

V. Phillip Jellerson

- ◆ ***Before the tribulation?***
- ◆ ***During the tribulation?***
- ◆ ***After the tribulation?***
- ◆ ***This book settles it!***

THE Church RAPTURE

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The Return Of Jesus

We live in a world that is unaware;
Yea, they don't even seem to care
That the day is perhaps very near
When Jesus is going to appear.

We live in a world that has little concern
That one day Jesus is going to return.
They're too busy searching for earth's treasure
And forbidding nothing that brings them pleasure.

We live in a world where there is little fear
Of the day when Jesus will suddenly appear;
'cause their minds are evil and their souls are black,
They couldn't care less that Jesus is coming back.

We live in a world that struggles each night and day;
Each one making a life in his own helpless way.
Their mortal bodies are tired and their spirits sour
Yet aren't consoled by His return at some soon hour.

V. Phillip Jellerson, Composer

Aids And Explanations

I wish to apologize for any mistakes to be found in this book. I wish there were none but that is unlikely. Some mistakes may be mine while others will occur in the production process. I hope that any grammar, punctuation, or typographical errors will not detract from the value of the information or your enjoyment.

Following are the explanations of terms used throughout this book.

Tribulation period refers to the **last seven years** just prior to Christ's return to earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom (1,000 years of earthly rule in Jerusalem).

Pre-tribulation means **before** the tribulation period begins.

Pre-tribulation rapture suggests a rapture which occurs **before** the tribulation period begins.

Pre-tribulationists **are** those who believe that the rapture of the church will happen **before** the tribulation period begins.

The below examples show how to read Bible references used in the book.

Revelation 19 refers to Revelation Chapter 19

Revelation 19-21 means Revelation Chapters 19 thru 21

Revelation 19,21 means Revelation Chapters 19 and 21

Revelation 19:21 means Revelation Chapter 19 verse 21

Revelation 19:21-24 means Revelation Chapter 19 verses 21 thru 24

Revelation 19:21,24 means Revelation Chapter 19 verses 21 and 24

Revelation 19:21-24,30 means Revelation Chapter 19 verses 21 thru 24 and verse 30

Introduction

A Discussion Of The Rapture

The rapture is probably the most arousing prophetic subject for Christians. Regrettably it is one of the most mistaught prophetic subjects. The rapture is always connected to the tribulation period in one of three positions.

1. BEFORE the tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture)
2. DURING the tribulation (mid-tribulation rapture)
3. AFTER the tribulation (post-tribulation rapture)

The question has been asked, "Does it really matter when the rapture takes place?" Yes and No. To those who have passed on it makes no difference. To those who are here when the tribulation arrives it will matter a great deal. It is this author's opinion that many who live today will greet the tribulation period.

We begin by defining the word "rapture." It is widely known that the term "rapture" is not in the Bible. That leads some to question the validity of the rapture but the absence of the word "rapture" is not grounds for its dismissal. "Trinity" is not in the Bible but it is commonly recognized as Biblical. Trinity defines God as existing in three persons: God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The original language of the New Testament is Greek. Later the Greek manuscripts were translated into Latin. In the Latin translation the Greek word "harpadso" was translated "rapture" which was adopted by the English translators. The Greek word "harpadso" means to seize or snatch up which loosely describes what will happen at the rapture. Christians will be snatched up bodily to meet the Lord in the air at the rapture. Paul expressed it as being "caught up" in I Thessalonians 4:17.

The Bible tells of several individuals who were raptured (snatched up or caught up) to heaven. Enoch was the first. He was strolling along one day in communion with God when he suddenly disappeared from earth. The Bible says, *And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.*

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Genesis 5:24 Enoch experienced a rapture in that he was snatched from earth to heaven by God.

Next is Elijah the prophet. He was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire. (II Kings 2:11) This too was a type of the coming rapture - a "snatching up" from earth to heaven. In Revelation we see the rapture of God's two witnesses in Jerusalem during the tribulation period. The Antichrist murdered them but that was not the end. Look at what happened.

And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them. Revelation 11:11-12 Here we have both a resurrection and a rapture. God's two witnesses were revived (brought back to life) and raptured (caught up) to heaven.

There is no need to doubt the rapture just because it is not Biblical language. God performed real life instances of the rapture with Enoch, Elijah, and His two witnesses of The Revelation. Paul wrote an accurate description of the rapture in I Thessalonians 4:16-17. Instead of "rapture" (snatched up) Paul said we would be "caught up" to be with the Lord. There will be a rapture regardless of the terminology used.

Now, concerning the time of the rapture, it is routinely preached that it could happen at any moment. This is referred to as an "imminent" rapture meaning "any moment" rapture. For there to be an imminent rapture there must be no prophecy which has to be fulfilled before the rapture. In other words, there is no unfinished prophecy keeping the rapture from happening NOW.

The pre-tribulationists say that the rapture can occur at any moment meaning it is imminent. That means that the tribulation period, in a sense, is also imminent because it immediately follows the rapture. That can not be! The tribulation period is scheduled for a specific date on God's prophetic calendar and it will not happen before the planned time.

The truth is there can be no imminent rapture or tribulation period because there is prophecy now in progress and prophetic events yet to come

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which bring us to the tribulation period. Yet we continue to hear of an imminent rapture. Here are some Bible verses which are purported as teaching an imminent rapture.

Matthew 24:36 *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

Matthew 24:42 *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

Matthew 24:44 *Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

The fact that the Lord's return is unknowable does not necessarily translate into His imminent return. All the above warnings refer to Jesus' appearing in Matthew 24:30 which comes AFTER the tribulation period. (Matthew 24:29) Therefore, imminency cannot be ascribed to the Christ's return, the rapture or the tribulation.

The imminent rapture theory finds basis in the apparent truth that Paul and the early Christians expected Christ to return in their lifetimes. That expectancy is seen in the following verses.

Peter wrote: *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.* I Peter 4:7 Do you suppose that when Peter said that the end of everything is *at hand* that he had the year 2008 and beyond in mind? Not likely. Doubtless Peter believed that the *end* would come in his time.

Paul wrote: *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.* Romans 13:11 Notice Paul's use of the plural pronouns *our* and *we*.

It seems certain that Paul and his companions believed that the Lord Jesus would return while they yet lived. Paul's *knowing the time* refers to the spiritual depravity of those days. In light of that spiritual darkness Paul said that their salvation (rapture) was *nearer* than they had believed. Do you think that *nearer* in their minds stretched to the year 2008? No, they expected deliverance from this sinful world by the rapture in their lifetime.

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I Corinthians 15:51-52 *Behold, I shew 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 shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* Paul named we three times indicating that he expected that he and his fellow Christians would be alive at the rapture.

I Thessalonians 4:17 *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.* Notice again the use of the plural first person pronoun we.

I Timothy 6:14 *That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul admonished Timothy to keep his commandment until Jesus Christ appeared.

It is obvious from Paul's letters that he and the early Christians believed that the Lord would return in their lifetimes. Of course we know that He did not because we await His return. What happened? It will be explained momentarily but first let us look at Paul's comment about his impending death.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day... II Timothy 4:6-8

Paul declares his readiness to be a martyr for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has convinced Paul that the Roman Emperor, Nero, will soon take his head. He accepted the fact of his death and no longer expected Jesus Christ to return for him and the church beforehand. How could it be that Paul had believed that Jesus Christ would return in his time but now with his death near knows that it will not be so?

The fact is Paul never taught an imminent return of Jesus Christ. Their belief that Christ would return in their lifetimes was not born of any Biblical or church doctrine. In fact, Paul gave an abbreviated outline of prophetic events which discounts an imminent rapture.

II Thessalonians 2:1-4 *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

To understand Paul's prophecy we need to know what *that day* in verse 3 is. *That day* refers to the *day of Christ* in verse 2. Paul explained that the rapture, *our gathering together unto him* (verse 1), in *the day of Christ* (verse 2) would not occur before: (1) a time of *falling away* and (2) *that man of sin be revealed*, which is the Antichrist.

Those two events did not happen in Paul's time so how could he and his Christian brethren believe that Christ would return in their time? Simple, they expected those events to happen in their time. They did not know how far in the future those events were. Considering the oppressive Roman rule and the unchecked Christian persecution of their time it is understandable how they believed that Jesus would come for the church in their time.

Are they of the early church to be faulted for believing that Christ would return in their time? Certainly not. It was this expectancy that motivated and sustained them through serious tribulation. The Bible teaches Christians to live in expectation of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)

We must not overlook the fact that the imminent rapture theory is not without contradiction. Many who teach an imminent rapture also believe that the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 represent seven specific and successive church periods within the Church Age. Ephesus, the first church, represents the first church period. Smyrna pictures the second church period and so on with Laodicea being the last church period.

Do you see the problem? If the seven churches represent seven successive church periods in the Church Age then the rapture cannot be imminent - cannot happen at any moment. It could not happen until the completion of the Laodicean church period which many feel is where the

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church is now. If the rapture is imminent then there can be no seven church periods. If there are seven church periods then an imminent rapture is not possible.

An imminent rapture? Impossible! Jesus, Paul and John all placed the rapture AFTER the tribulation period.

* * * * *

One last word about the rapture before we jump into the main subject. Did you know that the rapture keeps a promise made by Jesus and answers a prayer of His also?

A promise kept - While on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane with the disciples on the night that He was taken into custody Jesus made this promise.

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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. John 14:2-3

A prayer answered - Later that same evening Jesus prayed to the Father and asked the following.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. John 17:24

Every Christian can take Jesus' promise and prayer as personally. He had YOU and ME in mind when He spoke that promise and prayed that prayer for us to be with Him.

Therefore let us pray, "Come, Lord Jesus....."

PART 1

The Lord's Rapture

The Lord's Rapture

The Lord's prophecy in Matthew Chapter 24 points to one main event and it is a knockout. Jesus prophesied,

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with 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.
Matthew 24:30-31

This is the climactic event of the Lord's prophecy. All that was said before this event points to it and all that follows explains it. In His tribulation prophecy Jesus voiced two urgent warnings: *watch* and *be ready*. verses 42, 44 Both warnings relate to the climactic event.

There are two critically different views concerning the identification of the climactic event which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:30-31.

View 1 The event is the gathering of the Jews from around the world back to Israel. That makes this event the second coming of Christ to earth when He sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

View 2 The event is the rapture of the church at Christ's appearing in the air. He sends forth the angels to gather the church to Him.

This is no petty matter because the two views are different events which occur at different times. Whichever view a Christian holds will affect his/her outlook and expectation of the Lord's return. They will display one of two attitudes depending on their belief of the climactic event.

First attitude - Christians who believe this event to be the gathering of Israel into the Millennial Kingdom assign the Lord's prophecy to Israel. They tend to pay little heed to Jesus' warnings to *watch* and *be ready* because they believe that this event concerns Israel.

Second attitude - Christians who see this event as the rapture of the church realize that Jesus' prophecy is for the church. They understand that the church will experience the tribulation that Jesus preached. They will take seriously His warnings to *watch* and to *be ready* and live expectantly of His coming.

The climactic event will be a thriller for both Israel and the church. We have got to settle in our minds what this climactic event in the Lord's prophecy is. With that as our spur we will carefully study this climactic event to determine its identity.

Israel's Gathering

We begin by looking at the gathering of Israel at Christ's second coming to earth. By many prophets God warned Israel that they would be driven from their land and scattered among the nations if they failed to keep His commandments. Moses issued the first such warning. *And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other...* Deuteronomy 28:64

Foolishly Israel failed to observe God's many warnings. Consequently Israel was taken captive by many nations over a period of time. Foreign powers such as Assyria, Syria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome besieged Israel destroying their land and taking the Jews captive. They have been populating foreign lands for nearly three thousand years. Many millions of Jews never knew their homeland. This is truly a tragic story.

Israel remains a scattered nation but one day they will return to the land God gave them. With each warning of dispersion there was a promise of gathering, such as this one by Jeremiah. *And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord...* Jeremiah 29:14

While it is true that Israel has seen a partial gathering since 1948 it is a prelude to the total gathering promised throughout the Old Testament. The tribulation period will create in the hearts of the Jews an intense yearning for their Messiah. When Jesus Christ comes back to earth and saves Israel at the Battle of Armageddon the Jews will recognize their Messiah. They will

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return to Israel from all over the world to serve their Messiah King.

God spoke of this future gathering of Israel through the prophet Ezekiel. *Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there.* Ezekiel 39:28

When Jesus Christ returns and establishes His Millennial Kingdom (a thousand year reign on earth) all Jews from around the world will return to Israel, their promised land. Not only will they repatriate their land but they will dwell in complete safety as spoken by Ezekiel.

And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. Ezekiel 34:28

IMPORTANT: All the prophecies pertaining to the gathering of Israel will happen when Jesus Christ returns to earth. Jesus Christ does NOT return to earth in Matthew 24:30-31. He only appears in the heaven for the rapture of the church which Paul described in I Thessalonians 4:16-17

When we have finished this book we will know that it is gathering of the church which takes place in Matthew 24:30-31 NOT the gathering of Israel.

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Old Testament prophecy repeatedly declares that one day all Jews will be gathered to Israel but that is not the event Jesus related in Matthew 24:30-31. Many believe that it is but it cannot be for these reasons.

1. Jesus does not come to earth at this event. Therefore He cannot set up His earthly kingdom and receive the Jews back to Israel.
2. Jesus dispatches angels to gather the elect and bring them to meet Him in the air. The Jews will be gathered to meet Jesus in Israel not in the air.
3. No Jews will come from heaven at the gathering of Israel. To explain that we read Mark's parallel writing to Matthew's 24:30-31.

