

# Is the Rapture Next? Part 1



- *Do you think Christians will go through the Great Tribulation or will the rapture happen before then?*
- *Should we be looking for the any-moment return of Christ and the rapture or should we be looking for the horror of the antichrist and the Great tribulation?*
- *Is the rapture next on God's calendar?*

A careful study of the various Bible passages that describe Christ's second coming shows that it will occur in **two phases**—the **rapture** and the **return** (also called the **revelation**). The rapture and return are two different events. They are not a second and third coming but the one coming in **two installments**. One Bible teacher explains Christ's second coming like a two-act play separated by a seven-year intermission which is the tribulation period.

- ▶ At the **rapture**, Christ is coming **FOR** all Christ-followers (the Church) to take them to **the Father's house in heaven** (John 14:1-3).
- ▶ At the **return**, Christ is coming **WITH** the Church to take them **to the earth** to establish His earthly millennial (1,000 years) kingdom (Rev. 19:11-20:6; Matthew 24:27-31; Zechariah 14:1-5, 9).

The rapture and the return focus on two different purposes and are separated by time.

## Is the Rapture Next on God's Calendar? Or Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?

In the Christian community, there have been DIFFERENT viewpoints concerning the time of the rapture. The debate deals with the question—will Christians go through the seven-year tribulation period or be raptured before it? Are Christians to be looking for the any-moment return of Christ and the rapture, or the horror of the antichrist and the Great Tribulation? There are five major positions concerning the relationship of the rapture to the Tribulation period. (See chart).

1. **The Pre-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers will be raptured *before* the seven years Tribulation.
2. **The Partial Rapture:** Only faithful believers who are *spiritually worthy* will be raptured *before* the Tribulation.
3. **The Mid-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers will be raptured in the *middle* of the Tribulation.
4. **The Pre-Wrath Rapture:** All believers will be raptured *five and a half years* into the Tribulation, just *before* God's wrath is poured upon the wicked world.
5. **The Post-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers surviving the Great Tribulation will be raptured at the end of the 7 years, the same time Jesus returns to the earth.

The conviction of this Bible study is that the rapture happens **before** the seven years Tribulation. The any moment return of Jesus Christ to rapture the Church and take her to the Father's house is the believer's **blessed hope** (Titus 2:13).

**Christians Have A Blessed Hope, Not A Beastly Horror.**

## 1. The Anticipation of the Early Church for the IMMEDIATE (Any moment) Return of Christ.

The anticipation of the early Church was for the imminent (any moment) return of Jesus Christ for all His followers. They did *not* anticipate facing the Antichrist, the persecution, judgments, and disasters of the Tribulation. They were looking for the return of Christ for the church at any moment.

The any moment anticipation of Christ's return is seen in Titus 2:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Philippians 3:20.

---

Titus 2:11-13 NLT **"11 For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. 12 And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, 13 while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed."**

---

Q1. (Titus 2:11-13). According to Paul, what does the grace of God instruct us? Also, how do we know that Paul and the early Christians were anticipating the imminent (any-moment) return of Christ and the Rapture?

Paul is saying that Christians should live lives of purity and self-control day after day *while waiting for Christ's coming*. They were to live with anticipation that Jesus could return at any moment. Paul did *not* say that they should prepare themselves for the Tribulation period before Christ comes for His people. He did not warn them that they may face the Antichrist, be hunted down and martyred for their faith, experience the catastrophes that will shake the earth during the Tribulation, etc., all of which would have been an appropriate warning if the Rapture is at the end of the Tribulation. Paul did not interject any of the features that are part of the Tribulation period as events that are necessary for Christians to face before the return of Christ. He spoke of Christ's coming as if that was the **next anticipated event** for the believer. Paul spoke as if Christ's return could happen imminently—at any moment.

---

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 NLT **"9 for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. 10 And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment."**

---

Q2. (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). What reputation did the Thessalonian Christians have? Also, how do we know that they were anticipating the imminent (any-moment) return of Christ and the Rapture?

Notice how the Thessalonian Christians responded to the gospel—they **turned** to God, **served** God, and **waited** for His Son from heaven. They were living for God daily with the

anticipation of the any moment return of Christ. Their anticipation was not the Antichrist and the horrors of the Tribulation period, but the coming of Jesus at the Rapture. Like the Thessalonians, along with living daily for God and fulfilling all our responsibilities in our family, work, and life, we should have an anticipation of the imminent return of Christ.

Philippians 3:20 NLT **"20 But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior."**

Q3. (Philippians 3:20). What does it mean to you that the believer's citizenship is in heaven? Also, how do we know that Paul and the early Christians were anticipating the imminent (any-moment) return of Christ and the Rapture?

Even though the Christian is on earth, he is a citizen of heaven. Paul indicates that it is natural for believers to have a patient and eager anticipation of the return of Christ from heaven. Paul speaks of the return of Christ as if it is imminent. It is the next event on the prophetic calendar for the Christian. The believer is waiting for Jesus, not the Tribulation, etc.

Tim LaHaye mentions in his book, *No Fear of the Storm* (p.64), that Christians who do not look for the imminent return of Christ should stop singing the Hymn, "'Glad day! Glad day!... Jesus may come today,' and start moaning, 'Sad day! Sad day! Jesus can't come today! I'll live out each day and anxious be, the Beast and False Prophet I soon shall see. Sad day! Sad day! Jesus can't come today.'"

The important point is to observe that the record of the New Testament consistently portrays the early Christians as **anticipating an any-moment return of Christ**. It never indicates that they viewed the next events of God's prophetic calendar to be an any-moment coming of the antichrist and their suffering through the horror of the Tribulation.

Christians do not need to fear the future. God is in control of human history. His plan for the ages is unfolding. Jesus is coming again to rapture the Church and to take her to His Father's house (John 14:2-3). **Christians are to have a blessed hope, not a beastly horror.**

### The Rapture Is A Motivation

1. It motivates the believer to wholeheartedly serve and **LIVE** for God.

1 John 3:2-3 NLT **"2 Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. 3 And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure."**

Q4. (1 John 3:2-3). How should an eager expectation of Christ's coming affect our lives? How are you personally affected?

2. It motivates the believer to **WITNESS** to the lost and to reach as many as possible.

Romans 13:11-12 NLT **"11 This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here...."**

Q5. Why should we seek to win as many as possible according to Romans 13:11-12? If Christ's return was near in Paul's day, how should we view His return?

3. It motivates the believer to **RESIST** temptation, **DENY** sin, and to seek purity in his or her life to be ready to meet Christ (1 John 3:2-3; Titus 2:11-13; 2 Pet. 3:10-11; Rom. 13:11-14).

Romans 13:12-13 NLT **"12 The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. 13 Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy."**

Q6. (Romans 13:12-13). How should an anticipation of Christ's soon coming influence our lives?

Are you living with an anticipation of Christ's return? Are you ready to meet Christ at His return? Have you received Christ as your Savior? Are you surrendered to His will for your life?

