

## BLESSED HOPE BIBLE PROPHECY STUDY

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### *“What is the Rapture of the Church?”*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Open your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4. But do some quick finger stretching exercises, because we are going to look at quite a few passages. Our topic is going to be the **“Rapture of the Church.”** Let’s read from 1 Thessalonians and then we’ll take a close look at what the Bible has to say about our Blessed Hope. Beginning in verse 13 Paul writes:

**<sup>13</sup>But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.**

**<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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.**

**<sup>18</sup>Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

Even though he was only in Thessalonica for a short period of time, the Apostle Paul taught the new believers there all about the return of the Lord.

Why did he do that?

Because, as he wrote in Titus 2:13, Paul was looking for the Blessed Hope of Jesus’ return. He believed that the Lord could return at any moment and take the church out of this world. And he had instructed these babes in Christ to serve Jesus and wait for Him to save them from the **“wrath to come”** (1 Thessalonians 1:10). This time of trouble is the seven-year Tribulation we talked about last time. But after Paul left, there was some confusion about what Paul had taught them.

Some were saying that those who had died missed out on this glorious event. So he wrote this letter, in part, to comfort them in the knowledge that all church-age believers would be taken up when Jesus returns. The dead in Christ will rise first, and then the rest of us (who are still alive) will be taken away.

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This passage in 1 Thessalonians is the clearest teaching on the Rapture of the church. And virtually all Christians believe in this doctrine.

But there is some debate about the timing of the Rapture. This has led to much division in the church, especially in the last 20 years or so. Just like we saw last time with the differing views on the Second Coming, so there are differing views on the Rapture. Believers fall basically into one of four camps:

1. First, there is the post-Tribulation view, *post* meaning *after* the Tribulation.
2. Second, there is the mid-Tribulation view which sees the Rapture happening at the 3½-year mark of the Tribulation.
3. Third, there is the pre-wrath view, which places the Rapture at the ¾ mark of the Tribulation.
4. And, fourth, there is the pre-Tribulation view, which has the Lord taking His bride out of the world before this time of trouble.

In a little while we are going to explore each of these views in more depth. But as we move along, I want you to keep something in mind. Ask yourselves a question:

Which of these views fits best with what Paul said to these believers in Thessalonica about comforting one another with his teaching?

Typically, the first thing that critics of the Rapture point out is that the word *rapture* does not appear in the New Testament. Neither does the English word *Bible*. And that is where there confusion comes from – *translation*.

The term *rapture* comes from a Latin word meaning “a carrying off, a transport, or a snatching away.”

Did you notice that on the slide of 1 Thessalonians 4, I highlighted the words “**caught up**” in verse 17?

In Greek that is the word *harpazo*, which was translated in the Latin Vulgate Bible as *rapturos*, from which we get Rapture. So if you want to call it the harpazo or the great “snatching away,” that is fine with me. The point is: the church will be taken out just like the Bible teaches.

But then why, the critics ask, wasn’t the Rapture taught in the Old Testament?

Well, it wasn’t taught, but there were types or pictures of the Rapture in it.

Look at this quote from *Rapture Forums* that speaks of this:

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*In Noah's day there were those who passed through the flood (Noah and his family in the ark); there were those who perished in the flood (the unbelieving world); and there was Enoch who was "translated" or "caught up" before the judgment of God was poured out. Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:24) and pleased Him (Hebrews 11:5), just as Christians who abide in Christ please God (1 John 3:22). Interestingly, from the time God told Noah to enter the ark, until the time when the waters of the flood were on the earth, God granted seven more days for the world to repent (Genesis 7:1-10). Perhaps this is a foreshadow of the final seven-year period culminating in the final judgment (Revelation 19:11-21)?*

I believe that Noah in the Ark is a picture of the nation of Israel which will be kept through the Tribulation. We will talk about that in a moment and will also learn more about Israel in a future study.

Then there are those who perish in the Flood. This represents the unbelieving world during the Tribulation (called those who " **dwell upon the earth**" in Revelation).

