

THE RAPTURE, PART 2

As we continue to unfold the event of the rapture, we will find that the idea of the rapture is actually very widely accepted. Most theologians accept it as an end times event. However, and this is very critical, and should be obvious, that what is in question regarding the rapture is the **TIMING** of when it happens. The issue is not will it happen, but **when** will it happen. Will it happen before the Tribulation, at the middle of the Tribulation, or at the end of the Tribulation period – that is the issue that has to be resolved – the timing. The theological terms used are is it a pre-tribulational rapture, is it a mid-tribulational rapture, or is it a post-tribulational rapture. We must get the timing correct, or nothing else will make sense.

Then to make it even a little more complicated, there is another issue that impacts how people interpret the rapture. The issue is the relationship between Israel and the Church. We will discuss this in some detail in a later study, but for the time being, it is important to see what those three primary views are. They are called **replacement theology**, **covenant theology**, and **dispensational theology** and they can be viewed as follows:

		
REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY	COVENANT THEOLOGY	DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY
Church Replaces Israel	Church is Offshoot of Israel	Church and Israel Are Distinct

So, first of all, what we need to do is to actually define the rapture and what it is. The word “rapture” is not actually found in the New Testament, but is the Latin translation (*rapturo*) of the Greek word for “**caught up**” (“*harpazo*”) found in [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#).

1Th 4:17 (NKJV) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up (*harpazo*) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The phrase “**caught up**” is one Greek word and literally means to be “snatched up or taken away”, and implies to be taken up by an open display of force, or taking a prize away from an enemy. It means that it happens both quickly and without warning. It is the biblical event that will remove the church from the earth immediately prior to the time of the outpouring of God’s wrath on the ungodly in what we know as the seven years of tribulation and great tribulation. At the rapture, the nation of Israel will not be taken. Those Jewish individuals who have been saved will be raptured simply because a Messianic Jew is considered to be a part of the church.

At the rapture, those who have previously died in Christ will have their bodies resurrected to be with Christ first. Then all of the Christians who are alive at the time of the rapture will be instantly translated into their new resurrection bodies. Both groups will be caught up, or raptured, to meet Christ in the air,

and they will be taken back to heaven for two specific events - the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. They will forever be with the Lord. The Church, also called the Bride of Christ will return with Christ at His Second Coming and will reign and rule with Him during the Millennium and then enter with Him into the eternal state. That is the overall scenario. I think that it is certainly worth mentioning that after [Revelation 3](#) that the church is never mentioned again until the Second Coming in [Revelation 19:14](#) where the “armies in heaven” come with Him to the earth.

Rev 19:14 (NKJV) And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Now, there are several key passages that deal with the rapture. There is [1 Thessalonians 4:15-18](#), [1 Thessalonians 5:1-4](#), [2 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#), [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](#), and [John 14:1-4](#). The key passage is [1 Thessalonians 4:15-18](#) which reads as follows,

1Th 4:15 (NKJV) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The context of this passage needs to be understood if we are going to fully understand what it is stating. It is clear from both [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#) that Paul had actually taught these new believers about end time events, and there were some areas about which they were confused. In Paul’s teaching to the Thessalonians prior to his writing [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#) to them, he had apparently already talked to them about what he calls “**the wrath to come**” and about the “**Day of the Lord**”. Because those two phrases are contextually linked to each other in both [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#), it is reasonable to see them as being synonymous.

Most of the concern that the Thessalonians had was centered on two issues – (1) what happened to their loved ones who were saved, but who died before the rapture, and (2) why were they going through a specific tribulation in their life at that time. Now, there is a very specific reason why they were concerned and somewhat confused about their going through a time of tribulation. In their mind, based on what Paul had taught them, they felt that the rapture would precede that time of tribulation in their life. We will see that in just a moment.

So, the tribulation that they were experiencing made them feel like they had actually missed the rapture. It must be understood that when Paul was writing, he had no personal idea as to how long (days, years, decades, or centuries) that it would take for the events of the rapture and the Day of the Lord to unfold and come to pass. You have to appreciate that at the point when Paul was writing to the Thessalonians that John had not yet written Revelation. That is very important to understand. Most likely Paul thought that the unfolding of all of the events would be relatively soon, maybe in his own lifetime. In [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#) we read,

1Th 1:9 (NKJV) For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His

Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even Jesus* who delivers us from the wrath to come.

It does not make much sense for Paul to talk about being delivered “**from the wrath to come**” if in fact the church is to actually go through the Tribulation / Great Tribulation. So, Paul seems to assume here that he too would be delivered from the “**wrath to come**” by using the word “**we**”. Paul fully understood that a great day of God’s wrath was coming even though he obviously did not understand a great deal about its details. He taught very clearly in this passage that Jesus actually “**delivers**” believers from that great day of wrath (v10). What was missing in his understanding was the “**when**” this would occur. The Thessalonians also knew about “**the Day of the Lord**” which is a specific reference to a future time of unprecedented judgment on the ungodly and wicked. It is what we would call the seven years of tribulation as clearly described in [Revelation](#), but they did not yet have all of that information. If they had had that information prior to the writing of Paul’s letters to them, then they probably would never have asked him the questions they did.. [1 Thessalonians 5:1-4](#) talks about this “**day of the Lord**” and says,

