

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *The Rapture*

The biblical explanation of the Rapture, what happens to Christians when Jesus calls them to meet Him in the air, seems fantastic. So, how should a believer feel about the Rapture and what is it all about? Do you eagerly anticipate the Rapture of the Church, or do you dread it? The Bible doesn't tell us the date and hour of Christ's return. But there are certain facts about the Rapture you can know for sure. This *Pathway* series will help you understand what the Bible says will take place when the Rapture occurs and how you can be fully confident and prepared for it.

DAY ONE — The Rapture

Today's Prayer: Ask God to help you understand these important truths about the future. Praise God today because He is in control of this world.

Today's Verse: *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John (Revelation 1:1).*

God's Time Clock

Suddenly, without any warning, the sirens began to scream throughout the city. "What's going on?" Jim questioned. "Those are air-raid sirens," shot back Darrel. "There must be some emergency." Quickly they turned on the radio to see if they could find out what was happening. To their horror, they heard these words, "This is an actual warning. Incoming nuclear warheads have been picked up by radar heading straight for the United States. Everyone take cover immediately."

Before Jim and Darrel could gather up their families and take shelter, the earth shook with a devastating blast. Within a matter of minutes, the earth was silent again. All forms of life were still now. All that remained were the burnt ruins of what was once a neighborhood. It had happened. The superpowers had released all their nuclear weapons, and all forms of life on this planet were destroyed. The world, as we know it, came to an end.

There have been books, television shows, and all kinds of speculation on how the world will end. Many have tried to paint a scene much like the nuclear attack in the preceding paragraph. What is the future of our world? It is an interesting question.

Try to remember theories you have heard on how the world will end. Describe them in the space below.

What keeps the earth from flying off its axis today and floating helplessly through space? What keeps the sun the right distance from the earth to create a living environment suitable for man? Who keeps man from using weapons that would destroy life on planet earth? The answers to these questions are all the same, God.

God created this earth for a purpose. He created the sun and the stars. He created all the physical laws that keep the earth in running order. All those predicting how the earth will end would do well to read their Bibles. God has laid out the timetable for future events.

A Look in the Book: The Bible assures man that the sun will not burn out, killing all life on the earth. The Bible assures man that there will not be a nuclear war that ends life on this planet. It also assures that the planet earth will not smash into another planet and break into space rubble.

What does the Bible say? The biblical teaching concerning the future of the world is called eschatology. That means the teaching of last things. The Bible tells its readers what lies ahead — how the earth will eventually be replaced by a new environment. But several important events must come to pass before this happens.

Read Revelation 22:6-7.

In describing the words of the Book of Revelation, **what two words does John use in verse six?**

How does John describe the person who keeps the words of this prophecy in verse 7?

John concludes this book of prophecy with some important warning to believers and nonbelievers alike. Grab your Bible and read Revelation 22:8-21. **List below at least two warnings from this passage.**

God's time clock is moving ahead. He has everything under control. *He which testifieth these things saith, "Surely I come quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20).*

Next thing on God's agenda directly involves every believer. What's next? Tomorrow we will cover that important subject.



DAY TWO — The Rapture

Today's Prayer: Thank God that He has not left you in the dark about what may take place very soon. You have every chance now to make the proper preparations for God's next prophetic event.

Today's Verse: *Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6).*

What's Next?

Becky was taking a series of entrance exams to get into a private college. Each day the test covered a different subject. She could study 24 hours for the next subject before she was tested. On this particular evening, she was studying for the English test. She read all the material. She studied all the grammar and punctuation rules. She finally went to sleep confident she would do well on the exam.

The next morning, she reviewed her material and went to the school to take her exam. When the exam was placed on her desk, she was horrified to discover that she had studied the wrong material. Today was the Math exam. She failed the exam miserably. She explained to the teacher what had happened, and he allowed her to retake the Math exam. As she left the room, Becky turned and asked her teacher, "Just to make sure I'm clear on this, what's coming next?"

