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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.

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¹ John E. Young, The Rapture Examined (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2003), 16; Jim Bakker, Prosperity and the Coming Apocalypse (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 124; Jim Brown, The Rapture...But When? (Palm Coast, FL: Christian Awareness Ministries, 1992), 5-11; Ralph Woodrow, The Secret Rapture: Is it Scriptural? (Palm Springs, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1989), 37, 41. The most vocal advocate that the pretribulation rapture teaching had its origin in Margaret Macdonald is Dave McPherson, author of The Three R’s. Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery: Pretribulation Rapturism from 1830 to Hal Lindsey (Simpsonville, SC: P.O.S.T., 1998); The Rapture Plot (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III, 1995); The Great Rapture Hoax (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983); The Incredible Cover-Up (Medford, OR: Omega, 1980); The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture (Kansas City, MO: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974). This view was countered in Tim LaHaye, Rapture Under Attack (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1998) and Thomas Ice, “Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald” BSac 147 (April-June 1990):155-68.

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.³ It is believed to be a Christian revision of an earlier Jewish apocalypse.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷

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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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The Apocalypse of Elijah is an anonymous apocryphal work presenting itself as a revelation given by an angel. Two versions are known today: a Coptic Christian fragmentary version and a Hebrew Jewish version. The title derives from mentions of Elijah within the text, although there is no other reason to assume that he is meant to be the author. This apocalypse is mentioned in the Apostolic Constitutions, the List of the Sixty Books, the Synopsis of Pseudo-Athanasius, the Stichometry of Nicephorus, and A Week of Tribulation? Apocalypse? Rapture? Antichrist? Revelation 12 Signs in the Heavens: Revelation Decoded (Part 15) - YouTube.

Descent of Christ to Hell âœ±, Harrowing of Hell δŶ“œ Gospel of Nicodemus 12 - 21. Descent of Christ to Hell âœ±, Harrowing of Hell δŶ“œ Gospel of Nicodemus 12 - 21 - YouTube. The Apocalypse of Elijah. English translation made from the text in Georg Steindorff Die Apokalypse des Elias (1899)1. Anthony Alcock. Twenty-two unpaginated folios of an Akhmimic text with fragments of a 23rd contain two separate texts: the first an anonymous apocalypse (pp.1-18), the second the Apocalypse of Elijah (pp.19-44), which, according to Steindorff, is a separate text that starts on a new page.Â Almost twenty years after Steindorff's work had appeared, E.A. Wallis Budge published a series of Biblical texts in the British Museum Coptic Biblical Texts (1912). Codex 7594 contains texts of Deuteronomy (partial), Jonah (almost complete) and the Acts of the Apostles (partial). The Apocalypse of Elijah is an anonymous apocryphal work presenting itself as a revelation given by an angel. Two versions are known today, a Coptic Christian fragmentary version and a Hebrew Jewish version. The title derives from mentions of Elijah within the text, although there is no other reason to assume that he is meant to be the author. YouTube Encyclopedic. 1/3.