

# The “Rapture” in Catholic Theology



# The Rapture in Catholic Theology

**Definition:** The word “rapture” comes from the Catholic Vulgate Bible (Latin version of the Bible) in *1 Thes 4:17* where the word “*rapiemur*” is used and is translated in English as “caught up.”

The modern notion of “the Rapture” states that sometime in the future, Jesus will come back before the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, to “take up” (rapture) the faithful Christians so they don’t suffer the great Tribulation and persecution of the Christians noted in *Matthew 24:21*. This notion is not in conformity with historical Christian theology nor with the Bible.

The word itself is scriptural from the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, but the concept of Christ coming again before the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is not.

## Dispensationalism (non-Catholic notion of the Rapture)

Dispensationalism teaches that God has dealt with man through various successive “dispensations” or stewardships and that on each occasion, man has failed in his duties. It is a relatively “new” concept or doctrine.

- The father of dispensationalism is **John Nelson Darby** (1800-1880). It has its origins in the 1830’s in England.
  - Modern proponents of Dispensationalism include Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell, and Dave Hunt.
- He created a timeline that broke up history into “dispensations” – 6 or 7 in number in around 1830.
- He taught that 5 of these dispensations (periods) have already occurred and we are living in the 6<sup>th</sup>. The 7<sup>th</sup> is the millennium (thousand year reign of Christ).
  - Dispensation 1 - Innocence. Creation - Fall
  - Dispensation 2 - Conscience. Fall - Noah.
  - Dispensation 3: Human Government. Noah- Abraham.
  - Dispensation 4 - Promise. Abraham - Moses.
  - Dispensation 5: Law. Moses - Church.
  - Dispensation 6: Church- Tribulation
  - Dispensation 7: Kingdom or Millennium, when Christ will be a literal king on the literal throne of David for 1000 literal years.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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- He began the teaching this notion of the “**Rapture**” from a couple of scriptural verses
    - *Mt 24:37:41* – As in the time of Noah . . . One is taken and one is left
    - *1 Thes 4:16* – Caught up with the Lord
  - He also taught what is called “**Millennialism**.” This is the literal one-thousand year reign of Christ on earth after the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. He derived this from the following:
    - Rev 20:1* Then I saw an angel come down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the abyss and a heavy chain. He seized the dragon . . . and tied it up for a thousand years
    - Rev 20:4* I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had

*not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

Darby's Rapture theory is as follows:

## **Rapture – Tribulation – 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming – Millennium – Final Judgment**

### **Problems with Dispensationalism (Rapture) and Millennialism**

- The problem with the “Rapture” is that there are 3 “Comings” of Christ instead of two.
  - His birth
  - The Rapture to take faithful Christians to heaven before the tribulation
  - The 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming (the final judgement)
- The texts used to support the rapture don't actually do so.

***1Thes 4:15-17** Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the **coming of the Lord**, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself . . . will come down from heaven, 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. Thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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- This previous verse is talking about the “coming of the Lord,” which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, the end of time. Those who are “left” are the ones being caught up.
  - The following scripture seems to say the same thing . . . that those “left behind” are the ones that are saved:

***Mt 24:37-41** For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the **coming of the Son of Man** . . . Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.*
  - Note that those who were “left behind” were Noah and his family . . . the righteous. It seems to say that the unrighteous will be “taken away.”
  - In addition, the dead must rise first at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ in **1 Thes 4**. We see this supported in the Gospel of John:

***Jn 6:54** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.*

And Paul tells us regarding the resurrection. . .

***1 Cor 15:23** but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the **end***

This means that **1 Thes 4** is in the context of the “Last Day” or the end of time, or the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. It is not another secret “rapture” before the end of time.

As for Millennialism . . .

- Scripture in one place, does seem to support the idea of a thousand year span (**millennia**) between the Second Coming and the Final Judgment – That is in Revelation Chapter 20.

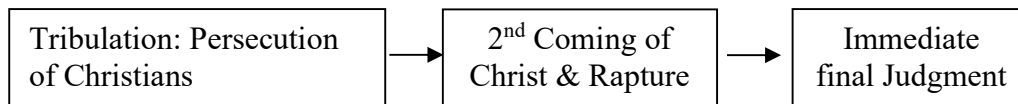
- But in the rest of scripture, there is no mistaking that the Final Judgment will be when Jesus comes a second time. We see in Matthew that when Christ comes again, there will be judgement and a final destiny for the righteous and the wicked.

*Mt. 25:31–32, 46 "[w]hen the Son of man comes in his glory . . . Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats . . . And [the goats] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life".*

And many other times in the Bible when the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is mentioned as follows:

- The Day of the Lord (*1 Thes 5: 2*)
- Coming of the Lord (*Jas 5:7*)
- That Day (*Mt 24:36*)
- Coming of the Son of Man (*Mt 24:39*)
- His Coming- *parousia* (*1 Thes 3:13*)
- Day of Judgment (*Mt 10:15*)
- The Coming of the Day of God (*1 Pt 3:12*)

### The Catholic Position (Amillennial)



The Catholic Church teaches from a historical consensus that the “Millennium” is a *spiritual* reign of Christ that has been present in the Church since Pentecost. It is an ecclesiastical kingdom, founded at Pentecost. Ecclesiastical comes from the Greek work “*ekkaleo*,” which means “the called out/summoned,” and is associated with the Church.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

The Kingdom of Christ started with the Church and ends with heaven at the end of time. The Bible uses the terms, “Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven” interchangeably with “the Church.”

*Mt 16:18-19* I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . .

In addition, *Matthew* gives us multiple parables in **Chapter 13** where he speaks about “the Kingdom of Heaven.” The Kingdom of heaven is like . . .

- A field with good seed and bad seed (13:24ff)
- A net with good fish and bad fish (13:47ff)

And in **Chapter 25**, the Kingdom of heaven is like

- 10 wise virgins and the 10 foolish ones.

This cannot be “heaven” where the righteous are present with God. There are no “bad seeds” or “bad fish” or “foolish virgins” in Heaven. The parables are clear that this kingdom is here on earth.

A more balanced perspective is given by Peter who writes the following:

*2 Pet 3:8–14 "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. . . . what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."*

# Dispensational Terminology

WHEN WILL THE 2<sup>ND</sup> *COMING* OF CHRIST OCCUR?

## Premillennialism

Rapture	Tribulation	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Coming</i>	<i>Millennium</i>	Final Judgment
		Christ rules on earth	(Literal reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years)	

## Amillennialism (The Catholic Position)

<i>Millennium - Tribulation</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Coming</i>	Final Judgment
Millennium is the present period of Christ's rule in heaven. Age of the Church. Tribulation occurs during the Millennium	Faithful will be "caught up"	Immediately after the 2 <sup>nd</sup> coming

## Postmillennialism

Rapture	Tribulation	<i>Millennium</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Coming</i>	Final Judgment
		(figurative)		

WHEN WILL THE *RAPTURE* OCCUR?

## Pre-tribulation

<i>Rapture</i>	<i>Tribulation</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Coming - Millennium	Final Judgment

## Mid-tribulation

<i>Tribulation - Rapture</i>	Millennium	2 <sup>nd</sup> Coming	Final Judgment
Rapture will occur in the middle of the Tribulation			

## Post-tribulation

Millennium - <i>Tribulation</i>	<i>Rapture</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Coming	Final Judgment
(figurative)	During the 2 <sup>nd</sup> coming		