Making the proper preparations for what you will do next is only common sense. However, if you are confused about what lies ahead, or simply don't know what's next, it is very hard to prepare.

It is much the same in your Christian life. Knowing what is coming next on God's time clock can help you plan accordingly. **Name the next three major prophetic events in proper sequence:**

A Look in the Book: The chronological picture is pretty clear in the Bible. Read Matthew 16:16-18. *And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

What did Jesus promise He would build? Is it present with us today?

Acts 2 began the fulfillment of the prophecy in Matthew 16 — the establishment of the Church Age. That is where Christians are presently.

Next, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

What event is described that will end the current Church Age?

The Rapture is the next great event to take place. What is it? When will it occur? What warning signs will take place? Those questions will be answered in the next couple of days. Today, we will continue to study the chronological picture of future events.

Now read 2 Corinthians 5:10.

What event is described in this passage? _____

The Judgment Seat of Christ is only for believers raptured from the earth. Nonbelievers will still be on the earth awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20. The Church will be raptured, and the members of the Church will stand before God in judgment of their works. No person raptured will be judged for salvation. That was assured the moment he or she trusted Jesus Christ for salvation.

Revelation, chapters 4-19, describes the next event. It is called the Tribulation, a period of seven years divided into two equal parts. The second part includes God's judgment upon this earth. The Church (all the saved) will be removed; only the unsaved will remain.

At the end of the seven years, Christ will return with all believers to the earth. The great battle of Armageddon will be fought, and Jesus will destroy all nonbelievers. This event is commonly known as the Second Coming.

That is a quick look at what lies ahead for the earth. It is hard to imagine, but it is as real as the age in which we are currently living. The future event that most concerns you as a Christian is the Rapture of the Church. Tomorrow, we will discuss that event more fully. For review, write a list of the next four prophetic events.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

DAY THREE — The Rapture

Hiding It in My Heart: A good verse to memorize is John 14:6. It's where Jesus tells us that He is the only way to God. Memorize it today.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

Today's Prayer: Thank God that He has given you salvation as a free gift. Then, pick one of your friends or family members who is unsaved and trust God for his or her salvation.

Today's Verse: *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52).*

What Is the Rapture?

John had been taking an afternoon nap when he was awakened by the sounds of nearby sirens. As he climbed off the couch, he noticed that the sirens seemed to be coming from all directions. *What's going on?* he wondered to himself. He called for members of his family, but no one answered. He went into the kitchen and found supper burning in the oven. *That's funny,* he thought. *Mom never leaves the kitchen when she's cooking.*

He turned on the television. Every channel had nothing but news. Finally, out of desperation, he sat and listened to the news broadcast. The newscasters began telling how thousands of people had vanished from the face of the earth. Experts were unable to give a rational reason for this strange phenomenon. Some were speculating that it had something to do with the Church and a thing called the Rapture. John's stomach began to tighten now. His parents had tried to tell him about Jesus Christ's return, but he had refused to listen. Now, it seemed they had been right. He had been left behind without a clue of what to do next. John had missed his chance.

Even though the above scenario sounds like something out of a science-fiction movie, it will be a reality some day. The Bible tells of an upcoming event called the Rapture of the Church. All believers will be taken from the earth in a split second, and only the nonbelievers will remain. What does the Bible have to say about this event?

A Look in the Book: *Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.*

Verse 13 indicates that God does not want believers to be ignorant about the Rapture, but rather to know as much as you can about this prophetic event. By answering the following questions from the Bible, you will be able to **describe the details of the Rapture.**

Who is actually coming from heaven to get His people? _____

Who will rise first? _____

Then who will rise? _____

Where will the believers be reunited with saved loved ones who have died?

How long will the believer be with the Lord? _____

The word Rapture means "caught up." All believers at the Rapture are caught up together, those who have died and those still alive, in the clouds to be taken home to heaven. Remember what Jesus Christ said to His disciples in John 14:1-3.

Put Christ's message into your own words. _____

On a day just like today, the trumpet could sound, and, in a moment, you would be taken from this earth.

What about those around you? Are they ready? If the Rapture happened today, would they be left behind? What have you done to change that? Each day, you need to be a witness for Christ, because it could be your last chance.

DAY FOUR — *The Rapture*

Today's Prayer: Ask God to show you areas of your life with which He is displeased. Then ask Him to give you the power you need to prepare your life each day for the Rapture.

Today's Verse: *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2).*

Are We There Yet?

On any trip, the kids ask again and again, "Are we there yet?" Sometimes the destination seems like it's getting farther away instead of closer. A 10-hour trip is bad enough, but it is worse when you thought it would only be a six-hour trip. The mental games you play on the way can be as tiresome as the physical discomfort.

Recently, two heavyweight fighters squared off for the boxing championship of the world. Both fighters knew exactly when the fight would take place. If a fighter begins intensive training too soon, he will peak before the fight. But these fighters wisely timed their training to be in prime condition the night of the fight.

Life is more like a mugging than a boxing match. You never know if or when you might be mugged. No one sets a date and prepares for an upcoming attack. If muggings were scheduled, a person could make the proper arrangements to be ready to defend himself. Attacks like this come without warning. There is no time to prepare yourself. You must take it as it comes and hope for the best. In the past couple of days, you have studied God's time clock. God has the future planned, and His time clock is moving ahead on schedule. The next main event for this world is the Rapture of the Church. That is the moment when all believers are snatched from this earth to be with Christ.

A Look in the Book: If you knew exactly when the Rapture would occur, you could go all out spiritually the last month and be better prepared. Well, some of us may need more than one month! However, the Bible does not say when the Rapture will take place. In fact, it states that no man can know the date of the Rapture. Not knowing the day forces believers to always be prepared to be taken from this earth and stand before God in judgment of our works.

Read Matthew 16:18. *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

In Jesus' discussion about building His Church, **was it past, present, or future?**

At that time, the Church had not yet been established. **Now read Acts 2:41-47.**

Here you can see the Church, which Jesus said in Matthew He would build, now in its early stages and growing. Therefore, believers have lived or are living in a time period between the beginning of the Church and the Tribulation.

What is the next thing on God's time clock? It is the Rapture of the Church which opens the door to the Tribulation. When will it occur? At any moment. Believers in the first century thought the Rapture would come in their lifetime. Most theologians today think it will be in your lifetime. According to the Bible, there is nothing that must happen to prepare the way for the Rapture. It could be today, tomorrow, or 100 years from now.

Are you prepared if the Rapture should come today? Is your spiritual life in order? Are you living for the things that are eternal? It is very possible that this week could be your last week to make your life count for God. Once the Rapture takes place, you will have no more opportunity to prepare for the Judgment Seat. There is no date for which to plan or prepare. Every believer should be ready every day. Remember, today you could stand before Jesus face-to-face. ***Are you ready?***

DAY FIVE — The Rapture

Today's Prayer: Thank God for His mercy to you. Thank Him that He has promised to remove you from this earth before He pours out His judgment upon the wicked.

Today's Verse: *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22).*

The Tribulation

All this week, you have been learning about future events as predicted in the Bible. More specifically, you have studied the details of the Rapture of the Church. Once the Church has been taken from this earth, those left behind will suffer the judgment of God.

Can you think of times in history, as recorded in your Bible, when God has exercised judgment? **Read the following passages, list God's judgment.**

Genesis 7:1-4: _____

Genesis 19:24: _____

Exodus 12:29-30: _____

There are many more examples of God's judgment throughout history. Knowing the past helps you to realize God is very serious about the judgment to come.

The Rapture of the Church will be a glorious time of reunion with our loved ones and a time to meet our Savior face-to-face. But it is also God's method of removing His loved ones before the world is judged. Like He spared Israel, Lot and Noah, God will spare His Church.

A Look in the Book: *Read Daniel 9:24-27 to find the time of the Tribulation.*

In the Jewish sabbatical time measure, the "weeks" are weeks of years. Therefore, one week is equal to seven years by our standards. The first 69 weeks have already come to pass. The final week is described in verse 27. The final period of seven years is known as the Tribulation.