Mark wrote, *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.* Mark 13:26-27

Jesus will send the angels to gather His elect from all of earth and all of heaven. That will not happen with the gathering of Israel. The Jews will migrate to Israel from all over the world but none from heaven. At Christ's appearing all Christians on earth and in heaven will be gathered together to meet the Lord in the air. (I Thessalonians 4:13-17)

The climactic event of Matthew 24:30-31 becomes clear if one understands the prophecy before and after it. Here is a simple outline of the Lord's prophecy leading up to the climactic event.

- verses 4-8 world tribulation
- verses 9-14 Church tribulation
- verses 15-21 Israel's tribulation
- verse 22 the promise of deliverance
- verses 23-26 false religion, false Christs and false hope
- verses 27-28 the manner of Christ's appearing
- verses 29-31 The Climactic Event**

The following outline explains the climactic event.

verses 29-31 the Climactic Event

- verses 32-35 explain how to know the nearness of the event
- verses 36-39 explain the lack of awareness of that event
- verses 40-41 explain a separation that will happen at that event
- verses 42-44 explain the need to watch and be ready for that event
- verses 45-51 explain the faithful and unfaithful servants

In verses 30-31 Jesus described the climactic event as a "gathering." We will learn that this gathering is the rapture of the church. At this gathering some will be taken to be with Jesus Christ and some will be left behind. In verses 45-51 Jesus explains that the faithful will be rewarded while the unfaithful will be punished.

We will now show that the event in Matthew 24:30-31 is the gathering of the church at the rapture. We will do that by comparing language of the text with other accepted rapture verses. We begin with:

The "clouds" Of The Rapture

Clouds are associated with the Lord's return at the rapture a number of times. Interestingly this truth has its beginning with the Lord's ascension into heaven after His resurrection.

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 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. Acts 1:9-11

After giving the apostles their final instructions on the Mount of Olives Jesus returned to heaven. The apostles watched as He rose and disappeared into a cloud. How shocked they must have been. As they stood eyeing Jesus ascend to heaven two angelic men adorned in white robes suddenly joined them. They informed the apostles that Jesus will return in the same manner in which He left.

That means that Jesus will return from heaven bodily and visibly. Also, whereas Jesus disappeared into a cloud at His departure He will appear from the clouds at His return. Here are four more verses which agree.

Matthew 26:64 - *...nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Mark 13:26 - *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*

Mark 14:62 - *...and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Luke 21:27 - *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

Perhaps Paul gave the best presentation of Jesus returning in the clouds of heaven in this most cherished description of the rapture. He wrote:

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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 which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. I Thessalonians 4:16-17

These are cornerstone verses for the rapture of the church. What Christian does not know these verses? Jesus Christ will appear from the clouds of heaven and perform the resurrection and the rapture. We will be escorted by angels to meet the Lord in the *clouds*. Paul's description of the rapture compares with that of Jesus in Matthew 24:30-31. They gave us two different views of the same event - the rapture.

The Apostle John greeted the seven churches of The Revelation with Jesus coming back with clouds. *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.* Revelation 1:7

Behold, he cometh with clouds can only be the rapture of the church. Some have declared this to be Christ's return to earth but that is prophetically improper. Surely John and all the Christians he wrote to were looking for the rapture. The church still waits for His appearing in the clouds at the rapture. Christians are not waiting to COME BACK with Christ. They are looking TO GO to Him at the rapture.

John saluted the seven churches with *Behold, he cometh with clouds...* That is what Jesus said of His appearing ...*they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven...* Matthew 24:30 It is unshakeable that John greeted the seven churches with the hope of the rapture not Christ's return to earth.

Daniel wrote prophesied of Israel in the coming tribulation period but did you know that he too wrote about Christ coming in the *clouds of heaven*? In Chapter 7 Daniel related his vision of four beasts representing four Gentile world kingdoms which would be ruled by Christ.

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him:

his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14

Daniel saw *one like the Son of man* came with the clouds of heaven. His vision showed the Messiah returning in the *clouds of heaven*. That agrees with Jesus' appearing in Matthew 24:30. *And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.* Daniel and Jesus spoke of the same event but with different prophetic view points. Daniel reported that the kingdoms of this world would be given to the Son of man at His coming in *the clouds of heaven*. This agrees with John's Revelation prophecy which reads:

And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST; AND HE SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER. Revelation 11:15

This happens after *the Son of man comes in the clouds of heaven* (Daniel 7:13) which corresponds with *they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven* (Matthew 24:30) and *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him...*(Revelation 1:7)

Jesus taught that His *coming in the clouds of heaven* was to gather His elect which is the church. Daniel knew nothing of the church so he could not tell of its gathering. Daniel's prophecy concerned Israel and the Gentile nations at the return of Jesus Christ. He prophesied that all nations would come under the rule of Jesus Christ at His return in *the clouds of heaven*.

Clouds will be part of the Lord's return. The phrase *coming in the clouds of heaven* makes the event in Matthew 24:30-31 the rapture of the church.

The "angels" Of The Rapture

Jesus said, *And he shall send his angels...and they shall gather together his elect.* Matthew 24:31 Angels were created to worship and to serve God just as man was. They had a very active part in the life of Jesus Christ. Here are some notable occasions.

- * Angels told Joseph and Mary of His coming birth.
- * A host of angels praised God at His birth.

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- * Angels ministered to Jesus after Satan's temptation.
- * An angel strengthened Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- * Angels rolled away His grave stone after His resurrection.
- * Angels were present when He ascended into heaven.

Angels will be important players in the rapture. Most Christians are not aware of this because the climactic event in Matthew 24:30-31 is believed to be the gathering of Israel at Christ's second coming to earth. That is ascribing church prophecy to Israel. It is little wonder that Christians are confused about the tribulation period and the rapture.

The angels will have a very important assignment at the rapture. *And he (Jesus) shall send his angels...and they shall gather together his elect...* Matt 24:31 (parenthesis mine) The angels will descend to earth and gather the *elect* and transport them to meet Jesus Christ in the air. The *elect* of the New Testament are the church.

Jesus made these additional confirmations of the angels coming with Him at His appearing.

Matthew 16:27 *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the Holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.*

Luke 9:26 *For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of Him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.*

The Apostle Paul divulged the most information about the rapture. In a letter to the church at Thessalonica he taught that Christians would receive rest from their tribulations when Jesus returned with the angels. *And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.* II Thessalonians 1:7

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When will the church receive and enjoy its promised rest? When Jesus Christ is *revealed from heaven*. Who comes with Jesus when He comes to give rest to the church? The angels. Why? They will gather the church on earth and deliver it to their Savior in the air as He announced in Matthew 24:31.

II Thessalonians 1:7 (above) is thought by many to be Christ's second coming to earth. That is an unscholarly conclusion for these reasons. First, rest comes to the church at the rapture not at His second coming to earth. Second, the church accompanies Jesus Christ when He comes to earth not angels. (Jude 14, Revelation 19:14) Third, the word *revealed* is derived from the same Greek word which is translated "appear" in Matthew 24:30.

When Jesus Christ appears at the rapture He will bring an entourage of angels to gather the Christians. How will the angels know who to gather? For sure they will not escort anyone to meet Jesus who is not a Christian. Could Jesus have given the answer with His statement, ...*Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.* Luke 12:8-9

The word *confess* in this verse means to declare ones allegiance to. Thus, Jesus said that those who declare their allegiance to Him before others He would declare His allegiance to them before the *angels*. How marvelous! Jesus will declare His allegiance to every Christian before the angelic host of heaven. Conversely, those who deny Jesus He will deny before the *angels*.

Jesus passed this promise of confession to the Revelation church at Sardis. His promise was, *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.* Revelation 3:5

Why would Jesus confess the names of Christians to the angels in heaven? One reason may be so that the angels can rejoice for those who repent unto salvation. (Luke 15:10) Another reason Jesus confesses the names of Christians to the angels may be so that He can *send his angels...and they shall gather together his elect.* Matthew 24:3

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Could it be that the angels will know who to gather because Jesus confessed to them those who confessed Him? Perhaps each angel will be given a name or names to gather. Maybe the Christians will be gathered by their guardian angels who watched over them. One thing is for sure. The angels will take no one to meet Jesus at the rapture who has not confessed Him before others.

Jesus had alluded to the act of angels transporting Christians to heaven before He gave His tribulation prophecy. On an earlier occasion He was addressing the Pharisees and told them the true story of the rich man and Lazarus. They both died and of Lazarus Jesus said, *the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's Bosom*. Luke 16:22

Lazarus, a beggar and a believer, died and was escorted by angels into Abraham's bosom or blessed presence. Abraham is in heaven so that is where the angels took Lazarus. From that we can believe that the souls of deceased believers are whisked to heaven by angels. It should not then be hard to see that angels will transport believers to meet Christ in the air at the rapture.

This study of the word *angels* has shown that the climactic event in Matthew 24:30-31 is the rapture of the church NOT the gathering of Jews to Israel.

The "gathering" At The Rapture

Evident throughout the Old Testament is God's promise to gather the scattered Jews and reestablish the nation of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel, along with others, prophesied this gathering. *For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land*. Ezekiel 36:24

This promised gathering has been a burning hope for displaced Jews for two millennia. For many centuries the nation of Israel did not exist. Today Jews from all over the world look for their Messiah to come and restore the Kingdom of Israel. That gathering will happen when Jesus Christ returns to earth after the tribulation period to save Israel and to set up His Millennial Kingdom.

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As the elect of the New Testament are not the elect of the Old Testament neither is the *gathering* of the New Testament the *gathering* of the Old Testament. Jesus identified the New Testament *gathering* in His tribulation prophecy. *And he (Jesus) shall send his angels with 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.* Matthew 24:31

The Gospel writer Mark also recorded Jesus' prophecy of the *gathering* of the elect at His appearing. Mark's language almost matches that of Matthew exactly. *And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.* Mark 13:27

We know that this "gathering of the elect" which Jesus promised is the rapture of the church because abundant New Testament teaching proves it to be. Earlier in this chapter several reasons were given why the *gathering* in Matthew 24:30-31 could not be the gathering of Israel. To call it so scrambles New Testament prophecy - scrambles church prophecy.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica of a *gathering*. He said, *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him...* II Thessalonians 2:1 Notice that Paul spoke of *our gathering together unto him* (the Lord Jesus Christ). Surely Paul was not thinking of Israel when he wrote *our gathering*. How can *our gathering together unto him* be anything but the rapture of the church?

We must not make the unforgivable mistake of substituting the gathering of Israel for the gathering of the church. The *gathering* in Matthew 24:31 is the rapture of the church because:

- * Jesus does not come to earth at this appearing.
- * angels will come to earth and gather the church.
- * the church will be taken to meet Jesus in the air.
- * angels will not gather the Jews and take them to meet Jesus in the air. The Jews will gather in their homeland - Israel.

Proper understanding of the verb *gather* should convince us that the event in Matthew 24:30-31 is the rapture of the church at Christ's

appearing.

The "appearing" At The Rapture

This is the most defining word in the climactic event of Matthew 24:30-31. Confusion as to the identification of that event comes partly from the multiple expressions of the Lord's return. His coming - His return - His appearing and His revelation all speak of the return of Jesus Christ. We must get a handle on these terms before we can correctly ascertain the identity of this event.

Many Christians are unclear about the second coming of Christ because they do not comprehend the splitting of His return into two stages. The two stages are the rapture and the second advent or return to earth.

Stage 1 **R**APTURE. Jesus appears in the sky but He does not come to earth. Angels come with Him and they gather the elect (the church) and take them to meet Christ in the air and they remain with Him.

Stage 2 **A**DVENT. Jesus comes straight to earth with no delay. The church comes with Him. Jesus defeats the world's armies at the Battle of Armageddon and sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

The two stages can be explained quite simply. In stage 1 Christ comes to get the church while in stage 2 Christ comes to earth with the church. Both stages of Christ's return can be easily remembered by the letters **A** and **R**.

Stage 1 His **A**ppearing at the **R**apture **A = R**

Stage 2 His **A**dvent or **R**eturn to earth **A = R**

When the terms His appearing, His coming, His return and His revelation are used we must determine which of the two stages is meant. Does it really make a difference? It surely does because they happen at different times with different results. Remember the two letters of association, **A** and **R**. At Christ's **A**ppearing He will **R**apture the church. At His **A**dvent He **R**eturns to earth with the church.

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The various terms for the Lord's return are confusing but they need not be. The terms *His coming* and *His return* are pretty much interchangeable. They can refer to either of the two stages of Christ's return. For example, the coming of the Lord in I Thessalonians 4:15 can only be the rapture or first stage. In Jude 14-15 His coming is to earth in judgment which is the second stage.

The revelation of Christ (visible manifestation at His return) is the same as His **A**ppearing. Pre-tribulationists often view the revelation of Christ as His **A**dvent or **R**eturn to earth when should be His **A**ppearing at the **R**apture. They are forced to that view because they believe in a secret or unseen rapture. One misinterpretation leads to another misinterpretation which leads to false prophecy.

For sure the world will see Christ's **A**dvent or **R**eturn to earth but that is not His revelation. The revelation is His spectacular **A**pppearance at the **R**apture. Here are three verses dealing with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Luke 17:29-30 *But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.*

On the day that Lot was saved God's judgment fell. Jesus said that when He is *revealed* judgment will fall on the ungodly like it did on Sodom and Gomorrah. *Fire and brimstone* (God's wrath) will fall the same day of His revelation at the rapture.

