

The End Times

A 15-minute class summary — Pleasant Springs Church, Discipleship School

Full four-lesson series: ps-church.com/discipleship/end-times

Before you start — notes for the teacher (*not read aloud*)

Timing. About **15 minutes** at a normal teaching pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. The **[9:00] Revelation section is the designated cut** if you are running short. **Never cut the last section** — the whole lesson exists for it.

⚠ **Who is in the room, and this one really matters.** Somebody present was raised on *Left Behind*. Somebody's mother is still frightened of being left behind. Somebody teaches the pretribulational Rapture in another church and loves Jesus more than you do. **This lesson corrects a doctrine without attacking the people who hold it.** If you cannot teach it warmly, do not teach it.

Say the posture out loud, early and again at the end. Pleasant Springs does not teach the pretribulational Rapture — and honours brothers and sisters who do. *"In the essentials, unity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."*

What this lesson is not. It is not a timeline, and it is not date-setting. If someone asks you to identify a current event with a prophecy, **decline, and say why.**

Scripture. All English, ESV. The Greek is on the website if anyone wants it.

Time of day. Deliberately time-neutral — no "tonight" or "this morning."

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — the story you were probably told

Most of us grew up on a story that goes like this. One day, maybe any day, Jesus quietly returns above the clouds. In a split second every true believer vanishes — cars crashing with empty seats, planes falling out of the sky, children gone from their beds. Then seven years of tribulation under an Antichrist. Then Jesus comes back publicly.

That story reached us through the **Scofield Reference Bible** of 1909, through Dallas Theological Seminary, through Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, through the *Left Behind* novels. It has been preached from thousands of pulpits and put into worship songs.

To most American Christians it feels like **just what the Bible teaches**.

I am going to tell you honestly: **it is not**. And I am going to say something else just as plainly before I say anything else — **the people who teach it are our brothers and sisters**. Many of them love Jesus better than I do. We are not here to score a point off anybody.

In the essentials, unity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.

[2:00] Where the doctrine came from

The pretribulational Rapture is not an ancient Christian teaching. It appears in the **1830s**, through an Irish preacher named **John Nelson Darby**.

⚠️ Now hear what I am *not* saying. I am not saying it is new, therefore it is false. New is not the same as wrong. But when a doctrine is presented as **the plain teaching of Scripture that every Christian has always seen**, and it turns out no one saw it for eighteen hundred years — **that is worth knowing before you build your hope on it**.

So what does the text actually say?

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 (ESV) — "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, 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, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to **meet the Lord in the air**, and so we will always be with the Lord."

Two things to notice, and neither requires knowing Greek.

First — this is not quiet. A cry of command. An archangel's voice. A trumpet.

⚠️ **Whatever this is, it is the noisiest event in the New Testament.** A secret rapture it is not.

Second — the word for "meet." In the ordinary Greek of Paul's day, that word had a specific use: when a visiting king or governor approached a city, the citizens went **out** to meet him — and then **escorted him back in**. It is a welcoming party, not an evacuation.

They go out to meet him, and they come back with him. That single observation reorders the whole picture.

And Jesus himself, on how visible his coming will be:

Matthew 24:27 (ESV) — "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Lightning is not discreet.

And when he left, the angels told the disciples exactly what to expect:

Acts 1:11 (ESV) — "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come **in the same way as you saw him go into heaven**."

In the same way. Visibly, bodily, in person. That is the promise the church held for eighteen centuries before anyone proposed a silent one.

[5:30] What we are not doing with dates

One more thing before we go on, and I want to be blunt.

Matthew 24:36 (ESV) — "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."

⚠ **Pleasant Springs does not set dates, and we do not identify current events with prophecy.** Not because it is uninteresting — because **it has been done in every generation for two thousand years and has been wrong every single time.** Every wrong prediction hands the sceptic a reason, and costs some believer their confidence.

If someone asks me which world leader is the Antichrist, my honest answer is: **I do not know, and neither does anyone selling you a book about it.**

[7:00] Reading Revelation like its first readers

Revelation is the most misunderstood book in the Bible. It has been read as a code for the European Union, the United Nations, nuclear war, barcodes, microchips, and nearly every president.

Here is the correction, and it is simple. **Revelation is mail.**

Revelation 1:9 (ESV) — "I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

A real man, on a real island, writing to **seven real congregations** in what is now western Turkey, under a real Roman persecution, in a literary form — Jewish apocalyptic — that his first readers recognised immediately.

⚠️ **We are not its original audience, and our century is not its principal subject.** Our job is to read *with* those seven churches, not around them.

And notice the blessing at the front of the book:

Revelation 1:3 (ESV) — "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near."

Read aloud. Hear. Keep. That is a letter for a congregation standing in a room, not a puzzle for a spreadsheet.

Christians have read it four main ways — **preterist, historicist, futurist, idealist**. The series lays out all four fairly. ⚠️ **Note which one is newest:** reading it as a forecast of the next twenty years is the most recent approach, not the historic one.

