

# Excerpts of Archived Lecture:

## RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND “THE RAPTURE”

Robert C. Welch

### INTRODUCTION

- A. The two features of the title are included in teleology, the consummation of the ages.
- B. They are scripturally related actions.
- C. They are interwoven in a false theory involving premillennialism.

#### **I. The Meaning of “rapture” (*harpazo*) is given in the Scriptures, though the word is not in common translations.**

- A. The word means: being caught up, transported.
- B. Figuratively it signifies: the spirit, mind or emotion caught up from the physical in ecstasy.
- C. Related to the resurrection, it is being caught up with the Lord at his coming.

#### **II. History of the development of the false theory of “the rapture” is pertinent.**

- A. Ellen G. White, of the Seventh Day Adventists, has a peculiar slant.
- B. Jehovah’s Witnesses are incoherent on the subject.
- C. Moses E. Lard is a forerunner of the theory in the church.
- D. R. H. Boll followed W. E. Blackstone in *Jesus Is Coming*.
- E. Basically, it is taught as a seven-year period (divided into 3½ year periods) with tribulation on the earth, but with the saints raptured (caught up) at the beginning and revealed (brought back) at the end.

#### **III. Passages usually and most often applied to the theory are examined.**

- A. “The rapture” is found, but the return is denied (1 Thess. 4:13–17).
- B. The exact timing is supposed to be stated in Daniel 9:24–27; Ch. 12; but their application is specifically denied by the Lord.
- C. The tribulation of the wicked is supposed to be described (Rev. 19:20; 20:1–3), but their proof texts have nothing about the rapture and subsequent return of the saints.

#### **IV. Some of the terms used in proof of their theory are examined.**

- A. Christ’s coming (*parousia*) is supposed to be different from his appearing (*epiphaneia*) but they are at the same time (2 Thess. 2:8).
- B. Coming “with his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13) is supposed to be at a different time from our being “caught up ... to meet the Lord”; but is an erroneous result from ignoring the context.

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## Introduction

The apostle Paul tells us that we are a people “upon whom the ends of the ages are come.” (1 Cor. 10:11). Let us be aware of the plural number used in that statement. We are now concerned with the end of the ages, the consummation of the ages, the completeness of time. Such a subject is known in higher educational and theological circles as teleology. This is from the Greek word used in the New Testament for the perfection or completion of things. The resurrection of the dead and what is called “the rapture” are two features of this consummation. These are scripturally related items. The Scriptures show that when the Lord comes again the dead will be raised and that the living saints together with the risen saints will be enraptured with the Lord forever.

The sad reality, in spite of such a glorious promise, is that the resurrection and the rapture have been woven into a false theory which becomes a part of the false and speculative theory of premillennialism. This theory of the limited resurrection at the coming of the Lord is false whether they tie it with premillennialism or not. Their theory of the nature of the rapture is false, whether or not they tie it to premillennialism. But all three are interwoven into a false system which becomes ludicrous and unbelievable.

## Meaning of “Rapture”

The word *rapture* is not in our common versions of the Bible. The word, however, could appropriately be used in translation of the Greek word *harpazo*. This word is translated by such terms as “caught up.” From English dictionaries and Greek lexicons we learn that the two words mean “being caught up, transported.” There is a figurative sense of the English word: the spirit, mind or emotion caught up from the physical in ecstasy. Sometimes we are enraptured with a beautiful passage of Scripture, a soul stirring hymn or a powerful and eloquent sermon. In its direct relation to the resurrection, it is being caught up with the Lord at his coming. Of this the Scriptures speak. Of this we sing: “When with rapture I behold him”; and, “Your enraptured soul will view.”

## Development Of The Theory

The false theory of the rapture has a long and varied history. Popular radio and revival meeting preaching thrives on the fanciful theories of premillennialism, involving the abuse of prophecies in the Bible. This preaching presumes to know that the end is upon us; that the great tribulation is about to overtake the world which they see in every prophetic utterance and in every moral and political event; and that God's people will be "raptured" up out of this holocaust, to return after a brief period, to reign for a thousand years on the earth.

A period of seven years is the time for the saints to be raptured, according to the basic false theory. This is divided into two periods of three and one-half years each. This timing they derive from the statements of Daniel 12. During this seven-year period there is supposed to be waged a great carnage against the wicked of the earth, such as has never been known, some calling it the battle of Armageddon from the reference in Rev. 16:16. The saints are supposed to be raptured (caught up) at the beginning of this period and then revealed (brought back) at the end.

