

## Does The Bible Teach The Rapture?

Franklin Church of Christ  
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AM Worship

### Introduction:

We cannot live in our society today without hearing someone talk about the Rapture. There are books about it, movies about it, sermons about it and even bumper stickers about it. While not all denominations hold the Rapture theory as their creedalized position, the majority of people today who claim to be Christian accept it. And in their minds, to question the Rapture is to question the very fabric of Christianity. Is the modern Rapture theory really in the Bible? I do not believe so.

### Discussion:

- I. What is the modern Rapture theory?
  - A. There are variations in modern Rapture theory typically regarding the expected time of the Rapture. But, all believers in the Rapture believe our world is hurtling toward the so-called Great Tribulation (based on a misunderstanding of **Matthew 24:29** and **Revelation 7:14**). This Great Tribulation will last seven years and will end with Christ's Glorious Appearing. At which time Jesus will establish His kingdom, ruling for 1000 years on earth (based on a misunderstanding of just about every prophetic passage in the Bible).
  - B. Somewhere in relation to the Great Tribulation, Christ will return in the air to "Rapture" His church. In the Rapture, Jesus will resurrect all the dead saints and translate all the living saints into imperishable, spiritual bodies, catching them up to be with Him forever. The rest of the dead will be left in the graves and the rest of the living will be left behind on the earth.
  - C. The variations of this Rapture theory all have to do with when the Rapture will take place in relation to the Great Tribulation. Some believe it will happen following the so-called Great Tribulation (post-tribulation Rapturists). Some believe it will happen sometime in the middle of the Tribulation (mid-tribulation Rapturists). Most believe it will happen before the Tribulation (pre-tribulation Rapturists). But all of them agree that at some point Jesus will call the saints to Him leaving others behind on the earth. Then Jesus will come in His Glorious Appearing and set up a kingdom on the earth in which these saints will reign on the earth for 1000 years. Thus, modern Rapturists see two phases of Christ's Second Coming. In the first phase, Christ returns in the air to Rapture His church. In the second phase, called the Glorious Appearing, Christ returns to the earth to establish a physical kingdom. Because most Premillennialists accept the pre-tribulation view, that is the one we will discuss in this lesson. However, by the end of our lesson, we will actually have demonstrated the falsehood of each of these theories.
- II. Why is this theory so successful?
  - A. It is not successful because it is in the Bible. Never forget Jesus' words in **Matthew 7:13-14**. Few find the truth. That many accept this doctrine does not mean it is Biblical.
  - B. This doctrine is successful for the very reason so much false doctrine is successful. Following in the devil's footsteps in **Matthew 4:6**, the purveyors of this error use Bible passages, but they misuse Bible teaching. When those who listen, dig no further than a casual glance at a verse that uses the same kind of language as the false teachers, they will easily be duped.
  - C. Finally, it is popular because the teachers of this doctrine are out teaching it. Though they don't have the Bible to back them up, they are talking louder than we are and are convincing people that the Bible is on their side. These false teachers have cornered the "prophecy market" and Christians sit back idly, afraid to discuss the issues.
- III. Upon what is the modern Rapture theory based?
  - A. According to Tim LaHaye, co-author of the **Left Behind** series, in his books, **Will You Escape The Tribulation? Rapture [Under Attack]** and **Are We Living In The End Times?**, there are three main "supporting scriptures": **John 14:1-3**; **I Thessalonians 4:13-18** and **I Corinthians 15:51-58**.
  - B. **John 14:1-3** is part of the conversation Jesus had with His apostles on the night of His betrayal. In this passage, Jesus claims He is preparing a place for them in His Father's house. Since He is preparing a place for them, He must be planning to return for them that they may be with Him.

- C. **I Thessalonians 4:13-18** states that on some day in the future, Jesus will descend with a shout of the archangel and the sound of a trumpet. At that time, the dead in Christ shall rise and those believers who are still alive will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord. By the way, lest you fall into the trap of claiming “Rapture” is not found in the Bible, LaHaye makes a big deal out of the fact that “Rapture” comes from the Latin term used to translate the Greek word for “caught up”.
- D. **I Corinthians 15:51-58** teaches Christians will not all die, but will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye to imperishable, spiritual bodies. This will occur at the last trumpet.
- E. The crux of the argument is that these passages all refer to one future event. But this event must be separate from what is called the Glorious Appearing because none of these passages contain accounts of dead unbelievers being raised. Nor do they contain any reference to unbelievers being taken to judgment. Additionally, these verses do not contain other events Rapturists believe will occur when He comes in the second phase of His return, such as the establishment of a kingdom or Jesus again being on the earth.

