

End-times Revealed through Bible Prophecy Pt. 3

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Subtitle: The Rapture of the Church Pt. 1

We are journeying through a series of messages on the subject of End Times to gain understanding of certain events that will take place in the near future.

The ultimate event of End Times will be the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. He will be returning to earth soon to establish His literal Kingdom.

Last Sunday we spoke about Daniel's 70th Week & the Rise of the Antichrist. Today we will study the Word around the subject of the Rapture of the church.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (NKJV) *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.*

- Verse 17 speaks about the rapture of the church
 - One day soon, Jesus will leave heaven and come to earth to “collect” those believers “*who are alive and remain*” in the last days
 - In verses 13 & 14, apostle Paul re-assured the Thessalonian believers that those Christians who had previously died (fallen asleep), Jesus “*will bring them with Him*” when He comes to “collect” those who are alive
 - Christians who are alive in the last days “*will by no means precede*” those Christians who have previously died
 - *The dead in Christ shall rise first* (vs. 16)
 - ***Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air* (vs. 17)**
 - We are supposed to “comfort one another with these words”
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- It is comforting to know that there will be a rapture of the church!
 - The message of the rapture of the church is not supposed to frighten Christians – it is supposed to comfort Christians!

A. Why will Jesus Christ “catch away” the church before He returns to earth?

- Because the Bible says so (it is written)
- Because God’s judgement (wrath) will be poured out on earth during the 7 Year “Great Tribulation” period
- God is calling His ambassadors home before He declares war on the world
- Because Jesus needs us all in heaven at the “Judgement (Reward) Seat of Christ” prior to His visible Return to earth

1 Thessalonians 5:9 (NKJV) *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians chapter 5 speaks about destruction coming on the earth during the Great Tribulation, just before the 2nd Coming of Christ. God will remove genuine believers before this destruction breaks loose.

Luke 21:36 (NKJV) *Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

In Luke 21, Jesus spoke about the same troubles that will happen on the earth just prior to His Return. In vs. 36 He said that we (believers), need to “watch” (stay alert) and “pray” so we will be counted worthy to escape these things.

Ultimately, the main criteria to escape God’s judgement and stand before the Son of Man is to be born again! (Jesus said: You must be born again. Jn 3:7).

Of course, to be born again means that we live the Christian life as laid out:

- Through the commands of Jesus Christ in the Gospels
- Through the pattern of the early church in the book of Acts
- Through the teaching in the letters to the church in the New Testament

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (NKJV) *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.*

- Apostle Paul speaks about “us” and “they”
- He makes a definite distinction between “believers” and “unbelievers”

- Unbelievers will not escape from the coming judgement
- But believers will “obtain salvation” from the coming judgement
- Escape from Gr. *ekpheugo*
- ek = out of, pheugo = to shun or avoid (something abhorrent) by flight

John 5:24 (NKJV) *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me **has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.***

Once again, genuine believers “*shall not come into judgement*”:

- neither God’s judgement poured out during the “Great Tribulation”, nor
- God’s judgement meted out at the “Great White Throne Judgement”

Remember, God’s judgement for our sins & shortcomings was laid on Jesus Christ:

- He bore God’s judgement for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:1-12)
- The punishment of our sins was laid upon Him

If you are genuinely born again, and you are walking with the Lord, you have nothing to fear concerning the rapture.

B. Various terms for the “Rapture” of the church

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NLT) *Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be **caught up** in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.*

**caught up – Greek ‘harpazo’ - a sudden catching up
catching or snatching away
carrying off**

Rapture – from the Latin word ‘raptus’ (rapiemur) used in the Latin translation of 1 Thess.4:17.

The Rapture of the church is also called:

- the catching away of the church
- the escape of the church (from God’s judgement)
- the departure of the church

2 Thessalonians 2:3 (Ampl) *Let no one deceive or beguile you in any way, for that day will not come except the apostasy comes first [unless the predicted great falling away of those who have professed to be Christians has come], and the man of lawlessness (sin) is revealed, who is the son of doom (of perdition).*

The marginal (foot) note of the Amplified Translation on 2 Thess. 2:3 says:

➤ ‘A possible rendering of the Greek *apostasia* is “departure [of the church]”’

2 Thessalonians 2:3 (Kenneth Wuest’s Expanded Translation): *Do not begin to allow anyone to lead you astray in any way, because **that day shall not come except the aforementioned departure [of the church to heaven] comes first** and the man of the lawlessness is disclosed [in his true identity].*

Paul said: “That day” of Jesus’ visible Return to earth cannot come unless:

- The aforementioned departure (rapture) of the church takes place
- The man of lawlessness (antichrist) is revealed in his true identity

C. Our bodily resurrection at the time of the Rapture

1 Corinthians 15:50–54 (NLT) *What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. **51 But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. 53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. 54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory.***

- Vs 50 – we cannot go to heaven with our physical, death-doomed bodies
- Vs 51 – not all Christians will die – but all Christians will be transformed
- Vs 52 – (at the rapture) there will be a moment, a split-second, where:
 - Christians who have died will experience a bodily resurrection
 - (Christ will bring them with Him to the rapture of the living saints)1 Thessalonians 4:13
- Christians who are still alive at that time will be transformed
- Vs 53 – our physical bodies will be transformed into spiritual bodies

- Our mortal bodies will be changed into immortal bodies
- Vs 54 – our death-doomed bodies are transformed into eternal bodies

1 Corinthians 15:49 (LB) *Just as each of us now has a body like Adam's, so we shall some day have a body like Christ's.*

That “some day” for the living saints will be at the rapture of the church.

Philippians 3:21 (LB) *When he comes back, he will take these dying bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer all else everywhere.*

D. A previous bodily resurrection of some of the OT saints

There has been a bodily resurrection of some Old Testament saints following the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 27:50–54 (NLT) *Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, 52 and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. 53 They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. 54 The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, “This man truly was the Son of God!”*

Similar to this past event, the future rapture of the church will be a powerful witness to many unsaved people.

Prayer for Salvation:

Dear God, I admit that I have sinned by disobeying Your commandments. I ask You to forgive me, and cleanse me from all my sins. Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, and that You rose again from the dead. I now surrender my life to You, and receive You as my personal Lord and as my Saviour. Please come into my heart, and make me born again. I ask You to lead me and guide me, and help me to live for You, for the rest of my life. Amen.