

This is one of the most debated and controversial questions among Christians. Many have even ended up arguing over it. Some believe the Church will endure the Great Tribulation before being raptured, while others believe we will be taken up first and then the Tribulation will follow

There is a key biblical truth that many miss: Christ's Coming is Divided into Three Phases. If someone fails to understand these phases, the Bible can become confusing. These phases are:

1. The First Coming of Christ

This is when Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, lived about 33½ years, died, rose again, and ascended to heaven.

2. The Second Coming / The Rapture of the Church

In this phase, Christ will receive His elect in the clouds. The dead in Christ will rise, and together with believers who are alive, they will meet the Lord in the air. Christ will not come back to earth at this stage—He will remain in the sky, and those taken will go with Him to the heavenly mansions that have been prepared.

This phase matches Jesus' words in Luke 17:34–35 (NIV):

“I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”

And the idea of *“coming like a thief in the night”* also fits here—some will be taken unexpectedly. This is not a public, visible coming for judgment, but a secret gathering of the faithful before the Tribulation begins.

Jesus also assured the Church of protection from that coming trial:

Revelation 3:10 (NIV) says:

“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.”

The wording is significant: the Church is promised to be kept *from* that hour, not *through* it.

This phase is not when every eye will see Him. That event belongs to the third phase, which we'll explore next.

Questions About the Rapture Phase

If the rapture were the same as the day when everyone sees Christ, how do we explain those left in bed or working in the field? Would they wake up and see Him? That would make Jesus' imagery meaningless:

"two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left."

Furthermore, the biblical description of Christ's visible return includes cosmic disturbances:

- Nations will mourn
- Mountains and islands will shift

- The sun will be darkened, the moon will turn to blood
- A great earthquake will occur

If all that happened at the rapture, who would still be asleep or working? What role would the Antichrist play, and how would the mark of the beast be implemented?

So it's clear: the day of the rapture is distinct from the day when every eye sees Christ.

3. The Third Coming (Visible Return of Christ)

After the rapture, people will vanish and much confusion will sweep the world. Most will assume people just disappeared. Few will realize that the Church has already been taken up. There will be no dramatic signs in the heavens right away—life will seem normal.

During this time, the Antichrist will rise. In the first 3½ years (42 months), he will deceive the world and many will accept his mark, thinking it harmless or necessary for identity or commerce. Only a few will refuse it, fully understanding its implications.

Those who reject the mark will be persecuted, falsely accused, imprisoned, and tortured in terrible ways. Many will be killed. As the second half of the Tribulation nears its end, only a remnant will remain. Then God will pour out the seven bowls of wrath (Revelation 16) on those who received the mark.

Then comes the visible return of Christ, which includes:

- The sun turning dark
- The moon becoming like blood
- The sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky
- Christ descending with his saints and the heavenly armies to wage the final battle (Armageddon) and to usher in His 1,000-year reign on earth

Matthew 24:29-31 (NIV) describes this moment.

Also see Revelation 6:12-17 (NIV) for the cosmic upheaval accompanying His return.

Who Are the Elect Gathered at His Return?

These are not the Church, but the 144,000 Jewish believers who were sealed by God after hearing the message of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. They were protected from the Antichrist and the plagues of the Tribulation (Revelation

12:14–15). They will be gathered to *Mount Zion* in Israel (Revelation 14:1) and will accompany Christ in His return.

So the ones gathered from the four corners of the earth are not the Church but these sealed Jews—not a Gentile congregation.

What About Revelation 7:9–16?

Some interpret that passage to mean the Church goes through the Tribulation, because it shows a great multitude “from every nation” standing before God, clothed in white, who “came out of the great tribulation.” But note the timing: this is a heavenly scene after the rapture.

This multitude includes believers from all generations—martyrs, those persecuted, modern Christians, and others. It is one unified group of redeemed, not split between those who did or did not go through Tribulation.

Summary and Conclusion

- The Church will not go through the Great Tribulation. She will be spared (kept *from* it).

- Those left behind after the rapture will be subjected to the Antichrist's wrath and may die.
- They will miss the heavenly banquet, though they might still be resurrected later to partake in Christ's earthly millennial reign.
- The rapture is not the same as the visible return—biblical prophecy distinguishes them.

Why Do Many Get Confused?

Because many Christians do not understand God's prophetic timeline, especially the teaching in Romans 11 about Israel's spiritual blindness and the role of Gentiles.

That blindness allowed Gentiles to receive grace and salvation now. But the Bible teaches that Israel's blindness is temporary; there will come a day when their eyes are opened again. When that happens, the time of grace for Gentiles will close, and the focus of salvation will return to the Jewish people.

After the rapture, the window of grace for Gentiles will shut. The Antichrist will rise, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit will shift to Israel.

Romans 11:25–27 (NIV) says:

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. ... And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

Thus, once the Church is raptured, the stage is set for Jewish restoration and for God to work in and through Israel during and after the Tribulation.

Final Word: A Call to Responsiveness

We Gentiles live in a time of grace. If you hear the gospel today and believe in your heart, it's because God is still calling you. But this window will not stay open forever.

Once the rapture occurs, the Holy Spirit's restraint will be removed, the Antichrist will be revealed, and salvation will turn toward Israel.

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 (NIV) says:

“For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the splendor of his coming.”

May the Lord bless and guide us

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