

**Eschatology 101**  
**Week 5**  
**The Rapture of the Church**

The Rapture of the Church is one of the most controversial topics in all of Christendom. For most believers the question is not if there will be a rapture of the Church, but when will it occur?

I like what Dr. Chuck Missler says about the rapture: (paraphrase) “The rapture is a preposterous belief, about the only thing it has going for it is that it is absolutely taught in scripture.”

When you think about it though, there are many preposterous beliefs that we as Christian’s have no problems with and in fact hang our entire faith upon.

- The Virgin Birth
- The fact that God became man and lived among us
- The resurrection of Jesus after 3 days and nights in the tomb
- The fact that God as the Holy Spirit lives within us

We believe these things because they are Biblical facts and because we have experienced the person of Jesus Christ!

We will look at the topic of the Rapture tonight and see that it is also a indisputable Biblical fact.

You will not find the word rapture in any of your english translations. It does not appear there. So where does the term come from?

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

**[1Th 4:13-18 NKJV] 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.**

The Greek word for “caught up” in verse 17 is the word *harpazo* and it means to snatch away by force. To pluck up.

In Latin the word for *harpazo* is translated *rapturus* from which we get our english word *rapture*.

The greek word here for “meet” is “*apantesis*” and carries the context of the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary or special guest.

I find it interesting that Paul was only with the Thessalonians for 2 weeks and he had already taught them about the rapture of the church, and the end times.

The church today tends to shy away from these topics with new believers and yet I contend that a basic understanding of Gods plan for his people, Israel and the Church, is foundational to the understanding of the majority of scripture.

In 1 Thessalonians, the people in Thessalonica were worried that their loved ones who had passed away would miss the rapture.

Paul is writing to remind them of what he had already taught them that when Jesus comes for His Church, the dead in Christ will rise first then those who are alive will be caught up with them in clouds of the air and be with Jesus forever.

We will talk about this in more detail later but it is important to note that Paul uses the word “we” when describing those who are alive and remain when this event takes place.

He believes it is entirely possible that Jesus could come at any moment for His Church and that Paul could be alive to see it. It almost seems as if he expects to be alive.

It is also important to point out that Paul is speaking in plain terms. His statement is completely free from symbolism or allegory.

So the reader is faced with a dilemma here. Either Jesus is going to come and snatch us up to be with Him in the clouds, or Paul’s writings are not inspired by the Holy Spirit and we cannot trust what he has written.

*"The Apostle's declarations here are made in the practical tone of strict matter of fact, and are given as literal details . . . Never was a place where the analogy of symbolical apocalyptic language was less applicable. Either these details must be received by us as matter of practical expectation, or we must set aside the Apostle as one divinely empowered to teach the Church."*  
- Dean Alford

We who are alive will not precede those who are asleep in Christ.

Does that mean that the dead in Christ are just lying there in their graves awaiting Jesus’ return?

No.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:8

**[2Co 5:8 NKJV] 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**

As a believer you will be with the Lord the second you depart from this earthly body. The resurrection here is when those who are with the Lord when this time comes will get their resurrection bodies which will in some way be made up of their former earthly bodies.

If one thinks about this long enough it can raise all kinds of questions:

What about those who are cremated or dismembered in some kind of terrible accident?

God will have no problem with this. If he knows the number of hairs on each person's head, he has no problem keeping up with everyone's DNA.

Some believe that the dead in Christ are disembodied spirits until this resurrection, others believe that we get some temporary body while we wait for this moment, and yet others believe that the second we die, we experience this event and the resurrected body immediately.

I am not sure the Bible is completely clear on that.

This all happens with "a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God".

This will be an audible event. The question we are left with is will everyone be able to hear it or just believers?

Will it be a visible event to the world or will believers just disappear?

We'll have to wait and see.

The trumpet was used in the Bible to sound the alarm for war and throw the enemy into a panic as we see in Numbers 10, and Revelation 8 and 9. It was also used to assemble God's people as we see in Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 10:2.

This trumpet is gathering the Church to the Lord and seems to be the same trumpet referenced in 1 Corinthians 15.

**[1Co 15:52 NKJV] 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.**

There are 3 times trumpets are associated with end-times events; here, The 7 trumpet judgements in Revelation, and the trumpet gathering Israel at the end of the age in Matthew 24:31.

In comparing this trumpet with the one culminating the 7 trumpets in Revelation 11, Dr. Edmond Heibert says this:

*"The subjects are different: here it is the church; there a wicked world. The results are different: here it is the glorious catching up of the church to be with the Lord; there it is further judgment upon a godless world. Here 'the last trump' signals the close of the life the church on earth; there the 'seventh' trumpet marks a climax in a progressive series of apocalyptic judgments upon the living on earth."*

In comparison to the trumpet in Matthew 24:31 David Guzik writes:

*“The subjects are different: Matthew refers to Jewish believers during the great tribulation; Thessalonians refers to the church.  
The circumstances are different: Matthew refers to a gathering of the elect scattered over the earth, with no mention of resurrection; Thessalonians refers to the raising of the believing dead.  
The results are different: Matthew refers to living believers gathered from all over the earth at the command of their Lord who has returned to earth in open glory; Thessalonians refers to the uniting of the raised dead with the living believers to meet the Lord in the air.”*

This passage is very clear and can leave us no doubt about the certainty of this event if we believe that Paul’s writings are “God breathed” and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

What is in contention in the Church today is the timing of this event.

