

The Three Raptures Explained: Church, Tribulation Saints, and Old Testament Resurrection

July 2, 2026

The Three Raptures — What Scripture Actually Teaches

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV)

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

The word **caught up** (Greek *harpazō*, Latin *rapio*) means to **seize and carry off by force** — not by your own choice. Scripture breaks down **three raptures**: one for the church before tribulation, one during tribulation, and one for Old Testament saints at tribulation’s end.

Rapture Basics — Church First

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NKJV)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NKJV)

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Point	Teaching
Harpazō	Seize, pluck, pull, take by force — you cannot refuse

Point	Teaching
Dead in Christ	Only Christians — Old Testament saints were not “in Christ”
Church in Revelation	Word “church” disappears from Revelation 4-22 — church is already in heaven
Twinkling of an eye	Church rapture is instant — enemies do not see you go

Rapture 1 — The Church (Before Tribulation)

Revelation 3:10 (NKJV)

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

1 Thessalonians 5:9 (NKJV)

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Church is kept **from** the hour of temptation — not through it
- Taken away **by force before** God’s wrath is poured out
- Holy Spirit’s active presence on earth restrains the man of lawlessness — when church leaves, restraint lifts
- Verses about rapture **after** tribulation refer to other groups — not the church

Key insight: If you are in Christ, you are part of **Rapture 1** — before tribulation, not after.

Harvest Pattern — First Fruits, Main Harvest, Gleanings

Harvest Stage	Rapture Group
---------------	---------------

First fruits	144,000 virgin Jews (Revelation 14) — first fruits unto God
Main harvest	Church — caught up before tribulation
Gleanings	Great multitude from tribulation nations (Revelation 7:9-14)

Isaiah 9:2-3 (NKJV)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they joy before You according to the joy of harvest.

Rapture 2 — During Tribulation (Three Parts)

Part A — The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:11-12 (NKJV)

Now after the three-and-a-half days the Spirit of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.

- After **3½ years** (1,260 days) of tribulation — mid-point
- Killed, resurrected, then **"Come up hither"**
- Enemies **behold them** ascending — unlike church rapture in a twinkling
- Men of Jerusalem / Israel — same pattern as Jesus ascending

Part B — The 144,000 Virgin Jews

Revelation 7:1-3 (NKJV)

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

Revelation 14:1-4 (NKJV)

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads. ... These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

Detail	Meaning
144,000 only?	No — Revelation 7:9 shows a great multitude <i>after</i> the 144,000
Virgins — literal	Not defiled with women — physical virginity required for this group
Sealed on forehead	Different from church — we are already sealed by Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)
First fruits	Redeemed from among men left behind after church rapture
12,000 per tribe	Revelation 7:8 — sealed from each tribe of Israel

Ephesians 4:30 (NKJV)

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Galatians 6:17 (NKJV)

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Part C — Great Multitude From Tribulation

Revelation 7:9-10, 14-17 (NKJV)

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and

before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

... "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat."

- **Came out of** great tribulation — they entered it, unlike the church
 - From **all nations** — gathered through martyrdom during tribulation
 - Not called "the church" — church period ended before tribulation
 - They were hungry and thirsty — could not buy or sell without the mark
 - Five foolish virgins parallel — had lamps but ran out of oil; timing failed them
-

Rapture 3 — Old Testament Saints (End of Tribulation)

Daniel 12:1-3 (NKJV)

"At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."

Ezekiel 37:11-14 (NKJV)

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and

bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,” says the Lord.’”

