

RAPTURE EXPLANATION

Some say the Church will be removed from the earth before the Second Coming of Jesus in a moment called the “*Rapture*”, but I’ve never seen this taught in the Bible. Is this a “*third Coming*” of Jesus? Can you explain it to me?

There is **no** Biblical teaching concerning a “*third coming*” of Christ. Our Lord has already come to earth once (during His Earthly ministry from approximately 4 BC – AD 28), and scripture calls for His eventual return to live on Earth again and reign as King for 1,000 years. Therefore, we speak of Christ’s return as a second coming because it will be the second time Christ resides on the earth.

On the other hand, the Bible does teach of another kind of appearance of Jesus, which is fundamentally different than either His first or His second comings. This other appearance is a kind of return but only to “*the clouds*” (i.e., in the sky) to retrieve the Church saints and remove them from the Earth.

Jesus revealed this unique return in John 14:1-3:

¹ “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.”

At the end of John 13:36, Jesus had announced He would leave the disciples soon:

Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

Jesus told Peter that the disciples would have an opportunity to “*follow*” Jesus later. Then in John 14, Jesus explains what He meant. Jesus described the place He was going as “*My Father’s house*”. This is the Heavenly throne room, and this is the place Jesus went when He departed the Earth. John 20:17:

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to My God and your God.*’ ”

Then Jesus explains that in this place are many dwelling places, and He was departing the Earth to prepare a place for each believer. So, Jesus promises every believer in the Church an opportunity to join Jesus in the Heavenly realm in a future day.

Then Jesus said that His return to fulfill this promise will occur in the same manner as when He left the earth (i.e., *passing through the clouds as described in Acts 1:9*). Notice this particular return is strictly for the purpose of retrieving the believers on earth and then taking them back to Heaven. Specifically, Jesus says He will “*receive*” us to where He is so that where He is (i.e., in Heaven) so will we be also.

Such an appearance of Christ is very different than the nature of Jesus’ promised second coming to live and reign on earth. In fact, this appearance is not a “*coming*” at all, in the sense that Jesus never reaches the Earth or sets His feet upon the ground, according to Paul. Instead, Jesus comes to the sky to retrieve the Church and then returns to the Father without making the Earth His dwelling place. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15:5:

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ For if **we** believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

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.

In this passage, Paul writes to comfort the church concerning the fate of those believers who die before Christ's return for His Church. Paul assures the church that those who die (i.e., are "*asleep*") will not be left behind at the resurrection, but in fact, they will rise first to meet Christ. After the dead rise, those saints who are still alive on Earth will be "**caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**". Once again, notice that this rendezvous occurs above the surface of the Earth in the sky.

Therefore, we know Paul cannot be describing Jesus' second coming, for Jesus remains "**in the air**" and only meets the resurrection saints after they have departed the Earth in new resurrected bodies. This important detail proves this moment is a unique event, altogether separate from Christ's Second Coming, and one that matches Jesus' promise to believers in John 14.

The Church has taken to calling this unique event the "*rapture*", because the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible published in the early 5th Century used the Latin word *rapere* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 for the Greek word *harpazo*, which means "*caught up*". The Bible uses the word "*resurrection*" to describe this moment in 1 Corinthians 15.

Regarding the timing of this event in relationship to the Tribulation, we first must understand the **purpose** of Tribulation before we can establish the timing of the Rapture. The Bible teaches repeatedly and clearly that the time of Tribulation is a time of judgment specifically intended for the Jewish nation.

The Bible teaches consistently that the seven-year period of Tribulation is intended by God to chasten Israel for Her sins under the Mosaic Covenant, but it will lead the nation as a whole to repent and turn to Christ.

For example, in Ezekiel 20-33-38 God promises to bring Israel back into her land for a period of judgment and redemption. In Daniel 9:24, God lists seven reasons why Israel must experience the seven years of Tribulation. And in Jeremiah 30:2-9 God promises an unprecedented period of distress coming for Israel called the time of "*Jacob's troubles*" but the nation will be saved in the end.

So, the seven-year period of worldwide distress called Tribulation is a time of judgment specifically directed toward the nation of Israel for the purpose of bringing Israel back to God. Due to the unprecedented nature of this time of judgment, it impacts the entire world and brings distress to everyone living on Earth in those days. Nevertheless, it is a result of Israel's sin and is directed specifically against that nation.

Because the purpose of Tribulation is for Israel (and not for the Church), Paul teaches that the Church will not be subjected to this time of distress when it arrives on Earth. We can find Paul's teaching on the rapture and its relationship to Tribulation in several passages, beginning with 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10:

⁹ 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.

Paul says the Lord's return from Heaven is timed to rescue the Church before the wrath to come. The wrath Paul mentions is the wrath of the entire seven years of Tribulation.