It is my belief that the purpose of the Rapture of the Church is to remove The Bride of Christ from the earth prior to the pouring out of God’s wrath that takes place during the 70th week, or that final 7 year period in Daniel 9.

There are other beliefs as far as timing of the rapture is concerned.

The belief I and the pastors here at Calvary hold is known as the Pre-tribulation rapture position. The Church is removed before the 70th week.

There are also those that believe in a mid-tribulation rapture position. They believe that the Church is removed in the middle of the 70th week.

There is the Pre-Wrath rapture position that states the Church will be removed sometime in the second half of the tribulation period.

Another belief is the Post-Tribulation rapture where the second coming of Jesus at the end of the 70th week and the rapture are simultaneous events.

There are distinct differences between the Second Coming of Jesus and the Rapture.

**Rapture**

Translation of Believers  
 Translated Saints go to heaven  
 Earth is not judged  
 Imminent, could happen anytime  
 Not explicitly in the Old Testament  
 Involves believers only  
 Occurs before the day of wrath  
 No reference to Satan  
 He comes for his own  
 He comes in the air  
 He claims His bride  
 Only His own see him  
 The Great Tribulation begins  
 Church age believers only

**Second Coming**

No translation involved  
 Translated Saints return to earth with Him  
 Earth is judged  
 Occurs after 7 yrs, and many detailed events  
 Predicted in the Old Testament  
 Involves all on earth  
 Concludes the day of wrath  
 Satan is bound for 1,000 yrs  
 He comes with his own  
 He comes to the earth  
 He comes with His bride  
 Every eye shall see Him  
 Millennium begins  
 Old Testament saints raised after the millennium

Most of the believers I have spoken to about this are either Pre-trib or Mid-trib. I have spoken to a few in our fellowship here who fall into the mid-trib camp and they are wonderful people who I respect and love as brothers and sisters in Christ.

I just believe they are wrong about this. They believe I am wrong too. :)

The point is that our beliefs on when the rapture of the Church happens should not break our fellowship with those who may disagree with our position.

What ever your position is or comes to be on this matter just make sure you are building it on what the Bible says and not on what man says. Don't inherit your position on these things from others. Do your own study.

I did forget to mention one other position that is out there.. The Pan-tribulational view.. It will all just pan out in the end.

That is a very popular view now days for those who feel that these topics are too controversial to get into.

Its ok if you are a follower of Jesus to chose that position, but I hope you do not. I don't think it is ever a good thing to ignore any part of scripture.

I want to now present the case for the Pre-trib view from scripture.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 Paul writes:

**[1Th 1:9-10 NKJV] 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.**

It is clear from this passage that the believers of Thessalonica are waiting on the Lord. They believe He could return for them at any moment. This is known as the Doctrine of Imminency and is seen throughout the New testament.

**im·mi·nent [im-uh-nuhnt]**

**adjective**

**1.**

**likely to occur at any moment; impending: Her death is imminent.**

**2.**

**projecting or leaning forward; overhanging.**

When we study the second coming of Jesus, we see many references for us to be ready for Him to come at any moment.

Matthew 24:36; 24:42-46; and Acts 1:7 are all verses spoken by Jesus that tell us to watch because we do not know the day or hour of His return.

This is not a new doctrine as some teach. We see examples of it in writings as early as 70 – 180 AD.

*"All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins" (Pseudo-Ephraem (374-627 AD)).*

*The First Epistle of Clement, 23 (written around 96 A.D. by Clement, a prominent leader of the church at Rome who knew some of the apostles personally and probably is the Clement referred to in Phil. 4:3): "Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, 'speedily will He come, and will not tarry.'"*

*As early as 70 - 180 AD, The Didache, chapter 16, section 1, says, "Be vigilant over your life; let your lamps not be extinguished, or your loins ungirded, but be prepared, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come."*

*"But what a spectacle is that fast-approaching advent of our Lord, now owned by all, now highly exalted, now a triumphant One!" (Tertullian 155 - 245 AD).*

But we do not need the words of men to give credence to this doctrine, we have the Word of God that clearly states that Jesus can come at any time, and we are to expect Him at any time.

