

Lesson 2: The Coming Rapture of Believers

Titus 2:13 NKJV - *...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

Hebrews 9:28 NKJV - *Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*

In the not-too-distant future, God will shake the heavens and the earth. One day, millions of born-again believers will instantly and without warning, vanish from the face of the earth. The scripture declares that the trumpet will sound, the archangel will shout, and Jesus Christ will supernaturally remove His people from this planet. This event is called the “blessed hope.” It is commonly called the “rapture.”

I. The Word “Rapture”

A. Definitions of Rapture

1. The word “rapture” is not found in the Bible, but the phrase “caught up” is.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 NKJV - *¹⁵ 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.*

2. “Caught up” (harpazo) – to snatch away; to seize for one’s self

3. Rapture – ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy; an expression of ecstatic delight; state of mind from high emotions

4. The English word “rapture” comes from the Latin “rapto,” which is a translation of the Greek word “harpazo.”

5. In Christian eschatology, the rapture refers to the belief that either before, or simultaneously with, the second coming of Jesus Christ, believers who have died will be raised and believers who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

II. The Timing of the Rapture

The Word of God teaches us that one day Almighty God will pour out His righteous judgment upon the earth. In the Book of Revelation we are told that judgment will come in three phases: the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, and the bowl judgments. All of these judgments will take place during the Great Tribulation. We are told in scripture that Jesus will come for His people to receive them unto Himself. There is a difference of opinion in the timing of when He comes to receive them unto Himself.

A. Defining the Rapture Positions

1. The pretribulation rapture position teaches us that prior to the tribulation, Jesus will remove all born-again believers from the earth. This view is based upon the premise that God has not appointed believers to wrath, but rather to be recipients of mercy and grace.
2. The midtribulation rapture position teaches that the real terror of the tribulation does not start until the middle of the seven years. At that time the antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and all hell breaks loose. This is when the wrath of God really unfolds, so those holding to this position believe that is the timing of the rapture.
3. The posttribulation rapture position is based upon events of Matthew 24 in which Jesus outlines the signs of the Last Days. Posttribulationists believe that at the end of those events is when the rapture takes place.

Matthew 24:30 NKJV - *Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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.*

III. The Rapture is the Appearance of Christ to Believers

A. Reasons to Believe a Pretribulation Rapture

1. The tribulation period is a specific amount of time with chronological events unfolding. If it is to happen suddenly and without warning, it must precede the tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 NKJV - *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.*

2. Jesus promised to keep believers from the hour of trial (tribulation) that would come upon the whole earth.

Revelation 3:10 NKJV - *Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

3. Believers are not appointed to the wrath of God; they have been delivered from it.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 NKJV - *⁹ For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*

4. In Revelation, we find Christ coming to earth at the Battle of Armageddon to rescue Israel. The armies that are with Him are believers returning with Him in glorious power.

Revelations 19:11-14 NKJV - *¹¹ Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.*

IV. Are You Rapture Ready?

A. Three Key Spiritual Dynamics

1. Let us be watchful, meaning to be spiritually prepared, walking in fellowship with Jesus as we await His appearing.

1 Thessalonians 5:6 NKJV - *Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*

2. We are to be sober, meaning we are to be spiritually alert, living a self-controlled life and not intoxicated by the ungodly culture.

3. We are to pray without ceasing! This means to abide in the presence of God with a continuous attitude of prayer and worship.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 NKJV - *¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing.*