



“We Will be Caught Up Together”:

The Rapture?

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Do Catholics believe in the Rapture? Will believers be caught up into heaven before a tribulation at the end of time?

In recent years, the idea of a “Rapture” has gained significant popularity, particularly following the *Left Behind* novels of Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. The doctrine asserts that believers will be caught up into heaven, leaving non-believers behind to suffer a great tribulation. Then Christ will come again in glory to bind Satan and establish 1,000 kingdom of peace with Jerusalem as its capital, complete with a rebuilt Jewish Temple and restored animal sacrifices. Then Satan will be destroyed forever before the righteous are sent to Heaven and the unrighteous are condemned to hell. This belief system is known as dispensationalism.

Many elements of dispensationalism, including the rapture, are foreign to the rest of Christianity, including Catholicism. Dispensationalism takes its roots from the teachings of John Darby, an Irish clergyman of the 1800’s. Significant Dispensationalists since Darby include Dwight Moody, C.I. Scofield, Hal Lindsey and, today, John Hagee and Tim LaHaye.

This outline will address three underlying aspects of Catholic teaching regarding the end of time:

1. The Church is the new People of Israel, and the promises of God to His People in the Old Covenant are fulfilled in and through Christ’s Church in the New Covenant.
2. There will be great tribulations at the end of time, but believers will not be snatched away before them. Instead we will be called to faithfully suffer through them in imitation of Christ.
3. At Christ’s second coming, he will judge the living and the dead. He will fully establish the eternal kingdom, which will have no end.

The Church is the New Israel

At the heart of dispensationalism is the claim that the made to Israel in the Old Covenant (for a restored kingdom, a rebuilt temple, etc) have not been fulfilled, because the Jewish people rejected Christ as their king. When the Israelites rejected Jesus as their Messiah, Jesus instead instituted the Church as a “Great Parenthesis” in God’s overall plan, but will return again to fulfill his promises to Israel for an earthly kingdom. Catholics and the vast majority of Protestants believe instead that the Old Testament prophecies to the Israelites have been fulfilled in the Gospel. The Church is the new Israel, comprised of all Jewish People who followed Christ to receive the promises made to them and of Gentiles who were ‘grafted onto’ them to share in those promises. Christ did not come to establish an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly one.

Romans 9:6—8: For not all who are of Israel are Israel, nor are they all children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall bear your name." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.

Romans 11:1, 15—20: I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.... For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch of dough; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place and have come to share in the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. If you do boast, consider that you do not support the root; the root supports you. Indeed you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is so. They were broken off because of unbelief, but you are there because of faith.

John 18:36: My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants (would) be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.

Mark 7:5—13: So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.' You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." He went on to say, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Whoever curses father or mother shall die.' Yet you say, 'If a person says to father or mother, "Any support you might have had from me is qorban"' (meaning, dedicated to God), you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother. You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things.

2 Timothy 3:16—17: All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

See also *Colossians 1:13*; *1 Peter 2:9—10*; *CCC 541, 680, 681*; *John 6:15*; *Matthew 16:18—20*; *Mark 9:1*

The Church will Suffer Through the Tribulation

Dispensationalists insist upon the need to "rightly *divide* the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV) and introduce a number of distinctions that are by no means obvious to the casual reader, e.g., the "kingdom of heaven" vs. the "kingdom of God," the "day of the Lord" vs. the "day of Christ," the "Book of Life" vs. the "Lamb's Book of Life," the "judgment seat of Christ" vs. the "Great White Throne of Judgment." Most famously, they distinguish between a secret coming of Christ in the rapture, when the Church will be caught up into Heaven before the tribulation, and a glorious coming of Christ after the tribulation, when Christ will usher in the millennium kingdom. Such artificial divisions defy the most obvious meaning of Scripture.

Catholics and most other Christians instead believe that the "rapture" identified in 1 Thessalonians 4 is the same event as the glorious coming of Christ in Matthew 24 and elsewhere. Christians will meet Christ in the air at his glorious coming to joyfully welcome him. Catholics acknowledge that there will be a great period of tribulation at the end of time. Believers will not be snatched away before the

tribulation, but are called as members of the Body of Christ to suffer in imitation of Christ through the tribulation, so that they may share more fully in His glory.

I Thessalonians 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, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, 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.

Matthew 24:21—22, 29—31: [F]or at that time there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect they will be shortened.... Immediately *after the tribulation of those days*, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

John 17:15: [Jesus prayed,] “I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one.”

I Peter 4:13: But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 675, 677: Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection.

See also *John 15:20; Matthew 16:24; I Corinthians 12:26; Colossians 1:24; 2 Corinthians 1:5;*

Christ will Come Again to Fully Establish the Eternal Kingdom

The simple Catholic understanding of the end of time is that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. Dispensationalists interpret Revelation 20 very literally, and assert that Christ will come again in glory to establish an earthly kingdom, will raise up believers to reign with him, and will only after 1,000 years will judge the world and usher in eternity. Dispensationalists are not the first to believe that there will be some sort of literal millennium of peace, and the Church has officially rejected the possibility of such an earthly period of peace. Instead, Catholics believe that Christ will come again and immediately judge the living and the dead, sending the just in their risen bodies to eternity in the kingdom of Heaven, and the wicked to eternity in hell.

Although the Church hasn't offered an official interpretation of Revelation 20, the generally accepted interpretation is that the millennium symbolizes the history of the Church. Christ has already bound Satan through his death on the Cross, all who come to him through faith and baptism have already risen to new life in the “first Resurrection,” and we now await the judgment and the final Resurrection at the Second Coming.

Revelation 20: 1—6: 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, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil or Satan, and tied it up for a thousand years and threw it into the abyss, which he locked over it and sealed, so that it could no longer lead the nations astray until the thousand years are completed. After this, it is to be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones; those who sat on them were entrusted with judgment. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image nor had accepted its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection.

Matthew 25: 31—32: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

John 5:24—29: Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life. Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation.