

The Rapture

The Bible tells that the Lord may come at any moment. This truth is stated in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. I understand the Bible to teach that believers living today should be looking for the coming of Christ described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which is referred to as the "Rapture" of the Church (from the Latin term for "catching away"). Scholars take this to be "the blessed hope" of Titus 2:13. This is the event the Thessalonian converts awaited (1 Thes 1:9-10). Read of this also in Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-57. Note that the statements of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 (about those who "sleep in Jesus") have reference to the bodies of believers which had been buried, after death. These bodies will be raised first (verse 16). Then the living saints (who will not experience death) will meet the Lord in the air (verse 17).

Some suppose the rapture of the church will take place under tranquil circumstances, so that the sudden disappearance of believers in Christ could be readily identified. But I know of nothing in Scripture to suggest that this event will occur in that way. If instead, there should be an atomic explosion, or a sudden declaration of war, with perhaps additional catastrophic events such as earthquakes, whirlwinds, or other natural phenomena which would distract (the minds of men) it does not seem likely (in my opinion) it would be noticed that believers had disappeared.

In the event of such catastrophes, unbelievers might also be destroyed. Of those remaining, there would be undoubtedly a considerable number of persons professing Christianity, who never experienced the new birth. No one would be able to discern that the living, true believers in Christ had been caught up to Heaven. That it is more likely to be this way seems probable from the fact that Scripture says of those who previously heard the gospel and did not believe it, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thes 2:11). If recognized that the Rapture had taken place, it would seem they would more likely believe the truth. But there will be no "second chance" (2 Cor 6:2).

That the Rapture will take place prior to the Great Tribulation is apparent (to me) from Revelation 3:10. Confirmation is given in the context of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. It is important to note that the correct translation of 2:2 is "the day of the Lord" (Tribulation), as rendered in the earliest manuscripts. The KJV translation "the day of Christ" (Rapture) is incorrect. Note the assurance to the persecuted believers of Thessalonica in verse 3, "that day (Great Tribulation) shall not come except" etc. - verse 1 speaks of the Rapture.

There are differences of opinion about when the Rapture will occur, due to the various views of dispensational teaching, etc. The Emmaus course *Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth* is helpful.