

The Case of the Missing Saints

(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)

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(All scripture references are from the King James Version of the Bible.)

Introduction

Here is a mystery to be solved. When will the Rapture occur? Will it happen before the period of time that we call the Tribulation (pre-tribulation)? Will the Rapture occur in the middle of the Tribulation when the Antichrist breaks his seven-year peace treaty with Israel (mid-tribulation)? Or will it happen at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus Christ returns to the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (post-tribulation)? I've even read one author who believes that everyone is right and there will be three raptures: pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation. Who's right? Some of my friends are so sick of the subject that they've chosen to be pan-tribulationists; they believe that, "It will all pan out in the end!"

One study Bible I own contains nine different explanations of how the end times might unfold. With a subject as complex as Biblical eschatology it is probable that each of the different schools of thought will have part of the truth and at the same time be partially in error. As we survey these widely varying opinions, our common sense tells us that much of what is being proposed concerning the end times is certainly no more than speculation and the teaching of men. Any trained detective surveying this scene would immediately suspect that the whole truth has yet to be found. For when the truth comes to light, most of the opinions pass away.

Under these circumstances, I'm not surprised that many of the people I know are either confused about the timing of the Rapture, have given up on ever knowing when it will occur, or have simply chosen to accept the position of a recognized teacher or other authority figure. But is this the way it should be? Was it God's intention for it to be this way? I for one don't think so! In Acts 17:11b we're told that the Bereans "...received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." I believe that we should do likewise.

Psalm 119:160a says that, "Thy word is true from the beginning..." In my personal study of the Rapture, I've yet to find anyone who has brought together all of the scriptures concerning the Rapture to see what they say about when it will occur. What I have found is that they tend to fall into one of two common errors of Biblical interpretation. Either they take a couple of scriptures, sometimes out of context, put them together and jump to a conclusion. Or they already have their minds made up, holding a predetermined doctrinal position, and then interpret the scriptures to fit their view. In this second case, scriptures that support the doctrinal position are emphasized and those that don't are ignored or explained away. We need to let the whole Bible speak to us. And we must develop our doctrines from the Bible. When we turn this around and interpret the Bible based on our doctrines, we are prone to get into trouble by painting ourselves into a corner of misinterpretation. Or to put it another way, when the complete teaching of the Bible and a doctrine disagrees, guess which one is wrong?

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It is written in Proverbs 18:13, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Is it possible to set aside our preliminary conclusions and the doctrines we’ve been taught about the Rapture? Can we be open-minded and search the scriptures to let the Bible speak for itself? That’s my purpose for writing this article. I’ve done the legwork and searched the scriptures for those passages that testify about the Rapture. We will analyze each passage to determine the Biblical facts concerning the Rapture. (Who, what, when, where, why, and how?) When we’ve finished, we will know when the scriptures say the Rapture will occur. Or, if it turns out that the scriptures are ambiguous, then we will know that the timing of the Rapture is unknowable and that any suggested time is mere supposition.

I will not try to win this case or sway the jury with brilliant or sophisticated arguments. If I persuade by my arguments, then the next teacher who has more persuasive arguments will be able to swing opinion to his position. But if our conviction is based on the complete truth of unchanging Holy Scripture, then even the most eloquent advocate of an erroneous position should not have the means to lead us astray.

With the complexity of the subject material and the wealth of information available, it would have been very easy for a competent author to expand this article into a book. That, however, would have defeated my desire to share the results of this investigation with a broader audience. Many times I’ve struggled over cutting the references down to just the essential verses while entire sections surrounding them were so rich. In the end, I felt it was best to keep the article short and concise, but I’ve also included broader references for those who enjoy digging deeper. I hope that the majority will be satisfied with this compromise.

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).

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. But, 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!"

"Behold, I tell you a mystery..."

The entire fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians is devoted to the resurrection. But, to study all of it would be beyond the scope of this article. What we're looking for, The Rapture, is introduced as the revelation of a mystery in verses 50-53. Teaching specifically about the resurrection of believers, this passage explains that the mortal (perishable) bodies we now have must be replaced with immortal (imperishable) bodies in order for us to receive our heavenly inheritance. When this resurrection of those who are spiritually alive occurs, it won't matter if we are physically alive or physically dead. If we are found righteous before God and our sins have been forgiven, then our bodies will be instantaneously transformed into immortal bodies.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

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.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:50-53).

According to this scripture, at the sounding of the "last trumpet" the Rapture will occur in conjunction with the resurrection of believers who have already died. Many have speculated about when this last trumpet will sound forth. Some of this speculation may have merit, but in this passage we are not told either which specific trumpet is to be the last trumpet or when it will be blown.

There is a second passage in this chapter that refers to the Rapture. It is contained in verses 20-23.

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

This passage tells us that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as a firstfruits offering. We who belong to him will be made alive when he returns. So our resurrection or rapture (if we're physically alive at the time) is also associated with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - The Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 15:22.

What? - We shall not all die, but those who are alive will be changed, 1 Cor. 15:51.

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- “The dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed,” 1 Cor. 15:52b.
- When?** - At Christ’s Second Coming, 1 Cor. 15:23.
 - In conjunction with the resurrection of the dead in Christ, 1 Cor. 15:51,52.
 - At the last trumpet, 1 Cor. 15:52.
- Where?** - From earth to the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. 15:50.
- Why?** - Because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” 1 Cor. 15:50.
 - For our corruptible bodies must be made incorruptible, 1 Cor. 15:53.
 - Our mortal bodies must be made immortal, 1 Cor. 15:53.
- How?** - “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” 1 Cor. 15:52.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant...”

In First Thessalonians, we are told that we should not be ignorant about the fate of believers who have died and that we should not grieve like those who are without hope. This is one place where we get the concept of the Rapture being the “blessed hope” of the saints. We are also told that the saints who are alive when the Rapture occurs will not precede those saints who have died. The “dead in Christ” will be resurrected first and then the living saints will be caught up together with them in the clouds where we will all meet the Lord in the air.

13 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.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 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.

16 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:

17 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.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

With respect to timing, this passage refers to the Second Coming of the Lord. The trumpet is again alluded to along with a shout and “the voice of the archangel.” Believers who remain alive until that day will be caught up in the clouds with the resurrected believers and our Lord will meet us there in the air. From that point and throughout eternity we will never again be separated from our Lord Jesus Christ.

The passage continues by affirming that the Thessalonians knew the times and the seasons when the Rapture would occur. It reminds them that this event comes like “a thief in the night” and as we saw above they will be taken to be with the Lord. In contrast to this, it warns that when nonbelievers think they are safe, then calamity will fall upon them suddenly and they will have no escape from it.

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

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3 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 (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

We are very fortunate indeed that the Thessalonians received this reminder of a fact they knew perfectly. For here we see that the Rapture occurs when our Lord comes like “a thief in the night.”

This passage wraps up with an exhortation to be prepared for this coming event. The coming of the thief should not surprise us. We are to remain awake and sober because we have hope of salvation and knowledge that the Thief is coming for us. We must avoid loosing our senses by becoming drunk or falling asleep in our faith while we wait for His return. Since we are destined for salvation and not for wrath, we are encouraged to comfort and build each other up in the knowledge of our faith and hope.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do (1 Thess. 5:4-11).

What is the wrath that we have escaped from? Is it some temporal discomfort, a punitive punishment, or is it the ultimate wrath of eternal damnation in the lake of fire? In the context of this passage it is not compared with some temporal grace or blessing but with salvation. Therefore, we should understand that the “wrath” spoken of here refers to eternal damnation. This is the “second death” in the lake of fire that is spoken of in Revelation 20:14,15. It is of course a comfort to know that we have been saved from this second death and will receive instead eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - The Lord Himself, 1 Thess. 4:16.