1Th 5:1 (NKJV) But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ² For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. ³ For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

Because we do have [Revelation](#), we know that “**this Day**” is speaking of the outpouring of God’s judgment on the earth, but because of his perspective that it might occur relatively soon, Paul thought that it would be soon and that it should not “**overtake**” or surprise them. He said that it was coming as a “**thief in the night**”. However, the Thessalonians were somewhat confused about some of the issues that surrounded this event called “**the day of the Lord**”. From [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#), it appears that they thought that they had actually missed the rapture because they were suffering persecution and were already in that “**Day**”. [1 Thessalonians 3:3-4](#) speaks to this fear when it says,

1Th 3:3 (NKJV) that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. ⁴ For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

So, the issue was that because they were actually suffering persecution, they thought that they were already in “**the Day of the Lord**” and that is why they thought they had missed the rapture. Then to make it somewhat worse for them, there were some false teachers who were teaching that they were already in “**the Day of the Lord**”. This was exactly the opposite of what Paul had taught them, so they were very confused about everything. Apparently, the way that Paul taught them was that it was imminent, but that they were not in it and would not be in it. [2 Thessalonians 2:1-3](#) identifies this problem and says,

2Th 2:1 (NKJV) Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you

by any means; for *that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,*

The persecution that they were experiencing was the normal persecution that any believer can expect when they are fully devoted to Christ. It seems that the church today may have some days of persecution ahead in the near future. However, the persecution that the Thessalonians were experiencing certainly was not the suffering that will be experienced by those during the Tribulation / Great Tribulation period. That seven year period is a definitive time of the wrath of God being poured out in judgment on all of the ungodly and wicked people who blaspheme the name of God if by nothing else other than their life and their ungodly lifestyle. It will be a time of unprecedented judgment and wrath and will be much, much worse than anything the Thessalonians were suffering at that time.

Now, what should be evident about these passages in [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#) is that the Thessalonians thought that because they were in “**the Day of the Lord**” and had “missed” the rapture that what that implies is that in their mind based on what Paul had taught them was that the rapture would actually precede “**the Day of the Lord**”. This is very important for us being able to establish if we will in fact be raptured before the seven years of Tribulation actually begin.

So the [1 Thessalonians 4:15-18](#) passage clearly delineates five specific stages that are part of the rapture. Please look again at that passage and we will see these five specific stages. Please keep in mind that this passage has nothing to say about the timing of the rapture.

1. The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout and with the sound of a trumpet (v16).
2. The dead in Christ will rise first (v16).
3. Those believers who are alive and remain on the earth will be “**caught up**” (Gr. *harpazo*) together with them in the clouds (17).
4. We will meet the Lord in the air (v17).
5. From that moment forward, we shall always be with the Lord (v17).

Another key passage is [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](#) which says,

1Co 15:51 (NKJV) **Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.**

What Paul is explaining in this passage is that some Christians will not actually die (**sleep**), but something will happen where their bodies will be immediately transformed. It will take place “**in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye**”. Obviously, this passage clearly aligns itself with the concept of the rapture.

Another major passage is [John 14:1-4](#) which says,

Jn 14:1 (NKJV) **"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.² 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.³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to**

Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know."

What Jesus said in this passage was completely startling to the disciples. They had never heard or been taught about anything like this. In their mind, the kingdom of God was a kingdom that the Messiah was going to clearly establish on the earth. That was what they had always believed. Then to make it even more startling to them, they had little to no understanding of the church as we know it. The only time they had ever heard of the concept of the church was in [Matthew 16:18](#) where Jesus said,

Mt 16:18 (NKJV) And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

The only other time where the word was used in the gospels was in [Matthew 18:17](#) which says,

Mt 18:17 (NKJV) And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Maybe Jesus has spoken to them more about the church, but the Scriptures certainly do not intimate that to us at all.

So, they were never taught that the kingdom of God would be another place, or what we refer to as heaven. What Jesus tells them in this passage in [John 14](#) is that after He leaves that He was going to prepare a place for them and that He would come again and receive them to Himself so that where He was they could be there with Him also. This was a completely new concept to the disciples – absolutely a new concept to them. You have to appreciate that at the Second Coming the saints are coming with Christ to the earth to live here and reign with Him for 1000 years. However, the event that Jesus is describing in [John 14](#) is one where He comes to get them. If I can describe the differences between the rapture and the Second Coming in a different way, it may provide greater clarity.

1. In the rapture, Jesus meets believers in the air and takes them to heaven. In the Second Coming, He brings believers to the earth for 1000 years.
2. In the rapture, it happens in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye and Jesus comes in the clouds to reward the saints. In the Second Coming, the heavens are opened and Jesus comes in great glory to rule the nations.
3. In the rapture, Jesus comes for His own. In the Second Coming, He comes with His own.
4. With the rapture, the purpose is deliverance of the saved. With the Second Coming, the purpose is judgment of the lost.
5. With the rapture, only God knows when. With the Second Coming, it will be exactly seven years after the signing of the treaty with Israel.