

Questions Regarding the Rapture

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52)

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Some Questions about the Rapture

1. *Is the term “rapture” found in the Bible?*

Yes and no. It is not found in the English translation of the Bible (KJV), but it is derived from a Latin verb (*rapere*, to snatch, seize) which was used in the Latin Bible to translate the Greek verb “caught up” (*harpazō*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17— “Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be CAUGHT UP [raptured] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” It is very interesting to see how this verb “caught up” is used in the New Testament. Study the following verses: Acts 8:39 (“caught away”), 2 Corinthians 12:2,4 (“caught up”), Revelation 12:5 (“caught up”); John 10:28-29 (“pluck out of”), etc.

2. *Has a rapture-like event ever taken place in history?*

Yes, on several occasions. Enoch was suddenly removed from earth by God. God took him (Gen. 5:21-24). Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Philip was raptured (suddenly removed) from one place to another (Acts 8:39). Paul was raptured to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2,4). The Lord Jesus was raptured to heaven at the ascension (Rev. 12:5). But that a whole generation of believers will suddenly be removed from earth to heaven without seeing physical death is an event unprecedented in the history of the world (compare 1 Cor. 15:51).

3. *What do people mean when they say “secret rapture”?*

This is a common term used by men who deny the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. In what sense is the rapture a secret? In 1 Corinthians 15:51 the truth pertaining to the Rapture is called a “mystery.” This means that it was a truth that was unrevealed to men in previous ages. Moses, David, Isaiah and John the Baptist knew nothing of the rapture of the Church. It was a secret or mystery that had not yet been revealed. However, a New Testament “mystery” is something that was once hidden but now revealed. God has made it known to His saints and it is a secret no more. Paul said, “I **shew you** a mystery.” If he showed it to us, then it is no longer hidden. It is clearly revealed to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

The Rapture is also a secret event in the sense that it will occur suddenly and be unannounced to the world. There will be no forewarning. It will take place at God’s appointed time and it will take the world by surprise. It will be over before the world has time to realize that it happened.

4. *Will the Rapture be a “silent rapture”?*

When Christ calls His Church to Himself there will be sounds and noise involved. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last **trumpet**. For the **trumpet will sound**, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52b). “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a **shout**, with **the voice** of the archangel, and with **the trump** of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16).

How much of this noise the unsaved will hear is not revealed in Scripture. The event will happen so suddenly and will take place so quickly that it is probable that the only thing the unsaved will notice is the sudden disappearance of those who are true believers. So it was in the case of Enoch. He was there and suddenly “he was not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:24).

5. *How quickly will the Rapture take place?*

This is answered in 1 Corinthians 15:52, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” The word “moment” is interesting. It is the Greek word “*atom*.” The word *atom* means “not cut, you cannot cut it anymore.” Suppose you were to keep cutting up a pie into smaller and smaller pieces. If you had a knife sharp enough (that is, with a small enough blade), you could keep cutting the pieces down to the point where you could not cut the pieces or particles any smaller. We call this an “atom.” [However, we now know that you can even cut atoms into smaller particles].

The term “*atom*” is also used of time. We can cut time into years and into days and into hours and into minutes and into seconds. An “*atom* of time” is the smallest measurement of time (the point where you can’t cut time anymore). In English we might call this a “split-second.” How fast will the Rapture take place? In a split second, in the twinkling of an eye. If the unsaved blink, they will miss it!

6. *As the Rapture takes place, what is the order of events?*

This is answered in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

FIRST, God (in the Person of Christ) will come down from heaven and He will bring with Him the souls of those “which sleep in Jesus,” that is, who have died in Christ (see verse 16 and verse 14).

SECOND, those who have died in Christ will rise first (v. 16). Their bodies will be raised from the graves.

THIRD, those believers who are alive and remain unto the coming of Christ will be caught up or raptured. Thus those who have died in Christ and those who are alive when Christ returns will together meet the Lord in the air, to be with Him forever (v. 17 and see John 14:3).

7. *When was the Rapture first revealed?*

The Rapture was not revealed until the Lord spoke the words “I will come again and receive you unto Myself” found in John 14:1-3 the night before He died on the cross. Don’t make the mistake of looking for the Rapture in Matthew chapter 24. His coming mentioned in Matthew chapter 24 is His coming to the earth following the great Tribulation.