And last of all there is Enoch who is taken out BEFORE the Flood. This translating of Enoch is a type of the Rapture.

But the biggest reason the Rapture is not taught in the Old Testament is because it was a mystery. The Rapture is not for the Old Testament saints. It is for the church and is a last days' event. Listen to what Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:50-58):

**<sup>50</sup>Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. <sup>51</sup>Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—<sup>52</sup>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. <sup>53</sup>For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>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."**

**<sup>55</sup>"O Death, where *is* your sting?  
O Hades, where *is* your victory?"**

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<sup>56</sup>**The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.** <sup>57</sup>**But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

<sup>58</sup>**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

Pastor Glenn used this passage to teach us about our resurrection on Resurrection Day. This event takes place at the Rapture of the church. Once again Paul tells us that something wonderful awaits those who trust in Jesus.

In a moment (**the twinkling of an eye**) we will be **changed**. This word “**changed**” means to “exchange one thing for another” or to “transform.” What Paul is saying is that we believers will exchange Earth for Heaven (resurrected) and be instantly transformed into our heavenly bodies. And he gives us a time stamp for when this happens.

He says we will be changed at the **last trumpet**. There has been much debate on exactly what this **last trump** is. Some say the trumpet here in 1 Corinthians (and 1 Thessalonians) is the same trumpet found in Revelation 11. But there is a problem with this view.

The seventh trumpet is not sounded to call the church out of the Tribulation. It is sounded to bring in the final seven bowl judgments. So I reject this idea. But I want you to be Bereans, so I printed the screen from an article in *Got Questions*. You can look it up and read it if this is important to you. But for now just notice that Paul says all of this is a mystery.

A mystery in this sense is something that God did not reveal until a time when it could be understood. He did not speak of the Rapture in the Old Testament, because it is something that will only happen for the church. Listen to how *Got Questions* talks about the resurrection of the various saints:

*The first great resurrection of the Church will occur at the time of the rapture. All those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ during the Church Age, and have died before Jesus returns, will be resurrected at the rapture. The Church Age began on the Day of Pentecost and will end when Christ returns to take believers back to heaven with Him ([John 14:1-3](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#)). The Apostle Paul explained that not all Christians will die, but all will be changed, i.e., given resurrection-type bodies ([1 Corinthians 15:50-58](#)), some without having to die! Christians who are*

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*alive, and those who have already died, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and be with Him always!*

*Another great resurrection will occur when Christ returns to earth (His Second Coming) at the end of the Tribulation period. After the rapture, the Tribulation is the next event after the Church Age in God's chronology. This will be a time of terrible judgment upon the world, described in great detail in Revelation chapters 6-18. Though all Church Age believers will be gone, millions of people left behind on earth will come to their senses during this time and will trust in Jesus as their Savior. Tragically, most of them will pay for their faith in Jesus by losing their lives ([Revelation 6:9-11](#); [7:9-17](#); [13:7](#), [15-17](#); [17:6](#); [19:1-2](#)). These believers in Jesus who die during the Tribulation will be resurrected at Christ's return and will reign with Him for a thousand years during the Millennium ([Revelation 20:4](#), [6](#)). Old Testament believers such as Job, Noah, Abraham, David and even John the Baptist (who was assassinated before the Church began) will be resurrected at this time also.*

There has also been a lot of confusion concerning the Rapture because people don't understand these three groups of *saints*. We will talk about this a little more when we discuss the various views of the Rapture. Just know that, until there was a church, it was not necessary to talk about the Rapture.

And that brings us to our next major point of contention critics have about our Blessed Hope.