#### IV. Do these passages really teach the modern Rapture theory?

- A. Having read these passages you can probably already tell some of the problems this theory has. All these passages teach is that some time in the future, those who have submitted to Jesus will be either resurrected or translated to be with Christ forever. This will occur at the last trumpet when Jesus descends in the clouds. While nothing is said in these passages about dead unbelievers being resurrected or judged, the Rapturist must also admit there is nothing said about unbelievers being left behind. In fact, these verses don't say anything about the unbelievers at all. Why? Because when Jesus spoke in **John 14** and Paul wrote in **I Thessalonians** and **I Corinthians**, they were not explaining step by step what would happen at the end, they were providing hope for Christians. What happens to unbelievers at that time had no bearing on the points they were making and, therefore, was not discussed in those passages at all. Thus, these passages cannot be used to support modern Rapture theory, they can only be used to support that Christians will be called to be with Jesus for eternity some day.
- B. Interestingly, LaHaye admits, “One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture is that no one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of His Second Coming separated by the Tribulation. This is true” (**Rapture [Under Attack]**, p 75). In other words, even LaHaye admits that no one passage refers to two different events in Christ's second coming. Based on this he determines, “Our task is to carefully study all the second-coming passages to see if they are talking about the same event.” LaHaye's assertion is that when we look at all the passages that teach on Christ's Second Coming, we will notice some speak of one event, while others speak of a second event. Thus, the Second Coming must actually encompass two distinct and separate events that make up the one Second Coming. One of the phenomenal aspects of this is, after making his admission, LaHaye then tries to find both events in one verse. The verse is **Titus 2:13**, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” Allow me to explain why this is so striking. In the books, **Rapture [Under Attack]** and **Are We Living In The End Times?**, LaHaye assures us that the Bible calls the Rapture our Blessed Hope and calls the final phase of Christ's Second Coming His Glorious Appearing. To read LaHaye's books, you would expect to find these two phrases used repeatedly throughout the Bible. Guess what? Not only is **Titus 2:13** the only verse where these two phrases are mentioned together. This is the only verse where these two phrases are used period! However, LaHaye assures us the Bible is filled with teaching on these two events and they are separate events. I hope you can see from this verse, that the blessed hope is not an event separate and apart from the glorious appearing of Christ. Rather, our blessed hope is the glorious appearing of Christ when He “shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (**Hebrews 9:28**). I trust you can see the absolute subjectivity and manipulation of scripture when **Titus 2:13** is used and abused in this way. Sadly, this is the way Rapturists must treat scripture to defend their doctrine.
- C. A careful study of the Premillennialists' position demonstrates that they are not careful and consistent with the Bible at all, but are subjective and manipulative. That is, they come up with two events because they want two events, not because they use scripture consistently. Consider the following quote from **Rapture [Under Attack]**, which explains why **John 14:1-3; I**

**Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:51-58** must teach about an event considered distinct from Jesus' Glorious Appearing.

"Notice what is missing in the Rapture events. Christ does not come to the earth with power and the holy angels as He promised. Instead, He comes in the air, which is defined as 'in the clouds' (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). Nor does He set up His earthly kingdom, for He gathers His translated church into His Father's house. He does not deal with the Antichrist or bind Satan, nor does He destroy the kings of the earth who are gathered at Jerusalem to oppose Him."

This statement demonstrates what was said earlier. **John 14:1-3, I Thessalonians 4:13-18** and **I Corinthians 15:51-58** must teach about an event distinct from that final Glorious Appearing because of all these things that are not mentioned. If they were consistent with this approach, their position might have merit, but look at a passage of scripture, which, LaHaye assures us, refers to the Glorious Appearing. Notice how much this passage sounds like the supposed Rapture passages. Then you tell me if these Rapturists are being honest or manipulative.

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days ... the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (**Matthew 24:29-31**).

