

A Controversy: Is Revelation 12:5 a Figure of the Rapture?

There is a controversy concerning verse 5. Some expositors argue that the verse 5 "caught up" wording represents the rapture of the Church.

Revelation 12:5 states:

⁵ And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

The greatest obstacle to discovery of God's truth in Scripture is not the lack of education or even ignorance, but it is the illusion of knowledge and understanding which opposes God's truth, the light of His doctrines. This illusion is often rooted in pride and conceit when God desires to teach us in our humility and modesty.

Some biblical expositors have suggested that the figure of the man child, is the body of Christ being "raptured". They argue that this event is the Church's departure because of the usage of the word "harpazo". This view is rooted in the belief that the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 doctrinally represent Christian churches throughout this Age.¹

Doctrine is a belief or set of beliefs held and taught by God in His Book. Doctrines necessarily require division.² Timothy 2:15 clearly says that God's truth requires division. That means that not all truth should be doctrinally applied to all groups in the Scriptures. The Scriptural doctrines are either focused at the Jew in Tribulation or the Church during the Pentecostal Age. This is why there are so many divisions in the churches. The works doctrine plainly alluded to in the Gospels, Hebrews, James, Peter, John, Jude and Revelation are doctrinally applicable to the Jew should not be applied to the Church, Christ's own. You may make an application, a spiritual or inspirational application, but not a doctrinal application. All Scripture is profitable for "instruction in righteousness". You may apply Jewish doctrine to a Pauline Christian for "instruction in righteousness". Just do not make a member of Christ's body keep the commandments, keep the feast, etc. as a necessary component of salvation.

If we were to attempt to prioritize God's view on His doctrine we would look to 2 Timothy 3:16. The verse states:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

There are four listed purposes for all Scripture. Doctrine is first on the list. God is very concerned with teaching knowledge and making us understand doctrine.³ Studying God's words and doctrines is laborious.⁴ In the future, Israel will finally understand God's doctrines.⁵

¹ H.A. Ironside, Revelation, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1920) Lecture 13

² 2 Timothy 2:15

³ Isaiah 28:9

⁴ 1 Timothy 5:17

⁵ Isaiah 29:24

Presently, they are confused. They continue to be steeped in tradition, not knowing the Scriptures.⁶

There is only one true doctrinal application for these Revelation churches. There are only two doctrinal choices before us: (1) Jewish doctrine, or (2) Church doctrine.⁷ One doctrinal application and one inspirational application. If the churches are Jewish assemblies, then the Christian churches may draw an inspirational application and rightly so. If the churches are Christian assemblies, may the Jew draw an inspirational application? Why would they?

We must study the word clues in Revelation 1-3 in order to learn which doctrinal application is intended by Jesus, the revelator of this prophetic book. The Jews were often astonished at Jesus' doctrines.⁸ God accused the Jewish leadership in Isaiah 28, a great chapter on the Crowns of Pride and Glory, as being doctrinally incompetent.

The doctrine of the coming Messiah, the sure foundation stone, the precious cornerstone to be laid in Zion. He was one of the major topics of this chapter. The "covenant of death" described in chapter 28 was the law, not some 20th century mythical peace treaty with the Antichrist. Paul clearly sets out God's doctrine on this "covenant of death" law in 2 Corinthians 3. The "covenant of death" was buried with Jesus in Daniel 9:26. Jesus fulfilled the law in perfect submission to the Father. These mythological fantasies are the type of scholarship which permeates our "end of days" culture where people run to and fro from one wind of fanciful doctrine to another.⁹ God help us.¹⁰

As Harry Ironside (1876-1951) said, in his book of lectures titled, "Revelation", "if the interpreters are wrong as to the woman and the man child, it necessarily follows that they will be wrong as to many things connected with them." Ironside asserts that the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are Christian. Based on his doctrinal view, he concludes that Revelation 12:5 is the rapture of the Christian Church. I doctrinally disagree with Ironside.

