

*Exposing dangerous errors about  
the end of the world*

*the* **RAPTURE**  
**DELUSIONS**

**STEVE WOHLBERG**

The Rapture  
Delusions

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# The Rapture Delusions

*Exposing Dangerous Errors  
About the End of the World*

STEVE WOHLBERG

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*“For this cause God shall send them **strong delusion**, that they should believe a lie.”*

—2 Thessalonians 2:11 KJV

**Delusion (noun):**

1. A misleading of the mind.
2. False belief; a fixed misconception.
3. Something which one accepts as true or real but which is actually false or unreal.

—*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*

A lie can travel halfway around the world before truth puts its boots on.

—Mark Twain (1835-1910)



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## *Preface*

**G**rowing up just over the hill from Hollywood, California, I had absolutely no interest in biblical prophecy for the first 20 years of my life, mainly because I had never heard of such a thing. “Rapture? What’s that?” I would have said with a mystified look if you had asked me about it. My Jewish family was warm and friendly but not spiritual. My brother Michael had

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his bar-mitzvah at age 13, but I didn't, for it was only casually presented to me as a take-it-or-leave-it option. As far as I remember, we never read the Scriptures or prayed even one time.



Some of my young  
friends perished due to  
pills and alcohol. It's a  
miracle I'm not where  
they are.



As a teenager surrounded by the head-pounding music of rock and roll bands like the Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, and Deep Purple and the drug culture of the 1960s and 1970s, my life

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took a sharp turn in the wrong direction. Some of my young friends perished due to pills and alcohol. It's a miracle I'm not where they are.

During the summer of 1979, while inhabiting discothèques nightly, I worked as an extra in the film business. One day I was providentially assigned to work on a television series called *From Here to Eternity* on a sandy stretch of Oxnard Beach. There I met a fellow extra who “witnessed” to me about Jesus Christ and the approaching end of the world. With curiosity mingling with interest—and a nagging sense of need for something beyond glamorous illusions—I decided the very next day to visit a Christian bookstore near our home and to scan the prophecy section.

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Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* was the first Christian book I ever touched. I bought it and two of his other books, *Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* and *Terminal Generation*. Although my marijuana-clouded brain hardly understood what I read, God used those books and started working inside my mind.

A few days later, I found a Bible and began to read. Dimly at first, I slowly started comprehending the message and grace of Jesus Christ. The turning point came when I read about the intense pressure Christ endured in the Garden of Gethsemane, the blood that dripped from His forehead, the appearance of a heavenly angel to strengthen Him, and His unfathomable love for a

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perishing world (see Luke 22:39-44). After wrestling with a mysterious cup, Jesus made that critical decision—the choice to save lost sinners no matter what it cost Him personally, even if it meant separation from His Father. Finally I read—to use the title of Mel Gibson’s hard-hitting film—about *The Passion of the Christ* and His suffering on the Cross. That did it. Shortly thereafter, in a dormitory room at California State University of Northridge, I slipped to my knees and invited my Messiah into my heart. My darkness turned to light! Jesus freely forgave my sins, removed my guilt, and changed my life! No more drugs. I was clean.

After discovering that my Messiah came once as the Babe of Bethlehem,

my interest was strongly piqued in the subject of His second coming and the events predicted to occur during Earth's last days. I craved understanding and longed to be ready for the return of the One who was crucified for me, should it occur in my lifetime. This explains my interest in and passion for prophecy.



Could religious leaders  
*today* be making a similar  
mistake by misunder-  
standing the prophecies of  
*His second coming?*



That was 30 years ago. I've learned a lot since I first read Hal Lindsey's books

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while working as an extra in Hollywood. One thing that has impressed me for years—and which was so poignantly displayed in Mel Gibson’s gripping film—is the reality that one reason why the religious leaders in Christ’s day rejected their Messiah was because they misunderstood the Old Testament prophecies predicting His arrival. Think about it. Because it happened once, couldn’t it happen again? Could religious leaders *today* be making a similar mistake by misunderstanding the prophecies of *His second coming*? Yes they could, and yes, many are making such a mistake. That’s why I wrote *The Rapture Delusion*, which not only proves that massive distortions have entered Christianity but also clarifies



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much of what the Scriptures actually teach about the end of the world.

Inside these pages I have combined years of research, countless hours of study, and only God knows how many earnest prayers for “the Spirit of truth” to guide me into “all truth” (see John 16:13). I hope the discoveries you are about to make will thrill your heart as they did mine when I first learned them.

Get ready for an amazing journey—controversial for sure, yet exciting and rewarding as well. When Jesus Christ does return, may we all “*be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless*” through His perfect righteousness (2 Peter 3:14).

—Steve Wohlberg

## *Introduction*

**I**t was 4:09 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, on Thursday, August 15, 2003. It started with a blip. Lights flickered and then went out, and in a few hours it was dark from New York to Cleveland to Detroit, even into Canada. The late-August front cover of *Newsweek* labeled the event, “Blackout of 2003.” Thankfully, the 50 million North Americans affected took it quite

well. Looting was minimal, and no one died.

