

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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COVENANTAL RAPTURE: PART 1

The other day I met a Christian woman who would not even consider sending her child to a Christian school. As she talked, I tried to prepare myself for all of the arguments against humanism that I could muster. I thought of the, "Enclave" argument, which says that Christians are being too over-protective when they put their kids in a private Christian school. I rehearsed in my mind the "Racial" position, which maintains that Christians have their kids in private schools to keep them away from minority groups. And, as I continued to think through the various liberal positions against Christian education, I was pulled back out of suspended time when the lady said, "I just don't think my kids will ever need to be educated."

I had never heard this one. Were her kids so brilliant that they would jump from "toddlerhood" into adulthood over night? No, that was not her view at all, she reassured me. I could read her interpretation of my facial expression from the look on her face. She hastened to add, "I just don't believe my kids will ever need Christian education because the rapture is going to take place in the very near future, so near that I don't even worry about their going to school."

I was thunderstruck. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. All I could do was try to show her a "more excellent way." She would have nothing of it. She was thoroughly convinced of an imminent rapture.

Thanks be to God she is not typical among even the dispensationalists. But in a perverted way, she illustrates the prevailing lethargy among God's people. They don't act, for the most part, because they don't believe it will make a difference. Sure there are exceptions. There are always those who act inconsistently with their theology. There are the activist **dispensationalists**, who are dedicatedly attempting to live out the Christian life in an obedient manner. I thank God for these people. But they are the exception not the rule. The vast majority of Christians in this society don't do much more than go to Church and attend a Bible study every now and then. They want to be left alone to attend the "First Church of the Steering Wheel." I recently heard of some Christians who left a very committed Christian congregation because they didn't approve of the social level, better the lack of social status among the Christians at this particular church.

Now, I certainly don't believe in any one single cause for the lack of Christian involvement, but I am convinced of the rapture concept's role in this matter. Rapture fever has taken its toll on the evangelical community by creating an attitude of escape. It has contributed greatly to the inertia of modern day evangelicalism. It has had a part in crippling the true evangelism of this society as well as every country where the Gospel has gone.

Don't believe me on this last point? Consider the following. Most evangelicals think they are committed to the

Great Commission, when in fact they are not. Well, in a sense they are because they want to see souls saved and maybe they believe in some kind of discipleship in a very narrow sense. But, in a very real way, they are not fully, and maybe not truly, dedicated to the Great Commission because their view diminishes the layman's involvement in the Great Commission. Did you follow what I just said. The soul saving approach to the Great Commission **destroys** the incentive of a layman's involvement in the Great Commission.

How can this be? Think about it. If the rapture concept is true, if Jesus is coming soon or if it is imminent at any moment, then the Church should be busily involved in saving as many souls as possible before the rapture. It should not worry itself about doing anything to improve society. Indeed, most don't because most can't spend all their waking hours evangelizing and most don't want to see this world changed. It's really simple to understand. If the Great Commission is simply saving souls then most laymen are excluded because they must spend most of their time doing such mundane things as earning a living and raising children, kids who probably won't reach puberty. They cannot do the one thing they must do: save souls. This is why from time to time evangelical quit everything they're doing to get into the "saving soul" business.

In response to this, I believe in the necessity to save souls. But the Great Commission is the covenant renewal of the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28). In the context of the work of creation, it involves saving souls and equipping them to subdue the earth. It **restores** the ability to man, through the power of Christ, to do what God originally told Adam and Eve to do. This view of the Great Commission means laymen, who cannot spend all of their work hours trying to, convert people or they will be fired, can be just as faithful to the Great Commission by learning a skill and faithfully working on their jobs to express their relationship to God through their work, and most importantly, to carry out the Great Commission Cultural Mandate.

This view of the Great Commission is a far cry from the rapture position. As I say, it is not the only reason for the decline of Christian influence in the West, but it is a major contributor to the situation. In the midst of the growth of Modernism and Liberalism, it is no coincidence that the increasing popularity of the rapture belief has seemingly added fuel to the fire of Christianity's declining ability to transform the world. At the very least, therefore, the rapture concept has become a major factor in the evangelical church's tacit approval of the false notion that, "This world may not be Satan's but we might as well act like it."

