

# Bible Controversies

## The Lord's Return

Part 1 of 3 — Lessons 1–9 | A Study by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®  
Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

### About This Study

Part One of Bible Controversies (Lessons 1–9) by Keith Blades of Enjoy the Bible Ministries® introduces the series by identifying the root causes of doctrinal discord among Christians, then applies right division to the first and foundational controversy: the doctrine of the Lord's return. Keith establishes that God has two distinct programs in the Bible — one for Israel and one for the Body of Christ — and that each has a separate return of Christ associated with it. By keeping these two programs distinct, the confusion surrounding the rapture, the tribulation, and the timing of Christ's return is completely resolved. Israel's return is post-tribulation, to the earth, as a man of war; our blessed hope is a pre-tribulation rapture delivering the Body of Christ from the wrath to come, found exclusively in Paul's epistles.



### Lessons at a Glance

Lesson	Core Focus
<b>Lesson 1</b>	Why Bible Controversies Exist — Improper Bible handling as the root cause; the role of dishonesty, ignorance, and Satan's ministers
<b>Lesson 2</b>	Three Reasons for Controversy — Survey of causes completed; introduction to the Lord's return as the first major controversy
<b>Lesson 3</b>	Two Distinct Returns of Christ — Israel's return vs. the Church's return; why right division is essential to this doctrine
<b>Lesson 4</b>	Christ's Return in Israel's Program — Post-tribulation, to the earth, to the Mount of Olives; Matthew 24 rightly divided
<b>Lesson 5</b>	Christ Returns as Warrior; Our Hope Introduced — Zechariah 14; Israel's day of wrath; the rapture as deliverance from wrath
<b>Lesson 6</b>	Delivered from the Wrath to Come — Paul's epistles as the exclusive source of rapture doctrine; 1 Thessalonians 1:10
<b>Lesson 7</b>	Examining the Rapture in Paul's Epistles — The rapture explicitly taught; only found in Paul; pre-tribulation deliverance confirmed
<b>Lesson 8</b>	The Rapture in Full: 1 Thessalonians 4–5 — The Lord descends; dead rise; living caught up; not appointed to wrath
<b>Lesson 9</b>	Conclusion: The Lord's Return Settled — Right division resolves all confusion; Israel's return vs. our blessed hope summarized

## Lesson Summaries

L1

### **Why Bible Controversies Exist** *Introducing the Series and Its Foundational Premise*

- The series “Bible Controversies” examines doctrines causing division among Christians — the Lord’s return, water baptism, spiritual gifts, and others
- Bible controversies are entirely our fault — God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33); the Bible is designed to be clear
- Reason 1: Improper Bible handling — verses taken out of context, passages only partially dealt with, dishonest handling of scripture
  - Paul warns against “handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2) — a trap for Christians, not just infidels
- Reason 2: Ignorance — failure to study the Bible and attend churches where it is truly taught; pure human viewpoint substituted for doctrine
- Reason 3: Satan’s ministers — deliberate false teachers who prey on ignorance and produce confusion (Ephesians 4:14)
- The remedy is always the same: honest, accurate, complete handling of God’s word — controversy is preventable

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### **Right Division and the Return of Christ** *Surveying Causes of Controversy; Introducing the Rapture Question*

- Review of the three causes: improper Bible handling, ignorance, and Satan’s ministers — all three combine to produce maximum confusion
- The most common form of improper Bible handling: failing to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)
  - Rightly dividing means keeping God’s program with Israel separate from His program with the Body of Christ in this dispensation of grace
- The doctrine of the Lord’s return is a prime example of the confusion produced by failing to rightly divide
- Key disputed questions introduced: Is there a rapture? Does the church go through the tribulation? When does Christ return?
- Right division will demonstrate these questions are not complex — they are only confused because the two programs are being mixed

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### **Two Distinct Returns of Christ** *Why Right Division Is the Essential Starting Point*

