

The Case of the Missing Saints
(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)
Rockey Jackson - November 24, 1999
Section 2 of 13

Part One: The Investigation

What is my starting position?

My starting position for this article includes the central truths of the gospel that have traditionally been held by Evangelical Christians. It also includes the following items that I want to highlight. The Holy Bible is the infallible Word of God. There are some exceptional passages of scripture that are obviously symbolic or allegorical, but in general Bible prophecy is to be taken literally. Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming again in all His glory as the Lion of Judah and he will rule the earth in person for one thousand years. This Second Advent or Second Coming of our Lord will be preceded by a period of tribulation. The Rapture will occur sometime prior to or concurrent with the Second Coming. Finally, there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust, the just to everlasting reward and the unjust to everlasting punishment.

Our language does not easily differentiate between physical life and spiritual life or physical death and spiritual death. Often times it must be inferred from the context whether life or death is to be taken in the physical or spiritual sense, or both. Also, a person may be physically alive while they are spiritually dead or conversely, physically dead but spiritually alive. God is much more concerned with our spiritual life than He is with our physical life. Usually, when God is speaking or a passage is related from His point of view, life and death should be understood to be spiritual. Man's perspective is usually physical. I will attempt to distinguish between physical and spiritual when it is important.

I expect that anyone who takes the time to read an article on the timing of the Rapture will be in basic agreement with this starting point. There is, however, one more thing that I want to bring out which I do not believe is generally well known. At least, I haven't seen much teaching on it. This is the fact that the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust are two separate events that occur at different times.

The resurrection of the just and the unjust

Again, I believe that most Christians have a clear understanding that all of mankind will be resurrected. The just will be resurrected to eternal life and the unjust to eternal punishment. Many synonymous terms for just and unjust are used in references to these resurrections. Jesus Himself spoke of them as individual events when He referred to them as "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of damnation."

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28,29).

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Many, however, have never been taught that these are two distinct events separated by a thousand years. The first resurrection, the resurrection of life, leads into the Second Advent and Christ's millennial reign. The second resurrection, the resurrection of damnation, does not occur until a thousand years later at the end of Christ's millennial reign.

This is explained in the 20th chapter of Revelation, which tells about the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ over the earth. Verses 1-3 tell us that Satan will be bound for one thousand years while the Lord reigns over the earth. The resurrection of the just, which is depicted as the resurrection of life, is written of in verses 4-6 where it is called the first resurrection. We're told in verse 6:

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).

In verses 7-10 Satan is freed and leads the last revolt against the Lord at the end of the thousand years. Finally, in verses 11-15 the resurrection of damnation is described. It is depicted as the resurrection of judgment and spiritual death.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Some other scriptures that denote these two resurrections are listed below. Often, we don't even bother to think about the fact that these scriptures are very accurately referring to two distinct resurrections. Usually, we just take it as a reminder that everyone is eternal. Both believers and unbelievers will eventually be resurrected, the saved to eternal life and the unsaved to eternal spiritual death and punishment.

2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust (Acts 24:15).

14 And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14).

This last scripture is from one of our Lord's teachings. It specifically denotes only the resurrection of the just. This shows even greater precision by referring to it as a unique event separate from the resurrection of the unjust.

Commonly, when the resurrection is discussed in a general sense, it is not important to differentiate between the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of nonbelievers. They are referred to as if they will be a single event. The important point is that God will raise the dead. However, when we are dealing with the subject of the end times and in our case the Rapture, it is good to know and to keep in mind that the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust are distinct events.

What is this event we call the Rapture

At the start of any investigation it is a good idea to know what we're looking for. My dictionary provided three possible definitions for the word rapture. The first definition is a state of ecstasy, to be transported by a lofty emotion. Second is an expression of ecstatic feeling. And third is transporting a person from one location to another, especially to heaven. (Beam me up Lord!) The third definition is the one we are interested in. For our investigation, the Rapture is a specific event in which our Lord Jesus Christ transports all believers who are alive at that time directly to heaven without passing through physical death.

The word rapture does not appear in our English translations of the Bible. Many scholars have written about how the word rapture came to be used to refer to this event so I won't address it in this article. It is enough to know what we mean by its use. If the word rapture was used in our Bibles we would simply be able to consult a concordance to find the references where it occurs. Since it doesn't, we must look for scriptures which describe an event that fits the definition of the Rapture. So, my fellow sleuths, our work is cut out for us.

Now that I've shared my starting position for this article, we can begin our investigation into the timing of the Rapture. First we'll look at the Epistles because they provide most of the facts about the Rapture. Next we will consult the Gospels to obtain the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning this event. Then we'll search the book of Revelation, our crime scene if you will, to see if we can definitively identify the Rapture in relation with the other events of the Apocalypse. Finally we will sum up what the Bible has had to say, come to a conclusion as to whether or not the timing of the Rapture is knowable and, if so, when it will occur. Let's begin our inquiry. Do you love a good mystery? "Come Watson, the game is afoot!"