The Rapture: A New Doctrine

The rapture concept has become fairly popular in this century, arguing for a secret rapture of the Church before

the Second Coming of Christ. It is a recent invention, having first been developed by a female minister in the 1830s, Margaret McDonald, who influenced Edward Irving, a Presbyterian minister in Scotland, to spread the view even further. Prior to the last century, it was unknown, bringing one of the most obvious indictments against the popular-but-ever-fading view. It simply lacks historical basis. All the different eschatological positions held to the bodily return of Christ. But none of them believed in a secret rapture of the Church. Oswald T. Allis makes an important, almost humorous, observation,

The fact that, according to an Act of Parliament adopted in 1752, the Episcopal gives directions for calculating the feasts of the Church year as far ahead as A.D. 8500+, was not calculated to convince Darby and his associates a century ago that the bishops and other clergy of the Established Church were living in eager expectation of the advent. It indicated rather that they regarded the Church of England as firmly established on earth and expected it to remain there almost "world without end."¹

Allis is almost sarcastic in his description of dispensationalism. But it reflects a too-easily-forgotten fact about the history of dispensationalism. It is new.

As a minister in the Reformed Episcopal Church,² I am familiar with the of This prayer book was written by Thomas Cranmer, the English Reformer and Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1549. He led his Church and

country into the movement of the Holy Spirit called the Reformation. He was eventually martyred, burned at the stake, for his renunciation of the Roman Catholic doctrine called, **transubstantiation**.

In the of Cranmer was anxious to restore the historic doctrine, worship, and practice of the Ancient Church before it became Roman Catholic. He also combined the best of Calvin and Luther, having visited the Continent during the time of the Reformation and having been impressed with the brilliant theology of Calvin and the beautiful worship of Luther. There is no question that this book is a Reformational document, yet it continues the Ancient Church as well. Cranmer fused into two services, the eight Hours for prayer in the monasteries that dated back to the early Church in Acts, where prayer was conducted every three hours, explaining why individuals were going up to pray at the "ninth hour" for example (Acts 9). He wanted laymen to be involved in daily prayer.

The paved the way for the English Reformation. It became a tool for practical and doctrinal revival. It engaged laymen in worship and prayer as never before in the history of the English Church. It forged the theology of Calvin into the hearts of Englishmen, as reflected in the confessional statement of the Episcopal Church, These are so thoroughly Augustinian and Reformed that they laid the groundwork for another great confession on which it is based, the

being written by an Anglican!

When I first read Allis' comment, I was provoked to check out his reference to the plan of the Church year through the year 8500 +. He is referring to a table that the bishops of the church at that time developed so that ministers would know in advance the dates of major feasts, such as Easter and Christmas. The clergy could then celebrate these events at the same time. This table, together with the complete set of tables for finding the key Church events of the calendar, is produced below from the Reformed Episcopal Church's 1875 prayer book.

A TABLE TO FIND EASTER-DAY,

FROM THE YEAR 1900, TO THE YEAR 2199, INCLUSIVE.

GOLDEN NUMBERS.	DAY OF THE MONTH.	SUNDAY LETTERS.	GOLDEN NUMBERS.	DAY OF THE MONTH.	SUNDAY LETTERS.
14	Mar. 22	D	15	April 9	A
3	23	E	10	10	B
11	24	F	4	11	C
11	25	G	12	12	D
19	26	A	12	13	E
8	27	B	1	14	F
8	28	C	15	15	G
16	29	D	9	16	A
5	30	E	17	17	B
5	31	F	6	18	C
13	April 1	G	18	19	D
2	2	A	20	20	E
2	3	B	21	21	F
10	4	C	22	22	G
10	5	D	23	23	A
18	6	E	24	24	B
7	7	F	25	25	C
7	8	G			

THE Golden Numbers in the foregoing Calendar will point out the Days of the Paschal Full Moon, till the Year of our Lord 1900; at which Time, in order that the Ecclesiastical Full Moons may fall nearly on the same Days with the real Full Moons, the Golden Numbers must be removed to different Days of the Calendar, as is done in the annexed Table, which contains so much of the Calendar then to be used, as is necessary for finding the Paschal Full Moons, and the Feast of Easter, from the Year 1900, to the Year 2199, inclusive. This Table is to be made use of, in all respects, as the First Table, before inserted, for finding Easter till the Year 1899.

The Reformed Episcopal Church, holding "The faith once delivered unto the saints," declares its belief in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, and the sole Rule of Faith and Practice; in the Creed "commonly called the Apostles' Creed; in the Divine institution of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and in the doctrines of grace substantially as they are set forth in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion.

