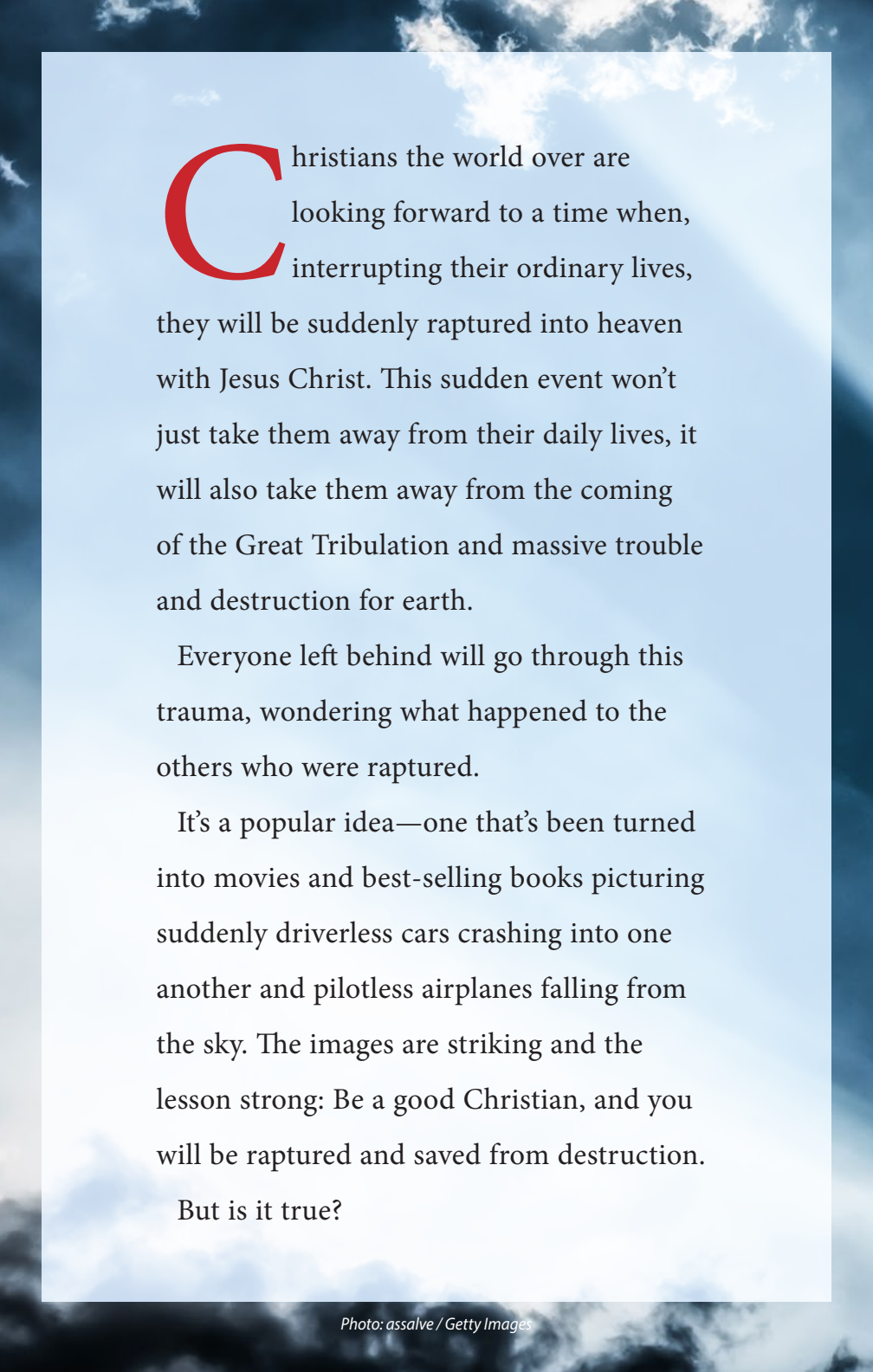


The
Rapture
vs. the
BIBLE

BEYOND
TODAY
BIBLE STUDY AID



Christians the world over are looking forward to a time when, interrupting their ordinary lives, they will be suddenly raptured into heaven with Jesus Christ. This sudden event won't just take them away from their daily lives, it will also take them away from the coming of the Great Tribulation and massive trouble and destruction for earth.

Everyone left behind will go through this trauma, wondering what happened to the others who were raptured.

