

Harpazo in other New Testament Passages

Up to this point, the scripture using the word, *harpazo* has been written by Paul and seemingly relates to the Rapture. Looking at other authors will change the contextual use of the word and it may or may not take on a new meaning. Good exegesis and hermeneutics demands that the interpretation be made based on the new author's usage of the word within its specific context.¹ The word, *harpazo*, is used thirteen times in the New Testament. Five of them specifically relate to raptures (Philip in Acts 8:39, Paul in 2 Cor 12:2-4, Jesus in Rev 12:5, and the Church in 1 Thess 4:17). Of these five *harpazo* uses: 1 Thessalonians 4:17 was addressed above; in Acts 8:39, the Holy Spirit temporarily "caught away" Philip after he ministered to the Ethiopian eunuch and placed him in Azotus, some 20-30 miles away (similar to Ezekiel being bodily transported for his visions in the Old Testament); in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul twice describes his experience of being temporarily "caught up" to the Third Heaven (again, similar to Ezekiel and to John's experience in Revelation, beginning at 4:1); and in Revelation 12:5, the man child of the Woman (usually interpreted to mean, Jesus) was "caught up" to God and His throne. Most students of prophecy interpret this last rapture to be a vision of Jesus' ascension. However, at least one student of prophecy interprets this vision to be the Rapture of the Church, because *harpazo* is explicitly used as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and the "male child" could be symbolic of the Body of Christ versus Christ himself. Also, this particular vision is in the middle of Revelation (after chapter 11 and the "Two Witnesses," and before chapter 13 and the revelation of the "Beast"). There have been many other inferences to the Rapture in Revelation (3:10-11; 4:1-2; 4:4 and 5:9-10; 4-18; 7:9-17; 11:11-13, 11:15-18; 14:14-20; 19:11 – 20:6), but

¹Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), 23-31.

12:5, is the only one that explicitly uses *harpazo*.² Another article, about the Rapture in Revelation, distinguishes between the “Earth Dwellers” or non-elect (Rev 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 16:9-11; 17:2, 6, 8; and 18:24 – 19:2) and “Heaven Dwellers” or elect (Rev 1:5-7; 5:9-11; 7:9-15; 12:12; 13:6; 19:1-9, 14; and 20:4, 6). The thesis of this article is that the “Hour of Testing,” mentioned in Revelation 3:10 and 6:10, does not appear to begin until 8:13 and is preceded by the Rapture in 7:9. Therefore, the “Heaven Dwellers” are in heaven for the entire Tribulation addressed in Revelation.³

The other eight times *harpazo* is translated, “to forcibly seize upon, snatch away, take to oneself or use force on someone” are in Matthew 11:12; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28, 29; Acts 23:10; and Jude 23.⁴ Of these eight citations: two are used of Paul and Jesus being (or potentially being) physically “taken by force” (John 6:15, when the crowd intended to take Jesus by force and make him king and Acts 23:10, when the Romans had to take Paul away by force to save him from the crowd in Jerusalem); five are used by Jesus to describe theoretical entrance into the kingdom of heaven and possibly to infer the final entrance to the kingdom at the Rapture (Matt 11:12, the violent taking the kingdom by force; Matt 13:19, Satan coming to snatch away the seed sown in a person’s heart; John 10:12, Satan again as the “wolf” who snatches away the sheep; John 10:28-29, no one being able to snatch the sheep from either Jesus’ or the Father’s

²Michael J. Svigel, “The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation,” *Trinity Journal* 22 (Spring 2002): 23-74.

³A. Boyd Luter and Emily K. Hunter, “The Earth Dwellers and the Heaven Dwellers: An Overlooked Interpretive Key to the Apocalypse,” *Faith and Mission* 20 (2002): 3-9.

⁴Zodhiates, “harpazo,” *New Testament, KJV*, 892-3.

hand); and the final use in Jude 23, which speaks of saving others by *snatching* them out of the fire of judgment. A case can be made for the Jude 23 citation as a direct inference to the Rapture.

