

Ministry of Grace

The Rapture

Primary Scripture Passages

Behold! I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:51-55) [ESV]

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) [ESV]

What is the Rapture?

The rapture is an event described in the Bible wherein Christians (New Testament believers in Christ) who have died physically will be raised to life. Then, living Christians will be caught up with them and taken away from this earth by Jesus Christ. Both those who are physically dead (who are asleep in Jesus Christ) and those who are still physically alive at the time of the rapture will have their physical bodies changed into incorruptible, eternal bodies.

This event will be announced by a trumpet call and a loud proclamation from an archangel voice. Christians will be caught-up (raptured) into the air (the atmosphere of the earth), where they will be joined with our Lord Jesus Christ. At that point, Christians will "be like Him because they will see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). From that moment on, for all eternity, Christians will be in the presence of the Lord.

What does the Bible say about the rapture?

The word "rapture" does not appear in any of the major English translations of the Bible. So where does the term come from? In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the words "shall be caught up" are translated from the Greek word *harpadzō*, meaning "to take away by force, to snatch away, to transport hastily, or to plunder"

Then we who are alive and remain **shall be caught up** together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17) [LITV]

Here are some other verses that have the word *harpadzō*:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and the violent **take it by force**. (Matthew 11:12) [ESV]

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When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and **snatches away** what has been sown in his heart... (**Matthew 13:19**) [ESV]

Perceiving then that they were about to come and **take Him by force** to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself. (**John 6:15**) [ESV]

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf **snatches them** and scatters them. (**John 10:12**) [ESV]

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **carried Philip away**, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (**Acts 8:39**) [ESV]

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago **was caught up** to the third heaven... (**2 Corinthians 12:2**) [ESV]

In the fourth century a Catholic priest and language scholar by the name of Jerome translated the Bible into the common (vulgar) Latin language of that time. In this Latin Vulgate translation of **1 Thessalonians 4:17** he used the word *rapiemur*, a form of *rapare*, to translate *harpadzō*. When *rapare* is transliterated into the English it becomes the word “rapture.” Thus, even though the word “rapture” is not used in any English translation of the Bible, it still remains appropriate to refer to this event as the rapture.

What happens at the Rapture?

A Shout and a Trumpet Blast

The rapture is a loud event that starts off with Jesus Christ coming to the atmosphere of the earth (not to the earth itself) with a loud shout of command and with a sound of the trumpet. The phrase “sound of the trumpet” is translated from a single Greek word *salpingz*, which can refer to the musical instrument itself or to the sound that it makes. In Scripture, it most often refers to a trumpet blast or a trumpet call.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. ... (**1 Thessalonians 4:16a**) [ESV]

The grammar of the Greek text indicates that it is Christ himself who makes the shout. The text is also very clear that it is not “the archangel’s voice” but “the voice of an archangel.” This is significant for a couple of reasons. First, there is more than one archangel mentioned in the Bible. Secondly, an archangel is not the one shouting, it is Christ who is shouting. His very words are what cause the events of the rapture to occur. Apparently, the sound of this command is so powerful that Paul could only describe it as sounding like it came from an archangel.

Those who “sleep in Jesus” will come with him and get their resurrected bodies

Christ will not be alone when he comes. He will bring with him all Christians who have died physically. These are not dead spiritually because John 5:24 tells us that Christians have “passed from death unto life.”

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (**1 Thessalonians 4:14**) [ESV]

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So, the question is, where have these been since they “passed away.” In our studies on Heaven and Hell we learned that all the righteous go to Paradise when they die physically. Before Christ’s resurrection Paradise was in Sheol. However, when he rose from the dead he took Paradise up next to the third heaven. Apparently, as Christ comes down from his throne room (the third heaven), he will stop off at Paradise and gather up all Christians who are there and bring them with him to the atmosphere of the earth where they will be united with their resurrected bodies.

