

Many Christians neglect the study of biblical prophecy because they consider it too contentious or irrelevant to daily life. At the same time, churches may be concerned about the apathy of believers and struggle to encourage people toward living a holy life. I would suggest that the teaching of the Rapture, a topic woven throughout the fabric of the New Testament, speaks to these issues and can provide some serious motivation for godliness.

No single Bible verse says precisely when the Rapture will take place. We will not imagine that we will settle the issue of timing in relation to the Tribulation or the Second Coming in a way that would satisfy everyone. However, this does not mean that the Scriptures do not teach a clear position on this matter. We will examine several aspects of the Rapture as taught in the Bible that show it is an event distinct from the Second Coming of Christ to reign in His kingdom. We might say that the Bible reveals two distinct phases to the Lord's return. (See also Thomas Ice, *Why I Believe The Bible Teaches Rapture Before Tribulation*)

Power Point comparing:

John 14:1-3

trouble verse 1
believe verse 1
God, me verse 1

told you verse 2
come again verse 3

receive you verse 3
to myself verse 3
be where I am verse 3

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

sorrow verse 13
believe verse 14
Jesus, God verse 14

say to you verse 15
coming of the Lord verse 15

caught up verse 17
to meet the Lord verse 17
ever be with the Lord verse 17

(See also J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*)

The Imminent Coming of Christ

*The New Testament speaks of our Lord's return as imminent, meaning that it could happen at any moment. Other events **may** occur before an imminent event, but nothing else **must** take place before it happens. Imminency passages instruct believers to look, watch, and wait for Christ's coming. If either the appearance of the Antichrist, the Abomination of Desolation, or the unfolding of the Tribulation must occur before the Rapture, then a command to watch for Christ's coming would not be relevant. Pretribulationism teaches a truly imminent Rapture since it is the only view not requiring anything to happen before the Rapture. The New Testament indicates that the believer's hope is to look, watch, and wait for a person and that is Jesus. Only Pretribulationism enables a believer to look for Christ and yet at the same time give full meaning to Second Coming passages and the signs that lead up to our Lord's return to the earth. Imminency is a strong argument for the pre-tribulation Rapture and provides the believer with a true "blessed hope." (See Thomas Ice, *Why I Believe The Bible Teaches Rapture Before Tribulation*)*

Matt 25:13 NKJV¹³ *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

Luke 12:40 NKJV⁴⁰ *“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

Luke 21:34-36 NKJV³⁴ *“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy [or “may have strength”] to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

First Corinthians 1:7 NKJV⁷ *so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Php 3:20-21 NKJV²⁰ *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

First Thessalonians 1:10 NKJV¹⁰ *and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

Titus 2:13 NKJV¹³ *looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

Hebrews 9:28 NKJV²⁸ *so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*

Revelation 1:1 NKJV¹ *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,*

Revelation 3:11 NKJV *Behold, I am coming quickly [“soon” ESV]! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*

Revelation 22:7 NKJV *“Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

Revelation 22:20 NKJV *He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

We should never look at the Rapture as a way to escape the trials and troubles of this world. Nor is the Rapture any safeguard from persecution, even unto death. It is however, a way to adequately harmonize the passages relating to the Lord’s return that speak of waiting and watching as if it could happen at any moment with those passages that speak of very definite events that must take place in the seven-year period of time often referred to as the Tribulation before Christ comes back to establish His kingdom here on earth.

Power Point Contrasting the Rapture and the Second Coming

The Two Events Contrasted

■ The Rapture Point 1

- We know neither the day nor the hour. This event can happen at any moment. No unfulfilled prophecy stands between us today and the Rapture of the Church.
 - Mat 24:36-25:30; esp. 24:36,42,44; 25:13; James 5:7-9

■ The Second Coming Point 1

- The time is clearly marked as after the seven years of Antichrist's rule. The number of days is even emphasized. Much prophecy regarding the period of Tribulation must be fulfilled before this can happen.
 - Dan 9:27, 12:11-12, Rev 12:6, Rev 6-19

■ The Rapture Point 2

- Christ comes *for* His saints.
 - John 14:1-3, 1 Thes 4:16-17

■ The Second Coming Point 2

- Christ comes *with* His saints.
 - Jude 14-15, Rev 19:11-14

■ The Rapture Point 3

- Christ takes us to His Father's house.
 - (John 14:1-3)

