

Do you believe in the Rapture?

Why?

Why not?

Will it be like the "Left Behind" series of books/movies?

How does the theory match with the Bible?

Rapture

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

In [conservative Protestant Christian eschatology](#), the **rapture** ("harpazo" in Greek in 1 Thessalonians 4:17) is the name given to the event in which all Christians living on earth are simultaneously transported to [Heaven](#) to be with [Jesus Christ](#). This is a common belief among [Fundamentalists](#), [Evangelicals](#), [Pentecostals](#), [Baptists](#), and many independents. While almost all [Christian groups](#) believe that those who are [saved](#) will have eternal life, the term "rapture" is applied specifically to the event in which all Christians on earth simultaneously [ascend](#) to join Christ, and are transformed into immortal bodies. The concept was popularized since the 1830s, and recently since the 1970s, by proponents of the [premillennialist](#), and in particular the [dispensationalist](#) interpretations of scripture. According to these theories, world events indicate that the fulfillment of prophecies of the end times is imminent, and that the rapture could take place at any moment.

The timing of when the rapture will take place is a key point often discussed and debated between denominations and individuals who accept the notion. The most common is that the rapture will take place immediately prior to the [great Tribulation](#), a seven-year period preceding the [second coming](#) of Christ to the earth. Others propose that the rapture will take place either mid-way through the Tribulation, or after it when Christ comes to earth to establish his kingdom, taking over rulership of the world for 1000 years. (see [Millennialism](#))

Etymology

"Rapture" is a word of Latin origin, not Hebrew or Greek, the languages of the Bible. Its Greek equivalent is *harpazo*, which is found in the Greek text of 1 Thes. 4:17. When translated into English, both words mean "to be caught up, or snatched away." Harpazo, the word Paul actually used, comes from roots that mean, "to raise from the ground", "take for oneself" or, simply, "to choose" (*haireomai*), all of which are akin to *airo*, "to raise up."

History

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The origins of the doctrine of the rapture are hotly debated. The [Orthodox](#), [mainline Protestant](#), and [Roman Catholic](#) churches, which represent the majority of Christians worldwide, have no tradition of such a teaching and reject the doctrine, in part because they cannot find any reference to it among any of the early Church fathers and in part because they do not interpret the scriptures the way that Rapture-believers do.

Two early Church fathers from the first century, Clement and Polycarp, made statements that may appear to be a reference to the rapture.

There was a manuscript, [The Shepherd of Hermas](#), dated to the second century, that is perhaps the oldest known reference to a great tribulation to come and a possible escape from it. This text includes a series of visions that appeared to the shepherd. The first vision was of a giant raging bull, and the Shepherd was able to escape harm from it by relying on God for protection. The next vision encountered was that of a beautiful maiden, identified by the shepherd as the church. She identifies the bull as the great tribulation to come, and tells him he escaped it by putting his trust in God. She then charges him to go tell all other believers they can also escape the coming tribulation but only if they also put full faith in the Lord. This interpretation, however, is not accepted by scholars, as it is clearly taking the visions out of context. The "escape" of the "beautiful maiden" does not refer to a rapture, or being taken out of the tribulation, but it refers to going through the tribulation and yet coming out victorious from it by faith in the Lord.

Some pre-Tribulation proponents maintain that the earliest known extra-Biblical reference to the "pre-Tribulation" rapture is from a [sermon by "pseudo-Ephraem"](#), attributed to a fourth century [Byzantine](#), Ephraem of [Nisibis](#), in which he is quoted as saying, "For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins." However, the interpretation of this writing, as supporting pre-Tribulation rapture, is debated.

There exists at least one 18th century and two 19th century pre-Tribulation references, in a book published in [1788](#), in the writings of a Catholic priest Emmanuel Lacunza in [1812](#), and by John Darby himself in [1827](#). However, both the book published in [1788](#) and the writings of Lacunza have opposing views regarding their interpretations, as well.

The rise in belief in the "pre-Tribulation" rapture is sometimes attributed to a 15-year old Scottish-Irish girl named [Margaret MacDonald](#) (a follower of [Edward Irving](#)), who in 1830 had a vision that was later published in 1861.

The popularization of the term is associated with teaching of [John Nelson Darby](#), prominent among the [Plymouth Brethren](#), and the rise of [premillennialism](#) and [dispensationalism](#) in English-speaking Churches at the end of the [19th century](#). In 1908, the doctrine of the rapture was further popularized by an evangelist named [William Eugene Blackstone](#), whose book, *Jesus Is Coming*, sold more than one million copies. The following year, 1909, the [Scofield Reference Bible](#), which teaches the pre-

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Tribulation rapture, was published; by 1930 it had sold 1 million copies, and as of 2007 has sold 5 million copies.

In 1957, Dr. [John Walvoord](#), a theologian at [Dallas Theological Seminary](#), authored a book, "The Rapture Question," that gave theological support to the pre-Tribulation rapture; this book eventually sold over 65,000 copies. In 1958, [J. Dwight Pentecost](#) authored another book supporting the pre-Tribulation rapture, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, that sold 215,000 copies.

During the [1970s](#), the rapture became popular in wider circles, in part due to the books of [Hal Lindsey](#), including *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which has reportedly sold between 15 million to 35 million copies. Lindsey proclaimed that the rapture was imminent, an idea which he based on world conditions at the time. The [Cold War](#) and the European Economic Community figured prominently in his predictions of impending [Armageddon](#). Other aspects of [1970s](#) global politics were seen as having been predicted in the [Bible](#). Lindsey suggested, for example, that the seven-headed beast with ten horns, cited in Revelation, was the [European Economic Community](#), a forebear of the [European Union](#), which at the time aspired to ten nations; it now has 27 member states.

In 1995, the doctrine of the pre-Tribulation rapture was further popularized by [Tim LaHaye](#)'s book series, [Left Behind](#), which sold tens of millions of copies and was made into several movies.

The doctrine of the rapture continues to be an important component in [fundamentalist Christian eschatology](#) today. Many Christians continue to feel that world conditions point to the rapture, Tribulation, and return of Christ occurring soon.

Next week, we will begin looking at the scriptures.

(Note: these notes are short due to a lot of time spent in active discussion on this topic)