

THE RAPTURE

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43, 47-50;24:36-44

One resurrection, two destinations

John 5:28-29

An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

Our text (1 Thess. 4) says the Lord will come with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, whereupon the dead in Christ shall rise. The same voice that called Lazarus from the tomb will penetrate not only the atmosphere, but even the earth's surface to the deepest grave with the authoritative summons, "Come forth!"

The Bible says all those in the grave will rise, those who did evil to a resurrection of judgment and those who did good to a resurrection of life. This will be the beginning of the total and mandatory evacuation from the earth.

No one is left behind.

According to the Bible, the earth will be completely evacuated of people upon Jesus' return. The first to evacuate will be the wicked, the tares that had been sewn in the wheat field.

Matt 13:41-42

At the end of the age the Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt 13:49-50

at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is precisely the picture Jesus painted in His discourse recorded in Matt. 24, where He said

"Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left."

Matt 24:40-41

Jesus said this event will be similar to the Flood in Noah's day, wherein the wicked

"were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt 24:39-40)

After the wicked are thus removed to face destruction, the righteous dead are called forth from the grave to meet the Lord in the air. But right on their heels will be the righteous who are alive when the Lord returns. It is portrayed as basically one motion, in that Scripture says those Christians yet living will be "caught up together with them" – the resurrected saints – to meet the Lord in the air.

The resurrection of the righteous is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, where the apostle Paul is comforting Christians who had the misconception that Christians who died before the Lord returned would miss out on the promised hope of heavenly glory. Paul writes

to assure them that not only will the dead in Christ be included in the resurrection to life eternal, but they would even precede those who are living when Jesus returns.

Sudden but not Secret

The word "rapture" as such is nowhere to be found in the Bible. But its equivalent, the word translated "caught up," is found at 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Tremendous noise

1 Thess 4:16-17

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

One thing the Bible definitely teaches about the rapture, or the snatching away or taking up of people at the Lord's coming is that it is anything ***but*** secret!

Reactions

Despite the fact that the Bible repeatedly tells us that the Lord will return, most people on that day will be surprised. The Bible says they will be involved in everyday activities, such as marriage, eating and drinking. At a time when they think all is well, the Lord will return in a thunderous crescendo of ear-piercing sounds trumpeting His arrival.

The Bible compares the element of sudden surprise at the Lord's return to that of a thief who breaks into the house in the middle of the night.

A lot of the controversy surrounding the 9/11 attack on America relates to our nation's readiness for such an event. Much criticism has been leveled against various individuals and groups for our apparent lack of preparation.

There won't be time for any finger-pointing on the day of the Lord. With the Lord will come His angels, who will gather up all the lawless ones and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:42, 50).

Run to hide in the mountains

The lesson

Be ready, for we know not when the Lord will return.

The earth will be evacuated on that day in preparation for the renewing fire described in Peter's second letter, wherein he wrote:

2 Peter 3:3-15

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation;