

## Here, There, or in the Air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

### A. What Is the Rapture?

1. From the Greek *harpazo* meaning “to snatch, to seize or take suddenly.” It appears 13 times in the NT. It comes from *raeptius* in the Latin Vulgate.
2. It is Christ coming to “catch away” his church, first the resurrection of the believers who have died (“the dead in Christ will rise first” vs. 16) and the transformation of the living believers.
  - a. It will be instant and immediate (“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” 1 Cor. 15:52).
  - b. Death in the Bible means separation. For believers, it is characterized as sleep (Gr. *koimao*). The word “cemetery” (sleeping place) is derived from this.
3. It is one of four resurrections mentioned in Scripture.
  - a. OT believers (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:1-3).
  - b. The unrighteous to be judged (Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:12-13).
  - c. Believers who die during the Tribulation (Rev. 20:4-6).
4. Other Biblical “Raptures”
  - ❖ *Enoch* – Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5; *Elijah* – 2 Kings 2:1, 11; *Isaiah* – Isa. 6:1-3; *Jesus* – Rev. 12:5; *Philip* – Acts 8:39-40; *Paul* – 2 Cor. 12:2-4
  - a. These events were –
    - (1) Literal – not symbolic.
    - (2) Physical – five of the six were transfers to heaven, one to another location on earth.
    - (3) Sudden – occurred with little or no warning.

### B. Five Main Views on the Timing of the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10)

1. Pre-Tribulation – teaches that the church will be raptured before the seven-year Tribulation.
  - ❖ Objections:
    - It teaches two “second comings.”
    - This view did not emerge until late in church history (the 1830’s with John Nelson Darby).
    - There is no specific verse that emphatically says that Jesus is coming for the Church before the Tribulation.
2. Mid-Tribulation – Christ will rapture the Church halfway through the Tribulation.
  - ❖ Objections:
    - It makes no room for the imminent (at any time) return of Christ.
    - Rev. 6:16-17 clearly references God’s wrath long before the seventh trumpet of Rev. 11:15.

- There is no consensus where in Revelation to place the Rapture.
3. Post-Tribulation – the Rapture and the Second Coming are one event separated by moments.
- ❖ Objections:
- The events of Revelation 19 make no mention of the Rapture.
  - The wrath of God is not confined to the end of Revelation but occurs throughout.
  - If God has preserved the Church throughout the Tribulation, then what is He rescuing us from?
4. Partial Rapture – multiple “raptures” will occur throughout the Tribulation.
- ❖ Objections:
- The Bible uses inclusive words like “we” and “all” (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:14).
  - It fragments the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).
  - Does not exempt believers from God’s wrath.
  - The timing of the Rapture would then depend on our own spiritual maturity.
5. Pre-wrath – the Rapture will occur 5 ½ years into the Tribulation.
- ❖ Objections:
- According the 1 Thess. 5:1-3, the Day of the Lord comes unexpectedly with people saying, “peace and safety.”
  - Places all of God’s wrath after the seventh seal is opened. All the other calamities are the result of man and Satan.

### C. Why I Believe in the Pre-Tribulation View

1. It best explains the place of the Church in Revelation, which is in heaven.
  - The Greek word for church *ekklesia* is used twenty times in Revelation. Nineteen of these occur in chapters 1-3. It does not appear again until chapter 19 where the Church is depicted as a Bride returning to earth with her victorious Bridegroom.
2. It solves the issue of various beliefs regarding Christ’s return.
  - The NT describes two facets of Christ’s Second Coming. (1) He will come ***for*** His Church (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:16) and (2) He will come ***with*** His Church (I Thess. 3:13). The best explanation is that the Second coming is in two phases that bookend the Great Tribulation.
3. It allows for the Church to be exempt from all of God’s divine wrath.
  - Christians are never promised to be spared from the everyday problems in life (John 16:33; James 1:2-4) but these are vastly different from the wrath of God to be poured

out in judgment on a sinful world. God's pattern has always been to spare the righteous from His judgment (Sodom and Gomorrah, Noah's Flood).

4. It accounts for the timing of events that need an element of time to be carried out.
  - The Judgment Seat of Christ – 2 Corinthians 5:10
  - The Preparation of Christ's Bride – Rev. 19:7-18
  - Life in the Millennial Kingdom – Rev. 20:1-6
  - Separating the Sheep and the Goats – Mt. 25:31-46.
  - Removal of the Restrainer – 2 Thess. 2:3-8
5. It's the best explanation for understanding the role of the restrainer in 2 Thess. 2:3-8.
  - Many believe the "man of lawlessness" here is the Antichrist.
  - The force that is "holding him back" is referred to as a "what" (vs.6) and a "who" (vs. 7).
  - The power of the Holy Spirit in the Church fits nicely to explain these descriptions.
6. The doctrine that Christ's return is imminent is best accounted for with a pre-Trib view.
  - Any moment – while prophetic events may take place before, they are not necessary to precede it.
  - Without warning – Matthew 24 speaks of Christ's Second Coming, not the Rapture.
  - Certain – but not necessarily soon.
7. It explains why the believers at Thessalonica were so distraught. (2 Thess. 2:2).
  - After Paul's first letter, someone sent a phony letter saying that the Day of the Lord had already arrived, and they were living in the Tribulation. Their fear and worry show that they believed they would be raptured before the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) occurred.

#### **D. How Believing in the Rapture Benefits Us**

1. It motivates us to faithfully be about the work of the Lord knowing He could return at any time.
2. It means that we are compelled to share the Gospel with the lost so that they too can escape God's wrath.
3. It inspires us to live lives of holiness and purity in preparation for the Lord's return (1 Jn 3:2, 3).
4. It gives us hope that no matter how bad things get, God is in control. The person, place and promise of John 14:1-3 should be our focus.
5. It reassures us that we will see our departed loved ones once again (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

(Much of the source material for this message is adapted from *The End* by Mark Hitchcock, Tyndale House, 2012).