- God has two programs in the Bible: His prophetic program for Israel and His present program for the Body of Christ in the dispensation of grace
- Each program has its own distinct return of Christ — two different events at two different times with different characteristics
- Israel’s return: spoken of in the Old Testament, the Gospels, early Acts, and Hebrews–Revelation — post-tribulation, to the earth, with wrath
- The Church’s return: found exclusively in Paul’s epistles — before the tribulation, into the air, delivering believers from the wrath to come
- Mixing these two events together produces all the confusion — passages from Israel’s program are wrongly applied to the Body of Christ

- Right division immediately separates the two and resolves the apparent contradictions

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### **Christ's Return in Israel's Program** *Matthew 24 Rightly Divided — Post-Tribulation, to the Earth*

- Matthew 24:29–31: Christ plainly states He will not return until after the tribulation period — sun darkened, moon fails, stars fall, then He appears
- Those who apply Matthew 24 to the Body of Christ must conclude: the church goes through the tribulation and there is no pre-tribulation rapture
- But Matthew 24 belongs to God's program with Israel — the dispensation of grace was not in effect when the Lord spoke these words
- In Israel's program, Christ returns physically to the earth — not merely appearing in the air
- He returns to a specific location: the Mount of Olives, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 14 — the very spot from which He departed
- Applying passages from Israel's program to the Body of Christ is the core error producing rapture controversy

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### **Christ Returns as Warrior; Our Blessed Hope Distinguished** *Zechariah 14 and the Transition to Paul's Doctrine of the Rapture*

- Zechariah 14:1–9: Christ returns to Israel at the close of the Day of the Lord as a man of war to vanquish Israel's enemies
- The Day of the Lord includes the tribulation period — Israel's saints endure the wrath; they are not delivered from it before it begins
- The contrast with the Body of Christ is stark: God through Paul teaches us to look for Christ to come for us before His wrath is administered
- The return of Christ for the Church is part of "the mystery" — hidden from ages and generations, now revealed exclusively through Paul's epistles
- Our deliverance from the wrath to come is our distinctive hope — not found in Israel's prophetic scriptures (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

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### **Delivered from the Wrath to Come** *Paul's Epistles: The Exclusive Source of Rapture Doctrine*

- Since the dispensation of grace was revealed to and through Paul, the rapture is only found in Paul's epistles — nowhere else in scripture
- The rapture is part of "the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery" (Romans 16:25) — not prophesied, but newly revealed
- The Body of Christ is promised deliverance from the wrath to come — we will not go through the tribulation unlike Israel's saints
- Israel's program is currently suspended — therefore the return of Christ associated with Israel's program does not apply to us today
- Christians can have completely settled minds on the Lord's return by rightly dividing — confusion and uncertainty are unnecessary

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### **Examining the Rapture in Paul's Epistles** *1 Thessalonians 1:10 — Waiting for God's Son Who Delivers Us*

- 1 Thessalonians 1:10: Paul taught the Thessalonians to wait for God's Son from heaven, "which delivered us from the wrath to come"
- This pre-tribulation deliverance is not speculation — it is the explicit content of what Paul taught from the beginning of his ministry
- The rapture doctrine is found only in Paul's epistles because it belongs only to the Body of Christ — it is absent from the Gospels, Acts 1–8, and Hebrews–Revelation
- The rapture is a completely distinct event from Israel's return: different timing, different manner, different participants, different program
- Paul's doctrine on this settled the Thessalonians' thinking; properly understood, it should settle ours as well

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### **The Rapture in Full: 1 Thessalonians 4–5** *The Lord Descends, the Dead Rise, We Are Caught Up Together*

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 is the most detailed rapture passage in Paul's epistles — Paul wrote it to comfort saints who were confused about believers who had already died
- The sequence: the Lord descends from heaven with a shout and the voice of the archangel — the dead in Christ rise first
- Then living believers are caught up together with the risen dead in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air — entirely different from Christ's return to the earth in Matthew 24
- We are not appointed to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9) — confirming pre-tribulation deliverance
- Understanding this doctrine removes any need to watch for tribulation signs or prepare for the Day of the Lord — those belong to Israel's program