In another passage from 1 Thessalonians, Paul wrote to assure the Church that the Lord reassures the Church that we are not to worry about the day of Tribulation overtaking us unaware, because the Lord has not destined us for His wrath. Paul specifically referencing the rapture in this passage, when he reminds the Church, it will escape the terror of Tribulation in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10:

¹ 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.

⁵ **You** are all **sons** of light and sons of the day. **We** are not of the night nor of darkness.

⁶ Therefore let **us** not sleep, as others *do*, but let **us** watch and be sober.

⁷ For **those** who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

⁸ But let **us** who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

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.

Notice in v.9 Paul says the Church is not destined for wrath, which begs the question **who is** destined for the wrath of Tribulation? The answer came in the earlier verses when Paul says that the unsuspecting world will be the intended target, which principally refers to unbelieving Israel. As mentioned above, Tribulation is a time of judgment intended for the Jewish nation and the unbelieving world, but the Church will escape this time, because Christ collects the Church from the Earth and escorts His Bride away before the coming judgment.

Finally, Paul gives additional detail on the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53:

⁵¹ 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.

Paul's main point in 1 Corinthians 15 is to demonstrate the truth of resurrection and the need for a new "**incorruptible**" body before men can enter into the heavenly realm. As he teaches on this point, Paul introduces a "**mystery**", a hidden truth that God is now unveiling through Paul's writing.

The mystery Paul revealed in this passage was that not every Christian will experience physical death (i.e., "**sleep**") before they receive their new, incorruptible body. Though most Christians will experience a physical death before the resurrection of the righteous, some

Christians will still be living when the moment of resurrection takes place.

Paul then says that in a moment (in Greek, the phrase literally means in “*an atom of time*”), the dead are raised into their new bodies and the living are “*changed*”. The Greek word is *allasso*, which means an exchange of one thing for another.

Paul is teaching that at the moment of the resurrection for all saints, any believers who are still alive at that moment will instantly exchange their present body for a new body. The exchange for a new incorruptible form is necessary because we are immediately escorted into Heaven with the Lord.

This is the same Rapture Paul described in 1 Thessalonians, and it is a moment the Church has expected and longed for since Paul wrote these words. The rapture (resurrection) of the Church occurs prior to the Tribulation and is intended to remove the saints prior to the Lord returning His attention to the sins of Israel and Her disobedience under the Old Covenant.

RAPTURE AT THE SEVENTH TRUMPET JUDGMENT?

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says the Rapture will happen at “*the final trumpet*”. Isn’t this a reference to the last of the Trumpet Judgments in Revelation? And wouldn’t this mean the Rapture happens in the latter half of Tribulation?

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is explaining the manner of our resurrection.

Paul says the moment of our transformation into our new physical bodies will happen instantaneously at “*the last trumpet*”. Since Paul refers to this trumpet as “*the last*” trumpet, it must be a specific trumpet and the final trumpet of a series of trumpets.

Some assume Paul was referring to the Trumpet Judgments of Revelation. In Revelation we find seven Trumpet Judgments which take place during Tribulation, including the seventh in Revelation 11:15:

*Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”*

Is this trumpet the same as the one Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 15? While the two descriptions sound similar, they are not the same event. The trumpet of resurrection and the trumpet judgments are two different events, which happen at different times, though both involve the use of a trumpet. In fact, these are very different trumpets.

First, the trumpet referenced in 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the trumpets traditionally blown during the Jewish feast of Rosh Hashanah (also called the Feast of Trumpets for that reason). The last trump is a well-known Jewish phrase of Paul’s day referring to the final trumpet blown at this feast. Rosh Hashanah observance involves blowing a series of trumpets at the feast each year. During the ceremony, there are a series of short trumpet sounds which conclude with one, long trumpet blast called the “*tekiah gedolah*”, which means “*the great trumpet blast*”. This is the trumpet Paul was describing in 1 Corinthians 15, and it announces the resurrection of the Church.

Paul was intimating that the feast of Rosh Hashanah pictures the Rapture of the Church. All seven feasts on the Jewish calendar picture aspects of God’s redemptive plan, starting with Passover and ending with the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Rosh Hashanah pictures the moment of the Church’s resurrection (also called the Rapture), which is why a trumpet is blown during the feast. That “*tekiah gedolah*” is a prophetic picture of the trumpet that will blow at the Church’s resurrection.

On the other hand, the trumpets of the seven Trumpet Judgments are announcement blown by

angels in Heaven during the latter half of Tribulation. They are signals to warn unbelievers of impending judgment. These judgments will be the final opportunities for unbelievers on Earth in Tribulation to be saved before the final wrath of God poured out on earth in the Bowl Judgments.

How do we know these trumpets are not one Paul was referencing in 1 Corinthians 15? Because the historical order of authorship for the New Testament books precludes the possibility that these are the same trumpets. Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth refers to "*the*" last trumpet, and his use of the article "*the*" indicates Paul expected his audience to know and recognize this particular trumpet blast. This wasn't "*some*" trumpet, it was "*the*" the trumpet, so Paul must be referring to a trumpet already known to his readers in the day he wrote 1 Corinthians.

