

THE SECRET RAPTURE FACT OR FICTION?

Will Jesus return invisibly, to secretly "rapture" or take away the Church to heaven BEFORE the coming tribulation?

A COMMON IDEA today among fundamentalists is that Christ may return invisibly, secretly, "at any moment" to "rapture" or "catch away" the Church before the great tribulation and the appearance of a superhuman "Antichrist." This secret return of Christ they call "the first phase" of Christ's second coming.

Coming in Two Phases. Jesus, we are asked to believe, may suddenly descend from heaven this very night! But He will stop in mid-air.

Immediately, the righteous dead will be raised and all true Christians who are alive will be "translated." Then Christ returns to heaven - some say for 3 1/2 years, others say for 7 years.

During this period, according to this teaching, God will vent His wrath upon the world by permitting an Antichrist to deceive the nations and torture all who won't submit to Him. This time of torture they call indiscriminately the "tribulation" and "Day of the Lord."

Then, they say, the "second phase" of Christ's coming will occur. Jesus will come visibly, in power and glory, WITH the saints, to conquer Antichrist. But is this what the Bible really teaches?

Are there "two phases" to the second coming of Jesus Christ? Will He return secretly? Why is the word "rapture" not mentioned once in the entire Bible if this theory is true? It is time you learned the truth!

A Time Sequence of Events. Jesus has given us a time sequence of events soon to occur. This sequence you will find in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. These three chapters contain the order of events at the close of this age of man's rule. Notice what Jesus told His disciples.

Following false teachers proclaiming a false gospel, yet coming in the name of Christ, would be wars, famines and pestilences-occurring in that order. Then there would be what? - the secret return of Christ to take away the Church in a secret rapture immediately before a tribulation? No! Just the opposite! Here are Jesus' own words: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars...and famines shall be and earthquakes in divers places. But all these are the beginning of sorrows. THEN" - the very next event - "shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matt. 24:6-9, Partin version).

Did you notice that? Jesus' own disciples - those who follow Him "you" - are to be delivered up to tribulation!

The disciples of Jesus could not be in tribulation if they were secretly raptured to heaven before the tribulation and if only unbelievers remained on earth. Besides, Jesus said that it is "for His name's sake" that the nations would hate you. This obviously must be referring to believers, not nonbelievers.

Mark records the same statement of Jesus: "And ye shall be hated of all for my name's sake" (Mark 13:13). A martyrdom of Christians! Luke records the same (Luke 21:12, 17).

A Way of Escape? Though Jesus prophesied that Christians would be persecuted in a coming great tribulation, He also said there 4, for some a way of escape!

That way of escape is not a secret rapture!

"But watch," said Jesus, "and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). You can escape all the troubles soon to fall on a heedless world - but you must watch world events and pray!

Jesus repeated this same promise to His Church today: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation [trial]" - the tribulation and events that follow - "which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

But how and where are the Christians who watch and pray going to escape? Turn to the 12th chapter of Revelation. Here we find the answer!

Here we find the true Church the Church of God pictured. A woman, remember, is the symbol of a Church (II Cor. 11:2). This chapter pictures the true Church, whereas the 17th chapter of Revelation pictures the false churches - a mother church and her daughter churches. Notice verse 6 of chapter 12. In the tribulation during the Middle Ages "the woman [the true Church] fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God." That tribulation is merely a type of the coming great tribulation - a time of trouble of such magnitude as has never occurred on earth before.

Now turn to verse 13: "And when the dragon [Satan] saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman" -this is the persecution that is yet in the future. How does the Church escape? "And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman that she should fly TO THE WILDERNESS to her place" for 3 1/2 years.

The Church is NOT taken to heaven, but to the wilderness - to a desert region here on earth. "And the earth helped the woman" (Rev. 12:13-16).

Could anything be plainer?

But what happens to those not accounted worthy to escape? "And the dragon...went away to make war with the rest of her seed" - the remainder of the Church that did not escape. The people whom Satan hates-and against whom he stirs up the nations-the people who "keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus" (verse 17).