8. *What about those who set dates for the Rapture?*

Edgar Whisenant wrote a book entitled, *88 Reasons Why The Rapture Could Be In 1988*. Of course, the Lord did not come in 1988 so a new book might have been written: *89 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Take Place in 1989*. Someone surmised that the added reason given in the new book could be this: “Reason #89—Because He did not come in 1988.”

Many others have foolishly tried to set dates. For example, Harold Camping predicted that Jesus Christ would return on or between September 15, 1994 and September 27, 1994. [A ten page critical review of his book is available from George Zeller. However, since Camping's prediction obviously failed, Zeller's review, though vindicated, is now unnecessary. History has proven Camping wrong and it must have been a major embarrassment!] Camping failed to learn his lesson and he set another date for May 21, 2011! This prediction gained national publicity. How unwise to try to announce that which God has chosen not to reveal. God has not told us the time. He wants us to be ready always.

9. *What will happen to infants at the time of the rapture?*

The best selling book *Left Behind* and the film by the same title depict all infants and young children being removed and raptured from the earth, including infants and children of unsaved people. Mothers were running around in panic crying out, “Where is my baby?”, etc. But does the Bible really teach this?

The rapture is when Christ comes to remove (“catch up”—1 Thess. 4:16-17) the church (all true believers) from earth. He will come to receive His bride and bring her to heaven. Thus, the rapture is for those “in Christ,” those who are part of the body and bride of Christ.

Infants are not saved and they are not in Christ; nor are they part of the church. It would be wrong to point to a living infant and say, “That baby is saved and has eternal life and his sins are forgiven!” On the contrary, every baby is born in sin and every infant has a wicked sin nature (Rom. 5:12, Psalm 51:5; Job 14:4; Psalm 58:3). Babies are not saved and they do not possess eternal life. If this were true, then does this mean that when they get older they become UN-saved and forfeit eternal life? This is Biblically absurd. It would also be absurd to say that all the unsaved children around the world growing up in Hindu and Muslim and Buddhist homes part of the church that is in Christ.

Keep in mind that an infant that is a year old at the time of the rapture will be approximately 8 years old at the time when Christ returns to this earth to rule and reign, and thus will be certainly old enough to make a responsible decision for or against Christ at that time or even prior to that time.

Whether or not Christ takes infants that belong to saved parents is not revealed in the Scriptures, though it does seem reasonable to suppose that God would take such infants instead of leaving them parentless and defenseless. One thing we do know for sure is that **God will do**

what is right (Gen. 18:25; Rom. 9:14). God is certainly far more concerned for every infant and young child (saved or unsaved) than we are.

What kind of concept of God does the *Left Behind* book and film convey to the world when unsaved mothers are going around in deep panic crying, “Where’s my baby?” It makes God look like a kidnapper! This gives Reformed men and others all the more reason to mock our “secret rapture theory” (as they call it).

It is important to realize that the issue under discussion is not what happens to infants who die. Though it is not our purpose here to defend the doctrine of infant salvation, yet we are assured, based on Scripture, that they will be SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS (see the helpful book by Robert P. Lightner entitled *Heaven For Those Who Cannot Believe*). The issue is this: What happens to infants that are alive at the time of the rapture? This is an entirely different question.

The book LEFT BEHIND is a fictional book based on prophecy, but it does teach doctrine. One of the very questionable doctrines it teaches is that at the time of the rapture pregnant women will suddenly become un-pregnant (that is, the unborn babies will be taken in the rapture, leaving the unsaved mother many pounds lighter!). A rapture for embryos! The following is found on pages 46-47 of the book LEFT BEHIND:

Most shocking to Rayford was a woman in labor, about to go into the delivery room, who was suddenly barren. Doctors delivered the placenta. Her husband had caught the disappearance of the fetus on tape. As he videotaped her great belly and sweaty face, he asked questions. How did she feel?

