

A Concentrated Article On
The Rapture Of The Church

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"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds; to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1st Thessalonians 4: 16, 17).

The term "rapture" is derived from the Latin word *raptus*, which means "caught away" or "caught up." This Latin word is equivalent to the Greek *harpazo*, translated as "caught up" in 1 Thess. 4:17. This event, described here and in 1 Corinthians 15, refers to the catching up of the church from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. It involves *only the faithful* of Christ's churches.

1) Just prior to the rapture, as Christ is descending from heaven for His church, the Resurrection of the "dead in Christ" will occur (1 Thes. 4:16). This is not the same Resurrection found in Revelation 20:4, for the latter is an event occurring after Christ returns to earth, destroys the wicked, and binds Satan (Rev. 19:11 thru 20:3). The resurrection in Revelation 20:4 relates to the martyred dead of the tribulation and possibly to O.T. saints (see Rev. 20:6)—NOTE: This "first resurrection" includes the resurrection of Christ and all God's people, in contrast to the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium, as shown in 20:12-13; Isa.26:19-21; Dan. 12:2, 13; Matt. 27: 52-53; Jn. 11:25-26; 14:19; 1 Cor. 15: 20, 52).

2) As the dead in Christ are raised, living believers will be transfigured; their bodies will put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51, 53). Their transformation will happen in a very short time, "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15: 52).

3) Both the resurrected believers and the transfigured believers will be "caught up together" (1 Thes. 4:17) to meet Christ in the air, that is, in the atmosphere between earth and heaven.

4) They will be visibly united with Christ (1 Thes. 4: 16-17), taken to His Father's House in heaven (John 14:2-3)—NOTE: *My Father's House* clearly refers to heaven, for Jesus must "go" there in order to prepare a place for us (Mt. 6: 9; cf Ps. 33:13-14; Isa. 63:15). God has a home where there are many rooms and to which the "household of God" now on earth (Eph. 2: 19) will be transferred; "here we have not continuing city, and united with loved ones who have died (2 Thes. 4:13-18). *I will come again*. As certain as Christ went to heaven, so He will return from His Father's presence and take His followers to be with Him in heaven (17:24), to the place prepared for them, the hope of all believers. The main purpose of the Lord's return is that believers may forever be with Him, and united with loved ones who have died (1 Thes. 4: 13-18).

5) They will be removed from all distress (2 Cor. 5:2,4; Phil. 3:21), from all persecution and oppression (Rev. 3:10), from the entire sphere of sin and from death (Cor. 15:51-57); the rapture delivers them from "the wrath to come" (see 1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9), that is, from the great tribulation.—NOTE: *The hour of temptation*. Christ's promise to deliver the faithful in Philadelphia from the hour of trial is identical to Paul's promise to the Thessalonians that they would be delivered from the "wrath to come" (1 Thes. 1:10); it extends to all of God's faithful throughout the ages (vv. 13, 22). This hour includes the divinely appointed time of trial, wrath, and tribulation that will come on "all the world" in the last years of this age, just prior to the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth (5:10; 6-19; 20:4). Concerning this time, the Bible reveals the following truths:

A) This time of trial involves the wrath of God upon the ungodly (chs.6-19: Isa. 13:6-13; 17:4-11; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; Zech. 14:1-4; Matt. 24:9-31; 1 Thes. 5:2). *A thief in the night*. This

metaphor means the time when the day of the Lord begins is uncertain and unexpected. There is no way one can date it (Matt. 24:42-44).

- B) Also included in this time trial is the wrath of Satan on the godly, on those accepting Christ during this terrible time. For them there will be hunger, thirst, exposure to the elements (7:16), and great suffering and tears (7:9-17; Dan. 12:10; Matt. 24:15-21). They will experience indirectly the natural catastrophes of war, famine, and death. They will be persecuted, tortured, and in all probability will suffer martyrdom (6:11; 13:7; 14:13). They will undergo the ravages of Satan and demonic forces (9:3-5; 12:12), evil and violence from wicked men, and persecution by the antichrist (6:9; 12:17; 13:15-17). They will suffer loss of home and will need to flee in fear (Matt. 24:15-21). It will be an especially disastrous time for those with families and children (Matt. 24:19), so terrible that the tribulation saints *who die* are counted blessed, for they rest from their labors and are free from persecution (14:13).
- C) For those who are overcomers before that day arrives (2:7; Luke 21:36), God will keep them from that hour of trial, most likely through the rapture, the catching away of the faithful to meet Christ in the air before God pours out His wrath (Luke 21:36; John 14:3; Rev. 3:10). This deliverance is a reward for those who persevere in keeping God's Word in true faith.