*The Rapture Delusion* is about another blackout—a spiritual one—now occurring within Christianity concerning the true meaning of God’s “*sure word of prophecy*” (2 Peter 1:19 KJV). Millions of prophecy-minded Christians, including me, sense we are nearing the return of Jesus Christ. Yet when it comes to what the majority *think* is going to happen during Earth’s last days and what the Bible *actually says* will occur, the difference is seismic.

It’s no secret that the following five teachings have become immensely popular:

1. All true Christians will soon vanish in the rapture.

## *Introduction*

2. Seven years of apocalyptic terror will overtake those left behind.
3. One sinister man—the antichrist—will take over the world.
4. The antichrist will enter a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, claiming to be God.
5. The nations of earth will attack Israel at Armageddon.

These five concepts are being taught on radio, on television, at prophecy conferences, in countless books and magazines, in end-time movies, in seminaries, and on the Internet. This five-point belief system is also tightly connected—with one event supposedly leading to the next—just like New York City’s electrical power grid is intertwined.

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On August 15, 2003, at 4:00 P.M., our nation's generators, electrical cables, transmission lines, and systems operators were all working efficiently together. Everything was fine. Until 4:09. Then a single, high-voltage current forced America into "the largest power outage in our history."<sup>1</sup>



When it comes to popular  
prophetic theories, is it  
possible a large portion of  
Christianity is now in the  
midst of another out-  
age—*a truth outage?*



When it comes to popular prophetic theories, is it possible a large portion of Christianity is now in the midst of another outage—a *truth outage*? The Bible clearly predicts:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

Has that time come?

The purpose of *The Rapture Delusion* is to closely examine the first two teachings just listed. My larger book,

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*End Time Delusions*, tackles the last three. As you read these eye-opening pages, you will discover irrefutable, high-voltage, New Testament proof of another system failure.

Please read this book prayerfully.

With God's help, I hope to turn some lights on.

**Endnote**

1. “Blackout of 2003,” *Newsweek*, August 25, 2003, 21.







chapter 1





*Now You See Them,  
Now You Don't*

*If in the last few years you haven't  
discarded a major opinion  
or acquired a new one, check  
your pulse, you may be dead.*

—Frank Gelett Burgess (1866-1951)

**A**lthough the exact word *rapture* isn't in the Bible, millions of prophecy-minded Christians have nevertheless

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been taught that soon God's Church will disappear from planet Earth without a trace. Headlines are predicted to read: "Multitudes Missing, Chaos Sweeps Globe!" "All Children Have Disappeared!" "Massive Traffic Snarls Due to Evaporated Drivers!" "Planes Crash, Trains Wreck, as Pilots and Engineers Vanish!" Perhaps you've seen bumper stickers reading: "In case of Rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned."

In the last few years, the number-one promoter of the rapture idea has been the *New York Times* bestselling *Left Behind* series, coauthored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. A high-speed, 16-book sequence of novels

about the end times, *Left Behind* teaches that the return of Jesus Christ takes place in two distinct phases. First, Jesus comes *invisibly* to remove His Church before a seven-year tribulation, during which the rest of humanity must face the antichrist. This is the rapture. At the end of those seven years, Jesus will again return *visibly* to deliver those who became Christians during the tribulation—after being given a “second chance” to be saved—and to pulverize the invading enemies of Israel at Armageddon. This is the second coming. Thus, it’s rapture first, then seven years with the antichrist, then the visible second coming of Jesus Christ.

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...a rumor has circulated  
that some higher-ups at  
a large airline want at  
least one non-Christian  
pilot aboard each flight—  
just  
in case!



These popular concepts—rapture, seven years of horror, future antichrist—have also been taught in many apocalyptic Christian films, such as *A Thief in the Night*, *Image of the Beast*, *Tribulation Force*, *The Omega Code*, *Left Behind: The Movie*, and *Megiddo*. Because the rapture teaching

has been promoted so heavily in our society, even among those outside the Church, a rumor has circulated that some higher-ups at a large airline want at least one non-Christian pilot aboard each flight—just in case!

The real question is: Although “rapture” isn’t a biblical word, is the doctrine there? If not, could it be an *end-time delusion*? Let’s find out.

First of all, the Bible certainly does teach the exciting truth that Jesus Christ will return for His people. Our Lord Himself said, “*I will come again and receive you to Myself*” (John 14:3). All Christians should believe Christ’s promise and long to meet Him on that great day.



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But will He come invisibly? Will the Church disappear? Does the Bible really teach vanishing Christians? Without a doubt, the most quoted passage used to support the rapture concept is First Thessalonians 4:17. Lots of Christians know this verse by heart, and it is cited in *Left Behind: The Movie*. There Paul wrote that true believers will someday be “*caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thess. 4:17). But does “caught up” mean disappear? Is Paul describing a silent return of Jesus Christ before an apocalyptic seven-year tribulation? We don’t need to guess. The answer is in the context, and you don’t need to have a four-year degree to grasp the truth.