Then living Christians will be instantly changed and taken up

Immediately after those who “sleep in Jesus” get their resurrected bodies, all Christians who are alive at the time will be instantaneously changed and raptured off the earth.

in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet ... **(1 Corinthians 15:52)** [ESV]

The Greek word translated “moment” is *atomos*, meaning “the smallest indivisible amount of time.”

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.... **(1 Thessalonians 4:17a)** [MKJV]

Although most English translations say “... with them in **the** clouds,” there is no definite article (the) in the Greek. There will potentially be millions of Christians raptured on that day and from the perspective of the spiritual realm it will probably look like clouds rising up from the earth to meet our Lord.

We will be with the Lord forever from that moment on

... And so we shall ever be with the Lord. **(1 Thessalonians 4:17b)** [MKJV]

Christians have been waiting for and anticipating the rapture since the first century. When it finally happens, it will be a day of rejoicing for us all. I’m sure that many of you will feel like I know I will. There will be two thoughts that immediately come into my head. The first will be, “It’s finally over!” and the second one will be, “It has only just begun. Hallelujah!”

When does it happen?

The Rapture occurs on the “day of Jesus Christ” (not the Day of the Lord)

who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(1 Corinthians 1:8)** [ESV]

just as you did partially acknowledge us--that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. **(2 Corinthians 1:14)** [ESV]

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **(Philippians 1:6)** [ESV]

... and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **(Philippians 1:10b)** [ESV]

holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. **(Philippians 2:16)** [ESV]

From these verses we see that “the day of Christ,” or “the day of Jesus Christ,” or “the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ” is the end of the Christian era. Because we know that the rapture marks the end of the Christian era, we can safely say that the rapture occurs on the day of Jesus Christ.

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The Rapture is NOT the "Day of the Lord" and does NOT come as a thief!

Many people are confused about the "Day of Christ" and the "Day of the Lord." They tend to think of them as the same thing. However, once we recognize that the Day of Christ is a reference to the rapture, then we can turn to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians where he makes it very clear that the rapture is not the Day of the Lord. Compare **1 Thessalonians 4:13-16** with **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that **we** who are alive, who are left until **the coming of the Lord**, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, **with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.** And the dead in Christ will rise first. (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-16**) [ESV]

But of the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need that I write to you. For **you yourselves know accurately** that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. For when **they** shall say, Peace and safety! Then sudden destruction comes on **them**, as travail upon a woman with child. And they shall not escape. (**1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**) [MKJV]

There are a number of things in these two passages that we need to take special note of. The first is that Paul says, "**we do not want you to be uninformed**" regarding the rapture. This is Paul's polite way of saying, "You are uninformed regarding the rapture and we want to inform you." However, regarding the Day of the Lord, he says, "**for you yourselves know accurately.**"

The second thing to notice is that Paul says, "... who are left until **the coming of the Lord**" (the person) referring to the rapture. However, he says, "**the day of the Lord comes ...**" (the day) when referring to the Day of the Lord. This may be a subtle distinction, but it is important.

The next thing to notice is that the rapture comes as a noisy event. Paul says, "**For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.**" But the Day of the Lord comes, "**like a thief in the night.**" A thief in the night comes quietly, trying not to be noticed.

The last thing we can see when comparing these two passages is Paul's use of personal pronouns. He says "**we**" concerning the rapture, but he says "**they**" and "**them**" concerning the Day of the Lord.

God will pour out His wrath on the Day of the Lord

There are more than 20 passages that talk about the Day of The Lord. When the prophets spoke of it, they represented it as a day of God's wrath, a day of woe, and a day to be feared.

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, (**Isaiah 13:9**) [ESV]

That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. (**Jeremiah 46:10**) [ESV]

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or the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. (**Ezekiel 30:3**) [ESV]

Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, (**Joel 2:1**) [ESV]

Nonetheless, Christians are told that we have not been appointed to wrath and, in fact, we will be delivered from the wrath to come.

