THE FUTURE FORETOLD

Biblical Prophecy Without the Panic

STUDY COMPANION

THE BLESSED HOPE

What Does the Bible Actually Say About the Rapture?

TEXT FIRST. THEORY SECOND.
KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE IT.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY COMPANION

This study has **two parts**.

PART ONE — FOLLOW THE MESSAGE

Start here.

Part One follows the message and answers the two questions we promised to investigate:

1. What is “the blessed hope”?

2. How much of what Christians call “the rapture” comes directly from the Bible—and how much comes from interpretation?

You don't need any previous knowledge of Bible prophecy.

Read the passages, answer the questions, and when you reach the end of Part One, **you have completed the main study.**

PART TWO — WANT TO GO DEEPER?

Part Two is optional.

It's for anyone who wants to investigate the harder question:

When does the rapture happen in relation to the Tribulation?

Pivot Point Church teaches a **pre-tribulation rapture**, meaning we believe Jesus gathers His church before the Tribulation begins.

But rather than simply telling you what to believe, Part Two will let you examine some of the biblical evidence for yourself—including passages that Christians use to support other interpretations.

Throughout both parts, keep asking:

THE TEXT SAYS

What does the passage actually say?

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

What conclusions are we drawing as we connect this passage with other Scripture?

That distinction will become very important.

PART ONE

FOLLOW THE MESSAGE

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1. WHAT IS “THE BLESSED HOPE”?

Before we talk about the rapture, let's start with the phrase in the title.

READ: Titus 2:11–14

Pay particular attention to verse 13:

> “while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”

We use the word **hope** differently in everyday conversation.

“I hope it doesn't rain.”

“I hope I get the job.”

“I hope things work out.”

Usually, we mean:

I want this to happen, but I don't know whether it will.

Biblical hope is different.

BIBLICAL HOPE

Biblical hope is **confident expectation based on God's promise**.

We're waiting for something God has promised.

Now look carefully at Titus 2:13.

What does Paul say Christians are waiting for?

Does the verse identify our hope primarily as escaping something—or as the appearing of Someone?

Who is that Someone?

That's our first answer.

WHAT IS THE BLESSED HOPE?

The blessed hope is our confident expectation of the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Our hope isn't ultimately a prophecy timeline.

It isn't a chart.

And it isn't primarily an escape from terrible events.

Our hope is Jesus.

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2. WHY DOES HIS COMING GIVE US HOPE?

If our blessed hope is centered on Jesus' appearing, the next question is obvious:

What happens when He comes for His people?

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Don't begin at verse 16.

Start at verse 13.

Paul tells us **why** he's talking about this.

Some of the Christians in Thessalonica had died.

Those who remained were grieving.

Paul says:

> "we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death…"

And then:

> "…so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."

Paul doesn't say Christians don't grieve.

They do.

But Christian grief is different because **death isn't the end of the story.**

THINK ABOUT IT

What problem is Paul addressing?

What does verse 13 tell you about the purpose of what follows?

Was Paul primarily trying to create an end-times timeline—or comfort grieving Christians?

Keep that answer in mind.

It will matter later.

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3. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS?

Now read **1 Thessalonians 4:16–17** again slowly.

Don't add anything yet.

Just observe.

WHAT HAPPENS FIRST?

WHAT HAPPENS TO BELIEVERS WHO HAVE DIED?

WHAT HAPPENS TO BELIEVERS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE?

WHERE DO THEY MEET JESUS?

WHAT DOES PAUL SAY WILL BE TRUE FOREVER?

Now put Paul's description in order:

___ Living believers are caught up.

___ Jesus comes.

___ God's people meet the Lord.

___ The dead in Christ rise.

THE TEXT SAYS

From this passage alone we can confidently say:

Jesus comes.

The dead in Christ rise.

Believers who are still alive are caught up together with them.

They meet the Lord.

And they will be with Him forever.

Notice what we haven't done yet.

We haven't discussed the Tribulation.

We haven't built a timeline.

We haven't even used the word *rapture*.

We've simply allowed the passage to tell us what happens.

Text first. Theory second.

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4. WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU'RE STILL ALIVE?

Paul gives us another important piece in a different letter.

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:50–53

Pay particular attention to verse 51:

> “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—”

Here, “sleep” is referring to death.

According to Paul, will every Christian experience physical death?

What happens to those who are alive?

What happens to those who have died?

Paul describes something much bigger than people simply disappearing.

The biblical picture includes:

RESURRECTION

The dead are raised.

TRANSFORMATION

Living believers are changed.

REUNION

Living and resurrected believers are gathered together.

JESUS

God's people are with Him.

REFLECT

Which of those aspects of Christ's coming gives you the greatest sense of hope?

Why?

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5. SO WHERE DOES “RAPTURE” COME FROM?

Now we're ready for the terminology.