Jude was the brother of James (leader of the Jerusalem church and who wrote the Epistle of James) and also a half-brother of Jesus. He wrote his short letter to the *kletos*, “called, invited, welcomed appointed . . . one who is called means one who is saved.”⁵ This short epistle was written between AD 70 and 80 against false teachings and false teachers.⁶ This makes it one of the last epistles written. Verses 5-16 deal with the judgment of these false teachers, specifically at the Second Coming. Jude does this by making reference to the apocryphal, non-canonical book of *Enoch* 1:7-9,⁷ in verses 14-15. Starting in verse 17, he addresses the believers by issuing an exhortation to “remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles.” Continuing in verse 18, “In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their ungodly lusts” and in verse 19, “who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” Jude’s focus is clearly on the “Last Time” or End Times in these verses and contains similar language to 2 Peter 3. He then continues on to encourage them in verses 20-23 by telling them to, build themselves up on their most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit (v. 20) and keep themselves in the love of God, “waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life”—v. 21 (similar language to James 5 about the imminent Rapture). Then in verse 23, Jude encourages them to *save (sozo)* others by *snatching them (harpazo)* out of the fire (another inference to the

⁵Zodhiates, “kletos,” *Dictionary*, 869-70.

⁶Charles Caldwell Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1890.

⁷Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or I Enoch; A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 26.

deliverance from wrath theme of the Rapture). Therefore, it appears that this usage of *harpazo* also seems to refer to the Rapture.

All the uses of *harpazo*, except for 1 Thessalonians 4:17, seem to speak of an individual rapture as compared to the collective Body of Christ. However, they could still be individual New Testament (apocalyptic) confirmations of the Old Testament (prophetic) raptures and precursors to the collective Rapture of the Church (especially Jesus' ascension at the beginning of the Church Age). The other New Testament Greek words that are similar to *harpazo* and used in related passages were addressed in chapter 1, but shall be quickly reviewed next.

Episunagoge is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, referring to the "gathering together" of believers to meet Jesus at his *parousia* (the Rapture, previously addressed in 1 Thess 4:17). *Analambano* is used in Mark 16:19 and Acts 1:2, 11, 22 to describe Jesus' ascension (rapture). The same word is used in the Septuagint in 2 Kings 2:9-11 to describe Elijah's rapture. It is also used in the Septuagint to describe Ezekiel being "bodily lifted up" by the Spirit of God for his visions. Two other words, related to *analambano*, are used by Luke in Acts 1 to refer to the ascension of Jesus: in verse 9, *epairo*, meaning, "to be raised up, to be taken up, or to be borne upward;" and in verse 10, *poreuomai*, meaning, "to depart, go away or toward someplace." A related word, *anabaino*, meaning "to go up, arise, ascend up, climb up or come up," is used in Revelation 4:1 when John is told to "come up here" by Jesus. *Metatithemi* is used in both Hebrews 11:5 and in Genesis 5:24, in the Septuagint, to describe the *translation* (rapture) of Enoch to heaven. This word is related to *allasso*, used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 to describe what happens to the believer's body at the Rapture, and to *metamorphoo*, used by Matthew and Mark to describe Jesus' appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9;

Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36). *Ekpheugo* is used in Luke 21:36 to describe the believers being able to escape the “great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people” (Tribulation) and to stand before Jesus (another inference to the Rapture). It is also used in Romans 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:3, and Hebrews 2:3; 12:25 in reference to *escaping* the judgment of God. *Sozo* is used in Romans 5:9 to describe believers being *saved from* the wrath of God, and in the Septuagint to describe the following: the *rescue* of Lot and his family in Genesis 19:17-22; Jacob’s *surviving* the encounter with the angel in Genesis 32:30; and in Daniel 12:1 to describe Daniel’s people being *saved from* the “time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (speaking of the Day of the Lord = Tribulation). *Soteria* is used in Hebrews 11:7 to describe Noah and his family’s *deliverance* from the Flood; in Exodus 14:13; 15:2, in the Septuagint, to describe the *deliverance* of Israel from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea; and in 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:14; 9:28; and 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Peter 3:15 to describe believers being *saved from* the wrath of God (to be poured out during the Tribulation).

With all of this testimony considered, it appears that the term rapture can pertain to an individual or a group of individuals. However, the primary and related Rapture passages appear to apply to an isolated, unique event involving the Body of Christ (Church) and occurring prior to the Tribulation (Day of the Lord or Daniel’s 70th week). Next, to explore the remainder of the uses of *parousia* to see if they are consistently used as a unique term to describe the *coming* of the Lord associated with the Rapture of the Church.