

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Rapture and Christ's Appearing

By: Michael Hardt

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

1. What do Christians wait for?

Christians wait for the coming of Christ to take (or 'rapture') them out of the world. This event is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout [...]. Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air..."

Hence we learn that (1) Christ will come in person and that (2) this meeting will take place in the air, not on the earth. Some Christians have thought they should wait for the kingdom (or even try to prepare the way for it). However, Christ says "Surely I come quickly" and the true Christian hope is to wait for this event: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

2. Does anything have to happen before the rapture?

No – absolutely nothing. The rapture can occur any moment. In the verse quoted in [question 1](#) Paul says 'we which are alive ... shall be caught up'. This shows that, even in the first century Christians expected – and were to expect – the Lord's coming at any moment, and certainly within their life time.

3. What does the rapture mean for Christ?

It is the event Christ is waiting for now. He is the Bridegroom and it will be a joy for Him to take His bride to be with Him. It is good to think about this aspect, as Paul said: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thess.3:5, N.Tr. – see also Rev.3:10).

When still on earth, the Lord prayed: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24).

4. What does the rapture mean for those who belong to Christ?

It will mean blessedness, the end of all suffering, tears, and sorrow. But above all else it means that we will be with Christ forever: "and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

This is also underlined in John 14:3: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also".

It will be the happy and blessed fulfilment of the bride's hope and longing. This is how Scripture describes it – is it true in my and in your heart?

5. How do we know there will be a 'tribulation period'?

The Bible tells us so: Jeremiah speaks of 'the time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer. 30:7). Daniel confirms: "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Dan. 12:1). See also Mt. 24:21 (and Mk. 13:19).

6. What, then, do we mean by 'the tribulation'?

A time of trouble after the rapture (see [question 9](#)):

- Firstly, for the whole earth (Rev. 3:10; Mt. 24:6-7) etc.

- Secondly, for Israel: there will be tribulation for all of Judah, coming from the Assyrian (Isa. 28) as discipline, and there will be tribulation specifically for the ‘remnant’ of faithful Jews who will be oppressed by the antichrist (Mt. 24:15ff).

7. What saints will go through the tribulation?

Some teach that Christians, those composing the church, will go through the tribulation period. But what does the Bible teach? Nothing of the sort:

- Jeremiah 30:7 speaks of ‘Jacob’s trouble’ and therefore refers to the Jews.
- Daniel 12:1 speaks of Daniel’s people – again Israel.
- Matthew 24 speaks of the same events as Daniel and, further, gives a number of additional proofs that the people concerned are Jews: the mountains of Judaea, the Sabbath day, etc.
- Revelation 3:10 – true – is addressed to the church in Philadelphia, but states that the faithful will be kept from the hour of tribulation, not that they would go through it.
- Revelation 7 then shows that the elders (of which the church are part) are a distinct class from those who go through the tribulation.

All scriptures that mention the tribulation period therefore reinforce the same point: the saints who go through the tribulation period are not part of the church, they are not Christians.

8. Do Christians face trials and tribulations?

Yes. The Lord said to His disciples: “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). In a general sense, everyone who really follows the Lord will experience difficulties and even ‘tribulation’ because the world is hostile to Christ. However, this is quite a different thing from ‘the tribulation’.

9. When will the ‘tribulation period’ happen?

During a 7 year time period – between the rapture and the kingdom. In Daniel’s prophecy about the 70 weeks (1 prophetic week = 7 years) in Daniel 9, there is a gap between week 69 and week 70 (Dan. 9:25-27). At the end of week 69 Christ was crucified (Messiah is ‘cut off’). Then comes the time of the Church – in which we live right now – unmentioned by Daniel. But week 70 remains outstanding.

During the first 3,5 years of this tribulation period God’s providential judgements will fall upon the earth (famine, wars, etc. – Rev. 6ff.). The last 3,5 years will be much worse – a time of unparalleled trouble: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world... nor ever shall be” (Mt. 24:21). This second half is spoken of as 3,5 years (or ‘times’), as 42 months, and as 1260 days in Revelation 11–13 etc. Oppression will come from the Jewish ‘antichrist’ and from the government of the re-established Roman Empire (Rev. 13). In addition to this, God’s judgements fall upon the earth (Rev. 6-19).

10. What happens in the middle of the ‘tribulation period’?

Four important events happen in the middle of the week (i.e. 3,5 years into the tribulation period):

- sacrifices cease (Dan. 9:27)
- the antichrist sits in the temple and demands worship (2 Thess. 2:4)
- the ‘abomination of desolation’ is put up, and
- Satan is cast from heaven onto the earth (Rev. 12:7-9).

11. What do we mean by the ‘appearing of Christ’?

The Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth in power, accompanied by angels (2 Thess. 1:7) and by the saints who had been taken to heaven at the rapture (see [questions 1 and 2](#)) – 2 Thess. 1:10.

This event had been announced by Old Testament prophets (e.g. Dan. 7:13-14). He will come to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14) from where He once ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11-12).

12. What does the appearing of Christ mean for Israel and Western Europe?

Israel or, more precisely, a minority in Israel (the 'remnant') will realise that Christ is the one they (nationally) crucified and will repent and accept Him (Zech. 12:10-14; Rev. 1:7), the rest will be judged.

Western Europe is described in prophecy as the revived Roman Empire (Rev. 13), as a confederation of 'kings' to delegate some of their power to the head of this empire (Rev. 17:13). Tragically, "These shall make war with the Lamb" but "the Lamb shall overcome them." (Rev. 17:14; cf. 19:19). He will destroy the Western European armies by the breath of His mouth (Rev. 19:20).

13. What does the appearing mean for Christ?

It will be the moment of glory and display. He had refused to be made king by men (John 6:15), presented Himself to Jerusalem in meekness

(Zech. 9:9; Mt. 21:7-10) and had been rejected shortly afterwards. But at His appearing, He will be universally recognised (Phil. 2:10-11), 'glorified' and 'admired' (2 Thess. 1:10). The One who once bore the crown of thorns (curse) will then wear 'many diadems' (Rev. 19:12), the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

14. What does the appearing mean for Christians?

Although Christians wait for the rapture (question 1) they love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). On the one hand, it will be the day of display for them when the results of their work for Christ will be seen (Phil. 1:6,10; 4:1), and they will contribute to the glory and admiration Christ receives (2 Thess. 1:10). On the other hand, more importantly, it is the day when their Master – whom they followed when He was rejected – will be honoured and recognised by all.

The day of display for the 'King of kings' – MUST be a day of joy for His bride.

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