

The Rapture

Is it Biblical?

By [Ed Ferner](#)

Rapture: The state of being transported by a lofty emotion; ecstasy. An expression of ecstatic feeling. The transporting of a person from one place to another, especially to heaven. [Webster, American Heritage Dictionary](#)

Elements of the above definition are rampant today in the Christian church. This understanding holds that Christians will be taken up into the clouds and all non-Christians will be left behind on earth at the second coming of Christ. When this event is discussed in the church, it seems to originate from the following sources in the Scriptures.

1. [Matthew 24:31](#) *And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*
2. [1 Thessalonians 4:16-18](#) *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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.*
3. [2 Thessalonians 2:1](#) *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,*

- ⊕ Before looking in detail at the three verses above, we should look at some of the background that surrounds the concept of "rapture."
- ⊕ The term "rapture" is NOT a scriptural word!
- ⊕ The word "rapture" does not appear anywhere in the Scriptures.
- ⊕ Rapture is not the translation of any Hebrew or Koine Greek word found in the Scriptures.
- ⊕ Rapture does not come from the word of God, but rather from the mind of man.
- ⊕ The rapture/removal of the church from the earth is not a prominent historic teaching of the church.
- ⊕ Rapture does not appear in the historic creeds of the church.
- ⊕ Rapture, although it was heard of from time to time, was relatively unheard of and seldom taught until the early nineteenth century.
- ⊕ The concept of a rapture became widespread in the twentieth century.
- ⊕ The first known recorded reference to a rapture/removal of the church from the earth appeared in a fourth century AD sermon written by a person known as Pseudo-Ephraem (AD 303-373).
- ⊕ The next time we hear of the rapture is from a Calvinist theologian by the name of Dr. John Gill in 1748.
- ⊕ It seems that the concept was brought more into the forefront by an American Baptist pastor by the name of Morgan Edwards in 1788 and a Jesuit priest, Emmanuel Lacunza in 1812. Edward Irving, who translated some of Lacunza's writing in 1826 perpetuated and fed fuel to the concept.

- ⊕ The theory of a church rapture came into prominence in the church around 1830 by the Plymouth Brethren in Scotland. It is reported that one of the Plymouth Brethren leaders, John Darby (1800-1882), was holding meetings when a fifteen year old Scottish girl (Margret Mac Donald) gave a charismatic utterance that a select group of believers would be removed from the earth before the days of Antichrist, and that other believers would have to live through a period of tribulation on earth. Darby spread this pre-tribulation rapture teaching in Europe and later in the United States.
- ⊕ The rapture theory was also given a big boost in America when footnotes on it appeared in the Scofield Bible in 1917.
- ⊕ An additional activity that promoted the rapture was the publication of a series of end times charts in a book entitled *Dispensational Truth* by Clarence Larkin in 1918.

From the preceding backdrop we must ask ourselves the question: Does the Bible really teach a physical rapture of the church, or is there a possibility that we have been conditioned to believe this theory by the teaching of some in the church without any real study of the event by our own initiative? Let us now look at the Koine Greek word that appears in passage #2 above which causes people to think that there is to be a rapture.

In verse #2 above, the Greek word that is translated "caught up" in the KJV is "harpazo." When we look at the possible meanings for this word we come up with the following: to seize, catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take away (by force), snatch away, transport hastily, to take someone away from among them, seize or claim for oneself.

In past Learning Activities we have established a pattern where once we have somewhat defined the possible meaning of a Greek word in the Bible that the next thing we should do is to check the context in which that word is being used in the text. Let's examine the context of [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#).

4. [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) *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.*

5. What are the last eight words of the verse above speaking about? _____

6. [1 Thessalonians 4:14](#) *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*

7. What is the main topic of the verse above? _____

The context, then, of [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#), is resurrection and not some rapture event. Being "caught up" in this verse is to be resurrected.

8. What do the first eight words of the verse in #4 above tell you? _____

9. Considering the first eight words and the last eight words in [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#), what conclusions do you come to? _____

This understanding is also confirmed by Paul.