I am in agreement with Dr. Bullinger's view¹¹ that the Churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are fully Jewish based on the Scriptures, their Jewish terminologies, doctrines and facts found in the Old Testament describing each one. Bullinger sets forth a complete analysis of each of the seven assemblies leaving the reader with one conclusion. The assemblies are fully Jewish. This, however, does not exclude an inspirational Christian era church application. It is clear that such an application can be made to suit many of the characteristics of the seven assemblies. This does no violence to the Jewish doctrine, which then can lead an interpreter into a correct doctrinal application of Revelation 12. Remember the central goal of these seven years is the calling out of a Jewish remnant nation which acquires the testimony and faith of Messiah Yeshua Jesus. A group gets judged and a group gets protected, fed and ultimately saved.

⁶ Matthew 22:29

⁷ Excluding the "doctrines of man" and the "doctrine of devils"

⁸ Matthew 22:33; Mark 1:22, 27, 4:2; Luke 4:32

⁹ Ephesians 4:14

¹⁰ Isaiah 41:13

¹¹ E. W. Bullinger, D.D. (1837-1913) The Apocalypse, Second Edition (1909)

This judgment and salvation work of these seven Tribulation years was emphasized by a material omission in the Scriptures. Omissions are important for what they do not say. Matthew 21:5 tells about Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem on Nisan 10, the week of His death and resurrection.

Matthew 21:5 states:

"Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."

Many jump to conclusions and say that Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on Nisan 10 fulfilled Zechariah 9:9. That is partially true. What Matthew omitted were the words, "he is just, and having salvation". Doctrinally, this is Jewish national salvation which had not been included purposefully. National salvation is reserved for Christ's Second Coming. Surely Jesus came and offered the free gift of salvation in the Pauline sense. The Book of Tribulation is not dealing with individuals, but the nations. Now, is the day of salvation where God is dealing with individuals, but that day ends at the "fullness of the Gentiles and the removal and departure of Christ's own at the rapture event. Surely, God is going to judge the world and those Jews who will have rejected Christ as their personal saviors during this Age. God is principally going to save a remnant Jewish nation which possesses the faith and testimony of Yeshua Jesus.

At His First Coming, the nation of Israel rejected Him and manipulated His Roman execution. They did this because of envy.¹² The patriarchs did the same thing to Joseph, an earlier type of Christ. They sold Joseph into Egypt for envy.¹³ This Zechariah omission tells us that just judgment and salvation have been reserved for His Second Coming as the Judge and Savior of Jacob.¹⁴

The male child of verse 5 certainly speaks to Jesus in His Lord of Lords and King of Kings role.¹⁵ Jesus ascended to the Father the first day of His resurrection.¹⁶ Jesus ascended to heaven on Day 40 following His resurrection.¹⁷ The Scriptures speak of two returns, one for Christ's own at the rapture¹⁸ and at the end of Daniel's 70th week¹⁹.

Prior to Jesus' ascension we are given some additional information. Jesus ascended to Heaven immediately following His resurrection. This was not the Day 40 ascension. We know that there were three events: (1) Jesus was resurrected from the grave in the tomb, (2) then immediately following His resurrection, He ascended to Heaven, but returned, and (3) He ascended on Day 40 of the Omer count prior to the Feast of Pentecost.

Resurrection Ascension: Wave Sheaf Offering of First Fruits

¹² Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10

¹³ Acts 7:9

¹⁴ Romans 11:26; Isaiah 59:21; Jeremiah 31:34

¹⁵ Psalm 2:1-12, 110:1-7; Ezekiel 20:37; Revelation 2:27

¹⁶ John 20:17

¹⁷ Acts 1:9-12; Luke 24:50-53; Mark 16:19

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:52

¹⁹ Revelation 1:7, 19:10-16

John 20:17 states:

¹⁷ Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Harpazo: Caught Up or Taken by Force

Some commentators have opined that the use of the word "caught up" in verse 5, the Greek word "*harpazo*", implies that the "*catching up*" meaning "*taken by force*" matches the same words used in the two principal rapture verses.²⁰ Does the "*catching up*" mean "*taken by force*"?

