

What is the rapture?

(Please note: the following paragraph cannot be supported from the Bible). The first will be a secret rapture—or carrying away of the saved to heaven—at the beginning of a seven-year period of tribulation, during which the antichrist will appear. The second phase occurs at the close of this time of tribulation when Jesus will return to Earth in triumph and glory.

Rapture and the Bible

Jesus promised that He would return to Earth to take His people to be with Him. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. 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 (John 14:1-3). Did Jesus mean that He would return secretly and “rapture” His people from Earth, leaving behind those who are lost to wonder where their raptured friends and relatives have gone? This is the belief of those who hold to the idea of the rapture. In these verses, Jesus doesn’t say how He will return—secretly or otherwise. But other Bible texts make it plain what will happen when Jesus returns.

Is the Rapture Biblical?

After His resurrection, Jesus returned to heaven, and the disciples watched as He rose into the sky. The Bible says, “While they [the disciples] watched, He [Jesus] was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men [angels] stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ ” (Acts 1:9-11).

Two points stand out in these verses. First, the Jesus who returns to Earth the second time is the very same Jesus who lived here on Earth with us and went back to heaven following His resurrection. And second, He will return to Earth the same way—“in like manner”—as He went back to heaven. How did Jesus go to heaven following His resurrection? Did He go secretly? No. The disciples watched Him rise, literally, bodily, into the air until a cloud hid Him from their sight. So these verses tell us that Jesus will return to earth the same way—not secretly.

Is Jesus' Second Coming Secret?

Another Bible text makes it even more clear that Jesus will not return secretly. “Behold, He [Jesus] is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him” (Revelation 1:7). This text says that when Jesus comes, every eye—everyone on earth—will see Him come. That doesn’t sound like He is coming secretly! Matthew says that Jesus’ coming will be as visible as the lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other. “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:27). The Bible says that Jesus will come in glory with the angels (see Matthew 16:27); that He will come with the shout of the archangel and a blast from the trumpet of God (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17); that the wicked will see Him coming and cry out for the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from His face (see Revelation 6:14-17); and that He will return as King of kings,

leading the armies of heavenly angels (see Revelation 19:11-16). All these texts make it clear that Jesus' coming is anything but secret!

Will Jesus come like a thief in the night?

The Bible says, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10, NKJV; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:2). But does this mean that He will come secretly and snatch away the saved, leaving the wicked behind? No. This very text that says Jesus will come like a thief in the night, also says that the heavens will pass away with a great noise. That won't be secret!

So what does it mean for Jesus to come "like a thief in the night?" The apostle Paul says, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6). Jesus' coming will be unexpected by those who are not watching and waiting for Him. It will come upon them like a thief in the night. But His people—who are not of the night nor of darkness—will be looking for Him. They will be aware of the signs of His coming and will know that it is near. Jesus' coming will not overtake them like the unexpected appearance of a thief. That's what the Bible means by saying that Jesus' coming will be like a thief in the night—it will be unexpected to those who are not watching for Him.

The "Day" of the Lord comes as a thief in the night

Note: both 2 Peter 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 5:2 do not speak about the "Lord" coming as a thief in the night, but rather the "day" of the Lord coming as a thief. This completely changes the meaning of the verse. In fact, the subject of the sentence is "day," while the phrase modifying the subject is "of the Lord." Christians are to watch and be ready for the "day" of the Lord to come suddenly, but once the event is at hand it cannot be hidden. It will be very obvious when Jesus comes again!

Raptured or Left Behind?

But doesn't Matthew 24:37-42 say that when Jesus comes, some people will be snatched away and others will be left behind? Let's see what Matthew says. "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and **took them all away**, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be **taken** and the other **left**. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:37-42).

Matthew says that when Jesus comes it will be like it was in the time of Noah—some people will be saved (left) and other people will be destroyed (taken). Looking more in-depth at Matthew's wording, those who are "taken" when Jesus comes are those who are lost, taken away, and destroyed by the brightness of His coming (see 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

You can think of it like this, imagine a flood swept through your town. Those who escaped, were left behind by the waters of the flood, while those who lost their lives were taken away by the water. Additionally, in the parallel passage of Luke 17:37, Jesus' 12 apostles ask the question, "Where Lord?" referring to those who are taken. Jesus responds by saying, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather." Thus Jesus again explains that those who are taken will be destroyed as is symbolized by the gathering of vultures seeking to consume the dead. Therefore, we can see that the Bible does not support the idea of the secret rapture for the saved.

