

The Case of the Missing Saints
(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)
Rockey Jackson - November 24, 1999
Section 1 of 13

(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. 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. 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. 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, 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. 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. However, that 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.