It's a popular idea—one that's been turned into movies and best-selling books picturing suddenly driverless cars crashing into one another and pilotless airplanes falling from the sky. The images are striking and the lesson strong: Be a good Christian, and you will be raptured and saved from destruction.

But is it true?





Countering the rapture error

The idea of a rapture of believers up into heaven before the prophesied tribulation of the last days is widely taught and believed in Christianity today. Popular books and movies spin themes around this doctrine that essentially teaches Christ will *come back twice*—first coming into the atmosphere to snatch believers away to heaven and later returning with them to confront God’s enemies at Armageddon and render final judgment.



Regrettably, we live in a time when most are content to get their knowledge of religion secondhand, preferably through dramatic presentations—including stage, screen, movies and novels.

But you can't afford to neglect your responsibility to prove the truth!

Those willing to take a careful look at the Bible will see that the popular rapture theory doesn't stand up to the scrutiny of God's Word.

The rapture teaching was popularized in the 1970s by Hal Lindsey's writings (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, etc.) and more recently by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in their *Left Behind* fictional books and films. But where did this concept of the rapture originate?

Credit for the idea generally goes to John Darby, a 19th-century theologian who labored to correct common false teaching related to the second coming of Christ.

Darby correctly believed that Jesus Christ would return to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God and literally rule the world for 1,000 years. In his zeal for countering error, Darby promoted the idea that Christ would come to catch away believers prior to the period of end-time calamities leading up to His final coming.

Caught up, yes—but when?

A study of the topic needs to begin in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Paul writes in verse 16 that when Jesus returns with the sound of a trumpet, those believers who've already died will be resurrected. He goes on to say: "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" (emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted).

The original Greek phrase "shall be caught up," "combines the ideas of force and suddenness seen in the irresistible power of God" (Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 1984, p. 94). It's from the Latin translations that we derive the English words "rapt," "raptor," "rapture" and "enraptured." To be *raptured* in English liter-

A definition of common terms

Darby argued in favor of what is termed *premillennialism* in contrast to popular *postmillennialism* and *amillennialism*. Let's briefly consider these terms.

First, the root word, *Millennium*, is Latin for 1,000 years. In Christian theology, it refers to the first 1,000 years of Christ's reign over the Kingdom of God on earth, as described in Revelation 20:4.

A premillennialist believes that Christ will return at the beginning of the Millennium, intervening in a wicked world to then literally rule the nations for the 1,000 years as the verse states.

A postmillennialist believes that the Millennium is either 1,000 years or just a very long period of Christian governance of the world brought about by the Church advancing the Kingdom on earth—at the end of which Christ will return to a fully Christianized world. This view, popularized in the century

before Darby by the Anglican theologian Daniel Whitby, became prevalent among Calvinist Puritans and their offshoots. Postmillennialism helped give rise to the idea of “the social gospel” and the belief that the Church can actually extend the reign of Christ over the earth by its actions. It has led to many churches involving themselves in politics on the premise that they are virtually obligated to lobby governments in the direction of godliness.

An amillennialist does not believe in Christ literally reigning for 1,000 years on earth but, rather, sees the Millennium as figuratively referring to the entire Church age, with Christ and the saints reigning in heaven as well as on the earth through the limited spread of Christianity. This had been a popular teaching since early medieval times, and it remains the majority position among those who identify themselves as Christians today.

ally means to be suddenly caught up.

Technically speaking, there *is* a “rapture” of sorts, in the sense of a sudden catching up of Christ's followers at His return. The Bible calls it the *resurrection*. The debate is over the nature of this event and when it occurs. The common rapture teaching places it *years before* the world will witness Christ's triumphant coming, which is definitely *not* biblical.

Scripture speaks of “the day of the Lord” and “the day of Christ.” Both terms refer to the time when Jesus

will intervene to judge and ultimately reward His saints and rule over all the earth. “The day of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “the Lord's Day” are similar phrases. This great “day” is not confined to 24 hours. (Please see the chart in the center of this study aid for an in-depth comparison of these terms and related scriptures.)

Isaiah 34:8 refers to “the day of the LORD's vengeance, the *year* of recompense for the cause of Zion.” Introduced by the heavenly signs of Revelation 6:12-17, the following



chapters reveal this time to be one of cataclysmic events. And it culminates with Jesus coming in glory with His then-resurrected saints to destroy the armies gathered against Him and stand on the earth (Zechariah 14:1-5; Psalm 149:5-9; Jude 1:14). (See our booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* for further information.)

