. However, the word last further implies that what is going to take place during this period is going to be the closing events before eternity begins. Notice again how this contradicts the dispensational theory. If saints are resurrected and raptured a thousand and seven years before the end of time, they

are not raised at the last day as Jesus suggested. Jesus was either right or wrong about that. I choose to believe that He was right.

If the millennialist says the last day is a reference to the rapture period, they produce another problem for themselves. The resurrection isn't the only thing that is going to happen at that definite period of time designated as the last day. The judgment is going to take place at that same time too. Listen to Jesus:

John 12:48 - "He that rejects me, and receives not my words, hath one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

Now the premillennialist have a real mess. If the rapture is a reference to the last day, the judgment takes place before the tribulation, before the arrival of the anti-Christ, before the battle of Armageddon, before the resurrection of tribulation and Old Testament saints, before the thousand year reign of Christ on earth, and before the resurrection of the wicked. Who could believe such a thing? Not even premillennialist believe that. But if they cast the last day to the events after the millennium kingdom and the resurrection of the wicked, they have some of the righteous resurrected at some point other than the last day, again making Jesus wrong.

Conclusion:

The rapture is an exciting part of the premillennial doctrine. Movies have been put out about it. Thousands of sermons have been put out about it. Series of books have been written about it. The problem is it is unscriptural because the Bible says nothing about it.