

## **What is the rapture? Is it part of Catholic doctrine?**

The word “rapture” itself is not found in Scripture. It is adapted from the Latin verb *rapiemur* (“we will be caught up”), which appears in the Latin Vulgate translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up [or “raptured”] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

St. Paul is saying that the faithful who are still alive at the time of Our Lord's second coming will be taken to heaven after those who have already died have been raised (1 Thess. 4:15). Catholics believe that all the just will be gathered at the end of time, when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. However, Catholics generally do not use the term “rapture” to describe this reality.

When we hear the term “rapture” in today's culture, the meaning usually accorded to that term is the one supplied by Fundamentalists, as popularized by the “Left Behind” books. According to this perspective, which dates back to the “premillennialists” of the 19th century, Christians will be suddenly (“in the twinkling of an eye,” based on 1 Cor. 15:52) taken to heaven (“raptured”), after which there will be seven years of tribulation followed by a millennial (1,000-year) earthly kingdom established by Christ for the Jews, based on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3.

The view of the rapture represented by the “Left Behind” series is incompatible with Catholic doctrine. Among several other difficulties it reflects a profound misunderstanding of the role of the Church as the mystical body of Christ and the fulfillment of the promises made to the people of the Old Covenant.

When it comes to the end times, we do well to realize that we do not know when all this will occur. Whether the end of our earthly life is natural death or whether we live until Our Lord returns, we should view the present as the “acceptable time” (2 Cor. 6:2), the time to ensure that we are right with God, and then whenever the Lord decides to come for us, He will find us ready.

*For more detailed information on the “rapture” and related topics we recommend the following titles:*

Paul Thigpen, [\*The Rapture Trap: A Catholic Response to “End Times” Fever\*](#) (Ascension Press)

Carl E. Olson, [\*Will Catholics Be “Left Behind”? A Critique of the Rapture and Today's Prophecy Teachers\*](#) (Ignatius Press; also available in Bible study form through [Catholic Scripture Study International](#)) (Google “Carl Olson” and “rapture” for many good articles and blog entries on the subject)

David B. Currie, [\*Rapture: The End-Times Error That Leaves the Bible Behind\*](#) (Sophia Institute Press)

William Kurz, S.J., [\*What Does the Bible Say About the End Times?: A Catholic View\*](#) (Servant Books)

Michael Barber, [\*Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation\*](#) (Emmaus Road Publishing)

[Statement by Illinois Bishops concerning the "Left Behind" books and videos](#)

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