

# The Rapture

By

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This term, “rapture,” is not found in any acceptable translation of the Scriptures, and only came into use about 1830 AD. It was originally used by medieval mystics to describe their occult levitations, practices condemned by church leaders (Dave McPherson, Christian News, 9/28/87).

It is applied to Paul’s statement that the saints are to be “caught up” to meet the Lord at His coming. The doctrine, as taught by many popular evangelists, is that Christ will return and secretly “rapture” Christians away with Him for a period of seven years (some say 3 ½ years) while all left on earth suffer “great tribulation.” Then Jesus returns to reign on earth for 1,000 years before the unbelieving dead are raised up for judgment.

It is my conviction that this scenario contradicts what Scripture teaches about Christ’s second coming. It is also the conviction of the great majority of Christian’s worldwide.

**No Secret.** “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 that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:16–17). The shout, the voice and the trumpet all indicate a rather noisy event, rather than something done in secret.

Peter writes, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:10). There are other passages which mention that Jesus will come “as a thief in the night,” but the context shows that this refers to His coming unannounced and unexpected, but certainly not secretly (Mt. 24:43–44).

His coming will be observed by all humanity. “Behold He comes with the clouds and every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7; Acts 1:11). Eyes of love and eyes of hate, eyes of hope and eyes of fear, eyes of joy and eyes of sorrow—every eye will see Him come.

A number of films and sermons on the subject depict people awaking one day to find that family members and other citizens have mysteriously disappeared. But no such picture is portrayed in the Scriptures.

**No Time To Follow.** Does Scripture allow for a two-stage coming of Christ, once to rapture the saints, and again to reign for a “millennium”?

Jesus taught that Christians and unbelievers, described as the “wheat and tares,” will not be separated until the end of the age and final judgment. Rather, they are to “both grow together until the harvest” (Mt. 13:30). He explained: “The harvest is the end of the world,” carefully pointing out that the unsaved will be burned up and then the saved will “shine forth in the kingdom of their Father” (MT. 13:43). According to the two-stage

theory both would NOT grow together until the end of the world, and the unsaved would not be cast into the fire until a thousand years or more AFTER the harvest.

Peter preached that the heavens must receive Christ “until the time of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:19–23). This restoration, according to Peter’s letter, includes a “new heavens a new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:7–13). The first earth having been destroyed by the fire which destroys the ungodly and the earth. This indicates that Jesus remains in heaven until He comes in judgment, at which time history is consummated.

Jesus had a lot to say about the resurrection of the dead, and indicated that all, the saved and the lost, would be resurrected at the same time. “For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29). He said that those who believe on Him will have immortal life, “and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39–40, 44–45). There are no days left after the last one!

The “rapture” of I Thessalonians and the resurrection mentioned in other places take place at the same time. Evidently the saints are to be caught up (raptured) at the end of the world, with no time on earth to follow.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul wrote that when Jesus comes from heaven with the angels, he will destroy those who have not obeyed the gospel, but will be glorified in his saints and “marveled at among all them that believed” (II Thess. 1:7–10).

ALL come forth at His voice; ALL come forth at the sound of the trumpet; ALL are either glorified or destroyed at the same coming of the Lord. Therefore we cannot expect a period of “tribulation” or a thousand-year millennium AFTER the resurrection and rapture.

**The Dead Rise First.** The key “rapture text” of I Thessalonians says that “the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in clouds” (I Thess. 4:17). Paul was writing to assure the Christians that their lived ones who had “fallen asleep” in death would not be left behind when Christ comes for His own. He explains that the saints living when Jesus returns will not be caught up to precede those who had already died, because the dead shall be raised FIRST, then all the saved together shall be caught up with the Lord. Nothing here indicates two resurrections. The unsaved are not being considered in this passage, but other Scriptures, as already noted, show that they also will be resurrect at this same time.

Paul writes that Jesus will raise the dead “at His coming” (I Cor. 15:23), and follows this with the statement: “Then comes the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death” (I Cor. 15:24–25). Death is abolished by the fact that immortality is given to the saved, and all the rest suffer the final destruction in Gehenna, also called “the lake of fire” (Rev.20:15). This points to the conclusion that the “rapture” will not take place until the last day of history, and that it will not leave a world of unsaved people to be dealt with.

**Christ Reigns.** If there is no time for a millennium after the “rapture,” what of Christ’s reign? As prophesied by David, He now rules “in the midst of (His) enemies” (Psa. 110:2), having sat down on His Father’s throne, of which David’s throne was an earthly type (Rev. 3:21, Heb. 12:22). He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18) and reigns “far above all rule, and authority, and power” (Eph. 1:20–23). Christians are already translated into Christ’s kingdom (Col. 1:13, Rom. 14:17). Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world, and refused to support the rulers of the Jews and their ambition for an earthly kingdom.

So, What is to happen in the “last day”?

1. Jesus will appear as unexpectedly as a thief (I Thess. 5:2–4), but with supernatural voices, trumpet sound, and holy angels (II Thess. 1:7).
2. Both saints and unredeemed will be raised from the dead (John 5:28–29).
3. As the redeemed are raised, they will be changed, and made immortal with glorious bodies (I Cor. 15:52, Phil. 3:21).
4. The judgment will take place (II Tim. 4:1, Acts 17:31).
5. In connection with judgment, the earth and the ungodly will be destroyed by fire. Note that “the earth is stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (II Peter 3:7). But that destruction does not take place until the Christians have been caught up out of it. **THIS IS GOOD REASON FOR THE “RAPTURE.”**
6. There will be a “new heaven and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness” for the saints, now made immortal (II Peter 3:13).
7. God will dwell with His people in this new creation (Rev. 21:3).

In spite of all the false prophecies to the contrary, no one knows when Jesus is coming to receive His own, but until that time we are under His instructions to purify ourselves (I John 3:3), that we may be lights in the world, calling all men to faith and repentance from sin (Mt. 28:20, Heb. 3:15, Rev. 22:12).

This may lead to intense persecution, like millions have already experienced, and which many are suffering now, even as this is read. Whatever tribulation is yet to come will come before the so-called “rapture,” not after it. Today is the gospel age, the time for sinners to be saved. When Jesus comes there will be no further preparation. Therefore, watch and be ready!

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