What? - All believers who remain alive will be caught up in the clouds together with believers who have been resurrected from the dead and meet the Lord in the air, 1 Thess. 4:17.

When? - At the coming of our Lord as “a thief in the night,” 1 Thess. 4:15, 5:2,4.

- At the shout of the Lord, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God, 1 Thess. 4:16.

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- Immediately after and joining with the resurrection of the dead in Christ, 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

Why? - Because “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation,” 1 Thess. 5:9.

How? - By the command of our Lord, 1 Thess. 4:16.

“Do you not remember...?”

Paul believed that the Thessalonians already knew everything they needed to know about the Rapture. Fortunately for us, however, he was soon to find out that they would need another reminder concerning the timing of the Rapture. Apparently, they had been told by sources other than the Apostle Paul that the day of the Lord had already come and gone. In Second Thessalonians 2:2, Paul notes three sources of this misinformation: by spirit, by word, and by letter. Paul refutes these worries by reminding the Thessalonians of something he had already taught them while he was with them. He writes in 2 Thess. 2:3, “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.” The passage then tells us that this man of sin and lawlessness will oppose God and exalt himself above God. He will even place his own throne in God’s temple and proclaim that he is God. This event has come to be known as the Desolating Sacrilege. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had taught them these things and that they knew what was restraining the man of sin so that he would be revealed at the appointed time. The passage ends with the assurance that the Lord will destroy the lawless one when he returns.

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2 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 Christ is at hand.

3 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;

4 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.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

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

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming (2 Thess. 2:1-8).

It is apparent that 2 Thess. 2:1-8 is referring to the Rapture, the same event that we just looked at in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11. There are three specific phrases used in each passage that show they are tightly connected to each other. The first phrase is “the coming of the Lord” in 1 Thess. 4:15 and “the coming of our Lord” in 2 Thess. 2:1. Secondly, the scripture in 1 Thess. 4:17 says, “we ... shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord” and 2 Thess. 2:1 tells of “our gathering together unto him.” The third phrase is “the day of the Lord” in 1 Thess. 5:2 and “the day of Christ” in 2 Thess. 2:2.

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From this passage, we can see that the Rapture will not occur “except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed” by installing himself as God in the temple. This man of sin is commonly referred to as the Antichrist and his desecration of God’s temple is known as the Desolating Sacrilege. It was described by Daniel the prophet in Dan. 11:29-39, by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 24:15 and Mark 13:14, and by John the Apostle in Rev. 13:1-18.

There has already been one and quite possibly two fulfillments of these prophecies. The Hellenistic king Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria conquered Jerusalem in 168 B.C. When he conquered the city he had a pig sacrificed on God’s alter in the temple. This is the archetype of the Desolating Sacrilege and led to the Maccabean revolt. The second possible fulfillment would be when Jerusalem and the Second Temple were destroyed by the Roman general (and later Emperor) Titus Vespasian in 70 A.D. There are differences of opinion about whether or not these are the actual fulfillment of the prophecies in Daniel and the gospels. There are also differences of opinion on whether or not these prophecies will have a double fulfillment. I will not be able to solve those issues in this article. All I will note is that the Rapture has not yet occurred and there is still the prophecy in Revelation 13:1-18 of yet another occurrence of the Desolating Sacrilege to come in the time of the Apocalypse.

We should not be deceived into believing the rapture has already occurred or that the day of the Lord has passed before this very obvious event takes place. This is a real event that has been literally fulfilled once and possibly twice before. It’s not a mystical event occurring in some spiritual sense. We should not be deceived into equating the physical temple of God that will be desecrated with the spiritual temples of the Holy Spirit, our bodies. The Desolating Sacrilege is an actual event that was revealed by the prophecies of Daniel and John. Our Lord Jesus Christ authenticated their words by his own testimony as referenced previously.

According to this passage, the Thessalonians knew what and who was restraining the man of lawlessness from coming before his appointed time. Unfortunately for us, however, we are not given that information in this passage. And I have never found even the suggestion of another Biblical reference that would provide these facts. Without a scripture reference, any suggested restraint for the man of sin is no more than the conjecture of man.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - Our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thess. 2:1.

What? - All living believers will be gathered to meet the Lord, 2 Thess. 2:1.

When? - At the coming of the Lord, 2 Thess. 2:1.

- After the Desolating Sacrilege, 2 Thess. 2:3,4.

“One day is as a thousand years”

The last passage we’ll study in the Epistles is found in the third chapter of the Apostle Peter’s second letter. In this chapter Peter provides a grand scope of history from the creation to the destruction of this world. Verses 8-10 tell us that the “day of the Lord” will last one thousand years. It will begin when Jesus Christ comes “as a thief in the night” which we saw in 1 Thess. 5:2 refers to the Rapture. The day of the Lord will end with the total annihilation of the heavens and the earth in preparation for the creation of new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

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8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:8-10).

If verse ten was pulled out of context and studied by itself, we might get the wrong idea that Christ's coming as a thief in the night referred to the literal day when the heavens and earth pass away. Taken in context with verse eight we see that this is not a literal day, but the millennial reign of our Lord. We can read more about this time in the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of Revelation. The real significance of this passage to our study is that it defines the boundaries and the length of the day of the Lord. Its duration is one thousand years. It begins with the Rapture and ends with the complete destruction of the current creation. We know that it begins with the Rapture because verse 10 says, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." We know that the destruction of the current creation is the last event because of the passage referenced in Revelation. After a thousand years have passed and the dead have been judged, it says in Rev. 21:1, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." It is not directly related to our study, but I must comment on verse nine. It tells us that the Lord's desire for mankind is salvation, not damnation.

Casebook Notes:

When? - As the first event initiating the day of the Lord, the millennial reign of Christ, 2 Pet. 3:10.

The testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ

We noted before we began this investigation that we would not be able to just look up the word rapture in the Bible because it doesn't appear in our English translations. Therefore, we are forced to search for the Rapture by its definition. As we've seen from the Epistles, the Rapture is the occasion when our Lord Jesus Christ comes as a thief in the clouds to gather all living believers unto Him. It occurs concurrently with the resurrection of those believers who have already died. We find this in Matthew 24:31 where our Lord says, "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." It is also found in Mark 13:27 where He tells us, "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." The second quote from Mark makes it explicitly evident that the four winds is a reference to the entire earth.

This testimony of our Lord is found in what has come to be called the Olivet discourse. It came about in the following way. In the days just prior to His crucifixion, Jesus revealed to his disciples that the Temple would be destroyed. Pondering this the disciples asked Him the following questions as recorded in Matt. 24:3b, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" We are fortunate that the disciples

asked these questions and preserved for us this deposition. Could we possibly find a more trustworthy witness than our Lord Jesus Christ? His testimony provides us with a broad survey of history beginning with the destruction of Herod's temple and ending with a chronology of the end times up to His return. So, let's examine the testimony of our Lord and see when He says the Rapture will occur.

“Tell us, when shall these things be?”

The Olivet discourse is recorded in the 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew, the 13th chapter of Mark and the 21st chapter of Luke. To keep things short, we will only look at Matthew. The Mark and Luke passages are noted for those who want to dig deeper. Below is a table containing the chronology of events recorded in these passages of scripture. In His testimony our Lord associates the Rapture with His coming. From the outline we see that this occurs between the Great Tribulation and the Judgment of the Nations.

Chronology of Events	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Destruction of the Temple	24:1,2	13:1,2	21:5,6
General Tribulation	24:3-14	13:3-13	21:7-19
Desolating Sacrilege/Great Tribulation	24:15-28	13:14-23	21:20-24
Rapture/Coming of the Lord	24:29-44	13:24-37	21:25-36
(Warnings/End Time Parables)	24:45-25:30		17:20-37
Jesus Judges the Nations	25:31-46		

In the section where the Lord speaks of His coming, we are told that immediately after the Great Tribulation there will be signs in the heavens foretelling the coming of the Son of Man. Then a trumpet will sound and the angels will gather together all believers both from the earth and from heaven.

