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## Harpazo: The Scriptural Concept of Rapture

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the LORD in the air: and so shall we ever be with the LORD"  
(1Thessalonians 4:17).

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### Preface

"Harpazo" (har-pad'-zo) is the Greek word which the New Testament translators have rendered as "caught up". "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one **caught up** [Greek, harpazo] to the Third Heaven" (2Corinthians 12:2). "Rapture" is taken from an obsolete French word, which means "abduction" or "to carry off". Though Greek scholars may refrain from using "rapture" to translate "harpazo", it is not a wresting of Scripture for the honest Christian to see the connection between the two. "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29).

### Some Background

Many honest-hearted Saints have never read Hal Lindsay's popular paperback, "The Late Great Planet Earth" (1970), never have listened to a Bible teacher expound from J. Dwight Pentecost's study in Biblical Eschatology, "Things to Come" (1958), or have never examined a copy of Dave Hunt's more contemporary paperback, "Global Peace and the Rise of Antichrist" (1990), but the "rapture" word has found it's way into the popular vocabulary of Professed Evangelical Christianity. "After this I looked, and, behold, a Door was opened in Heaven: and the First Voice which I heard was as it were of a Trumpet talking with me; which said, Come Up Hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter" (Revelation 4:1). Even the dictionary suggests that "rapture" may be defined as the "transporting of a person from one place to another, especially to Heaven" (from the American Heritage Dictionary). "And they heard a Great Voice from Heaven saying unto them, Come Up Hither. And they ascended up to Heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them" (11:12).

It should not surprise even the newest searcher of Bible Prophecy, that even those who believe in a Rapture, have many and various positions as to the timing of the event, i.e., Pre-Tribulational Rapture, Mid-Tribulational Rapture, Pre-Wrath Rapture, Post-Tribulational Rapture, etc. Differences also exist as to the subjects of the Rapture (who will be raptured), i.e., anyone who has been Born Again (backslidden or not), or only those who are walking in obedience. Some even believe that there will be more than one Rapture. Though it may seem laughable to skeptics to note such a variety of Rapture positions, the LORD inspired the Apostle Paul to record that the integrity of our faith is based upon what we have been persuaded is true. "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). And, the integrity

of our faith is vital to our very Christian existence, as witnessed by Abraham's believing of God to give him a promised son in his old age. "And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (4:21).

Nearly 50 years ago, J. Dwight Pentecost wrote: "The present age, in respect to the true church, terminates with the translation of the church into the Lord's presence. The doctrine of the translation of the church is one of the major considerations of the Eschatology of the New Testament (John 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 1:8; 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Cor. 5:1-9). It is one of the questions on which Bible students are most in disagreement at the present time. Interpreters of the premillennial school [that Christ would return before a thousand year period known as the Millennium] are divided into such camps as the partial rapturist, who raises the issue of the subjects of the rapture, and the pretribulationist, midtribulationist and posttribulationist, who raise the issue of the time of the rapture in relation to the tribulation period" ("Things to Come", p. 156). "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

### **Harpazo: Caught Up**

Without debating the timing of the Rapture, the subjects of the Rapture, or the number of Raptures... the Scripture is unequivocal about the concept of the Rapture. "16 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: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** [Greek, harpazo] together with them in the clouds, to meet the LORD in the air: and so shall we ever be with the LORD" (1Thessalonians 4:16-17). This reference to the Resurrection of the Just is found in conjunction with a definite Rapture event. In addition to this reference, the Apostle Paul mentions his experience of being "**caught up** [Greek, harpazo] into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2Corinthians 12:4), using the word "harpazo" twice (12:2, 4). Also, "harpazo" is translated "caught up" in the Revelation, when describing the Ascension of the LORD Jesus Christ back into Heaven after His Resurrection. "And she brought forth a Man Child, Who was to rule all nations with a Rod of Iron: and her Child was **caught up** [Greek, harpazo] unto God, and to His Throne" (Revelation 12:5).

### **Harpazo: A Word Study**

In addition to the four times that "harpazo" is translated as "caught up" (in the King James Version), there are nine other verses in which the Greek word "harpazo" is found in the New Testament. The LORD Jesus used "harpazo" to describe the ministry of John the Baptist. Even while in prison, Jesus compared the ministry of John the Baptist as godly "violence", and John as "violent" with his ministry of "force". "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent **take** it by **force** [Greek, harpazo]" (Matthew 11:12). Seizing something by force is part of the meaning of "harpazo". It **does mean** that the LORD will forcibly take His people Home, whether they know, have been taught, understand, or even honestly-but-ignorantly disagree with the Rapture concept. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an **honest and good heart**,

having heard the Word, **keep it**, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23), the LORD described the Seed, which is the "Word of the Kingdom" (13:19), i.e., the Word of God, falling into four kinds of ground:

- (1) the evangelized-but-lost world: "by the way side" (13:4), which are those who "heareth the Word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not" (13:19),
- (2) those who confess to any kind of Christianity: "stony places" (13:5), which "dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended" (13:21),
- (3) the even better taught, but still not saved professedly Evangelical Christians: "among thorns" (13:7), but the "thorns sprung up, and choked them" (13:7), and
- (4) the True Saints: "good ground" (13:8), who "brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (13:8).

