

WHAT ABOUT THE RAPTURE?

By

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“In Case of Rapture This Car Will No Longer Have a Driver.” So reads the bumper sticker. The owner of the car obviously believed in a “secret rapture”, the doctrine so popular with dispensationalists today. This doctrine holds that Christ will return and secretly take the Christians away with Him for seven years while the sinners left on earth suffer “great tribulation.” Then Christ will return, they believe, and live on earth for 1,000 years before the unbelieving dead are raised to judgment.

Christ’s coming is one of the clearest and most emphatic doctrines in the New Testament. It is the “blessed hope” of the redeemed, and that which gives incentive to faithfulness, patience and labor. But the “secret rapture” doctrine which puzzles many is largely based on human speculation rather than Scripture.

NO SECRET. While the term “rapture” is not found in Scripture, it refers to the coming of Christ when all the saved, both living and the resurrected, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, 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 the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:16–17). Certainly there is nothing secret indicated here. There will be the Divine shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. Whatever these are supposed to indicate, whether natural or spiritual, they certainly indicate a noisy event, supernaturally announced.

Men will actually see Him come. “Behold He comes with clouds and every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7, Acts 1:110). Eyes of love, eyes of hate, eyes of anticipation and eyes of fear, eyes of sorrow and eyes of joy — every eye will see him come. “For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:27).

Many churches are showing movies and film strips which depict people awaking one day to find that members of the family and other citizens have mysteriously disappeared. But no such picture is depicted in Scripture.

A THIRD COMING? Those who hold to the secret rapture refer to either a third coming or a second stage of His coming. Can there be 2 stages to His coming?

Jesus taught that Christians and un-believers, described as the “wheat and tares” would not be separated until the end of the age. It is His design that “both grow together until the harvest” (Matt 13:30). He explained: “The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are angels”, carefully pointing out that the unsaved will be burned with fire, and “then” the saved “shine forth in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43). According to the two-stage theory both would NOT grow together until the end of the world, and the wicked would not be burned until one thousand and seven years after the harvest!

Peter taught in Acts 3:19–23 that the heavens must receive Christ “until the time of restoration of all things.” This restoration, according to Peter’s letter (II Peter 3:7–113) includes a “new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness”, the first earth having been destroyed by a fire which melts even the elements (II Peter 3:10). This speaks of only one coming, at which time history is consummated.

The “rapture” of I Thess. 4 and the resurrection mentioned in other places is one and the same thing. Jesus said, “For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29). In the next chapter Jesus taught that those who believe on him will have everlasting life “and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40, 44 etc.). Evidently the “rapture” is at the end of the world, with no time periods to follow.

ALL come forth at his voice, ALL come forth at the second coming (I Thess. 4:16–17, I Cor. 15:52, 11:15–18).

LIKE A THIEF. Several passages of Scripture mention Christ coming “as a thief in the night”, but the context shows that this refers to his coming unannounced when the world is not expecting him. “If the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched...therefore be you also ready; for in an hour that you think not the Son of Man comes” (Matt. 24:43–44). Plainly Jesus refers to the time of his coming as being unknown, but certainly it will be known at the time it happens.

Peter says “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Pet. 3:10). All this, great noise and destruction of the earth, comes “as a thief”; but certainly not secretly.

ONE TAKEN, ONE LEFT. “Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left:” (Matt. 24:40–41, Luke 17:34–35). This says nothing of secrecy, but simply says that of the people living and working together one may be received by Christ for immortality and glory and the other left for destruction (II Pet. 3:7).

THE DEAD RISING FIRST. Writing of Christ coming in I Thess. 4:16–17, Paul says that “the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds...” Here Paul explains that the saints living when Christ comes will not precede those who have died in being caught up (“raptured”), because the dead shall first be resurrected, then all the saints, both those who had died, and those alive, shall be caught up with the Lord. After all the saints of all ages are caught up, then will come the destruction of all the ungodly (See II Pet. 3:4–13).

Revelation 20 speaks of “the first resurrection.” Every Christian is raised twice. In his baptism he is buried with Christ and raised with Him, too, to walk in a new life (Rom. 6:4), so that he is “raised with Him (Christ)” and “made alive together with Him” (Col. 2:12–13, cf., Eph. 2:5–6).

According to I Thess 4 Paul taught what will happen to saints when Christ comes, that they all, both dead and living, will be caught up to meet the Lord. Then on the next page, in II Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “When (at the time) he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints” the wicked will suffer His vengeance of flaming fire (II Thess.

1:4–10). Certainly Paul left no place nor time for the seven years tribulation nor one thousand years of Utopia.

CHRIST REIGNS. Christ is already reigning, having sat down on His Father's throne, of which David's throne was an earthly type (rev. 3:21, Heb. 12:22). He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18) and reigns "far above all rule, and authority, and power" (Eph. 1:20–23). The apostles preached that Christians are already translated into Christ's Kingdom (Col. 1:13, Rom. 14:17) and look forward to a new body and a new creation (Rom. 8:23, II Peter 3:13). Christ Himself said that His kingdom was not of this world, and because He would not support the rulers of the Jews and their ambition for an earthly kingdom they became incensed and had him killed.

The ambition for a world kingdom, which began when they demanded of Samuel that he give them a king like the other nations, caused them to misinterpret the prophets concerning the Messiah. "The Jewish Encyclopedia" gives almost two columns to the "Millennium" and states that the idea "is older than the Christian Church; for the belief in a period of one thousand years at the end of time as a preliminary to the resurrection of the dead was held in Parsiism. This concept is expressed in Jewish literature..."(outside the Bible. Ed). It states that the idea went out of vogue in the 2nd century but was revived by the Montanists. It has been revived again in our day to support political Zionism.

Since all Christians recognize the fact that Christ is coming again, some will say, "What difference do the details make?" The answer is that one error leads to another, and the secret rapture idea is part of a host of errors.

For example, the two-stage theory of Christ's return also leads to the "two-gospel" theory, that we are now to preach the "gospel of grace" but after the rapture Jewish evangelist will preach the "gospel of the Kingdom". But the Bible teaches that there is ONE Gospel (Gal. 1:6–9) and that the gospel of grace IS the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 20:24–25).

The two-coming teaching also supports the idea that there are two kingdoms, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. Scripture teaches that they are one and the same kingdom (Matt. 19:23–24, etc.).

Worst of all, the teaching of two second comings of Christ divides the people of God into two classes or groups, with two gospels, two kingdoms and two plans of salvation. The Bible plainly teaches that Christ has broken down "the middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile, so that when either of them are in Christ, they are ONE in Christ regardless of race (Eph. 2:11–19).

To summarize, when Christ comes at the end of the world the righteous and the unrighteous shall be raised at the same time (John 5:28–29, Acts 24:15). Judgment shall ensue (II Thess. 1:4–10). This earth shall be burned up and dissolved (II Pet. 3). Christ will deliver the kingdom up to God (I Cor. 15:23–3:10).

Now, TODAY, is the gospel age, the time for sinners to be saved (Matt. 28:20, John 8:21, Heb. 3:15, Rev. 22:12). When Christ comes there will be no further preparation. **Therefore, watch and be ready!**

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