

What's All This Talk About the "Rapture"?

The "rapture" is just ONE feature of a doctrinal system called premillennialism. The cornerstone of premillennialism is the belief that at the second coming of Christ, He will return to the earth and rule over an earthly kingdom for 1000 years.

According to this same doctrinal system, other significant events will occur before this "earthly reign." Prior to Christ's second coming, a seven year period of intense tribulation will take place on the earth. According to most premillennialists, saints will be spared from this tribulation. Both living saints and those who have died in the Lord will be raptured, or caught up to meet the Lord in the air. They will then go to heaven with the Lord, and then come back with Him seven years later. They distinguish between the Lord coming "for" His own and "with" His own.

Other less popular rapture theories: 1) Mid-tribulation theory. Saints will be "raptured" in the **middle** of this tribulation period. 2) Post-tribulation theory. Saints will have to endure this entire period. They will be "raptured" at the **end** of this period and then return immediately with Christ.

According to this same doctrine, the rapture, this coming "for" His saints, will be invisible and secret. Virtually the only sign that He has come will be the disappearance of the saints. Cars will be moving without drivers, machinery will be running without operators, classrooms will be without teachers, etc.

1. What does the English word rapture mean?
2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is probably the main "proof text" used by those who teach the rapture. Using this text, answer the questions below.
 - a. According to this passage, will there be anything secretive or silent about this coming?
 - b. One point they like to make from the above passage is that since only the righteous dead ("dead in Christ") are mentioned, there must be another resurrection at a future date (for the wicked). Examine the context carefully. Why does this passage focus on those who have died in the Lord?
 - c. Are the wicked (those apart from Christ, in darkness) addressed in the following chapter (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)?
3. When you add the rapture to premillennialism, it includes 3 resurrections: 1) At the rapture, when saints of the "church age" are raised; 2) Seven years later at the end of the tribulation, when tribulation period saints and Old Testament faithful are raised; 3) 1000 years later at the end of Christ's reign, when all the wicked will be raised.
 - a. According to the Scriptures, how many bodily resurrections will there be, and what two groups will be included? (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).
 - b. And what "day" will that resurrection be? (John 6:39-40, 44, 54). **(see back)**

4. Another popular “proof text” is 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. After the resurrection described in this passage, what comes “then”? (1 Corinthians 15:20-28, see especially v. 24).

Perhaps the best way to address this doctrine is to put in order the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus, using what is **plainly** taught in a number of Scriptures (instead of speculating on highly **figurative** passages). Below is what we find when we study those plain statements.

1. It is foolish to make predictions about the time of His return, because He will come as “a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). Understanding that a thief does not warn us ahead of time (Luke 12:39), we need to heed the following admonition: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13).
2. His coming, or appearance in the clouds, will be obvious to everyone, because it will be signaled by a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52).
3. At the time of His return, which is described as the “last day,” there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the righteous and the unrighteous (Acts 24:15; John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 12:48). Jesus will speak and “ALL who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth...” (John 5:28-29).
4. The righteous who have died will meet Jesus in the air, followed by the righteous who are still alive (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). This will necessarily involve a separation of the “sheep” from the “goats,” the “wicked” from the “just” (Matthew 25:32-33; 13:49).
5. The righteous, who will be given spiritual or incorruptible bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-54), will then go to heaven to “always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17; see also John 12:16; 14:3; 17:24).
6. The unrighteous, on the other hand, will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8), an eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). They will be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
7. “The heavens will pass away with a great noise...both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). The saved will dwell in what the Bible calls a “new heaven and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).

“When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more...”