This seven-year period is divided into two equal parts by a significant event described in Daniel 9:27. This event is also described in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. *Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Describe the event. _____

The man of sin will break his treaty with Israel and establish himself as God. He will demand to be worshiped by all.

Two things will distinguish this judgment from others in history. In Revelation 3:10, the Bible tells us it will be a worldwide judgment. *Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*

Describe the second distinguishing feature. _____

The second thing that distinguishes this period of time is that people will actually long for death because of the calamities taking place on the earth. They will no longer be interested in buying houses, saving money or living for the future. Instead, they will fear for themselves that they might escape the judgments of God. Read Revelation 6:16. *And said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."*

What did the people cry out to happen? _____

The Book of Revelation describes the judgments that will come upon the earth during the Tribulation. When the Tribulation comes, people will prefer death to life. When will all this take place? The only thing that must take place before the Tribulation is the Rapture of the Church. Since the Rapture could happen today, the Tribulation could be right around the corner.

DAY SIX — The Rapture

Today's Prayer: Ask the Lord to help you to prepare for His coming. Then, tell God all about the person you plan to witness to this week. Ask God to prepare his heart to receive Him as Savior.

Today's Verse: *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come (Matthew 24:42).*

Are You Ready?

On the morning of December 7, 1941, the United States was bombed by the Japanese. Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese fighter planes, and the damage was extensive. It is assumed that the attack was a surprise. However, that doesn't seem to be completely true.

That fateful morning, while the Japanese planes were still 137 miles (50 minutes) away, it is reported that the United States radar picked up the planes. A young officer was in charge that day. Being a Sunday, most of the top brass was not on duty. According to the report, the young, inexperienced officer decided it was nothing to worry about. The little dots on the radar seemed insignificant. But the destructive attack force which the dots represented was indeed real and significant. The harbor was destroyed, and losses were heavy because the warning was ignored.

You may ask, "How could anyone be so careless when so much was at stake?" That is a good question. That is also the question that you and everyone around you must consider after a study of the Rapture and other coming events. The Bible clearly warns of the upcoming judgment upon this earth. It also teaches that believers could be raptured into the presence of God even today. The Bible gives more warning of impending disaster than the young officer ever had. The question is, what are you doing about it?

A Look in the Book: After Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the coming Rapture and the Day of the Lord, he writes some advice all Christians need to take to heart. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11.**

How does Paul tell Christians to live in light of what is to come? Put Paul's commands into your own words in each of these verses.

Verse 6 _____

Verse 8 _____

Verse 11 _____

Why does Paul say believers should live this way? Put Paul's reasons into your own words for the following verses.

Verse 4 _____

Verse 5 _____

Verse 7 _____

Verse 9-10 _____

Paul's message is very clear. Because we know God, and He has given us His Word, we should be ready for His return at any moment.

If Jesus returned today in the Rapture, which could happen, are you ready? You have no excuses. You have been warned and instructed in God's Word. For believers, there are no real surprises ahead. If you fail to prepare, it's no one's fault but your own. On the other hand, your faithfulness will be rewarded at this time. Depending on what you've accomplished for the Lord, you may look forward to, rather than dread, the future.

What about your friends? Do they know what is to come? If you are really a friend, you should warn them of the coming judgment for nonbelievers. The end is near, and some Christians don't care enough about their friends to warn them that time is running out. Knowing the truth of the Rapture and Tribulation should motivate every believer to live for God and proclaim His message. If Jesus should return today, are you ready?

Hiding It in My Heart: Memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:6 and be careful to obey these important words.

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

On My Own: **Write the name of one person you are going to warn this week.**

Ask your pastor to pray for you and this person this week. Tell him you want the Lord to provide you an opportunity to share with this friend what the Bible teaches about the future. Then, report back to your pastor after you've met with your friend. Ask your pastor for follow-up advice.