This Church recognizes and adheres to Episcopacy, not as of Divine right, but as a very ancient and desirable form of Church polity.

This Church, retaining a Liturgy which shall not be imperative or repressive of freedom in prayer, accepts The Book of Common Prayer, as it was revised, proposed, and recommended for use by the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, A.D. 1785, reserving full liberty to alter, abridge, enlarge, and amend the same, as may seem most conducive to the edification of the people, "provided that the substance of the faith be kept entire."

The Church condemns and rejects the following erroneous and strange doctrines so contrary to God's Word:

First, That the Church of Christ exists only in one order or form of ecclesiastical polity:

Second, That Christian Ministers are "priests" in another sense than that in which all believers are a "royal priesthood":

Third, That the Lords Table is an altar on which the oblation of the Body and Blood of Christ is offered anew to the Father:

Fourth, That the Presence of Christ in the Lords Supper is a presence in the elements of Bread and Wine:

Fifth, That Regeneration is inseparably connected with Baptism.

These Declaration of Principles state very clearly the position of the Re-

formed Episcopal Church. As a testimony to its faithfulness, the REC has never had a major split and has preserved its commitments to the historic Christian doctrines without collapsing into liberalism during a period of history when virtually every denomination fell. Its theological seminary, Philadelphia Theological Seminary, is the only reformed seminary in America, to my knowledge, that still affirms six-day creationism. In short, I believe the Reformed Episcopal Church is one of the most faithful reformed body in America. The same applies in the Episcopal direction as well, for I know of no other Episcopal group that so faithfully adheres to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. This is why I am a minister in this group and not some other!

TABLE II

1	2	3	1	2	3
Years of our Lord			Years of our Lord		
B 1600	0	E 4000	10	B 6400	20
1700	1	4100	11	4500	21
1800	2	4200	12	6600	22
1900	2	4300	12	6700	23
B 2000	2	B 4400	12	B 6800	22
2100	2	4500	13	6900	23
2200	3	4600	13	7000	24
2300	4	4700	14	7100	24
B 2400	3	B 4600	14	B 7200	24
2600	4	4900	14	7300	25
2600	5	5000	15	7400	25
2700	5	5100	16	7500	26
B 2800	5	B 5200	15	B 7600	26
2900	6	5300	16	7700	26
3000	6	5400	17	7800	27
B 3100	7	B 5500	17	7900	28
3200	7	5600	18	8000	27
3300	7	5700	18	8100	28
3400	8	5800	18	8200	29
3500	8	5900	19	8300	29
B 3600	8	B 6000	19	B 8400	29
3700	9	6100	19	8500	30
3800	9	6200	20	8600	30
3900	0	6300	21	8700	31

To find the Month and Days of the Month to which the Golden Numbers ought to be prefixed in the Calendar in any given Year of our Lord, consisting of entire Hundred Years, and in all the intermediate Years, betwixt that and the next Hundredth Year following look in the second Column of Table II. for the given Year, consisting of entire Hundreds, and note the Number or Cypher which stands against it in the Third Column; then in Table III. look for the same Number in the Column under any given Golden Number, which when you have found, guide your Eye sideways to the Left Hand, and in the First Column you will find the Month and Day to which that Golden Number ought to be prefixed in the Calendar during that period of One Hundred Years.

The Letter B prefixed to certain Hundredth Years in Table II. denotes those Years which are still to be accounted Bisextile or Leap Years in the New Calendar; whereas all the other Hundredth Years are to be accounted only common Years.

These two prayers clearly emphasize several important aspects of the growth of Christ's kingdom. First, they anticipate a time of worldwide conversion. Second, they believe that revival is more than personal, including even the transformation societies. Third, they even ask God to bring the cities under His law. Fourth, they believe that spiritual transformation comes through prayer, evangelism, and hard work, but not by political might.

Granted, the Reformed Episcopal Church, like all Historic Churches, does not require its members or clergy to be any particular millennial persuasion. But these prayers at least are part of a corpus of material that allows for the position to be represented in the Church. They even point to a time when perhaps the Episcopal Church was almost decidedly Postmillennial. This cannot be said of the

in the Episcopal or any other historic denomination. Rapture theology is new on the scene of theological ideas. Yet, this is not the most telling argument against it: the lack of Biblical support in either the Old or New Testament.

