

THE NON-PROPHET'S GUIDE™ TO THE RAPTURE



Written & Illustrated by
TODD HAMPSON

BIBLE PROPHECY FOR EVERYONE

- ➔ Cuts through the complexity and confusion
- ➔ Entertaining and user-friendly
- ➔ Full of fascinating visuals, timelines, and charts

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INTRODUCTION

And Still...

We wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

TITUS 2:13

This was the moment he had been preparing for since the age of seven. All the years of training—the blood, the sweat, and the tears—for this moment. There was nothing more left to do. The contest was over, and now, the results were in someone else's hands. The sound of his own heavy breathing, combined with the whoosh-whoosh of his heart beating in his ears, muffled the satisfied cheers and chatter of the sold-out crowd.

As his adrenaline dissipated, the exhausted pugilist began to realize how spent his legs felt, how swollen his eyebrow was, and how sore a couple of his ribs were. He looked up into the bright lights to take a deep breath and to receive a squirt of water from the clear plastic bottle his corner team waved in front of him. Then he tilted his head down to catch a glimpse of the blood-stained canvas. He swallowed, and then, exhaled.

After 12 three-minute rounds—a full 36 minutes of laying it all on the line—his heart rate finally began to settle as he watched the referee gather scorecards from the three judges and place them in the hand of the sharply dressed boxing announcer, clad in a tuxedo. The crowd waited in rapt anticipation, quieting to hushed tones in order to hear which fighter would be crowned champion.

At the end of any championship boxing match, there is a pregnant pause—a moment of anticipation as the judges' scorecards are tallied and the announcer

awaits the results. When the announcer meticulously reads the three scorecards one at a time, no one yet knows which fighter is the winner. If the contender beat the reigning champion, after reading the scores, the announcer utters these three words, “And the new...” conveying that the former champion has, indeed, lost his belt.



But if the champion wins and retains his belt, after reading the scorecards, the announcer will utter these two words, “And still...” indicating that the champ is still the champ.

When it comes to the primary, epic, and imminent event that church-age believers have been waiting for since the first century, the rapture is still the reigning champion and the pound-for-pound best hope we have. In fact, not only is it the best hope, but it is the blessed hope—the event we’ve all been waiting for and the next event in God’s prophetic plan.

The rapture should be on the hearts and minds of every believer, yet it has fallen out of style. Its clear details marred and faded by many persuasive dissenting voices coming from outside of the church and from within. Today, the pretribulational (pretrib) rapture of the church is often seen as a distant cousin to more important doctrines—a once-hyped fantasy of sorts that has lost its luster. Worse yet, the rapture in general, and the pretribulational rapture specifically, is under direct attack from some prominent voices within the church!

So what are Christians to believe? Are those who teach a pretrib rapture abusing Scripture and misleading millions? Is the event merely an invention of a theologian from the 1800s that was popularized in the twentieth century, as many contenders claim? Should Christians retreat to a nebulous, unclear position of panmillennialism and avoid teaching on the topic altogether? After all, everything will pan out in the end, right? Is talk of the end times

in general, and teaching about the pretrib rapture specifically, all simply a distracting side-show for sensationalists? Will the rapture of the church and the return of Christ occur at the same time? What did the early church believe about the rapture? Most importantly, what does God's Word have to say about it?



The purpose of this book is to answer those questions (and many more) with crystal-grade clarity and to reaffirm this important biblical doctrine for a new generation of believers who may be confused or disheartened by the broad assault on the seemingly once-settled truth of the great snatching away (*harpazō* in Greek) of believers. My goal is to demonstrate that this event is clearly prophesied to take place at the end of the church age and that all believers should be looking forward to this momentous event, like a bride anticipating her wedding day.

