
The Rapture

The word rapture refers to an event which will mark the end of the Church Age and which will be an occasion of great joy to Christian believers. All believers, both those who have died and those who are alive at the time, will be taken up to meet Jesus Christ, who will have returned to "the air", earth's atmosphere. Then, the Christians and the Lord Jesus will return to heaven together. At the time of the Rapture, Christ will not set foot on earth; and He will be visible only to believers. READ 1 Thess. 4:17; Acts 1:11.

The Rapture is to be distinguished from the Second Advent of Christ. While the Rapture sets the stage for the Second Coming, these are two separate events. A chart giving comparisons between these two future appearances of Christ is found in a later section of this article.

There has been controversy for many generations concerning the timing of the final events in human history. The position held by the majority of categorical and fundamental Bible teachers is as follows:

- We are presently in the dispensation known as the Church Age, and we do not know when this age will end.
- The Rapture will occur at the end of the Church Age; and the day of the Rapture will be the first day of the seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation.
- The Second Coming of Christ will occur on the last day of the Tribulation period and will usher in the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ.

The statements above are part of a position, or viewpoint, concerning the chronology of the final events of human history, a doctrinal concept known as the Pre-Tribulation Rapture / Pre-Millennium Tribulation view. There are several other schools of thought among Christian scholars; and this article does not attempt to sort out the differences in these viewpoints categorically.

The study of the various points of view, and an examination of the proofs that the Pre-Tribulation/Pre-Millennial position is the correct one, is indeed a fascinating study. But the stu-

dents needs considerable background to handle such research, including a thorough knowledge of general prophecy, a good general orientation to the whole Bible, and a lot of practice in tracing threads of logic through interwoven networks of Bible doctrine. For the time being we will settle for ...

A DESCRIPTION OF THE RAPTURE

The Rapture was promised by the Lord Jesus Christ just before His crucifixion, John 14:1-3. At the Rapture, He keeps His promise and fulfills the prophecy. The Rapture completes the Redemption of the body because the believer receives a resurrection body at that time, Phil. 3:20,21; 1 John 3:1,2. It would be useful at this point to read the description of the Rapture in 1 Cor. 15:51-53 and then to note the comments below concerning the terminology used.

mystery -- a doctrine "hidden" from the Old Testament saints. The Rapture is pertinent only to the Church Age and was never revealed to believers living before the beginning of the Church Age.

we shall not all sleep --- i.e., there will be some believers alive at the time of the Rapture.

we shall all be changed - refers to the resurrection body.

in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye -- a reference to the time element. The Rapture is not a long, drawn out process of evacuation. We will be with Christ instantly.

the dead shall be raised incorruptible -- the resurrection body does not include the decay and corruption of sin and death.

we shall all be changed -- another reference to the new physical body and new personal attributes associated with the resurrection body.

this corruptible must put on incorruption -the most important feature of the resurrection body is that there will be no Sin Nature.

this mortal must put on immortality -- the believer will not die but will receive an immortal body.

The dead in Christ (believers who have died previous to the Rapture) will be raised first. Then, those who are still alive will be taken up. 1 Thess. 4:16,17.

The Rapture is a rendezvous for living and dead Christians. Confidence in the Rapture is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Thess. 4:18.

In principle, the Lord Jesus Christ is the "first fruits" of the believer, as noted in 1 Cor. 15:20-23. Read this passage first, then note the following comments:

firstfruits -- pictures the resurrection of Christ which is a guarantee of our bodily resurrection.

by man came death -- through Adam came spiritual death with the end result of physical death for every human.

by man came also the resurrection -- by Jesus Christ, in His humanity, came spiritual resurrection (salvation) followed by physical resurrection, Phil. 3:21.

The word "hope", translated from the Greek word *ελπις* (**elpis**), meaning "confidence", is a technical designation for the Rapture in at least three Bible passages, including:

- The living hope, 1 Peter 1:3
- The blessed hope, Titus 2:13
- The purifying hope, 1 John 3:3

The Rapture takes the sting out of death, 1 Cor. 15:54-56. Therefore, the Rapture removes the despair of bereavement, 1 Thess. 4:13-18. This confidence in the Rapture comes through the obtaining of wisdom, discernment, and knowledge of the Plan of God, Job 19:25-27. The edified believer has confidence. The result is blessing, peace, a relaxed mental attitude, and stability.

The believer has a "reservation" in heaven, 1 Peter 1:4; Eph. 2:6. The Rapture takes the believer to the "mansion" which Christ has prepared in advance, John 14.

The testing which the believer and the Church endure during the Church Age is terminated with the Rapture. The Body of Christ is no longer a target of Satan in spiritual warfare.

It is not known, and cannot be predicted, when the Rapture will occur. Nevertheless, the Bible directs us to pursue certain activities while waiting for the Rapture. These are given in the last section of this article. Meanwhile, take a look at ...

WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING FOR THE RAPTURE

Stay in Fellowship. "And now, little children, abide in Him; that when He shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." 1 John 2:28

Employ the Faith-Rest techniques. "Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by forged letters as from us, as that day of Christ is at hand." 2 Thess. 2:1,2

Have Confidence. "Being confident of this very things, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1:6

Have Patience. "Be patient, therefore, unto the coming of the Lord..." James 5:7

Grow in Christ by continuing to be edified.

"...be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." James 5:8 See also Isaiah 33:4 and 2 Tim. 2:15

Contrasts Between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ

THE RAPTURE	THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST
Only believers see Christ. The Rapture is private. Heb. 9:28; Acts 1:11	Every eye shall see Him. The Second Coming of Christ is public. Rev. 1:7
Christ meets believers in the air, 1 Thess. 4:17	Christ sets foot on the Mount of Olives, Zech. 14:4
Believers are taken off the earth, John 14:3	Unbelievers are taken off the earth, Mt. 24:37f
Believers go to heaven, 1 Thess. 4:17	At the Second Coming, believers <i>come back</i> to earth with Christ, 1 Thess. 3:13; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess 4:13; Zech. 14:5
There is no timetable for the Rapture	The Second Coming is seven years after the Rapture, Matt. 24:29-30
Believers are rewarded. 1 Cor. 3:11-15; Rev. 22:12	Unbelievers are judged at the Second Coming; the Baptism of Fire takes place, Matt. 25:31,32,46
The Rapture is a source of comfort to the believer, 1 Thess. 4:18	The Second Coming of Christ is a source of terror for the unbeliever, Rev. 6:15-17
There are no changes in nature associated with the Rapture	There are many changes in nature associated with the Second Coming, Isa. 35
The world is not judged at the Rapture.	The people of the world are judged, Jude 15
The Rapture is a mystery of the Church Age, 1 Cor. 15:51	The Second Coming is the subject of extensive prophecy in the Old Testament.
The unconditional covenants such as those with Abraham and David are not fulfilled at the Rapture.	The covenants are fulfilled at the Second Coming; Israel inherits her possessions.
There is no dealing with Satan or demons at the Rapture.	At the Second Coming, Satan is bound for a thousand years, Rev. 20:2

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