10. [1 Corinthians 15:23](#) *But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming*

11. What conclusion do you come to from the verse in #10 above? _____

Putting together the understandings of [Learning Activities 34, 51](#) and 52 along with the material in this Learning Activity we can see that those who believed in God during the Old Covenant times and were dead at the time Christ appeared in AD 70 were resurrected (the general resurrection) at the time of Christ's presence. That is what is being said in [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#).

Now let us look at the continuance of the above scripture which you have already recorded in #2 above. In that verse we see that the *"we which are alive and remain"* is referring to those Christians who were alive at the Parousia who had not yet died and naturally would apply to any person who became a Christian after the Parousia. All who are included in those two categories would have to wait until their biological life was finished here on earth and then they would follow those who had preceded them at the general resurrection. This is the meaning of [1 Corinthians 15:51](#) where it is stated that *"...We shall not all sleep..."* You must keep in mind that when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in early AD 50 and 1 Corinthians in the Spring of AD 55 that the Parousia had not yet happened (AD 70)! The things Paul was speaking about were future, but not very far into the future (about 15-20 years away)! However, Paul and those with him were waiting for Christ to appear. This is evident from the Scriptures.

The resurrection, therefore, is a continuing event just as the presence of Christ is a continuing event from AD 70 onward to the present time. Christians living when the Parousia began would be taken or removed at the point at which they left their mortal bodies at the instant of their biological death. This is a continuing event which is still taking place today.

We need also to go back to the verse that appears in item #10 above, which is [1 Corinthians 15:23](#). In that verse the phrase appears, *"they that are Christ's at his coming."* The Greek word that is translated "at" is "en." This actually is an incorrect translation and should be translated, in my opinion, "in." The phrase would then read, *"they that are Christ's in his presence,"* (because the Parousia is the presence of God). When the translators use "at" they are steering our minds to think that the resurrection is at one instant or point in time. The use of "in" helps us to see that resurrection started at the Parousia, but continues because the presence of God continues in the believer even right up to and including the present time. Hence, we can readily see that resurrection is a continuing event for the New Covenant Christian!

The above sequencing of *"the dead in Christ shall rise first"* and *"Then we which are alive..."* is further proven by the first word of [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#). That word "then" is translated from the Greek word "epeita" which is only used of sequence. It could actually be translated "afterward" without any violence to the word or the translation. It was during this "afterward" time period that Paul and the early church as well as all believers up to the present time have experienced their resurrection *"in the presence"* of Christ (Christ in us, our hope of glory!). In the verse of item #10 above, the word "afterward" is the Greek word "epeita."

12. Galatians 1:18 *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.*

13. In the verse above the word translated "then" is "epeita." How long of a time period does this verse say that "epeita" was? _____

14. Galatians 2:1 *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.*

15. The word "then" in the verse above is "epeita." How long of a time period does this verse say that "epeita" was? _____

Clearly, the word "epeita" does not have to be a discrete instant of time, but can and is a period of time.

Finally, what about the verse that started this Learning Activity listed in item #1? We can now see that in that verse Jesus was speaking of His presence at His Parousia to gather His elect who were dead, but who had believed the testimony of God under the Old Covenant as well as those who had believed Jesus when He walked the earth as Jesus of Nazareth. This event happened in AD 70 at the general resurrection.

The same is true of the verse found in item #3 at the beginning of this Learning Activity. Paul is referring to the gathering, assembling or being caught away during the resurrection which event would begin at the Parousia in AD 70, at the general resurrection, and continue in the presence of the Lord each time a believer died after that time right on down to our present time. What a wonderful truth and understanding this is for the believer! That is why Paul continued in the next verse by saying to the Thessalonians to "be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither in spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" which event took place about nineteen years later!

Self-Check answers

5. Resurrection.

7. Resurrection.

8. That the Lord was going to come back from having ascended into heaven.

9. The coming presence of Christ (His return presence) is connected with the resurrection.

11. Chapter fifteen of 1 Corinthians is also a resurrection passage and it is also saying that the resurrection (general resurrection, see Learning Activities #51 and #52) take place at the same time as the Parousia (presence, appearing, coming) of Christ which actually happened in AD 70 (see Learning Activity #34).

13. Three years.

15. Fourteen years.