As one prominent theology expert notes,

The rapture is often referred to as “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) because it provides comfort not only to those believers who are concerned about the coming tribulation, but also to those who long to be reunited with their departed loved ones who share faith in Christ. The second coming, which encompasses both the rapture and the glorious appearing, is one of the most significant events mentioned in the entire Bible. There are 321 references in the New Testament alone to this awesome event, making it the second most prominent doctrine presented in Scripture after the doctrine of salvation.¹

If the doctrine of the Lord's return is second only to the doctrine of salvation, then it is recognizably a matter of prime importance for our faith and practice as Christians. A careful look at God's inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient, and completed Word makes it abundantly clear that there is no basis for eschatological agnosticism, no reason to throw our hands up and embrace panmillennialism, and no impetus to water down our theological

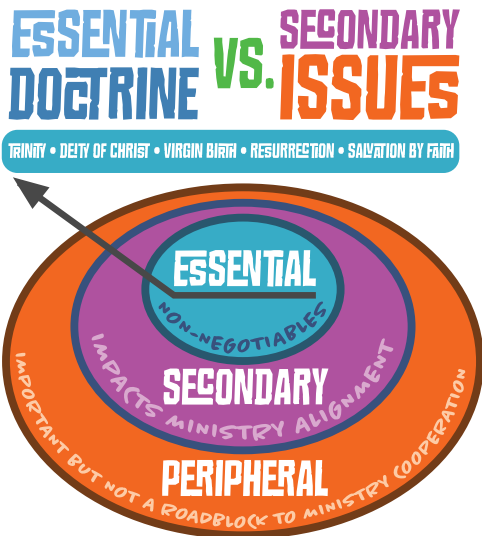
approach due to the direct attacks upon the doctrine of the rapture in general, and the pretrib position in particular. This is a primary biblical topic that all believers should hold in high regard and attempt to understand.

Perhaps this is your first time hearing about the rapture and you simply want to know what it is, where it is found in Scripture, and why it is so important. Whether you are a new believer in Christ who wants to learn the basics of the rapture, or a longtime believer who wants to take a deeper look at the details of this doctrine in order to firm up your convictions and sharpen your apologetic—this book is for you. If we are nearing the end of the church age, as it seems, the fog of spiritual warfare and the crafty deception of the enemy will work to erode our sense of clarity when it comes to this critically important teaching of the Bible.

Therefore, it is time to take an in-depth look at the doctrine of the rapture to show that—despite going 12 championship rounds with various contenders—it *is still*... the undefeated champion, the culmination of our salvation, and the primary end-times event that triggers all the others! Join me in this book as we take a systematic approach, allowing Scripture to be our guide as we discover conclusively that the rapture is present in the Bible. It is our blessed hope, designed to comfort us as we walk through a broken and sinful world and as we await all the promised future events—beginning with the

great snatching away of the bride to join her long-awaited Groom.

One final note before we dive in. I want to acknowledge the importance of unity in the body of Christ. My goal here is not to intentionally offend my brothers and sisters in Christ who hold to another view of the timing of the rapture (or other end-times events). My goal is to defend what I believe is a critical doctrine for believers to understand and wrestle with—one that I



believe is very clear in Scripture when we synthesize all the biblical passages that are related to it. Christians' salvation is based on Christ alone, and while there are fundamental orthodox doctrines that one must hold to in order to be a Christian, your view on the timing of the rapture is not one of them.

That said, I believe the rapture is of extreme importance—perhaps now more than ever. Hebrews 10:25 informs us that watching believers will be able to “see the Day approaching.” My friends, the day of the Lord's return at the end of the tribulation is approaching, which means the rapture of the church will come even sooner than that! If the conditions of the world right now, seen through the lens of Scripture and illuminated by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, do not have you convinced that the culmination of the age is near, I am not sure what will. This is why I believe that every believer who is living must come to grips with what Scripture teaches about the rapture.

This is imperative for our generation and for the next generation, whom we are mandated to equip if the Lord does not come in our lifetime. The practical implications of understanding the *timing* of the rapture are immense. It is the difference between preparing for survival during the darkest period of earth's history or preparing for our supernatural wedding day. It is the difference between facing the worst horrors the world has ever seen or seeing the Lord face to face in our glorified bodies, surrounded by millions of other resurrected believers going to the Father's house.

Overall, the purpose of this book is to give believers hope and confidence in the rock-solid doctrine of the rapture, to show the overwhelming support found in Scripture and early church history for the pretribulation rapture position, to demonstrate how the doctrine fits holistically into God's grand narrative, and why this is the most exciting time in history to be alive!

In section 1—The Basics, we will discuss the fundamentals of the rapture as we discover where it is found, how we are to understand it, and when it is going to happen in relation to other end-times events on God's prophetic calendar. We will also consider what Christians have believed during various periods of church history, and we will take a detailed look at ten compelling reasons to believe in a pretribulation rapture.

