

The Missouri Challenge: Show Me!

Is there a single clear pre-tribulation, secret rapture text in the Bible?

Is there any indication that Christ's return will be a two-phase, instead of a one-phase event?

"I began searching for those passages that described a rapture that precedes the Tribulation. To my amazement, I couldn't find any." – Jim Bakker; "Prosperity and the Coming Apocalypse" p. 123

"This departure of the church from the earth will obviously cause quite a stir, though the Bible never seems to refer to it directly." – John Walvoord (former president of Dallas Theological Seminary and author of the early book in support of the rapture theory, "The Rapture Question" 1957); "Christ's Olivet discourse on the End of the Age- Part 1" – Bible.org – Theological Journal Library CD

"It is not too much to say that the rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology." – John Walvoord; "The Rapture Question" p.16 (original edition). This statement was removed from later editions of this book.

The most famous Bible text used to support the secret rapture theory is 1 Thess.4:15. When we compare this text with the 2nd coming text in Matthew 24:27-31, we find that they are really one in the same event.

"For this we say to you by the word Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the **coming** (parousia) of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with **a shout**, with the **voice of the archangel**, and and with the **trumpet** of God... Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up together** with them in the **clouds** to meet the Lord **in the air**..."
- 1 Thess. 4:15-17

"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the **coming** (parousia) of the Son of Man be... Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven,... they will see the Son of Man coming on the **clouds** of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His **angels** with a **great sound** of a **trumpet**, and they will **gather together** His elect **from the four winds**, from one end of heaven to the other."
- Matt. 24:27, 30-31

When we look at all the Greek words used for the coming of Christ we find that they are never used exclusively in reference to any supposed ‘secret rapture’ text.

Erchomai (strongs #2064)

Supposed Rapture Texts – John 14:2,3; Rev. 16:15

2nd Coming Texts – Matt.24:30; Rev.1:7; Jude 14

Parousia (strongs #3952)

Supposed Rapture Texts – 1 Thess.4:15; 1 Cor.15:23; 1 Thess.5:23

2nd Coming Texts – Matt.24:27; Matt.24:37,39; 1Thess.3:13

Epiphaneia (strongs #2015)

Supposed Rapture Texts – 2 Tim.4:8; 2 Tim.4:1; 2 Tim.6:14

2nd Coming Texts – Titus 2:12,13; 2 Thess.2:8

Apokalupto (strongs #601,602)

Supposed Rapture Texts – 1 Cor.1:7; 1 Pet.1:13

2nd Coming Texts – 2 Thess.1:7,8; Luke 17:29-30

“We conclude then, that from a study of the Greek words themselves the distinctions between the coming of the Lord for His saints and with His saints is not to be gleaned.” – Paul D. Feinberg (ThD Dallas Theological Seminary; PhD University of Chicago – Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology – Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Professor of Theology – Moody Bible Institute); ‘Premillennialism or Amillennialism’ p.207

When we look at the prophetic parables of Jesus, His return is always portrayed as a one-phase event. Furthermore, there are always only two groups of people in these parables – the saved and the lost (Weeds/Wheat; Sheep/Goats; Wise Virgins/Foolish Virgins; Good fish/Bad Fish; Faithful Servant/Evil Servant). No second chance is offered in Scripture.

The Dispensational order of events is not found in the Bible (see: Matt.24; Mk.13; Luke 21; 1 Thess.4; Joel 2):

Dispensational Order:

1. “Rapture” – Saints caught up
2. Tribulation
3. 2nd Coming in power & glory

Biblical Order:

1. Tribulation
2. Signs in the Heavens
3. 2nd Coming in power & glory
4. Saints caught up

A close examination of the historical record shows that the secret rapture doctrine did not arise until the 19th century. We do not find a two phase return referred to in the church creeds or the writings of the church fathers. There is only one phase mentioned in the Apostles Creed (100AD), Nicene Creed (380AD), Constantinople Creed (381AD), and the Athanasian Creed (450AD). The writings of early church fathers, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian. Protestant creeds including The Augsburg Confession, the Westminster Confession, The Anglican 39 Articles of Religion, and The New Hampshire Baptist Confession.

