

3. The Rapture

The end-times will bring the worst suffering the world has ever seen. Jesus said of the end-times, *“For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.”* (Matthew 24:21) There will be global conflict and persecution of Christians. The world will be a miserable place. Jesus told believers, *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”* (Matthew 24:7-9)

But there also is good news. There is a way for God’s people to avoid the end-times. A rapture rescues believers from end-time suffering; rapture occurs when God suddenly removes people from earth—taking them up into heaven. The word “rapture” comes from the Latin word “rapio” which means to take away by force. The benefits of an early rapture are obvious. Those leaving the earth will avoid tremendous persecution and suffering.

Jesus and Paul used the words “taken” and “caught up” to refer to rapture. Paul wrote, *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) Jesus said, *“I tell you on that night, two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”* (Luke 17:34-35) To be “left” is to be “left behind” on earth.

Jesus cited Noah as an earlier example of God protecting believers just prior to a worldwide (flood) judgment. To emphasize the point, Jesus cited a second example, the destruction of Sodom; angels removed Lot and his family from Sodom immediately before God destroyed that city. *“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:26-30)*

The Problem

Pastors and authors routinely teach that every Christian will be raptured (removed) from earth at the very start of the seven-year end-time period. Just three authors teaching a pre-tribulation rapture of all believers (Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins of the Left Behind series; Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth) sold over 100,000,000 books, about one copy for every seventy persons on earth. Hal Lindsey's bestseller, The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon stated "The decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it." Lindsey sold a lot of books, but was wrong on many issues.

What if a complete pre-tribulation rapture of the entire church is an invalid interpretation? Then not all believers will be removed for the entire seven-year period. The consequence of this bad teaching is catastrophic. Belief that God raptures all Christians into heaven at the start of end-time tribulation has resulted in an epidemic of complacency, and widespread lack of discipline among believers.

God established incentives for us to live disciplined lives. Following years of study, teachers are placed in authority over students. After excelling as a leader, an executive gains authority over an entire corporation. Jesus promised positions of authority in his kingdom for believers who wisely handle responsibility. Jesus provided an analogy in the following parable, "*Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that*"

servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions." (Luke 12:42-44)

Jesus also offered incentives for action that matter during this Age. Consider the promise Jesus made to the Philadelphia Church. *Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.* (Revelation 3:10) The only *hour of trial* that affects the whole world is the end-times. By making this promise to a narrowly defined group, Jesus disclosed that not all believers would escape tribulation, but only the believers who endure trials patiently.

Jesus explained what would happen to those who miss the rapture. *The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* (Matthew 24:50-51) The person left-behind was not called a thief or murderer, but a *servant*. Believers in Christ are servants of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). At the early rapture, unprepared servants of God will be left-behind on earth to suffer alongside unbelievers.

The Consequence

Panic will take hold when end-time events begin on earth. Unprepared Christians will act with selfishness and contempt. When the pressure was on, Jesus laid down his life. He expects us to follow that example—to patiently endure every situation. Jesus described the widespread failure to patiently endure just prior to the early rapture. *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.* (Matthew 24:12-13) Those who stand firm to the end will be rescued from the end times.

Jesus repeatedly warned us to keep watch for this return ...

- *Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.* (Matthew 24:42-44)
- *Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.* (Matthew 25:13)
- *Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the*

rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch. (Mark 13:33-37)

- *It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. (Luke 12:37-38)*

Believers are to live with hearts not weighed down by anxiety, but instead to trust God for deliverance. Jesus said, *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”* (Luke 21:34-36)

Jesus taught three parables that tell us how to take advantage of the opportunity for an early rapture.

Parable	Issues
A man leaving on a journey entrusted his property to three servants. Rather than invest the money (called “talents”), one servant simply buried it. Upon learning of this situation the master responded, <i>“You wicked, lazy servant!”</i> (Matthew 25:14-27)	Use your talents for God’s kingdom. - Do you make full use of your abilities and resources? - Do you invest time in God’s work?

<p>Before departing on a journey another master placed one of his servants in charge of his other servants to ensure someone would care for them. But after the master was away a long time, the lead servant began to mistreat the other servants. When the master returns, he will hold that lead servant accountable. (Matthew 24:45-51)</p>	<p>Do not beat up fellow servants of God – instead, care for them.</p> <p>Physical abuse is less common than to beat up emotionally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you treat your spouse, children, and siblings? - How do you treat co-workers and those you supervise?
<p>Ten virgins took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and did not take oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. Only those who had taken oil were ready when the groom arrived. Those who were foolish were excluded from participating in the wedding. (Matthew 25:1-13)</p>	<p>Oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you respond to the Holy Spirit? - Do you personally know the Holy Spirit?