In section 2—The Backstory, we will take a broader survey of the biblical narrative as we look at all the Old and New Testament accounts of raptures (i.e., people being suddenly removed to heaven or other locations while still alive). We will consider raptures in the Old Testament, raptures in the first century, raptures prophesied for the future, and other key details about what the Bible teaches about the resurrection of the dead and the logical chronology of key end-times events.

In section 3—The Breakdown, we will learn the significance of the Thessalonian church and the importance of Paul’s most eschatological letters—1 and 2 Thessalonians. We will take a frame-by-frame, slow-motion look at the details of the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4, discuss the all-important “removal of the restrainer” from 2 Thessalonians 2, and discover the importance of three key aspects of our salvation and how they relate to the rapture of the church at the end of the church age.

In section 4—The Bottom Line, we will consider the implications for our generation as we witness the convergence of end-times stage-setting conditions in our day, how to get ready for whatever is in our near future, and how to best prepare the next generation of believers to have a solid understanding of eschatology and how to leverage it for the sake of the gospel.

Finally, *in section 5—The Best News Ever*, we will discuss and lay out what it means to be a Christian and why that is the single most important detail every person needs to nail down in their life. Also, we will discuss what all of this means practically for today as we consider how to use our feet before liftoff!

Remember Jesus’ promise,

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3).

And still...!

The Non-Prophet

He's a Renaissance man. The ultimate throwback. The Non-Prophet is a 501(c)(3) that seems to have been born in 501 BC. He prefers the clothing, speech, food, grooming (or lack thereof), and customs of an archetypical Old Testament prophet living in twenty-first-century America. He misunderstands Bible prophecy and gives well-meaning but poor advice. The Non-Prophet is also not very wise with money, so he's a Non-Prophet on two levels. He's the epitome of the idiom "a day late and a dollar short."



SECTION 1:

THE BASICS

GETTING A GRIP ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

CHAPTER 1

Is the Rapture in the Bible?

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17

Every established sport has well-developed fundamentals—foundational skills and techniques that have been developed and refined over time. These fundamentals serve as a key facet of training for beginners and are reinforced continuously thereafter. In football training camps, the pros are reminded of the fundamentals. In boxing, trainers pay attention to the fundamentals and hone the smallest details in order to prepare their fighters and hopefully give them every advantage over their opponent.

So what is the first lesson a boxer learns? Punching? Weaving? Footwork? Nope. The first fundamental skill a boxer needs to master is the boxing stance. The placement and angle of the feet, the weight distribution on the balls of the feet, the appropriate amount of bend in the knees, the specific angle of the waist, the position of the shoulders and elbows, the location and placement of the hands, the angle of the torso, and even the tilt of the head are all key factors that comprise the fundamental boxing stance.

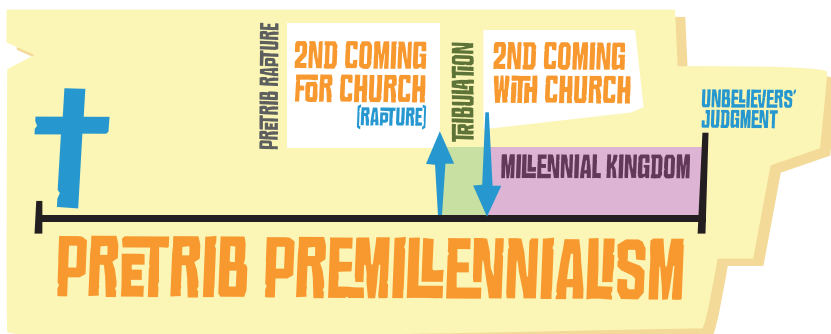


In training, these details are carefully repeated until each one becomes muscle memory. Most fighters must unlearn what their muscles have been taught, and this process takes time and attention. But this training is critical to the success of any serious boxer. To complicate matters, there are various styles of boxing based on a fighter's build, tendencies, and tactics that require modified versions of the basic fundamentals that must be learned.

If a fighter's stance is not developed with strong fundamentals, the rest of his skills will be built on a faulty foundation. The first fundamental a boxer learns may not be the most exciting one, but it is of the utmost importance.

