

# The Study of the End Times (Eschatology)

## Lesson Focus: The Rapture and Views of the Tribulation

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### Lesson Purpose

These notes guide our study of eschatology—the study of last things—with humility and faith. Scripture gives real promises and patterns, but not every detail of the timeline is revealed. Our goal is understanding, not speculation.

#### Theme Verse

*Titus 2:13* — “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

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### Core Beliefs Most Christians Agree On

1. A future time of Great Tribulation unlike any in history
  2. Jesus Christ will return after the Tribulation to establish His kingdom on earth
  3. Believers will experience a “Rapture” — a transformation from mortality to immortality
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### What Is the Rapture?

**Definition:** The term *rapture* comes from a Latin word meaning “to seize” or “to carry off.” It refers to the moment when believers are gathered to Christ.

**Primary Passage:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

#### Key Elements in the Passage

- Jesus will descend from heaven
  - A loud command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God
  - The dead in Christ rise first
  - Living believers are “caught up” together with them
  - Believers meet the Lord in the air
  - Eternal union with Christ
  - This teaching is meant to comfort believers
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# The Big Question: *When Does the Rapture Happen?*

There are three primary views:

## 1. Pre-Tribulational View

Rapture occurs before the Great Tribulation.

## 2. Mid-Tribulational View

Rapture occurs at or near the midpoint of the Tribulation.

## 3. Post-Tribulational View

Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation.

All three positions attempt to faithfully interpret Scripture. Each has strengths and weaknesses.

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# The Pre-Tribulational View

## Strengths:

### 1. Promise of Deliverance from Wrath

- 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 teaches believers are delivered from the coming wrath
- The Tribulation is understood as God’s judgment poured out on the earth

### 2. Protection from the “Hour of Testing”

- Revelation 3:10 — God promises to “keep” believers
- The word *keep* means to guard, protect, preserve

### 3. Use of the Word “Church” in Revelation

- “Church” appears frequently in chapters 1–3
- Absent in chapters 4–21 (the Tribulation section)
- Reappears in chapter 22
- Suggests the Church is not present during the Tribulation

### 4. Distinction Between Israel and the Church

Pre-tribulation teaching maintains that:

- God has distinct plans for Israel and the Church
- The Tribulation primarily concerns Israel

### **Daniel’s Seventy “Sevens” Prophecy (Daniel 9)**

- “Seventy weeks” = seventy sets of seven years = 490 years
- 69 “weeks” already fulfilled in history
- Final 7 years remain → identified as the Great Tribulation
- God’s prophetic plan centers on:
  - Finishing transgression
  - Ending sin
  - Atoning for iniquity
  - Bringing everlasting righteousness
  - Fulfilling prophecy
  - Anointing the holy place

### **5. Imminence of Christ’s Return**

- Jesus spoke of His return as something that could happen at any moment
- Believers are called to stay watchful and ready
- Pre-tribulationism best supports an “any-moment” return

### **6. Pattern of Deliverance in Scripture**

Examples of God rescuing the righteous before judgment:

- Noah delivered from the Flood
- Lot delivered from Sodom
- Rahab delivered from Jericho

2 Peter 2:6–9 emphasizes:

- God rescues the godly
- God reserves the unjust for judgment

#### **Key Distinction:**

- Ordinary trials refine believers
- The Tribulation is divine judgment on sin

## **Weaknesses of the Pre-Tribulational View:**

Humility is essential when considering these challenges.

## 4. Historical Development

- Formal doctrine developed relatively recently (1800s)
- Not widely systematized in early church history

## 2. Two-Phase Return of Christ

Requires:

1. A secret coming (Rapture)
2. A visible Second Coming after the Tribulation

## 5. Presence of Believers During the Tribulation

- Revelation 13 describes “saints” on earth
- Common response:
  - Church-age believers are raptured
  - Tribulation believers come to faith afterward

## 6. “Last Day” Resurrection Language

John 6:40 — believers raised “on the last day”

Challenge:

- How can resurrection happen earlier if it occurs on the “last day”?

Common Response:

- “Last day” may refer to a time period, not a single moment
- The rapture begins the final phase of history

## 7. No Explicit Timeline in Scripture

- The Bible does not provide a detailed chronological schedule
- Interpretive frameworks are constructed from multiple passages

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# Living in Light of the End Times

Regardless of one’s view:

# Essential Spiritual Responses

- Be ready
- Stay spiritually awake
- Live sober and alert lives
- Encourage one another with hope

Prophecy is meant to produce faithfulness, not fear.

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## Key Terms

- **Eschatology** — Study of last things
  - **Rapture** — Calling up of believers to Christ
  - **Tribulation** — Future period of intense global distress and judgment (God pouring out his wrath)
  - **Imminent** — Could happen at any moment
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## Discussion Questions

1. Why is humility important when studying end-times prophecy?
  2. What brings believers comfort in the rapture passage?
  3. Which strength of the pre-trib view seems most convincing? Why?
  4. Which weakness raises the most questions for you?
  5. How should prophecy change the way we live today?
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