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### **Conclusion: The Lord's Return Settled** *Summary of Both Returns; Our Blessed Hope Made Plain*

- The controversy over the Lord's return is entirely unnecessary — rightly dividing the word of truth settles it completely
- Israel's return (prophetic program): after the tribulation, directly to the earth, to the Mount of Olives, as a man of war with power and wrath
- The Church's return (dispensation of grace): before the wrath begins, into the air, delivering the Body of Christ from the coming Day of the Lord
- The church today is not Israel — we are not the recipients of promises and warnings written to Israel's saints concerning the tribulation
- Our expectation is the rapture: our blessed hope, the comforting doctrine that Paul teaches exclusively for the Body of Christ in this dispensation

## Key Doctrinal Distinctions

### Two Programs Means Two Distinct Returns of Christ

God has two different programs in the Bible — His prophetic program for Israel and His present program for the Body of Christ in the dispensation of grace. Each program has a separate return of Christ associated with it, and these two returns are not the same event. They occur at different times, in different manners, and with entirely different participants. Israel is taught to expect Christ to return after the tribulation period, to the earth, as a man of war. The Body of Christ is taught to expect the Lord to come for us before the wrath begins, catching us up into the air to be with Him. Mixing these two distinct doctrines together — the result of failing to rightly divide the word of truth — produces every form of rapture confusion that exists among Christians today.

### The Rapture Is Exclusively Revealed in Paul's Epistles

The doctrine of the rapture of the Church is part of the revelation of the mystery of Christ committed to the Apostle Paul. It was kept hidden from ages and generations and was not prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures. Therefore, it is found only in Paul's epistles — nowhere in the Gospels, nowhere in Acts 1–8, and nowhere in Hebrews through Revelation. Those who look for rapture doctrine in non-Pauline scriptures are searching outside the portion of the Bible that pertains to the Body of Christ. The fact that the rapture is absent from Israel's prophetic scriptures is not a problem; it is exactly what we should expect once we understand right division.

### The Body of Christ Is Delivered from the Wrath to Come

In God's program with Israel, the people of God are taught that they will go through the tribulation period — that great and terrible day of the Lord's wrath. They are given instructions for how to endure and flee during that time. But the Body of Christ in this dispensation of grace has been promised something entirely different: deliverance from the wrath to come. As Paul declares in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, we are not appointed to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the comfort and settled assurance of the doctrine of the rapture, properly understood through right division.

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## Key Scripture References

Reference	Significance in This Study
<b>2 Timothy 2:15</b>	The command to rightly divide the word of truth — the foundational principle for resolving the Lord's return controversy and all Bible controversies
<b>2 Corinthians 4:2</b>	Not handling the word of God deceitfully — Paul's standard for honest Bible handling; improper handling is the root of all controversy
<b>Ephesians 4:14</b>	Satan's ministers keep Christians "tossed to and fro" by every wind of doctrine — one of the three main causes of Bible controversies
<b>Matthew 24:29–31</b>	Christ's post-tribulation return to Israel — often misapplied to the Body of Christ; belongs to Israel's prophetic program exclusively
<b>Zechariah 14:1–9</b>	Christ returns to the Mount of Olives as warrior King at the close of the Day of the Lord — fulfillment of Israel's prophetic program
<b>1 Thessalonians</b>	We wait for God's Son from heaven who delivers us from the wrath to come —

Reference	Significance in This Study
<b>1:10</b>	the pre-tribulation rapture stated plainly in Paul's earliest letter
<b>1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:9</b>	The most detailed rapture passage: Lord descends, dead rise, living caught up; we are not appointed to wrath but to salvation
<b>Romans 16:25</b>	The preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery — Paul's gospel and the mystery are distinct; the rapture belongs to the mystery

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