In this section of the book, we are going back to the basics. We're getting our stance correct. If you are new to Bible study, or new to the study of eschatology (the doctrine of things to come), this section is for you. And even if you have studied the topic before, it is good to revisit the fundamentals to make sure your conclusions stand on a solid foundation.

That is why we're beginning this section with a chapter that asks the question, "Is the rapture in the Bible?" Perhaps the title of this chapter took you by surprise. If you are familiar with the doctrine of the rapture and have heard it taught for some time, you may wonder why I propose this question. Well, in addition to revisiting our foundation to make sure we've got it right, believe it or not, there are many today from within the church who attempt to argue that the rapture is not in the Bible. In saying that, sometimes they mean the English word *rapture* is not in the Bible, but there are also those who teach that the very concept of the rapture is not present in the Bible. In this chapter, I will address both of those arguments as we go back to the basics.



Another related claim is that the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture is a relatively new teaching and that it was made up by a prominent theologian in the 1800s. I'll quite easily bust that myth in chapters 3 and 4. But for now, let's address the question above in both of its forms.

First things first, is the word *rapture* in the Bible? What people are asking here is: Do we find the word *rapture* in the original languages that the Bible was written in? The answer to that question is: No, we do not. Right about here, some would shout, "See! The rapture is not even in the Bible!" But neither is the word *Trinity* or the phrase *Great Commission* for that matter. The word *Bible* is not even in the Bible! So what is going on here?

TOP 3 DEFINITIONS OF HARPAZŌ

1. to seize, carry off by force
2. to seize on, claim for one's self eagerly
3. to snatch out or away

Well, no English words are used in the ancient manuscripts. The real question we need to ask is whether the concept of the rapture is in the Bible. The answer to that is yes! The Greek word *harpazō* is used to describe the moment that we call the rapture. The word simply and clearly (based on all 14 uses in the New Testament) means "to seize," "suddenly take away," or "remove by force." Think of it as a divine snatching away, like a special-ops team extracting a soldier from behind enemy lines.

14XS HARPAZŌ IS USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

VERSE

Matthew 11:12
Matthew 12:29
Matthew 13:19
John 6:15
John 10:12
John 10:28
John 10:29
Acts 8:39
Acts 23:10
2 Corinthians 12:2
2 Corinthians 12:4
1 Thessalonians 4:17
Jude 23
Revelation 12:5

CONNOTATION

taken by violent force
carry off by force
snatching away like a bird snatching a seed
to take by force
like a surprise snatching as from a wolf
to snatch from an open hand without warning
to snatch from an open hand without warning
sudden disappearance/vanished from sight
urgently grabbed by a soldier and quickly taken away
suddenly caught up to heaven
suddenly caught up to heaven
suddenly caught up into clouds
quickly rescuing someone from fire
quickly snatched away from immediate danger

Harpazō is the word used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (above) that we have translated “caught up” in English Bible translations. The reason it has come to be known as the rapture is because *harpazō* was translated *rapturo* in the Latin translation by Jerome in the late fourth century. Jerome’s translation became the standard in the Catholic Church and was used almost exclusively for roughly 1,300 years, until the Reformation in the sixteenth century.

When new English translations were created after the Reformation, the word *rapturo* was simply transliterated as *rapture*. So, no—rapture is not in the Bible, but *harpazō* is. We are not obligated to call it the rapture. We can call it “the great catching away” or “the sudden removal by force” or anything that explains the concept of what is intended by the Greek word *harpazō*. But for simplicity’s sake—and because most people understand what is implied by the term—we use the word *rapture*.

The Primary Rapture Texts

In addition to the key passage referenced at the opening of this chapter, where Paul explains the mystery of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, there are a few other New Testament passages that provide additional insight. I'll share two of those in this chapter (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and John 14:1-3) and one more in chapter 4 (Revelation 3:10), for reasons that will become apparent later.

A *mystery* in the New Testament is not something unknowable. Rather, it is something that was not previously revealed through God's special revelation. This mystery is something that was not shared overtly in the Old Testament. Presumably, Paul learned of this mystery when he himself was caught up to heaven to receive special revelation (more about this in chapter 6).