You may have heard someone say:

“The word rapture isn't in the Bible.”

If they're talking about most English Bible translations, they're right.

Look again at **1 Thessalonians 4:17**.

What words does your Bible use?

> “will be _____ together with them…”

The NIV says:

“caught up.”

The Greek word translated “caught up” is ***harpazō***.

It carries the idea of being seized, snatched, or caught away.

When the New Testament was translated into Latin, the phrase became ***rapiemur*** **[rah-pee-EH-moor]**, meaning:

“we shall be caught up.”

That comes from the Latin verb *rapio*, meaning to seize or carry away. Our English word **rapture** ultimately developed from that Latin word family.

So there are two different claims we need to distinguish.

CLAIM ONE:

“The English word rapture doesn't appear in most English Bibles.”

True.

CLAIM TWO:

“Therefore the event Christians call the rapture isn't in the Bible.”

False.

The English label came later.

The event didn't.

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6. IS THE RAPTURE BIBLICAL?

Now let's answer the question directly.

If by “rapture” we mean:

Jesus comes,

the dead in Christ rise,

living believers are caught up with them,

they meet Jesus,

and God's people will be with Him forever—

YES.

The rapture is biblical.

Those things are explicitly described in 1 Thessalonians 4.

But now we need to be equally clear about something else.

Does 1 Thessalonians 4 explicitly say:

“The rapture will happen before the Tribulation”?

No.

That conclusion requires us to connect 1 Thessalonians 4 with other passages.

That doesn't automatically make the conclusion wrong.

Interpretation isn't a bad word.

Every time we ask what several biblical passages mean when understood together, we're interpreting Scripture.

The important thing is recognizing when we're reading something directly from the text and when we're drawing a conclusion from several texts.

That's why we keep saying:

TEXT FIRST. THEORY SECOND.

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7. NOW ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

We started with two questions.

Don't move on until you can answer them in your own words.

QUESTION ONE

What is “the blessed hope”?

Now compare your answer:

The blessed hope is the confident expectation of the appearing of Jesus Christ. Our hope is ultimately Jesus Himself and what His coming means for His people.

QUESTION TWO

How much of what Christians call “the rapture” comes directly from the Bible—and how much comes from interpretation?

Write your answer:

Now compare it:

The event Christians call the rapture is explicitly biblical. Scripture says the dead in Christ will rise and living believers will be caught up with them to meet Jesus.

Exactly where that event belongs in the end-times timeline requires interpretation.

That's an important distinction.

You now have the answer to the questions this message promised to investigate.

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8. WHY DID PAUL TEACH THIS?

There's one more verse we can't skip.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:18

After explaining all of this, Paul says:

> "Therefore encourage one another with these words."

What word does Paul use?

Encourage.

Not frighten.

Not obsess.

Not speculate endlessly.

Not calculate dates.

Not attack Christians who interpret the timeline differently.

Encourage.

Remember where the conversation started.

These people were grieving.

Paul tells them:

The people you love who died in Christ aren't lost.

Jesus is coming.

The dead will rise.

The living will be changed.

God's people will be reunited.

And you will be with Jesus forever.

REFLECT

Has your previous exposure to end-times teaching primarily produced:

☐ Hope
☐ Fear
☐ Curiosity
☐ Confusion
☐ Excitement
☐ Anxiety
☐ A desire to study Scripture
☐ Something else: _____

How does Paul's purpose in verse 18 challenge the way you've thought about prophecy?

_____

_____

_____

9. YOUR PIVOT POINT

Now return to Titus 2.

Don't read only verse 13.

Read **Titus 2:11–14** again.

Paul doesn't describe Christians as people sitting around waiting for Jesus to return.

The expectation of Christ's appearing affects how God's people live **while they're waiting**.

So ask yourself:

If I genuinely believe Jesus is coming, what should change about the way I live this week?

Is there something God has been asking me to do that I've been postponing?

Is there someone I need to forgive?

Is there someone in my life who needs to hear about Jesus?

Is there something I need to surrender?

Have I spent more time wondering **when Jesus is coming** than asking **who I'm becoming while I wait**?

The rapture isn't supposed to make Christians stare at the sky.

It's supposed to change the way we live while our feet are still on the ground.

Prophecy isn't supposed to produce spectators.

It's supposed to produce disciples.

TAKE THIS WITH YOU

You don't need to understand every end-times timeline to understand the promise.

Jesus is coming.

The dead in Christ will rise.

Living believers will be changed.

God's people will be gathered to Him.

And we will be with the Lord forever.

That's why our future isn't defined by fear.

Our hope isn't ultimately an event.

OUR HOPE IS JESUS.

And if that's enough study for today, **stop here.**

You've completed Part One.

But if you're asking:

“If the Bible doesn't explicitly say the rapture happens before the Tribulation, why does Pivot Point Church teach that it does?”