(Note: Logically and scripturally, the question "where" only applies to those who are taken, because the location of those who are left would be the exact same location as before the event occurred.)

Those who hold to the idea of a secret rapture also believe that there will be seven years of tribulation following the rapture and that during this time individuals who were left on earth will have another opportunity to accept Jesus and be saved. Is there any Bible evidence for this belief?

Seven Year Tribulation

First, there is no biblical evidence for a seven-year period of tribulation following Jesus' return to Earth. And the Bible is clear that when Jesus returns, every person's eternal fate has been decided; individuals who are lost will not have a second chance to be saved. Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). The Bible presents Jesus' second coming as the great climactic event of the ages when men and women are either saved or lost for eternity. There is no seven-year period to reconsider our lives and change our destiny. Jesus pictured the separation that will take place at His coming between the righteous and the wicked—the saved and the lost—in these words: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' . . . Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' " (Matthew 25:31-34, 41).

That is not to say there will not be a tribulation. The Bible does certainly foretell of a soon coming "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" before Jesus' return (Daniel 12:1). However, does Scripture support the interpretation that Christian believers will be raptured, and taken away from the tribulation, leaving only the wicked?

Jesus doesn't leave us in the dark and sheds light on the event that will be like none other before it. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

Are the elect raptured before the tribulation?

One must question, if the "elect," or God's people, are raptured before "the great tribulation," why would they need the days "shortened?" Actually, all throughout the Bible,

we are given examples of God's people being saved in the middle of tribulations, not being saved before it.

- When the Israelites were captive in Egypt, God preserved them in the midst of the plagues that devastated Egypt. Just as Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage after the plagues, so God's church will be protected through the plagues and be delivered from the hand of the oppressor (1 Corinthians 10:11; Psalm 91; Psalm 46).
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego entered the flames when they refused to yield to the universal death decree of Babylon's King. Their death-defying faith forced them to face the flames of tribulation, and in those flames God miraculously delivered them (Daniel 3:16-28).
- Daniel's decision to be faithful in his daily prayers caused him to be tossed into the lion's den. God saved Daniel while he was going through tribulation, not before it came (Daniel 6).

Similarly, right before Christ returns, the faithfulness of the elect will cause them to be the target of the ungodly, bringing about a time of persecution and great tribulation. However, just as throughout all of Biblical history, God preserves His elect. The same Jesus that was with the Hebrew men in the fire and lion's den, will go with us through our trials. When the last day judgments are poured out on the world, God will shield those who follow Him with all their heart and mind.

How old is the rapture theory?

Historically, the belief in the secret rapture is relatively new. Many of the notable Christian leaders of the faith understood from the Bible that Christ's coming would be a literal, audible, glorious event for God's persecuted people who would be raptured after they endured the great tribulation brought about by the antichrist including:

John Bunyan, John Calvin, Adam Clarke, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, Matthew Henry, John Huss, John Knox, Hugh Latimer, C.S. Lewis, Martin Luther, D.L. Moody, George Mueller, Sir Isaac Newton, John Newton, Charles Spurgeon, William Tyndale, Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, John Wesley, George Whitefield, William Wilberforce, John Wycliffe, Ulrich Zwingli, and many others.

Of course, the truth of a teaching is not dependent upon who believes it, but whether or not it is in line with all of the Scriptures.

The rapture, pre-tribulation & last day events

There are some other points to consider when seeing if the "secret rapture" and pre-tribulation understanding fits into the last events of earth's history as outlined in the Bible:

- The notion that the tribulation will occur after Christ comes for the church is glaringly inconsistent with 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, which makes it plain that the antichrist is revealed before Jesus comes and is destroyed by the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Thus, as we have seen, the teaching of the secret rapture is not found in line with what the Bible teaches about the Second Coming of Jesus.

Bible verses about the rapture

John 14:1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. 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."

Acts 1:9-11, "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.' "

Revelation 1:7, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."

Matthew 24:27, "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

Matthew 24:37-42, "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."

Luke 17:35-37, " 'Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.' And they answered and said to Him, 'Where, Lord?' So He said to them, 'Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.' "

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, "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."

Revelation 6:14-17, "Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 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, and said to 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! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Revelation 19:11-16, "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white

and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night."

Revelation 22:12, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:' ... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' "