They say that Jesus did not teach about the Rapture. This is not true. Although it was not a major focus of His teaching, the Lord did make a wonderful promise to His bride. Listen to what the Apostle John quoted Jesus as saying in his Gospel (John 14:1-3):

**<sup>1</sup>“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup>In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.**

What Jesus is speaking of here is a Jewish wedding. I am just going to do a quick explanation of this, but it is a fascinating picture of the Rapture if you want to study it further. This how it worked:

First, there was the betrothal. The groom would pay a betrothal fee for his future bride (Jesus did this for us at the Cross). Then he would go to his father's house where he

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would prepare a place for him and his bride to live (That is what we just read about in John 14). Next, the father would choose the time when he would send his son to collect his bride. But he alone knew the day and hour (Matthew 24:36). And last of all, the son would collect his bride and take her to the place he had prepared for her. There they would have the marriage supper and consummate the marriage.

We are now living in the betrothal stage. The bride (us) has been purchased, and Jesus is preparing a place for her at His Father's house. One day soon, the Father is going to say that the time is right and send Jesus to get us. But again, only the Father knows when this will happen.

And guess what?

The groom is anxiously awaiting that moment, just as much as the bride is. For 2,000 years He has been preparing a place for us to dwell with Him.

So what we are supposed to do is watch and be ready for Jesus to come and get us. This is known as the doctrine of imminence. What this doctrine speaks of is that Jesus could come at any moment to *rapture* us out of this world. There is nothing more, biblically, that has to happen for Him to return. The imminence of Christ's return is generally taught among evangelicals. But there is some disagreement according to one's view of the timing of the Rapture. So let's take a look at each view and see if we can discern which one fits best with what we have just learned.

- First, we have the post-Tribulation view. Post-Tribulationism teaches that the Rapture occurs at or near the end of the Tribulation. At that time the church will meet Christ in the air and then return with Him for the commencement of His kingdom on Earth. In other words, the Rapture and Second Coming occur almost simultaneously. According to this view, the church goes through all seven years of the Tribulation. One strength of this view is that in Matthew 24 Jesus says He will return after a “**great tribulation**” (verses 21-29). Also, the Book of Revelation, they say, only mentions one coming of the Lord. And that occurs after the Tribulation.

Remember, we spoke of three groups of saints earlier. Post-tribulationists don't see a difference between the saints in the church and the saints during the Tribulation. We all, like people throughout the history of the church, will experience intense persecution. And this causes a cleansing of the body (or bride) of Christ.

In relation to this, they distinguish between Satan's (or man's) wrath and the wrath of God. Satan's wrath is directed at the saints, and God allows it as a means of purifying His faithful. On the other hand, God's wrath is poured out on Satan and

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his followers. And God will protect His people from that punishment. Keep that in mind because the pre-wrath view is big on this as well.

The biggest weakness that post-Tribulationism has is the clear teaching of Scripture that those who are in Christ will not ever experience the wrath of God. Romans 8:1 is clear that there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul admonished the church to do this:

**and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

The “**wrath to come**” Paul speaks of here is the Tribulation. Jesus will deliver the church from this time of trouble.

Will believers in all ages have tribulation?

Yes, they will. In fact, Jesus promised us that we would have trouble while we are in this world (John 16:33). But tribulation and THE Tribulation are two different things. All believers will have struggles in this life—especially if they diligently serve the Lord. But during THE TRIBULATION, God is going to pour out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. Here is another quote from *Got Questions* that explains the seven-year Tribulation:

*Throughout Scripture, **the tribulation** is associated with the [day of the Lord](#), that time during which God personally intervenes in history to accomplish His plan (see [Isaiah 2:12](#); [13:6–9](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1–31](#); [3:14](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)). It is referred to as “tribulation . . . in the latter days” ([Deuteronomy 4:30, ESV](#)); the great tribulation, which refers to the more intense second half of the seven-year period ([Matthew 24:21](#)); “a time of distress” ([Daniel 12:1](#)); and “the time of Jacob’s trouble” ([Jeremiah 30:7, NKJV](#)). And we have this description of the tribulation that attends the day of the Lord:*

*“That day will be a day of wrath— a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness— a day of trumpet and battle cry” ([Zephaniah 1:15–16](#)).*

A second problem the post-Tribbers have is the fact that the word **church** is absent in all Biblical passages related to the Tribulation. In the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, the church is mentioned 19 times. But in chapters 4-2,1 the word **church** never appears. And this just happens to be the lengthiest description of the Tribulation in all the Scriptures. So the post-Tribulationist must assume

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that the saints spoken of in these chapters means the church. As we saw earlier, this is not the case.