II Thessalonians 1:6-7 *Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.*

Paul taught that the church will get rest from tribulation when the Lord Jesus is *revealed* from heaven with His angels. The angels will gather the church and present it to Jesus Christ in heaven. Then will the church have rest. That means that the *revelation* of Jesus Christ is the same as His appearing in Matthew 24:30-31.

I Peter 1:13 *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at*

the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Peter tells Christians to be alert and hope to the end for God's grace which will come at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. That grace is the salvation of our souls which comes at the rapture not Christ's return to earth. Therefore the *revelation of Jesus Christ* is the same as His appearing in Matthew 24:30.

Appear is the term used in the event of Matthew 24:30. Remember, this event can be called His return or His coming. Remember also that these terms can refer to either of the two stages of Christ's return: (1) His **A**ppearing in the air for the **R**apture or (2) His **A**dvent or **R**eturn to earth.

Can we know for sure which phase of Christ's return is given in Matthew 24:30? Yes. When applied to the return or second coming of Jesus Christ the terms "appear" and "appearing" always designate the first stage. **A**ppear = **R**apture. In the first stage Jesus **A**ppears (comes into view) in the sky but does not come to earth. He sends His angels to **R**apture (gather) the church and bring them to meet Him in the air.

The words "appear" and "appearing" are used twelve times in the New Testament in describing Christ's return. In all instances His appearing is linked to the church. In each case some benefit is promised or some truth concerning the church is given. In none of them is Christ's return to earth (stage 2) in view. The use of the terms **A**ppear or **A**ppearing always refer to the **R**apture.

The expert work of the famed W. E. Vine, M.A., is helpful here. He defined *appear* in his linguistic book **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** as follows.

[Quote] PHAINO...signifies, in the Active Voice, to shine; in the Passive, to be brought forth into light, to become evident, to appear. It is used of the appearance of Christ to the disciples, Mark 6:19; of his future appearing in glory as the Son of man, spoken of as a sign to the world, Matt 24:30....the sign being the appearing of Christ Himself... [Unquote]

According to the famed linguist, Dr. W.E. Vine, the word *appear* in Matthew 24:30 refers to the sudden manifestation (visible appearance) of Jesus Christ in the atmosphere above the earth. He will not come to

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earth at this *appearing* which is the first phase of Christ's second coming. This **A**ppearing of Christ is for the **R**apture of the church. Following are other Bible verses which support this truth.

Colossians 3:4 *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.* Paul told the Christians in Colossae that when Christ appeared they would appear with Him in glory.

Jesus described His appearing in Matthew 24:30-31 thusly, *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.... And he shall send his angels....and they shall gather together his elect...*

At His **A**ppearing Jesus will send His angels to **R**apture the church and to take them to meet Him in the air. (I Thessalonians 4:17) Christians will then appear in glory with Jesus Christ as Paul said.

I Timothy 6:14 *That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...* Paul encouraged Timothy to keep the faith until the **A**ppearing of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not **A**pppear during the life of Timothy but we know that Timothy would not have had to keep the faith beyond the rapture. Thus the Lord's **A**ppearing has to be the **R**apture.

II Timothy 4:8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

According to Paul all who love the **A**ppearing of Jesus Christ will receive a crown of righteousness on *that day*. What day? Surely Christians will be crowned with righteousness when Christ **A**ppears at the **R**apture not later at His **A**dvent or **R**eturn to earth. Christians will return to earth with Jesus Christ wearing their crowns.

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Hebrew 9:28 *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many: and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

Jesus will **A**ppear again with *salvation* (deliverance from God's wrath and judgment) unto them that look for him. Salvation will come at Christ's **A**ppearing at the **R**apture (first phase) not His **A**dvent or **R**eturn to earth (second phase).

Appear is what Jesus said He would do in Matthew 24:30. There are twelve New Testament references to the **A**ppearing of Jesus Christ. They all agree with *appear* in Matthew 24:30 which is the first phase of Christ's second coming. **A**ppear = **R**apture.

This completes our exposition of the Lord's rapture of the church which was the central point of His tribulation prophecy. We have compared the language used in Matthew 24:30-31 with other verses which are generally viewed as the rapture. There should be no conclusion other than the climactic event in the Lord's prophecy is the rapture of the church.

Before moving on it will be helpful to shine our attention on this glaring example of inconsistent prophecy interpretation. I recently saw a list in a book by a certain prophecy writer. This list had two columns. One column had Bible verses which depict the rapture while the other listed verses showing Christ's return to earth.

The writer put all verses with the words "appear" and "appearing" in the rapture column except one. He put Matthew 24:30-31 in the column for Christ's return to earth. Inconsistency! This often happens when one's interpretation is guided by a preconceived belief system such as the pre-tribulation rapture. Incorrect interpretation leads to incorrect prophecy which leads to an incorrect future.

The Rapture Folly

Sadly many preachers and their followers believe the prophetic folly that the rapture will occur before the end time tribulation period begins. It ought to be perfectly clear after digesting the information in this chapter that the Lord's climactic event in Matthew 24:30-31 is the rapture of the church.

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Why is it seen by many Christians as the gathering of Israel at Christ's return to earth? The answer is found here.

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. Matthew 24:29

Jesus was definite as to when the climactic event would happen. He said, *Immediately after the tribulation of those days...* What days? The days of the tribulation period. (Matthew 24:4-28 Revelation 6-18) Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture cannot accept the climactic event as being the rapture because Jesus unmistakably placed it **AFTER** the tribulation. They therefore must conclude that the climactic event is the gathering of Israel at Christ's return to earth.

PART 2

A Misplaced Rapture

A Misplaced Rapture

We begin with the assumption that the reader knows what the rapture is and that it is always linked to the tribulation period. The proper placement of the rapture in relation to the tribulation period remains a problem for many. Some place the rapture before, some during and others after the tribulation period. One thing is certain. The rapture happens only once.

A Christian lady once said to me, "It doesn't matter when the rapture happens as long as it does." In one sense that is true. The time of the rapture really is unimportant to all who die before the tribulation period. However, it will be of great concern to Christians when the tribulation period begins. Will they enter the tribulation period or will they be taken to heaven by the rapture prior to it?

Most Christians' belief echoes that of their pastor or Christian friends. That is fine if these people are correct but if they are wrong your future may be different than you imagine. Many Christians have a strong belief about the time of the rapture but cannot prove it with the Bible. Still, others use the Bible to prove their belief but are wrong because of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of Bible prophecy.

If you believe that the rapture comes before the tribulation period you are in the majority which will soon be the minority. The pre-tribulation rapture belief is losing favor. Why? Bible prophecy clearly conveys a rapture that comes **AFTER** the tribulation period. We are going to scrutinize the Bible verses used by those who teach a pre-tribulation rapture.

Think on these questions. Do you believe that the rapture comes before the tribulation? Why do you believe so? If you were asked to prove your belief from the Bible could you do it? Any Bible references which you may use probably are in the following list which we are going to examine. We have divided the Bible references into two groups.

Group 1 Bible verses which address the rapture directly

Group 2 Bible verses which do not address the rapture directly but are used to promote a pre-tribulation rapture

GROUP 1 RAPTURE VERSES

John 14:2-3 *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 unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Jesus told His disciples that He was going to heaven to prepare a place for them (the church). He also told them that He would come again *and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also*. The words *receive you unto myself* speak of the rapture.

Jesus told of His appearing in the sky at the rapture in Matthew 24:30-31. There He sent His angels to "gather together his elect." This is equivalent to Jesus' promise to *receive you unto myself* in John 14:3. It is also our *gathering together unto him* which Paul wrote in II Thessalonians 2:1.

Jesus promised the rapture in John 14:2-3. Now the big question. Did Jesus promise that He would *come again* before the tribulation period? No, He did not. He made no association of His return to the tribulation period. Therefore there is no proof of a pre-tribulation rapture in John 14:2-3.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 *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 which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

These are dynamite rapture verses and are vigorously cited as proof of a pre-tribulation rapture. Several elements of the rapture are named here but the time of the rapture is our concern. Read those verses again very carefully. Now the big question. Do they tell us that the rapture happens before the tribulation period? No, they do not. Proof of a pre-tribulation rapture will have to come from somewhere else.

I Corinthians 15:51-52 *Behold, I show 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 shall sound, and the*

dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

It is necessary to identify exactly what Paul is describing in these verses. First, we must realize that the rapture involves several distinct actions. They are:

1. The appearing of Christ in the air with His angels
2. The resurrection of deceased Christians with their new bodies
3. The transformation of the living Christians (changed bodies)
4. The sending of the angels to gather the Christians
5. The transportation of the Christians to meet the Lord in the air

In the above verses Paul mentions two of the five actions of the rapture. First, the resurrection of the dead in their new bodies. Second, the transformation of the bodies of the living Christians. *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.* Now the big question. Did Paul at all indicate that these two actions will happen before the tribulation period? No, he did not. To see a pre-tribulation rapture in I Corinthians 15:51-52 is to see something that is not there.

Acts 1:9-11 *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 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 to into heaven.*

This is Luke's story of the Lord's ascension into heaven after His resurrection which His disciples witnessed. Standing by them were two angels who comforted the disciples with the promise that Jesus would return in the same manner as they saw Him leave. It is mutually agreed among prophecy preachers that this future return of Christ is the rapture of the church.

Now the big question. Can it be determined from the angels' message that Christ is to return before the tribulation period? Absolutely not. We are only given the promise that He *shall so come* but not when. There is no pre-

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tribulation rapture to be found in Acts 1:9-11.

Titus 2:13 *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.*

The prophecy pundits disagree as to which event this is. Some say it is the Lord's second advent (return to earth) while others believe it is His appearing at the rapture. It was proven in the previous chapter that the word "appearing" makes this the rapture.

Paul's *glorious appearing* of Jesus Christ matches Jesus' description of His appearing in Matthew 24:30. There Jesus said, *they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*. Paul and Matthew testified of the same event, the rapture.

Now the big question. Did Paul place the *glorious appearing* before the tribulation period. No, he did not. He simply urged the church to be looking for the *glorious appearing* of the Savior Jesus Christ. There is no pre-tribulation rapture in Titus 2:13.

Hebrews 9:28 *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without Sin unto salvation.*

We know that the word *appear* makes this Christ's appearing at the rapture. Paul told the Hebrew Christians that Christ will *appear* to those who look for Him and deliver them by the rapture. Questions: Did Paul say when Christ would *appear the second time*? No, he did not. Did Paul mention the tribulation? No. Did Paul give any time for Christ's appearing at the rapture? No. How then can this verse be thought to teach a pre-tribulation rapture?

We have looked at six Bible references which deal directly with the rapture. None of them give the time of the rapture. None of them place the rapture in relation to the tribulation period whether it be before, during or after. They therefore cannot be proposed as Biblical proof of a pre-tribulation rapture.

Comfort And Hope

One highly celebrated prophecy writer tries to rationalize a pre-tribulation rapture with emotional arguments. We are emotional beings and are prone to being influenced by our emotions. Many Christians have been persuaded into believing a pre-tribulation rapture by improper emotional appeals.

Paul verbalized an exciting picture of the rapture in I Thessalonians 4:16-17. He followed that by instructing Christians to *comfort one another with these words*. What words? Paul's words of the rapture in verses 16-17. The promise of the rapture is be a source of comfort for Christians because it is our ticket out of this hopeless and dying world and into eternal life with Jesus Christ.

Is the rapture a comfort to Christians because it comes before the tribulation period? No, because Paul gave absolutely no hint of the rapture coming before the tribulation period. Christians will NOT be comforted by a pre-tribulation rapture. How then does the rapture bring comfort to Christians? To know that we must understand what prompted Paul to write I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

If we will go back and read the preceding three verses we will see what moved Paul to explain the rapture as he did. They read:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. I Thessalonians 4:13-15

These verses convey the fact that the Christians at Thessalonica misunderstood the rapture. They thought that Christians who died beforehand would have no part in the rapture thereby never seeing them again. They ignorantly believed that the rapture was only for living Christians. Paul corrected their misunderstanding with I Thessalonians 4:13-17. Paul taught them the following rapture truths.

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1. The spirits of dead Christians will come with Jesus at the rapture.
verse 14
2. Living Christians will not leave before the dead Christians. verse 15
3. The bodies of the dead Christians will be resurrected first. verse 16
4. The living Christians will join the resurrected Christians and they will ascend together into the clouds to meet Jesus. verse 17

Many Christians are comforted knowing that they will see their deceased loved ones again in heaven. That truth comforts millions of Christians every day, me and my wife included. Our five year old son, Scott, was accidentally killed by a car. How often my wife has expressed comfort knowing that one day she will see Scott in heaven. That is the comfort Paul meant in I Thessalonians 4:1

The author who rationalized that only a pre-tribulation rapture could be of comfort applied the same emotional rationale to the "blessed hope."
*Looking for that **blessed hope**, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.* Titus 2:13

As these perilous last days unfold Christians are longing more earnestly for the *appearing* of Jesus Christ which is our *blessed hope*. In strained logic based on emotionalism this author claims that Jesus' appearing (rapture) could be a *blessed hope* only if it occurred before the tribulation period. Well, all but one of the twelve apostles plus many of the seven deacons plus Paul and his companions and many of the early church all died as martyrs *looking for that **blessed hope**.*

The *blessed hope* lies in the **FACT** of the *glorious appearing* not **WHEN**. Titus 2:13 gives only the promise of the *glorious appearing* not the time of it. How then can it be suggested that Christ's *glorious appearing* (rapture) could be a *blessed hope* only if it came before the tribulation period? Would not Christ's appearing be a *blessed hope* to the Christians at any time? Will not Christ's appearing be a *blessed hope* to the Christians of the tribulation period? You bet it will.