29 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:

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.

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 (Matt. 24:29-31).

Here we again see that when our Lord returns to take His saints out of the world, He only comes to the clouds. Also, the resurrection of believers who have died occurs at the same time.

This section continues by providing two analogies. The first one is a positive parable taken from the fig tree. When a fig tree puts on leaves, we know that summer is beginning. In the same way, we will know that Our Lord is about to come for us when we see the signs occur that He told us to look for. The second analogy is a negative parable from the days of Noah. In those days life continued as usual until the flood came and destroyed all but Noah and his family.

Those who believed in God and prepared themselves by accepting His salvation were protected. Those who paid no attention to God's word were utterly surprised by their destruction.

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

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

37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Matt. 24:32-39).

We see in verse 36 that only the Father knows the specific time, the day and the hour, when our Lord shall come and gather us to Him. But the contrast between the two analogies is obvious. Those of us who know God's word should know the general timing, the season when our Lord is about to come for us. We will not know the exact day and hour of the Rapture, but we should not be surprised like those who have shunned God when they are left behind.

This section of scripture concludes with two warnings to watch and be ready for our Lord's return. The first warning tells of two people working together. They are in close association with one another. One is taken while the other is left behind. The second warning provides another allusion to our Lord's coming as a thief. A thief comes at an unexpected time. If it is known that a thief is coming, it is possible to take steps ahead of time to stop him. Because we don't know the specific time of the Rapture, we are warned to pay attention to the events that indicate the general time or the season. Then His coming won't surprise us like it will those who don't believe God or know His word.

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

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

43 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.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Matt. 24:29-44).

Even though we're told the general timing and several signs which will indicate that the Rapture and the Lord's return are near, we are also told that no one, except the Father, knows the day or the hour when it will occur. Some take this as an excuse for their lack of concern about

when the Rapture will occur. They simply assume that it is totally unknowable. However, these warnings were not given to let us be complacent, but as an exhortation to keep watch, to be alert and looking for the time when the Rapture will occur.

Casebook Notes:

- Who?** - The Lord Jesus Christ is the master thief and the angels are the bagmen, Matt. 24:30,31.
- What?** - All of the elect of God will be gathered from the four winds to meet the Lord in the clouds. Matt. 24:30,31.
- When?** - After the Desolating Sacrilege with the subsequent Great Tribulation and before the Judgment of the Nations, Matt. 24:1-25:46.
- After signs appear in the heavens, Matt. 24:30.
 - At the Lord's coming on the clouds, Matt.24:30.
 - At the sound of the trumpet, Matt. 24:31
 - Concurrently with the gathering of believers who have died, Matt. 24:31.
- Where?** - From the earth to be with the Lord in the Clouds, Matt. 24:30,31.
- How?** - Gathered by the angels, Matt. 24:31.

“The harvest is the end of the age”

One final passage of scripture we need to look at in the gospels is the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. In this parable we are told that the good and the bad will grow side by side until the harvest. Then God will have the angels gather the tares for a harvest of destruction and the wheat harvest will be gathered unto Him. This parable says:

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:24-30).

Later, the disciples asked the Lord to explain this parable to them. This is what He answered them:

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

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37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 13:36-43).

So we see that there will be two climactic harvests. One will consist of those who offend God and practice lawlessness. They will be cast into the fire where they will be in anguish. The other harvest will bring the righteous into the kingdom of their Father.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - The Son of Man and His angels, Matt. 13:41.

What? - God's righteous ones who are the harvest of wheat, Matt. 13:30, 39, 43.

When? - At the harvest, Matt. 13:30.

Where? - Into the kingdom of our Father, Matt. 13:43.

How? - Gathered by the angels, Matt. 13:39.

Navigating through the book of Revelation

So far we've gathered our facts about the Rapture from the teachings of the Apostles as recorded in the Epistles and the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Next we will look in Revelation to see if we can definitively find the Rapture in the events of the Apocalypse. Whenever we're about to go into unfamiliar territory, it is a good idea to consult a map and develop a feel for the country. In this section I've included some explanatory comments and an outline of Revelation to help us navigate through what for most students is indeed unfamiliar territory.

I don't pretend to understand all of the mysteries contained in the book of Revelation. I do, however, believe that a basic understanding of the structure of the book will help everyone navigate through it more easily. If Revelation were to be written today, it would be formatted like a newspaper or magazine. There would be several articles and several sidebars.

A sidebar is a short item that goes with, but is not part of a major article. It adds additional information on some person, place, thing, or event contained in the article it's attached to. Anyone may write a sidebar. It doesn't have to be written by the author of the article it is attached to. Sidebars are placed in any convenient location near the major article.

I've outlined Revelation showing its major articles and its sidebars. The sidebars are italicized in the outline and are labeled with an "S" preceding their number. If you've had trouble getting lost in Revelation, try reading with the outline. Skip over the sidebars. The narrative

should now read smoothly. Later, go back and pick up the information in the sidebars. Remember that they are placed in proximity to the part of the story they relate to. They may look backward, forward, or be concurrent with the narrative around them.

Outline of the Revelation of Jesus Christ

- I. Prologue/Vision of the Risen Christ (1:1-20)
 - II. Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)
 - III. Vision of Heaven and the Lamb (4:1-5:14)
 - IV. Redemption of the Earth (6:1-16:21)
 - A. First Seal, White Horse – Conqueror (6:1,2)
 - B. Second Seal, Red Horse – War (6:3,4)
 - C. Third Seal, Black Horse – Scales (6:5,6)
 - D. Fourth Seal, Gray Horse – Death (6:7,8)
 - E. Fifth Seal, Martyrs (6:9-11)
 - F. Sixth Seal, Great Earthquake (6:12-17)
 - S1. *Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)*
 - S2. *The Unnumbered Multitude (7:9-17)*
 - G. Seventh Seal, the Seven Trumpets (8:1-16:21)
 - 1. First Trumpet, Third of Vegetation Destroyed (8:7)
 - 2. Second Trumpet, Third of Sea Destroyed (8:8,9)
 - 3. Third Trumpet, Third of Fresh Water Made Bitter (8:10,11)
 - 4. Fourth Trumpet, Third of Light Darkened (8:12)
 - 5. Fifth Trumpet, Demonic Locusts (9:1-12)
 - 6. Sixth Trumpet, Third of Mankind Killed – No Repentance (9:13-21)
 - S1. *The Little Book – Seven Thunders (10:1-11)*
 - S2. *Measuring the Temple (11:1-2)*
 - S3. *The Two Witnesses (11:3-13)*
 - 7. Seventh Trumpet, the Seven Bowls (11:14-16:21)
 - S1. *The Woman, the Dragon, and the Man Child (12:1-6)*
 - S2. *War in Heaven, Satan Cast Down to Earth (12:7-17)*
 - S3. *The Two Beasts/Desolating Sacrilege (13:1-18)*
 - S4. *The Lamb and His Followers (14:1-5)*
 - S5. *The Angelic Announcements (14:6-13)*
 - S6. *The Two Harvests (14:14-20)*
 - S7. *Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues (15:1-16:1)*
 - a. First Bowl, Sores on People with the Mark (16:2)
 - b. Second Bowl, Sea Turns to Blood (16:3)
 - c. Third Bowl, Fresh Water Turns to Blood (16:4-7)
 - d. Fourth Bowl, Intense Heat – No Repentance (16:8,9)
 - e. Fifth Bowl, Darkness – No Repentance (16:10,11)
 - f. Sixth Bowl, Armies Gathered for Armageddon (16:12-16)
 - g. Seventh Bowl, Earthquake and Hail (16:17-21)
 - S13. *The Woman on the Beast (17:1-18)*
 - S14. *Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)*
- V. Jesus Christ Reigns One Thousand Years (19:1-20:15)

