

"Left Behind?"

Several recent books and movies talk about the rapture and a sudden disappearance of a mass of people. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Does the Bible speak of a rapture and what does it say?

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29:29, that "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." God doesn't tell us everything, but what He does tell us is sufficient to lead us into an eternal relationship of joy and peace. God's Word is also sufficient to help us distinguish between the imaginary and the real, the true and the false. We're interested in what the Bible actually teaches rather than in speculating about the future. So thanks for joining us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Perhaps you've read books or seen movies about the end times. Words like "rapture" and phrases like "mark of the beast" and things like "left behind" have been sensationalized by Hollywood and popular religion. Scenes of sudden, mass disappearances and disasters challenge the imagination, but they mislead people about the second coming of the Lord. They say that He will first come invisibly, take away the righteous or rapture them, and seven years later come a third time visibly. Well according to them, this rapture will begin a seven year tribulation, and then the Lord will set up a thousand year kingdom.

They believe Jesus Christ will reign over the earth for a thousand years from a throne in Jerusalem and re-establish temple worship. At the beginning of the thousand years or millennium, the devil and his angels will be bound and peace will exist on the entire earth. Well at the end of the 1000 years Satan will be released in order to raise an army against Jesus, but the Lord Jesus will destroy them. They say only then will the final judgment take place.

Well if you want to know more about what we're talking about today, we offer this study free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now we have materials that are free on our website at www.searchtv.org. The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from John 14:1 through 6, and hear what God says about the second coming.

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in the gospel according to John, chapter 14, verses 1 through 6. "'Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'" Aren't you grateful that we have a way to the Father through Jesus. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful for your love and for Your providence. And Father we're thankful that You are preparing a place for us to be with You one day. And Father, help us to live and to walk worthy of our calling. Father may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

What does the Bible say will happen when Jesus comes again? Well when Jesus comes again on the last day, everyone will know it; there'll be no doubt about it! He will appear in the sky, He will raise the dead (that is both the good and evil), and He will take us all to the Judgment seat, He'll destroy the earth and all its works, and He'll reward the righteous and condemn the unbelievers and ungodly. There is no seven year of tribulation or thousand year reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem. When Jesus comes again, we'll be raised to face Him in the judgment! Well let's look at each of these events.

First, when Jesus comes again, everybody will know it. Jesus' coming will be visible. Revelation 1 verse 7 says, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." Not only will it be visible, it'll also be announced by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. 1

Thessalonians 4 verse 16 says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Those who have rejected Him will be surprised to find out that they were wrong. They will mourn that they had failed to serve Him and must face His wrath.

Second, when Jesus comes again, He will raise the dead. Some believe that there is a resurrection of the righteous dead at the rapture and then a thousand years later a resurrection of the wicked. But the Bible doesn't teach that there will be two earthly resurrections, no. The Lord Jesus said in John 5 verses 28 to 29, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, and those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." The Lord Jesus clearly states that everyone who is in the tomb will be raised, both the good and the evil, at the same hour! To put a thousand year period between these resurrections is misleading. When he was on trial, the apostle Paul made it clear in Acts 24 and verse 15, that "there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." Now on that day, all who are in the tomb shall rise!

Third, Jesus does not have to wait until He comes again to set up His kingdom. My friends, His kingdom is already here on earth today. It is the church! The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16 verses 18 to 19, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Now Jesus promised to build His church and to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. We know Jesus did indeed build His church, and we see its existence in the book of Acts. One must wonder why Jesus built one thing and gave keys to another, unless the church and the kingdom of heaven are the same thing.

When Jesus died upon the cross, He died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). Now it wasn't a substitute until the kingdom came, like some have suggested. Someone says well Phil, how do you know that? Well, let's think together. In Acts 20:28 Paul spoke of the church, "which He purchased with His own blood." Now Jesus shed His blood in order to purchase the church. In Revelation 5 verses 9 to 10, the elders sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Now the same blood of Christ that purchased the church also purchased the kingdom. The fact is, the church that Jesus purchased when He died on the cross is the kingdom of God today! There's no future kingdom to be established one day; we are in the kingdom now!

Well how do we know that? Well Colossians 1 verses 13 to 14 says, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us (these are both in past tense) to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” The kingdom that grants us redemption and the forgiveness of sins is the church.

The apostle John also said that he was in the kingdom. Revelation 1 verse 9 says, “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Now just as John was at that time suffering tribulation, John was at that time in the kingdom of God.

In fact, John wrote in Revelation 1 verses 5 to 6, “To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— and has made us (past tense) to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Now the Lord who released us from our sins made us to be a kingdom (now not kings as some versions say) but a “kingdom.” And 1 Peter 2 verse 9 says that we are a “royal priesthood.” If we are not in a kingdom, how can we be “royal priesthood”? In Acts 2 and verse 30, Peter quoted God’s promise to David that He would seat one of his (that is David’s descendants) upon his throne and said that the resurrected Jesus Christ fulfilled that promise. Now he concluded in verse 36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him (that is Jesus) both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now to be Christ, that is to be the Messiah, the son of David, He is to be the king of God’s people. To say there is no kingdom today is to say that Jesus is not yet king, but Peter said the resurrected Christ is sitting on His throne at the right hand of God.