Thin proof

Rapture believers are quick to point out that Jesus said no one will know the day of His return for His followers (Matthew 24:36) while other prophecies reveal the length of the final trib-

ulation period leading up to His coming. For instance, Daniel 12:11 says we will be able to count 1,290 days from an end-time event leading into the Great Tribulation (called “the abomination of desolation”) until His return. So the point is made that for us to not know the day it must come before that event—thus the rapture. Yet Daniel was told that he would be resurrected at “the *end of the days*” (verse 13)—the end of the two series of days just mentioned, including the 1,290. That places Daniel’s resurrection *after* the tribulation period. This is *contrary* to the common rapture doctrine.

Along with the statement about not knowing the day, Christ also said: “Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:40-41). The rapture argument is that, without warning, some people will just vanish—being secretly raptured by Christ. Since this is compared to people living life as usual and

The common rapture teaching places it years before the world will witness Christ's triumphant coming, which is definitely not biblical.

not knowing they were on the brink of disaster, as in Noah's day (verses 37-39), the argument is made that this disappearance of believers can't be amid the hard times of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord.

In reality, this section deals with the separation between the righteous and the unrighteous when Christ returns. We see at His Second Coming that the saints will be instantly changed (Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Corinthians 15:50-53) and “taken” to meet Jesus in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The saints will then begin ruling upon the earth (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6) and those unconverted who are not “taken” will be given the opportunity for salvation at a later time.

Despite the lack of biblical evidence for the common rapture doctrine, many still cling to it. Some denominations even refer to it as “the blessed hope.” They take this phrase from Titus 2:13, where Paul writes that we

should be “looking for the *blessed hope* and glorious *appearing* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

As they see it, the word “appearing” conveys something secretive and sudden—that is, the rapture. Therefore “blessed hope” becomes a sort of shorthand for this rapture in literature and films on the doctrine. A few other New Testament references that mention “the appearing of Christ” are also often cited, as if these scriptures strengthen the case.

But all of these are simply referring to Christ's coming, either the first time as a perfect sacrifice for sin or the second time as the invincible King.

Nothing in any of the verses has anything to do with a secret rapture of believers to heaven before the end-time tribulation period—despite the attempts of many evangelical theologians to read the passages this way. We will indeed be caught up into the air to be with Christ—but this will come at the end of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord.

Learn More

The book of Revelation is full of symbolism of what will happen in the future. Download or request our free study aid *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* to get some help understanding what that symbolism means, where the world is headed and why.



Download it from our website or request it at the address on the back page.

www.UCG.org/booklets

We'll meet Christ in the air... but when?

Most people say 1 Thessalonians 4 describes a secret Rapture taking place before the Great Tribulation. But put together all the scriptures that talk about being resurrected to meet Christ in the air, and you can piece together a coherent picture of not only when it will happen (at the end of the Tribulation), but how obvious it will be (very).

	1 Thessalonians 4	Matthew 24	1 Corinthians 15	Revelation 11-20
WHEN?	Not stated	After the tribulation	Last trumpet	Seventh trumpet
WHERE IS CHRIST?	In the clouds	In the clouds	Not stated	Seen coming down to earth
WHO IS GATHERED?	The dead, then the living saints	The elect	The dead, then the saints	The dead are judged, the saints rewarded
WHO IS RAISED FIRST?	The dead	Not stated	The dead	Not stated
WHAT IS HEARD?	The voice of an angel and a trumpet	A trumpet	Last trumpet	Seventh trumpet

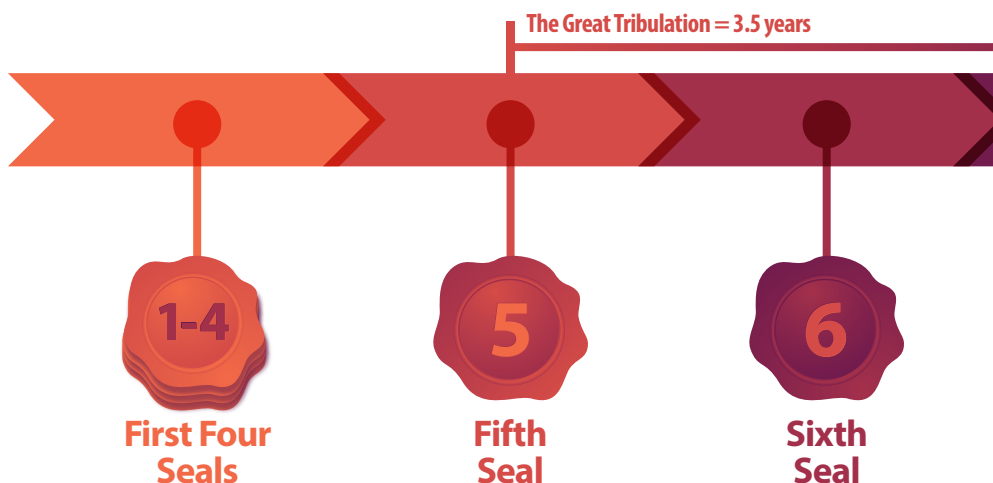
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Progression of End Time Events