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Christ's appearing is a *blessed hope* NOT because of WHEN it happens but because it WILL HAPPEN. God's prophecy is not formulated in respect to human emotion and reason. Bible prophecy reveals God's design for human history according to His foreknowledge, plan and will.

The idea that the rapture can offer neither comfort nor hope unless it comes before the tribulation period is man's philosophy not God's prophecy. The Bible does not teach a pre-tribulation rapture. Jesus Himself, as it has been pointed out, placed the rapture after the tribulation of the last days.

GROUP 2 NON-RAPTURE VERSES

We will now work with verses which do not specifically present the rapture but are often used to promote a pre-tribulation rapture. There are several of them and we will address them all. The tribulation period is drawing near and Christians must be doubtless as to the time of the rapture.

Escape Or Endurance

Luke 21:36 *Watch ye therefore, 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.*

Pre-tribulationists really grab a hold of this verse. They interpret Luke's words as teaching that the church will escape the tribulation period by the rapture. This is one of those times when a simple reading of the verse may not capture the truth. A little word study will uncover the truth of Jesus' message.

The word *escape* is key to understanding Jesus' admonition to Christians. The original Greek word "ekpheugo" was translated into the English word "escape" in Luke 21:36. The Greek "ekpheugo" means to flee "out of" or "away from." Fleeing would be our responsibility - the Christian's responsibility. Therefore, Jesus could not have been talking of the rapture because Christians will not be able to flee "out of" or "away" from tribulation to heaven.

What we have here is a translation problem. The fact is there are a few "word" translation issues with the Bible. Our English Bible was translated from Greek manuscripts which presented translation problems. The word

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escape in Luke 21:36 is such a problem. Some Bible scholars and translators believe that instead of "ekpheugo" the Greek word "katischuo" is correct.

"katischuo" means to prevail or to persevere. Bible manuscripts other than the King James use the Greek word "katischuo." Prophetically it does fit the situation better. Jesus ended His tribulation sermon by urging the disciples (church) to watch and pray. Why? Not to *escape* the tribulation by the rapture, not to *escape* by fleeing but that they might *escape* by persevering. By watching (remaining faithful) and praying they would prevail through the tribulation period.

Christians who persevere (remain faithful) during tribulation are overcomers. Overcomers are victorious. John wrote in his first letter that faith is the power of an overcomer. *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* I John 5:4-5

In each of His letters to the seven churches Jesus promised rewards to *him that overcometh*. (Revelation 2:7,11,17,26 and 3:5,12,21) Who is an overcomer? An overcomer is a Christian who remains faithful to Jesus Christ unto the end. The end can be at one's death or, in the case of the tribulation period, unto the rapture.

Back to Luke 21:36. Jesus admonished the disciples to watch and pray for two reasons. First, that they might escape (prevail, persevere) during the tribulation period. Second, that they might confidently *stand before the Son of Man*. That refers to the church at Christ's appearing at the rapture which marks the end of the tribulation period. (Luke 21:27, Matthew 24:30)

The word *escape* cannot rightly signify a pre-tribulation rapture because it would contradict the Bible's otherwise perceptible teaching of a post-tribulation rapture. The Word of God is not confused but man can be and too often is.

Escape Or Protection

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them

that dwell upon the earth. Revelation 3:10 Jesus spoke this to the church at Philadelphia.

This verse is a pillar in the belief of a pre-tribulation rapture. Many prophecy voices say that this is the Lord's promise of a pre-tribulation rapture. If we construe Jesus' promise to *keep thee from the hour of temptation* as teaching a pre-tribulation rapture we have a problem. How then do we reconcile what Jesus promised the church at Smyrna with that which He promised the Philadelphians? To Smyrna Jesus wrote,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried: and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Revelation 2:10

Jesus warned the Christians at Smyrna that they would go through *tribulation*. To the Philadelphia church He promised to keep them from tribulation as some interpret it. Literal and futuristic Bible preachers view the seven churches of Revelation as being representative of all churches in the Church Age. If that be true how do we square the seemingly contradictory promises of tribulation and deliverance from tribulation?

Someone suggested the solution that the tribulation promised to the church at Smyrna was for only ten days and that no future tribulation period was in view. That solution does not fly because the church has seen periods of cruel persecution and tribulation since that announced for Smyrna. Terrible tribulation is burdening the church in many parts of the world today. It will not stop until Jesus returns to claim His bride, the church.

It has also been proposed that the tribulation which Jesus announced for the church at Smyrna was for that church alone. Wait one minute! If what Jesus promised the Smyrna church was only for them then what He promised the Philadelphia church was for them alone. That would mean that only the Christians at Philadelphia would escape the coming tribulation. We know that that cannot be. The truth is that Jesus' prophecies to the seven churches project to the Revelation tribulation period and beyond.

Our problem boils down to the meaning of the word *temptation* in Revelation 3:10. Pre-tribulationists interpret *temptation* to mean tribulation.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** and **The New Century Dictionary** give no such meaning. Temptation is not tribulation and tribulation is not temptation. Tribulation is life's troubles and trials. Temptation is the spiritual battle between sin and righteousness within all mankind.

Jesus did not promise deliverance from tribulation in Revelation 3:10. He promised deliverance from temptation - from yielding to sin. The truth is Jesus promised to *keep thee* (the church) from succumbing to a particular temptation during the tribulation period. That temptation is the mark of the beast (Antichrist) during the tribulation period. (Rev 13) How are they kept from taking the mark of the beast? God seals all of His servants, Jews and Christians, with His mark first. (Revelation 7)

Continuing with our interpretation difficulties, Jesus said, *I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation...* The preposition *from* is problematic also. Bible translators are at odds as to the correct translation of the Greek word "ek" which was translated *from*. Some say it means "out of" as being removed or taken away. Others say it means "through" as in going through by enduring or persevering.

It must be concluded that Jesus did not promise deliverance from the tribulation period to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10 because:

1. we have conflicting promises. (Revelation 3:10 and 2:10)
2. tribulation is never defined as temptation or vice versa.
3. the preposition *from* more aptly carries the meaning "through" rather than "out of."

Jesus' promise to *keep thee from the hour of temptation* was not one of escape but one of protection. He promised to *keep* (prevent) the church from faltering in an extraordinarily difficult time of temptation (the mark of the beast) during the tribulation period.

Falling Christians

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition... II Thessalonians 2:3

One prophecy writer viewed the words *a falling away first* as the rapture which allows that *man of sin* (the Antichrist) to rise to power. Frankly, that is an unscholarly and unacceptable rendering of that verse.

Paul was writing to the church at Thessalonica who were mixed up about the Day of Christ. They thought they had missed the rapture because they were suffering tribulation. Paul instructed them that *our gathering* (the rapture) which begins the Day of Christ would not happen before these two events: (1) *a falling away* and (2) *that man of sin be revealed*.

Paul's *man of sin* is John's beast of Revelation - the last world ruler - the Antichrist. Paul told the church at Thessalonica that the Day of Christ would not come until *that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition*. Before the *man of sin* appears Paul said there would be *a falling away*.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** were used to gain definition of *falling away*. Here is W. E. Vine's definition of the Greek word "apostasia" which was translated as *falling away* in II Thessalonians 2:3.

"a defection, revolt, apostasy, is used in the N.T. of religious apostasy;... In 2 Thes 2:3 "the falling away" signifies apostasy from the truth."

Apostasy, the falling away from or the forsaking the truth, has always been a danger to God's people. Apostasy was Israel's biggest problem. God indicted Israel for their apostasy by the prophet Isaiah. ...*they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward*. Isaiah 1:4

In the spiritual sense Paul's *falling away* and Isaiah's *gone away backward* are the same. Israel became estranged from God by their "going away backward" - walking away from God's Word. Today the church is divorcing itself from God through apostasy - a spiritual *falling away*. Apostasy is like a cancer. It spreads and sickens the church which is the body of Christ.

Paul's *falling away* is taken by some preachers as that of Israel. Not so. Paul is addressing the church at Thessalonica not Israel. Also, the context of Paul's teaching concerns the Day of Christ and the rapture. These are matters of the church not Israel. Lastly, the church is warned several times

of the coming apostasy - of Christians abandoning Biblical faith. Here are two.

I Timothy 4:1 *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils...*

It is a sad commentary but there is a mass exodus from Biblical doctrine by Christians of all denominations in these last days. Christians who forsake Biblical doctrines are at the mercy of *seducing spirits and doctrines of devils*.

II Timothy 4:3-4 *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

Many disciples left Jesus never to return because they did not like His teaching. John wrote, *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* John 6:66 Jesus would empty many large churches today if He were to preach in them. Worldly Christians do not want the meat of the Word. They want spiritual fluff.

The *falling away* in II Thessalonians 2:3 pertains to the church and not Israel. This apostasy will occur before the Day of Christ. The Day of Christ begins with our *gathering together unto him* - the rapture. Here is the sequence of the events Paul discussed in II Thessalonians 2:1-3.

1. A falling away (apostasy) II Thessalonians 2:3
2. The man of sin (Antichrist) will be revealed II Thessalonians 2:3
3. The Day of Christ (II Thessalonians 2:2) begins with *our gathering together unto him* (the rapture) II Thessalonians 2:1

Think about this. If the rapture starts the Day of Christ and the Day of Christ comes AFTER a time of apostasy and AFTER the Antichrist how is it possible to have a pre-tribulation rapture?

Holy Spirit Departs?

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. II Thessalonians 2:7

This follows Paul's description of the Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2:3-4. Paul explains that the Antichrist will not appear until *he who now letteth* is removed or taken out of the way. The word *letteth* means to prevent. *he* will prevent the Antichrist from coming to power until the proper time and then *he* will be removed or taken out of the way.

There are differing opinions as to who or what *he* is. Many Bible scholars and preachers see the rapture here because they interpret *he* as the Holy Spirit. They theorize that if the Holy Spirit is taken from the earth then the church must also be removed by the rapture. This makes way for the *man of sin* - the Antichrist. Here are several arguments against that thinking.

First argument - The verse reads *until he be taken out of the way* NOT taken away from the earth. The presence of *he* will prevent the Antichrist from coming to power until *he be taken out of the way*. This verse does not say that the preventing power (*he*) leaves the earth thereby necessitating the removal of the church from the earth by the rapture.

Second argument - The idea that the earth could be free of the presence of the Holy Spirit is unbiblical. Like God the Father the Holy Spirit is omnipresent (everywhere present). The Holy Spirit was involved with earth's creation. (Genesis 1:2) The Holy Spirit is present on earth during the tribulation period. (Revelation 11:11) The earth can be no more absent of the Holy Spirit than it can be of God.

Third argument - If the Holy Spirit is removed from the earth before the tribulation period how do we get the tribulation Christians? It is the Holy Spirit who draws lost souls to Jesus Christ. He indwells believers as the seal of their salvation. He teaches and leads Christians in the way of Jesus Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit will be extremely vital during the tribulation period.

Many believe that the tribulation Christians are not Christians of the church. That is hard to believe when one considers what is

said of them. They are born again, washed in the blood, faithful witnesses, servants of God, suffer for their faith and are martyred for Jesus Christ. You cannot be any more Christian than that. There is no Biblical distinction between the tribulation Christians and the church. Only an ill conceived pre-tribulation rapture makes them different.

The tribulation period will be prime time for the Holy Spirit. Many people will be saved because of His wooing. They then will need His indwelling, His sealing, His teaching and His leading in that trying time. The Holy Spirit's role will make Him indispensable in the tribulation period. It is untenable that *he* of II Thessalonians 2:7 is the Holy Spirit.

Fourth argument - If Paul meant the Holy Spirit with the pronoun *he* why did he not say the Holy Spirit? Five times in his two short letters to the church in Thessalonica Paul named the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. Why did he choose the third person pronoun *he* in II Thessalonians 2:7? He chose it because he meant someone else other than the Holy Spirit.

If *he* is not the Holy Spirit then who is *he*? Once again **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** serves us. Here are selected excerpts from Dr. Vine's explanation of *he*.

"Lawlessness is presented as being restrained or prevented to some degree by a restrainer, "he." That restrainer, who now letteth or prevents the overspreading of lawlessness, will be removed or taken out of the way. This will create a social atmosphere of unchecked lawlessness and immorality.Verse 6 speaks of a principle: "...ye know what withholdeth..." It is the "what" that prevents or restrains "he" from coming to power. (It seems to Dr. Vine and other Bible scholars that this principle could be the rule of law.) In verse 7 we have that principle, the rule of law, expressed in terms of "he" which can be embodied in a single person or a series of persons. Therefore, "he" in respect to the rule of law can be a single law giver, such as a king, or a body of law givers, such as the constituted government of a country or nation."

This author concurs with Dr. Vine's judgment that *he* in II Thessalonians 2:7 is a code word for the Roman Emperor or Roman Government. Why did

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Paul not name the Emperor or specify the Roman Government? He could have written, "only the Emperor Nero who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." Paul chose discretion over foolhardiness. He did not want to invoke retribution upon himself or the church from the Roman Government. A few years later Paul was beheaded by the Emperor Nero.