■ The Second Coming Point 3

- Christ and the saints stay on earth to rule during the Millennium.
 - Rev 20:4-6

■ The Rapture Point 4

- This happens in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye - instantaneously.
 - 1 Cor 15:51-52

■ The Second Coming Point 4

- This takes some time to accomplish everything involved.
 - Rev 19-20

■ The Rapture Point 5

- He who now restrains will be taken out of the way so that the lawless one can be revealed. Satan will be very active during the Tribulation period.
 - 2 Thes 2:7-8, Rev 6-19

■ The Second Coming Point 5

- The beast, the false prophet and the dragon are all defeated at the Second Coming. Satan will be bound during the Millennial Kingdom Age.
 - Rev 19:19-20:3

- The Rapture Point 6
- The wrath of God is not intended for the church, but for the sons of disobedience.
 - Ephesians 5:6-7, Colossians 3:5-7, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9

- The Second Coming Point 6
- The events leading up to and including Christ's Second Coming are described in Revelation 6-19 as the "wrath of God" (or similarly) ten times.
 - Rev. 6:16,17; 11:18; 14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; 19:15
- The word *church* does not appear at all in these chapters, though it appears 19 times in Rev 1-3 and once more in Rev 22.

- The Rapture Point 7
- The Rapture of the Church is a comforting, purifying hope for the church.
 - John 14:1-3, Phil 3:20-21, 1 Thes 4:17-18, James 5:7-9, 1 John 3:1-3

- The Second Coming Point 7
- The Second Coming is a great and glorious victory, but, as such, is more breathtaking or awe-inspiring than comforting. In fact, for the lost it will be an awful day.
 - Mat 24:29-30, Jude 14-15, Rev 1:7, 19:11-20:3

- The Rapture Point 8
- At the Rapture, the church is removed from the world.
 - John 14:1-3, 1 Thes 4:15-17

- The Second Coming Point 8
- At the Second Coming, believers and unbelievers are still mixed together and will be separated by Christ when He judges them. Only the saved will be allowed to enter the Kingdom Age.
 - Joel 3:2, Mat 25:31-46

- The Rapture Point 9
- At the Rapture, believers will receive immortal bodies similar to the one Christ possessed after His resurrection.
 - Matt 22:30, 1 Cor. 15:51-53, Phil. 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2

- The Second Coming Point 9
- At the Second Coming, believers are not translated into a new state. They will retain their mortal bodies and repopulate the earth during the Millennium.
 - Isaiah 65:18-25

- The Rapture Point 10
- Christ gathers His church to Himself at the Rapture.
 - John 14:1-3, 1 Thes 4:16-17

- The Second Coming Point 10
- Christ will gather Israel to their land at the Second Coming, after the Tribulation and before the Millennial Kingdom Age.
 - Isaiah 11:11-12, 41:8-13, 43:1-6; Micah 2:12; Zeph 3:19-20; Mat 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27

- The Rapture Point 11
- The Rapture of the church along with the sudden translation of saints into their glorified bodies is a New Testament idea. It pertains to the church.
 - The references for this event are all New Testament references.

- The Second Coming Point 11
- The Second Coming is an Old Testament idea.
 - Zech 14:4
- The Tribulation pertains to Israel as well as to Gentile unbelievers.
 - Jer 30:7-11
- The Kingdom is also an Old Testament idea pertaining to Israel as well as the Church.
 - Isaiah 9:7, Dan 2:44, Micah 4:6-8

- The Rapture Point 12
- We, the Church, should happily and eagerly await the imminent coming of Christ for us. Belief in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture preserves this outlook.
 - John 14:1-3, Phil 3:20-21, 1 Thes 4:17-18, James 5:7-9, 1 John 3:1-3

- The Second Coming Point 12
- According to the Prophetic timetable, the Second Coming can only happen after Antichrist's rule.
 - Rev 19
- Rejection of the belief in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture would force us to look for the coming of Antichrist as the next big, impending prophesied event.
- Where is the hope in that?

Resources

- Chafer and Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*
- Thomas Ice, *Why I Believe The Bible Teaches Rapture Before Tribulation*
- Thomas Ice, *Differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming*
- LaHaye & Hindson, *The Popular Handbook of Bible Prophecy*
- J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*
- Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*
- J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*
- John Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*