

## Will some be left behind?

The passage in Matthew 24:40-41 is sometimes cited as a description of the rapture: “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.”

Once again, we understand more fully when we consider these verses in context. Starting in verse 36, Jesus warns that since we will not know just when He will return, we must be ready for it at all times. He urges us not to be oblivious, as people were before the Flood. Instead, we can be spiritual-

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*When Jesus returns, He will come to the earth and He will rule over the earth (Acts 1:9-11; Revelation 11:15; Zechariah 14:1-4).*

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ly prepared for Jesus’ return. But still, He warns, there will be some who are prepared and others who are not.

In verse 42 Jesus makes the point: “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” And in verse 44 He concludes the thought: “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Verses 40-41 contrast those who heed Jesus’ warning to be prepared with those who do not. Nothing is said of anyone being taken away in a rapture.

Notice also that being “taken away” isn’t necessarily a good thing. Speaking of those who weren’t prepared in Noah’s time, verse 39 says that the Flood “took them all away.” And speaking of the end times in verses 40 and 41, Jesus said that one is “taken” and the other left. Could being “taken” indicate one who is swept away by the events of the Tribulation at the end of the age and the “other left” a reference to one who is spiritually prepared and endures that time?

## Warnings of troubled times, but no promise of rapture

There are many prophetic warnings about the end of this age. The apostle Peter said that knowing the times that are ahead should motivate us to live “in holy conduct and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11). Jesus described coming times of unparalleled stress and difficulty (Matthew 24:21-22). He warned that since we don’t know the timing of His return, we ought to take heed, watch and pray.

Jesus also warned that we must be on guard so that we are not caught unawares as those events draw near and that those who are vigilant and focused may escape the times to come (Luke 21:34-36). And Revelation 12:13-14 describes in symbolic language the Church being protected from Satan during the time of the Great Tribulation. But they aren’t taken in a rapture, and they don’t go to heaven to be protected.

In all the prophecies of the end of the age and of the return of Jesus Christ, there is no indication or even a hint that He will swoop near the earth to secretly snatch away believers, leaving the rest to suffer the anguish of the Great Tribulation. His return will be visible, and His followers will be with Him as He descends to the Mount of Olives to begin His thousand-year reign here on the earth (Zechariah 14:4-5; Luke 21:27; Revelation 5:10; 20:4).

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a Worldwide Association, Inc.  
P.O. Box 3490  
McKinney, TX 75070

+1-972-521-7777/U.S. toll-free: 1-888-926-4929  
info@cogwa.org

<http://LifeHopeandTruth.com>

# Life Hope & Truth

## Will There Be a Secret Rapture?

*Many believe when Jesus returns, He will approach secretly to snatch away all believers and children in a rapture to protect them. Is this biblical?*

Many believe when Jesus returns, He will approach secretly to snatch away all believers and all children, who will be taken to heaven where they will be protected during the Great Tribulation. Though the Bible does clearly teach that there will be a Great Tribulation and that Jesus Christ will return, it does not teach there will be a secret rapture.

This teaching is often referred to as the “rapture theory.” It is a theory because it has no definitive proof. Neither Jesus nor the apostles taught that such an event will occur and, in fact, it has no scriptural support. Although there is some disagreement as to its exact origin, the doctrine was unheard of until the early 19th century and became widespread when it was incorporated into the footnotes of the *Scofield Reference Bible*.

*Scofield’s* comments are in reference to 1 Thessalonians 4:17: “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.”

The phrase “shall be caught up” is believed by adherents of the rapture theory to describe the rapture. One meaning of the English word rapture is “being carried away in body or in spirit.” However, the word rapture is not used here or any other place in Scrip-

ture. The phrase “shall be caught up” is translated from a Greek word that means “to catch, pull, or take by force” (*Louw and Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). This is a strong word in the Greek, emphasizing that the action will be sudden and forceful. It conveys the forceful power of God by which He will resurrect those who had died.

In the Vulgate (Latin) Bible the phrase “shall be caught up” is translated *rapere*, from which the word *rapture* is derived.

In order to see this statement in its context, it’s helpful to read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others

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*If the faithful are dead and in their graves, why would they need to be snatched away to escape the Tribulation?*

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who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.”

### **The promise of a resurrection— not a rapture**

Apparently these first-century Christians had expected Jesus to return during their lifetime. When some died before He came back to the earth, they were concerned and confused. To encourage them,

Paul appeals to their faith in Jesus’ resurrection and the promise of a resurrection of the faithful when He returns.

Notice that this passage does not include any warning about or even a reference to the Great Tribulation at the end of the age. Paul wasn’t warning them to be mindful of their Christian responsibilities so they could be among those who were “caught up together” to “meet the Lord in the air” to escape difficult times. In fact, if the faithful are dead and in their graves, why would they even need to be snatched away to escape the Tribulation? By reading the full context we see that Paul reminded them of the promise of the resurrection of the faithful when Jesus returns.

Clearly he is writing about a resurrection, not a rapture.

### **Not a secret event**

Another key element of the rapture theory is that it is supposed to be secret. With no warning, faithful believers suddenly disappear.

But notice again 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.” With trumpets and angels declaring Jesus’ return, this is hardly the description of something done secretly.

In Matthew 24:30 Jesus says that at His return people from all over the earth will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. In Revelation 11:15 we read that the seventh trumpet will sound and a loud voice will proclaim that Jesus will rule the nations of the world forever.

These passages describe the same event: the dramatic, powerful and very visible arrival of Jesus Christ when He returns to take control of and rule

over all the nations. There is no passage to support the teaching that He will approach the earth without really returning, secretly snatch away believers to heaven and then return again after the Tribulation.

### **Meet the Lord in the air**

Does the final phrase in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 mean that we will go to heaven and be always there with the Lord? Note that they will meet Him in “the clouds”—that is, in the lower atmosphere of the earth, not in the heaven where God resides.

When Jesus returns, He will come to the earth and He will rule over the earth (Acts 1:9-11; Revelation 11:15; Zechariah 14:1-4). Those who “meet the Lord in the air” won’t stay in the air with Jesus, but will come down to the earth with Him. The phrase “and thus we shall always be with the Lord” doesn’t mean

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they will go to heaven with Him, but describes how it is that the resurrected saints will come to be with Him.

The word translated “meet” is from a Greek word meaning to officially greet and escort a visiting member of royalty or a governmental representative (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*). In other words, when Jesus returns, faithful believers who had died will be resurrected and those still living will be changed to spirit. They will rise together into the clouds to greet Jesus as He is returning and escort Him to the earth where He will begin His reign.