In this passage, Jesus comes in the clouds and does not come to the earth. Nowhere in this passage does Jesus set up an earthly kingdom. He gathers His saints. He does not deal with any Antichrist, nor does He bind Satan. There is no destruction of earthly kings gathered at Jerusalem to oppose Him. Yet, in several charts in both of LaHaye's books, we are told this is not the Rapture, it is the Glorious Appearing. Why? Because **vs. 29** mentions a tribulation and to LaHaye, as a pre-tribulation Rapturist, the Rapture cannot come after the Great Tribulation. Do you see the point? Suddenly this passage, which reads just like the Rapture passages is not about the Rapture. Why? Because interpreting the events in each passage the same way, messes up their timeline. From the Premillennialists' perspective, consistency would demand these passages all talk about the same event. However, to really believe in a pretribulation Rapture demands they talk about different events. They must either quit being consistent or quit believing in two phases of the Second Coming. Guess which one they decided to give up? They gave up consistency and decided to continue being Premillennialists. (By the way, a careful study of **Matthew 24:29-31** demonstrates it is not about the Second Coming at all, but about the destruction of Jerusalem. But that is for another sermon.)

- D. Not only do we learn that the Premillennialists' use of scripture is inconsistent, subjective and manipulative, we learn from a consistent look at scripture that Jesus' Second Coming has only one event. LaHaye admits that no one Bible passage teaches two phases of Christ's second coming. But he does not want to admit that some Bible passages declare all the dead will be raised at the same time, disallowing this two phase return. **John 5:28-29** declares a coming hour in which all who are in the tombs will be raised, those who submitted to God will be raised to life, those who were wicked will be raised for judgment. In other words, when all in the tombs hear His voice at the coming of the Lord, there will be no one left to resurrect some time later. To believe in the modern two phase return of Christ, we have to perform plastic surgery on this text in the same way LaHaye did on **Titus 2:13**. Somehow, we shove not just seven years of tribulation but also 1000 years of earthly kingdom between these resurrections. Yet Jesus said, "an hour is coming." If Jesus said an hour is coming in which everyone will be resurrected, in what way can we fit a millennium there? How does this affect our understanding of **I Thessalonians 4** and **I Corinthians 15**? Now we understand that those passages were not telling the whole story. They simply explained what will happen to Christians at end. **John 5:28-29** explained what will happen to the wicked at that time. They will not be left behind in the graves, they will be resurrected also.
- E. The modern Rapture theories based on these three passages cannot really fit with the timelines set up by the Premillennialism with which they are said to coincide. Keep in mind that, according to pre-tribulation Rapturists the Rapture will take place, then the events of **Revelation 4-19** occur during the tribulation, then comes the Glorious Appearing. Notice in **I Corinthians 15:52**

(a supposed Rapture passage), this calling home of the church takes place at the “last trumpet”. However, in **Revelation 4-19**, seven more trumpets are sounded. Additionally, in **Matthew 24:31** (supposedly the Glorious Appearing) another trumpet will sound. So, these Rapturists have eight trumpets following the last one. Keep in mind, these guys want to claim they are the only ones that take prophecy literally. But they have a last trumpet that is not a last trumpet. LaHaye tries to cover this up by saying it is “His last trumpet for the church” (**Rapture**, p 35). But that is his manipulation; my Bible just says it is the last trumpet.

F. The long and short of all this is, an examination of these passages and what the Rapturists teach about them and other passages demonstrates that you can not get their theory of Rapture and be consistent.

V. What does the Bible say about the end?

A. **I Thessalonians 4:13-5:3** says that the church will be called to be with Christ when the Lord descends with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet (no doubt, the last trumpet of **I Corinthians 15:52**). But that day of the Lord is coming like a thief. Those walking in darkness will be saying, “Peace and safety” and suddenly they will be destroyed. Notice that the Christians are to prepare and be ready for that day of the Lord (**5:4-8**). To fit with modern Rapture theory, since the Christians are to be ready for this day of the Lord, it can only correspond with that time when the church will be called home just discussed in the previous verses. What happens on that day to the ones who walk in darkness? They are not left behind to suffer a lengthy tribulation. They face “sudden destruction” (KJV).

B. **II Thessalonians 1:5-12** teaches there will come a day when the Lord is revealed from heaven. On that day, He will be glorified and marveled at among all who believe. Just looking at **vs. 10**, we might think that Rapturists claim this as a Rapture passage. After all, surely the day in which Jesus is glorified in His saints and marveled at by those who believe is on the day when they meet Him in the clouds. But no, according to LaHaye, this is talking about the Glorious Appearing. And there is a good reason for this, because on that day God will come in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and did not obey His gospel. Their punishment on that day is not the beginning of a seven-year tribulation. Rather it is eternal destruction. Therefore, it is very detrimental to the whole “left behind” concept to make this passage the Rapture. Now, you tell me. Does this passage fit a two-phase system wherein the saints are called to meet Jesus in the air and then some time later come back with Jesus to destroy those who did not believe? Or does this fit a one-time event when Jesus is revealed to believer and unbeliever alike? On that day, He is glorified and marveled at by those who believe and He destroys those who disbelieve. Which interpretation fits with the passage we read in **I Thessalonians**?