If you are wondering if an entire doctrine can be developed around a New Testament mystery, the answer is yes. One of the most glaring mystery doctrines is represented by much of the New Testament and nearly 2,000 years of human history. Everything in the New Testament from Acts 2:1 through Revelation 3:22 (as well as Revelation 19:14–22:21) is part of this mystery. This mystery is the church! Believers sometimes forget that the church is a mystery. It is not found in the Old Testament (though there are a few strong hints), yet it was revealed in the New Testament.

We discover other important mysteries in Paul's writings as well. The apostle used the term *mystery* no less than 21 times in his letters. God used at least two supernatural events (Paul's conversion and Paul's trip to heaven) to turn a legalistic persecutor of Christians into the vessel through whom the entire Gentile world would hear the gospel. An incredible amount of Scripture—13 of the 27 New Testament books—came through Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Regarding the mystery of the church, Paul wrote,

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things (Ephesians 3:7-9).

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, we find Paul talking about himself in the third person (as an act of humility as supported by the thrust of that chapter); he wrote,

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

Regarding the mystery of the rapture, we will first look at 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, where the apostle Paul wrote,

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

Here we have Paul revealing for the first time, the doctrine of the rapture. We're not given all the details of this future event, but we are clearly given two specific details that I would like to address in this chapter (later, in chapter 4, I'll address the trumpet detail). First, we are told, "We will not all sleep" (verse 51).

While those of you with young children may think this is a prophecy about your children at bedtime, it is actually a common euphemism for death found in the New Testament.

Believers who fall asleep (using the imagery for earthly death) simply close our eyes in this world and open them in heaven. We're told that to be absent from the body



is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Throughout Paul’s epistles, he often refers to death as sleep. So the idea in 1 Corinthians 15 is that we will not all die. The final generation of Christians in the church age will not see death but will be transformed—given their glorified bodies in an instant. By the way, my good friend and Greek scholar Jeff Kinley often shares that the Greek word that we translate “in a moment” is *atomos*, from which we get the English word for atom. It is an indivisible moment of time.

The closest thing to this in our modern vernacular is Planck time. This unit of time is taken from studies in theoretical physics and was discovered by Max Planck in the late 1800s. It was shared in a scientific paper by him in 1899.¹ Planck time is (in modern human terms) the shortest measurable unit of time. For all we know,

God’s *atomos* could be even shorter than our modern Planck time, but the point is that this change from our natural bodies to our glorified spiritual bodies will be instantaneous. While this may seem impossible to us, nothing is impossible for the God who created everything out of nothing.

The second detail from 1 Corinthians 15 that I want to point out is this: Those who have died in the church age (those who sleep in Christ) will be resurrected at this time. Notice Paul wrote, “The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (verse 52). The context of the chapter is the resurrection of church-age believers. On a side note, please do not miss the fact that Paul assumed the Lord would return during his lifetime. Note the phrase “we will be changed.”

The promise of the gospel is for our born-again spirits as well as the redemption of our sin-marred bodies! Our spiritual salvation is the down payment for our full redemption as image bearers. We are created in the image of God as a complex union of body and spirit. Unlike the false teaching of the Gnostics in the New Testament (and the many other times this ancient heresy



has reared its ugly head throughout church history), the human body is not evil. It was created by God. All humans (saved or unsaved) are created in the image of God and include a glorious and complex union of body and spirit.

The Promises from Jesus

With the primary rapture passages of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 in mind, let us now take a look at a key moment in the ministry of Jesus. As he neared the events of the cross, he wanted to provide his disciples one final comforting message. In what has come to be known as the upper room discourse—found only in the Gospel of John (chapters 13–14)—we become like flies on the wall during Jesus’ final teaching to his disciples before he would be betrayed and crucified. Immediately following the last supper and his teaching in the upper room, Jesus and the disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane—the final stop before Jesus’ arrest.

In John 13, we find this final teaching already in progress while Jesus was washing the disciples’ feet. Jesus shot straight with the twelve, telling them he would be betrayed by one of them, and that Peter would disown him three times before the night was over. With those jarring proclamations fresh in the minds of his disciples, Jesus then spoke great words of comfort to them. In the opening verse of John 14, Jesus stated, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me” (verse 1).

After Jesus’ fear-calming statement, he then shared a promise to return and a promise to take the disciples (and us) with him. In verses 2-3, we read this incredibly revealing and hope-filled prophecy: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (NKJV).

