

Victorinus and the Rapture: Did He Teach a Pre-Trib View?

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Victorinus of Pettau (c. 270 AD), an early Latin commentator on the Book of Revelation, has sometimes been cited by modern pre-tribulation rapture advocates as an early witness to their position. But when we look closely at his writings, the picture is more complicated.

Victorinus's Commentary on Revelation

In his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Victorinus interprets the sixth seal of Revelation as symbolizing the final, climactic persecution under Antichrist:

- The moon turning to blood represents the church shedding her blood in martyrdom.
- The stars falling are believers troubled for Christ's sake.
- The fig tree casting its figs describes those who fall away from the church under pressure—that is apostasy, not rapture.
- The heaven rolled up like a scroll he equates with the church being “taken away.”
- The mountains and islands removed signify the righteous fleeing persecution.

In isolation the phrase that the church “shall be taken away” could sound like rapture language. However, Victorinus consistently interprets Revelation through the lens of persecution, martyrdom, and endurance, not an escape from tribulation.

Victorinus and Persecution

Elsewhere, Victorinus makes it clear that the church faces the full fury of Antichrist's assault:

- “The little season signifies three years and six months, in which with all his power the devil will avenge himself under Antichrist against the church.” (Commentary on Revelation 20).
- “The woman flew into the desert with the assistance of the wings of a great eagle,” that is, of two prophets. This is the whole catholic church.” (Commentary on Revelation 16).

- “I saw an angel descending from the rising of the sun.’ He is speaking of Elijah the prophet, who was to come before the time of antichrist to restore and to strengthen the churches from the intolerable persecution.” (Commentary on Revelation 7)

All of this confirms that Victorinus expected the church to suffer intensely during the last days.

Did He Teach a Pre-Trib Rapture?

Some modern interpreters, like Lee Brainard, have pointed to Victorinus’s comment that the church is “taken away” as evidence of a pre-tribulation rapture. But in context, Victorinus is not describing a secret catching away before tribulation. Instead, he is speaking of either the removal of the faithful through martyrdom, or the scattering of the saints fleeing persecution. His references to apostasy, endurance, and Antichrist’s three-and-a-half years of power show he did not envision the church escaping the tribulation altogether.

Conclusion

Victorinus was certainly imaginative—and at times a little eccentric—in his interpretations of Revelation. But far from teaching a clear pre-trib rapture, his writings reflect the mainstream view of his day: that the church must endure Antichrist’s persecution before the return of Christ.

If anything, Victorinus testifies to the early church’s expectation of suffering, not deliverance from it.