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- A. Marriage Supper of the Lamb (19:1-10)
- B. Vision of the King of Kings (19:11-16)
- C. Battle of Armageddon (19:17-21)
- D. Satan Bound for a Thousand Years (20:1-3)
- E. Judgment of the Nations (20:4-6)
- F. Satan Released/Final Rebellion (20:7-10)
- G. Resurrection and Judgment of the Dead (20:11-15)
- VI. New Heavens and New Earth (21:1-22:5)
- VII. Christ's Call/Epilogue (22:6-21)

My outline of Revelation contains forty-nine items, five sets of seven items and one set of fourteen items. Forty-nine is equal to seven times seven. Now before anyone gets too excited about this very perfect number, let me confess that I arbitrarily made it that way. When I surveyed my draft outline I noticed that there were already several sets of seven and that the total was close to forty-nine items. I just liked the idea of the outline equaling seven squared. So, I revisited the text containing the sets that did not equal a multiple of seven to see if they could logically be divided to fit my desired scheme. To my satisfaction, I found that I could easily do it with a clear conscience that I had not damaged the logical integrity of the outline. This still leaves the question of whether or not my arbitrary choice was inspired? I leave it to you the reader and the still small voice to decide. After all, I never said that it was my intent to remove all of the mystery from our faith but only to see what the Bible has to say about the timing of the Rapture.

Referring again to our analogy of a magazine, Revelation may be divided into seven distinct articles: the vision of the risen Christ, the letters to the seven churches, the vision of heaven and the Lamb, the redemption of the earth, the millennial reign of Christ, the new heavens and earth, and finally Christ's call to come to Him. The redemption of the earth is the largest article. It is divided into the seven seals. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls. This article also contains the entire set of fourteen sidebar articles. I subdivided only one other article. The millennial reign of Christ contains: the marriage supper of the Lamb, a vision of the King of Kings, the battle of Armageddon, the binding of Satan for one thousand years, the judgment of the nations, Satan's release and final rebellion, and the resurrection and judgment of the dead. Now that we know our way around the book of Revelation, our crime scene if you will, let's get out our magnifying glasses and see what we can find.

The Rapture in Revelation

Our task now is to determine, if possible, where the Rapture may be found within the events of Revelation. We have gathered many clues. By summarizing our Casebook Notes we see that we need to look for the following:

1. Signs in the Heavens – Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:24,25, and Luke 21:25,26.
2. The Last Trumpet – 1 Cor. 15:52, 1 Thess. 4:16, and Matt. 24:31.
3. Desolating Sacrilege/Great Tribulation – 2 Thess. 2:3,4, Matt. 24:1-25:46, Mark 13, and Luke 21:5-36.
4. The Two Harvests – Matt. 13:24-30 and Matt. 13:36-43.

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5. The Lord Coming in the Clouds – 1 Cor. 15:23, 1 Thess. 4:17, 2 Thess. 2:1, Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:26, and Luke 21:27,28.
6. The Voice of the Archangel – 1 Thess. 4:16.
7. The Shout of the Lord – 1 Thess. 4:16.
8. The Thief in the night – 1 Thess. 4:15, 5:2,4.
9. The day of the Lord – 2 Pet. 3:10 and 1 Cor. 15:23.
10. The resurrection of the living – 1 Cor. 15:51,52, 1 Thess. 4:15-17, Matt. 24:31, and Mark 13:27.
11. The judgement of the nations – Matt. 24:1-25:46.

Signs in the Heavens

We find unusual signs in the heavens spoken of in conjunction with the Sixth Seal (Rev. 6:12-17 – IV.F. on my outline) and the Fourth Trumpet (Rev. 8:12 – IV.G.4.).

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (Rev.6:12-17)?

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise (Rev. 8:12).

It appears that there will be a continual string of signs in the heavens much like the wars and rumors of wars along with the other birth pangs Jesus spoke of in His Olivet discourse.

The Last Trumpet

The last of the seven trumpets of Revelation is found in Rev. 11:15 (IV.G.7.). The sounding of the seventh trumpet seems to bring events to a final culmination. It includes the final seven bowl judgements and can be seen lasting from Rev. 11:15 through Rev. 16:21. We do not definitively know that this trumpet is the last trumpet spoken of in 1 Cor. 15:52. But, if we find the Rapture within this portion of Revelation, then it could fit.

After the Desolating Sacrilege and the Great Tribulation

The Desolating Sacrilege is described in the eighth sidebar (Rev. 13:1-18 – S8). It is in the midst of a group of sidebar articles located between the Seventh Trumpet and the First Bowl. We know from the passages we've reviewed in the gospels that this Desolating Sacrilege marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

The two Harvests

In Revelation 14:14-20 (sidebar S12), looking forward to the final seven judgments, we are told about two harvests which will occur. These are the final two climactic events that the human race will experience before the Lord begins his earthly reign. In the first one, the Son of Man reaps the harvest of the earth, which we are told is ripe. This is a look ahead to the rapture.

14 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 (Rev. 14:14-16).

The second harvest is of the vintage of the earth. This harvest of grapes is destined for wrath. They are gathered and thrown into the great winepress outside of the city where they are crushed. And we're told that blood will flow out of the winepress and rise as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of "a thousand and six hundred furlongs." This will occur at the battle of Armageddon.

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 (Rev. 14:17-20).

The order of gathering the harvest of the Lord and the vintage of the earth is not the same here in Revelation as it is in Matthew where the tares are gathered first and the wheat last. We must ask the obvious question, "Why?" Are these harvests different events? We don't have enough information to answer these questions at this time. We'll have to hold on to them until we learn a little more.

The Lord Coming in the Clouds

Referring back to the scripture of the two harvests, we see in Rev. 14:14 that the Son of Man is sitting on a white cloud with a sickle in His hand ready to take His harvest.

14 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 (Rev. 14:14).

The Voice of the Archangel

In the next verse, Rev. 14:15, an angel comes out of the temple and cries with a loud voice that it is time to reap the harvest.

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 (Rev. 14:15).

The voice of the archangel is referenced in 1 Thess. 4:16-17, which says:

16 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:
17 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 (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

This is not a definitive fulfillment of 1 Thess. 4:16, but it is a possibility.

The Shout of the Lord

In Rev. 16:1 a loud voice is heard coming from the temple. It commands seven angels to go forth and pour out the contents of their bowls on the earth. These are the final plagues with which the wrath of God on the earth is completed.

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth (Rev. 16:1).

Could this voice from the temple which commands the angels be the shout of the Lord referred to by 1 Thess. 4:16?

The Thief

We refer to the Rapture as the time when the Lord Jesus Christ gathers his own from the ends of the earth and the ends of heaven. It is also referred to as the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14 and Acts 24:15) or the resurrection of the living (John 5:29). But, perhaps our most common association is as the time when our Lord Jesus Christ comes like a thief to steal His own out of the world. We see this in Matt. 24:43, Luke 12:39, and 1 Thess. 5:2,4. About the Rapture

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we are also admonished to “watch” in Matt. 24:42-44, Matt. 25:13, Mark 13:32-37, Luke 12:35-40, and 1 Thess. 5:6-7.

