

The Rapture: Up, Up and Away

Why God needs to rescue his people before the day of the Lord begins...

1. The day of the Lord is a time of worldwide disaster as a direct punishment against human sin.

⁹ See, the day of the LORD is coming
—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—
to make the land desolate
and destroy the sinners within it.

¹⁰ The stars of heaven and their constellations
will not show their light.

The rising sun will be darkened
and the moon will not give its light.

¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil,
the wicked for their sins.

I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty
and will humble the pride of the ruthless. (Isa 13:9-11)

2. The day of the Lord is part of the transition from human power to God's kingdom.

⁴⁴ "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (Dan 2:44-45)

3. God has always rescued godly people from his wrath. If it was true in the past, it is true now.

The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation." (Gen 7:1)

"But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.) By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. (Gen 19:22-24)

4. While God sometimes judged his people as a whole for their sin in ancient times, the church is fundamentally different. We are sinless, washed clean by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9-10; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 1:7), indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:11), with a new identity (Eph 2:3-6). **We are not only *not* the targets of God's wrath, we are members of his family and reflect the righteousness of Christ.**

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life. (Rom 5:9-10)

5. Jesus specifically mentions the flood and the ark in his description of his return. He emphasizes the imminency of his return (that he is coming like a thief—i.e., without warning) and he includes a cryptic description of people disappearing.

³⁶ "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. (Matt 24:36-41)

The Key Passage:

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13-18)

1. "Rapture" is a Latin word meaning "caught up."
2. Paul is responding to a concern that the people who have already died will miss out on the events relating to the day of the Lord. Specifically, the one where Jesus returns for his people.

3. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' promise in John 14 to come and bring us back to where he is.

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:1-3)

4. It is the same event described in 1 Cor 15 in connection with the resurrection of believers (not to be confused with the resurrection of nonbelievers).

⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in 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. ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor 15:50-54)

5. The rapture will happen without warning, and it precedes the day of the Lord. We will be saved from the day of the Lord.

¹Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that **the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night**. ³While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹**For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.** ¹⁰**He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.** ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thess 5:1-11)

Rapture in our Cultural Imagination

- The Snap
- Alien abduction

A Question of Timing

There are (said to be) five different views of the timing of the rapture:

- Pre-tribulation rapture
- Mid-tribulation rapture
- Post-tribulation rapture
- Partial rapture
- Pre-wrath rapture

1. The entire time frame of Daniel's seventieth seven is included in the day of the Lord, and it has a worldwide scope. Anyone left on earth will necessarily feel the consequences of God's wrath.

¹⁵Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Rev 6:15-16)

2. There are 144,000 people who are sealed and survive the seven years (Rev 7:1-8; 14:1-5), but they do live through and experience God's wrath.
3. In Revelation 3:10, Jesus' promise to the church in Philadelphia (which is typical of faithful Christians in the current age) is to keep them from the time frame of his wrath, not to protect them during it.

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. (Rev 3:10)

4. The church (*ekklesia*) is not mentioned or pictured on earth in Revelation chapters 4-19, until the return of Christ in Rev 19:14.
5. The return of Christ for the church is described as imminent (without warning), but the day of the Lord and the return of Christ to earth will unfold after a series of predictable signs (Matt 24; 2 Thess 2). If the rapture doesn't precede Daniel's 70th seven, then the church will have warning and won't be surprised.
6. Daniel's 70th seven is part of God's plan for Israel, not the church (Dan 9:24). When we leave, the Holy Spirit will also, but unbelieving Israel will remain for the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy.

⁶And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. (2 Thes 2:6-7)

7. The rapture is not described in a way that fits the return of Christ to earth. It is a peaceful and joyful time of reunion, not the scene of apocalyptic battle and carnage in Rev 19. It is to bring us to where Jesus is, not to take us right back to earth to fight. There is therefore more than one "coming" of Jesus, and more than one resurrection of the dead. But that's what Scripture literally indicates. Trying to combine them to simplify matters creates bigger problems.