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7 Seals

1. Religious deception (Revelation 6:1-2; Matthew 24:4-5)
2. War (Revelation 6:3-4; Matthew 24:6-7)
3. Famine (Revelation 6:5-6; Matthew 24:7)
4. Disease epidemics (Revelation 6:7-8; Matthew 24:7)
5. Tribulation (Revelation 6:9-11; Matthew 24:8-12, 21-22)
6. Heavenly signs (Revelation 6:12-17; Matthew 24:29)
7. Seven trumpets (the "Day of the Lord")

7 Trumpets (the "Day of the Lord")

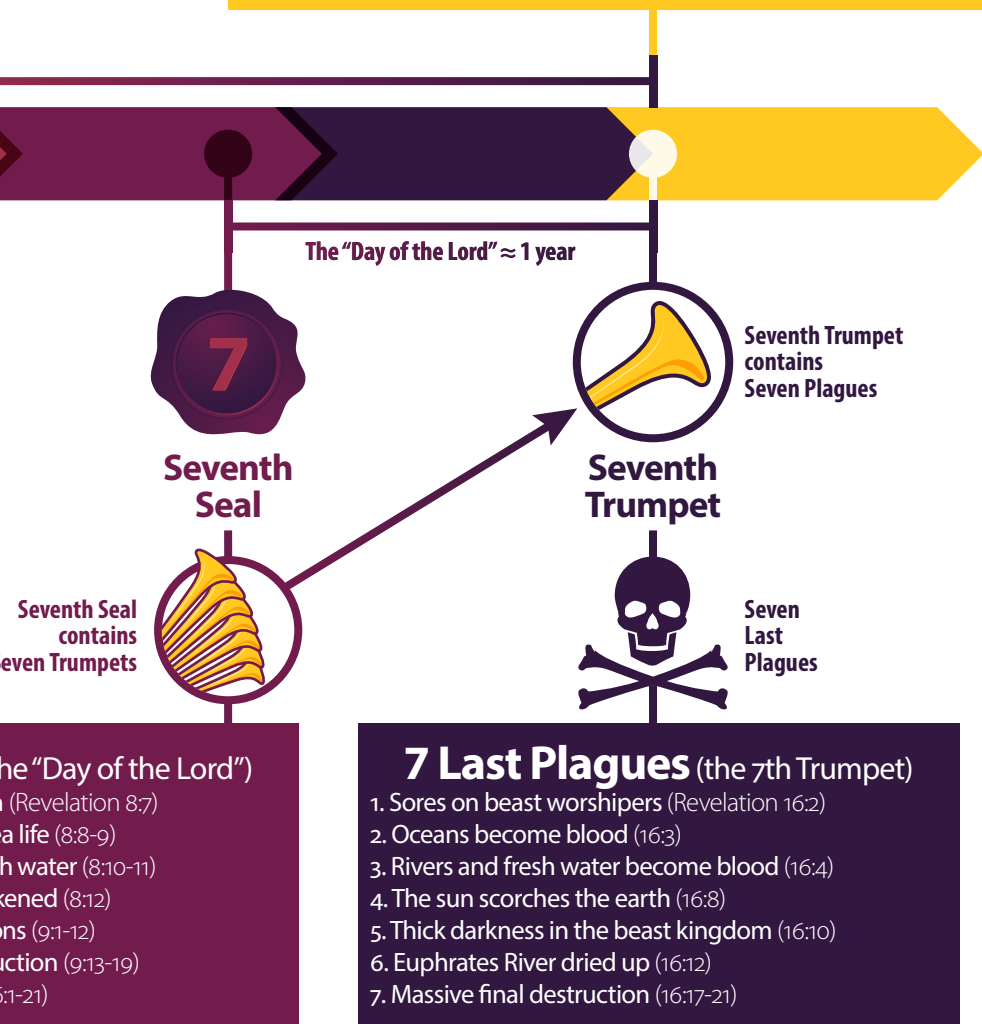
1. Destruction of vegetation
2. Devastation of oceans, seas
3. Devastation of rivers, fresh water
4. Sun, moon and stars dark
5. Torturous human afflictions
6. Enormous military destruction
7. Seven last plagues (15:1; 16:1-17)