Will the Church disappear? Does the Bible really teach vanishing Christians?



Have you ever driven down a highway without realizing how fast you were going, and then, when you finally looked down at your speedometer, you thought to yourself, *I'm going too fast and must slow down?* This is what we need to do with First Thessalonians 4. We must slow down and take a full look.

Here is what Paul actually wrote:

*For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with*

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*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 (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).*



Rapture promoters interpret “caught up” to mean *disappear* because this view fits their tightly meshed prophetic system, yet it must be admitted that the text doesn’t say this.



Rapture teachers interpret this event as silent and secret, yet doesn't it seem rather loud and visible? There is a shout, a voice, a trumpet. Have you ever heard of a silent trumpet? The truth is, First Thessalonians 4:16 is one of the noisiest verses in the Bible! Look carefully: Jesus Christ comes down from Heaven shouting and blowing a trumpet. The dead rise. Then true believers are "caught up." Honestly, do you see anything here about vanishing Christians prior to the tribulation? Rapture promoters interpret "caught up" to mean *disappear* because this view fits their tightly meshed prophetic system, yet it must be admitted that the text doesn't say this.

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Two thousand years ago, at the end of His earthly life, Jesus Christ was also “taken up,” (see Acts 1:9). This doesn’t mean He disappeared, leaving His clothes on earth. Instead, in full view of His wondering disciples, “*while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight*” (Acts 1:9). This event was highly visible. Luke said Jesus Christ was “taken up,” and then clouds are mentioned, just like Paul wrote about believers being “caught up...in the clouds.”

Notice carefully the full context of this verse:

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while*

*they looked steadfastly toward Heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into Heaven, will so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into Heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).*



Everything will be highly visible, just like the ascension of Jesus Christ.



Here we have holy angels—in the form of men in white robes—explaining

the simple truth about Jesus Christ's return. They told the disciples that just as Jesus was literally and visibly "taken up" into the clouds, even so would He "*come in like manner as [they had] seen Him go into Heaven.*" Although these angels never attended a seminary, there's no doubt they had their theology straight. They taught no secret coming or vanishing Christians. Everything will be highly visible, just like the ascension of Jesus Christ.

Let's return to First Thessalonians and take a look at the thief-in-the-night idea:

*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. Therefore comfort one another with these words. But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape (1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:3).*



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Here Paul compares the coming of Jesus Christ to the arrival of a midnight thief. Rapture promoters interpret this to mean Jesus will come like a *silent* thief to snatch believers off this earth before seven years of chaos—then driverless cars will crash, pilotless planes will collide, and babies will be found missing from their cribs. The Christian film *A Thief in the Night*, which is similar to *Left Behind: The Movie*, portrays this dramatically. Yet is this really what Paul is saying?

Again, let's slow down and take a closer look at our biblical speedometers. First of all, the day when Jesus comes as a thief is clearly *the very same day* in which He descends with a shout and a trumpet blast. Second, it comes as “a

thief in the night” only upon the unprepared. When it hits, “sudden destruction comes upon them [the lost], as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”



*... it is not a secret coming,  
but only a sudden one.*



*Do you see what Paul is really saying? Jesus' coming as a "thief in the night" does not mean He will come quietly and invisibly to steal believers out of this world, as is taught in rapture movies and *New York Times* bestselling books. Rather, it means He will come unexpectedly, bringing "sudden destruction"*

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upon the unsaved. *Thus, it is not a secret coming, but only a sudden one.* Will the unprepared get a “second chance” to be saved during a subsequent seven-year tribulation? Paul answered this question when he wrote, “*They shall not escape*” (1 Thess. 5:3).

Here’s a simple summary of what First Thessalonians 4:16-5:3 really says:

1. Jesus Christ will literally descend from Heaven with a shout and a trumpet blast.
2. The dead in Christ will rise first and true believers will be “caught up,” just like Jesus Christ Himself was visibly “taken up” into the sky almost 2,000 years ago.

3. This cataclysmic “day of the Lord” will burst upon the unprepared like the unexpected arrival of a midnight thief.
4. “Sudden destruction” will overwhelm the lost, “and they shall not escape.”

When taken literally, these words describe the visible second coming of Jesus Christ, not a secret rapture.

Immediately after his solemn prediction of Christ's return as a midnight thief, Paul wrote to true believers:

*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are*

*not of the night nor of darkness*  
(1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

Remember the Blackout of 2003? It left 50 million North Americans in darkness because a massive system failure short-circuited our electrical power grid. In the prophecy realm, when it comes to popular interpretations of First Thessalonians 4:16-5:3, we have just witnessed another system failure. Honestly, the doctrine of a silent, secret return of Jesus Christ and vanishing Christians *is just not there*.

Again, Paul wrote, “*You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness*” (1 Thess. 5:5).

God wants us to avoid truth outages.  
He wants the lights on.

**Thank you for reading the first chapter of  
*The Rapture Delusions!***

We are confident that you found it enlightening.  
The rest of the book will prove to be a blessing to you as well.

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