For that reason, we know Paul could not have meant the trumpets described in the Trumpet Judgments of Revelation, because the book of Revelation wasn't written and revealed to the Church until 40 years after Paul's death. No one in Paul's day could have known that trumpet judgments were a part of God's plan for Tribulation when Paul referred to "*the*" trumpet, so Paul was clearly speaking about some other trumpet. On the other hand, the final trumpet blast of Rosh Hashanah was very well known to Paul and his readers.

Therefore, at the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he was speaking of the final trumpet of Rosh Hashanah blown at the feast of Trumpets, and since this feast is a picture of the Rapture, it fits the context of 1 Corinthians perfectly. Therefore, Paul was not referring to the Trumpet Judgments but to the feast of Trumpets.

WHY THE TRIBULATION?

The Bible promises a seven-year period of Tribulation on Earth, but the final judgment moment for unbelievers waits for another 1,000 years. So why does God bother with bringing Tribulation on earth? What does it accomplish?

The seven-year Tribulation is an important period in God's plan for the earth. We learn of the seven-year period of Tribulation and God's purposes in bringing it primarily from the Old Testament prophets in Daniel 9:24-27:

²⁴ "Seventy weeks are determined for Your people and for Your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, *there shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.

²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.

²⁷ Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week, He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

In Daniel 9, we learn three important details regarding the coming time of Tribulation.

1. First, we learn that this period of time last one "*week*" (or literally "*seven*" in Hebrew).

By the context of the historical events described in Daniel 9, it becomes clear that Daniel

means a seven-year period of time.

Daniel says a total of seventy “*sevens*” (i.e., 490 years) have been decreed by God. Based on the timing of events Daniel provides in verses 25-26, we can see that 69 of the 70 “*sevens*” have already transpired, leaving just one seven-year period remaining. That remaining seven-year period is the period of Tribulation, which has yet to happen.

2. Secondly, Daniel tells us God designated this period of 490 years for Daniel’s “*people*”.

In other words, this is a period for Israel. Israel refers to the nation descended from Abraham and bound to the Old Covenant. By these terms, the Church is not “*Daniel’s people*”, so the Church is specifically excluded from the events of this 490-year period. This period began in 605 BC before the church was formed, and it was suspended when the Messiah was “*cut off*”. Therefore, the church has never experienced any part of the 490-year period designated for Israel nor will it ever!

3. Thirdly, we learn the purposes God has for Israel during this period.

In verse 24 Daniel says the 490 years were decreed for six reasons:

- a. To finish the transgression – to bring Israel’s disobedience to the Old Covenant to an end
- b. To make an end of sin – to put an end to all sin in the people of Israel (i.e., *to glorify Israel*)
- c. To make atonement for iniquity – to exact a price for Israel’s sins under the terms of the Old Covenant
- d. To bring in everlasting righteousness – to usher in the Millennial Kingdom on earth
- e. To seal up vision and prophecy – to bring to an end all revelation by granting a full knowledge of God
- f. To anoint the most holy place – to set up the Millennial Kingdom temple where Christ will reside

Notice that all these purposes and outcomes are focused exclusively on preparing Israel to enter the Kingdom following Tribulation at Christ’s Second Coming. This is further confirmation that this period of great distress on the Earth is focused entirely on Israel and not on the church. The extreme nature of the events during Tribulation impacts the whole earth, but the intended target is Israel.

We find even more confirmation of this conclusion in Jeremiah’s description of the Tribulation, when he labels it a “*time of Jacob’s* (i.e., Israel’s) *distress*” in Jeremiah 30:7:

Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.

Tribulation is called a time of Israel’s distress, and yet Jacob (i.e., the nation of Israel) will be saved from it. Therefore, the chief purpose of Tribulation is to bring Israel back to the Lord, as Ezekiel teaches Ezekiel 20:36-38:

³⁶ *Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord GOD.*

³⁷ *“I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;*

³⁸ *I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring*

them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I *am* the LORD.”

The Lord promises to bring Israel through a time of judgment and inspection (i.e., *pass under the rod*) so that He may purge Israel’s sin and rebellion thereby bringing them back into the bond of the covenant. The covenant mentioned in this verse is the Old Covenant delivered through Moses.

By the terms of that covenant, Israel must experience 490 years of God’s judgment for failing to keep the Covenant terms. Tribulation is the final act of that judgment, and it will result in bringing Israel back to the Lord.

Having learned the true purpose of Tribulation, we can see why the Church does not experience this period of history when it arrives. Since this period is appointed for Israel, the Church will be removed prior to the beginning of the final seven years of God’s judgment. This is why Paul says the Lord will return to remove the church prior to the beginning of the Tribulation in 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.