
End Times Study

FAQs - Short version

What is the rapture of the church?

The word *rapture* does not occur in the Bible. The term comes from a Latin word meaning “a carrying off, a transport, or a snatching away.” The concept of the “carrying off” or the rapture of the church is clearly taught in Scripture.

The rapture of the church is the event in which God “snatches away” all believers from the earth in order to make way for His righteous judgment to be poured out on the earth during the tribulation period. The rapture is described primarily in [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#) and [1 Corinthians 15:50–54](#). God will resurrect all believers who have died, give them glorified bodies, and take them from the earth, along with all living believers, who will also be given glorified bodies at that time. “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” ([1 Thessalonians 4:16–17](#)).

The rapture will involve an instantaneous transformation of our bodies to fit us for eternity. “We know that when he [Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” ([1 John 3:2](#)). The rapture is to be distinguished from the second coming. At the rapture, the Lord comes “in the clouds” to meet us “in the air” ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). At the second coming, the Lord descends all the way to the earth to stand on the Mount of Olives, resulting in a great earthquake followed by a defeat of God’s enemies ([Zechariah 14:3–4](#)).

The doctrine of the rapture was not taught in the Old Testament, which is why Paul calls it a “mystery” now revealed: “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” ([1 Corinthians 15:51–52](#)).

The rapture of the church is a glorious event we should all be longing for. We will finally be free from sin. We will be in God’s presence forever. There is far too much debate over the meaning and scope of the rapture. This is not God’s intent. Rather, the rapture should be a comforting doctrine full of hope; God wants us to “encourage each other with these words” ([1 Thessalonians 4:18](#)).

What is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?

The second coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of believers that God is in control of all things, and is faithful to the promises and prophecies in His Word. In His first coming, Jesus Christ came to earth as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, just as prophesied. Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies of the Messiah during His birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection. However, there are some prophecies regarding the Messiah that Jesus has not yet fulfilled. The second coming of Christ will be the return of Christ to fulfill these remaining prophecies. In His first coming, Jesus was the suffering Servant. In His second coming, Jesus will be the conquering King. In His first coming, Jesus arrived in the most humble of circumstances. In His second coming, Jesus will arrive with the armies of heaven at His side.

The Old Testament prophets did not make clearly this distinction between the two comings. This can be seen in [Isaiah 7:14](#), [9:6–7](#) and [Zechariah 14:4](#). As a result of the prophecies seeming to speak of two individuals, many

Jewish scholars believed there would be both a suffering Messiah and a conquering Messiah. What they failed to understand is that there is only one Messiah and He would fulfill both roles. Jesus fulfilled the role of the suffering servant (Isaiah chapter 53) in His first coming. Jesus will fulfill the role of Israel's deliverer and King in His second coming. [Zechariah 12:10](#) and [Revelation 1:7](#), describing the second coming, look back to Jesus being pierced. Israel, and the whole world, will mourn for not having accepted the Messiah the first time He came.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels declared to the apostles, "'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'" ([Acts 1:11](#)). [Zechariah 14:4](#) identifies the location of the second coming as the Mount of Olives. [Matthew 24:30](#) declares, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory." [Titus 2:13](#) describes the second coming as a "[glorious appearing](#)."

The second coming is spoken of in greatest detail in [Revelation 19:11-16](#), "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

What is the Tribulation? How do we know the Tribulation will last seven years?

The tribulation is a future seven-year period of time when God will finish His discipline of Israel and finalize His judgment of the unbelieving world. The church, made up of all who have trusted in the person and work of the Lord Jesus to save them from being punished for sin, will not be present during the tribulation. The church will be removed from the earth in an event known as the rapture ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#); [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](#)). The church is saved from the wrath to come ([1 Thessalonians 5:9](#)). Throughout Scripture, the tribulation is referred to by other names such as the Day of the Lord ([Isaiah 2:12](#); [13:6-9](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1-31](#); [3:14](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)); trouble or tribulation ([Deuteronomy 4:30](#); [Zephaniah 1:1](#)); the great tribulation, which refers to the more intense second half of the seven-year period ([Matthew 24:21](#)); time or day of trouble ([Daniel 12:1](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#)); time of Jacob's trouble ([Jeremiah 30:7](#)).

An understanding of [Daniel 9:24-27](#) is necessary in order to understand the purpose and time of the tribulation. This passage speaks of 70 weeks that have been declared against "your people." Daniel's people are the Jews, the nation of Israel, and [Daniel 9:24](#) speaks of a period of time that God has given "to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy." God declares that "seventy sevens" will fulfill all these things. This is 70 sevens of years, or 490 years. (Some translations refer to 70 weeks of years.)