Is the time when the Lord comes like a thief found in Revelation? Yes, in the sixth bowl judgment that is found in Rev. 16:12-16 (IV.G.7.f.). Here we see that the Euphrates River will be dried up to allow the armies of the East to come to the battle of Armageddon. Three evil spirits will be let loose to gather the kings of the whole earth to the battle. Then, at that time, Jesus tells us that He will come as a thief and we will be blessed if we watch and keep our clothes so that we will not be seen in our shame and nakedness. Finally, we’re told that the mobilization of the armies will be completed when they are gathered together at Armageddon.

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

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.

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16).

Most commentators either ignore verse 15 or they treat it as a misplaced promise that we will miss all of this. However, the Holy Spirit doesn’t make mistakes. This verse didn’t get lost in the heavenly word processor and then get pasted here by accident. Neither did Jesus ask the angels to spread the pages of Revelation out so He could throw a dart to randomly find a place for this extra verse. No, Jesus tells us explicitly here in His Revelation that the Rapture will occur during the time of the sixth bowl judgment, while the world’s armies are gathering for the battle of Armageddon.

How long will it take to gather these armies? In the Persian Gulf war of 1990, it took the allies six months to gather enough men and materials to push the army of Iraq out of Kuwait. For this battle angels will help to prepare the way and many of the armies will be close by. Will three months, a season, be long enough to gather them together? We see, then, that this passage does not reveal the day or the hour of the Rapture, but only the general season when it will occur.

Now, remember the question we’re holding? Why is the order of the harvests we see in Matthew and Revelation different? We see from the passage we just looked at that the Rapture occurs while the armies are gathering for Armageddon. The Rapture occurs in a moment, at a single point in time. It will take a season of undefined length for the armies to gather. So, the harvest of the vintage of the earth or the tares begins first but finishes last. Therefore, either order would be appropriate. If one’s perspective was the start of the harvest, then the harvest of the tares begins before the harvest of the wheat. On the other hand, if the end of the harvest is in view, then God’s grain is harvested first followed by the harvest of the vintage of the earth.

The day of the Lord

The day of the Lord or Christ's millennial reign is found in Rev. 19:1-20:15 (V.). We know from 2 Pet. 3:10 that the Rapture is the first or initiating event of this day. Here there is some overlap with the preceding events in the article on the Redemption of the Earth (IV.). For we saw above that the Rapture occurs during the sixth bowl judgement (IV.G.7.f.). We then attend the marriage supper of the Lamb that is found in Rev. 19:1-10 (V.A.). Then we return with our Lord to the earth for the Battle of Armageddon in Rev. 19:17-21 (V.C.).

The First Resurrection

Following the battle of Armageddon and its conclusion with the binding of Satan for a thousand years, we find another reference to the Rapture in Rev. 20:4-6 (V.E.). Here we're told about the Lord's followers who return with Him at His Second Coming. They have been resurrected and will reign with Him during his millennial reign. We are told specifically in verse five that, "This is the first resurrection." We have seen that the Rapture and the resurrection of the dead in Christ occurs at the same time. In fact, in 1 Thess. 4:16b,17 we're told, "...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."

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

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. 20:4-6).

There is one group of believers that is specifically mentioned as part of this first resurrection. They are the martyrs who would not receive the mark of the beast or worship him. They have obviously lived and were martyred during the great tribulation. Here we see that the first resurrection, the Rapture, can not occur before the tribulation or these believers could not have a part in it.

The judgement of the nations

We saw in the outline of the Olivet discourse in the gospels that the Rapture would precede the judgement of the nations. There is still consistency with Revelation as the judgement of the nations is found in the passage we just looked at (Rev. 20:4-6 – V.E.). Here we have been raptured and returned with our Lord to judge the world.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - Our Lord Jesus Christ in the role of a thief, Rev. 16:15.

What? - The harvest of the earth and the first resurrection, Rev. 14:14-16 and Rev. 20:4-6.

When? - During the sixth bowl judgment, while the armies are gathering for the battle of Armageddon, Rev. 16:12-16.

Where? - From the earth to be with the Lord, Rev. 20:6.

Why? - Because the harvest is ripe, to escape the second death, to be priests of God, and to reign with Christ a thousand years, Rev. 14:15 and Rev. 20:6.

How? - By the sickle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Rev. 14:16.

The solution of our mystery

The Rapture is defined as the transportation of living believers from mortal existence on the earth to eternal existence with the Lord Jesus Christ. It will be equivalent to resurrection for those who experience it because their mortal bodies will be instantaneously changed into immortal bodies without passing through death. This is necessary in order to receive eternal inheritance because the mortal cannot inherit what is immortal. The Rapture and the resurrection of the just are effectively a single event. They occur at the same time and have the same purpose, to provide all those who are spiritually alive with immortal bodies and gather them to the Lord.

We have seen from our study of the pertinent scriptures that the Rapture is associated with the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in fact the very first event that ushers in the day of the Lord (the millennial reign of Christ). Our Lord will come as a thief in the night to steal us out of the world and take us to be in heaven with Him. When the Lord comes as a thief, He will only descend to the clouds and the angels will gather all believers, both from heaven and from earth, to him. This is the Bridegroom coming for His Bride. We will go with Him to the marriage supper of the Lamb and we will forever remain with our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not know the specific time, the day or the hour, when the Rapture will occur. We are, however, supposed to know the general time, the season, when it will occur. There are several specific, observable major events that will precede the Rapture. They include unusual signs in the heavens, the Desolating Sacrilege, and most of the Great Tribulation. Because we don't know the specific time when the Rapture will occur, we are to stay awake and watch for the signs that declare the season of the Rapture so we won't be unprepared or surprised when the Lord comes for us.

The Rapture is the first of several events that make up the Second Coming of our Lord. The Bible in Rev. 16:15 tells us that the Lord will come as a thief during the sixth bowl judgment. This is the season when the armies are gathering for the Battle of Armageddon. Other initiating events of the day of the Lord include the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the Battle of Armageddon, the binding of Satan (for one thousand years), and the Judgment of the Nations. The final removal of unrighteous men from the earth at the start of Christ's millennial reign occurs at the Judgment of the Nations when the Lord separates the sheep from the goats. We see therefore, that the current age of grace we are living in does not end prior to the kingdom age (millennial reign of Christ) that the Lord is coming to establish. There is an overlapping time of transition between these two periods that lasts from the Rapture until the completion of the Judgment of the Nations.

To sum up, we do not know the specific time, the day and the hour, that the Rapture will occur. However, the scriptures are consistent in teaching its general timing. The Rapture will occur very near the end of the Tribulation while the world's armies under the leadership of the Antichrist are gathering for the battle of Armageddon. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, we

will be changed. We will be gathered together with believers who have already died. And we will become the Bride of Christ. In a grand resurrection of the (spiritually) living we will all receive immortal bodies, which are our wedding garments. The Lord our Bridegroom will take us to attend the banquet He has prepared for His Bride, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Then we will come back with the Lord when He physically returns to defeat the Antichrist and judge the earth. And we will reign with Him for a thousand years.

This does not agree with any of the commonly held positions for the timing of the Rapture. It is not pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, nor post-tribulation in the traditional sense. Since we don't know what day or hour our Lord will come for us, we must be aware of the signs that indicate the season of the Rapture. We are exhorted to avoid spiritual complacency and to keep alert or the return of our Lord Jesus Christ could be an unpleasant surprise instead of a joyful reunion.

Well, it has been an interesting case. I'm glad that you've shared it with me my fellow sleuths. Together we investigated the Epistles, read the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then traced our way through the story of Revelation. Everything tracked in the outline of Revelation as we expected it to. Of the eleven items we were looking for, we definitely found eight of them. For the remaining three items we found possibilities though we couldn't definitively say that we knew we had found exactly what was referenced in the Gospels and Epistles. From the weight of the evidence it appears to be an open and shut case. So, the time has come to submit our evidence to the court of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Part Two: Yes, but what about...?

