

The Rapture

In the first *Left Behind* book, based on the false teaching of Hal Lindsey, people disappeared from an airplane, leaving the rest to wonder what had happened. Their clothes were there but the bodies were gone – raptured into heaven.

Such scenes depict what some believe will happen at the start of the last seven years before the end of this age – based on the teaching of Hal Lindsey. Their idea is that the Jewish antichrist and the Roman antichrist will start the clock on a seven-year countdown to the end when they sign a pact to protect Israel.

The name these writers have given the event which occurs at the start of the last seven years is “the rapture,” from the Latin word rapture, or “to take away” or “snatch” (Lindsey, New World 77). At the rapture, according to Lindsey, “all deceased believers” will be raised and all living Christians will be transformed. These resurrected and transformed Christians “will be bodily taken into heaven” where they will be with Jesus in heaven for the final seven years of the age (New World 275). Lindsey further believes that on earth, during this same time, the final world events will be taking place, culminating in three and a half years of a “great tribulation,” and the ending battle of Armageddon. Because Christians are in heaven during this time, they will not suffer the pain and anguish visited on those still on earth. Thus, it is said, they will avoid “the great tribulation” (New World 77; See also LaHaye and Jenkins 95-117).

These men then say that Christ, along with those “raptured,” will return at the end of the seven years to defeat His enemies, judge those who have rejected Him, and start His kingdom (Lindsey, New World 263). At this same time, the righteous Old Testament dead will be raised and go into the kingdom (Lindsey, New World 275). Christ will then reign on earth a thousand years at the end of which will come the resurrection of the wicked, the “great white throne judgment,” and the start of eternity (Lindsey, New World 275, 276, 279).

Let’s look at the scriptures these men - Lindsey, LaHaye and Jenkins – use to teach this false doctrine. We need to understand that the word “Rapture” is never actually used in these passages, although in **1 Thess. 4:17**, Paul does say that the Christians will be “*caught up*” to be with Christ in the air. I want you to also note that the verses we will be examining are the strongest proof texts these men use to try and prove their theory of the end of time. If the rapture is not taught in these passages, then it is not taught in the Bible at all.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Note that this passage, cited as major support for “the rapture,” does not use the word “rapture,” never mentions seven years, never mentions two comings of the Lord, and never mentions an earthly reign.

To help us understand what Paul is teaching in this passage, then we need to understand what question Paul is seeking to answer? Apparently, the Thessalonian Christians were concerned about whether Christians still living when the Lord returned would have an advantage over Christians who had previously died. To answer their question, Paul first explains that Christians should not sorrow for their departed brethren as those who sorrow who have no hope, for even as God raised Jesus, so God will raise those who have died (*fallen asleep*) in Jesus (vss. 13-14). Also, those Christians still living when Christ returns, Paul adds, will have no advantage over those Christians who have died in Christ (15). In order to demonstrate this, Paul gives the order of events at the end: **1)** the Lord shall descend from heaven, **2)** the dead in Christ shall rise, **3)** living Christians shall be changed and with the resurrected Christians, be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, **4)** those now reunited Christians shall remain with Christ forever (16-17).

The key to this passage is understanding the phrase “*the dead in Christ shall rise first*.” Paul’s concern here is answering the question about the dead in Christ, and those Christians who will be alive at His coming – there is no mention of the unrighteous dead or living, because it is not a part of the question. Paul compares two events in this passage, the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the “*caught up together with them*” of the living Christians at his coming. Other N.T. passages will deal with these issues (actually saying that all the dead are raised at the same time) and we will examine them later. This passage merely teaches that dead Christians will be raised first, and second, living Christians (having transformed bodies) will join them in the air to meet with Jesus. Thus, Paul answers their

question by saying that there is no advantage to being alive when Christ returns. If you are dead you will be raised in a new body, and if you are alive you will be changed into the same kind of body. Both parties will receive a new body and be taken by Christ into heaven. Paul does not teach here the dead in Christ will be raised before all other dead – **1 Thess. 4:13-17** certainly does not teach “the rapture.”

1 Corinthians 15:50-53

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

This passage, likewise, never mentions “the rapture,” says nothing about seven years, does not suggest two coming of the Lord, and never mentions an earthly reign of Jesus. It simply says that, “**at the last trumpet**,” both those who are dead and those who are still alive will both be transformed into incorruptible bodies. Paul’s point here is that since no one could go to heaven in corruptible physical body, both the dead, who will be raised, and those still living will both be transformed into incorruptible bodies, suitable for an eternal home. So, Paul says, when Christ returns, it will not matter whether one is dead or alive – the same thing will happen to both. Much the same point as in **1 Thess. 4:13-17**.

When will all of this happen according to **1 Cor. 15:50-53**? “**At the last trumpet**” according to Paul. Lindsey and others who teach the doctrine of “the rapture,” say that these events will take place a thousand and seven years before the last trumpet, seven years of tribulation on earth and then a thousand-year physical reign of Christ on earth.

You have now read the two major passages, which according to Lindsey and others, teach the concept of “the rapture,” but clearly, they do not at all teach such a theory.

Let’s now turn to the Scriptures and look at the verses that plainly contradict the concept of “the rapture.”

1 Cor. 15:22-26

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end,

when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Let's put the events of this verse in order: **1)** Christ Himself was first raised from the dead as God's evidence to us that we also shall be raised; **2)** Christ shall return as He promised; **3)** Those who are Christ's shall be raised; **4)** Then comes the end when Christ will conclude His reign and return the Kingdom to God.

Notice there is no place in this sequence for a rapture or a thousand-year reign. Notice that when Christ returns, He will end, not begin His reign. When Christ raises the dead, He conquers His last enemy (death) and therefore, needs to reign no longer.