At first glance, this may not seem relevant to the topic at hand. The rapture was a mystery until Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote down the revelation he had received concerning the event. But if we compare Jesus’ statements in this passage with Paul’s statements from the key rapture text cited at the beginning of this chapter, we find an amazing correlation between the two. I believe this confirms the two passages are talking about the same event.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:17-18

Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds **to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.**

Therefore, **comfort one another** with these words. (NASB)

JOHN 14:1-3

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you,

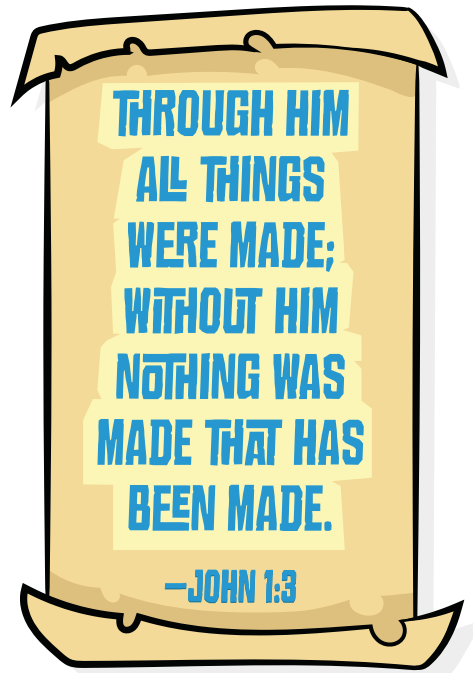
I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be. (NASB)

We are given two promises in John 14:2-3:

(1) Jesus himself left to go and prepare a place for us, and (2) he is going to come again and receive us to himself. Let's take a closer look at these promises:

Going to Prepare a Place

First, Scripture tells us that all of creation was made through Jesus. He was also a carpenter by trade before he began his earthly ministry. If it took him six days to create the heavens and the earth, can you imagine how amazing our future place is going to be? What meticulous care and attention to personal detail must be given to something that takes Jesus 2,000 years to build?



Coming Back to Receive Us

Second, Jesus promised that he is coming back to receive us. He's not just coming back to us. He's also receiving us—that is, we're also going to him. In other words, he's meeting us somewhere in the middle. Indeed, the final step in the ancient Jewish wedding tradition was what was known as the *nissuin* (“to take”). The term comes from *naso*, which literally means “to lift up!”² In 1 Thessalonians 4, we are given many more details, as well as the exact order of events related to the rapture. We will look at this in great detail in chapter 10.

Some have argued that Jesus is simply describing his return at the judgment—that John 14:1-3 is describing the same event as Revelation 19:11-15. But a simple comparison of the details quickly reveals to us that these are two vastly different events.

COMPARING THE DETAILS OF THE	
RAPTURE	AND THE RETURN
SIGNLESS/IMMINENT EVENT	MANY SIGNS/PROPHECIES BEFORE
MEET JESUS IN THE ATMOSPHERE	RETURN WITH JESUS FROM HEAVEN
BEFORE THE TRIBULATION	FINAL EVENT OF THE TRIBULATION
ONLY BELIEVERS SEE JESUS	WHOLE WORLD SEES JESUS
GOD'S GRACE AND REWARDS	GOD'S WRATH AND DESTRUCTION
BRINGS ENCOURAGEMENT	BRINGS JUDGMENT
FOCUS ON THE CHURCH	FOCUS ON ISRAEL

Feet Firmly Planted

Circling back to our opening analogy of a boxer learning the basics, beginning first and foremost with a proper stance—we can stand firm in our knowledge that the concept of the rapture is indeed taught in Scripture. Not only is it taught, but if we slow down long enough and look carefully, we find that we are given quite a bit of detail about this promised future event.

Furthermore, we discover that it is not merely an obscure or nebulous teaching. It is, in fact, of such importance that Paul—the apostle to the Gentiles—was given special revelation on the matter. If that were not enough, our Lord Jesus himself shared the foundational promise of the rapture with his disciples as he comforted them with his final teaching before the crucifixion. In fact, both Jesus and Paul cited the natural comfort that the teaching of the great catching away was intended to bring:

Jesus: “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1).

Paul: “Therefore, comfort one another with these words”
(1 Thessalonians 4:18 NASB).