We need to understand that Jesus already is sitting on the throne and already has full authority. After His resurrection Jesus said in Matthew 28 and verse 18, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Now Jesus doesn’t lack any authority. He already has all authority now! Ephesians 1 verses 20 to 21 says that God “raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” Jesus is already filled with authority, and is already on His throne! Revelation 17 and verse 14 and Revelation 19 verse 16 proclaim that He is now “King of kings” and “Lord of lords.” We don’t have to wait for the future to see Jesus reigning; He overcame Satan at the cross and has been sitting on His throne ever since.

Fourth, when Jesus comes again, He will destroy this world with intense heat. There is no seven year tribulation or thousand year afterward. 2 Peter 3 and verse 7 says, “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” It is misleading to say that Jesus will stay here longer. The day of judgment will see the complete destruction of this present world. Peter explains in verses 10 to 12, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. And since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements, (that is the fundamental things of this earth), will melt with intense heat!” You see the same day that Jesus comes, the day of the Lord, is the day that the heavens and earth will be destroyed by burning and melt with intense heat.

Fifth, some say that when Jesus returns He’ll restore Old Testament temple worship and sacrifices to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ. My friends, the Lord’s Supper already commemorates the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We’re already remembering His body and His blood. There is no need

for restoring Old Testament worship. That covenant and its ordinances came to an end according to Hebrews 10 verse 1 through 10. There isn't any need for a temple made with hands. Paul told the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3 and verse 16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" The church is the temple of God today! Paul told the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 2 verses 19 to 22, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." My friends God dwells in His people today, not in some physical building made with stones.

Sixth, some teach there is a 1000-year gap between the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. But this is not what the Bible teaches. 2 Thessalonians 1 verses 7 to 9 teaches that "the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." My friends, when Jesus returns, there will be a judgment that very day! There is no gap between a supposed limited rapture and the second coming!

Now seventh and last, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. God makes it clear in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10, "For we must (we must) all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We will all be judged by the word of God found written in the books according to Revelation 20 verses 11 to 12. God will judge us by our works. And those who have lived faithfully will enter heaven, and those who did not live faithfully, those who would not believe in Jesus, those who would not obey the gospel, would not obey His, those folks will be lost.

Someone says, "well Phil, haven't you read Revelation 20?" Oh yes, indeed I have. Revelation 20 says nothing about a rapture, you can read the whole chapter it's not there. Revelation 20 says nothing about a bodily resurrection, it does talk about those in heaven who were resurrected, but nothing about a bodily resurrection. Here he talks about a unique resurrection at the throne of God. More than that, this chapter says nothing about Jerusalem being the new capital, not one thing in Revelation 20 about a new Jerusalem. Nor is there anything about a literal throne on earth, not one thing. There's not one thing in Revelation 20 about rebuilding the temple. In fact, no Scripture in the New Testament says that Christ will ever set foot on earth again, not a one. 1 Thessalonians 4 and verse 17 says that we will "meet the Lord in the air, and so shall always be with the Lord." My question is this, are you ready to meet Him? Are you right with the Lord, or will you be lost on that day, because you were disobedient or unbelieving? Oh, I hope you'll come to the Lord and get right with Him today. Let's pray together. Oh heavenly Father, we're grateful for Your love and we're thankful for all that You have done for us and for the preparations that You have made. Father we know that one day we'll have to come and face You. Help us Father to live our lives here in such a way that we may be prepared to be with You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name we pray, Amen!

Throughout history, many have made predictions as to the exact date of the return of Jesus Christ. And supposed prophets have suggested date after date. The Bible teaches Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18 and verse 36). Jesus said in Matthew 24 verses 35 to 36, that "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day (that is the day that heaven and earth

pass) at that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." Now later the Lord said to His disciples concerning His Second Coming: that "It's not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His authority" (Acts 1 and verse 7). Both Peter and Paul make it clear that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 2).

Now even if we don't know when Jesus will return, we know that He'll fulfill His promise to return and judge us. Shouldn't we be prepared? Peter said in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 11 says, "Since all these things are to be destroyed (that is the earth and all it's works) in this way, (he says) what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" If the Lord Jesus came today, would He open the gates of heaven to you or would He reject you?

If there's any sin barrier between God and you, don't let another day pass until you've made it right with God. Now to become a Christian, believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Your faith and your love will lead you to repent of sin and turn to righteousness. Now repentance corrects our behavior and our thinking. A penitent believer is willing to confess the Lord Jesus Christ before others and to be baptized, immersed in water. The Lord Jesus Himself said in John 3 and verse 5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." My friend, you can enter God's kingdom and be born again when you are in the waters of baptism. And so we ask that you respond to God's love today. Won't you?

We hope that today's study about the end times has stirred you to consider your future, and the future of your soul. Consider what God says. Now if you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, we ask that you mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of the churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you contact us, don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

So we ask that you please, please get involved with a church of Christ. Now if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. And if you need someone to talk to you about your salvation or your soul, we have friends who'll answer your questions. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us, tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.