This is confirmed by another part of this passage in Daniel. In verses 25 and 26, Daniel is told that the Messiah will be cut off after "seven sevens and sixty-two sevens" (69 total), beginning with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. In other words, 69 sevens of years (483 years) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah will be cut off. Biblical historians confirm that 483 years passed from the time of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the time when Jesus was crucified. Most Christian scholars, regardless of their view of eschatology (future things/events), have the above understanding of Daniel's 70 sevens.

With 483 years having passed from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the cutting off of the Messiah, this leaves

one seven-year period to be fulfilled in terms of [Daniel 9:24](#): “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.” This final seven-year period is known as the tribulation period—it is a time when God finishes judging Israel for its sin.

[Daniel 9:27](#) gives a few highlights of the seven-year tribulation period: “He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” The person of whom this verse speaks is the person Jesus calls the “abomination that causes desolation” ([Matthew 24:15](#)) and is called “the beast” in [Revelation 13](#). [Daniel 9:27](#) says that the beast will make a covenant for seven years, but in the middle of this week (3 1/2 years into the tribulation), he will break the covenant, putting a stop to sacrifice.

[Revelation 13](#) explains that the beast will place an image of himself in the temple and require the world to worship him. [Revelation 13:5](#) says that this will go on for 42 months, which is 3 1/2 years. Since [Daniel 9:27](#) says that this will happen in the middle of the week, and [Revelation 13:5](#) says that the beast will do this for a period of 42 months, it is easy to see that the total length of time is 84 months or seven years. Also see [Daniel 7:25](#), where the “time, times, and half a time” (time=1 year; times=2 years; half a time=1/2 year; total of 3 1/2 years) also refers to “great tribulation,” the last half of the seven-year tribulation period when the beast will be in power.

For further references about the tribulation, see [Revelation 11:2-3](#), which speaks of 1260 days and 42 months, and [Daniel 12:11-12](#), which speaks of 1290 days and 1335 days. These days have a reference to the midpoint of the tribulation. The additional days in [Daniel 12](#) may include the time at the end for the judgment of the nations ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)) and time for the setting up of Christ’s millennial kingdom ([Revelation 20:4-6](#)).

In summary, the Tribulation is the 7-year time period in the end times in which humanity’s decadence and depravity will reach its fullness, with God judging accordingly.

When is the Rapture going to occur in relation to the Tribulation?

The timing of the rapture in relation to the tribulation is one of the most controversial issues in the church today. The three primary views are pre-tribulational (the rapture occurs before the tribulation), mid-tribulational (the rapture occurs at or near the mid-point of the tribulation), and post-tribulational (the rapture occurs at the end of the tribulation). A fourth view, commonly known as pre-wrath, is a slight modification of the mid-tribulational position.

First, it is important to recognize the purpose of the tribulation. According to [Daniel 9:27](#), there is a seventieth “seven” (seven years) that is still yet to come. Daniel’s entire prophecy of the seventy sevens ([Daniel 9:20-27](#)) is speaking of the nation of Israel. It is a time period in which God focuses His attention especially on Israel. The seventieth seven, the tribulation, must also be a time when God deals specifically with Israel. While this does not necessarily indicate that the church could not also be present, it does bring into question why the church would need to be on the earth during that time.

The primary Scripture passage on the rapture is [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#). It states that all living believers, along with all believers who have died, will meet the Lord Jesus in the air and will be with Him forever. The rapture is God’s removing of His people from the earth. A few verses later, in [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#), Paul says, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The book of Revelation, which deals primarily with the time period of the tribulation, is a prophetic message of how God will pour out His wrath upon the earth during the tribulation. It seems inconsistent for God to promise believers that they will not suffer wrath and then leave them on the earth to suffer through the wrath of the tribulation. The fact that God promises

to deliver Christians from wrath shortly after promising to remove His people from the earth seems to link those two events together.

Another crucial passage on the timing of the rapture is [Revelation 3:10](#), in which Christ promises to deliver believers from the “hour of trial” that is going to come upon the earth. This could mean two things. Either Christ will protect believers in the midst of the trials, or He will deliver believers out of the trials. Both are valid meanings of the Greek word translated “from.” However, it is important to recognize what believers are promised to be kept from. It is not just the trial, but the “hour” of trial. Christ is promising to keep believers from the very time period that contains the trials, namely the tribulation. The purpose of the tribulation, the purpose of the rapture, the meaning of [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#), and the interpretation of [Revelation 3:10](#) all give clear support to the pre-tribulational position. If the Bible is interpreted literally and consistently, the pre-tribulational position is the most biblically-based interpretation.

Will there be a second chance for salvation after the Rapture?

Some Bible interpreters believe that there will be absolutely no chance for salvation after the rapture. However, there is no place in the Bible that says this or even hints to it. There will be many people who come to Christ during the tribulation. The 144,000 Jewish witnesses ([Revelation 7:4](#)) are Jewish believers. If no one can come to Christ during the tribulation, then why are people being beheaded for their faith ([Revelation 20:4](#))? No passage of Scripture argues against people having a chance to be saved after the rapture. Many passages indicate the opposite.