Two thousand years of history adds insight to Paul's understanding. Paul was correct in that Roman rule had to go before the Antichrist could appear but it was not to be a Roman Emperor of Paul's time. It will be the multiple governments of the Revived Roman Empire that will be taken out of the way (made powerless) by democracy. What irony. Democracy (people rule) will put the Antichrist in power and he will become an absolutely evil monarch.

In summarizing, *he* is not the Holy Spirit who will *be taken out of the way* resulting in the rapture in II Thessalonians 2:7 . Paul was informing the church in disguised language that Roman rule had to be removed to allow for the Antichrist. In the next verse Paul wrote, *And then shall that Wicked be revealed...* The capitalized *Wicked* is the Antichrist who Paul described as *that man of sin, the son of perdition*. II Thessalonians 2:8

Mankind's Worst Day

Jeremiah 30:7 - Jeremiah wrote, *Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be Saved out of it.*

Daniel 12:1 - Daniel wrote: *...and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time...*

Matthew 24:21 - Jesus said, *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

Jeremiah, Daniel and Jesus all described the same time - the tribulation period of Revelation.

Adherents to the pre-tribulation rapture hail Jeremiah's and Daniel's statements as proof that the tribulation period is exclusively for Israel. While it is true that Israel will bear their worst troubles ever in that time that is not proof that the church will not also be present. Let us not forget that

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Israel and the church have been coexisting and suffering tribulation for the past two thousand years.

- * Daniel and Jeremiah prophesied tribulation for Israel. They did not know of the coexistence of Israel and the forthcoming church.
- * Israel and the church have co-existed for 2,000 years. Both have Endured hatred, persecution and tribulation during this time of coexistence.
- * Even now both are experiencing tribulation and persecution around the world. This will continue until Jesus Christ returns to rapture the church.
- * The tribulation period will be Satan's last desperate assault on God's people both the church and Israel.

Understandably Old Testament prophecy of the final tribulation period concerns Israel because their prophets had no knowledge of the church. Therefore, their prophecies do not demand the church's absence during the tribulation period. Also, any prophecy for Israel found in the New Testament cannot be hoisted as proving the church's exclusion from the tribulation period.

The 24 Elders

Revelation 4:1 is a prophetic hammer for the pre-tribulationists. It is here they drive home a pre-tribulation rapture. John was called to heaven and was transported there in the spirit. (Revelation 4:2) He saw God on His throne *And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.* Revelation 4:4

Who are the *four and twenty elders*? Many believe them to be the raptured church which went to heaven in the person of John in Revelation 4:1-2. This gets a little confusing. John's spiritual entry into heaven is seen as representative of the rapture of the church. Then in heaven John sees twenty four elders who also supposedly represent the raptured church.

Who are the twenty four elders? It has been expressed that they represent both the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel's 12 tribes) and the twelve

apostles. It is evident that they are allied to the church in some way because:

- * They wear white robes and golden crowns. Revelation 4:4
- * They worship and praise God. Revelation 4:10
- * The Lamb stood among them. Revelation 5:6
- * They sing a song of salvation. Revelation 5:9

Pre-tribulationists believe that the twenty four elders represent the church which was raptured in Revelation 4:1. They are only partially right. The twenty four elders are a representation of the church but not of a church which is raptured in Revelation 4:1. Further study of Revelation shows that the church and the twenty four elders remain separate. They never become ONE or unified as a single body.

On four occasions John saw great gatherings of Christians in heaven: Revelation 7:9; 15:2; 19:1 and 20:4. On two of those occasions, Revelation 7:9 and 19:1, John saw the twenty four elders also present apart from the Christian multitudes. The truth is that the twenty four elders are an eternal heavenly dimension of the church. This is explained by the example of Israel's tabernacle in the wilderness. In his letter to the Hebrews Paul said this of Israel's tabernacle.

"...We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. and ...Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, THAT THOU MAKE ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN SHEWED TO THEE IN THE MOUNT." (Hebrews 8:1-2, 5)

Moses had been instructed to build the tabernacle and all furnishings exactly to the pattern God had showed him. That pattern was a copy of the eternal heavenly tabernacle. Why was that so important? Because one day Jesus Christ (High Priest) would enter the holy place in the heavenly tabernacle and sprinkle the mercy seat with His blood from His sacrificial death on the cross.

Paul confirmed that Jesus did just that in his letter to the Hebrews. *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in*

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once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.
Hebrews 9:12 Jesus did not enter the temporary tabernacle which Moses built. He entered God's eternal tabernacle in heaven.

Just as Israel's tabernacle in the wilderness was patterned after a heavenly tabernacle, the church on earth is patterned after a heavenly church represented by the twenty four elders. Just as the heavenly tabernacle has always been in heaven so has the heavenly church in the form of the twenty four elders always been with Jesus Christ. The earthbound church will join Jesus at the rapture.

The twenty four elders are not mentioned after Revelation 19:4. They do not accompany Christ and the church to earth. Nothing is said of them as participating in the Millennial Rule of Jesus Christ and the church. Neither the heavenly pattern of the Jews' tabernacle nor the heavenly pattern of the church (24 elders) leave heaven.

The twenty four elders DO NOT represent a raptured church in Revelation 4:1.

Rapture Or Revelation

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.
Revelation 4:1

This verse commands considerable attention. To those who espouse a pre-tribulation rapture this verse looms large. They imagine the angel's call to John *Come up hither* to be the rapture. Here are several rebuttals to that perverted prophecy.

REBUTTAL 1 Rapture language.

Not another time in the Bible do you find a "door" associated with the rapture. Let us read some well known verses which convey the rapture.

Matthew 24:30 *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven....they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven...*

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Matthew 24:31 *And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect...*

John 14:3 Jesus said: *I will come again, and receive you unto myself...*

I Corinthians 15:52 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

I Thessalonians 4:16 -17 *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air...*

II Thessalonians 2:1 *...by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him...*

Rev 1:7 *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him...*

No door! Of the variety of words used to convey the rapture only "trumpet" is found in Revelation 4:1 but it is not the rapture trumpet. This trumpet is a voice: *and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me.* The *first voice* is that of Christ's angel who greeted John in Revelation 1:10. He heard a trumpet-like voice not an actual trumpet. No trumpet (instrument) is blown in Revelation 4:1.

If Revelation 4:1 is void of the usual rapture language why is it believed by many that the rapture occurs there? Maybe this is the reason. If it were not for the supposed rapture in Revelation 4:1 there would be no textual evidence of a rapture in Revelation before the tribulation begins in Revelation 6.

REBUTTAL 2 The absent church.

Pre-tribulationists eagerly point out that the church is not named after Revelation 4:1 until Revelation 19 which proves that the church was raptured in Revelation 4:1. Actually, the church is not named either in Revelation 4:1 or Revelation 19.

If the omission of the title "church" in Revelation prophecy makes it unrelated to the church then we have a larger problem. The church is not named in nine New Testament books: Mark, Luke, John, II Timothy, Titus, II Peter, I & II John and Jude. Are we to believe that these books are not

relevant to the church because it is not specifically named? Of course not.

“Church” is not named from Revelation 3:22 until Revelation 22:16. Notwithstanding, who would deny that the martyred souls under the altar in Revelation 6 are the church? Who would deny that the saved throng in Revelation 7 is the church? Who would deny that it is the church that returns with Christ in Revelation 19? Who would deny the church’s presence with Christ in the Millennial kingdom in Revelation 20? Who would deny that it is the church which inhabits the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21? Yet it is not so named.

There are many words, terms and descriptions which clearly indicate the presence of Christians (the church) in Revelation. Examples:

1. The title “saints” is used 10 times. Christians are New Testament saints. Saints are mentioned thirteen times in Revelation.
Pre-tribulationists classify them as “tribulation saints” as opposed to church saints. A study of the tribulation saints reveals there is no difference in their faith from that of the church. There is no scripture that divides saints into church saints and tribulation saints. There is one class of saints, the church, and one rapture.
2. The title “servant” appears 3 times. (7:3; 11:18; 15:3) Christians are New Testament servants of God and Jesus Christ.
3. Prayers of the saints rise up before God. (5:8; 8:4) Christians communicate with God through prayer. These saints are on earth because saints in heaven have no need for prayer.
4. We see those who were *slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.* (Revelation 6:9) Martyrdom is Christianity’s brightest badge.
5. Those who came out of great tribulation *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb.* (Revelation 7:14) Christians are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ.
6. *a great multitude....stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb.* (Revelation 7:9-10) What group can praise God for salvation other than the church?

7. *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.* (Revelation 12:11) These are Christian martyrs of Satan during tribulation period.

Here is a question for those who think that the church, described above, will not be in the tribulation period. Why would God keep the church from the tribulation period and then save millions during that time?

God's Two Witnesses

The incident of God's two witnesses in Revelation 11 casts much doubt on a rapture in Revelation 4:1. John described the two witnesses as, *These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.* Revelation 11:4 The two designations, *olive trees* and *candlesticks*, have swayed many to identify the two witnesses as Jewish prophets to Israel. Olive oil was used to anoint prophets, priests and kings. The candlesticks are seen as lamp stands which were placed in the temple for light.

The two witnesses are more than Jews if we consider Jesus' definition of the *candlesticks* to John. Jesus said, *The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.* Revelation 1:20

John described the two witnesses as the *two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.* First is the "olive tree" symbolism. Throughout the Bible olive oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Also, the olive tree speaks of a spirit led Israel. We can safely interpret the *two olive trees* as being two spirit filled Jews with a message to Israel from God.

Beside *two olive trees* God's two witnesses are called *two candlesticks*. We do not need to wonder as to who the *candlesticks* are. Jesus definitely defined "candlestick" as the church in Revelation 1:20. It must be concluded that God's two witness are Christian preachers ordained for ministering to the church during the time of tribulation.

The two witnesses will be persons of both Judaism and Christianity. Special notice is made of their wearing of sackcloth which points to the

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somber spirit of their message. For three and a half years they will preach repentance, salvation and judgment. As soon as their preaching is finished they will be killed by the Antichrist. Their dead bodies will be left to decay in the street for three and a half days while the world rejoices.

Their celebration is suddenly squelched when the two witnesses are resurrected and rise toward heaven in a cloud of glory. It is during this most troubling time in the history of the church that God shows them visual proof of the coming rapture. It is as if God is reassuring the church that they too will be taken up by the rapture very soon.

We have seen much textual evidence (terms, phrases, descriptions) which positively identifies the church in Revelation 4-14. The omission of the word "church" is no indication that the church experienced a pre-tribulation rapture in Revelation 4:1.

REBUTTAL 3 The call to heaven.

John's call to heaven, *Come up hither*, in Revelation 4:1 is repeated on another occasion. We just talked about God's two witnesses in Jerusalem in the tribulation period.

They are killed by the Antichrist and left in the street. After three and a half days God revives them and calls them to heaven with *Come up hither*. Revelation 11:12 The calling to heaven of God's two witnesses resemble the rapture of the church far better than John's call to heaven in Revelation 4:1. For example:

- * The two witnesses are killed and resurrected.
- * They ascended up into the clouds of heaven.
- * The people watched the two witnesses rise into heaven.

The two witnesses were called to heaven bodily but not so with John. He never physically left the island of Patmos. He was transported to heaven in the spirit. Four times John indicated that his reception of Revelation was a spiritual experience. He said, *And immediately I was in the spirit*. Revelation 4:2 (see also Revelation 1:10; 17:3; 21:10)

● Once John spoke particularly of having a vision. (Revelation 9:17) It is

probable that in each of his "in the spirit" experiences John had a vision. The point is that John was not given The Revelation in heaven. He received the Revelation on the Island of Patmos while in the Spirit - in the spirit of worship.

REBUTTAL 4 The purpose.

The trumpet-like voice of Christ's angel called John to heaven with *Come up hither*. Pre-tribulationists think this to be Christ's call at the rapture and John represents the church body. If we will notice the purpose for the call it does not stand that it is the rapture. Four times we are told explicitly the purpose of the Revelation.

Revelation 1:1 Jesus told John that the purpose of Revelation was to *shew unto his servants **things which must shortly come to pass***.

Revelation 1:19 Jesus commanded John to *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the **things which shall be hereafter***.

Revelation 4:1 Christ's angel called John to heaven with *Come up hither and I will shew thee **things which must be hereafter***.

Revelation 22:6 John was informed that God had sent his angel to *shew unto His servants the **things which must shortly be done***.

There is no room for doubt or disagreement as to why John was called to heaven in Revelation 4:1. Four times it is clearly stated that Jesus wanted His servants (the church) to know the future - to know what was coming. The Revelation is a prophetic book given to the church by Jesus Christ for them to know the future.

God has never been a God of surprises concerning His dealings with mankind. Neither has He kept His works, good or bad, secretly from us. God wants us to know what lies ahead as He affirms in these verses.

Isaiah 48:3,5 *I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee.*

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Daniel 2:28 *But there is a God in heaven that revealed secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.*

Amos 3:7 *Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his Secret unto his servants the prophets.*

Mark 13:23 *But take ye heed: behold, I have **foretold** you all things.*
Jesus said this to His disciples as He was giving them His tribulation prophecy.

Therewith we have the purpose of the Revelation prophecy. God revealed the future for the world, Israel and the church. John was called and taken to heaven in the Spirit for the purpose of receiving the Revelation of the future.