Then came the scream and the dropping of the camera, terrified voices, running nurses, and the doctor. CNN reran the footage in superslow motion, showing the woman going from very pregnant to nearly flat stomached, as if she had instantaneously delivered. “Now, watch with us again,” the newsman intoned, “and keep your eyes on the left edge of your screen, where a nurse appears to be reading a printout from the fetal heart monitor. There, see?” The action stopped as the pregnant woman’s stomach deflated. “The nurse’s uniform seems to still be standing as if an invisible person is wearing it. She’s gone. Half a second later, watch.” The tape moved ahead and stopped. “The uniform, stockings and all, are in a pile atop her shoes.” Etc.

According to this teaching, after the rapture there will be a period of nine months when no babies will be born anywhere in the world (the only exception being some babies conceived after the rapture that may be born pre-mature)! Maternity wards in hospitals will be empty for months! Later in the book there is an argument between Rayford and his flight attendant, Hattie, about Hattie’s sister who is out of work because she worked at an abortion clinic and there simply aren’t any abortions to be performed. In summary, the film and book teach that at the time of the rapture all infants on earth are raptured and taken to heaven including all unborn children.

The tribulation is a period of time when God’s wrath will be put on display. It will be the most severe period of judgment the world has ever known. It will be similar to the plagues that fell on Egypt, only on a world-wide scale and more severe. It is helpful to think back through history on other occasions when God’s judgment fell in order to see what happened to infants.¹

¹I am indebted to Pastor William Hixson of Ohio for many of these insights.

Is it unthinkable that God should expose helpless infants to a terrible time of judgment? What about the babies in Jericho? Were they supernaturally delivered? What about the children of the kingdom of Bashan and the children of the kingdom of Heshbon (see Deut. 3:6)? In Egypt the firstborn of each household was slain from the palace of Pharaoh and on down. In Bethlehem God allowed babies to be slain due to Herod's jealous rage (Matthew 2).

Children often in Scripture and in life bear the consequences of their parents' unbelief. Is this principle going to be overthrown at the rapture? Unsaved moms going around and saying, "Where is my baby?" eliminates one of the horrors of that time of judgment—having your children suffer with you throughout that period. It undercuts one important reason to be saved—that is, for the sake of our children and other family members (Acts 16:31; 2:39; 1Cor. 7:14 etc.). Was not one of the rich man's worst torments in Hell (Hades) the fact that his brothers were going to join him (see Luke 16:27-31)? One of the greatest reasons to be saved is for the sake of family and friends that we may influence, that they may save themselves from this wicked generation. Cornelius is to be the example of us all, who called together his kinsman and friends to hear the gospel (Acts 10:24).

Why would God deliver infants and unborn of the unsaved just prior to the first half of the tribulation, which is much milder, and have other infants suffer in the last half which is more severe (Luke 21:23)? Why would God allow pregnant women to be ripped up in other historical judgments and do extraordinary things to avoid it in this last one (2 Kings 8:12; 2 Kings 15:16; Hosea 13:16; Amos 1:13; Isa. 13:15-18)? See also Deuteronomy 28:54-56 and Lamentations 2:20 for other examples of children suffering (being literally devoured) in historical judgments.

The fact that people have experienced historical judgment does not automatically mean they have come under damnation. Moses is the classic refutation of this. He came under historical judgment which involved death, but certainly he was a saved man (Hebrews 11:24-26; Matt. 17:3-4). Are we to believe that all the infants that drowned in the flood are in hell because they experienced an historical judgment? Certainly not.

Those who advocate that all babies throughout the world will be raptured might reason in this way: Since infant salvation is true, then infant rapture must also be true. The rapture of infants of the unsaved is a very bold extrapolation on no Biblical grounds and seems an unwarranted sensationalist device for creating a dramatic effect in a book or film. The real horror is not babies disappearing, but remaining to grow up in those awful times. "Woe unto them with child and to them that give suck in those days" (Matthew 24:19).

Consider the message our Lord gave to the women of Jerusalem who were bewailing Him on His way to the cross. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us [compare Hosea 10:8 and Rev. 6:16]. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:28-31). If what God has done in the past is an indication of what He will do in the last great historical judgment, then this passage has great bearing. Children suffered greatly in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD which is a prototype of the last great judgment.

"But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people (Luke 21:23). This passage is significant because Luke seems to connect the sufferings in 70AD with end time events in the future at the return of Christ. The future tribulation will be a time of special suffering for those who are pregnant and for those who have small children who are nursing.

