

The Rapture

When used on its own, the word “rapture” just refers to the followers of Jesus being taken with Him to heaven. But the “secret rapture” is the belief that Christ will come for His believers in an event that only they are aware of. Meanwhile, those who still haven’t accepted Jesus will notice that many people have suddenly disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Most secret rapture supporters believe in the pre-tribulation rapture.

This is where we will start.

This theory teaches that the righteous will be suddenly taken away to heaven before what is referred to as the “tribulation” period. Those still on earth, now noticing that people around them have disappeared, will have to endure this seven-year tribulation.

The theory teaches that this time is an opportunity for the people left behind to repent and accept Jesus. Then, Jesus will return after this tribulation and bring all His new converts to join everyone else in heaven. This belief in the secret rapture is common enough that young adult books and blockbuster movies have been based on it. (Ever heard of the Left Behind series?) But despite the theory’s acceptance among modern theologians, the idea is fairly new.

It was in the 1800s that John Nelson Darby popularized this doctrine through his philosophy of dispensationalism. This involved a literalist approach to theology that also divided all of history into distinct eras, or “dispensations,” and that God dealt with each of them differently. They’d have different struggles, different tests, and different judgments. Along with this was a literal interpretation of Israel as a nation, rather than seeing it as symbolic for the church of all believers. (spiritual Israel)

And where this relates to the secret rapture is when Darby theorized that the Old Testament prophecies have yet to be fulfilled for Israel (or those who do not accept that Christ was and is the Messiah)—and that fulfillment would culminate with the second coming of Christ. But the current church of believers in Jesus would not be

under that dispensation, and they already believe in Jesus, so Darby asserted that there must be a secret rapture for the true believers before the public rapture (the Second Coming) of those converted during the tribulation period.

The secret rapture idea didn't spread widely until the 20th century, when it appeared in the Scofield Reference Bible. Because this Bible was so popular among the Christians of the time, the theory became widely accepted by many denominations. To better understand this movement, let's start by looking at how certain verses are interpreted. There are several verses that speak of Jesus coming for the righteous like a "thief in the night," such as:

1 Thessalonians 5:2: "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (ESV).

Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed" (ESV).

1 Thessalonians 5:4: "But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief" (CSB).

Luke 12:39-40: "But know this: If the homeowner had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into" (CSB).

But here's one of the most commonly-referenced passages used in support of the secret rapture:

Matthew 24:40–44: "Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (ESV)

Dispensationalists take these verses to mean that Jesus will rapture His followers from the earth while everyone else won't even know what happened until it's too late. That's how they see the fate of the workers left behind in the field or at the mill.

Let's take a closer look at these passages, let's start with Matthew 24:42–44.

The term “thief” is also used in several other verses about the end times (**2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2**). They all refer to how the timing of Jesus' arrival at the Second Coming will be a surprise. And because we never know when this day will happen, we should accept His gift of salvation and live out His gospel today (**1 Thessalonians 5:4–6**).

A thief trying to break into a house, illustrating how the Second Coming will be unexpected (Think of it like this: you can't always know when a thief might come to your house, so you set up a security system and keep your home secure so that when it happens, you're ready.)

But none of these verses indicate that Jesus' arrival, or the rapture of believers, will go unnoticed. In fact, **2 Peter 3:10** states that His appearing will be such a powerful event that the sky will burn. And revisiting **Matthew 24:39–41**:

“...and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left” (ESV).

All these verses are saying is that if you look at two random people out living life, they might appear similar, just going about their routines—but one was prepared for what was happening while the other one was caught by surprise. But there isn't any mention of life on earth continuing on after one person is taken and the other left. This whole section of Matthew 24 is talking about the “day of the Lord,” or the Second Coming. So both the taking and the leaving are happening at the time of Jesus' return.

Now let's look at other parts of Scripture that talk about the Second Coming, and how and when God's followers will be taken to heaven with Jesus.

What does the Bible say about the rapture?

The Bible states that Jesus will come to earth to rapture the righteous in a literal, worldwide event. The Second Coming goes by many different names, like the “coming of the Son of Man,” the “end of the world,” and “the day of the Lord.” It refers to the time when Jesus will appear to the world and call all His followers to join Him in heaven and receive the gift of eternal life.

The first resurrection (of the “dead in Christ”) will also happen at this time (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**).

Are the rapture and the Second Coming two separate events?

This is the primary difference between those who believe in the secret rapture and those who don't. It's not an issue of if the Second Coming and the rapture will happen at all, but if they happen at the same time or not. The Bible describes the rapture as part of what happens at the Second Coming. They are part of the same event. “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**, NKJV).

