

The Rapture - Part 6

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INTRODUCTION

My previous articles commenced a series on the rapture of the church. We began with the question, "What is the Rapture?" This question can best be answered by noting ten truths about the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. In previous articles from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we saw that the rapture is an important doctrine and not something that can be marginalized or explained away as a secondary doctrine. We also noted that the rapture is an event that is distinct from the Second Advent of Christ. We further observed that the rapture will involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air, and that the rapture will involve a reunion between living and deceased Church-Age believers. We then began to examine several more points from 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. In the last article, we noted that the rapture will be a resurrection. We now move on to our sixth point.

An Exemption from Death

Sixth, the rapture will exempt an entire generation of Christians from death. First Corinthians 15:51 says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." Verses 54-56 say, "But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." Thus, Paul explains, that the rapture will involve the removal of an entire generation before the expiration of their natural life spans and the experience of death.

As our human bodies, tainted by original sin, are decaying and dying, it remains heartening to note that there will be a generation of Christians that will not have to face the prospect of death. Death, even for the believer, is never an easy process. Perhaps we are that generation of Christians that will not experience physical death.

Some reject the notion of a future rapture since the concept of a supernatural removal prior to death is foreign to the Scriptures. However, despite the fact that an event of this magnitude may seem like science fiction to some, it remains a biblical fact that many raptures have already taken place. Both Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:11) were snatched up into heaven by God before the expiration of their natural life spans. Thus, neither man experienced physical death. Christ was similarly raptured through His Ascension (Acts 1:11; Rev. 12:5). However, His rapture was somewhat different since He was taken to heaven in His resurrected body. Although they were eventually brought back to the earth,

The Rapture - Part 6

other examples of individual raptures include Philip (Acts 8:39) and Paul (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). The latter was caught up into the third heaven to receive divine revelation.

As noted in an earlier article, the Greek word translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is *harpazō*, which means to be seized or caught up by force. According to a leading lexicon, this Greek verb has the meaning of “to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, *snatch/take away*.”¹ Interestingly, this same verb is also used to describe the catching away of Christ (Rev. 12:5), Philip (Acts 8:39), and Paul (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). Like Philip and Paul, who were eventually returned to the earth, John was similarly caught up to heaven (Rev. 4:1-2) in order to be divinely given much of the Apocalypse (Rev. 4–22). In the future Tribulation period, the two witnesses will also be raptured (Rev. 11:12).

These numerous biblical examples reveal that the concept of the rapture is not foreign to the Bible. Many individual raptures have already taken place. Thus, it should come as no great surprise to learn of a future rapture for the church. Such an event is in harmony with how God has worked in the past. The only difference with these other events and Paul's prediction of a rapture is that the future rapture will entail the removal of an entire generation rather than merely the translation of an individual. What Paul unfolds in 1 Corinthians 15:51, 54-56 is that the future rapture of the church will exempt an entire class of people, as opposed to merely a specific individual, from the prospect of death. Our hope and prayer is that we are that very generation spoken of by Paul.

In sum, not only is the rapture an important doctrine, an event that is distinct from the Second Advent of Christ, an event that will involve the catching up of every believer to meet the Lord in the air, a reunion of living and deceased Church-Age believers, and a resurrection, but the rapture will also exempt an entire generation of Church-Age believers from death.

(To Be Continued...)

¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (134). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

