

The Rapture of the Church

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Scripture References:

John 14:1-3
I Corinthians 1:4-9, 15:50-58
Philippians 3:20-21
I Thessalonians 1:9-10, 4:13-18
Titus 2:11-14
Revelation 3:10, 4:1-3

I. The Rapture Defined

The “Rapture” refers to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for his bride, the Church. Since the rapture is not mentioned in Old Testament prophecy, it is “a mystery.” We know that it is imminent—it could happen at any time. The Rapture relates only to the Church, so it must occur before God resumes his dealings with Israel as a nation. The Rapture that we are dealing with in this topic is the first stage in the second coming of Christ.

I Th 4:13-17

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

1Cor 15:51-58

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Raptures in Scripture

The Rapture of the Church is actually one of six raptures in the Scriptures. Four have taken place already, and two are still to come:

- Enoch (Gn 5:24, Hb 11:15)

- Elijah (2Kn 2:1, 11)
- Christ's ascension (Mr 16:19)
- Paul's visit to the 3rd heaven (2Cor 12:2-4)
- The Church (I Th 4:17)
- Two witnesses (Rev11:3, 11-12)

III. Views of the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ

A. There has been a great deal of disagreement in Christendom about when the Rapture will take place

1. ***Amillennial View: There Will Be No Earthly Millennium***

According to this view, the Church age will end in a time of trouble, Christ will come, there will be a general resurrection and final judgment, and then eternity.

2. ***Postmillennial View: Christ Will Come After the Millennium.***

Postmillennialists make the Millennium the last 1,000 years of the Church age. According to this view, there will be an era of peace and abundance brought about by the efforts of the Church—a time of preparation that will culminate in Christ's return to earth. After this, there will be a general resurrection and final judgment, and then eternity.

3. ***Premillennial View: Christ Will Come Before the Millennium.***

Premillennialists believe that the coming of Christ to the air for His Church—the Rapture—will precede His literal Kingdom on earth. (Amillennialists and postmillennialists see the Rapture as concurrent and essentially synonymous with the Second Coming of Christ). They also hold that God will resume His dealings with Israel as a nation. There will be a seven-year period of Tribulation, followed by the Second Coming of Christ to the earth, a 1,000-year earthly kingdom, the resurrection and judgment of the lost, then eternity.

Premillennialists follow the plain, normal, literal, historical, and grammatical method of interpretation. They point out that the prophecies regarding Christ's first coming were all fulfilled literally, and thus expect the same to hold true for prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled. They understand Rv 20 literally. They agree with each other on most prophecies, but differ on their understanding of when the Church will be raptured (1 Cr 15:50-8; 1 Th 4:13-8), as follows.

a. ***Posttribulation Rapture.*** According to this view, the Church will remain on earth throughout the Tribulation, with the Rapture occurring at the end of that seven-year period.

b. ***Midtribulation Rapture.*** Midtribulationists believe that the Church will endure the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation, and then be removed in the middle of that period, before the second half, known as the "Great Tribulation."

c. ***Pretribulation Rapture.*** Pretribulationists believe that the Church will be raptured from earth before the seven-year Tribulation begins. The Church will not go through any of the Tribulation period. Only this view harmonizes all that Scripture says about the Rapture. It satisfies Christ's promise to keep us *out of* the hour of trouble (Rv 3:10). The Rapture can be imminent only if it is pretribulational (1 Th 5:6).

B. The Rapture is a preliminary stage in the Second Coming of Christ
The events, in order, are:

- 1) the Rapture, the coming of the Lord to the air for His saints
- 2) the Great Tribulation
- 3) the Return of Christ to the earth with His saints
- 4) the millennial Reign
- 5) the Eternal State.

The Rapture: The First Stage	The Final Stage
1. The Lord Himself 1 Th 4:16 ; The Savior Ph 3:20	1. The Son of Man Mt 24:27,30
2. A "mystery"—not found in OT prophecy 1 Cr 15:51	2. Specifically foretold in the OT Dn 7:13
3. To take the Church, His bride 1 Th 4:17	3. To deliver Israel Zc 14:3
4. Into the air 1 Th 4:17	4. Down to the earth Zc 14:4
5. For His saints 1 Th 4:16-17	5. With His saints Zc 14:5
6. Those taken will be "forever with the Lord" 1 Th 4:17	6. Those taken will be judged Mt 24:39-41
7. He will appear "without sin unto salvation" Hb 9:28	7. He will come to take vengeance on His enemies 2 Th 1:7-8
8. As the Morning Star Rv 22:16	8. As the Sun of Righteousness MI 4:2
9. Secretly 1 Cr 15:52	9. Publicly, "every eye shall see Him" Rv 1:7
10. Foreshadowed only by moral signs 2 Tm 3	10. Ushered in by physical signs Mt 24
11. Independent of earthly dates	11. Dependent on earthly times and seasons and certain dates Ac 5:1; 1 Th 5:1
12. Imminent: an immediate hope 1 Th 1:10; Ph 3:20	12. Could not happen at once

IV. The Rapture in Promise

A. Christ promises to return for his bride:

Jh 14:1-4.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Jh 11:25-26.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

B. His return is imminent:

Philippians 4:5-7

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Titus 2:13

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

- C. Nothing else in prophecy has to occur before Christ returns. Paul and the NT writers anticipated his return at any moment. Contrary to what we hear and read in popular media and Christian circles, there are no events left to be fulfilled to precede His coming. Scripture does not allude to any date, time or season before Christ's return. Date setting takes away from the joy and truth of the Rapture.

Matthew 24:44

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

V. The Joy of the Rapture

1 Th 4:16-18 .

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- A. The shout of the Lord
 - He will descend personally with a shout of joy at the calling of His bride. He will return for us in personally, just as He left.
- B. The voice of the Angel
 - All of heaven will be focused on this joyful reunion.
- C. Caught up together
 - We will have the joy of being reunited with our loved ones who have gone on before us. All of the divisions between Christians will be erased.
- D. Comforting words
 - We will never be parted with Christ, our Redeemer.

VI. Expectation of the Rapture

- A. Contrast between the Christian and unbeliever:
The unbeliever does not want to deal with eternity, thus the Second Coming of Christ is ridiculed as the epitome of something that will never happen. In contrast, the greatest hope of the believer is the Rapture.

1 Cor 15:13

But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

- B. The attitude of the believer:
We are to have a waiting attitude, even as the Lord Himself is waiting for that day.

1 Thes 5:6-11

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

C. The attitude of Christ toward the future:

We are to be patient in our anticipation as God's purposes are being worked out on this earth.

James 5:7

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord... Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Heb 12:2

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

D. The paradox of the Christian life:

We should plan for the future, but conduct our lives as though He was coming today.

Matthew 24:48

...servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming

;

"Working he waits, waiting he works" WE Vine

E. The Joy of that day:

Our joy is pictured in Luke 7 in the story of the widow of Nain. There were varying degrees of gladness at the resurrection of her son...

- The witnesses at the gates rejoiced that God had visited his people
- The boy rejoiced to see his mother
- The mother, who had experienced such sorrow, had a greater joy
- Christ Himself had the greatest joy anticipating the victory of the cross.

To what degree will we rejoice in his coming?

I Thes 2:19

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

I Thes 3:13

To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.