

THE RAPTURE AND GLORIOUS APPEARING OF JESUS CHRIST

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The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus Christ will "come again" (John 14:3) and "appear the second time" (Hebrews 9:38). At least nine biblical terms are used in the New Testament to describe the return of Christ.¹

1. Ho erchomenos. "The coming one," as in Hebrews 10:37, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come."
2. Erchomai. The act of coming. Used often of Christ's return. Cf. Matthew 24:30; John 14:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Jude 14; Revelation 1:7; 22:20.
3. Katabaino. To "come down" or descend, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout."
4. Heko. Result of one's coming, to have "arrived," as in Revelation 3:3, "I will come as a thief."
5. Parousia. Denotes arrival and presence (of a ruler), as in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"
6. Apokalupsis. Meaning to "unveil" or "uncover." Rendered "appearing" (1 Peter 1:7) or "coming" (1 Corinthians 1:7) or "revelation" (Revelation 1:1). Involves the unveiling of His divine glory.
7. Phaneroo. To "appear" (John 21:1) or be "manifest" (1 John 3:5). As in 1 John 3:2, "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. but we know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is."
8. Epiphaino. To "appear" in full light or visibility. Denotes the "brightness" of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8) and the glory of "that day... unto all them that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

9. Horao. To "see with the eyes," or to "appear" visibly, as in Hebrews 9:28, "and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time."

NATURE OF HIS COMING

The Bible predicts the literal personal return of Jesus Christ to rapture His church, to judge the world and to establish His Kingdom on earth. At times this is described as one grand event. At other times it is clearly divided into separate phases.

1. Personal. The intensive pronoun "himself" means the Lord and no other, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven."
2. Literal. He will return as He ascended literally. Acts 1:11 promises: "This same Jesus, who is taken up from you, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven." Revelation 1:7 promises that "every eye shall see him."
3. Glorious. He will return in the glory of His deity. Matthew 16:27, "in the glory of his Father." Matthew 25:31, "in his glory." Matthew 24:30, "...great glory."
4. Powerful. Jesus will return in the "glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). He will employ angels of power (1:7) to establish His Kingdom on earth as He comes with His angelic heavenly escort (Matthew 25:31).

TIME OF HIS COMING

Most evangelicals agree as to the nature of Christ's return, but there is substantial disagreement on the time of His coming. Notice these key aspects of the time of our Lord's return:

1. Future. The entire emphasis of the New Testament points to a future return of Christ. He promised "I will come again" (John 14:3). The angels promised He would return (Acts 1:11). The apostles taught the certainty of His future return (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 3:3-8; 1 John 3:2-3).
2. Progressive. The present tense of "cometh" in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 indicates that He is in the process of coming again, marking the steady, uninterrupted movement of time toward that certain day. Hebrews 10:37, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."
3. Imminent. The return of Christ is always described as potentially imminent or "at hand" (Revelation 1:3; 22:10). Every generation of believers is warned to be ready for His coming. Luke 12:40, "be... ready also: for the Son of Man comes at an hour you think not." Believers are constantly urged to look for the coming of the Lord (see Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 9:28; Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

4. Distant. From God's perspective, Jesus is coming at any moment. But from the human perspective it has already been nearly 2,000 years. Jesus hinted at this in the Olivet Discourse in the illustration of the man who traveled into a "far country" (heaven) and was gone "a long time" (Matthew 25:19). Peter also implies this in his prediction that men will begin to scoff at the second coming after a long period of time (2 Peter 3:8-9).
5. Undated. While the Rapture is the next major event on the prophetic calendar, it is undated as is the glorious appearing of Christ. Jesus said: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, not even the angels of heaven" (Matthew 24:36). Later he added: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons" (Acts 1:7).
6. Unexpected. The mass of humanity will not be looking for Christ when He returns (Matthew 24:50; Luke 21:35). They will be saying, "peace and safety," when caught unprepared by His return. So unexpected will be His return that, "as a snare shall it come upon them that dwell on the whole face of the earth" (Luke 21:35).
7. Sudden. The Bible warns that Jesus will come "as a thief in the night (and) then sudden destruction" will come upon the unbelieving world (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). His return for the Bride will occur in a flash: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye... for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead (believers) shall be raised incorruptible, and we (living believers) shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

TWO ASPECTS OF HIS COMING

The Second Coming of Christ is a series of events fulfilling all end-time prophecies. These include predictions of Christ's coming for His Church and with His Church. Pretribulationists generally divide the Second Coming into two main phases: the Rapture of the Church and the Glorious Appearing of Christ.

The Rapture (or translation) of the Church is often paralleled to the "raptures" of Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:12) or the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:9), all of whom were "taken up" into heaven. The Bible clearly states: 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 (Greek, *harpazo*) 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, italics added).

The hope of the Church is the Rapture. She awaits the Savior who is coming for His bride. The Church does not await the destruction of the world as unbelievers do, she awaits a Person. Peter explains that the present world is "reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:7, italics added). While the Church is

warned to prepare for suffering and persecution throughout the Church Age, she is not as the object of God's final wrath.

The Church is promised that the "coming of the Lord" will result in her being "gathered together" (Greek, episunagoges) into him" (2 Thessalonians 2: 1).² It is this promise of the Rapture, not the Wrath, that is in view in Revelation 3:10, "I will keep you from (Greek, ek "out of") the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world." Notice that the Church is to be kept from not through, the hour of tribulation. We are to wait for Jesus to come from heaven to "deliver us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

The Rapture will take up those who have died in Christ over the centuries and those believers who are alive when He returns. This will occur in the future. Jesus said: "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out" (John 5:28). Believers are pictured as being raised to life (first resurrection) to reign with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-5).