1 Corinthians 15:52 uses the term "*raised*" or "*egeiro*" for the dead in Christ and "*changed*" or "*allasso*" for the living in Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 uses the term "*raise up*" or "*anistemi*" for the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the term "*caught up*" or "*harpazo*" to describe the rapture of living in Christ.

The usage of "harpazo" according to Strong's Greek is "*catch up*". It is used four times in the New Testament. *Harpazo* has another translation usage which is "*take by force*". That phrase is used three times in the New Testament. The literal reading and understanding of the verse 5 leads the reader to the conclusion that the man child "*harpazo*" references Christ being "*caught up*" from Earth following his resurrection.

Commentators who favor an interpretation of the man child "*harpazo*" as the rapture of the Christ's own argue that Christ was never "*taken by force*". They describe the rapture as a "*taking by force*" only. They simply substitute their own words for they say that Jesus ascended with the implication being that it was a peaceful voluntary ascension. Which of the three events are they referencing. They are correct reading the Scriptures literally. Christ was resurrected once and ascended twice. Once on the Feast of First Fruits following His resurrection from death²¹ and a second time immediately following His resurrection²² and finally when He departed to the Father ten days prior to sending the Holy Spirit.²³

It should also be noted that the argument using "harpazo" as "taken by force" in a purported verse 5 rapture completely ignores the resurrection of the dead in Christ.

In the interest of settling the controversy we will dissect and analyze the language. Personally, I believe that the English is clear. The correct choice of words is "caught up" and not "taken violently". I know many people prefer to study the Greek and arrive at an interpretation which is consistent with their doctrinal biases. My Book of Revelation bias is rooted in a Jewish doctrinal view not a Church doctrinal view.

Table 1. Resurrection of Righteousness

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17

²¹ John 20:17

²² Ibid

²³ Acts 1:3, 9

This table will compare the terms used in the two principal rapture verses of the New Testament. The Greek terms are the root form from Strong's Greek Lexicon. It should be noted that the Blue Letter Bible indicates that the Greek root forms are identical between the KJB and the NIV.

Bible Verses	Dead in Christ		Living in Christ	
	English	Greek	English	Greek
1 Thess.4:16-17	Shall rise	Anistemi G450	Caught up	Harpazo G726
1 Cor. 15:52	Shall be raised	Egeiro G1453	Changed	Allasso G236

A review of the terminology associated with the two principal rapture verses clearly demonstrates that there are four different Greek words used to describe the resurrection of righteousness, one of which is "*harpazo*" and it is confined to the living in Christ and not the resurrection of dead in Christ.

Table 2. Christ's Ascension

This table sets forth the words used for Christ's ascension as a type of rapture of Christ's own. The word "*harpazo*" is not used. The two Greek words "*anabaino*" and "*epairo*" differ from all of the rapture related words in the two principal rapture verses above. The John 20:17 verse is the post resurrection ascension and the Acts 1:9 is the Day 40 ascension. There is no biblical record concerning the nature of Jesus' resurrection from death to life in the tomb as a *harpazo* type event. This, by the way, is the event which most closely resembles the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of the living.

Bible Verses	First Fruits		Day 40	
	English	Greek	English	Greek
1 Cor.15:3-5	Rose again	Egeiro G1453	N/A	N/A
John 20:17	Ascended	Anabaino G305	N/A	N/A
Acts 1:9	N/A	N/A	Taken up	Epario G1869

N/A: Not Applicable

In the context of the resurrection of righteousness, the subject matter of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes Jesus' resurrection as "he rose again". This word "*egerio*" Paul used to describe Jesus' raising up is the same word Paul uses to describe resurrection of the dead in Christ in verse 52.

