

The Case of the Missing Saints
(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)
Rockey Jackson - November 24, 1999
Section 7 of 13

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. However, the contrast between the two analogies is obvious. Those of us who know God's word should know the general timing, the season when

The Case of the Missing Saints - Testimony

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.