- And that brings us to our second view of the Rapture: mid-Tribulationism.

The mid-Trib view teaches that the Rapture will occur at the mid-point of the Tribulation, which they separate into two 3½-year periods. The first 3½ years are relatively quiet, but the second 3½ years are very bad.

They say that the seventh trumpet judgment and the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15 are the same blast. At that time, the trumpet will sound and the church will meet Jesus in the air. So, to them, the church will be here for the seal and trumpet judgments but be taken out before the bowl judgments are poured out. They use 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 as the base text for this belief. Paul writes:

**<sup>1</sup>Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup>not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. <sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,***

First, there is apostasy in the church. Next, the Antichrist is revealed. And third, you have the day of Christ.

Antichrist will not decisively be revealed until the mid-point of the Tribulation when he desecrates the Temple in Jerusalem. At that time, he will be given power over the **saints** for 3½ years.

Mid-Trib teaches us to look for the Antichrist, and not Jesus Christ. That is not what my Bible says we are to look for (Titus 2:13).

The problems with this view are many.

The church is not appointed to wrath but to salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The middies say that God's wrath only applies to the second half of the Tribulation. That is a very weak argument. Listen to what John saw after the seal judgments were loosed on the world in Revelation 6 (verses 15-17):

**<sup>15</sup>And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup>and said to**



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**the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup>For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”**

This passage clearly says that the wrath of God (**Him who sits on the throne**) is being poured out on the world at the beginning of the Tribulation. He is the One these people are hiding from. And Jesus is also God, and these judgments are called the **“wrath of the Lamb”** by the very people who are experiencing them.

What comfort is there in knowing that our groom is going to pour out His wrath on the world while we, the bride, is still here?

- That brings us to the third view of the Rapture: the pre-wrath view.

The pre-wrath view is closely related to mid-Tribulationism. The difference is that these people say that the Rapture occurs before the **“great day of...wrath”** found in Revelation 6:17. They believe the church goes through most of the Tribulation, but not the time of God’s wrath. In other words, the church will endure Satan’s fury and man’s persecution, but will be taken out before God pours His judgment out on the world. And the reason that the Lord leaves believers here at this time is to purge the unfaithful from the faithful.

There are various opinions on exactly when during the Tribulation this occurs. But most believe it will be about three-quarters of the way through. Like the mid-Trib view, pre-wrath proponents say that the seal judgments (and trumpet) are not the wrath of God, but the wrath of Satan (see chart). In the Revelation 6 passage we just read, they say the earth dwellers are looking forward toward the wrath of God and not describing what they just experienced. We already talked about verse 17 saying these judgments are the wrath of the Lamb. And it is Jesus who opens the seals and not Satan.

So it seems best to see all three sets of judgments as coming from God and being poured out on the world, not the church.

- And that brings us to our fourth position on the Rapture: The pre-Tribulation view. Pre-Trib teaches that the Rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation starts. At the blowing of the last trumpet (the trumpet of God), the church will

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meet Christ in the air. Then sometime after that the Antichrist will be revealed, and the Tribulation begins. The Rapture and the Second Coming are separated by at least seven years.

According to this view, the church does not experience any of the Tribulation.

Scripturally, the pre-Trib view has much to commend it. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 Paul says that the church is not appointed to wrath. And later in chapter 5:1-9 he says that believers will not be overtaken by the day of the Lord (the Tribulation). Also, Jesus promised the believers in Philadelphia that they would be kept from **“the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world”** (Revelation 3:10). Note that this promise is to *be kept from* and not preserved through the Tribulation.

We talked earlier about how the church is mentioned 19 times in the first three chapters of Revelation. But it is not mentioned again until chapter 22, which is after the Second Coming.