That's exactly what Part Two is for.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

The message gave you the biblical answer. Now let's investigate the evidence.

Scripture explicitly describes believers being caught up to meet Jesus. But exactly when does that happen?

Pivot Point Church teaches that Jesus gathers His church before the Tribulation. In this optional deeper study, we'll examine why we believe that—and why other Christians reach different conclusions.

Our goal isn't to win an argument. It's to understand Scripture.

10. WHAT IS THE TRIBULATION?

Christians use **Tribulation** to describe a future period of extraordinary worldwide trouble associated with events leading to Christ's return and God's judgment against evil.

You'll encounter several interpretations concerning exactly how those events unfold.

A **pre-tribulation rapture** simply means:

Jesus gathers His church before the Tribulation begins.

That's Pivot Point Church's position.

But we're not going to begin by trying to prove it.

We're going to examine the evidence.

Keep two columns in mind:

THE TEXT SAYS

What does Scripture explicitly say?

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

What conclusion are we drawing by connecting passages?

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11. JESUS PROMISES TO COME FOR HIS PEOPLE

READ: John 14:1–3

Jesus tells His disciples He is going away to prepare a place for them.

Then He says:

> “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

THE TEXT SAYS

What does Jesus explicitly promise?

Now compare John 14:3 with 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

JOHN 14

> “I will come back and take you to be with me…”

1 THESSALONIANS 4

> “And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

Pre-tribulation Christians see a strong connection between these promises.

Jesus comes for His people and takes them to be with Him.

But notice:

John 14 doesn't mention the Tribulation.

So this passage contributes to the picture, but it doesn't establish the timing by itself.

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12. RESCUED FROM COMING WRATH

READ:

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Pay particular attention to:

1 Thessalonians 1:10

> “Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

And:

1 Thessalonians 5:9

> “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath…”

THE TEXT SAYS

What does Paul explicitly say about believers and God's wrath?

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

Pre-tribulation Christians connect this coming wrath with the period of divine judgment associated with the Tribulation.

If the Tribulation is the coming period in which God's judgment is poured out on the world, these passages support the conclusion that believers are removed before that judgment.

But notice the interpretive step.

Scripture explicitly says:

Believers aren't appointed to God's wrath.

The pre-tribulation interpretation concludes:

Therefore, the church is gathered before the Tribulation.

Do you see the difference?

Does recognizing that difference weaken the argument—or simply make the reasoning clearer?

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13. “THE HOUR OF TRIAL”

READ: Revelation 3:7–13

Pay particular attention to verse 10:

> “I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world…”

THE TEXT SAYS

Who is Jesus speaking to?

What does He promise?

How widespread is the coming trial?

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

Pre-tribulation Christians commonly understand this worldwide “hour of trial” as the future Tribulation.

They understand Jesus' promise to “keep you from” that hour as evidence that the church will not enter it.

But other Christians understand this differently.

Some argue that Jesus is promising **protection through the trial**, rather than removal before it.

COMPARE: John 17:15

Jesus prays:

> “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

Now think carefully.

Does Revelation 3:10 necessarily require physical removal?

Could it describe divine protection?

What additional biblical evidence would help you decide?

This is exactly why we distinguish between the text and our interpretation.

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14. A PASSAGE WE SHOULDN'T AVOID

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8

Paul begins:

> "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him…"

Then he discusses several things:

- rebellion,
- the **man of lawlessness**,
- a restraining influence,
- and the eventual destruction of the lawless one by Jesus.

The "man of lawlessness" is a future opponent of God whom many Christians associate with the person commonly called **the Antichrist**.

THE TEXT SAYS

As you read, mark every event Paul explicitly mentions.

What appears to happen?

Does Paul explicitly identify the restrainer?

No.

That's worth remembering.

There are several theories about the restrainer's identity, but Scripture doesn't directly tell us.

We shouldn't say:

"The Bible says the restrainer is _____."

when the Bible doesn't fill in the blank.

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

Some Christians understand this passage to mean certain end-times events occur before believers are gathered to Jesus.

Many pre-tribulation interpreters understand Paul's gathering of believers and his discussion of the Day of the Lord as related but distinguishable events within the larger end-times picture.

ASK THE TEXT

Does this passage give us a complete end-times chronology?

What does it clearly tell us?

What questions remain?

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15. “AFTER THE DISTRESS”

Now let's look at one of the strongest passages used by Christians who reject the pre-tribulation interpretation.

READ: Matthew 24:15–31

Pay particular attention to verses 29–31.

Jesus says:

> “Immediately after the distress of those days…”

He then describes cosmic signs, His visible coming, and a gathering of His elect.

THE TEXT SAYS

When does Jesus place this gathering?

What happens immediately before it?

Who is gathered?

Now compare this passage with **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**.