There can be no doubt that the Bible teaches a Rapture ("caught up," or "gathering together") of the Church. Amillennialists and Post-millennialists miss this point altogether. There will be a Rapture, or 1 and 2 Thessalonians need to be removed from the New Testament! The only real question is when will it occur?

THE ORDER OF THE RAPTURE

By combining John 14:13, I Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, Tim LaHaye suggests the following sequence of events:³

1. Jesus Christ descends from heaven (John 14:1-3; I Thess. 4:16).
2. He comes to receive us (church) unto Himself (John 14:13).
3. He comes in the "twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52) with a shout and the trumpet call of God (1 Thess. 4:16).
4. He resurrects those believers who have "fallen asleep" in death (1 Thess. 4:14-15).
5. Those who are alive at that time will be "caught up" (Rapture) with the resurrected Church in the clouds (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53).

The Rapture will be followed by:

1. Judgment Seat of Christ (Romans 14:20; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10) and
2. Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

These two events precede the return of Christ in power and glory at Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21).

CONTRAST BETWEEN THE RAPTURE AND GLORIOUS APPEARING

RAPTURE	GLORIOUS APPEARING
1. Christ comes for His own (John 14:3; 1Thess. 4:17; 2Thess. 2:1).	1. Christ comes with His own (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14; Rev. 19:14).
2. He comes in the air (1 Thess. 4:17)	2. He comes to the earth (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11).
3. He claims His bride	3. He comes with His bride (Rev. 19:6-14).
4. Removal of believers (1 Thess 4:17).	4. Manifestation of Christ (Mal. 4:2).
5. Only His own see Him (1 Thess. 4:13-18)	5. Every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7).
6. Tribulation begins.	6. Millennial Kingdom begins.
7. Saved are delivered from wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5-9)	7. Unsaved experience the wrath of God (Rev. 6:12-17).
8. No signs precede Rapture (1 Thess. 5:1-3).	8. Signs precede glorious appearing (Luke 21:11, 15).
9. Focus: Lord and Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18).	9. Focus: Israel and Kingdom (Matthew 24:14).
10. World is deceived. (2 Thess. 2:3-12)	10. Satan is bound (Rev. 20:1-2).

REASONS FOR A PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

1. Christ promised to keep the Church from the Tribulation. In Revelation 3:10, the risen Christ said the Church would be kept from (Literally, "preserved" or "protected out of") the hour of trial, or divine retribution, that is coming on the whole world.
2. Tribulation judgments are the "wrath of the Lamb." Revelation 6:16 depicts the

cataclysmic judgments of the end times as the wrath of Christ. Whereas, Revelation 19:7-9 depicts the Church as the bride of the Lamb. She is not the object of His wrath which is poured out on an unbelieving world.

3. Jesus told his disciples to pray they would escape the Tribulation. In Luke 21:36 He said: "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen. Remember, even Lot was given a chance to escape Sodom before divine judgment fell.
4. His coming in the clouds means the Church's deliverance has come. Jesus told His disciples: "Lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). The hope of the Church is not in surviving the judgment of Tribulation, but escaping it.
5. God will call His ambassadors home before declaring war on the world. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, believers are called "Christ's Ambassadors" who appeal to the world to be reconciled to God before it is too late.
6. Moral restraint will disappear when the Church is taken home. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11 warns that after the "coming of the Lord" and "our being gathered to Him," the "man of lawlessness" (Antichrist) will emerge on the world scene. The Church's restraining ministry of "salt" and "light" will no longer hold back the tide of evil.
7. The Rapture will happen in the "twinkling of an eye." 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 promises that "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye... the dead shall be raised imperishable and we (living at the Rapture) will be changed." This instantaneous disappearance will terminate the Church's earthly ministry.
8. The Rapture will take place in the air. Unlike the glorious appearing when Christ descends to earth, splits the Mount of Olives, overthrows Antichrist and binds Satan, the Rapture will occur when we are "caught up together... to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17).
9. Woman who suffers persecution during the Tribulation symbolizes Israel. This is a very important point. The woman who delivers the male child (Christ) represents the nation of Israel. Israel, not the Church, brought forth Christ, and He in turn, brought forth the Church. He is the founder of the Church, not its descendant. Therefore, the persecuted "saints" of the Tribulation are Jewish - the remnant of the woman's seed (Revelation 12:1-2, 5-6, 17).
10. Marriage of Christ (Lamb) and His Bride (Church) takes place before the Battle of Armageddon. The Bible describes the fall of "Babylon" (Kingdom of Antichrist) in Revelation 17-18. But before it tells of Christ's return to conquer the Antichrist, it tells us "the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7-8). This clearly indicates the Bride has been taken to heaven earlier and that she returns with Christ and the host of the "armies of heaven... dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (Rev. 19:8, 14).

¹ 1. See Herman A. Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 63-65.

² A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1931 reprint), Vol. IV, p. 47. He notes that *episcunagoges* is a late word found only in 2 Maccabees 2:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Hebrews 10:25. It means "assembly" or "collection." Robertson notes that it refers to the rapture in 2 Thess. 2:1.

³ Tim LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1992), pp. 28-31.