C. For our last scripture to have its full effect, we must couple it with two quotes from LaHaye’s books, Understand that these books were written to defend that the Rapture is to occur before the supposed “Great Tribulation” against those who believe it will occur during or at the end of the Tribulation.

I long have been mystified that good brethren who love the Lord and His return accept the mid- or post-Trib position when it destroys a central teaching of our Lord—that “in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (KJV) and, “Of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36). There is no secrecy about His coming, in their views. Anyone can calculate precisely when He will come. He will return 1,260 days after the signing of the covenant with the Antichrist (if the mid-Trib view is right) or seven years after that event (according to the post-Trib position). Both views effectively destroy imminency! (*sic*) Only the pre-Trib view retains the constant expectation that Christ could come at any moment (**Rapture [Under Attack]**, p 72).

The context of this passage [I Thessalonians 1:9-10] is the Rapture, for Christians are not waiting for the Glorious Appearing. ... No, the Christians in Thessalonica were awaiting the coming of Christ for His church—that is, the Rapture. They already knew the Tribulation (or “wrath to come”) would follow the Rapture, and that is the part that God has promised to keep the Christians “out of” (**Are We Living In The End Times?**, p 111).

I recognize that LaHaye didn't quote a "thief in the night" passage in this paragraph. However, his quote from **Matthew 24:36** is in the context of one (**Matthew 24:42-44**). From LaHaye's own admission, if an event is to occur during or at the end of the so-called "Great Tribulation" it cannot be something which occurs as a thief in the night, because it can be calculated exactly by those who understand the prophecy. Keeping that in mind, read **II Peter 3:10-13**. Like a thief in the night, the day of the Lord will come. On this day of the Lord, the earth will be destroyed. If you couple this passage with LaHaye's arguments against his mid-Trib and post-Trib opponents, you find that LaHaye, and his Rapture-believing cohorts have shot themselves in the foot. You see, in **Are We Living In The End Times?**, LaHaye claims this passage refers to the Glorious Appearing, which is to come at the end of the tribulation. In modern Rapture theory, the Glorious Appearing can be exactly calculated. It cannot possibly be a "thief in the night" event, for the very same reason LaHaye condemns his opponents, he is proven false. Additionally, you will notice that Peter claims the Christians are to be looking for this day. Were you aware this Greek term is elsewhere translated "wait for" (**Luke 1:24; 8:40; Acts 10:24**)? But in the Rapture system, Christians don't wait for the Glorious Appearing because they will not be here. Interestingly, read on to **II Peter 3:14**, notice Peter's instruction to be found by Jesus on that day in peace, spotless and blameless. In other words, this day is the day Jesus comes back to find His church. What else happens on that day? The world is destroyed. There is no room for anyone to be left behind after that day because there is no earth on which to be left behind. So, in reality, this passage doesn't fit with either aspect of the Premillennial Second Coming. Since the earth is destroyed it can't be the "Rapture" as already demonstrated. But it cannot be the Premillennial Glorious Appearing either, because there is no earth on which to establish a physical kingdom after that day. (This, by the way, demonstrates that falsehood of the Mid- and Post-Trib Rapture systems as well.)

- D. What conclusion must we draw about Jesus' return? He is coming. But we do not know when. It will happen as a thief in the night. It could happen tonight. It could happen tomorrow. It could happen 100 years from now. But when it happens, that is it. There will be no one left behind. There will be no earth for them to be left behind on. There will be a resurrection of all the dead. A changing of all the living. And a judgment of all mankind. Those who are of the light will be preserved from the wrath of God and will be with the Lord forever. Those who are of the darkness will suffer eternal destruction. It's really quite simple.

### **Conclusion:**

Not only is the catching up of the church going to happen as a thief in the night, so is the destruction of the world and everything in it (**II Peter 3:10-13**). You will get no second chances when that day arrives. I encourage you to follow Peter's advice. Live a holy life, conducting yourself in all godliness, having become one of God's children by obeying His gospel (**II Thessalonians 1:8**). Then you will escape the wrath that is to come. Then you will be with the Lord forever.