SIMILARITIES I NOTICE

DIFFERENCES I NOTICE

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

Christians who hold a **post-tribulation** view generally understand Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 as describing the same gathering.

If they're the same event, the timing appears to place the gathering after the Tribulation.

Pre-tribulation Christians generally distinguish them.

They understand 1 Thessalonians 4 as Jesus gathering His church to meet Him in the air before the Tribulation.

They understand Matthew 24 as describing Christ's visible return following the Tribulation and a gathering associated with that return.

So the important interpretive question is:

ARE THESE THE SAME EVENT?

Or:

ARE THESE DISTINCT EVENTS WITHIN CHRIST'S RETURN?

Write your current conclusion:

Why?

What evidence would you want to investigate further?

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16. PUTTING THE PRE-TRIBULATION CASE TOGETHER

Now step back and look at the entire picture.

JOHN 14:1–3

Jesus promises to return and take His followers to be with Him.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–18

Believers are caught up to meet Jesus and remain with Him forever.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51–53

Dead believers are raised and living believers are transformed.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:10

Jesus rescues His people from coming wrath.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:9

Believers aren't appointed to suffer God's wrath.

REVELATION 3:10

Jesus promises to keep His people from a worldwide hour of trial.

Taken together, Pivot Point Church believes the strongest explanation is that Jesus gathers His church **before the Tribulation**.

Notice the wording:

“TAKEN TOGETHER, WE BELIEVE…”

We're not claiming one verse gives us the entire timeline.

We're reaching a conclusion from several passages.

We believe that conclusion best accounts for the biblical evidence.

And we should be able to explain **why**.

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17. KNOW THE OTHER VIEWS

As you continue studying prophecy, you'll encounter several positions.

You don't need to memorize the labels, but knowing what they mean will help you understand what people are discussing.

PRE-TRIBULATION

Jesus gathers His church **before** the Tribulation.

MID-TRIBULATION

The gathering occurs around the **middle** of the Tribulation.

PRE-WRATH

The church experiences part of the end-times trouble but is gathered before the final outpouring of God's wrath.

POST-TRIBULATION

The church remains through the Tribulation, and the gathering of believers is connected with Christ's visible return afterward.

Don't begin with:

Which one have I always been taught?

Ask:

Which interpretation best accounts for everything Scripture says?

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18. YOUR VERDICT — FOR NOW

Those last two words matter.

FOR NOW.

You don't need to pretend certainty if you still have questions.

After studying these passages:

☐ I currently believe the biblical evidence best supports a pre-tribulation rapture.

☐ I currently lean toward another interpretation.

☐ I'm not sure yet and need to study further.

The strongest biblical evidence for my current conclusion is:

The passage that challenges my current conclusion most is:

The question I still need answered is:

Something I understand differently after this study is:

Changing your conclusion because Scripture convinced you isn't failure.

That's what studying Scripture is supposed to do.

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19. THE TWO-COLUMN CHALLENGE

Before you finish, take a blank sheet of paper.

Draw a line down the middle.

On one side write:

THE TEXT SAYS

Write only statements you can point directly to in Scripture.

On the other side write:

THE INTERPRETATION SAYS

Write the conclusions you've reached by connecting those passages.

Then ask yourself:

Can I tell the difference?

And one more:

Can I accurately explain why a Christian who disagrees with me interprets these passages differently?

You don't have to agree with another interpretation to represent it fairly.

That's part of knowing **why** you believe what you believe.

FINISH WHERE WE STARTED

After studying *harpazō*, the Tribulation, wrath, Matthew 24, Revelation 3, and 2 Thessalonians 2, it would be easy to leave with your head full of timelines.

So go back to the beginning.

READ: Titus 2:13

> “while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”

Then read:

1 Thessalonians 4:17–18

> “And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

That's where we began.

And that's where we finish.

Our blessed hope isn't ultimately:

“I figured out the timeline.”

It isn't:

“My end-times chart was right.”

And it isn't even:

“I get to escape the Tribulation.”

Our blessed hope is:

JESUS IS COMING.

Death doesn't win.

The grave doesn't win.

God hasn't forgotten His people.

Those who have died in Christ will rise.

Those who are alive will be changed.

God's people will be gathered to Him.

And:

“WE WILL BE WITH THE LORD FOREVER.”

That's the blessed hope.

NEXT TIME

WHY WAS REVELATION WRITTEN?

When most people hear **Revelation**, they immediately think about beasts, 666, Armageddon, judgment, and the end of the world.

But before we try to interpret any of those things, there's a more basic question we need to answer:

Why was Revelation written?

Who first received it?

What were they experiencing?

And what was this strange and powerful book supposed to communicate to them?

Because before we ask what Revelation says about **our future**, we need to understand what it was saying to the people who first received it.

TEXT FIRST. THEORY SECOND.

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE IT.