

1. Introduction

The 'Rapture' is a common theological belief that teaches the bride of Christ will be taken to heaven before a future seven-year tribulation.

Previously, we demonstrated that the apostles taught the sign of the Son of Man's return would occur before the Tribulation.

We have a seven-part series on the [Tribulation starting here](#). In that series, we learned that the Great Tribulation had to be fulfilled within 40 years of Jesus' teaching on the Great Tribulation for Jesus to be a true prophet. There are also lessons on the [seven-year peace treaty](#) and the [Antichrist](#) that are pertinent to the rapture. Anyone wanting to study Eschatology in detail should start with [Jesus' prophecy about the Last Days here](#).

A. Darbyism

Until 1840, all theologians agreed that the rapture was the final return of Christ directly before the Great White Throne of Judgement. John Nelson Darby, the father of rapture theology and modern dispensationalism, is the subject of [our discussion on the Millennium](#).

B. "Left Behind" Series

The concept that followers of Jesus will be taken to heaven before the tribulation and that their garments will be neatly folded upon their departure from Earth, as Jesus' were when he was resurrected, was popularised in [Tim LaHaye's Left Behind](#) series. For adherents to [Left Behind](#), this theology presents multiple biblical challenges.

2. Thessalonian 'Rapture' Scripture

Let us begin with the most popular scripture cited by proponents of 'rapture theology' in First Thessalonians:

1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17

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. 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. 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.**

A. Great White Throne of Judgment

The first issue for 'rapturists' with this scripture is that the resurrection of the dead in Christ occurs immediately before the Great White Throne of Judgement.

REVELATION 20:11-13

THEN I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE AND HIM WHO SAT ON IT, FROM WHOSE FACE THE EARTH AND THE HEAVEN FLED AWAY. AND THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM. AND I SAW THE DEAD, SMALL AND GREAT, STANDING BEFORE GOD, AND BOOKS WERE OPENED. AND ANOTHER BOOK WAS OPENED, WHICH IS THE BOOK OF LIFE. AND THE DEAD WERE JUDGED ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS, BY THE THINGS WHICH WERE WRITTEN IN THE BOOKS. **THE SEA GAVE UP THE DEAD WHO WERE IN IT, AND DEATH AND HADES DELIVERED UP THE DEAD WHO WERE IN THEM. AND THEY WERE JUDGED, EACH ONE ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS.**

B. After the Millennium

If we consider the preceding verses in Revelation 20, the resurrection occurs after the Millennium concludes. This contradicts the rapture theory, which posits that it occurs before the Millennium. Verse 11 explicitly states that the resurrection takes place after the Millennium, as previously established.

REVELATION 20:4-5

... AND THEY LIVED AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST FOR A THOUSAND YEARS. BUT THE REST OF THE DEAD DID NOT LIVE AGAIN UNTIL THE THOUSAND YEARS WERE FINISHED. THIS IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION.

The dead in Christ coming to life is called the "First Resurrection."

(In Millennium, we learned that the word for a literal thousand is a different word for its translation here, which is for a long period of time of unknown length.)

C. After Satan's Release

The first resurrection must also occur after Satan is temporarily released, which is the current chronological position. Satan's final rebellion occurs after the Millennium concludes.

REVELATION 20:7

WHEN THE THOUSAND YEARS HAVE EXPIRED, SATAN WILL BE RELEASED FROM HIS PRISON

D. We Shall Always Be with the Lord

The verse in Thessalonians continues saying:

**1 THESSALONIANS 4:17
AND THUS WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD.**

The reference to being caught up is linked to eternity with God in heaven, not a Millennial reign.

E. Thessalonian Day of the Lord

The next chapter of Thessalonian starts with the word 'But':

**1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-2
BUT CONCERNING THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS, BRETHREN, YOU HAVE NO NEED THAT I SHOULD WRITE TO YOU. FOR YOU YOURSELVES KNOW PERFECTLY THAT THE DAY OF THE LORD SO COMES AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.**

The use of the word "But" is intentional, as Paul now shifts from the final return of Jesus in Chapter Four to His coming in judgment on Jerusalem, like a thief in the night in Chapter 5. He appeared above Jerusalem with His armies as the sign of the Son of Man on 21 May, 66 CE, witnessed by millions of Jews and recorded by three historians.

Therefore, we must be cautious not to assume that Chapters four and five relate to the same coming of Christ. Chapter four concerns His final return to save us from death.

**HEBREWS 9:28
SO CHRIST WAS OFFERED ONCE TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY. TO THOSE WHO EAGERLY WAIT FOR HIM HE WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME, APART FROM SIN, FOR SALVATION.**

This verse refers to His first advent and His future final return.

F. Thief in the night

In Chapter 5, Jesus refers to His coming as a thief because a thief comes to rob. This is not a reference to His final coming but rather to His coming in judgement of Israel.

The reference in Thessalonians used to 'prove' the rapture refers to the final return of Christ after the millennium, following the final release of Satan to attack the nations. This event immediately precedes the Great White Throne of Judgement. It is not the 'coming in the night' that is referred to, which is the coming in judgement of Israel during the First Jewish-Roman War.