How Many Resurrections and How Many Judgments are Taught in the N.T.?

You might have noticed that the only resurrections mentioned in the verses up to this point, were the resurrection of the righteous; *What about the unrighteous?*

In **John 5:28-29**, our Lord Jesus says, *"for a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and shall come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."* Jesus here speaks of the resurrection of both the good and the evil, and says they will both come from the grave at the same time, the same moment. So, Jesus says there is one resurrection, not three, as Lindsey and others suggests.

Acts 24:15 records Paul's statement to Governor Felix that *"there shall be a resurrection...both of the just and unjust."* If the resurrection of the just and the unjust were separated by over a thousand years, surely Paul would speak of "resurrections" in the plural. Many other references to the resurrection are also singular (**Acts 4:3; 17:18; 24:21; and 26:8**).

Perhaps the strongest evidence that the Christian dead will not be raised a thousand and seven years before the end of time, is that Jesus declares, not once but four times, that His followers, the righteous, will be raised *"on the last day"* (**John 6:39, 40, 44, 54**). When is the last day? In the N.T., this expression has reference to the final moment at the very end of time. As Paul wrote in **1 Cor. 15:23-26**, Christ will return to raise the dead and turn His kingdom over to God. Since the Christian dead are raised on *"the last day,"* there is no time for two later resurrections that is in the theory of the rapture. In this connection it is especially important to note that Jesus says, in **Jn. 12:48**, that those who reject His teaching

will be judged on “*the last day*.” Jesus himself puts both the judgment of the wicked and the resurrection of the righteous on “*the last day*.” Lindsey disagrees with Jesus on this point.

Another point to consider is this – In Rev. 20:11-15, John writes of a great white throne. Before it are “*the dead*” not the good dead or the bad dead or the Christian dead or the O.T. believers, but “*the dead*.” These dead come from “*the sea*” and from “*death and Hades*” – wherever we might imagine the dead to be. Before God on this occasion are both the good and the bad – together – for the names of some are written in the book of life and others are not. There is certainly no indication in these verses of more than one judgment.

The only other lengthy description of the final judgment in the Bible comes from Matthew 25:31-46. Lindsey calls this “the Sheep and Goat Judgment” and says it will take place when Jesus returns to stop the Battle of Armageddon and begin His thousand-year reign on earth (Lindsey, New World 264-265), of course this scripture mentions nothing of these events as Lindsey teaches it.

Mt. 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Note how such a theory plainly contradicts the text: **1)** Jesus says that this Sheep and Goat Judgment happens when “*the Son of man shall come in his glory*” (Mt. 25:31). The theory of the Rapture says it happens at Christ’s second coming when

He starts His thousand-year reign on earth. Paul teaches us that at the time of Christ's coming the dead are raised and then the end comes (**1 Cor. 15:23**). **2)** Jesus says that at this judgment, He will “*sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him*” (**Mt. 25:31-32**). Lindsey says t his is a judgment of only some who are living at the end of the tribulation. **3)** Jesus says the basis of judgment will be treatment of others (**Mt. 25:34-40**). Lindsey, on the other hand, makes the basis of judgment whether or not one has helped the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are not mentioned at all in this passage. (Only **Revelation 7 and 14** mention a group of 144,000, and it does not say they are Jewish evangelist). **4)** Jesus says the righteous and the wicked leave this judgment to go into “*eternal life*” or “*eternal punishment*” (**Mt. 25:46**). Lindsey says the righteous keep on living on earth, still in their unchanged, mortal bodies, for another thousand years. The unrighteous, he says, are “sentenced to eternal fire,” “slain with the sword of the Lord,” enter “a place called torments” where they suffer for the next thousand years,” and only then are cast into the eternal punishment of the lake of fire.

I want you to judge whether Lindsey and other teachers of this theory, or in harmony with Jesus' own statements in Mt. 25. The judgment of **Mt. 25** deals with a final judgement of “*all the nations*” with an “*eternal*” outcome. This is the same judgment as that in **Rev. 20** with only somewhat different terms used to describe it.

The N.T. only teaches one resurrection and, after it, only one judgment for all – both the righteous and the wicked.

Conclusion: **1)** the word “rapture” is never used anywhere in the Bible. It is taken from a Latin word meaning “to take away” and is applied by some to a moment seven years before the second coming of Christ when He will “snatch” His living followers away from whatever they are doing at the time. He will at this same moment, raise His dead followers so they can join Him in heaven for seven years. **2)** The two passages given as primary support for “the rapture” are 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-53. As we have seen, these passages do not describe the events of a rapture as Lindsey and others teach. **3)** 1 Cor. 15:22-26, the most specific passage in the Bible on the order of events at Christ's return, does not mention a rapture or a thousand-year reign. Rather, it says that when Christ returns, He shall raise the dead and end His kingdom. **4)** Many passages attest to there being only one resurrection and only one judgment – not three resurrection and two judgments as Lindsey suggest. **5)** Jesus declares that the resurrection of

the righteous will be on “*the last day*” and that does not at all fit the timetable of those who promote the rapture. **6)** The rapture theory says Christians who are taken into heaven in the “first resurrection” will return with Jesus to join in Thousand-year reign on earth. Can you imagine being in Heaven for 7 years with God and His people and then having to leave it to come back to earth for 1000 years! What an anticlimax! No matter how glorious an earthly reign of Christ might be, if there was one, could never equal being in heaven.

As with the other points of this theory – we can see Scripture never taught the idea of “the rapture” and that in many passages even contradicted this theory. There is not basis for “the rapture” in Scriptures, and thus this theory can be rejected. *It is our goal in all things to be Scriptural – we are to be judged by His words* not the words of false teachers.

(Stafford North, Armageddon Again?)