No Old Testament Precedent

It goes without saying that the word "rapture" cannot be found anywhere in the Bible, not in the Old or New Testaments. But this fact in and of itself is not convincing. Can it be supported exegetically from either testament? Or, is it there conceptually?

Perhaps the strongest argument against the rapture doctrine is the absence of any Old Testament model. What do I mean? The correct doctrine of Christ's relationship to the Old Testament is that He fulfills it. If He came to fulfill and not change, then there cannot be anything new in the New Testament. Yes, the New Testament has to be the Old Testament revealed, as an early Church Father argued. This does not mean to remove the fact that there is much in the Old Testament that is a mystery. Even so, once the mystery is revealed in the New Testament, what was mysterious in the Old is now clear to the spiritual eye. The New Covenant believer can look back into the Old Testament and see the mystery everywhere.

Thus, we should expect to see some incipient form of the rapture concept in the great deliverance sequences of the Old and New Testament: the Flood, Sodom, the Exile, and A.D. 70. It is my contention that the deliverance passages of the Old Testament in no way point to or indicate a rapture. Of course, even according to the dispensational position, the Church is not anticipated in the Old Testament, so how could a rapture of the Church be portrayed in any way? I agree, how could it if dispensationalism is correct. This is the whole point.

Nevertheless, I think that it is helpful to see that the deliverance passages of the Old Testament speak of the rescue of God's people in a much different sense from any kind of modern rapture view represented in either premillennialism or amillennialism. The key is the Biblical covenant. Deliverance is always in terms of God's covenant. The problem with various rapture views is that there is no covenantal justification for them. No covenantal promise is being fulfilled if the Church is mysteriously removed from the earth in defeat. This would undermine completely the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

As we examine briefly a few of these Biblical sequences, it will be apparent that God only rescues to persevere his covenant in the re-establishment of the true heirs, not to rapture in defeat. This is the contrast: perseverance of the saints vs. the rapture. In each situation where God protects His people from judgment, He perseveres them in His covenant by removing the wicked, not the righteous. It is only the unrighteous who are raptured! Notice how the covenant pattern is fol-

The particular table to which Allis referred is Table

If you examine it closely, you will find that it goes through the year 8500 +. Allis is correct in assuming that this reflects a certain view of the future. Up to this point in the history of the Episcopal Church, there is no doubt about the fact that the majority of the leadership of this part of the Lord's Kingdom was not expecting the imminent return of Christ. Consider the two following ancient prayers from the

For the Coming of Christ's Kingdom And Universal Peace

O Almighty Father, Thou King eternal, immortal, invisible, Thou only wise God our Saviour; Hasten, we beseech Thee, the coming upon earth of the kingdom of Thy Saviour Jesus Christ, and draw the whole world of mankind into willing obedience to His blessed reign. Overcome all His enemies, and bring low every power that is exalted against Him. Cast out all the evil things which cause wars and fightings among us, and let Thy Spirit rule the hearts of men in righteousness and love. Repair the desolations of former days; rejoice the wilderness with beauty; and make glad the city with Thy law. Establish every work that is founded on truth and equity, and fulfill all the good hopes and desires of Thy people. Manifest Thy will, Almighty Father, in the brotherhood of man, and bring in universal peace; through the victory of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.³

For Missionaries

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Desire of all nations, who didst come down from heaven to seek and to save the lost; Grant Thy blessing, we beseech Thee, upon Thy missionary servants who are carrying the light of Thy Gospel to the dark places of the earth. Preserve them from every danger to which they may be exposed; from perils by land and sea, from persecution and pestilence, from discouragement in their labors, and from the devices of the adversary. May they see Thy work prospering in their hands; and do Thou hasten the time, O gracious Saviour, when the multitude of the heathen shall be gathered into Thy fold, and when all in every land who neglect Thy salvation shall be converted unto Thee. And to Thee, Lord Jesus, be the praise; unto whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.⁴

3. *Book of Common Prayer*, The Reformed Episcopal Church, p. 41.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

lowed in the perseverance of the saints in each situation.

The Flood

First, God sees wickedness on the earth (Genesis 6:3). He declares the time of judgment. It is His decision who will be judged and how it will happen. He is the primary victim since He is being violated in His covenant arrangement.