Describing the vast majority who "heareth the Word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not" (13:19), Satan "**catcheth away** [Greek, harpazo] that which was sown in his heart" (Matthew 13:19). The events surrounding the Rapture are by stealth to the ungodly, i.e., the "Day of the LORD so cometh as a thief in the night" (1Thessalonians 5:2), but not to the Godly. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (5:4).

"Harpazo" is used to describe the great multitudes of people who were ready to "come and **take Him** [Jesus] by **force** [Greek, harpazo], to make Him a king" (John 6:15). Though they had the base design of wanting to force Jesus to be their benefactor for selfish reasons, it does remind us that the LORD will take His own by force for His own pleasure. "Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for **Thy pleasure** they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). It is the pleasure of our King to rapture His people, that "where [King Jesus is], there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

The Good Shepherd teaches us that He cares for us as His sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Compare the LORD Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd to the Antichrist as an "hireling" (10:12). "But he that is an hireling [Antichrist], and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf [Satan] coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf **catcheth** [Greek, harpazo] them, and scattereth the sheep" (10:12). Again, Satan will catch those who "received not the love of the Truth" (2Thessalonians 2:10), and these will "be damned who believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2:12).

Continuing with His analogy of Shepherd and sheep, Jesus assures us that no one is capable of seizing us by force out of His hand. "28 And I give unto them Eternal Life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man **pluck** [Greek, harpazo] them out of My hand. 29 My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to **pluck** [Greek, harpazo] them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). In this instance, it is with great relief that we are not snatched away-- by Satan. "The Name of the LORD is a Strong Tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

Philip the Evangelist was directed by the angel of the LORD to go to Gaza. He met an Ethiopian, who was a chief officer of Queen Candace, reading Isaiah 53. "6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:6-7). Expounding these Scriptures concerning Jesus the Messiah, the Ethiopian eunuch believed, and was baptized. "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the LORD **caught away** [Greek, harpazo] Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). In this instance, Philip was caught away to other earthly employments. About twenty years later, the Apostle Paul stayed over at Philip's house in Caesarea (21:8). But, to be caught away by the LORD means to be repositioned for higher service-- Earthly or Heavenly.

When Brother Paul was seized by the Romans in Jerusalem, he had an audience before the Sanhedrin of the Jews. There he attempted to make a defense of the LORD, as well as himself. "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). They demonstrated that they were in no mood to listen by ordering him to be struck on the mouth, i.e., "And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth" (23:2). Paul, then, acted as the LORD Jesus taught. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). He divided the Sadducees from the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin by bringing up an issue on which the two disagreed, i.e., "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (23:6). The resulting division between the Pharisees and Sadducees, allowed him to be extracted by the chief captain of the Romans. "And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to **take** him by **force** [Greek, harpazo] from among them, and to bring him into the castle" (Acts 23:10). In the same way, the LORD will rapture us with a strong arm from our enemies. "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His Tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a Rock" (Psalm 27:5).

The Epistle of Jude offers us a final glimpse at this Greek word "harpazo". "And others save with fear, **pulling** [Greek, harpazo] them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23). An emergency rescue worker pulls people out of the fire, while attempting to keep himself from also being injured. Christians have the same ministry, but towards those who are spiritually lost. "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). This depicts to us a ministry that pulls sinners from the error of their sins. "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). But, it also recognizes the great danger of the rescuer to be harmed by the contagion of the sinner's sin, as well as the "sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1). "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1Corinthians 9:27). So, the LORD has a "mighty arm: strong is [His] hand, and high is [His] right hand" (Psalm 89:13) to pull [harpazo] us out of this world with the strength of Omnipotence.

## Conclusion

The Apostle Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians assures us that there will be a Rapture, and his first epistle to the Corinthians reiterates that thought. "51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 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" (1Corinthians 15:51-52). Debates may rage as to the timing, the subjects, or even the number of Raptures, but the Scripture is clear that the Rapture is not a machination of modern Bible Eschatology. "13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. 15 For this we say unto you by the Word of the LORD, that we which are alive and remain unto the Coming of the LORD shall not prevent [literally, precede] them which are asleep. 16 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: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the LORD in the air: and so shall we ever be with the LORD. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these Words" (1Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Until the Harpazo, Maranatha!

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