“When I dug into the matter further, I was surprised to discover that many of the ideas associated with the pretribulational Rapture originated not in the Bible, but in an extrabiblical vision experienced by a young Scottish woman named Margaret MacDonald [at Edward Irving’s Church] in 1830.” – Jim Bakker; “Prosperity and the Coming Apocalypse” p.124

“I am not aware that there was any definite teaching that there would be a secret rapture of the Church at a secret coming, until this was given forth as an “utterance” in Mr. Irving’s Church, from what was there received as being the voice of the Spirit... it was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose.” Samuel P. Tregelles (early ‘Plymouth Brethren’ scholar and contemporary of Margaret MacDonald); “The Hope of Christ’s Coming” 1864 p.35

“Marvelous light was shed upon Scripture, and especially on the doctrine of the second Advent, by the revived spirit of prophecy. In the following account by Miss Margaret MacDonald, of an evening during which the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon her for several successive hours, in mingled prophecy and vision, we have an instance; for here we see the distinction between that final stage of the Lord’s coming... and His prior appearing...” Robert Norton M.D.; “The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church (Edward Irving’s Church)” 1861 p.15

“It was at Powerscourt [Powerscourt Castle Conferences of 1830 and onward – attended by Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby] that the teaching of a pretribulation rapture of the Church took shape.” – George Eldon Ladd (famous New Testament Scholar); “The Blessed Hope”; 1956 p.40,41

What about the famous “Left Behind” texts from which rapture books and movies have been made? The “Left Behind” texts of Matt.24:36-44 and Luke 17:24-37 are set in the context of the days of Noah and Lot. During those respective events there were only two groups of people – saved and lost. There were no groups of people who received a second chance. Those outside the Ark, or inside Sodom, were destroyed.

“I did experience a sudden change of opinion; the passages in Matt. xxiv, two shall be in the field, and one shall be taken and the other left; two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left, were brought to me in power, accompanied with a sudden conviction I have described.” – Robert Baxter (member of Edward Irving’s church)
“The Narrative of the Facts”

The full text of Matt.24:37-39 says:

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and **took them all away**, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: **one will be taken** and the other left.”

These passages indicate that the ones **taken** (and destroyed) will be the wicked. They are not **taken** to heaven in a secret rapture!

“The fact that those taken away are judged and those that remain enter the kingdom is taught explicitly in the context.” – John Walvoord, ‘The Rapture Question’ p.169

What about the famous “Thief in the Night” texts from which rapture books and movies have been made? The “Thief in the Night” texts: Matt.24:39-44; 2Pet.3:10; Rev.16:15-17; 1 Thess.5:1-3 are all in the context of an unexpected event that destroys all the wicked – leaving them no second chance or escape. The text in 1 Thess. 5 which states that “The Day” brings sudden destruction on the wicked so they cannot escape; is merely an extension of the famous rapture theory text which immediately precedes it in 1 Thess.4. Jesus statement, “Behold I am coming as a thief” in Rev. 16:15 takes place immediately after the outpouring of six of the seven last plagues. Peter says in 2 Pet.3:10:

“...the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

It is plainly apparent that the two most popular Biblical expressions used to promote the secret rapture theory do not apply to that theory at all!

The Bible is full of texts graphically portraying the destruction of the wicked (with no one left alive); as well as the destruction of the earth - at the return of the Lord. This concept is generally contrary to the Dispensational/Rapture scheme. The following text in Jeremiah is representative:

“I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form and void; and the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all the cities were broken

down **at the presence of the Lord**, by His fierce anger. For thus says the Lord. The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end.” – Jeremiah 4:23-27
See also: Ps.68:1-3; Is.24:17-22; 66:15-16; Jer.25:29-33; 2 Thess.1:7-10; 2 Pet.3:10-12; Rev.6:12-17; 14:14-20; 16:15,17,18,20

In Matt.13 we find the parable of the wheat and the tares. In verse 30 Jesus says that the wicked must **first** be gathered to be burned – **then** the wheat will be gathered into the barn. In C.I. Scofield’s famous Rapture teaching Bible, he states(contrary to Jesus’ plain words) that the wheat must **first** be gathered (a chronology more fitting the rapture theory scheme).

“The gathering of the tares into bundles for burning does not imply immediate judgment. At the end of the age (v.40) the tares are set apart for burning, but **first** the wheat is gathered into the barn (John 14. 3; 1 Thess. 4. 14-17). – p.1016, 1901/1917 ed.
This statement was removed from later editions.

In 1 Thess.4 and 1 Cor.15 (both supposed rapture texts) the trumpet of God is mentioned. 1 Cor. refers to this as the **last** trumpet. However, in several texts which Rapturists apply to the 2nd coming, the trumpet of God is also mentioned. Either the **last** trumpet of 1 Cor.15 is not really the **last** trumpet, or all of these texts are really describing the same event. In Matt.24:29-31 all the tribes of the earth mourn when the trumpet sounds. When the **last** (seventh) trumpet of Revelation sounds in Rev.11:15-19, the wicked are destroyed (v.18). The trumpet of God, which sounded at Mt. Sinai, was a very real, dreadful, and audible sound – which typified the 2nd coming event (Ex.19:16,17; 20:18,19; Heb.12:25-29).