Concluding Wisdom

We close with a quote taken from a commentary on Revelation written by Dr. William M. Smith, D.D. Writing on the issue of a rapture in Revelation 4:1 he wrote:

“John now beholds a door opening in heaven, and hears a voice saying, “Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter.” Many commentators place the rapture of the Church between Chapters 3 and 4 of this book, but inasmuch as the text itself is silent on such a subject, one questions the wisdom of even discussing it here.”

Several Biblical arguments have been given disclaiming the idea that the rapture is presented in Revelation 4:1. There is no textual basis for a rapture there and to put one there makes it man’s prophecy rather than God’s prophecy. It becomes a misplaced rapture.

PART 3

A Secret Rapture

A Secret Rapture

There is an amusing belief in Christendom that the rapture will be a secret event - an invisible event. According to this belief the rapture will not be seen by people on earth. They will become aware of it after suddenly discovering millions of missing people around the world. Sounds more like a sci-fi movie than Bible doctrine.

Why should the rapture be a secret event? Did Jesus come secretly the first time? Certainly not. He was in the public eye from the manger to the grave. His adult ministry was a very public one with large crowds often pursuing Him. He was the center of attention in Israel. The four gospels authenticate His person and public presence.

If the first coming of Jesus was so visible why should His coming at the rapture be veiled in secrecy? Why should the unbelieving world not see Jesus at the rapture? They saw Him at His first coming. The Bible clearly teaches that the world will see Jesus when He takes the church to Himself at the rapture.

Jesus' earthly mission was not a secret one. His presence and works were very public and so will the rapture be. The Apostle Paul made an interesting statement to King Agrippa while defending himself against a false charge. He said, *For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.* Acts 26:26

Paul said that King Agrippa was much aware of Jesus and His works because Jesus had not acted secretly. Jesus conducted His ministry openly to all the public. He and His works were observed by all of Israel and people from far away places. Jesus' first coming did not happen in secret so why should His second coming be secretive?

There was an aged Jewish man named Simeon who was in the temple when Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus to be dedicated to the Lord. He had been told by the Holy Ghost that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died.

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When Joseph and Mary entered the temple with baby Jesus Simeon recognized Him as the Lord's Christ. He held the baby Jesus and prayed to God, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all the people...* Luke 2:29-31

Simeon understood that Jesus was Israel's salvation who God *hast prepared before the face of all the people*. God intended for Christ to be seen and known by all people. The fame of Jesus spread far abroad. The world knew of Jesus Christ and yet they rejected Him. At His second coming the world will see Him but they will not turn Him away as they did at His first coming.

The secret rapture theory has evolved mostly from misunderstanding the Bible. Basically there are two Bible passages from which a secret rapture gains merit. We will closely examine both because they weigh heavily on the issue of a secret rapture. The first reference was written by Paul in a letter to the church at Corinth.

A Quick Change

I Corinthians 15:51-52 *Behold, I shew 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 shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

This begs explanation because it has been badly mangled prophetically. No doubt we all agree that these two verses concern the rapture but **ONLY ONE PHASE OF IT**. This is not the complete rapture. There are six distinct phases or actions to the rapture. They are:

1. the appearing Matthew 24:30
2. the resurrection I Thessalonians 4:16
3. the transformation I Corinthians 15:51-52
4. the gathering Matthew 24:31
5. the transportation Matthew 24:31
6. the meeting I Thessalonians 4:17

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Paul said, *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*. Sleep here means the dead body in the grave. Not all Christians will be dead when Jesus Christ comes at the rapture but all Christians will be changed. The bodies of all Christians both dead and alive will be changed to eternal bodies. Paul said this change would happen quickly - *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...*

Paul did not say that the rapture would happen in *the twinkling of an eye*. He precisely explained that the transformation (the changing of our bodies) would happen *in the twinkling of an eye*. The transformation will not be seen due to its quickness but that does not mean that the rapture will not be seen. It is undeterminable just how long the rapture (all six actions) will last but the world will see it.

Paul talked again of the changing of our bodies at the rapture in a letter to the church at Philippi. He wrote, *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body...* Philippians 3:20-21 At the rapture Christ will clothe Christians with a body fit for heaven like His.

The Apostle John also was aware of the transformation of our bodies at the rapture. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* I John 3:2

Christians are the sons/daughters of God now but we do not have the body that we will have. When Jesus Christ appears at the rapture we will be changed to be like Him. How marvelous that will be to have a body that no longer is subject to pain, disease and death. It is beyond our imagination but not beyond happening. Give us that new body, Lord Jesus!

Why is the changing of our bodies (transformation) at the rapture so important? Paul tells us. *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.* I Corinthians 15:50 Our sinful bodies of flesh and blood are not suitable for heaven. Christians receive a new spirit at salvation and at the rapture they will be receive a new body. Jesus went to heaven in a new and glorious body and Christians will too.

In conclusion, *in the twinkling of an eye*, is not saying that the rapture will happen as quickly as the blinking of an eye. *the twinkling of an eye* relates only to the transformation of the body which is just one of six actions of the rapture. It describes the quickness by which our bodies will be changed at the rapture.

Thief! Thief!

The second Bible passage from which many suppose a secret rapture was spoken by Jesus. In this passage Jesus likened His second coming to a break-in by a thief. Many have incorrectly assumed that the moral of this thief parable is a secret rapture but it is not. The lesson is WATCHING in order to be READY. We will inspect several Bible references to gain clarity of this matter.

Matthew 24:43-44 *But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

In this parable Jesus likens His coming at the rapture to the coming of a thief. He did not say that His coming will be a secret event (unseen). The moral of this parable is that the householder suffered loss because he was not watching and therefore not ready. Jesus said that if the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming he would have been watching and would not have suffered any loss.

The thief parable is part of Jesus' tribulation prophecy and is a warning for the church. As the householder did not know when the thief would come so the church does not know the exact time of the Lord's return. It is therefore required that Christians maintain a watchful attitude. The homeowner suffered loss due to his failure to watch and Christians will too if they are not watching at Christ's return.

Twice in the Revelation Jesus gave warnings of His coming as a thief. Remember, Jesus gave the Revelation to the church. (Revelation 22:16)

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Revelation 3:3 *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

Jesus warned the Christians at Sardis that if they did not watch He would come to them as a thief. Why was He concerned about their failure to watch? Because by not watching they would be unready for Jesus to come. Some Christians will be watching and therefore ready. Many more will not and Jesus will return to them as thief and they will suffer great loss.

Revelation 16:15 *Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

Though this is spoken during the time of God's wrath it was for the benefit of the church. Jesus said that those who *watcheth and keepeth his garments* will be blessed (happy). They will be happy because they escape God's wrath because of the rapture. To those who fail to *watcheth and keepeth his garments* Jesus will come as a thief and they will be naked and shameful.

The Apostle Paul preached that the Day of the Lord will also come as thief in a letter to the church in Thessalonica. This sheds light on the parable of the thief and of Jesus' coming as a thief. The lesson is the same: WATCH and be READY. Paul said,

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch, and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

I Thessalonians 5:2-7

The Day of the Lord (God's wrath) will come as a thief to the unbelieving world in a time when they are enjoying peace and prosperity. Suddenly they

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will find themselves in terrible trouble - in the Day of God's wrath. Because they lived in spiritual darkness (ungodliness) they did not recognize the signs of Christ's coming. They slept in the night meaning they were spiritually asleep.

Christians on the other hand, live in the day - live in righteousness. They are awake - not asleep. Paul urged Christians not to *sleep* as the ungodly but to *watch and be sober* (live righteously). The Day of the Lord (God's wrath) will not come upon them as a thief because they will be spiritually awake and watching. They will be removed from earth by the rapture before God's wrath strikes.

It ought now be clear that the thief parable in the Lord's tribulation prophecy dramatizes the need for watchfulness at Christ's coming. It does NOT advertise a secret rapture. The solemn truth is that there will be many unwatchful Christians when Christ comes back just as there are now. To them He will return as a thief and, like the housekeeper, they will suffer loss. Do not leave this book without reading the final chapter.

The Same Day

What will now be said is very, very important. The close relationship of the "coming of the Lord" in I Thessalonians 4:15-17 and the "Day of the Lord" just three verses later in I Thessalonians 5:2 has not been adequately communicated. We know that the coming of the Lord is for the rapture of the church and that the Day of the Lord is one of wrath and judgment. What is not generally realized is that the two happen on the same day?

Perhaps one reason this "same day" occurrence goes unrecognized is because of the chapter marker, "Chapter 5." It gives the impression that the writer moves to another subject when actually he continues the subject from Chapter 4. The original text had no chapters. Numbered chapters were added later as a help. If we disregard the chapter number in our Bible it is plainly seen that I Thessalonians 5:1 connects to the coming of the Lord at the rapture in I Thessalonians 4:15-17.

Paul opened "Chapter 5" by telling the church that they did not need to know the exact time of the coming of the Lord at the rapture. Why? Because they knew that the Day of the Lord *so cometh as a thief in the night*. (I Thessalonians 5:2) By this Paul linked the Day of the Lord which

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cometh as a thief in the night to the coming of the Lord at the rapture in I Thessalonians 4:15-17. In speaking of His coming at the rapture Jesus said, *Behold, I come as a thief.* Revelation 16:15

Truth: Jesus will *come as a thief* to some of His church. (Revelation 3:3) The Day of the Lord will *come as a thief* to the lost world. (I Thessalonians 5:2-3) The Day of the Lord will immediately follow the coming of the Lord at the rapture. They both occur on the same day!

The “same day” rapture and Day of the Lord is gloriously demonstrated in God’s deliverance of Noah and Lot from judgment. Both deliverances prefigure the coming day of the rapture which is also the Day of the Lord. Here are two verses from Noah’s story.

And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah’s wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark. Genesis 7:12-13

Noah and his family entered the ark of salvation on the day that the judgmental flood began. The moment God shut the door of the ark the torrential rains of judgment came down. This is an Old Testament type of the rapture and the Day of the Lord happening on the same day. When God saved Noah and his believing family the watery judgment came.

Lot’s deliverance from doomed Sodom typifies the rapture and the Day of the Lord as did Noah’s. Luke explained Lot’s deliverance with one succinct sentence. *But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.* Luke 17:29

It could not be clearer. The same day that the angels removed Lot from Sodom God’s fiery judgment fell from heaven and destroyed it. That is how it will play out on the day of the rapture. Jesus Christ will make His sudden appearance and remove the Christians from the earth. When they are safely with Jesus the Day of the Lord will begin. The rapture and God’s wrath will come on the same day.

“Watch” is the watchword for Christians. To the church at Thessalonica Paul wrote, *Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.* I Thessalonians 5:6 Christians must not fall asleep spiritually. Paul

urged Christians is to *watch and be sober*. How do we watch? We watch by remaining faithful servants of Jesus Christ. He will not come as a thief to faithful Christians and neither will the Day of the Lord.

We repeat. The lesson of the thief in connection with Christ's return is not secrecy. The lesson is watchfulness which keeps the Christian ready for the coming of the Lord at the rapture. The rapture will not be a secret event as we will now learn from God's Word.

It Is No Secret

Several Bible verses preclude any possibility of a secret rapture. We start with the Lord's description of His appearing at the rapture.

Matthew 24:26-27 *Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

Jesus used a natural phenomenon to describe His coming at the rapture. His coming will be *...as lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west...* Jesus compared His appearing to atmospheric lightning which we all have seen. Lightning instantly transforms the sky into a brilliant spectacle. If Jesus' appearing resembles lightning how in the world can it be secret?

Matthew 24:30 *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Jesus said *...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* This is Jesus' appearing at the rapture. *They* are all people on earth. How can there be a secret rapture when Jesus plainly stated that the people would see His appearing?

Revelation 1:7 *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the*

earth shall wail because of him.

John spoke of the same "coming" which Jesus described in Matthew 24:30. He too testified that people on earth will see Christ's appearing at the rapture with the words, *every eye shall see him*. If all eyes witness Christ when He appears at the rapture how can it be secret?

According to John *every eye* (all humanity) will observe Christ's appearing. In respect to Christ's coming all humanity can be divided into three categories.

1. The church - The appearing of Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven is for the gathering (rapture) of God's elect.
2. All Jews - They caused Christ's crucifixion. It is true that the Romans pierced (crucified) Jesus but it was at the insistence of the Jews
3. The Gentiles - People in all nations will be overtaken with despair at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Here is a thought. John's words *every eye shall see him* brings the blind to mind. Will they too gaze on His appearing? Why not? Jesus opened the eyes of the blind in His earthly ministry. It is not only conceivable but reasonable that Christ will open all eyes for His appearing. It seems right that Christ's appearing be seen by every man, woman and child.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah may have revealed truth about the blind at the time of the rapture in this prophecy to Israel. *Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.* Isaiah 35:4-5

Isaiah foresaw a time when Israel would be in deep despair from her enemies. Isaiah encourages them with a word from God. He tells them that God will come and take vengeance on their oppressors and save Israel. Then their blind will see and the deaf will hear. Does Isaiah mean physical blindness and deafness? No.

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Those comforting words from Isaiah to Israel project a spiritual enlightenment. The Jews' Messiah will return and vanquish their enemies and save the nation of Israel. The spiritually blinded Jews will see (recognize) the returning Christ as their Messiah. The spiritually deaf will hear (listen and understand) Him and follow. Jesus will then establish His Millennial Kingdom and assume the throne of David in Jerusalem.

Could not Isaiah's spiritual promise also be a physical promise at the rapture? When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit they suffered death twice: a spiritual death and a physical death. The rapture will be a miraculous work by Jesus Christ bringing both physical and spiritual sight. What a miraculous day that will be.