The days of Noah are parallel to the days just prior to Christ's coming to earth (Luke 17:26; Matt. 24:36ff). Certainly the unsaved babies of Noah's day did not escape the terrible judgment that came upon the entire world (and the fetuses did not escape either). They all drowned. I am not commenting on the eternal destiny of any of these children, but the historical judgments in this life certainly are experienced by them. Why would the judgments of the tribulation be any different than those of the past?

It seems far more in line with Biblical teaching to suggest that infants of unsaved parents at the time of the rapture will enter the tribulation along with their parents, and with their parents will face whatever those frightful days will bring. If an infant should suffer physical death during the horrors of the tribulation period, God will take care of this person based on His abundant mercy and the work of Christ on the cross. The benefits of Christ's cross-work (justification, etc.) are applied to this person at the time of death and not before.

10. If a person rejects Christ before the Rapture can he be saved after the Rapture?

There are some who teach that those who do not get saved prior to the Rapture have no hope of being saved after the Rapture. This view is based upon a misunderstanding of 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.⁽¹¹⁾ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:⁽¹²⁾ That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." They understand this passage to mean that if a person rejects the truth prior to the Rapture, he will be deluded and unable to believe following the Rapture. Who then will be saved during the Tribulation? They teach that those saved during the Tribulation will be only those who never heard the Gospel prior to the Rapture.

What does the passage really teach? These verses in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 are not talking about people who reject the truth *before* the Rapture. They are referring to people who reject the truth *during* the Tribulation. These are people who wilfully decide to follow the devil's man (see the context of 2 Thess. 2:3-9). These are people who reject the truth and receive the LIE that the man of sin is to be honored as God and worshiped. These are those who deliberately choose to take the mark of the beast and worship this evil man. According to Revelation 14:9-11, those who take the mark cannot be saved. Their destiny is Hell. Thus, during the Tribulation, those who wilfully identify with the devil's man are *doomed* and *damned* (2 Thess. 2:12). In that day the issue will be very clear: worship God (Rev. 14:6-7) or worship the devil's man (Rev. 14:9-11). One's choice will determine one's eternal destiny.

If a person refuses to believe on Christ prior to the Rapture, there is still hope that he will trust Christ after the Rapture. His earlier rejection was not final and not fatal. God still reaches out to men in grace during the Tribulation. However, it is always dangerous to reject the truth, no matter when you live. The time to be saved is **TODAY**, not tomorrow. If a person refuses to be saved today, what guarantee does he have that he will be willing to be saved in the future?

If a person refuses to trust Christ today when it is easy (for many, little or no persecution), why should this person be willing to trust Christ tomorrow when it will be very difficult (great persecution for believers during the Tribulation). Those who reject the Gospel today are in danger of rejecting the Gospel tomorrow. The person who rejects the Gospel before the Rapture could very well be one of those who will worship the man of sin during the Tribulation. Those who are unbelievers today will probably be unbelievers tomorrow.

God can certainly save a person who at one time strongly rejected the truth. Remember Saul of Tarsus. Remember how you yourself once rejected the truth before you were saved! During the Tribulation, God will be willing and able to save all those who will turn to Him. The same is true today: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

The time to believe is now. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). It is never safe to delay such a decision. The time to be saved is now, prior to the Rapture.

Isaiah summed up the duty of man regardless of what dispensation he lives in: “Seek ye the LORD **while He may be found**, call ye upon Him **while He is near**: ⁽⁷⁾ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon Him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

THE RAPTURE	
As taught by our Lord <i>(John 14:1-3)</i>	As taught by Paul <i>(1 Thess. 4:13-18)</i>
Comforting Words	
“Let not your heart be troubled.”	“Comfort one another with these words.”
The Necessity of Personal Faith	
“Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.”	“If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”
We Can Take Christ at His Word	
“If it were not so, I would have told you.”	“This we say unto you by the Word of the Lord.”
The Promise of His Coming	
“I will come again.”	“The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven.”
The Remarkable Removal from Earth	
“and receive you unto Myself.”	“We...shall be caught up... to meet the Lord in the air.”
Forever Present with the Lord	
“That where I am, there ye may be also.”	“and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Adapted from *God's Prophecies For Plain People*, William L. Pettingill (Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1923), pages 22-23.