For God has not appointed **us** to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**) [ESV]

and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (**1 Thessalonians 1:10**) [ESV]

The Day of the Lord will last for more than 1000 years

There are more than 20 passages that talk about the Day of The Lord. When the prophets spoke of it, they represented it as a day of God's wrath, a day of woe, and a day to be feared. However, Peter tells us that in the Day of the Lord, the earth will be burned up.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (**Revelation 21:1**) [NKJV]

Thus we see that the term "the Day of the Lord" refers to the entire tribulation period and the millennium.

Views of when and/or how the Rapture occurs

A. Post Tribulation

According to this view, the church will be present during the tribulation and will be raptured at the close of the tribulation.

1. This view holds that the rapture and the second coming are described in scriptures by some of the same words, which seems to indicate that they occur at the same time

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For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. **For the Lord himself will descend from heaven** with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. **And the dead in Christ will rise first.** (**1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16**) [ESV]

The Second Coming

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and **they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and **they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.** (**Matthew 24:30, 31**) [ESV]

2. This view holds that saints (the elect) are mentioned as present during the tribulation days

And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of **the elect** those days will be cut short. (**Matthew 24:22**) [ESV]

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Note: In the Bible, the words “saint” and “elect” are not used exclusively in reference to Christians. They are also used in reference to Jews and those saved during the Tribulation.

3. This view holds that the church can and will be preserved from the wrath of the tribulation by supernatural protection while living through the tribulation (like Israel was protected from the plagues while living in Egypt.)

and to wait for His Son from Heaven (whom He raised from the dead), Jesus, who **delivers us from the wrath to come.** (1 **Thessalonians 1:10**) [ESV]

The Greek word translated “delivers” is *rhuomai*, which means “to rescue by means of dragging or drawing to oneself.” Also, the word translated “from” literally means “out of,” not “in the midst of.”

4. The Post-Tribulation Rapture was the belief of the early church.

However, this view of the rapture is impossible to reconcile with the Sheep and Goat Judgment at the end of the Tribulation. If the Church (all believers at the time of the rapture) is raptured at the end of the tribulation, then who are the sheep?

B. Mid-Tribulation

According to this view, the church will be present for the first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation then raptured. They will return with the Lord at the end of the tribulation when He sets up his millennial kingdom.

1. This view assumes that the “last trumpet” of **1 Corinthians 15:52** is the same as the 7th trumpet of **Revelation 11:15**, and it is supposedly sounded at mid-tribulation.

in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 **Corinthians 15:52**) [ESV]

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (**Revelation 11:15**) [ESV]

The seven trumpets of Revelation are all judgments of God’s wrath against those dwelling on the earth. Also, there is no definitive scriptural evidence that the seventh trumpet judgment occurs at mid-trib. In fact, it probably occurs toward the end of the second half. Also, according to Zechariah, the second coming of the Lord, which occurs at the end of the tribulation (after **all** the trumpet and bowl judgments) will also be accompanied by a trumpet blast. So, the seventh trumpet judgment is not the “last trumpet.”

Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. (**Zechariah 9:14**) [ESV]

2. The "Great Tribulation" is only the last half of Daniel’s 70th week and, according to mid-tribulation theology, the church is promised deliverance from that only.

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and to wait for His Son from Heaven (whom He raised from the dead), Jesus, who **delivers us from the wrath to come.** (1 Thessalonians 1:10) [ESV]

3. This view holds that the resurrection of the two witnesses is a picture of the rapture of the church and that it occurs in the middle of the tribulation.

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. **The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come. Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, ...** (Revelation 11:11-15a) [ESV]

The tribulation is the 70th week of Daniel. As such it is a time that God is once again dealing with the Jews, not Christians. In fact, after chapter three, the church is not mentioned at all. The two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11 appear to be two Jews, not two Christians. Also note that the resurrection of the two witnesses happens **before** the sounding of the 7th trumpet judgment.

