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The Rapture in the Apocalypse of Elijah

by
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INTRODUCTION

Many evangelicals argue that the pretribulation rapture is a theological construction of J. N. Darby (d.1882) or his nineteenth-century contemporary, Margaret Macdonald; and that prior to the last two hundred years it was unheard of in Christian history.¹ However, within the last few decades several discoveries of beliefs similar to pretribulationism in writings of medieval Christians have surfaced, and have challenged that viewpoint. These discoveries include a seventh-century sermon of pseudo-Ephraem and a fourteenth-century text entitled The History of Brother Dolcino.² As new finds are discovered, evangelicals are gradually becoming aware that pretribulationism has a much broader history than its articulations over the last two hundred years. This article presents another example of teaching similar to pretribulationism in a document from the early church called the Apocalypse of Elijah.


The *Apocalypse of Elijah* is a third century treatise about the events of the end times, reconstructed in its entirety from fragments in Greek and several Coptic dialects. It is believed to be a Christian revision of an earlier Jewish apocalypse. The author of the third-century text does not claim to be the biblical Elijah, but may have been a Christian in third-century Egypt who took the name Elijah. Moreover, the text is not a writing of a gnostic group, but arose among a community of chiliast (millenarian) Christians living in upper Egypt.

The sources that influenced the *Apocalypse of Elijah* include the Old and New Testaments, most notably the synoptic Gospels, the Pauline epistles, and the book of Revelation, and the apocryphal writings *1 Enoch* and *Apocalypse of Peter*. Several of the church fathers were familiar with the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, and it was used as source material for later apocalyptic literature, even as distant as the eleventh century Irish text, *The Two Sorrows of the Kingdom of Heaven*.

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The fifth chapter of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* contains a rapture passage. It says that when the end-time persecution of the Antichrist intensifies, Christ will take pity on his people by sending angels from heaven to snatch up those having the seal of God on their hands and foreheads. The angels bear up these last-days saints on their wings, remove them from the wrath, and lead them to paradise. There the raptured saints receive white robes, eat from the tree of life, and dwell in safety from the Antichrist. Afterward, the earth experiences catastrophic end-time events. Then Enoch and Elijah descend from heaven to do battle with Antichrist. Finally, Christ returns with his saints, who reign with him for a thousand years.

This article will introduce the rapture passage in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, and discuss its contents regarding the rapture’s purpose, subjects, timing, and Scriptural basis. It will then answer an objection and explain the place of this passage in current scholarship about the history of pretribulationism.

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Rosenthal, *L’apocalypse d’élie: introduction, traduction et notes* (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuther, 1972), 16-7. Because more than one apocalypse circulated in the name of Elijah, it is difficult to determine which *Apocalypse of Elijah* these early Christian writers knew.

7. Then when Elijah and Enoch hear that the shameless one has revealed himself in the holy place, they will come down and fight with him saying, 8. Are you indeed not ashamed? When you attach yourself to the saints, because you are always estranged. 32. After these things, Elijah and Enoch will come down. They will lay down the flesh of the world, and they will receive their spiritual flesh. They will pursue the son of lawlessness and kill him since he is not able to speak. The Apocalypse of Elijah. Based on P. Chester Beatty 2018 Edited and Translated by Albert Pietersma and Susan Turner Comstock With Harold A. Attridge. 1. The word of the Lord addressed me as follows: “Say to this people, ‘Why do you sin and multiply sin, (5) provoking to anger the Lord God who made you? Do not love the world nor what is in the world for the world’s pride and its destruction are the devil’s.” It is wise to be hesitant in identifying this quotation with the Apocalypse of Elijah since it is not found in the Coptic or Hebrew texts, and because there were other compositions pseudonymously attributed to Elijah, although some are now lost. Some of these still extant, at least partially, are a Sahidic fragment in the British Museum (Or. See more of Armageddon, Apocalypse & The Blessed Hope/Rapture on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Armageddon, Apocalypse & The Blessed Hope/Rapture on Facebook. Log In. Forgot account? The founders of this page DO believe in a PreTribulation Rapture (Harpazo/Catching Away) but also respect the beliefs of other believers who do not. Let us all agree on middle ground that: 1. Jesus died and shed His blood for the sins of ALL mankind. 2. He IS going to return one glorious day for all of us who belong to Him (His Beloved Bride) and we will live forever with Him. See More. Armageddon, Apocalypse & The Blessed Hope/Rapture. January 6 at 7:13 PM â€• Get your lives in order folks..Jesus is at the door.