The word “rapture” isn't found in Scripture, although it means “the act of carrying off.” But Christians started using the term because they felt it was a fitting way to describe how the righteous will be “carried off” to heaven. And the definition is indeed fitting. But there's no indication that this rapture would be secret. Instead, when believers who are still alive are raptured, four things will happen:

1. Everyone on earth will see Jesus make an entrance (**Revelation 1:7**).
2. Believers who have died will be resurrected, transformed, and raised to meet Jesus in the air (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**).
3. Believers who are still alive at this time will also be transformed to have perfect physical bodies that never grow old or die (**1 Corinthians 15:52**).
4. All believers will meet Jesus in the air, where He will take them to heaven for the Millennium (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**).

What about the Great Tribulation?

According to the Bible, believers will not be raptured before the tribulation. Instead, the Bible expresses a post-tribulation view—the concept that the righteous will be raptured after the tribulation, at the same time as the Second Coming. Most secret rapture supporters believe that the righteous will be raptured before the tribulation in order for God to protect His people from harm. But the Bible teaches

that while the righteous will indeed be protected, they will still have to endure hardship (**1 Peter 5:10**).

The bible teaches that the righteous will have to go through the tribulation of the earth's final days. Many examples in Scripture point to this idea, but one of the most powerful examples is the verse that says the tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the righteous (**Matthew 24:21–22**).

Why would the time be shortened for the righteous if the righteous would not even experience it?

This suggests that the righteous will in fact be present on the earth during the “time of trouble.” What’s more, those verses also undermine the idea that the tribulation will last for a set amount of time—seven years. Dispensationalists actually take this interpretation from the 70 weeks prophecy in **Daniel 9:24–27.6**

This prophecy was stating how much time Israel as a nation would have to accept Jesus.⁷ Since the Bible translates a prophetic day as one year (**Ezekiel 4:6**), the Jews had 490 years to accept Jesus before God rejected them as His chosen people. All this means is that they would no longer be the primary nation to present the gospel message to the world. Instead, anyone who accepted Christ would be given that opportunity. In the final 70th week, the Bible says that Jesus was to cause the sacrificial practice—or the killing of lambs as an atonement for sin—to end because He paid the ultimate sacrifice (**Daniel 9:27**).

After that, the last 3 ½ prophetic days (3 ½ literal years) of the 70th week would pass, ending at ad 34 when Stephen was martyred by the Jews (**Acts 8:4**).

The fact that the Jews brought about the first early-church Christian martyr signaled the end of ancient Israel being God's chosen people. Dispensationalists believe that the 70th week (and if a week is 7 prophetic days, it would be seven years) did not occur at the end of Jesus' ministry on earth. Rather, they say that this event refers to an event in the distant future. They believe this time is the great tribulation where instead of Jesus ending the sacrificial system with His perfect sacrifice, the antichrist will end the sanctuary system after 3 ½ years.

But the Bible never mentions the 70-week prophecy or the 70th week in connection with last-day events. And it doesn't specifically mention a seven-year-long tribulation that ends with the second coming of Christ. As a matter of fact, just as we don't know the day of Jesus' arrival, we don't know how long the tribulation lasts. We only know that it lasts for a very short period of time, since

the world will be in such a volatile state. But we do know that much of this tribulation involves persecution (**Matthew 24:9-14**).

But even amid persecution, God will protect us and strengthen us, and we will be kept safe from the destruction of the last days. We're even told that God will shelter us from the final plagues sent on the earth (**Revelation 16, Psalm 91:5-7**), just as He sheltered the Israelites during the plagues in Egypt (**Exodus 11:7**).

The Bible often compares the last days of the earth to the days of Noah. And when we think about the story of Noah, we realize that when God sent the flood, He did not entirely remove Noah from the situation. Instead, He provided a way for Noah's protection amid the destruction. God promises to do the same for us! We don't have to worry about the end times because even though we'll still be on earth during the "time of trouble" described in **Daniel 12:1**, we have the reassurance that God will sustain us.

The biggest takeaway of all—Jesus is coming back for us!

God wants us to be prepared for Jesus' coming—and to have every possible opportunity to make an informed decision about the allegiance of our hearts. But when Jesus returns in a glorious, worldwide event and takes the righteous with Him to heaven, everyone on earth will be settled in their decisions (**Revelation 22:11**).

God doesn't want us to be afraid or caught off guard by that event. That's why He invites us today to faithfully follow Him, trusting that He will strengthen us and care for us. Then we can anticipate the incredible, indescribable joy the Second Coming will bring. So even if you're still figuring out what you believe about the end times and the Second Coming, keep studying your Bible, and the Holy Spirit will "guide you into all the truth" (**John 16:13, NKJV**).