If you've made it this far, you're probably wondering about all of those persuasive arguments for other positions concerning when the Rapture will occur. Proverbs 18:17 tells us that: "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." In this section we'll take a look at a few of the arguments which are commonly brought up for other positions and see if we can provide an adequate rebuttal to them.

Isn't the Church removed before the Tribulation?

One argument for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture based on a Greek word study goes something like this. The Greek word for the church, *ekklesia*, occurs many times in the first three chapters of Revelation and then is never used again in the rest of the book. Therefore showing that the church is not on the earth during the tribulation since it was so prominent before the tribulation, but isn't mentioned in it.

This is a very scholarly sounding argument since it is based on a linguistic study of the text. Since very few people are students of New Testament Greek and can't study it for themselves, they of necessity must take the scholar's word for it. However, when we take a critical look at this argument, we find that it contains a fatal flaw of logic. Refer back to my outline of Revelation. The first three chapters contain the revelation of the risen Christ and his letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Since He is addressing specific historical churches of the day, it is not surprising that the Lord uses the word translated "church" quite often in this section. From chapter four on, however, the subject changes to the redemption of the earth, the millennial reign of Christ and the new heavens and the new earth. It should not be surprising that when the church is no longer the subject, that the word for it is no longer used.

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To draw an analogy, let's say that when my daughter was in college she wrote me a letter. On page one she wrote about all of the plans she had for school until the end of the term. It's probable that she would mention the college several times. If on page two she changed the subject to her plans for summer vacation, she probably wouldn't mention the school at all. Now I doubt that anyone would consider me a great scholar if I jumped to the conclusion that at the end of May my daughter's college would cease to exist. But, that is exactly what this argument does to the church in Revelation. The analysis needs to go a step deeper to determine whether or not the subject has changed. We know that it has.

Taking a different tact into the study of the Greek word *ekklesia*, it has been transliterated into our language as *ecclesia*. In its many forms it refers to church things, especially the organization with its principles, practices and activities. In our common usage, when we speak about the church our usual reference is to the buildings we meet in. I will guarantee that our church buildings, organizations, principles, practices and activities will not be raptured. God has no use for them in heaven.

Ecclesia's literal meaning is "called out ones." Its technical meaning in the Christian context is a gathering of the saints, especially for worship. If believers can be found in the Tribulation, then the church, the *ecclesia*, is there by definition. Can we find these people in Revelation in the chapters dealing with the tribulation? Yes!

17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17).

12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12).

Who are those who obey God's commandments? They are the Jews. Who are those who hold to the testimony of Jesus and remain faithful to Him? They are Christians!

The inclusive term saints is used throughout the Bible for all of God's elect. Specifically in Revelation we find them in the following verses.

7(a) And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them (Rev. 13:7a).

10(b) Here is the patience and the faith of the saints (Rev. 13:10b).

6(a) And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17:6a).

So, we see that God's elect people, both Christians and Jews are in the tribulation. When the Rapture occurs, it is believers, saints, all of God's elect who will be taken to heaven.

Doesn't the Holy Spirit leave to make way for the Antichrist?

This is not really an argument for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. It is rather a logical result of Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine. A logical deduction cannot be used as a proof for the premise it

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is derived from. The logic goes something like this. Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine states that the Church is removed prior to the Tribulation. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost initiated the Church. Therefore, logically, if the Church is removed, it can be deduced that the Holy Spirit will also be removed. This logical deduction is then applied to the following verses we already looked at in 2 Thessalonians.

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way (2 Thess. 2:6,7).

And the assumption is made that the Holy Spirit is the one who is restraining the lawless one.

We have already shown that the Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation while the armies are gathering for the battle of Armageddon. We have also shown that there are Christians in the Tribulation. Having negated both the primary and the secondary premises for this argument, the deduction is also shown to be false. The assumption that follows the deduction is seen then as no more than an unsupported speculation of man.

The Thessalonians were told who was restraining the lawless one. However, this scripture does not reveal his identity to us. I believe that the Holy Spirit will continue His ministry of convicting the world of sin and empowering the saints to live for the Lord Jesus Christ until the Lord returns.

Isn't the Church seen in heaven dressed in white robes in Rev. 7:9-17?

Many have taught that the Church is seen in heaven with the Lord during the Tribulation based on the following passage in Revelation.

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

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17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes (Rev. 7:9-17).

It can be noted here that in verse 14 we are told that these have come out of the great tribulation, not that they came out before the Tribulation. We don't however need to depend just on the wording to understand who these are. We were told specifically who they are when they were given their white robes in Rev. 6:9-11.

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9-11).

These are certainly God's saints in heaven, but we see that they are in heaven by means of martyrdom and not by means of the Rapture. They are given the white robes of Christ's righteousness to cover them because they have not yet received their resurrected bodies.

Isn't the world evangelized by the 144,000 after the Church is removed?

Another concept that is often taught in conjunction with the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is that after the church is removed, many will be brought to the knowledge of the Lord by 144,000 Jews who become "super" evangelists. We are introduced to these 144,000 when they have the seal of God placed on their foreheads.

1 And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

4 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel (Rev. 7:1-4).

Verses 5-8 continue with the catalog of those who are sealed (twelve thousand from each of the tribes of Israel). The next time we see these 144,000 they are in heaven.

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1 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

3 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

5 And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God (Rev. 14:1-5).

Nowhere are we told what these 144,000 have any particular mission to perform. They are simply identified as firstfruits which have been “redeemed from among men.” Since the only way to get to heaven before the Rapture is through death, it would be much more logical to assume that they were sealed unto martyrdom than anything else. Whatever we choose to believe about the 144,000, it should be understood that it is simply our own conjecture and not scriptural fact.

What about the tribulation saints?

Another Pre-Tribulation Rapture teaching says that after the Church is raptured, many who have known about the end times but haven't believed will then believe because of the Rapture. The 144,000 Jews we just dealt with will evangelize others. These new believers then become a special class of Christians called “tribulation saints.” Well, there will be a period of time the Bible calls the Tribulation. And there will be saints in the Tribulation as we have already seen. But the term tribulation saints does not appear in the Bible. The Bible makes no distinction between believers before the Tribulation and those in the Tribulation. This term and concept are nothing more than the invention of those who advocate a Pre-Tribulation Rapture to explain why God's elect are still found in the Tribulation after they have supposedly been raptured away.

What about the seventieth week of Daniel?

In Daniel 9:24-27 the angel Gabriel delivers a message to Daniel. Gabriel tells him that God has allotted seventy weeks unto Daniel's people, the Jews, to fulfill His purposes in them. The weeks are weeks of years, or to put it another way each week represents seven years. These seventy weeks (490 years) are further broken up into periods of seven weeks (49 years), sixty-two weeks (434 years) and one week (7 years). The first sixty-nine weeks (483 years) are accounted for in the period between the time Daniel received the message and the time when the Messiah was cut off. This leaves one week (7 years) in which God will use the Jews to demonstrate his purposes in the earth in a special way. This last week is associated with the time when the Anti-Christ makes a seven-year covenant with Israel. There has been a gap of almost two thousand years since the Messiah was cut off and still the last week of years has not happened. I believe that it will be fulfilled just as the prophecy of the first 69 weeks was fulfilled. I believe that it is quite likely that it will be fulfilled within my lifetime.

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Many who believe that the rapture will occur before the Tribulation see the church as a gap filler that didn't exist during the first sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy and must be removed before the last week can be fulfilled. It would take a book to deal with this in any fullness and many books have been written both for and against this position. All I will say about it here is that I have never found conclusive arguments from scripture to convince me that the church must be removed from the earth for this prophecy to be fulfilled. In fact, I find ample evidence in scripture to convince me that not only will the church not be removed, but that believing Jews and Christians will actually be coming together in some form of unity as the end of the age approaches.

