

The Rapture

Find out what the Bible has to say



The Rapture in Fiction

Amanda looked at the television screen hanging on the wall in the student union where she had just arrived. "We are here in downtown Boston where all chaos has broken loose. A report has just come in of another airplane going down about ten miles north of here. Unmanned cars are running out of control, and people are vanishing into thin air. Clothes sit in little piles all over the city where people vanished. We are not certain yet just what is taking place, but the President has reported a national emergency." This is about how most of the stories begin. The popular scenario suggests that suddenly, sometime in the near future, people are going to vanish into thin air as chaos breaks loose on the planet. Since the novels are fiction, most don't go deep into the Bible verses that support this theory. While the pre-tribulation rapture scenario is certainly popular, exciting, and appealing, we want to know if it is the most accurate. Does the Bible teach that the rapture is going to occur before the rise of the antichrist and the mark of the beast? Why don't we take a moment to investigate?

Caught Up

Perhaps the most popular Bible verse used to support the pre-tribulation rapture states, “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds” (1 Thes. 4:16, 17). While many suggest this verse is speaking of a pre-tribulation rapture, in Matthew, we find a parallel verse of the literal second coming which shows Jesus and His angels “coming on the clouds...with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect” (Mt. 24:29-31). While most believe the first verse is talking about the pre-tribulation rapture, these same people admit that the second verse is talking about the literal second coming. Of course, it doesn't take much to decipher that both are clearly talking about the same event. Both verses show Jesus coming on the clouds, with the sound of a trumpet, gathering the believers, and yet Matthew says this occurs “immediately after the tribulation” (Mt. 24:29). In spite of popular opinion, the Bible says Jesus returns after the tribulation.

Like a Thief in the Night

Another popular rapture verse tells us that “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thes. 5:2). Since Jesus comes as a thief, some say that this is a picture of the saints being secretly taken in the rapture, but Paul adds, “you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thes. 5:4). The point is not that Jesus will come in a secret rapture, but that the second coming will be a surprise for those who aren’t prepared for it. Jesus’ return will not be a secret event. While Paul says that “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thes. 5:2), Peter adds some additional information. He 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 Pet. 3:10). This is clearly speaking of the literal second coming. While that day will come as a thief to those who are not ready, it is not a silent or secret event. The Bible says that “our God shall come, and shall not keep silent” (Ps. 50:3).

One Left Behind

Another popular verse, the basis of the Left Behind series, is found in Matthew 24:40, where Jesus compares His coming to “the day that Noah entered into 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” (Mt. 24:40). While many assume those “taken” are raptured into heaven, the Bible compares the “taken” to those who were taken to their death in the flood. While Matthew says the flood “took” them away, Luke 17:27 says “the flood came and destroyed them.” According to the Bible, these are not taken to heaven, but to destruction. How do we know this? Because Peter then asks, “Where Lord?” Since we know they are in the field, he is not asking where they are left, but where they are taken. To this, Jesus replies, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered” (Luke 17:36, 37). Since eagles are birds of prey, Jesus confirms that the wicked are taken to destruction, so don’t be “taken” by this lie. Those who are left behind are the saved.

Seven Year Tribulation

Some use a time prophecy of Daniel to support a pre-tribulation rapture. In the prophecy, we are told that the Jews had sixty-nine weeks before the "Messiah" was to come and make a "covenant with many for one week" (Dan. 9:24-27). Since prophecy depicts one "day for each year" (Eze. 4:6), some try to take this covenant week of seven years, throw it into the future, and apply it to the reign of the antichrist after the rapture, but this is actually a prophecy of Jesus' seven-year "covenant" with the Jews (Mt. 26:28)! The prophecy says that the "Messiah shall be cut off...in the middle of the week" (Dan. 9:26, 27). In the middle of the seven years, three and a half years into His ministry, the Messiah died on the cross. At that time, He would "bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27). Jesus' death brought an end to the sacrificial service. The Jews were then given three and a half years after the cross to accept Christ before the gospel was given to Gentiles (Acts 7:58; 9:15; 11:18), fulfilling the seven-year prophecy of the Messiah's covenant with Israel.

The Same Event

Tragically, many who support the pre-tribulation rapture theory are trying to take one single event and cut it into two separate events, and yet even those who support a pre-tribulation rapture recognize that some of these verses are speaking of a literal second coming. The problem is, when you compare the literal second coming verses to the verses used to support the pre-tribulation rapture, you find that they are clearly talking about the same event. Could it be that people are trying to take the literal second coming of Jesus and split it into two events to support their fantasy? While the rapture movies may be fun to watch, the Bible just does not support the idea that people will vanish into thin air and the great tragedy of this theory is that many who are expecting to be raptured away before the mark of the beast comes will not be prepared for the final crisis that is just about to take place, so don't get "caught up" in this teaching so "that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34).

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