

Debunking Popular Lies About The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

By: Jonathan Brentner

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One of the most unpopular beliefs among Christians today is that of the pre-Tribulation rapture. Many not only scoff at our expectation of meeting Jesus in the air, but also ridicule those of us who believe it could happen at any moment.

The resulting silence in most pulpits today regarding our “blessed hope” has opened the door for a great many misconceptions about it to flourish. For many, social media and Internet searches have replaced sound biblical teaching regarding our “blessed hope.”

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Below are five popular lies about the Rapture.

1. Belief In The Rapture Began With John Darby

Despite clear and overwhelming evidence to the contrary, most Christians remain convinced that belief in the pre-Tribulation rapture began with John Darby. They claim that since no one in the church held this viewpoint prior to the 19th century, we shouldn't ascribe to something no one believed before the time of Darby.

This assertion is blatantly false.

In AD 180, Irenaeus wrote “Against Heresies” to refute the errors of Gnosticism. In Book 5, Chapter 29, of “Against

Heresies" he wrote these words:

"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.'"

In the above quote, this early prominent early church theologian used the same Greek word for "caught up," *harpazo*, that Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, a favorite rapture verse of many. He clearly had this passage in mind.

While his words don't specify a pre-Tribulation rapture, they do reveal Irenaeus' belief that the event portrayed in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the *harpazo*, would come before a time of extended Tribulation on the earth as presented in Matthew 24:21ff during which time the church would be absent from the earth.

His words also confirm an early belief in Jesus' appearance for His church that's separate from the Second Coming. He didn't combine the two events as most do today.

In my book, "The Triumph of the Redeemed," I document beliefs similar to that of Irenaeus in the following documents or writers:

- The Shepherd of Hermas (about AD 140)
- Cyprian (AD 200–258)
- The Apocalypse of Elijah (Third Century AD)
- Ephraim the Syrian (AD 306–373)
- Morgan Edwards (1722–1795)

Each of the above examples, which predate John Darby by an exceptionally long time, express the belief that Jesus would remove His church from the earth before a period of extended judgment upon it. Ephraim clearly believed in a pre-Tribulation rapture although Morgan Edwards placed it at the midpoint of the Tribulation.

Ongoing research into the history of the church continues to uncover more occurrences of a belief in the removal of the church from the world followed by a time of tribulation and after that, the Second Coming.

In his book, "Dispensationalism Before Darby," Dr. William C. Watson devoted an entire chapter to instances of belief in the rapture during 17th century England. In a few of the cases, writers used the word "rapture" while others referred to some who would be "left behind." Church history is full of references, long before the time of Darby, that place Jesus' appearing for His church before a time of tribulation that precedes the Second Coming.

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2. There's No Mention Of It In Scripture

Many scoffers of our hope like to point out that the Bible doesn't contain the word "rapture." Such an assertion deceptively implies that there's no such event described in Scripture, which again is totally false.

The late Dr. Ed Hindson, former professor at Liberty University, acclaimed Bible scholar, and author, put it this way:

"If you disagree on the timing of the rapture, please don't tell people, 'There's never going to be a rapture.' No, there must be a rapture or the Bible is not true. There must be a time when the archangel shouts, when the trumpet sounds, and the dead in Christ are raised and the living are caught up (1 Thess. 4:13–18). We may differ on the timing of the rapture but not the fact of the rapture."

It's true that John Darby helped popularize the application of the word "rapture" to the event that Paul describes in 1

Thessalonians 4:13–18, 1 Corinthians 15:50-55, Philippians 3:20-21 and Titus 2:11-14. However, giving it a name is far different than creating it.

The event we refer to as the “rapture” occurs in the Bible; it’s just not labelled as such that in our English translations of Scripture.

3. Belief In The Rapture Is Escapism

Another falsehood used to discredit the rapture is that its proponents just want to escape tumultuous times on the earth. In other words, we are just seeking to avoid the Tribulation that Jesus said would be the experience of His followers.