Many consider Christ's coming in Revelation 1:7 to be His return to earth. It cannot be. John is writing to seven churches. What is the next event that the church is looking for? It is the rapture. The church must GO TO Jesus before it can come back WITH Him. So it must be Christ's coming at the rapture about which John said *and every eye shall see him*. A secret rapture? How can it be?

It Is No Secret

Solid Biblical evidence has been presented which defies the secret rapture belief. The Bible gives assurance that Christ's appearance at the rapture will be visible to all on earth. Also, it would seem that the rising of Christians to meet the Lord in the air will be viewable by all on earth. We have all heard that bit about the rapture and the world waking up one morning to find millions of people missing - unaccounted for. That is fantasy, not fact.

The Bible tells three stories of individuals who were observed as they were taken by God from earth to heaven. The first is the prophet Elijah. *And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it...* II Kings 2:11-12

What a wonderful type of the rapture - being taken alive from earth to heaven. Elijah's transport was a fiery chariot from heaven but Christians will

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be escorted to heaven by holy angels at the rapture. (Matthew 24:31) A significant fact of Elijah's rapture is that it was seen by his protégé, Elisha. It was not done in secret and Elisha did not keep it a secret.

The next person whose rapture was watched in astonishment is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.* Acts 1:9

Jesus had met with His disciples on the Mount of Olives and instructed them to be witness of Him throughout the world. Jesus ended the meeting by rising toward heaven and disappearing into a cloud. The verse reads, *while they beheld*, meaning that while the disciples watched Jesus ascended into heaven. Hardly a secret rapture. The disciples saw it, preached it and wrote about it.

The last example of the rapture of the church is God's two witnesses who will preach in Jerusalem during the first half of the tribulation period. About these two witnesses we are told:

And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. Revelation 11:11-12

The departure of the two witnesses provides a picture of both the resurrection and the rapture. After three and a half days lying in the street the dead witnesses are revived and taken up to heaven *and their enemies beheld them*. It is safe to speculate that the rapture of the two witnesses will be viewed by not only those at the scene but around the world. This will be possible by satellite television and the world-wide web or computer.

The raptures of Elijah, Jesus and the two witnesses prefigure the rapture of the church. The rapture of Elijah was seen by one person, Elisha. The rapture of Jesus was watched by the eleven disciples. The rapture of the two witnesses will be viewed by billions of people including those at the scene and around the world via satellite, television and computer .

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The rapture of the church will be seen by the whole world as it happens - in real time. (Matthew 24:30 Revelation 1:7) There will be no need for electronic transmission of the rapture because Christians will rise to meet Jesus Christ in the air from everywhere on earth. The lost populace will watch it. What a spectacle that will be!

It Is No Secret

Christians are instructed repeatedly in the Bible to be looking for Jesus to return. Here are three.

Luke 21:27-28 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

In verse 27 Luke told us that the Lord's coming will be seen by those on earth which agrees with what Jesus said of His coming in Matthew 24:30. Luke then instructed Christians what to do in those days of tribulation.

- what - *look up, and lift up your heads* - This demonstrates hope and expectation of the Lord's coming which will then be *nigh* or very near.
- when - *when these things begin to come to pass* - This refers to the events of the tribulation period which Luke outlined in the chapter.
- why - *your redemption draweth nigh* - Redemption for Christians is complete when Jesus Christ takes possession of the church at the rapture.

Christians should live more mindful of the Lord's return. It would be a good practice for Christians to stop occasionally and look up into heaven and imagine Christ coming. Looking up occasionally with confidence that we would leave if Jesus were coming will heighten our faith.

Titus 2:13 *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.* Titus 2:13 In the two verses prior to this one Paul praised the works of God's grace saying that it

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- * brings salvation which is available to everyone.
- * teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.
- * teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.
- * leads us to *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.*

Christians are to be looking for (living for) the *glorious appearing* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus described the *glorious appearing* as His appearing at the rapture. (Matthew 24:30) At least twelve times in the New Testament the “appearing” of Jesus Christ is mentioned. In all instances a visible Christ in His glorified body is intended. It is puzzling how the belief in a secret rapture lives on.

Hebrews 9:28 *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

Let us not misunderstand this verse. It does not say that Christ will *appear the second time* ONLY to those who look for Him. The message is that to those who *look for him* Jesus Christ will bring salvation or deliverance by the rapture. Those not looking for His appearing will not be delivered by the rapture but will be left behind.

If we are to be looking for the Lord’s appearing then it must be visible not invisible - not a secret. Christ’s appearing will have a greater audience than all the TV shows, sports events and theme parks combined. All humanity will be in attendance. All eyes will be fixed on the brilliantly spectacular appearance of Jesus Christ in the sky.

A great company will be seen with Jesus Christ at His appearing. Look at these ecstatic words penned by Paul. *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.* Colossians 3:4

The word *appear* here is the same as we read in Matthew 24:30 of Christ’s appearing. *appear* means to be seen - to be visible. The world will see the raptured church with Jesus Christ in the air. What a sight that will be for both those in the air and on the ground.

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Why should the world not see the rapture of the church? They will see Jesus Christ return to earth with the church after God's wrath. (Revelation 19:14) He will be seen on the Mount of Olives and heard barking the Word which will destroy the armies of the world at the Battle of Armageddon. (Zechariah 14:4, Revelation 19:15) The Bible gives no evidence that the rapture will be a secret thing.

The prophet Isaiah foretold a salvation which fits both Israel and the church at the close of the tribulation period. *The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord.* Isaiah 52:10) Isaiah's words were spoken for Israel but they also apply to the church. His prophecy was, *and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord.*

There will be a salvation for Israel and a salvation for the church. Israel will be saved from the Antichrist and his coalition of anti-Israel armies when Christ returns to earth after the wrath of God. (Revelation 19) The church will be saved when Jesus Christ appears in the air and sends angels to gather the church unto Himself at the end of the tribulation period. (Matthew 24:29-31) Both salvations will be witnessed by the whole world.

The world will watch an amazing preview of the rapture three and a half years in advance. Near the start of the tribulation period God places two witnesses (prophets) in Jerusalem. After gaining ruling power the Antichrist kills the two witnesses and leaves them lying in the street. Suddenly after three and a half days they revive and stand up. A voice from heaven, heard by all, bids the two witnesses to *Come up hither.* Revelation 11:12) They rise bodily up into heaven in the sight of all the people.

That is exactly what will happen when Jesus suddenly appears in the earth's heaven at the rapture. The unbelieving population will watch as millions of Christians rise from all over the earth to meet the Lord in the air. (I Thessalonians 4:17) What a spell-binding scene that will be.

Final thought. If the rapture is a secret event (unseen) why is there so much Biblical teaching about Jesus appearing in the sky? Why are we instructed again and again to watch for His appearing? The word "appearing" communicates the idea of being visible - of being seen with the physical eye. It is silly to think that we would be advised to watch for

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something that cannot be seen.

There will be no secret rapture. The Bible is very clear on that. The appearing of Jesus Christ at the rapture will be seen by all people on earth. If it is seen it cannot be a secret rapture.

PART 4

Seventh Trumpet Rapture

Seventh Trumpet Rapture

The Bible inarguably teaches that the rapture will happen at the sound of a trumpet. Before addressing the rapture trumpet it will be beneficial to discuss the prophetic role of the trumpet. No Revelation trumpet can be the rapture trumpet according to pre-tribulationists because they espouse a rapture which precedes the tribulation period. They associate the Revelation trumpets to Israel as in the Old Testament.

The trumpet played an important role in Israel's society in Old Testament times. A trumpet was blown to call them to worship, to religious observances, to memorial feasts and to war. Israel was God's nation of the Old Testament. God created a new nation with the New Testament covenant which is the church. Unlike Israel, the trumpet has had no official function in the ministry or worship of the church.

Proper Bible interpretation requires that we define New Testament language from within the New Testament writings before referring to the Old Testament. We should first search the New Testament for definition or explanation of words, terms or phraseology before consulting the Old Testament. The reasons include:

- Language. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek. Words carry different meanings in different languages.
- Time period. Over a thousand years separate some writings of the two testaments. Language and its meaning change over time.
- Recipients. The Old Testament was written to an earthly nation - Israel. The New Testament was written for a spiritual nation - the church.

There are three important differences between the trumpets of Israel and the prophetic trumpets of the New Testament.

1. Israel's trumpet calls were made by appointed Jewish trumpeters. The prophetic trumpets of The Revelation are blown by angels in heaven.

2. Israel's trumpet calls were usually known beforehand because they heralded scheduled times and events. The time of the Revelation trumpets will be unknown by those on earth.
3. Israel's trumpets were of no concern outside Israel. The trumpets of Revelation will affect all of earth and mankind.

The Rapture Trumpet

We will examine Bible verses which present the rapture and a trumpet. This is a relatively easy study but is very important to understanding that the rapture will be heralded by a heavenly trumpet.

Matthew 24:31 *And he shall send his angels with 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.* Please note, **a great sound of a trumpet.**

What is this event that includes the blowing of a trumpet? It was methodically proven to be the rapture in the PART 1, "The Lord's Rapture." Jesus will dispatch His angels to gather (rapture) the church with *a great sound of a trumpet*. Is this a particular trumpet? It most certainly is and it will be identified as we continue.

The "trumpet" was mentioned by Paul three times in his writings. In two of those mentions he explained the trumpet's role in the appearing of Jesus Christ at the rapture.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 *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 which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

These verses are unanimously considered to be expressing the rapture and for the second time we see it linked to the sound of a trumpet. Whereas Jesus simply mentioned a trumpet Paul identified it as *the trump of God*. Several things happen with the blowing of this *trump of God*.

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1. The Lord Jesus Christ leaves heaven to come for the church
2. The archangel Michael shouts loudly as Jesus leaves heaven
3. The *trump of God* is blown.
4. The deceased Christians rise from their graves
5. The living and risen Christians are caught up to meet Jesus in the air

Quite a noisy departure: Jesus gives a triumphant shout, the Archangel Michael is heard and the shrill blast of a trumpet! Will these sounds of the coming Lord be heard on earth? The Bible is not clear on that so whatever one believes is not arguable.

I Corinthians 15:52 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Paul explains the resurrection and transformation that will take place at the rapture. This is the third time that a trumpet is related to the rapture. This time it is identified as the *last trump* or last trumpet.

There is no reason that we should not see the trumpet in these verses as being the same trumpet. We have learned that: (1) A trumpet call will herald the rapture. (2) It will be the trumpet of God. (3) It will be the last trumpet. If it is to be the last trumpet then there must be a series of trumpets. Is there such a series of trumpets in the Bible? Oh, yes.

Revelation records a series of seven trumpet blasts from seven angelic trumpeters. (Revelation 8-11) Naturally, the seventh trumpet will be the *last trump* or last trumpet. Pre-tribulationists deny that the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the rapture because they say: (1) the rapture happens before the tribulation and (2) the trumpets pertain to Israel and not the church. Both beliefs are wrong.

Most Christians know that a trumpet is associated with the rapture but they fail to recognize it as the seventh trumpet of Revelation. This makes it a seventh trumpet rapture. John introduced the seven trumpets with, *And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.....And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets*

prepared themselves to sound. Revelation 8:2, 6

The first four trumpets are heard and the events which follow them are seen in Revelation 8. Trumpets five and six are given in Revelation 9. The seventh trumpet is mentioned but not blown in Revelation 10. *But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the **mystery of God** should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants, the prophets.* Revelation 10:7

An angel informs John that when the seventh trumpet begins to blow the *mystery of God* will be completed. A preacher was recently heard saying that the *mystery of God* was the seventy weeks of time which God prophesied for the nation of Israel. (Daniel 9:24-27) There are a couple of problems with that comprehension. First, "mystery" is not once found in the Old Testament and nowhere is Israel's seventy weeks presented as a mystery.

Secondly, the *mystery of God* is a New Testament concept which involves all aspect of the church. Paul said this about the mysteries of God: *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* I Corinthians 4:1 The *mystery of God* is expressed in many ways in the New Testament. Here are a few.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| * the mystery of the kingdom of God | Mark 4:11 |
| * the mysteries of God | I Corinthians 4:1 |
| * the mystery of God's will | Ephesians 1:9 |
| * the mystery of God in Christ | Colossians 2:2 |
| * the mystery of Christ | Colossians 4:3 |
| * the mystery of Christ and the church | Ephesians 5:32 |

It is unnecessary to discuss each of these mysteries because they all merge into one great mystery, the church. Thus, the seventh trumpet will herald the end of God's mystery, the church. It is then that the church will be completed and taken home.

The seventh trumpet is sounded and followed by a grand proclamation in Revelation 11. *And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE*

KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST; AND HE SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER. Revelation 11:15

A heavenly chorus of Christians loudly announce an absolute political coup on earth. All world kingdoms will be ruled by Jesus Christ. Theocracy will be the rule. All forms of human government will be abolished. No more evil dictators or godless democracies will rape mankind with their beastly rule. Jesus Christ alone will rule. Come Lord Jesus!

The Kingdom Rule of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the present tense in Revelation 11:15. It reads, *THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST ...* This is known as prolepsis which is really a statement of anticipation or expectation. It speaks of something as having happened or happening though it is yet to come. John often employed this form of expression in Revelation prophecy

Christ's possession of the kingdoms actually occurs later. Later on John wrote, *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.* Revelation 15:4 Here Christ's rule still remains future so He could not have taken control of the kingdoms in Revelation 11:15.

