

# *When Will Jesus Return in the Rapture?*

## *(Titus 2:13)*

The doctrine of the rapture of the church is not an incidental New Testament teaching. While the word “rapture” does not appear in our Bible, it is a word used to describe Christ’s gathering away His church to Himself. The New Testament describes the “hope” of Christ’s return as a *blessed* hope (Titus 2:13); a *purifying* hope (I Jn. 3:3), a *comforting* hope (I Thess. 4:18), and a *sure* hope (II Pet. 1:19). When will the hope of the Lord’s Return be realized? Without setting a specific date, the Bible clearly indicates God’s timeline for eschatological (“end-time”) events.

### I. Five Views of the Rapture

#### A. The Partial Rapture View

1. Only faithful believers who are “waiting” and “watching” will be taken in the rapture. The rapture is a reward for faithfulness.
2. As “left behind” believers are “purged” during the tribulation period, various groups are taken out in a series of successive raptures.
3. Problems with this view:
  - a. A believer’s translation and resurrection are part of salvation, not a reward for faithfulness.
  - b. Paul stated that “all” believers would be included in the rapture (I Cor. 15:51).
  - c. Paul states that believers are not appointed to wrath (I Thess. 5:9, 10). The tribulation period is the ultimate expression of God’s wrath.
  - d. This view divides the body of Christ, an untenable assertion given the New Testament emphasis on the unity of Christ’s body.

#### B. The Midtribulation Rapture View

1. The rapture will occur at the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation period.
2. Midtribulationists believe that Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week involves only the last half of the tribulation period, not the entire seven years. Thus, believers are removed before the wrath of God begins.
3. Problems with this view:
  - a. It is impossible to espouse a midtribulation view of the rapture and hold to the concept of imminency.
  - b. The last trumpet of I Cor. 15 and the seventh trumpet are not identical. The last trumpet of I Cor. 15 signals the completion of the believer’s salvation as he meets the Lord. The seventh trumpet is the last one in a series announcing divine judgment on the earth. There is even a later trumpet sounded during the tribulation to gather the elect of the

Second Advent (Mt. 24:31). Similarity does not prove identity.

- c. Even the first part of the tribulation reveals God's wrath, not simply human or satanic wrath. Those alive during this time recognize the seal judgments as the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16-17). In Revelation 5 it is Christ who breaks the seals and releases judgment on the earth.
- d. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 could not possibly be the church. The witnesses are literally killed and lie in the literal streets of literal Jerusalem for 3 days.

#### C. The Pre-Wrath Rapture View

1. This view is the invention of Marv Rosenthal in his book *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*.
2. The basic thesis of this view is that the church will be removed from earth by the rapture just before the fourth quarter of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel.
3. The view proposes that the tribulation involves three distinct periods: the beginning of sorrows, lasting 3 ½ years; the Great Tribulation, lasting 21 months; and the Day of the Lord, spanning the final 21 months.
4. This view teaches that the church will endure the time of "mans' wrath" and "Satan's wrath," but will be delivered before the Day of the Lord, the time of God's wrath—which begins at the opening of the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1).
5. The church must endure the Antichrist (who is the resurrected Hitler) and the Great Tribulation, but after 64 months into the 70<sup>th</sup> Week will be raptured.
6. Problems with this view:
  - a. This view totally destroys the doctrine of imminency, which Rosenthal calls "untenable."
  - b. The Day of the Lord is clearly longer than 21 months, covering the judgments of the tribulation and the blessings of the Millennium (Zech. 14:1-10)—including a total of 1007 years.
  - c. The judgments in the first half of the tribulation are clearly divine judgments. It is Christ who opens the seals and uses various means to judge a Christ-rejecting world.
  - d. Contrary to Rosenthal's claim that the word "tribulation" is never used for the first half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week, Christ clearly refers to the first half of the seven-year period when He says in Matthew 24:9 that "they will deliver you to tribulation."