And most importantly of all, the pre-Trib view is the only theory which clearly maintains the distinction between Israel and the church. It teaches us that God has a separate plan for each.

This idea comes from the 70 **“sevens”** prophecy found in Daniel Chapter 9. According to Daniel, the 70 sevens give us a prophetic timeline for the Jewish people from the time of Daniel to the Second Coming of Messiah. Sixty-nine of the 70 have already been completed, so the 70<sup>th</sup> is yet future. We call it the Tribulation. The last seven is a time of purging, as the mid- and pre-wrath views teach. But, it is centered on Israel, and not the church.

According to Zechariah 13:8, only one-third of the Jews will make it through this time of Jacob’s trouble. As for Gentiles, there will be many saved during this time, known as Tribulation saints. But most of them will be martyred for their faith and not *raptured* out of the world.

Another positive aspect of the pre-Trib view is that it has historical support. Even in Paul’s time, believers were looking for the Blessed Hope of the return of Jesus (Titus 2:13). James, the brother of the Lord, wrote this about the Lord’s return (James 5:8):

**You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**

The Apostle John echoed this thought when he wrote this (1 John 2:28):

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**And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.**

Believers are to be constantly waiting for and looking for the Lord to return. This would not be the case if we are catapulted into a time of trouble such as the Tribulation.

One perceived weakness of the pre-Trib view is that, to its critics, it is a recently developed doctrine. They sat that the idea was not formed in detail until the 1800's. Recent scholarship shows that is not exactly true. There have always been pockets of believers that taught a pre-Trib Rapture. But it really started to catch fire when the Jews began to return to Israel.

If there is no Israel, there is no need for a Tribulation. As we shall see next time we meet, Israel is God's timepiece as far as prophecy goes. In fact, Jeremiah said this about the "last days" (Jeremiah 30:7):

**Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it.**

The last time I looked, Jacob is Israel and not the church.

The church began after the resurrection of Jesus. At that time the Father set aside His chosen people for a season as He began doing what He sent Jesus to accomplish. He **so loved the world that He sent** His Son to save it. But one day this is going to happen (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8):

**<sup>6</sup>And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. <sup>7</sup>For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup>And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.**

The "lawless one" spoken of here is the Antichrist. Lawlessness has always been around. As John tells us in his letters, there has always, since the ascension of Jesus, been a spirit of antichrist in the world. But one day THE ANTICHRIST will appear in the world, trying to bring in Satan's kingdom on Earth. He cannot do that now because something, actually Someone, is restraining him. That Someone is the Holy Spirit.

I ask you, where does the Holy Spirit reside at this time?

Inside of me—and you.

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We are supposed to be the restraining influence, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the world. But once we are taken out, all “HE double hockey sticks,” breaks out. And I believe this happens before the Tribulation.

One last criticism of the pre-Trib view before we go.

Some have trouble with it because it teaches two different appearances of Jesus, whereas it seems that the Bible only speaks of one. The text they use is John 6:40 where Jesus promises this:

**And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.**

Jesus promises a resurrection on the last day. But pre-Trib teaches that all church-age believers are given their resurrected bodies at the Rapture. That is seven years before the Second Coming.

Is this a contradiction?

I don't think so.

The end times, called the “**last day**,” will span the entire time from the Rapture to the Second Coming. As we saw earlier, there will be both Jews and Tribulation saints who get saved during the Tribulation. In fact, it may be the greatest soul harvest period of all time. And these people will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation.

Our last slide gives us a look at the differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming.

Obviously, I adhere to the pre-Trib view of the Rapture. But I want you to keep Acts 17:11 in mind. Don't just believe what I say, but search the Scriptures to see what the Bible says about the Rapture. There are good people on each side of this argument. Some of them, like Hank Hanegraaf, the Bible answer man, are pan-Tribbers. They say they will wait and see how it all *pans* out. I say that I will explain it to them on the way up!

Let's pray.