In the prelude to the pouring of the vials of God's wrath the announcement is heard that all nations *shall come* and worship Christ. (Revelation 15:4) When will that happen? At the same time when *The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ...* Revelation 11:15 When will that happen? When Jesus Christ returns to earth and defeats the armies of the world at the Battle of Armageddon. (Revelation 19)

The proclamation of Christ's Kingdom Rule is made at the sounding of the seventh trumpet because that is when it will happen - after the seventh trumpet. However, there are several more works to be completed before Christ rules which are named in the following verse.

And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

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Revelation 11:18

Here is a breakdown of the actions called forth by the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

the nations were angry - The nations are not angered by the trumpet. It is an angry world when the seventh trumpet blows. That is easily imaginable upon observing the condition of our world today. Anger, unrest and violence fill our world daily as we head toward the blast of the seventh trumpet.

thy wrath is come - This is prolepsis (an expression of anticipation). God's wrath comes with the seven vials which follow the trumpets. (Revelation 15-18) God's wrath follows the rapture of the church.

the time of the dead, that they should be judged - The dead are those without Christ (lost) both dead and alive. Their judgment begins at the rapture (they are left behind) and ends at the White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15)

thou shouldest give reward - At the seventh trumpet God will reward His people (Christians) both dead and alive. Dead Christians will be resurrected with their eternal bodies and the living Christians will be instantly changed into their eternal bodies. They both will be taken up together to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth - Those who *destroy the Earth* are those who corrupt humanity with false gods, false religions and false gospels. God is not pleased with those who destroy the souls of people. Those destroyers will be destroyed by God.

Now for the tying together of these truths of the seventh trumpet. Jesus made these two statements concerning rewards.

Matthew 16:27 *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

Revelation 22:12 *...behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

Jesus will come quickly at the rapture. The rapture is a time of reward. The seventh trumpet is blown in Revelation 11:15. Three verses later it is said that *...thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great...* Revelation 11:18 The *prophets* and *saints* (Christians) will receive reward following the seventh trumpet. Jesus said that the reward comes with Him. When does He come? AFTER the seventh trumpet.

Many Christians believe that the rapture comes before the tribulation and the seventh trumpet. Though unrecognized by most readers, the rapture is pictured in Revelation AFTER the tribulation and AFTER the seventh trumpet. Please give close attention to the discussion which follows.

The Two Gatherings

Remember, the seventh trumpet was heard in Revelation 11:15 signaling the time for several things including the granting of reward to God's servants. We will jump ahead to Revelation 14 and see the reward of the rapture.

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. 17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. Revelation 14:14-20

Two gatherings are easily detected in this passage. The first gathering (reaping) is of the good of the harvest. The second is a gathering of the rejected of the harvest which is destroyed. To put it in the spiritual sense,

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the first reaping is of the righteous. The second gathering is of the unrighteous. Both gatherings occur AFTER the seventh trumpet blows in Revelation 11:15.

The SECOND Gathering

The second gathering, verses 17-20, will be addressed first because it is more obvious. Also, it will aid in understanding the first gathering. In the second gathering there are two key expressions which define it.

vine of the earth - The *vine of the earth* grows from Satan and produces sinners. Moses preached of this vine while delivering his last charge to Israel before his death. He reminded them of their privileged position with God compared to that of their enemies. Referring to the Gentile nations which Israel would soon be facing in their land of Canaan Moses said,

For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Deuteronomy 32:32
What was the *vine of Sodom* and *the fields of Gomorrah*? It was wickedness. The Gentile nations which Israel would soon battle were of a vile and wicked character. There was no hope of repentance in them so God would destroy them by His nation Israel.

God set Sodom and Gomorrah forth as an example to all the world as Peter witnessed. *And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.* II Peter 2:6 All who live ungodly will be overthrown and destroyed as those of Sodom and Gomorrah were.

The *vine of the earth* was described similarly by the prophet Jeremiah. By his mouth God reprimanded Israel for their waywardness. He said, *Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?* Jeremiah 2:21

Israel had degraded into a *strange vine* before their God. They forsook God's way of righteousness and adopted the ways of the ungodly Gentiles. This made them the *vine of the earth* rather than the vine of God. So it is today. All who are not of God and Jesus Christ are of the *vine of the earth*.

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What happens to the *vine of the earth*? First it will be *cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God*. (Revelation 14:19) This means that they will suffer God's wrath from the seven vials. Following that they will face the wrath of Jesus Christ at the Battle of Armageddon. (Revelation 19:15) Lastly the *vine of the earth* will be *cast into the lake of fire* where they will spend eternity. (Revelation 20:14)

Jesus taught that the *vine of the earth* would eternally suffer in a burning fire. His words were, *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.* John 15:5-6

Jesus called Himself *the true vine* (the source of life) with humanity as the branches. We either abide (live) in Him and bearing fruit or we abide in the world as lost and fruitless. Fruitless branches are dead branches. They will be cut away, gathered and burned. That burning is the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14)

the great winepress of the wrath of God - This is a metaphorical expression for the battle of Armageddon when Jesus Christ slays the armies of the world. The Battle of Armageddon is the winepress and Jesus Christ is the One who crushes the grapes of the *vine of the earth* (lost souls). *...and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.* Revelation 19:15

Pre-tribulation preachers all agree that the second gathering, verses 17-20, is descriptive of the Battle of Armageddon. Christ will utterly destroy all the kings and their armies which assemble against Israel. The second gathering offers little problem. It is the first gathering which pre-tribulationists somehow miss either inadvertently or conveniently.

The FIRST Gathering

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud

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voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. Revelation 14:14-16

...*and the earth was reaped* denotes a gathering. When a farmer reaps his harvest he gathers that which is ripe or good. Reaping comes before the gathering of the bad or unusable harvest. The reaping (gathering) here is the rapture of the church which precedes the gathering at the Battle of Armageddon, the second gathering. Both Jesus and Paul described the rapture as a gathering. (Matthew 24:31, II Thessalonians 2:1)

Jesus used the agricultural chore of reaping the harvest to explain the saving of souls from the fields of humanity. It relates directly to John's first gathering quoted above. Of the harvest Jesus said,

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. John 4:35-36

It is important to note that that which is reaped in Jesus' harvest analogy receives eternal life. John's first gathering is said to be a reaping of the harvest. (Revelation 14:15) The spiritual application here is that those who are reaped in the first gathering are kept or saved unto life eternal. This pictures the rapture of the church. Note: John's second gathering is not called a reaping.

There are also language clues which identify John's first gathering as the rapture. Here are three.

cloud - The "gatherer" was situated on a white cloud. Clouds are part of the rapture scene.

Son of man - Jesus Christ is the Son of man and He will supervise the reaping (gathering) of the good crop at the rapture.

angel - Jesus will send angels to reap (gather) the good crop (Christians) at the rapture.

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The two gatherings occur AFTER the tribulation period but at different times. The first gathering being the rapture happens at the appearing of Jesus Christ *immediately after the tribulation*... Matthew 24:29 The second gathering is the Battle of Armageddon which follows Christ's return to earth. (Revelation 19) The two gatherings are separated by a time of God's wrath from the seven vials. (Revelation 15-18)

A third party's view of the two gatherings in Revelation 14:14-20 is offered here which supports the interpretation that the first gathering is a gathering of believers while the second is a gathering of sinners for judgment. Following is an excerpt from the **Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary**. It reads:

"According to Rev. 14:14-16, "the Son of Man" will gather the grain harvest (the believer), while Rev. 14:17-20 describes angels as gathering the unbelievers for the purpose of judgment."

We already know that the gathering of believers is the rapture of the church. After the rapture God's wrath will fall upon the sinners left behind. Then many will have their blood spilled at the Battle of Armageddon.

Where Do They Go?

There are two destinations for those of the two gatherings which are revealed in Revelation prophecy. Ignorance therefore will not be a defense for anyone who is unhappy with their final destination.

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his name, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God, Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Revelation 15:2-3

As the time approaches for the wrath of God we see a great assembly of Christians who had gotten victory over the beast (the Antichrist). They had refused to worship the Antichrist or take his mark in the tribulation period. They now are in heaven standing on a magnificent crystal sea before the throne of God.

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This joyous Christian choir sings the songs of Moses and the Lamb - songs of deliverance and why not? They have been redeemed and rescued from a doomed world and placed with God and Christ in heaven. These are those who were reaped in the first gathering. (Revelation 14:14-16)

The disposition of those of the second gathering (Revelation 14:17-20) is not as glorious as those of the first gathering. They will feel the wrath of God poured from the seven vials (Revelation 15-18) including the *great winepress of the wrath of God* - the Battle of Armageddon. (Revelation 14:19-20; 19:17-21)

Those who survive God's wrath and the Battle of Armageddon will enter into the Millennial Kingdom. They will be subjects of the rod-of-iron rule of Jesus Christ and the church for a thousand years. ((Revelation 12:5; 2:26-27; 20:6) After the Millennial Kingdom they will stand before God's White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15) They will be judged, found guilty and committed to the lake of fire for eternity. Not a pleasant ending.

All who are alive when Jesus Christ returns will be affected by the two gatherings in Revelation 14:14-20. Our relationship with Jesus Christ will determine which gathering we will be part of. Born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (Christians) will make up the first gathering which is the rapture of the church. Unbelievers (lost souls) will be left behind for the second gathering. One wonders how many will wish they had gone in the first gathering.

Unbelievers often say that a loving God would not punish people or send them to hell. They think that way because they do not know God or His Word. God has made promises of reward and punishment. Would these people think that God should keep His promises? A loving God surely would be disposed to keeping His promises. If He were to neglect His promises of judgment then we could not be assured of His promises of reward or heaven.

Immediately after the two gatherings in Revelation 14 we see the redeemed of the first gathering (tribulation Christians) standing safely before God in heaven. (Revelation 15:2) Then the vials of wrath are spilled upon the earth and upon those of the second gathering. (Revelation 16-18) They are the unbelievers who were left behind at the first gathering.

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We see those of the first gathering again after the vials of wrath and just before Jesus Christ returns to earth. *And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Allelula: salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments...* Revelation 19:1-2

Doubtless this *great voice of much people* is a concert of praise to God from all Christians in the Church Age. They praise God for salvation and proclaim His judgments as being true and righteous. From the first Christian to the last they are all here in heaven as the time nears for two wondrous events. The first is the wedding of Christ and His church. (Revelation 19:7-9) The second is the return of Jesus Christ to earth with His new bride, the church. (Revelation 19:11-14)

We end our study of the two gatherings with this question for each reader. Will you be in the joyous throng praising God for your salvation and for His righteous judgments? Or will you be left on earth to suffer God's wrath and judgment? It is a choice we all must make.

Heaven Is Purged

There is more evidence in Revelation prophecy which undergirds the truth that the rapture cannot happen before the seventh trumpet.

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Revelation 12:7-9

There will be a mighty clash between two angelic forces - the forces of the Archangel Michael and the rebellious forces of Satan. This epic battle will stir heaven at the middle of the tribulation period. It will not be seen on earth but humanity will pay greatly because of it. ...*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* Revelation 12:12

Noteworthy is the declaration which follows Satan's banishment from heaven. *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation,*

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and strength, and the kingdom of God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. Revelation 12:10

Satan's access to heaven has been forever revoked. He and his fallen cohorts can no more enter God's heavenly realm. This opens the way for these grand occurrences mentioned in the preceding verse.

Salvation - Having been made forever free of Satan's presence and influence heaven is now ready for the church.

Strength - At the rapture the church will receive power it had not known before. It will not only escape the world but it will rule it with Jesus Christ.

Kingdom of God - The kingdoms of this world will become one kingdom ruled by the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

Power of Christ - The world has not known the true power of Jesus Christ. Now the world will experience His true person, position and power.

When do these things happen? After *the accuser of our brethren is cast down*. The accuser, Satan, is thrown out of heaven in the middle of the tribulation period. Until this happens it is not time (the conditions are not right) for the church to enter heaven. Heaven is purged by the permanent removal of Satan making it habitable for the raptured church.

The church is on earth when Satan is expelled from heaven in the middle of the tribulation period. That is shown by the words, *for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night*. Revelation 12:10 Satan is the *accuser of our brethren*. The *brethren* are Christians on earth. It would be pointless for Satan to accuse Christians already in heaven.

The next verse gives the legacy of the Christians on earth when Satan and his angelic henchmen are cast to earth. *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*. Revelation 12:11 The Christians on earth at the time of Satan's eviction from heaven were victorious over him because:

* They were washed in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

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- * They witnessed to others about Jesus Christ.
- * They became martyrs for Jesus Christ.

Who else could these brethren be other than Christian brethren of the church?

When will the rapture of the church happen? It will not - it cannot - happen before the tribulation period begins as the pre-tribulationists predict. Sufficient scriptural information has been presented which establishes the rapture **AFTER** the blowing of the seventh trumpet of Revelation.

Jesus said, *Immediately after the tribulation of those days...he shall send his angels **with a great sound of a trumpet**, and they shall gather together his elect...* Matthew 24:30-31 According to Jesus Christ the rapture follows the sound of a trumpet - the seventh trumpet of the Revelation.

* * * * *

T H A N K Y O U...

...for purchasing and reading this e-book book on The Church Rapture. I hope you enjoyed it and learned from it. I would consider myself as failing if you did not.

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Again, thank you and may **GOD BLESS.....** Phil Jellerson, Author