Ellen G. White, the founder and supposed prophet of Seventh Day Adventism, seemed not to have polished the theory to the extent that so many preach it today. She taught in her book, *The Great Controversy*, that when the Lord comes the second-time he will gather the saints through the "pearly gates" into the "Paradise of God." (page 646). While they are there all the wicked of the earth are to be destroyed during a period of a thousand years and the saints are judges in the matter. She says; "During the thousand years between the first and the second resurrection, the Judgment of the wicked takes place." (p. 660). Then she gets the return from this rapture after a thousand years for the resurrection of the wicked: "At the close of the thousand years, Christ again returns to the earth. He is accompanied by the host of the redeemed, and attended by a retinue of angels." (p. 662). Seventh Day Adventists are premillennialists but their theory varies widely from that which is held by the majority of them.

Jehovah's Witnesses have so much trouble with this being caught up that they hardly make one coherent assertion concerning it. They espouse the theory of a thousand-year reign upon the earth. But they have talked themselves into the corner of date setting for the Lord's return and cannot change that part of their theory. So, they assert that the Lord already has come the second time, in 1914 (*Harp of God*, pp. 216, 244) and that "millions now living will never die" (*ibid*, p. 241). From that time, according to the same book, he is gathering together his bride, the saints composed of 144,000, and "that soon all the saints shall participate with the Lord in glory in carrying out the further divine arrangement" (*ibid*, p. 269). Thus, they have the dead saints raised and with him here and now, but eventually to be changed from mortal to immortal. According to the same author the "caught up in the air" of 1 Thess. 4:17 is not in the air but is when "he comes to his temple" (*ibid*, p. 267), which is supposed to be his 1914 invisible coming.

Now we come to premillennialism among people in the church of Christ. Moses E. Lard had the theory. He quoted from another writer, but indicated that he was favorable to the view: "Here now are three events, real and literal, all happening at the same instant—the descent of Christ, the resurrection of the pious dead, the change of the pious living. Immediately on the happening of these, and before the Savior reaches the earth, both the raised and the changed are to be caught up in the clouds into the air to meet him. They are not, however, caught away from earth forever, but only temporarily to meet the Lord, who has not yet fully descended. Now, as the saints are after this to be forever with the Lord, and as the Lord is obviously on his return to the earth, it seems to be a necessary implication that the saints return with him to it." (*Lard's Quarterly*, Vol. 2, p. 216, Old Paths Book Club). He does not have all this seven-year period while there is great tribulation on earth, but he does have them raptured and returned before the thousand years reign.

While working with H. Leo Boles, he told me that as a young man trying to build a library he would ask various preachers what they considered to be the book which had the greatest influence upon them. He would then add the book to his library. When he asked R. H. Boll this question he was told that the book, *Jesus Is Coming*, by W. E. Blackstone had the greatest influence upon his thinking. That work is the basic, standard premillennial text for the popular religious preaching on the premillennial coming and the "rapture theory" related to it. You will find R. H. Boll and other premillennialists in churches of Christ essentially following this work. In his book, *Lessons On Daniel*, page 101, Boll has a chart which is patterned after one found on page 72 of Blackstone, detailing the seven year and thousand year periods.

In a booklet entitled, *A Survey of Bible Prophecy*, Richard Ramsey, of premillennial churches of Christ, describes his theory of the rapture in these words: "At the end of this age the Lord will take his church out of the world. This is usually called the Rapture ... The wicked dead are not raised at that time, nor does the world come to an end ... but after the church is removed from the earth there will come a defiance of God such as has never been seen before ... In this great Tribulation-period the Jewish people will be marked for special persecution. They will again be in their own land.... A group of 144,000 Israelites will be specially chosen and sealed.... The nations will gather themselves together for the Battle of Armageddon.... This battle will be won by the personal appearance of the Lord ... and Christ and his saints will reign for a thousand years." (ibid, pp. 56, 57). This epitomizes the false theory of two resurrections, the rapture and a third coming of the Lord.