How plain! Some of the Church escapes to a place of safety on earth. 'But there is no "secret rapture"! Jesus told us to "pray that your flight be not in winter, neither on a sabbath: for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the world's beginning until now, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:20, 21). If there were a "secret rapture," we would not have to be concerned about either the winter or the Sabbath!

Is the Tribulation the Time of God's Wrath? There is another great mistake that all who believe in the rapture theory have carelessly taken for granted without proof. It is that the "tribulation" and the "Day of the Lord" represent the same period of time.

The Bible reveals that the tribulation is the wrath of Satan, the wicked spirit ruler of this present age. We read of that in Revelation 12.

Notice! The devil is angry. He is responsible for the persecution of the Christians who are not accounted worthy to escape. Satan hates God's way. So does this world. It is Satan's world-little wonder that it hates the good news of the Kingdom of God.

What did Jesus say would immediately happen after Satan's wrath - the tribulation? The rapturists would have you believe that the "second phase" of Jesus' return would immediately occur. This is not what Jesus said. Notice: "IMMEDIATELY AFTER the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (Matt. 24:29).

Now turn to Joel 2:31: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood BEFORE the great and terrible day of the Lord come. "

The "day of the Lord" is the time God steps into world affairs directly. It is the time of His wrath against the nations!

The "day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," wrote Paul in I Thessalonians 5:2. This is not speaking of the rapture, but of the time of God's intervention in world affairs very shortly before Jesus returns.

Compare this with Revelation 6:12-13, 16-17: "...The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of the heaven fell to the earth ... And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of the one sitting on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: because the great day of their wrath is come; and who can stand?'" This day of God's wrath comes unexpectedly - like a thief in the night.

The tribulation, however, occurs before the "day of the Eternal's wrath"!

Notice that during this "day of the Lord" the trumpets begin to sound (Rev. 8:6). "And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets [trumpets] prepared themselves to sound." Trumpets are a symbol of war. This is the time when God's restraint over the nations is loosed when the nations war upon one another with horrifying new weapons till they learn that God alone can bring peace and that His laws make life worth living.

Notice, now, an amazing fact which very few have grasped!

The Seventh Trumpet Sounds. What happens when the seventh and last of these trumpets is sounded? "And the seventh angel sounded; and great voices in heaven came saying, 'The Kingdom of the world is become our Lord's and His Christ's, and He shall reign unto the ages of the ages ... We thank thee, Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, because thou hast taken thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and should destroy them which destroy the earth'" (Rev. 11: 15, 17-18).

Notice that this is the time for the prophets to receive their reward. It is the time of the resurrection! And this, remember, occurs at the seventh or last trump!

Now compare this with I Corinthians 15:51-52: "Lo, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet" -the seventh and last trumpet -"shall sound, and the dead" - and that includes the prophets (Rev. 11:18) "shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Do you grasp the significance of this scripture? AFTER the tribulation, after the intervening heavenly signs, during the Day of the Lord, at the sounding of the seventh trump the dead are resurrected and those alive, who believe and practice the truth, are changed from mortal to immortal!

This is no secret rapture before the tribulation. The dead are not resurrected twice! Those who are still living are not changed to immortality twice! There is not the slightest indication of a "secret rapture" and a resurrection of the saints before the tribulation.

But this is not all!

Open your Bible to Matthew 24:30: "...and then" - after the heavenly signs which follow the tribulation, not before, but after the tribulation and during the Day of the Lord - "THEN shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send forth His angels with a great trumpet [or "a great sound of a trumpet"], and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

This verse pictures the second coming of Christ - at the seventh and last trump, the great trump. And it is the time of the resurrection! The ELECT are gathered together. Who are the "elect" or chosen ones?

Who Are These "Elect"? Luke 18:7 tells us: "And shall not God avenge His elect, that cry to Him day and night?"

Any concordance will provide you with scriptures (I Peter 1:1-2; Col. 3:12; Rom. 8:33, etc.) proving that true Christians are the ELECT or chosen ones today. These are the ones to be gathered when Jesus returns with the sound of a great trump!