Events At Seventh Trumpet

1. **Christ seen in the clouds** (1 Thessalonians 4:17, Matthew 24:30, 26:64, Mark 13:26, 14:62, Revelation 1:7, 19:11)
2. **God's people raised** (Romans 6:5, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Matthew 24:31, 1 Corinthians 15:52, Revelation 20:6)
3. **Jesus stands on the Mount of Olives** (Zechariah 14:4)

Events After Seventh Trumpet

4. **Satan is bound** (John 12:31, Revelation 20:2-7)
5. **1,000 YEAR REIGN OF JESUS CHRIST BEGINS** (Revelation 20:2-7)



Chapter Outline of the Book of Revelation

Chapter	Story Flow	Insets*
1	Introduction	
2-3		Message to the 7 churches
4-5	Prelude—setting	
6	First 6 seals	
7	144,000 & great multitude	
8-10	7th Seal: The trumpet plagues	
11	The two witnesses	
12		The true Church
13		The two beasts
14		The three messages
15-16	The seven last plagues	
17-18		The false church
19	The return of Jesus Christ	
20	The Millennium	
21-22	The new heaven and new earth	

**Several chapters in the book of Revelation are insets. Although most of the book's chapters flow in chronological order, these chapters describe background events and conditions that are not part of the story flow and may span centuries.*

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The seventh trumpet

The return of Jesus Christ

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 about the resurrection and glorification of Christ's followers at *His return*. Verse 16 shows that this will occur when Christ descends from heaven with a mighty shout and the great sound of a trumpet. This is no secret event.

A parallel reference is 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, in which Paul plainly tells us that God will resurrect deceased believers to spirit at "the last trumpet." This is the same "trumpet of God" mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Paul further states in 1 Corinthians 15:51 that God will also change believ-

ers who are still living at the time into spirit. So the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints occur in the same time period.

What is the significance of the trumpet of which Paul wrote? The book of Revelation tells of seven trumpets sounded by seven angelic beings at

the end of the age (the first six coming in chapters 8-9). The drama builds through each event announced by a trumpet blast until the seventh and final angel sounds in Revelation 11. His announcement is the finale, the last and greatest event: The return of Jesus Christ to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth.

“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!’” (verse 15, English Standard Version).

This trumpet announces the com-

“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15).

ing of divine wrath and the time of rewarding God’s servants (verse 18). And combined with the other verses, it’s clear that Jesus descends at the blowing of this seventh trumpet—and that this is when the saints are caught up to Him.

When does this occur in the timeline of end-time events? In a prophecy Jesus gave, He referred to a desecration in Jerusalem—the abomination of desolation—to come before the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-22). This event would come 1,290 days before Daniel’s resurrection at Christ’s return (Daniel 12:11-13), just over 3½ years.

Jesus continued in Matthew 24:29:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” He said that all nations on earth would see the sign of His coming and would mourn. Then He stated that they would see Him coming with power and glory and that He would send His angels to gather His resurrected followers with a great sound of a trumpet (verses 30-31).

Compare this with Revelation 6, where we find a time of terrible final martyrdom (verses 9-11). This is followed by the heavenly signs Jesus was referring to and the people of the earth lamenting (verses 12-17). Notice the conclusion of the lament: “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

This corresponds to Joel 2:31, where we are told that “the sun shall be turned into darkness,

and the moon into blood, *before* the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.” That means that, in the book of Revelation, the trumpets blown after the heavenly signs represent the time of the Day of the Lord.

The seventh trumpet comes at the end of this year-long Day of the Lord—at the end of the 3½-year period of end-time calamity. The dead in Christ are raised and living believers are changed and made immortal at this point in time. They *cannot* have been taken up into glory *before* the tribulation period. Scripture doesn’t allow for a rapture of the saints to heaven for an interim of several years!



You can read more about these end-time events in our booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

Protection for the saints

We see that believers aren't taken off the earth during the Great Tribulation. But God *will* protect believers during this time of severe distress. The most specific reference to the protection that God promises for His people at the end of the age is in Revelation 12.