## Their “Proof-Texts”

Attention should be given to some of their favorite and most used proof texts. 1 Thess. 4:13–17 will naturally come at the top of this list because it uses an expression which is a definition of *rapture*. The passage is only concerned about saints; those who have fallen asleep and those who are alive when the Lord comes. Thus, when he says that those who have fallen asleep will rise first, he has only saints in view. The dead saints will rise before any are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It should be carefully noted that no reference is made to an eventual return of these raptured saints to the earth. Furthermore, there is no intimation of a tribulation period in the passage. Neither is there any hint of a millennial reign in the passage, much less such a period to follow the catching up to meet the Lord in the air. The whole theory is but a fine-spun tale.

They run back to the prophecy of Daniel to try to show just when the rapture will take place and to show how long it will last. They suppose it to be taking place during the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24–27. They make this week a figurative time of a literal seven years. They will then tie this with Daniel 12, with the “time, times and a half time” supposed to mean three and one-half years, thus they get the week divided in half. During this seven-year period there is supposed to be great tribulation upon the earth with the saints removed from it in the rapture. The man of sin, of 2 Thess. 2:3, is supposed to come in the midst of that seven-year period. There are a number of features about these chapters in Daniel which they cannot fit into their theory. They claim to know just when this prophecy will be fulfilled and how. They admit that the end is not yet, but only that it is near. But the passage declares: “for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end.” (Dan. 12:9). Thus, they are so presumptuous as to claim to know what is shut up till the time, and when the time will be, for its fulfillment. They claim that only the righteous will be raised at the time of the rapture, but the passage declares that some will be raised to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2). Thus, they have contradicted their own proof text with their theory, and would make Daniel contradict Paul to the Thessalonians.

An abomination of desolation is spoken of in both of their proof chapters (Dan. 9:27; 12:11). This is supposed to be the great tribulation of their theory. The Lord speaks, however, specifically identifying this prophecy from Daniel, and says that it would be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which history describes as having taken place in 70 A.D. The Daniel passage does not speak of sometime yet future to us. Jesus speaks of the utter destruction of the temple (Luke 21:6). In further minute description of that event he says; “But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand.” (Lk. 21:20). **In a companion reference to the same address of our Lord, this is said to be that which was spoken through Daniel (Matt. 23:15). Thus, people with this vain theory will refuse to accept the precise application made by our Lord.**

One readily can expect them to take the book of Revelation and weave it into their theory. They especially refer to the vivid figures of conflict as describing the tribulation of the wicked during the seven years of rapture of the saints. This is supposed to be climaxed in Rev. 19:20 and 20:1-3. But neither these texts nor their contexts have anything about the rapture and subsequent return of the saints. The passages do describe a destruction, but there is no hint that this is to occur after the Lord has come and the saints have met him in the air. There is no hint that this destruction will end with the saints being brought back to the earth after a seven-year period for another period of a thousand years on the earth. It is all simply a fanciful fabrication forming a part of the entire fanciful but false theory of premillennialism.

### **“Parousia” and “Epiphaneia”**

Two words are used with reference to the Lord’s arrival to be with his saints. His coming or presence is translated from the word *parousia*. His appearance or manifestation is translated from the word *epiphaneia*. It is from this latter word that some religions get their Epiphany day of celebration. Occasionally you will find people with this “rapture” theory attempting to make a distinction in these two terms, as if one applies to the Lord’s coming to take his saints up in rapture and the other to his coming back to earth with his saints after the rapture. The second term is used in the following passage: “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” (Tit. 2:13). The first term mentioned is in the following: “Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him” (2 Thess. 2:1). Remember that one of these is supposed to happen before the rapture, the great tribulation, or the rising up of the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2; while the other is supposed to occur after the events of this seven years. But such a distinction is suddenly annihilated by a verse in the context which uses both words: “And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the (*epiphaneia*) manifestation of his (*parousia*) coming” (2 Thess. 2:8). Both of these occur at the same time.

They suppose that there is a difference in time and action between his coming *for his saints* and his coming *with his saints*. He comes for his saints when the dead ones rise and together with the changed living ones are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-17). But in another place we find the expression “at the coming of our Lord Jesus *with all his saints*.” (1 Thess. 3:13b). Presumptuously they place their seven years of rapture between these two passages.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Welch, R. C. (1975). [Resurrection of the Dead and “The Rapture.”](#) In Bible Faculty of the Florida College (Ed.), *Great Bible Doctrines* (pp. 225-240). Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation Publications.

