

Hope for the Future

As the world faces one crisis after another, and they seem to be getting worse, some wonder if the end of human history as we know it is near. This end will eventually come, though no one can predict when Jesus Christ will return to earth. Jesus Himself said that (Matthew 24:36).

The Bible does describe final end-time events in detail, including Christ's return, judgments against a wayward world, the resurrection of all people, and the rule of a messianic king. For Christians, understanding such Bible prophecy gives hope and purpose. For non-Christians, knowing prophecy shows that an omnipotent God has a wise plan for planet Earth—a plan that involves justice and judgment.

This pamphlet cites the Holy Scriptures to show God's plan for a new heaven and earth. Read this pamphlet and learn how anyone can be part of the future kingdom of God. Understanding Bible prophecy can help us live better quality lives right now.

Why Is Bible Prophecy Important?

Bible prophecy is all about future events, but it appears that the overarching purpose of Bible prophecy is to change the way we think and the way we live right now. The future is to impact our present and give us a “two-world view.”

- 1 Bible prophecy reminds us that God is in control of this universe. It might appear that Satan or evil men have taken over, but no demon or man can thwart the purposes of a sovereign God.
- 2 Bible prophecy reminds us that God is good. If this life and this world, with all this pain and evil, are all there is, we might challenge the idea that God is good and loving. But Bible prophecy reveals that the ending of the story is good, even glorious, for the children of God (Romans 8:18).
- 3 Bible prophecy assists us in living holy lives. Those who have a clear understanding of the coming judgments and of Jesus’ magnificent return are more likely to live well for Christ and avoid being trapped by the sins of this present world. Bible prophecy helps to purify our lives (1 John 2:28–3:3).
- 4 Bible prophecy also helps us establish proper priorities. Those who live with an awareness of Christ’s return, the reality of personal judgment, and the coming kingdom of God think differently regarding the use of their time, money, and resources (2 Peter 3:10–14).
- 5 Finally, Bible prophecy gives us hope. While none of us will be exempt from painful, even depressing situations, the knowledgeable Christian can look beyond these matters, confident of a wonderful forever (Titus 2:13).

What's Next?

As we look at our world today and we observe such things as the emergence of Israel in their ancient land and a unique globalization taking place, it does seem that preparations for biblical end-time events are being put in place. However, the next unmistakable worldwide event is the rapture of true believers in Jesus Christ.

The rapture is the sudden, supernatural removal of believers from the earth. The term *rapture* comes from the Latin word *rapture*, which is the translation of the Greek verb meaning “caught up,” found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” This verb denotes a sudden, irresistible act of carrying off by force.

Genuine believers in Christ (members of the true church) will suddenly be caught up into the air by the power of Jesus Christ. At the rapture, Jesus will not return all the way to the earth as He will at the second coming.

Christians who are alive at this time will be caught up into the air to meet the Lord Jesus; at that moment they will receive new, glorified bodies. Those Christians who have died since the church began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) will also be involved in the rapture, having their physical bodies raised from the dead. These Christians have been with the Lord since their death, but only now do they receive their resurrected, glorified bodies.

All Christians will be taken by the Lord Jesus to heaven (1 Corinthians 15:51–53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; John 14:1–3) and will be with Him there until He returns to the earth at the second coming.

Is the Rapture Distinct from the Second Coming?

Though they have similarities, the rapture and the second coming have key differences:

- At the rapture, believers meet Christ in the air; at the second coming, the Lord descends to the Mount of Olives. None of the second coming passages (Joel 3:12–16; Revelation 19:11–21; Zechariah 14:1–5; Matthew 24:29–31) refer to the meeting in the air.
- At the rapture, the Lord comes to bless His people with the final aspect of their salvation. The rapture passages (1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; 1 Corinthians 15:51–53) contain no warning of judgment. In contrast, the second coming passages emphasize impending judgment for unbelievers.
- In the rapture passages, there is no mention of the millennial kingdom being established after this return of Christ; the second coming passages emphasize the establishing of Christ’s messianic kingdom.
- With the rapture, the Lord’s coming is seen as imminent; many signs and events must take place prior to the second coming.
- At the rapture, the Lord returns to heaven with His saints (to the “Father’s house”); at the second coming, the Lord Jesus descends and remains on the earth.

The interval between the rapture and the second coming is debated. Many believe the rapture will occur before the time of tribulation; this is called the “Pretribulation Rapture” view. Two other views are that Christ will return for believers at the end of the tribulation, the “Posttribulation Rapture”; and that Christ will return near the midpoint of the tribulation, or the “Midtribulation Rapture.” A more recent view, the “Prewrath Rapture,” holds that the rapture will occur about three-fourths the way through the tribulation.

The pretribulation view seems to handle best the combined theological, exegetical, and interpretive issues.