3. Corinthian 'Rapture' Passage

The next passage touted as proof of a coming rapture is found in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-54

BEHOLD, I TELL YOU A MYSTERY: WE SHALL NOT ALL SLEEP, BUT WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED— 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. FOR THIS CORRUPTIBLE MUST PUT ON INCORRUPTION, AND THIS MORTAL MUST PUT ON IMMORTALITY. SO WHEN THIS CORRUPTIBLE HAS PUT ON INCORRUPTION, AND THIS MORTAL HAS PUT ON IMMORTALITY, THEN SHALL BE BROUGHT TO PASS THE SAYING THAT IS WRITTEN: "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY."

A. Last Trumpet

The timing of this verse places it at the end, when the last trumpet sounds. For the first 1800 years, readers of the Bible, including teachers and theologians, have understood this scripture to refer to the final return of Jesus. It is only because of the teaching of the past one hundred and eighty years and the Scofield Reference Bible that people have misread this as some kind of rapture.

In our topic on the Feast of Trumpets we learned that trumpets are blown when there is a change in authority, for example when there is a new king.

B. Jesus Hands the Kingdom Back to the Father

The timing of the Last Trump is when the authority of the kingdom is returned to the Father, as seen in the preceding verses:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24-26

THEN COMES THE END, WHEN HE DELIVERS THE KINGDOM TO GOD THE FATHER, WHEN HE PUTS AN END TO ALL RULE AND ALL AUTHORITY AND POWER. FOR HE MUST REIGN TILL HE HAS PUT ALL ENEMIES UNDER HIS FEET. THE LAST ENEMY THAT WILL BE DESTROYED IS DEATH.

Jesus only returns the kingdom to the Father upon His final return. This is still to come because death has not been completely defeated. Although I have eternal life, I will, like you, die physically. The only people who will not do so are those referred to in both Corinthians and Thessalonians as being caught up to heaven at the instant Jesus returns to save us from mortality, thereby making our bodies incorruptible.

If the kingdom has been handed to the Father, then using the name of Jesus to heal would not be necessary. This is another reason to reject the full-preterist view that Jesus has returned for the final time in 66 or 70 CE.

4. One Taken, One Left Behind

The next scripture frequently cited by rapture teachers is Jesus' Last Days Prophecy.

LUKE 17:34-36

I TELL YOU, ON THAT NIGHT THERE WILL BE TWO MEN IN ONE BED: ONE WILL BE **TAKEN, AND THE OTHER WILL BE LEFT. TWO WOMEN WILL BE GRINDING TOGETHER: ONE WILL BE TAKEN, AND THE OTHER LEFT. TWO MEN WILL BE IN THE FIELD: ONE WILL BE TAKEN AND THE OTHER LEFT."**

A. Taken Up

The Greek word for taken is:

- παραλαμβάνω paralambanō; to receive near,

Those who interpret this passage as referring to the rapture believe it confirms that those taken are the ones the Lord takes to Himself in the air. However, other uses of the word indicate it is not limited to being received by God. For example, here is a passage where one man takes another:

ACTS 15:39

THEN THE CONTENTION BECAME SO SHARP THAT THEY PARTED FROM ONE ANOTHER. AND SO BARNABAS TOOK MARK AND SAILED TO CYPRUS;

And then in this example it talks about evil spirits being brought by the devil:

LUKE 11:36

THEN HE GOES AND TAKES WITH HIM SEVEN OTHER SPIRITS MORE WICKED THAN HIMSELF, AND THEY ENTER AND DWELL THERE; AND THE LAST STATE OF THAT MAN IS WORSE THAN THE FIRST."

There is no evidence to support the claim that this must mean they are received by the Lord. Therefore, what does Jesus mean?

B. A Time of Judgment

Firstly, we learn that this occurs during a time of judgement. It is compared to the flood of Noah, where all was normal before the sudden onset of the flood.

LUKE 17:26-27

AND AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, SO IT WILL BE ALSO IN THE DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN: THEY ATE, THEY DRANK, THEY MARRIED WIVES, THEY WERE GIVEN IN MARRIAGE, UNTIL THE DAY THAT NOAH ENTERED THE ARK, AND THE FLOOD CAME AND DESTROYED THEM ALL.

And also with Sodom and Gomorrah:

LUKE 17:28-30

LIKewise, AS IT WAS ALSO IN THE DAYS OF LOT: THEY ATE, THEY DRANK, THEY BOUGHT, THEY SOLD, THEY PLANTED, THEY BUILT; BUT ON THE DAY THAT LOT WENT OUT OF SODOM, IT RAINED FIRE AND BRIMSTONE FROM HEAVEN AND DESTROYED THEM ALL. EVEN SO, WILL IT BE IN THE DAY WHEN THE SON OF MAN IS REVEALED.

This period of judgement was to occur within forty years of Jesus's prophecy, or he would be a false prophet. Is there evidence of this within the next forty years? A resounding yes.

5. Historical Evidence for Being “Raptured”

A. Prelude to the Great Tribulation

In our topic, Dating the Great Tribulation, we learned that the Jews and particularly followers of Jesus understood:

- * The Roman siege of Jerusalem on 30 October 66 CE was the abomination of desolation.