The ascension following the resurrection is described as "*ascended*" or "*anabaino*". *Anabaino* is used ten times in the New Testament. When Christ departed on day forty, he used the term was "*taken up*" or "*epairo*". This term is used once in the New Testament. There is nothing suggesting that Jesus was "caught up" in the nature of a forceful act. Neither is there any suggestion that the rapture verses speak about any "*taking by force*". There is more in common with the "*ascending*" and "*taking up*" concepts of Jesus' ascensions with the two rapture verses' words, "*rise*", "*raised*", and "*caught up*".

There is nothing in the translation in Revelation 12:5 to even suggest a "forceful taking" is relevant. Harpazo is never used in its "take by force" usage. The commentators who prefer this interpretation are crafting a private interpretation in order to craft a result which favors their interpretation. We search for God's truth, not our preferred truths. If our beliefs are not aligned with God's truth, then our beliefs will be irrelevant and erroneous. This must be the intellectual honesty to which we all aspire and submit. God's truth first and foremost or nothing at all.

If one attempts to interpret the "*harpazo*" of Revelation 12:5 as the rapture of the Church, the argument is significantly weakened when comparing verse 5 to the two rapture verses above. Their proposition omits the dead in Christ. This is, without redefining the term "*harpazo*" to mean "*take with force*" as they assert, the distinguishing element.

Taken by Force

Strong's Lexicon states that "*harpazo*" G726 has been translated into six English words any number of times. The following words, along with their frequency of usage, is as follows: catch up (4x), take by force (3x), catch away (2x), pluck (2x), catch (1x) and pull (1x).

The one rapture verse which uses the term "*caught up*" "*harpazo*" was not translated as "*taken by force*". This is an important distinction.

The translation committees, which, in the case of the KJB translation work, were comprised of 47 Hebrew and Greek scholars of unparalleled intellectual stature. The translations which produced the 1611 KJB were subject to no less than fourteen independent reviews before word choices were adopted from the *Textus Receptus* manuscripts. Personally, I am inclined to defer to their word choices, not only in deference to their learned stature, but most significantly, because of God's express promise to inspire and preserve His words. In no case, had the phrase "*take by force*" been used in conjunction with the two principal rapture verses.

The three New Testament verses which translated the word "*harpazo*" in its "take by force" characterization are:

Matthew 11:12

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

John 6:15

When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

Acts 23:10

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 from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

[Emphasis added]

These three examples all share one common theme. The object of the force objected to being taken. This theme is diametrically opposed to any notion that the "*catching up*" action could be associated with the rapture. Would anyone object to being "caught up" to Christ? Is this not the "hope of glory"?²⁴ The proposition that the Revelation 12:5 "*caught up*" term represents the rapture of Christ's own, must fail for lack of any logical support in the Scriptures.

Now, if you must insist that the translators erred, then your word choices may be substituted to craft a private interpretation to suit your particular doctrinal viewpoint. This is what Eve did in Genesis 3. She deleted the word "*freely*".²⁵ She added the phrase, "*shall not touch*".²⁶ Satan simply questioned God's authority with the smug phrase "*Yea, hath God said*". Satan did lie in Genesis 3:4 telling Eve she would not die if she ate the fruit. Questioning the words of God's voice, adding words, deleting words, is where the whole problem began. If we are permitted to do these things, then we shall necessarily become "as gods".²⁷ I choose to believe that God was able to cause His Hebrew and Greek words to be accurately reflected in one English translation under the doctrines of inspiration and preservation. Is anything too hard for our God?²⁸