Paul also mentions the same tremendous noise of the seventh trumpet that will rend the air at Christ's return. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with an archangel's voice, and with the trump of God: AND THE DEAD IN Christ shall rise first; then

we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thes. 4:16-17).

Did you notice that this is the time of the resurrection? It is the time of the LAST TRUMP, according to I Corinthians 15:52. And in Revelation 11:15, 17-18 the seventh or last trumpet is also the time of the resurrection. And the time order of Jesus' Mount Olivet prophecy and of the book of Revelation places the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the resurrection after the tribulation - at the very climax of the "day of the Lord"! These verses describe the same trumpet, not different ones.

There is no possible room for a secret rapture.

One famous text used to contradict these plain passages of Scripture is the 14th verse of I Thessalonians 4. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so them also that are fallen asleep"the dead are asleep in their graves, not awake in heaven, according to Paul - "will God through Jesus bring WITH Him." This verse is supposed to teach that 3 1/2 or 7 years before Christ returns a "secret rapture" occurs; the dead are secretly taken to heaven and now they return with Jesus from heaven.

But is this what the Scripture says?

How is Jesus going to bring those who are asleep in death WITH Him? Notice: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the presence [or coming] of the Lord, shall in no wise precede [the Old English word "prevent" meant "precede"] them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven" - with the saints? No! "...and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (verses 15-16).

Observe that Jesus, with the angels from heaven, descends toward the earth, not-with-the-saints, order to resurrect the saints! "The Lord shall descend ... and the dead shall rise"! After Jesus descends toward earth the dead rise first! They meet Christ in the air.

Now the dead are with Christ in the air-the atmosphere surrounding this earth. "THEN we that are alive and remain shall together with them be caught up in the clouds" (verse 17). We, too, shall be together in the air with those who have just been raised, those whom Jesus is bringing with Him to this earth. Notice that being "caught up" - Paul does not say "raptured up" - occurs after the tribulation, at the last trump when Jesus descends visibly in power and glory.

Suppose you have a friend who is returning today. You would probably meet him at the bus or rail station or at the airport, wherever he arrives. Then you return with him to your home. In the same way, it is only natural that we should meet Jesus and return with Him to this earth at the Mount of Olives by Jerusalem.

If your friend were returning today, he would not take you back with him to the place he had already left, and then return all over again, would he? That would be ridiculous!

Yet that is the concept of a "secret rapture" - that Jesus meets you, takes you to the place which He left (heaven) in order to return to this earth!

Jesus Returns "in Like Manner." How did Jesus leave this earth? "He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" - the disciples were looking at Him - "and while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet" (Acts 1:9-12).

Were there two phases of Jesus' ascension? No! Then there will not be two phases to His return - He will come in the same manner in which

Notice the prophecy "concerning OR the fulfillment of this very promise: "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh ... His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives" (Zech. 14:1-4).

Jesus ascended visibly from Mt. Olivet; He will return visibly to it but this time in all the might and power of God as King of kings. And notice that it is in the very day in which He returns that His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives. "It shall be one day which shall be known as the Lord's, not day, and not night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time there shall be light" (verse 7). This is the climax of that period called the "day of the Lord" in prophecy. This one twenty four hour day will bring an end to this Babylonish civilization. And notice that Jesus sets foot on earth in the very day He returns not 3 1/2 or 7 or 1000 years later!

That is what the Scripture says!

There is no secret rapture before the tribulation or at any other time! The resurrection is at the mighty sound of the seventh trump IN the day of God's wrath which follows the tribulation. The tribulation is not the Day of the Lord. There are two separate and distinct periods of time. Christ does not return in two phases, one secret, the other visible. He returns in the same manner as He ascended - and that was no secret rapture! He ascended visibly. He will descend visibly.

Some, of course, seize on minor scriptures and misinterpret them to attempt to prove their theory. Take Revelation 4:1-2, for example. This, we are told, represents the rapture. But these two verses do not say that! John saw the prophecy in the Book of Revelation unfolded in heaven because that is where Jesus is-not because of a secret rapture!

