



[1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#)

(16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

King James Version

How did this teaching of the apostle Paul ever come to be called the [Rapture](#)? The answer lies in the word translated "shall be caught up" (Greek *harpagésómetha*). In Latin, this word is *rapere*, from which "rapture" is derived. Free of any arcane or mysterious interpretation, it simply means "to be caught up," "snatched," or "seized."

The trouble begins when people confuse this meaning with another definition of rapture that has nothing to do with the biblical concept: "a state or experience of being carried away by overwhelming emotion; a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things." When people blur these meanings, a picture develops of a strange, otherworldly experience preached by fire-breathing preachers to compel sinners to [repent](#) before God's wrath burns them to cinders.

Those who teach the Rapture frequently begin with [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#), but soon afterward they move into areas unsupported in the Bible. They make assumptions that are suspect. Worst, they fail to consider the clear order of events presented in Revelation, pinpointing when this astounding miracle will occur.

What do they believe? They believe that at some point in the near future, [Jesus Christ](#) will return and "snatch away" all Christians on the earth. Those who "believe" in Jesus will rise to meet Him in the air, and He will whisk them off to heaven for a 3 ½-to-seven-year Marriage Supper. In the meantime here on earth, untold destruction occurs when professing "born-again Christians" suddenly vanish while at the controls of cars, trucks, trains, airplanes, heavy equipment, and the like. "Unsaved" relatives and friends will frantically and unsuccessfully search for their raptured loved ones. The media will

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provide 24-hour coverage of the mysterious disappearance of millions of people, speculating wildly on its cause—everything from a mass alien abduction to shifting dimensions and levels of consciousness.

On the other hand, the biblical teaching of the first resurrection is more straightforward. On the day Christ returns to earth to establish His Kingdom, the dead in Christ will rise first, and those who are alive and converted will follow. They will meet Him in the air and immediately return to earth as a vast army of spirit beings to defeat the Beast and [False Prophet](#) in the Valley of Jehoshaphat ([Revelation 19:14](#); [Joel 3:1-2](#); [Zechariah 14:1-5](#)).

Notice two vast differences in these scenarios:

1. The Protestant Rapture takes place either 3 ½ or seven years *before* Christ's return, while the Bible shows it will occur *at* His [second coming](#). For this reason, the Protestant concept is often called the "Pre-tribulation Rapture."
2. When believers are "caught up" in the air, Protestants believe, they will go immediately to *heaven* for a long, spectacular feast. The Bible shows, though, that the saints will return *to earth* to fight in Christ's heavenly army and to help establish God's Kingdom.

Succinctly, then, the two differences are in **timing** and **destination**.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
[Caught Up in the Rapture](#)

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