Job 19:25-27 (NKJV)

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Isaiah 26:18-19 (NKJV)

We have been with child, we have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind; we have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen. Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

Detail	Teaching
Who?	Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, prophets — Old Testament saints
When?	End of tribulation — when trouble like never before is happening
Not “in Christ”	They died before the cross — separate resurrection from church
Not for Gentiles	If you are not Jewish and did not live in Old Testament era — this is not your rapture
Purpose	Enter millennial reign — complete the first resurrection category

The First Resurrection — A Category, Not One Moment

Revelation 20:6 (NKJV)

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Group	Part of First Resurrection?
Church (Rapture 1)	Yes — priests who reign 1,000 years
Two witnesses (Rapture 2A)	Yes
144,000 (Rapture 2B)	Yes — first fruits
Tribulation saints (Rapture 2C)	Yes — five foolish virgins who entered tribulation
Old Testament saints (Rapture 3)	Yes — completes first resurrection
Second resurrection	Separate — for those not in first resurrection

Five Foolish Virgins — Timing, Not Virginity Alone

Matthew 25:1-13 (NKJV) — key verses:

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ... And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ... And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.”

- All ten were **virgins** — virginity alone does not save
- All had **lamps** — knew gospel basics

- All **slept** — even the wise; issue is oil at midnight
- Foolish ones bought oil and returned — **door already shut**
- They enter tribulation as believers — part of Rapture 2, not Rapture 1
- Go with the **first rapture** — the second path is extremely difficult

Supporting Scriptures — Dead Relatives & Baptism for the Dead

1 Corinthians 15:28-29 (NKJV)

Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 (NKJV)

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord.”

- People worry about relatives who died without Christ — Rapture 3 covers Old Testament saints, not arbitrary dead relatives
- “Baptised for the dead” — Paul references a practice; do not confuse with necromancy (Deuteronomy 18)
- Old Testament saints had their **own** resurrection timing — not the church rapture

Three Raptures at a Glance

Rapture	Who	When	Key Scripture
---------	-----	------	---------------

1 — Church	Believers in Christ	Before tribulation	1 Thess 4:16-17; Rev 3:10; 1 Thess 5:9
2A — Witnesses	Two witnesses	Mid-tribulation (3½ years)	Revelation 11:11-12
2B — 144,000	Virgin Jewish men	During tribulation	Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-4
2C — Multitude	Tribulation martyrs (all nations)	During tribulation	Revelation 7:9-14
3 — OT Saints	Abraham, Moses, prophets, etc.	End of tribulation	Daniel 12:1-3; Ezekiel 37; Job 19; Isaiah 26

What You Should Do Now

1. Ensure you are **in Christ** — qualify for Rapture 1 before tribulation
2. Keep **oil in your vessel** — Holy Spirit fullness, not lamps alone
3. Do not wait for tribulation — buying/selling will be nearly impossible
4. Do not count yourself among the 144,000 unless you meet every criterion in Revelation 14:4
5. Old Testament saints have their own resurrection — do not merge timelines
6. Read Scripture daily — church disappears from Revelation 4 onward for a reason

Bottom line: Three raptures, one first resurrection category. The church goes first — by force, before wrath. Do not miss Rapture 1.

Every Scripture Referenced — Full List

Reference	Theme
1 Thessalonians 4:16-17	Church caught up by force

Reference	Theme
1 Corinthians 15:51-52	Mystery — changed in twinkling
Revelation 3:10	Kept from hour of trial
1 Thessalonians 5:9	Not appointed to wrath
Revelation 11:11-12	Two witnesses — Come up hither
Revelation 7:1-3, 7:8-9	144,000 sealed; great multitude follows
Revelation 7:14-17	Out of great tribulation
Revelation 14:1-4	144,000 virgins — first fruits
Ephesians 4:30 / Galatians 6:17	Church already sealed by Holy Spirit
Daniel 12:1-3	OT saints resurrect at tribulation end
Ezekiel 37:11-14	Graves opened — house of Israel
Job 19:25-27	Redeemer lives — flesh shall see God
Isaiah 26:18-19	Dead shall live — OT resurrection
Isaiah 9:2-3	Joy of harvest
Revelation 20:6	First resurrection — category
Matthew 25:1-13	Ten virgins — oil and timing
1 Corinthians 15:28-29	Baptised for the dead
Deuteronomy 18:10-12	No necromancy — abomination