

The supernatural removal of the Church out of this world is called the Rapture. The term **rapture** comes from the Latin word **rapturo**. This is the Latin translation of the Greek verb “caught up,” which is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The word denotes a sudden, irresistible act of carrying off by force. In that passage of scripture, the apostle Paul teaches that true believers in Christ will suddenly be caught up in the air by the power of Christ and will meet Him in the air.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

The night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to leave them soon, which would cause a break in their physical fellowship with Him. Jesus continues with a promise that He would come back again and bring them into a place of permanent fellowship namely the “Father’s house.”

Several critical truths:

1. Jesus went literally and bodily into heaven and he will return in the same manner.
2. This promise is made to His followers not to mankind in general. Jesus spoke to His disciples which also represent the church.
3. When He returns He will take His followers to the Father’s house which is also in heaven. The promise is to take (“receive”) to the place where he has made preparations for permanent fellowship.

This promise was new revelation to the disciples, for they were anticipating the establishment of the kingdom on earth. The disciples learned that they (the church) would not remain on earth, for the earth is not the hope of the church. John 14 is the first mention of the rapture event in the Scriptures.

Titus 2:13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

The believer is to live in anticipation of that time when Christ shall appear. Anticipating the return of Jesus, not looking for the Tribulation or some other event.

Philippians 3:20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (NIV).

Paul informs us that believers will be taken to the place of their citizenship (which is heaven) at the time of the Rapture. Their physical bodies will experience change and made like Christ’s body.

1 Corinthians 1:7 *So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

Paul urges the Corinthian believers to live dedicated lives in light of the coming of the Lord Jesus. John uses the same concept of the Lord's coming to motivate Christians to holy and dedicated service in 1 John 3:1-3.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53 *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

The word **mystery** appears in the New Testament at various times and refers to a newly revealed divine secret that was not revealed in the past and that would not be discovered without divine revelation.

The resurrection of the body was not a mystery, since the Old Testament scriptures speak of the bodily resurrection of believers. It was not a mystery that there would be believers on earth when the Lord comes back. The mystery found in this passage is the truth that some believers will not experience death, but, rather, will be caught up to meet the Lord in transformed, immortal bodies. The idea of receiving a resurrection body without first dying was new truth never before given.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Without a doubt this is the central passage on the rapture of the church. It may well be that the unsaved peoples are aware that something special and amazing is taking place, but they will not understand its significance or meaning. This was the case on the Damascus road when Saul of Tarsus fell before the risen Christ, seeing His glory for a brief moment and also hearing the word spoken to him by the Lord. Those traveling with Saul knew something had taken place, but did not understand the words spoken or comprehend the event (Acts 9:7; 22:9). In like manner when the voice of the Father was heard on Passion Week, many heard the voice but apparently did not understand the words, for they thought it was thundering or that perhaps an angel had spoken (John 12:28-30).

The Three Inaugural Sounds

Christ shout, the archangel's voice, and the trumpet of God.

The first sound at the Rapture is the shout. The word means "a shout of command" and implies both authority and urgency. The shout most likely comes from the Lord Himself even though the text is not specific on that matter. Neither does the text declare the context of the shout. It is possible the command is the one found in John 5:28-29 ordering those who are dead to come forth from their graves.

The second sound mentioned is the voice of the archangel. The only other reference to the archangel is in Jude 9. There he is identified as Michael. Michael is either the leader of the holy angels or one of the primary leaders. He and the other angels have been commissioned to protect the people of God (Dan. 12:1; Heb. 1:14), it may be that he is present to protect the saints of God from Satan and his forces as they pass through his domain. Satan is referred to as the "prince and power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), and God's people will be passing through these dangerous regions. No indication is given as to what is said by Michael, but perhaps it is a word of victory.

The third sound is said to come from a trumpet belonging to God. In the days when Israel was camped down at Mount Sinai, trumpets were used to call God's people together for assembly. Moses was instructed to make two silver trumpets to be used for notifying people of upcoming events and "for summoning the congregation" (Num. 10:2). This "last days" blast from God's trumpet summons the church of Jesus Christ to heaven and to fellowship in the Father's house. It parallels the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:52. Not every mention of a trumpet of God refers to this particular event of the Rapture. Just as there were a number of reasons why trumpets were blown in Israel, a variety of trumpets are blown in the end times to signal the conclusion of certain events or the gathering of certain peoples.

The Clouds in the Air

Paul describes to the Thessalonians that believers will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord. This parallels Jesus ascension into heaven, when He was received up into the clouds (Acts 1:9). Clouds can be refer to literal clouds that may carry or not carry rain. However, clouds are also used figuratively in the Bible to refer to the presence and glory of God (Ex. 14:19-24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 20:21; 40:34-38). It is best in this Rapture passage to understand clouds as referring to the visible presence and glory of the Lord.

The phrase "in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17) tells us in general terms that the meeting takes place somewhere between the heavens and the earth. What is significant about this information is that it distinguishes the Rapture from the Second Coming, when the Lord actually comes down to earth.

Participants in the Rapture

1. The Lord Himself (1 Thess. 4:16).
2. Believers. Specifically those who are “in Christ” (1 Thess. 4:16). Those who are “in Christ” are the ones who have been placed into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This work of the Spirit begin on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). “All will be changed” and given glorified bodies at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51). Being “in Christ” means no Old Testament saints will be participants, since they have not been placed into the church, the Body of Christ, by Spirit Baptism. No unbeliever will be part of the Rapture.

Believers who have previously died and who are therefore with the Lord in heaven return with Him to the meeting in the air (1 Thess. 4:14). At that moment (“in a twinkling of an eye”) they receive their resurrected bodies, which are fit for eternal living. At the same time, living believers exit the earth in their mortal bodies. Their bodies are instantly made immortal without having to pass through death.

Results of the Rapture

1. The promise of Christ to come back for His own is fulfilled.
2. Completion of our salvation. Romans 8:23 reminds us that “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Our physical bodies are the place where sin manifests itself and where the flesh resists the working of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:16-17). These physical bodies are in the process of decaying and dying, which is simply a manifestation of the results of sin in the created world. Christs death included the redemption of the body, but that aspect of our salvation has not yet taken place. It will take place at the Rapture. The “flesh” will no longer be around to promote sin. This final phase of our salvation will complete our liberation from the power and effects of sin.
3. Uniting of all believers. The truth of the Rapture was given to bring comfort to those believers who have experienced separation from loved ones (1 Thess. 4:18).