



Old Testament Reading – Genesis 5:21-24
New Testament Reading – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

The Glorious Return of Christ # 2 **“The Rapture of the Church”**

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The next major event on God’s prophetic calendar is the Rapture of the Church.

- The Rapture of the Church is that event when all those who received Christ as their Savior and Lord, during the church age, both living and deceased, as well as children who are too young to understand their sinful nature and, therefore, their need for a Savior, will suddenly be caught up from the earth, joined with Christ in the air, and taken to the Father’s House.
- While the event will be silent, the immediate effects will be catastrophic, as millions of people will vanish from the earth.
- For Christians, the event will be ecstatic; the fulfillment of our blessed hope in the promise of our Lord, **“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (1 Thessalonians 5:9)
- For unbelievers, the event will be horrific, as God pours out His wrath upon those who refused to receive His Son as their Savior and Lord.

According to a recent study, while most pastors never preach on the subject of eschatology, 25% of today’s pastors even tell their congregations that the rapture of the church will not happen.

- Less than 1/3 of today's pastors believe in the imminent rapture of the church. Many of them believe the "theory" of the rapture was added to the scriptures in the 19th century by J.N. Darby, Margaret MacDonald, or C.I. Scofield, yet there is verifiable evidence the "doctrine" of the rapture was taught in the early church as far back as 373 AD.
 - However, the rapture of the church will not be the first rapture in biblical history.
 - Genesis 5 – ***"Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."***
 - 2 Kings 1 – Elijah was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind that appeared as a chariot of fire and horses of fire.
 - Isaiah 6 – Isaiah was called into the ***"throne room of God."***
 - Genesis 7 – the ***"Ark"*** is a type or picture of the rapture.
 - Acts 9 – Philipp was ***"snatched away"*** and transported to Azotus.
 - 2 Corinthians – Paul was ***"caught up"*** to the third heaven.
 - Revelation 11 – the two witnesses will be ***"summoned to heaven in a cloud"*** to be commissioned to be God's divinely protected messengers to the Jews during the tribulation.
1. **The Lord's Promise of a Reunion – John 14:1-3 – *"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."***

Over the years, Jesus told His disciples He would be leaving them. However, when that final hour came, they were heartbroken with grief, for they could not conceive of life without Him.

- Sensing their sorrow, Jesus told them He would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to be their comforter, who would abide with them forever.
 - Then Jesus promised He would return and receive them unto Himself, that where He was going, they would also be.
 - The rapture of the church is one of the essential doctrines of the Christian Faith; it defines the purpose of the Christian Faith, which is to deliver us from the darkness and evil of this world into the light and loveliness of God's presence forever.
2. **The Lord's Pattern for the Rapture – 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 – *"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. Therefore, comfort one another with these words."***

The Thessalonian believers knew about the return of Christ, and they were eager for it to happen. The Apostle Paul praised them for their ***"work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

- They eagerly anticipated Christ's return so they could be a part of His glorious kingdom.
- However, they had two dilemmas:

- Some Christians had already died! *Would they miss out on the blessings of the rapture?*
- Some Christians were suffering such severe persecution, they thought it was the wrath of God. *Had they missed the deliverance of the rapture?*
- Paul told them of a “mystery” God had revealed to him that affirmed the Christians’ rapture **before Christ’s return** to earth as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- That “mystery” is based upon three foundational truths:

1. The death of Christ – verse 14

- Our only hope of victory is the death of Christ as payment for our sins.

2. The resurrection of Christ – verse 14

- Our only hope of eternal life is Christ’s resurrection from the grave.

3. The revelation of Christ – verse 14

- Our only hope of comfort is to believe Paul received this truth by divine revelation.

- Based on Christ’s death and resurrection and the confirmation he received from his encounter with Christ, Paul assured the Thessalonians that those who died before the rapture would receive the same blessings as those who were alive when Jesus came for them.

Then Paul outlined the pattern of events for that glorious day:

- Verse 16 – ***“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”*** (Notice it is a descent, not a return)
 - While the effects of the rapture of the church will be evident to everyone, the initial trumpet and call will be heard only by born-again believers in Christ.
 - This “last Trump” signals the close of the church age.
- Verse 16 – ***“And the dead in Christ will rise first.”*** Also, see 1 Corinthians 15:51ff.
 - Our glorified spirit will be united into our new and imperishable bodies. (1 John 3:2)
- Verse 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.”***
 - While it may sound dramatic and even fictional, this verse from the pen of the Apostle Paul is true, or nothing else he wrote can be trusted.
- Verse 17 – ***“And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”***

- First, that implies that we are already with the Lord; that Christ lives in us, giving us the hope of glory.
- Second, that gives hope to the dying, that even our death will not separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. (See Romans 8)
- Verse 18 – ***“Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”***
 - The only way such a “snatching away” makes sense is if it delivers all believers from every portion of God's wrath, which will be poured out on the earth during the Tribulation.
 - How could Paul's words comfort them if they had to endure God's judgment before they were delivered?
 - Only the “Pre-tribulation” position of the rapture fits into God's prophetic timeline
- Two supporting passages:
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:10 – Paul said these Christians had turned from their idols ***“To serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”***
 - They were not waiting on the Antichrist or even the return of Christ, but for Christ to come and deliver them from the wrath to come.
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 – if Paul knew these Christians were going to face the horrors of the Great Tribulation, he would have warned them about the greater suffering ahead, rather than affirming them of Jesus' promise of rest.
 - To accomplish its purpose, the rapture of the Church must precede the arrival of the Antichrist and the seven years of God's wrath that will follow.

3. **The Lord's Picture of Redemption – Revelation 19:7 – *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”***

- Throughout his epistles, the Apostle Paul portrayed the Church as the Bride of Christ.
- In Ephesians 5:21-32, Paul quoted Genesis 2:24, where God said, ***“For this reason (for marital unity) a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”***
- Paul said the “great mystery” was that he was not just speaking about the union of a man and a woman in marriage, but more importantly, about *the union of Christ and the Church*, the exact promise Jesus made to His disciples in the Upper Room.
- Is it just a coincidence that the pattern of a 1st-century Jewish wedding compares to the marriage of Jesus and His Bride, the Church?
- Revelation 3:10 – ***“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.”***