Verse 14 says, "But the woman

[symbolic here of spiritual Israel, the Church of God] was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly *into the wilderness to her place*, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent." The times here denote years—one (time) plus two (times) plus one half (half a time), equaling 3½ years, the period of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. And note that the protection is not in heaven but in *the wilderness*, or the *desert* as it's often translated. It's on the earth,

Popular Rapture teachings obscure biblical truth

The most popular and widely-believed version of the rapture theory has Jesus Christ miraculously rescuing His people from an earth on the brink of tribulation. It's a comforting belief, since it offers the promise of peace and safety in heaven while the earth below is immersed in turmoil and destruction.

Yet while God does offer protection for His people during the time of the Great Tribulation, nowhere is it stated that this will be in heaven. Rather, the prophetic outline makes it clear that believers do not ascend to meet Christ until He returns at the last of seven trumpets (see our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*).

As for this most popular concept of the rapture, the Bible doesn't teach it. It should be clarified, however, that the English word "rapture" itself literally just means being "suddenly caught up," and the Bible does mention that happening. The apostle Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that at Christ's triumphant return to the earth, living believers "shall be caught up together with [those who died in the faith] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

Yet while the catching up of believers to meet Christ is certainly

biblical, where many have placed the timing of this event with the rapture doctrine is not.

Most who espouse "the rapture" are more technically described as "pre-tribulationists" who believe in a "pre-Tribulation rapture"—typically mistaken in thinking the Tribulation is seven years, with it turning "Great" at the halfway point. There are also "mid-tribulationists" who believe in a "mid-Tribulation rapture," thinking the catching away occurs at that supposed halfway point, 3½ years before Christ's return. Finally, there are "post-tribulationists," who believe in a "post-Tribulation rapture," wherein the catching up of believers to meet Christ in the air comes at the end of the 3½-year Great Tribulation period. While the latter position is closer than the others to what the Bible teaches, the term rapture is still problematic, given all the false conception surrounding it.

To be clear, the popular rapture doctrine is false. There is no rapture of believers months or years in advance of Christ's actual second coming. Rather, believers will be caught up to meet Christ as He returns to the earth—after having been alive on earth through the 3½-year Tribulation period.



not in heaven.

There's more to the story. The context tells us that at least part of God's people will suffer persecution while God protects the rest of the faithful: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 17). It is possible that the result of this persecution will be martyrdom.

The Bible records many ways by

which God protected His people in the past, but does not reveal specifically how, where or when—or even all of the “who”—He will protect in the end. However, we can have confidence that He will reveal what we need to know at the essential time. In the meantime, our focus must be on the spiritual preparation for Christ's return and the establishment of our Father's Kingdom (Matthew 24:38-51).

A person with short hair, wearing a light-colored, textured sweater and dark pants, is walking away from the camera through a field of tall grass and small pink flowers. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a setting or rising sun, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. The sun is positioned directly behind the person, causing a slight silhouette effect and a bright glow around their head.

The hope
of the **resurrection**

Let's summarize what 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, which mentions believers being caught up, actually says:

- Christ's return is proclaimed by an angel's trumpet blast. It's clearly not a secret matter.
- Believers who've already died will be resurrected to join Christ *as He returns* to establish His rule over the earth.
- Living believers will also be changed to spirit to join those resurrected from the dead.
- All the saints, caught up together in the air, will rise to meet Christ and be with him forever.

In related scriptures, we see that the saints will come down to Jerusalem with Christ to rule with Him in the Kingdom of God on the earth (Zechariah 14:1-5; Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

We have also seen that the saints being caught up at the last trumpet doesn't occur *before* the period of end-time catastrophe but *at the end of* the 3½ years of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. There will be protection for God's people during this time—but that protection will be on the earth, not in heaven.

There is no secret rapture of believers before the tribulation period. We can thank God that there *is* a resurrection when true Christians will be caught up into the air *at the glorious second coming* of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is the great hope for all who trust in God and believe in Him and His purpose for their lives (Romans 8:28). The big lesson of the coming Great Tribulation, the persecution of the saints and the eventual return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the faithful is that there's no time to waste in developing your relationship with God the Father and His Son.

The time is now. *Start today* by approaching God in prayer and asking for His help in submitting to His will in your life. Stay close to God the Father and Jesus Christ and leave the fear of the future behind. Trust in the hope of the resurrection.

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The hope of the resurrection

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