LUKE 21:20

"BUT WHEN YOU SEE JERUSALEM SURROUNDED BY ARMIES, THEN KNOW THAT ITS DESOLATION IS NEAR.

- * The XII Fulminata legion, bearing the lightning insignia and eagle, was a sign.
- * The legion's movement from east to west was a divine sign.
- * The carcass was the followers of the Old Covenant that had died on the cross.

MATTHEW 24:27-28

FOR AS THE LIGHTNING COMES FROM THE EAST AND FLASHES TO THE WEST, SO ALSO WILL THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN BE. FOR WHEREVER THE CARCASS IS, THERE THE EAGLES WILL BE GATHERED TOGETHER.

B. Flee to the Mountains

These events fulfilled Jesus' prophecy that they must flee to the mountains.

MATTHEW 24:16-17 STATES:

"THEN LET THOSE WHO ARE IN JUDEA FLEE TO THE MOUNTAINS. LET HIM WHO IS ON THE ROOFTOP NOT GO DOWN TO TAKE ANYTHING OUT OF HIS HOUSE."

From approximately 9 November until 15 December 66 CE, the wise Jews and Christians escaped Jerusalem following Jesus' prophetic warning and fled to:

- * Mesopotamia (Iraq)
- * The Mediterranean (Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey)
- * Within Judea (Masada and Petra)

In the same lesson, we learned that on 27 December 66 CE Nero the Antichrist declared war on the Jews, marking the beginning of the 2300-day Great Tribulation and the beginning of the First Jewish-Roman War.

It was only a matter of months before people started to be taken from the grinding wheels and the fields by Romans, Jews and Idumeans (Edomites). This was not a rapture; some were taken for execution, captivity or slavery, while others were left to work in the fields to ensure the Roman army had food.

C. Romans

During the Galilee Campaign of 67 CE and the Subjugation of Judea in 68 CE, men and women were often taken captive by the Romans. However Vespasian did not want to destroy the agricultural infrastructure as it was necessary to feed their legions.

- Sepphoris and Tiberias were cities that the populace chose not to fight. They were left behind and were allowed out into the fields to work.
- Yet in Gabara and Jotapata, Vespasian ordered the entire adult male population was slaughtered and the surrounding villages were burned
- Under Vespasian, in Tarichaeae, 1,200 were executed, 6000 were taken to dig the Corinth canal and 30,000 were sold into the slave market.

This directly fulfils Jesus's statement that some will be taken from the fields and others left behind.

D. Jews Taking Jews

Between late 68 and early 69 CE Simon Ben Giora travelled throughout Judea and Idumea to recruit men for his army to attack Jerusalem.

John Gischala began recruiting farmers in 66 CE. As Vespasian marched through Galilee and Judea, John took these men from the fields and placed them in his army.

When Gischala fell, he led his army and a large group of farmers to Jerusalem. As they were being overtaken, John left the farmers unprotected, resulting in a Roman massacre.

E. Idumeans

John of Gischala deceived the Idumeans that the Jews of Jerusalem were defecting to the Romans. They joined Simon Ben Giora to attack Jerusalem. The Idumeans, who were Gentile Edomites converted to Judaism, massacred 8,500 people inside Jerusalem, including the high priests and the entire priesthood. This action resulted in the Jews fleeing from the farms throughout Judea. The Gentile Idumeans then trampled the city of Jerusalem for 42 months in fulfilment of Revelation prophecy.

Jesus set a time limit of forty years for the separation of those taken and those left behind. This period was fulfilled between 67 and 70 CE when some were taken captive and others were left to work in the fields by the Romans, Jews and Idumeans.

6. Jesus' Letter to the Church in Philadelphia

The final scripture used to justify the rapture before the Great Tribulation is in His letter to the Philadelphia church, where Jesus said:

REVELATION 3:10-11

BECAUSE YOU HAVE KEPT MY COMMAND TO PERSEVERE, I ALSO WILL KEEP YOU FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL WHICH SHALL COME UPON THE WHOLE WORLD, TO TEST THOSE WHO DWELL ON THE EARTH. BEHOLD, I AM COMING QUICKLY! HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE, THAT NO ONE MAY TAKE YOUR CROWN.

Followers of rapture theology have taken this passage from the letter to the Philadelphian church out of context, claiming that believers 2000 years later will not have to endure the future tribulation. Revelation was written by John in 62–64 CE, not the 90s, as demonstrated in our [Introduction to Revelation](#). John wrote the book before the destruction of Jerusalem. The First Roman War would indeed come swiftly, and Philadelphia was not attacked by the Romans. They did not experience the hour of trial that Samaria, Judea and ultimately Jerusalem did in 67–70 CE, during the early days of the [Great Tribulation](#), when [Jesus prophesied it would occur within forty years](#).

In this passage, Jesus states, “***I am coming quickly!***” The Greek word for ‘quickly’ is not to be interpreted as ‘suddenly’ but rather as ‘soon’. It is not talking about 2000 years later it would start shortly through Nero and the First Jewish-Roman War.