One prominent writer attempts to prove that 11 Thessalonians 2:7-8 refers to the rapture. His theory is that this prophecy has not yet begun to be fulfilled-that Christ must come first "to rapture the Church before the tribulation."

But notice the first part of verse 7: "For the mystery of iniquity DOTH ALREADY WORK" - even in Paul's day! This prophecy is being fulfilled.

Let us, however, notice the time setting of this prophecy. The Thessalonians had asked Paul how long they would have to wait until the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection. Paul answers that the day of Christ's return and the resurrection cannot come "except there come a falling away FIRST, and that man of sin be revealed..." (verse 3).

Notice the time sequence! An apostasy shall have come first and the man of sin shall have been revealed BEFORE the day of Christ. Until these two things happen, the day of Christ is being withheld-restrained! Christ is not coming and the resurrection will not occur until after the apostasy has commenced and the man of sin, claiming to be God (verse 4), rises out of its midst.

Now continuing with verses 6 to 9, according to the original inspired Greek: "And now you know what withholds [is keeping back the day of Christ from occurring], so that he [the man of sin] might be revealed in his own [or appointed] time. For the mystery of iniquity is already working: there is only one who is now withholding [keeping back the Day of Christ] until he [the man of sin] comes on the scene out of the midst [of the apostasy]; and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume...by the brightness of His coming.

Notice that this must all happen before the resurrection when Christ comes in "flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel" (II Thes. 1:8).

Observe that the Greek words *heos ek mesou geneetai*, translated in the King James Version, "until he be taken out of the way," mean exactly the opposite in Greek - "until he comes on the scene, or appears, out of the midst" of the apostasy!

How clear it is that Christ will not come until after the apostasy and the subsequent tribulation.

Will you be deceived into believing the false doctrine of a rapture? Will you go on blindly believing in the traditions of men and the theories they have advanced without proof Read your Bible! Check carefully! Prove all things (I Thess. 5:21). Your very life is at stake!

THE SECRET RAPTURE MYTH OR REALITY?

There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy...cars going in all directions...and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild!"

What was it? An invasion from planet X? The end of the world? No, according to the above quote, it was the secret rapture. The "blessed hope" that Christians had long awaited.

The author further explains: "Someday, a day that only God knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air.... Those who remain on earth at that time will use every invention of the human mind to explain the sudden disappearance of millions of people" (The Late Great Planet Earth, pp. 135-137).

Those "chosen few" who manage to qualify for the rapture will, if you believe the story, be whisked away to a spiritual never-never land, far away from the pains, agonies and trials of planet earth.

Sound plausible? Something to stake your life on? According to the rapturists, it most certainly is. As far as they are concerned, this future scenario for the saints is no spiritual pipe dream. They cite several scriptures to back up their theory. For instance, I Thessalonians 4:15-17: "For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord." (Revised Standard Version.)

Another is I Corinthians 15:51-53: "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable and this mortal nature must put on immortality."

Deflating the Rapture Balloon. After reading this far, maybe you are somewhat convinced as to the veracity of the rapture theory. But before you get too convinced, consider the following. First of all, there is the question of the "dead in Christ." According to the rapturists, the dead saints are in heaven: "We are told that the moment a believer breathes his last breath and dies his soul goes immediately to be with Christ - to before to face with the Lord" (The Late Great Planet Earth, p. 140, emphasis ours).

But according to the apostle Paul both the dead in Christ along with the living "shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. " Now how do the dead in Christ "meet the Lord in the air" if they have already been with him "face to face" since their death? And why would Paul tell the Thessalonians that the living shall not precede those who have fallen asleep [the dead]"? Why bring this question up if both he and the Thessalonians knew that the dead in Christ were already with the Lord? The question is more logically raised and answered if you know the dead aren't with the Lord.