This refusal to take the Scriptures literally, as they appear in writing, is sign of the times when people will not endure sound doctrine.²⁹ Doctrine is the foremost purpose of the Scriptures.³⁰ And accordingly, this same 2 Timothy verse necessarily implies the first doctrine of Scripture is that "All Scripture is God breathed".³¹ All means all, not some and not multiple versions of the voice of God's words. God has established ideological rules for each of His doctrinal jurisdictions, a set for the Jew and a set for Christ's own. If you do not learn to rightly divide God's doctrinal jurisdictions³², you will fall into error and believe in heretical doctrines. God forbid, doctrines of devils!³³

The Feasts of the Lord as Metaphors of Spiritual Resurrection

Symbolism of Christ's First Fruits Resurrection

²⁴ Colossians 1:27

²⁵ Genesis 3:2 omitting "freely" from Genesis 2:16

²⁶ Genesis 3:3 adding "shall not touch" which does not appear in Genesis 2:17

²⁷ Genesis 3:5

²⁸ Genesis 18:34; Jeremiah 32:27

²⁹ 2 Timothy 4:3

³⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16 Note: The word "doctrine" appears in the KJB, but has been supplanted with the word "teaching" in other bibles. This is an example of "corrupting the word of God" 2 Corinthians 2:17, which of course, the word "corrupt" has been removed from the other bibles as well. "Yea, hath God said"! Genesis 3:1

³¹ 2 Timothy 2:15

³² Ibid

³³ 1 Timothy 4:1

Let's consider the symbolism that God chose to use for the resurrection of Christ as a witness to His form of ascension rapture. On First Fruits, when Jesus was resurrected, Sunday morning, the Temple priests had prepared the "*wave sheaf offering of grain*".³⁴ This sheaf of grain offering represented the first fruits of the harvest, but in God's symbolic speech, it represented the spiritual harvest, the begotten Son of God. Jesus taught this doctrine in John 12:24 where He said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Jesus was the corn of wheat, the first fruit of the resurrection of righteousness.³⁵

The Threefold Order of the Resurrection of Righteousness

Paul describes the three orders of this first resurrection. He says in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24:

"²³But every man in his own order: (1) Christ the firstfruits; afterward (2)they that are Christ's at his coming. ²⁴Then cometh(3) the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. [Numbering added]

Jesus, the first order of the resurrection, was resurrected at the First Fruits festival when the Temple priests were waving up in the air the "*sheaf of grain*" offering to God. This offering represented Christ's post resurrection ascension into heaven as the first fruits of the resurrection of righteousness. The sheaf of grain represented a sample of the greater harvest to come at Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Conclusion. Christ's own, the second order of the resurrection, will follow Christ at His appearing as the greater harvest.

On the Feast of Pentecost, the Temple priests were concluding the Spring harvest offerings. God had instructed the priests to bake two loaves of bread with the fruit of the grain harvest and offer two loaves of bread baked up to God. This called the "wave loaf offering".

Pentecost represents a two-stage transaction involving Christ's own at His appearing. Now Christ did not appear at the first Pentecost. He had to depart before the Holy Spirit could come to his disciples.³⁶ The first stage of Pentecost was the "earnest deposit" of the Spirit of God into and indwelling the believers.³⁷

One of the Holy Spirit's works is to show Christ's own "*the things to come*".³⁸ We are studying, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the "*things to come*". What then, does Paul mean when he describes the second order of the resurrection of righteousness? Christ did not appear at the first Pentecost when the purchase deposit was made. The second stage of Pentecost is the redemption of the body.³⁹ The third order of the resurrection occurs at the end of Daniel's 70th week. This is "the end" prior to the Millennial reign. Revelation 20:5 days, "they came to life and reigned

³⁴ Leviticus 23:10-11

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:20

³⁶ John 16:7

³⁷ Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:22

³⁸ John 16:13

³⁹ Romans 8:23

with Christ for a thousand years".⁴⁰ This third order concludes the three orders of the first resurrection to life. The third order of the resurrection resurrects the tribulation saints who will be included in the Millennial population.

Gregory M. Wilson, J.D.

⁴⁰ Revelation 20:5