

Question #9: I would like to know about the rapture, especially as it is explained in the typical Baptist church.

In this question, as stated, it is added: “as it [the rapture] is explained in the typical Baptist church.” First of all, I think I know what you mean. But I would like to comment that there is really no “typical Baptist church.” There are so many Baptist groups, as there are so many different sects within all the denominations. I have found that every congregation, regardless of its denominational affiliation, is unique and therefore “non-typical.” But most importantly, every individual is so uniquely created by God: special and different from all others. In nature, snowflakes exemplify this so beautifully. That is why one-on-one individual Bible study is so vitally important to carrying out the Lord’s Great Commission as stated in Matthew 28:19-20.

The word “rapture” is not found in the Bible—at least not in any of the English versions I am familiar with. This of course is a “red-flag” warning for me right up front. I say this because man-made doctrine and teaching **always** requires non-Biblical words.

So the first thing I do with such a question in a personal Bible study is try to identify Biblical words that come close to the secular word being used. In the case of “rapture” the Bible word “*resurrection*” and the Biblical phrase “*being raised up*” usually can be agreed upon to track this teaching in the Scriptures, and especially the New Testament (NT).

Of course there have been many books and even movies on “the rapture” and its many varied teachings. Basically I understand the rapture theory to teach that God’s people will all be resurrected suddenly and without warning off the earth at some point. Then 7 years of intense persecution will occur. After these things Jesus will set up a 1,000 year kingdom on earth, with Him personally ruling from Jerusalem. Then Satan will “*be released for a short time,*” followed by the “*great white throne*” judgement found in Revelation 20.

For time’s sake, I’ll concentrate on the 3 Scripture passages that come up most often and I believe to be most important to a discussion of “the rapture.” They are I Thess. 4:13-18, Matt. 24:35-41, and John 5:25-29.

I Thess. 4:13-18 is most often cited by those who ascribe to the rapture theory. The passage reads as follows:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus

we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Here Paul is comforting Christians in Thessalonica who were undergoing intense persecution and some were being martyred. He shares that those who have died in Christ will rise (be resurrected) before those Christians who are still alive when Christ returns.

Note that nothing is said in this passage concerning the resurrection of the unrighteous persons. Also "*the coming of the Lord*," referred to in verse 15, is described in verse 16 with the following markers: "*the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God.*" Most "rapture" teaching states that the rapture is without warning and has no signs—God's people just disappear. Sometimes the term "secret rapture" is used by those espousing this theory.

The next Scripture often cited by those believing in the rapture comes in Matthew 24. Matthew 24:40-41 reads: "*Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.*" These verses are most well-known. Here, the rapturists say, is where the righteous are raptured (resurrected or lifted off) from the earth. Those who are "left" or "left behind" are the unrighteous. Usually these verses are quoted and used separately from their context in Matthew chapter 24.

If one reads the context in which Matthew 24:40-41 are placed in the Scriptures, the meaning becomes very different however. In the following passage verses 40 and 41 are given in their Biblical context:

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left" (Matthew 24:35-41).

Note in Matthew 24:35-37 Jesus is talking about the fact that no one knows the day or hour of His coming (v.36), and on that day "*heaven and earth will pass away*" (v.35). But most importantly, Jesus likens His coming to the days of Noah: "*For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah*" (Matt. 24:37).

The next two verses, which immediately precede the "rapture" verses (Matt. 24:40-41), describe in detail the conditions prior to the flood. Verse 38 shares that life was going on like normal until Noah entered the ark. Then verse 39 states: "*and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.*" (Matt.24:39). Notice the pronouns "they" and "them." These refer to the unrighteous who were drowned in the flood. Especially note that "*the flood came and took them all away.*" "Took" here in verse 39 and "taken," as used in verses 40 and

41, are used in parallel here: what happened at the flood will happen again when Jesus comes.

So those people “taken” in verses 40 and 41 must line up with the unrighteous that the flood “took” away in verse 39. But the rapture theory says just the opposite! The rapture theory teaches that those “taken” in verses 40 and 41 are the righteous, but this does not agree with verse 39.

Another way of seeing this inconsistency is to ask: “Who was left after the flood?” Of course righteous Noah and his family were left. That would mean those who are left in verses 40 and 41 are the righteous if in fact *“the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah”* (Matt. 24:37). This is exactly opposite of what the “rapture” folks say—that those left behind are the unrighteous who will then go through tribulation.

The last passage we will look at in this study concerns Jesus’ statement in John 5:28-29. I always try to bring up this passage when studying the “rapture.” This statement by Jesus reads: *“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment”* (John 5:28-29).

Here Jesus totally destroys much of the “rapture theory” doctrine, as I understand it. Note Jesus says in verse 28 **“an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice.”** Then in verse 29 both the good and the evil are resurrected at the same time period; as verse 28 puts it “an hour.” According to the “rapture theory” the good (Christians) are lifted off the earth at least 1,000 years before the unrighteous are taken off the earth for judgement. Just like evolution and its 4.5 billion years versus the Bible’s 6,000 years for the existence of the universe—so also the rapture theory’s 1,000+ years versus Jesus’ statement of “an hour” (John 5:28) are **totally incompatible**. In my opinion, further discussion of “the rapture” would be fruitless unless Jesus’ statements found in John 5 are reconciled with the rapture’s timeline.

Of course the “rapture” theory is not a salvation issue, as far as I perceive it. Even so, when given its proper valuation, it deserves our study and scrutiny in the Scriptures. Recognizing how much time and energy has been spent on this theory, I believe it has been used as a detour away from more important issues. Furthermore, rapture teaching becomes dangerous if one does not stay *“on the alert”* (Matt. 24:42), supposing that God will take us off the earth before things get too tough. Personally, I’m not falling for it!

Steve Compton