[9:00] The millennium, Israel and the Church — (cut this first if short on time)

Two questions drive nearly every disagreement. **What is the thousand years in Revelation 20?** And **what is the relationship between Israel and the Church?**

Christians have answered the first question three ways, and it is worth knowing the names because you will meet all three.

- **Amillennialism** — the thousand years is the present age; Christ reigns now through his church, and there is no future earthly reign before the end.
- **Postmillennialism** — the gospel gradually wins, the world is progressively christianised, and Christ returns at the *end* of a golden age.
- **Premillennialism** — Christ returns *before* the thousand years and reigns bodily.

⚠️ And note a distinction people constantly miss: **historic premillennialism is not dispensational premillennialism**. Both expect Christ to return before the millennium. Only the second requires a secret pretribulational Rapture and two separate programmes for Israel and the Church. **You can hold the first without the second — and we do.**

Here is where Pleasant Springs stands, stated plainly so you are never guessing.

We hold historic premillennialism. Christ returns bodily and reigns over a renewed creation.

And we read Israel and the Church covenantally. We are **not dispensational** — we do not hold two separate programmes running side by side. And we are **not strict supersessionists** — we do not teach that the Church simply replaced Israel and that God is finished with the Jewish people. Paul will not let us:

Romans 11:25–26 (ESV) — "...a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved..."

Paul's picture is an **olive tree**. Gentiles are branches grafted in — and he warns them in the same breath not to become arrogant toward the branches that were there first.

⚠️ **The Church is not a parenthesis, and it is not a replacement. It is the fulfilment of one covenant people, now including us.** Two chapters of one story, and the hero of both is Jesus.

[11:30] The good news, which is the point

Three-quarters of this lesson has been distinctions and corrections. **A Christian hope cannot live on negations.** You did not come to church to find out what we reject.

So here is what we affirm with everything we have.

The shape of biblical hope is not evacuation. It is consummation.

The story that began in a garden ends in a **garden-city**. God does not rescue you *out of* his creation and abandon the rest. He **remakes** it, and moves in.

Revelation 21:1, 3–4 (ESV) — "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

Notice the direction of travel. We are not evacuated upward. **He comes down.** That is the last picture the Bible gives us of God and his people, and it is a house-moving, not a rescue helicopter.

Titus 2:13 (ESV) — "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

Our blessed hope is not an escape. It is a person, appearing.

[13:30] Close

So what does this change on Monday?

It changes what you do with the world. If God is going to burn it all and take you away, the creation is a waiting room and you may as well not bother with it. **If he is going to remake it and live here, then the work you do in it matters** — the garden, the marriage, the school, the town. None of it is wasted.

It changes how you face bad news. Christian hope has kept a persecuted pastor on his feet and steadied an old saint in her last illness. It was never a

promise that you would be taken out before it got hard. **It is a promise that he is coming, and that he wins.**

And it changes how you talk to the people who see this differently. You have a view now, and you can give reasons for it. **That is not permission to be insufferable about it.** This is the "non-essentials, liberty" column, and anyone who makes it a test of fellowship has misunderstood something more important than eschatology.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV) — "Therefore encourage one another with these words."

⚠️ **That is what Paul says this doctrine is for.** Not speculation.

Encouragement. If your end-times teaching leaves people frightened rather than encouraged, something has gone wrong with it.

Let's pray.

Father, you have not told us the day or the hour, and you have told us enough. Thank you that our hope is not escape but your own appearing — that you are not finished with your world but are coming to remake it and live in it with us. Keep us from fear, keep us from date-setting, and keep us gentle with brothers and sisters who read these things differently. Make us people who are found working when you come. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

If you only remember three things

1. **The Rapture story is 1830s, not apostolic** — and the passage it rests on describes the noisiest event in the New Testament, with a word for "meet" that means *going out to escort the king in*.
 2. **Revelation is mail** to seven real churches under real persecution. Read it with them.
 3. **Hope is consummation, not evacuation**. He comes down. And Paul says the point of the doctrine is to **encourage one another**.
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The full series — ps-church.com/discipleship/end-times

Lesson	What it covers
1 The Rapture and the Parousia	Where the doctrine came from, and what the Greek actually says
2 The Book of Revelation	Author, audience, genre, and the four interpretive approaches
3 The Millennium, Israel and the Church	Three millennial views, four frameworks, Revelation 20
4 A Biblical Theology of the End	The positive, hopeful, Christ-centred shape of it all

Our posture, stated in the series: Pleasant Springs does not teach the pretribulational Rapture, **but honours brothers and sisters who do**. Every view is stated fairly and our own commitments are named plainly.

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. What version of the end times were you taught growing up? Who taught it to you?
 2. Does it unsettle you that the Rapture doctrine is about two hundred years old? Should age matter?
 3. "We are not its original audience." What changes when you read Revelation as somebody else's mail?
 4. Hope as consummation rather than evacuation — what does that change about how you treat your work, your town, your body?
 5. Paul says the point of this teaching is to **encourage one another**. Has end-times teaching ever frightened you instead? What would you want said differently?
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