First, I see in scripture that the mission of God's chosen people, Israel, was to bring all of mankind to a knowledge of God. They were also chosen to be the people from whom the Messiah came. Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel, died for the sins of all and brought the gift of salvation to all of mankind. When the nation of Israel rejected the Messiah (though not all Jews rejected Him) the task of spreading the gospel fell primarily to the gentiles who soon became the majority of believers in Jesus Christ. Paul deals with this mystery extensively in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of his letter to the church at Rome. Toward the end of this passage in 11:11-36 he tells us that Israel's rejection of the Messiah is not final. He likens the gentiles to branches from a wild olive tree that have been grafted onto a domestic olive tree whose root is Christ. The Jews are portrayed as branches that have been broken off from this tree. But, Paul tells us that the natural branches, the Jews, will be grafted back into the tree with us when they come to believe in the Messiah. There is no hint that the gentiles must be removed in order for the Jews to be restored.

Paul also wrote concerning the coming together of the Jews and the gentiles in Christ in his letter to the Ephesians. Here he likens this joining as the coming together of two men into one new man:

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:14-18).

We see this come to fruition during the time of the Tribulation in a couple of passages we have already looked at in Revelation. Here the two groups are referenced together, both those who keep God's commandments and those who have faith in Jesus.

17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17).

12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12).

Finally, the prophet Isaiah also foresaw his own participation in the resurrection of the just:

19 Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

20 Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

21 For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain (Is. 26:19-21).

So, it is not necessary for the church to be removed prior to the tribulation for God's purposes to be fulfilled. And there is ample Biblical evidence to show that to the contrary all of God's saints, the Jews and the Church (God's elect from every nation, tribe, and tongue), are coming closer together as the end of the age nears.

When will the number of the gentiles be complete?

Another teaching associated with the doctrine of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is that it will occur when the number of the gentiles is complete. This comes from Paul's letter to the Romans where we're told:

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in (Rom 11:25).

But have we considered when this will occur. Like the rapture, there is no scripture that says, "The number of the gentiles is now complete." We do know however, what it takes to get saved, repentance and believing in Jesus for salvation.

Can we find a time in the period of the Apocalypse when mankind will no longer repent and turn to our Lord for salvation? Yes, in the time of the Sixth Trumpet we're told:

20 And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:

21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts (Rev. 9:20,21).

This lack of repentance leads to the Seventh Trumpet that contains the final seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth. During the pouring out of these bowls, unsaved mankind is given more opportunities to repent, but twice more we are told that they refuse to do so.

8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.

9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds (Rev. 16:8-11).

Mankind's continued lack of repentance leads to the Sixth Bowl judgement where the armies of the world are gathered for the battle of Armageddon. And as we've seen already, this is the season in which the rapture occurs. The teaching is correct that the rapture will occur when the number of the gentiles is complete, but the assumed pre-tribulation timing is not. For when mankind stops repenting and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, then He will remove His own from the world. After which, He will return to unrepentant mankind as their conqueror and judge.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that Abner Doubleday was prophetic or that God is a baseball fan. I'm sure that it is just a coincidence, but it appears that for mankind in this age in which we live it will be three strikes and their out. May we labor in the harvest to bring as many of them as possible to salvation before time runs out.

What about the Doctrine of Immediacy?

The doctrine of immediacy says that there is nothing that needs to happen before the Lord returns to take His elect to be with Him. Our Lord could return for us immediately, at any moment. This is a doctrine held by many Pre-Tribulationists. One resultant benefit that is seen to flow from this doctrine is a state of urgency concerning salvation because at any moment we could find ourselves before the judgment seat of our Lord.

We don't need this doctrine, however, to maintain this urgency. Scriptures like the Parable of the Rich Fool support it just as well:

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).

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We should never lose sight of the fact that no amount of time has been guaranteed to us and we could at any moment be required to stand before our Lord. Accidents, disease, wars, violence, and natural disasters can all swiftly place us before our Lord. Sometimes babies in their cribs just stop breathing. Even young athletes in their prime, for no apparent reason, have simply crumpled to the ground when God has called them to stand before Him. No, an imminent rapture is not required to be urgent about salvation. We are never more than a heartbeat away from heaven.

But what does the Lord say about His immediate return? Throughout His ministry, Jesus continually dealt with the fact that the Jews expected the immediate establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. In response to this, Jesus told them that He would be going away.

11 And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

12 He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return (Luke 19:11,12).

The passage continues on to tell the story of the talents. A reminder that our Lord expects us to produce fruit while we wait for Him.

John also deals with this subject in his gospel. Peter had asked the Lord what would happen to John. Jesus answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" From this a rumor spread that the Lord would return before John died. In his gospel John refuted this assumption.

20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true (John 21:20-24).

I further submit that the entire epistle of Second Thessalonians was specifically written to deal with the problems brought about by an assumption that the Lord's return is imminent. The first chapter introduces the subject. We saw earlier that the second chapter provides teaching on when the Rapture will occur. It specifically says that the Desolating Sacrilege must occur first. The third chapter deals with the practical problem of those who have become disorderly, thinking that there is no longer a reason to work because the Lord's return is imminent. The solution is to stop feeding them and let God's natural laws take their course. When they become hungry, they will go back to work.

Will Christians experience God's wrath?

One mid-tribulation rapture position, the Pre-Wrath position, is based on the following verse in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians:

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 5:9).

This is then put together with the first place the word wrath is found in Revelation:

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (Rev 6:16,17)?

And voila, we have the rapture. The first weakness of this argument is that it doesn't deal with the scriptures that tell us when the rapture will occur. The second is that it doesn't take into account the context in which the word wrath is used in 1 Thes. 5:9. As we noted when we studied this passage above, wrath here is set in opposition to salvation. We therefore should understand it to mean the wrath of God that will consign unsaved mankind to eternal damnation, not to the temporal discomforts of God's wrath that will be poured out on the earth during the tribulation.

Will Christians experience God's wrath? No! But we certainly may experience persecution, wrath, and even martyrdom from the enemies of our souls.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved (Matt. 24:8-13).

7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 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.

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our 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.

11 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.

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12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. 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 (Rev. 12:7-12).

Many portions of scripture could be quoted here to show that God is able to protect us in times of trouble. I will quote only one:

7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee (Psalm 91:7).

But we must remember that while our view is primarily temporal, God is primarily concerned with our status for eternity.

10 Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom:

11 And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.

12 But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.

13 And it shall turn to you for a testimony.

14 Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:

15 For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

16 And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.

17 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

18 But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

19 In your patience possess ye your souls (Luke 21:10-19).

From our temporal view, I'm sure we would say that if we are killed a lot more than a hair of our head has perished. But from God's eternal view, because of the resurrection, He knows that even if we are martyred for Him not a single hair of our heads will be lost from eternity. Because it is true that God's elect are not destined for the wrath of eternal damnation, but we have been saved from the consequences of sin and are destined for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Summary of the three traditional views on the rapture

How then do I see the three traditional views of the rapture? Those who hold the Post-Tribulation view got closest to the right time for the Rapture. However, their view of the Rapture and Christ's physical return to the earth occurring on the same day does not take into account all that the Scriptures have to say about this subject. Those who hold to Mid-Tribulation views have rightly understood that God's elect will not experience His wrath. But, they missed the fact that God is more concerned with our eternal salvation than He is with our temporal protection. Those who propose a Pre-Tribulation Rapture seem to have done the best job in laying out the events of

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the end times and they rightly note that there are several events included in Christ's Second Coming. This includes the fact that the rapture and Christ's physical return to earth for the battle of Armageddon are separated by some period of time. They however do not correctly interpret the scriptures that tell us when the rapture will occur and erroneously place the Rapture prior to the Tribulation. As we've seen in the first section of this article, we don't know the day or the hour when the Rapture will occur, but it will be closer to seven days before Christ's physical return to earth than seven years.