The Third Coming of Christ? Trying to fit the secret rapture into future end-time prophecies is also somewhat of a dubious proposition. Most proponents of this theory would tell you that the rapture occurs before the great tribulation. Christ snatches away His saints and returns with them to heaven. Three-and-a-half or seven. years later-take your pick-He comes again, this time to visibly establish His Kingdom on the earth.

Rapturists in effect are speaking not only of a second but a third coming of Christ. The second is for the church; the third for the rest of the world. Most rapturists would agree that "the Bible is speaking of two separate events" (The Late Great Planet Earth, p. 139). But is it?

According to this theory, the rapture is supposed to occur at the last trump - Which trump is the last trump? The rapturists say (The Late Great Planet Earth, pages 140, 141) it is the seventh; and, in truth, the Bible says the same thing.

But notice what takes place at the seventh and last trump. "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has

become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever' " (Rev. 11:15).

Now you could hardly call that a secret coming of Jesus to rapture away the saints. Yet this event occurs at the last trump. There are no more trumpets following the seventh one. It is the same last trump Paul was referring to when he wrote: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable..." (I Cor. 15:52). It is obvious he is referring to the same event that is described in the 11th chapter of the book of Revelation.

And notice what else happens at this seventh and last trump: "The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great ..." (Rev. 11:18).

But how can this be? The rapturists say the prophets and saints were all raptured away 3 1/2 or 7 years before Christ's visible return to power. Yet here is more evidence that the dead receive their reward at the seventh trump and the visible, public return of Jesus Christ.

Returning In Unlike Manner. If the rapture theory were correct, then Christ never really returns to the earth at the time of the rapture; He only makes a "near miss." Yet notice the contrasting description given in the first chapter of Acts: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward -heaven as he went up, behold, two men [angels] stood by them in white apparel: which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-12, KJV).

Christ ascended visibly from the Mount of Olives. He plans to return the same way. If Christ had intended to rapture the saints, which includes the twelve disciples, why didn't He instruct the angels to tell them differently?

In order for Christ to return "in like manner," He has to return to the earth - terra firma - not reverse course in midair and head back for heaven. The prophet Zechariah said of this momentous event: "Behold, a day of the Lord is coming.... For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle.... Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights in a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east..." (Zech. 14:1-4).

Rupturing the Rapture's Timetable. Zechariah's description hardly sounds like a secret, hidden event. Nor does the description given by Jesus Christ Himself recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

In each of these passages it is important to remember that Christ is talking primarily to His own disciples, who later formed the nucleus of God's Church.

Notice what He answered in Matthew 24 in response to their question "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Verse 3.) Had Christ believed in the rapture theory, He might have answered this question by stating that the first sign of His coming would be one similar to what was described in the beginning of this article-general disorder, people missing, etc. Instead, He spoke of false prophets,

wars, famines and pestilence (verses 4-7). Then in verse 9 we read: "They will deliver you [Christians] UP to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake." Not only does Christ neglect to mention a rapture, but He even says that some Christians will have to go through tribulation.

The apostle John amplifies this in the 13th chapter of the book of Revelation. In speaking of the future "beast" power that would one day hold sway over the earth, John wrote: "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months [the great tribulation]...Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them" (Rev. 13:5, 7).

In the preceding chapter, John's description of the coming persecution of God's Church is even more explicit: "Then the dragon [the devil] was angry with the woman [the Church], and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). If the Church is to be raptured before the great tribulation, what happened to the faithful mentioned in the above verses? How come they missed the boat?

A Visible Return. The Olivet prophecy goes on to show what happens after this great tribulation: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light ... then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29, 30).

But then notice what happens in the following verse: "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect [God's Church, Christians, see I Peter 1:1-2, Colossians 3:12 and Romans 8:31 from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (verse 31).

Mark describes this same event: "And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:27).

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth He is not going to come in by some secret back-door method. The whole world is going to know about this earth-shattering event (see Rev. 1:7; 6:15-17). Christ is coming both to establish His Kingdom and to resurrect the saints (Rev. 20:4).

This, rather than a secret rapture, is what God wants Christians to look forward to with renewed hope and confidence.