In 1 Thess.4 the “Shout of God” is mentioned. Paul is alluding to the words of the prophet Jeremiah and the psalmist Asaph:

“The Lord will **roar** from on high, and utter His **voice** from His holy habitation; He will **roar** mightily against His fold. He will give a **shout**, as those that tread the grapes. against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise will come to the ends of the earth – For the Lord has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh. He will give those who are wicked to the sword, says the Lord.” – Jer.25:30,31

“Our God shall come, and **shall not keep silent**; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. **He shall call** to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: **Gather my saints together to Me...**”
– Ps.50:3-5

There is nothing silent or secret about the events described in these passages. Neither is there anything silent or secret in the parallel passage of 1 Thess.4.

The New Testament Scripture plainly teaches that believers will go through tribulation.

“In the world you will have tribulation...” – John 16:33

“We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.” – Acts 14:22

See also: 2 Thess. 1:4-9; Rev.1:9; 2:9; 7:9, 14; 13:7

Luke talks about being worthy to escape these events – but to also “stand before” the Son of Man who comes in power and glory. See Luke 21:36

The typology of the Old Testament likewise indicates that God’s people will go through tribulation – affected but not afflicted.

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” – 1 Cor.10:11

Noah and his family were delivered through the great flood that destroyed the earth
(But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be)

Israel was delivered through the ten plagues of Egypt – so God’s people will be
delivered through the seven last plagues – see: Is.26:19-21; Ps.91:1-9

The Hebrew worthies were delivered through the fiery furnace (Dan.3)

So with God’s people in the fires of the last days – see: Is.33:14,15

Daniel in the lions den (Dan. 6) – So in the last days.

The book of Daniel was meant to be read in the time of the end – Dan.12:4,13

The anti-Christ makes war with the *saints* (Christians) – Dan.7:21; Rev.13:7

Jesus actually said, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”

All the apostles were brutally murdered. Only John escaped martyrdom miraculously.

100’s of 1,000’s of Christians were martyred by pagan Rome. Millions more have been martyred over the last 1500 years. But affluent Christians (many of whom accept a prosperity gospel) have been foremost in proclaiming that Christians today will not have to go through the tribulation.

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease
Whilst others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas
And dungeon, rack, and flame, and sword?

At the ascension of Christ, angels of God testified to the disciples regarding the return of Jesus. They described only one event. They compared this one future event to the ascension that the disciples were even then observing.

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they *watched*, He was taken up, and *a cloud received Him* out of *their sight*. And while they *looked steadfastly* toward heaven as He went up, *behold*, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand *gazing up* into heaven? *This same Jesus*, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.*” Acts 1:8-11

The first thing that strikes one reading this passage is the overwhelmingly visual nature of the event. There is nothing secret or invisible about this occurrence. The fact that angelic men inform the apostles that this highly literal and visible ascension, typifies the singular return of Christ, puts to rest the idea that He will return in a secret or invisible way. They saw Him progressively receding from their view. Believers will likewise behold the return of Christ in the heavens gradually getting closer to the earth – not as an instantaneous, “What was that!” kind of happening. Revelation 1:7 says plainly:
“Behold, he is *coming with clouds*, and *every eye will see Him*,...”

Christ is returning only once more when people standing on earth will view that return. “...To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear *a second time*, apart from sin, for salvation.” – Heb.9:28

When He returns the second time He will bring salvation for those who have prepared for that day. Those who are not ready on that day will never be ready.

“And Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give *every one* according to his work.” – Rev.22:12

The Jewish nation was thoroughly deceived regarding the nature of Christ’s first coming. They believed that his first coming would take the form of His second coming in power and glory. Unfortunately, many Christians may likewise be misled regarding the true nature of Christ’s 2nd coming.

“Wherefore if they shall say unto you, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold He is in the *secret* chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming (*parousia*) of the Son of man be.”

In other words, you won’t be able to miss it. Unlike the famous rapture scenario where everyone is left looking around and wondering what happened. No one will have to tell you it happened!

The very first words that Jesus had to say on this subject in His famous Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 should also be the last word in this study:

“Take heed that no one deceives you.” – Matt.24:4