Another view is that those who hear the gospel and reject it before the rapture cannot be saved. Those saved during the tribulation, then, are those who had never heard the gospel before the rapture. The “proof text” for this view is [2 Thessalonians 2:9-11](#), which says the antichrist will work miracles to deceive “those who are perishing” and that God Himself will “send them a powerful delusion” to confirm them in their unbelief. The reason given is that “they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (verse 10). Granted, those who are hard-hearted toward the gospel before the rapture are likely to remain so. And the antichrist will deceive many ([Matthew 24:5](#)). But “those who refused to love the truth” does not necessarily refer to people who heard the gospel before the rapture. It could be anyone who wholly rejects God’s salvation, at any time. So, there is no clear scriptural evidence to support this view.

[Revelation 6:9-11](#) speaks of those martyred during the tribulation “because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.” These martyrs will correctly interpret what they see during the tribulation and will believe the gospel themselves and call on others to repent and believe as well. The antichrist and his followers will not tolerate their evangelism and will kill them. All of these martyrs are people who were alive before the rapture, but who were not believers until afterward. Therefore, there must be opportunity to come to Christ in faith after the rapture.

What is the great white throne judgment?

The great white throne judgment is described in [Revelation 20:11-15](#) and is the final judgment prior to the lost being cast into the lake of fire. We know from [Revelation 20:7-15](#) that this judgment will take place after the millennium and after Satan is thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are ([Revelation 19:19-20](#); [20:7-10](#)). The books that are opened ([Revelation 20:12](#)) contain records of everyone’s deeds, whether they are good or evil, because God knows everything that has ever been said, done, or even thought, and He will reward or punish each one accordingly ([Psalm 28:4](#); [62:12](#); [Romans 2:6](#); [Revelation 2:23](#); [18:6](#); [22:12](#)).

Also at this time, another book is opened, called the “book of life” ([Revelation 20:12](#)). It is this book that determines whether a person will inherit eternal life with God or receive everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

Although Christians are held accountable for their actions, they are forgiven in Christ and their names were written in the “book of life from the creation of the world” ([Revelation 17:8](#)). We also know from Scripture that it is at this judgment when the dead will be “judged according to what they had done” ([Revelation 20:12](#)) and that “anyone’s name” that is not “found written in the book of life” will be “thrown into the lake of fire” ([Revelation 20:15](#)).

The fact that there is going to be a final judgment for all people, both believers and unbelievers, is clearly confirmed in many passages of Scripture. Every person will one day stand before Christ and be judged for his or her deeds. While it is very clear that the great white throne judgment is the final judgment, Christians disagree on how it relates to the other judgments mentioned in the Bible, specifically, who will be judged at the great white throne judgment.

Some Christians believe that the Scriptures reveal three different judgments to come. The first is the judgment of the sheep and the goats or a judgment of the nations ([Matthew 25:31-36](#)). This takes place after the tribulation period but prior to the millennium; its purpose is to determine who will enter the millennial kingdom. The second is a judgment of believers’ works, often referred to as the “judgment seat [bema] of Christ” ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)). At this judgment, Christians will receive degrees of reward for their works or service to God. The third is the great white throne judgment at the end of the millennium ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)). This is the judgment of unbelievers in which they are judged according to their works and sentenced to everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

Other Christians believe that all three of these judgments speak of the same final judgment, not of three separate judgments. In other words, the great white throne judgment in [Revelation 20:11-15](#) will be the time that believers and unbelievers alike are judged. Those whose names are found in the book of life will be judged for their deeds in order to determine the rewards they will receive or lose. Those whose names are not in the book of life will be judged according to their deeds to determine the degree of punishment they will receive in the lake of fire. Those who hold this view believe that [Matthew 25:31-46](#) is another description of what takes place at the great white throne judgment. They point to the fact that the result of this judgment is the same as what is seen after the great white throne judgment in [Revelation 20:11-15](#). The sheep (believers) enter into eternal life, while the goats (unbelievers) are cast into “eternal punishment” ([Matthew 25:46](#)).

Whichever view one holds of the great white throne judgment, it is important to never lose sight of the facts concerning the coming judgment(s). First, Jesus Christ will be the judge, all unbelievers will be judged by Christ, and they will be punished according to the works they have done. The Bible is very clear that unbelievers are storing up wrath against themselves ([Romans 2:5](#)) and that God will “repay each person according to what they have done” ([Romans 2:6](#)). Believers will also be judged by Christ, but since Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us and our names are written in the book of life, we will be rewarded, not punished, according to our deeds. [Romans 14:10-12](#) says that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and that each one of us will give an account to God.