C. Partial Rapture

This view holds that only those believers who are worthy will be taken out of the world before the tribulation begins. For those left on earth, that time will serve as a time of purging

Hebrews 9:28 seems to require preparedness as a prerequisite for meeting The Lord (i.e. works are necessary in order to qualify to be raptured).

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:28) [ESV]

But, what about **I Corinthians 15:51**? - Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not **all** sleep, but we shall **all** be changed, [ESV]

D. Pre Tribulation Rapture

According to this view, the church will be raptured before the tribulation and will return with the Lord at the end of the tribulation to set up the millennial kingdom.

1. The tribulation is called "The great day of his wrath"

for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand? (Revelation 6:17) [ESV]

As we noted earlier, believers who know the Son will be delivered from the wrath to come and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:10) [ESV]

The Greek word translated "delivers" is *rhuomai*, which means "to rescue by means of dragging or drawing to oneself." Also, the word translated "from" literally means "out of," not "in the midst of." And, note that believers are assured that God has not appointed us to wrath

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For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**) [ESV]

2. The risen Lord promised the church at Philadelphia that He would keep them from (Greek *ek*, which means “out of”) the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Also notice that they will be kept out of the “hour” or the “time” of temptation. Hence Christians will be nowhere on earth during that “time.”

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (**Revelation 3:10**) [ESV]

3. Someone (the Holy Spirit) and something (the church or the Holy Spirit) must be removed before the man of sin (the Antichrist) is revealed. It is his covenant with Israel that marks the beginning of the seven year tribulation period.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (**2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**) [ESV]

This passage states that the "Day of the Lord" can't come until certain things happen.

- a. A rebellion.

For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first ... (**2 Thessalonians 2:3**) [ESV]

The Greek word translated “rebellion” is *apostasia*. It is a compound of two Greek words *apo* and *histēmi*. The word *apo* means “from, or away from” and the word *histēmi* means “a firm standing or standing upright in a place.” *Apostasia* literally means “to withdraw or to remove from a place” Doesn't this sound like a description of the rapture?

- b. The man of lawlessness must be revealed first.
- c. The tribulation begins after the man of lawlessness (the Antichrist) makes a covenant with the Jews. This is the beginning of the seven years, not the middle!
- d. The man of lawlessness can't be revealed until something (neuter in verse six and seven) and someone (masculine in verse seven) are taken out of the way.

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- e. Since the man of sin is empowered by Satan himself (verse nine) and God is the only one who can restrain Satan, the “someone” of verse seven must be God.

Note: The fact that the Holy Spirit can be referred to as a “thing” is evident from Jesus’ own reference to the “Holy Spirit” in **John 14:26** (the Greek for Holy Spirit in this case is neuter, not masculine.)

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit (neuter), whom the Father will send in my name, he (masculine) will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (**John 14:26**) [ESV]

Hence, the “something” in verse six could be either the church or the Holy Spirit.

- f. The principle instrument of restraint is God in His indwelt church. We are indwelt by all three persons of the Godhead. It is this indwelling presence of God which restrains evil which will be removed when the church is raptured.

one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (**Ephesians 4:6**) [ESV]

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me ... (**Galatians 2:20a**) [ESV]

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you ... (**1 Corinthians 6:19a**) [ESV]

5. Conclusion – Only the pre-tribulation rapture is fully reconciled with scripture

Summary

The rapture is an event in the future when Jesus Christ will come down to the atmosphere of the earth and snatch away all Christians. Our earthly bodies will be instantly transformed into immortal heavenly bodies and we will forever be in the presence of the Lord.

It is referred to in the New Testament as “The Day of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is **not** the “Day of the Lord,” because the Rapture is an event of joy and celebration for all Christians whereas the Day of the Lord is a time of judgment and distress. The Rapture is a noisy event whereas the Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night.

After the Rapture, the “Man of Lawlessness” (the Antichrist) will be revealed and the 7 year Tribulation will occur.

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