Here are just a few:

**"Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom 13:11-12).**

**"So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:7).**

**"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil 4:5).**

**"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess 5:6).**

**[Tit 2:11-13 NKJV] 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,**

**"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7).**

**[Mat 24:36-44 NKJV] 36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 "But as the days of Noah [were], so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 "Then two [men] will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 "Two [women will be] grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**

The only view of the rapture of the Church that is in keeping with the doctrine of the imminent return of Jesus is a Pre-trib view.

If the rapture happens Post-trib, then it cannot be imminent because it cannot take place until after the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel chapter 9.

If the rapture happens Mid-trib, then it cannot be imminent because the 70<sup>th</sup> week has to start and it has to be half way through prior to the rapture, and the same can be said for the Pre-wrath position.

Besides the Doctrine of Imminency there is other evidence from scripture that points to a Pre-Trib rapture of the Church.

*"1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 assures us that those believers who died would share equally with the living in the events of the rapture and the resurrection, answering their fear that somehow the dead in Christ were at a disadvantage. But if Paul believed Christians would go through the great tribulation, he would count the dead in Christ as more fortunate than those living Christians who might very well have to endure the great tribulation. It would have been logical for Paul to comfort the Thessalonians with the idea that the dead in Jesus were better off because they won't have to experience the Great Tribulation." - Guzik*

**[1Th 5:9 NKJV] 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

The 70th week or final 70 year period is when the wrath of God is poured out on the whole earth.

The Church though is not appointed to wrath and is removed before it begins.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 Paul comforts the believers there who are beginning to experience persecution promising them a coming rest and coming tribulation for their tormentors.

There was apparently a letter sent to them by an imposter between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians that had them thinking that they were entering the 70th week because of the persecution they were experiencing.

If Paul knew these people were destined to pass through an even worse tribulation like that seen in the 70th week, He would not have comforted them with a coming rest but He would have advised them to be prepared for an even worse trial than they were already experiencing.

**[2Th 2:1-3 NKJV] 1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for [that Day will not come] unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,**

There are many who teach that this "falling away" speaks of apostasy in the Church in the last days. This is the most common teaching you likely find when studying the commentaries; however, two men who I highly respect, Thomas Ice and Joe Fitch have suggested that this may be a reference to the rapture of the Church.

The Greek word for "falling away" is apostacia and comes from the compound of two greek words apo meaning from, and istemi meaning stand.

The Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon defines apostasia first as " defection, revolt;" then secondly as " departure, disappearance."

You can go do your own study on this but Thomas Ice sums it up this way:

*"What precisely does Paul mean when he says that " the falling away" (2:3) must come before the tribulation? The definite article " the" denotes that this will be a definite event, an event distinct from the appearance of the Man of Sin. The Greek word for " falling away" , taken by itself, does not mean religious apostasy or defection. Neither does the word mean " to fall," as the Greeks have another word for that. [pipto, I fall; TDI] The best translation of the word is " to depart." The apostle Paul refers here to a definite event which he calls " the departure," and which will occur just before the start of the tribulation. This is the rapture of the church." - Thomas Ice*

**[2Th 2:6-8 NKJV] 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [will do so] until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.**

Who is this restrainer?

It is the Holy Spirit who restrains and the Holy Spirit indwells the Church. When the Church is removed, there is nothing left in the world to restrain the evil from taking over.

We mention often here at Calvary that we need to study the whole counsel of God, meaning the entirety of scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

All of the evidence so far has been from the New Testament, is there Old Testament evidence for the Rapture of the Church?

I believe so..

In the Matthew 24 passage we read earlier, Jesus references the days of Noah.

When we look at the account of Noah in Genesis along with the Matthew 24 passage we understand that the people were just living their lives like everything was normal. Not expecting any type of catastrophic event even though Noah was building a big boat in his back yard and warning them about the impending judgment.

It will be the same during the time of the Rapture.

Most of you know how I like to look at the types or models laid out for us in the Old Testament.

I believe the story of Noah happened during the first time God poured out His wrath on the world, and it also models the next time period of God's wrath.

We see in the account that there were two groups of people, Noah and His family who were preserved through the flood, and the rest of the people who were destroyed in the flood. Noah and his family would represent Israel who will be preserved through the 70th week.

The one who perished in the flood, will be those who have rebelled against God and will perish during or at the culmination of the 70th week.

There was a third "group" if you will, that was removed before the flood. Enoch did not die, He walked with God and was taken up to be with the Lord prior to the flood. He was Raptured.

Also in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot, who was gentile by the way, was removed before God's judgment.

One of my favorite Rapture verses is from Isaiah.

First recall what Jesus promised us in John 14:1-3

**[Jhn 14:1-3 NKJV] 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.**

With that in mind, take a look at Isaiah 26:20-21

**[Isa 26:20-21 NKJV] 20 Come, my people, enter your chambers, And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, Until the indignation is past. 21 For behold, the LORD comes out of His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; The earth will also disclose her blood, And will no more cover her slain.**

The very early Church used to greet each other with the word Maranatha, it means “the Lord Comes!”

Come Lord Jesus!