Second, the problem is hierarchical in nature. The representative of the covenant, messianic line, is in danger of becoming extinct, making null and void God's covenantal promise in the garden (Genesis 3:15). Sin has eaten its way into humanity. One righteous family is left.

Third, the law of the covenant is being broken. There was inter-marriage between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Specifically, those in the line of Seth, the covenantal descendants, were marrying and fornicating with those outside the covenantal line.

Fourth, God judged the wicked and saved the righteous. He sent the sanction of judgement in the form of the Flood. He destroyed the wicked and removed them from the earth. He protected the righteous.

Fifth, God persevered the righteous and gave them the earth as their inheritance. The covenant was kept on the godly.

Sodom and Gomorrah

First, God again "saw" that the covenant promise was in jeopardy (Genesis 18:17-21). He initiated to persevere His people and His covenant, a transcendent theme. We should not forget that the entire destruction-of-Sodom sequence follows the great chapter on circumcision, the section of Scripture about the covenant sign. Circumcision was a reminder of the promise of God to Abraham. In this context, Sodom must be destroyed. Why? Sodom belonged to Abraham as part of his inheritance. If it had been allowed to stay in the hands of the wicked and remain corrupt, then the land promise to Abraham would have been nullified. Abraham's argument in this context is that if the righteous are destroyed with the wicked, the promise could be considered untrue.

Second, God responds to Abraham's covenantal logic to persevere Lot as a representative of the covenant (Genesis 18:32-33). The covenantal number of representation was ten. God was willing to save the city for ten. But if there were not ten, then God would keep His promise to the righteous, Lot and his family.

Third, God destroyed Sodom because the law of the covenant was being broken. Rampant homosexuality was being committed.

Fourth, God sent fire to judge the city. Even Lot's wife was judged with the symbol of sanctioning, salt, explaining why covenants were often cut with salt (Leviticus 2:13).

Fifth, the inheritance of Abraham was protected. Lot's inheritance was also preserved. Again, the wicked were removed from the earth. Granted, the righteous were taken from the city but they were not removed from the earth. They were persevered in their covenant so that they might inherit the earth.

The Exile

First, God transcendentally initiated the judgment of exile

on His people because He had promised to do so in the original ratification of the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:64-68).

Second, the messianic representative, the king, had apostatized. He was unfaithful, living like the pagans around him just as God had said that he would do.

Third, Israel had broken the law of the sabbath. For this reason, they were in exile for seventy years.

Fourth, God judged Israel by placing them in exile under pagan leaders, non-messianic kings. By being forced to live outside of the Promised Land, God provoked them to want what they had taken for granted. God removed the wicked, in this case the covenantal people. He left a righteous remnant in the land, Jeremiah and his few followers. He did not rapture the remnant! They represented the promise that had been given to them.

Fifth, God protected the inheritance. He told Jeremiah to buy land, covenant land (Jeremiah 32). Why? He instructed Jeremiah to give up what he could not keep, gold, to gain what he could not lose, covenantal ground. Thus, God persevered the covenant people. And, He brought the exiles back in a converted condition.

A.D. 70

First, Jesus spoke in a transcendent manner by giving the Olivet prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-28). He gave a New Covenant promise when He did.

Second, Jesus gave the promise for His covenant people, the Church, the new covenantal hierarchy. He wanted them to know when it was time to leave the new Sodom, Jerusalem.

Third, Christ brought judgment on Jerusalem as a lex talionis, an eye for an eye, for killing Christ. This was in ethical compliance with the Law of God the Father that was given at Sinai.

Fourth, Jerusalem was sanctioned by fire, just as was Sodom. The Romans burned the city and the Temple.

Fifth, very importantly, Jews who had converted to Christ sold their land and inheritance (Acts 2:44-45). They knew that the land was no longer theirs as Jews. The divisions of the land according to Joshua's apportionments were no longer valid. The Romans would soon destroy everything anyway. Thus, in the destruction of Jerusalem, the wicked were removed, the apostate covenant people of Israel, and the righteous were persevered.

Rapture theology has no Biblical precedent. In every case, the wicked are removed and the righteous are persevered. In part II of this study, we will look more closely at the passages that could possibly infer a rapture. One of them is Matthew 24. As we have seen that there is no Biblical example of rapture in the Old Testament, we will see that there is no Biblical passage that even supports such a position in the New Testament. There is no covenantal reason for such a view!

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