First, there’s a significance difference between the persecution and affliction that we experience because of our faith and the outpouring of God’s wrath during the Day of the Lord. Second, our belief stems from what Paul wrote about Jesus coming for us before this awful period of Tribulation begins (1 Thess. 5:1-10).

I love the response of John Walvoord to such criticism:

“Is it an unworthy motive to desire to escape the Great Tribulation? Actually, it is no more so than the desire to escape hell. The point in either case is not our desire or wishes but the question as to what the Scriptures promise. Pretribulationists hope to escape the Great Tribulation because it is expressly a time of divine judgment on a world that has rejected Christ. But the Scriptures also reveal the Great Tribulation as a time of satanic wrath against Israel and believers in Christ who are living at the time. The Great Tribulation is a time of both divine wrath and satanic wrath.”

Our hope for missing the Tribulation period rests on the words of Scripture rather than our desire to escape trouble. And as Walvoord points out, how is our desire to escape God’s wrath on earth any different than that of wanting to avoid it in the

lake of fire?

4. Those Who Believe In The Rapture Don't Care About The Current World

This falsehood is more of an attack on us who believe in the rapture than against the teaching itself. Again, the idea that we don't care about this world or its inhabitants is simply not true of the majority of those who daily watch for Jesus' appearing.

Scholar and author, Dr. Grant R. Jeffrey, wrote the following concerning the myth-based assertion that belief in the rapture causes us to cease caring about this world and its people:

"For the past two centuries, churches that enthusiastically taught the literal premillennial and pretribulation return of Jesus have been at the forefront of the worldwide medical missions as well as missionary efforts to reach the lost."

Of course there will be exceptions, but from what I see, there's no lack of compassion for the hurting and lost among those that wait expectancy for Jesus' appearing. Belief in the Rapture, if anything, accelerates the desire of most to give generously to help the poor and support the spread of Gospel.

5. Jesus Doesn't Intervene In Our World Until The End Of The Age

Those that believe the preceding falsehoods pertaining to the rapture say the next event on God's prophetic calendar is an end-of-the-age return of Jesus to initiate the eternal state.

Many pastors convey such a scenario by preaching that all believers today will someday die. I have heard this proclaimed several times from the pulpit in churches that I have attended in the past. Such teaching directly contradicts the New Testament; Paul tells us there will be saints alive at the time of Jesus' appearing (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:17).

The New Testament belief in Jesus' imminent appearing doesn't place an end date on this expectancy, but asserts that it could happen at any moment. The abundance of signs pointing to the soon arrival of the Tribulation period tell us that it's likely that most believers today will meet Jesus in the air before they die. Though not a certainty, it's a viable expectation for the day in which we live.

A careful study of the words in the texts describing Jesus' appearing and the Second Coming reveal that they cannot be the same event. At the time of the rapture, Jesus raises the dead saints immediately; it's the very first thing He does (1 Thess. 4:13-17). When He returns to the earth, several major events take place before He raises His followers (Rev. 19:17-20:4); it's likely that the resurrection doesn't happen the same day because of the many intervening events.

A careful study reveals an abundance of other stark differences between the two events that make it impossible for one to say they happen at the same time. Prominent early church theologians such as Irenaeus and Cyprian wrote that Jesus would come for His church before a time of Tribulation on the earth, Jesus' Second Coming after that. Some "post-Tribulationists" such as Robert Gundry place the bowl judgments in-between the rapture and Jesus' return to the earth.

Why do so many Christians cling to falsehoods about the rapture? It's because they start with beliefs regarding the end times that make such an occurrence impossible.

The most popular views regarding Bible prophecy claim that most of the book of Revelation is symbolism, code exclusively for first century AD saints, or past history (fulfilled prophecy). These widely accepted viewpoints presuppose that there cannot be a rapture, which explains its unpopularity in most churches.

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