The correct understanding of the Rapture occurring while the armies gather for the Battle of Armageddon solves most of the problems that are pointed out by each of the traditional positions with relation to the other two. It solves the problem of the lack of biblical support and the contrivances that are necessary for the pre-tribulation view. It deals with the scriptures that say when the rapture will occur unlike the mid-tribulation positions. Lastly, it does away with the problem of the U-turn rapture (meeting the Lord in the air as He is descending and immediately returning with Him to the earth) and the supposed ability to calculate the day of the Rapture once the Tribulation begins. These are associated with the post-tribulation view of when the Rapture will occur.

Epilog

How do you judge our case? Did we pass the cross-examination? We noted at the start of this article that we must develop our doctrines from the Bible and not interpret the Bible based on our doctrines or we would be prone to error. The Word of God is immutable, unchanging. Our interpretations and doctrines on the other hand should remain pliable. We need to be able to mold them continually, as our understanding of the Bible increases and then our view of God's revelation will get clearer and clearer as we learn. Maybe on our next case, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I'll get the benefit of your investigation into this amazing gift our God has given us, the Bible.

Part Three: My Personal Journey

If you're like me, you like to know a little about the background and motivation of the authors you read. Others are probably just wondering who this egotistical nut is who thinks he can do what scholars have failed to do for two-millennium. Then there are those who just like to get to know other people. If you don't fall into one of these categories, you can quit reading now and save some time.

Actually, I'm sure that many others have figured out when the Rapture will occur. Most of the people I know who have studied the Rapture on their own have come to the conclusion that it will occur at the end of the Tribulation. I just haven't met anyone else who has been able to explain it in this detail.

So, how did I come to this understanding? I was raised in a conservative evangelical church, which taught that the Rapture would occur prior to the Tribulation. While in my teens, I attended special services at my local church to learn about the end times. In these services, a time line was hung like a curtain across the front of the sanctuary to help us grasp the sequence of the major events included in the Apocalypse. However, it wasn't until I read Dr. Hal Lindsey's Late Great Planet Earth that I really understood that I might actually be living in the end times. I found the teaching of Dr. Lindsey concerning the Rapture to be in line with what I'd already been taught and his arguments were very persuasive. I had no reason to doubt, therefore, the validity of his

teaching. However, because of the lack of clear scriptural references to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, I remained persuaded, but unconvinced. And on this point I thought it would be very nice to be absolutely convinced. I wondered: “If I found all of the scriptures that talked about the Rapture, would they tell me when the Rapture would occur? Could I be convinced from the clear word of scripture?”

Over the next few years, I made it a habit to note any scriptures that talked about the Rapture. It was very frustrating though, because I didn’t seem to get any help from the Scriptures to indicate that the Rapture would occur before the Tribulation. If anything, they seemed to indicate that the Rapture would occur at the end of the Tribulation. I wasn’t ready yet to accept the idea that the teaching of the church of my youth and the popular scholars of my day could be wrong on this point. I thought that there must be more in the Scriptures on this subject and I was just missing it. However, as time passed, I had to admit that the Bible seemed to indicate that the Rapture would occur at the end of the Tribulation and that it wouldn’t hurt us to be prepared to go through the Tribulation.

Finally, I made the commitment to read completely through the New Testament and note every scripture I could find which talked about the Rapture. To my surprise, not only did some scriptures indicate that the Rapture would occur at the end of the Tribulation, but every scripture that included a reference to the timing of the Rapture agreed that it would occur at the end. I could not find a single scripture that referred to the Rapture that even hinted at the possibility of a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation fulfillment. I did however miss the one key verse (Rev. 16:15) that states specifically where the Rapture occurs in the chronology of Revelation. Though I was quite certain that the Rapture would occur near the end of the Tribulation, I wasn’t ready to openly advocate this position without specifically knowing when it would occur in the Revelation chronology. So, I continued to ponder it for a few more years.

Then, nearly ten years after I started my search (I didn’t say I was a quick study), I stumbled on the final piece of the puzzle. While listening to a teaching on the Pre-Tribulation Rapture, the pastor referenced Rev. 16:15 and noted how wonderful it was for the Lord to remind us that we’d already been raptured at the time the armies were gathering for Armageddon. But, while he had rightly identified that Rev. 16:15 was a reference to the Rapture, he totally missed its significance because of his pre-tribulation doctrinal position. But for me, it was the key piece I’d been looking for to complete the puzzle. Now I knew the actual place in the chronology of the book of Revelation where the scriptures specifically say the Rapture will occur. I went through the New Testament one more time to make sure I hadn’t missed anything else. Then I set down the outline for the teaching that makes up the body of this article.

It has been nearly twenty years since I wrote that outline. Many times I’ve desired to write an article based on it, but the Lord wouldn’t allow it. For the first ten years, I shared this teaching with anyone who would listen. However, I don’t think that I changed very many minds. My own brother rejected it until Rick Joyner endorsed the idea that we should prepare to go through the Tribulation. During the last ten years, I’ve shared this teaching with almost no one. First, because it seemed that almost everyone felt that they knew all there was to know about the Rapture and they were tired of hearing about it. And second, because the Lord had sent me to the desert and placed me in a cave (figuratively, of course) with Psalm 46:10 as my orders: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

After being sought out in my teens, twenties, and thirties, I found myself being literally ignored in my forties. Now as we approach the millennium, there seems to be a growing light at

the end of the tunnel. Believers are once again beginning to reconsider their understanding of the end times. And the Lord has given permission and provided the initiative for me to write this article. I hope that you've found it to be both enlightening and enjoyable.

Biography

I'm still in love with the beautiful wife of my youth, Karen, who I married in 1971. We live in Palmer Lake, Colorado with our two grown children, Lynnette and Jeremy. We are part of Golden Harvest Outreach Ministries in Colorado Springs, Colorado where we specialize in intercession and discipleship training. Both religion and engineering are areas in which I've studied, but I hold no formal degrees. I enjoy kayaking and skiing.

To their credit and my thanks, my parents brought me up in the knowledge of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I professed my faith and was baptized at the age of ten. The Lord and His people have been my passion since I came into a full knowledge of the Holy Spirit at the age of nineteen. I've served as a youth group leader, boy's group leader, men's group leader, Sunday school teacher, and home fellowship leader. I've been a retreat speaker and provided pulpit supply. I've been an Elder and served on church councils. Also, I've been a part time interim pastor.

I took my first paying job at the age of ten working as a ranch hand. While in college I worked as a telephone switchboard operator and an Emergency Medical Technician. Then I served two enlistments in the USAF as an Intelligence Operations Analyst. Between the Air Force and my present job, I worked as a professional woodcutter and a building materials store clerk. For the past fifteen years the Lord has graciously provided for us through Lockheed Martin Aerospace where I'm employed as a Systems Engineer.

I've yet to enter into the time of fulfillment of the Lord's plan for my life. And the length of time that the Lord is taking to train me makes me wonder if I'll have any time left to serve Him in the fullness of His purpose. In 1981, while I was stationed in Korea, I had the opportunity to attend a weeklong YWAM training course in Seoul. One thing I remember John Dawson saying as he taught was, "The longer the Lord takes to train you, the greater the assignment He has for you." It has been twenty-eight years of training so far. Oh boy, my assignment must really be a doozy! I know many others who live here in the Colorado Springs area who can relate to the way I feel. My current employment at Lockheed Martin is a gilded cage to be sure, but it is still Pharaoh's prison to me. I identify greatly with Psalm 105:19 where it is written: "Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him."

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