Jesus said, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3).

Jesus said, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Rev. 2:7).

Jesus said, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Rev. 3:10).

- D) Present day believers who hope to escape all these things that are about to come on the earth will do so only by faithfulness to Christ and His Word and by constant vigilance in prayer (Luke 21:36), lest they be deceived (Matt. 24:5).

6) The hope that our Savior will soon return to take us out of the world to "ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:17) is the blessed hope of all the redeemed (Tit. 2:13). It is a major source of comfort for suffering believers (1 Thes. 4:17-18; 5:10).

7) Paul uses "we" in 1 Thes. 4:17 because he knows the Lord's return was something that could have happened in his own lifetime, and he communicates this same anticipation to the Thessalonians. The Bible insists on a continual waiting with eagerness for the return of our Lord. Believers today must be ever watchful and hopeful for Christ's return to take them out of this world and unto Himself (cf. Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 7:29; 10:11; 15:51-52; Phil. 4:5).

8) The portion of the *professing church* that fails to abstain from evil, and is unfaithful to Christ will be left behind at the rapture (see Mat. 25:1; Luke 12:45). They will remain as part of the apostate church.

(Rev. 17:1)—**Saying to me:** Chapters 17-18 portray the fall of the great Babylon (16:19; 17:5).

- A) Babylon is the symbol for the whole world system dominated by Satan and manifesting wickedness politically, religiously, and commercially (Jer. 50:1; 51:1-64).

- B) Babylon will be completely destroyed during the last three and one-half years of this age. Religious Babylon (the harlot) will be destroyed by the antichrist (vv. 16, 17), while political Babylon will be destroyed by Christ at His coming (19:11-21).

Rev. 17:1—**The Great Whore:** Represents religious Babylon and encompasses all false religions, including apostate Christianity. In the Bible prostitution and adultery, when used figuratively, normally denote religious apostasy and unfaithfulness to God (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 3:9; Ezek. 16:14-18, 32; Jas 4:4), and signify a people who profess to serve God while actually worshiping and serving other gods. Note the sharp contrast between the great harlot and the bride of the lamb (19:7,8). The harlot is subject to Satan; the bride is subject to Christ. Satan clothes the one (v. 4); God clothes the other (19:8). Eternal death is the portion of the harlot; eternal glory the lot of the bride of Christ.

Concerning the false religion:

- A) The harlot will reject the gospel of Christ and the Apostles, the power of godliness, and the basic doctrines of Christianity (Matt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 3:5; 4:3).
- B) She will enter into partnership with the powers and philosophy of “Babylon” (v. 5), the world system with its immorality (17:2). Religious and political power will be combined to take spiritual control of the nations (vs. 18).
- C) Her leaders will persecute the true followers of Christ (v. 6). She will be a melting pot for many faiths and creeds, and doctrine will not be of primary importance. Her chief concern will be fellowship and oneness with her religious system, values, and goals. She will become a “habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit” (18:2; cf Isa. 47:12, 13).
- D) All true believers are commanded to come out of her or they will be condemned *with* her. (vs. 16). God will cause the antichrist to destroy her (vs. 16)—NOTE: These shall hate the whore. Sometime during the antichrist’s rule, the whore will be hated (vs.1) by the antichrist and his supporters, and they will utterly destroy her and her institutions. This is God’s judgment against the world religious system that rejected God’s truth in Christ. This may occur at the mid point of the 7-year-tribulation, when the beast professes to be god and demands that all worship him (13:8, 15; Dan. 9:27; 11:36-38).
- 9) Following the rapture is the day of the Lord, a time that brings tribulation and wrath to the ungodly (1 Thus. 5:2-10; 5:2). That will be followed by the second stage of Christ's coming, when He comes to destroy the ungodly and to reign on earth (Mat. 24:42,44).¹

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