

The Second Coming of Jesus

A Biblical Look at the Rapture

By Steve Pruitt

When I was in high school I wrote a term paper on three different views of the end times and the rapture of the church. I learned that there are a group of people who believe that the church will be “snatched away” from the earth before a terrible seven years of tribulation. This is known as a pre-tribulation rapture view. There is also a group of people who believe the church will be taken from the earth in the middle of a seven years tribulation period. Yet another group of people believe in a “taking away” at the end of a seven year tribulation. These last two views are known as mid-tribulation and post-tribulation views.

As a boy growing up I was taught the pre-tribulation view. All the preachers I heard speak on the subject taught that the world would grow more and more sinful, that the devil would have more and more control and the greatest hope for the church was for Jesus to come and take us out of all the chaos. In my teenage years I read a book by Ernest Angley titled “Raptured.” Not only did it scare me, it helped to mold my pre-tribulation theology of the second coming of Jesus; a view I held into early adulthood.

While in my mid-twenties I attended a conference in which one of the main speakers refuted pre-tribulation theology. I was offended at his frankness on the subject and decided to dive into the scriptures to prove that he was mistaken. It was during this quest that I realized that many of the scriptures used to support my pre-tribulation theology didn’t really say what I had been taught. As a consequence I began to examine more closely the scriptures to get a clearer understanding of end time theology.

Over the years I have believed that it really didn’t matter which one of the three views of the end times a person believed as long as they were ready when Jesus did come. However, in the last few years with the publishing of books and movies depicting the world after the rapture of the church, I have grown more and more concerned that many Christians have replaced scriptural truth with fiction.

As I mentioned before pre-tribulation teaching says that at any moment Jesus will return and remove the church from the earth. This “snatching away” will be a silent happening followed by seven years of the greatest tribulation man has ever experienced. Many have taught that during these seven years those who are “left behind” will have an opportunity to receive Christ as Savior. A person called the “Antichrist” will be revealed and will rule the earth until Jesus comes back seven years later with the church to destroy all who worship the “Antichrist” and his world system. These are the basic teachings of this view; details probably vary from teacher to teacher.

There are some aspects of this teaching that raise serious questions in my mind. One question is; if there is a literal seven year tribulation period does it start the very day the church is taken out of the earth? Is it exactly seven years to the day? If so would the people who are left behind not be able to know when Jesus would return the next time? It seems all they would have to do is count seven years and mark the calendar. However, Jesus taught that neither he nor the angels know when he is to return; only the Father.

Many preachers teach that all of the prophecies concerning the end times have been fulfilled that would delay the return of Christ. They teach that his return is imminent; it could happen any moment. If Jesus taught that only the Father knows the day of his return how do these preachers know it could happen any moment? When Jesus said that only the Father knows the time of his return was he talking about when he returns to rapture the church or when he returns after the seven year

tribulation period? Since Jesus did not make that distinction I must assume he was only speaking of one more return.

This raises some other serious questions. According to Jesus, how many times is he going to return? Did he teach a "Third Coming?" Does pre-tribulation rapture theology have Jesus coming back one too many times?

Let's look at some of the scriptures used to support a pre-tribulation rapture.

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Matthew 24:36-44 NKJV

Jesus said that when he returns the events on earth will resemble the events when God brought the flood in Noah's day. In Noah's day people were eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. This took place until the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and took all the evil people away. So, in the day Jesus returns people will be going about their business oblivious to the pending judgment. Jesus will catch them by surprise and they will be swept away in judgment.

Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one will be left. May I ask who was taken in the flood? Who was swept away by the judgment? The wicked were not "left behind" to get another chance at salvation. Noah and his family were not secretly transported away. They entered the ark in plain view.

Jesus also uses Lot as an example of the pending judgment before he returns.

Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Luke 17:28-30 NKJV

Jesus said the days of Lot were just like the days of Noah; wickedness abounded. Lot was taken out of the city before the judgment came. Like Noah he was given safe haven. The wicked were taken away in the judgment. They, like the wicked in Noah's day, were not "left behind" to get a second chance or to face Mr. Antichrist. In fact, it was Lot who was not removed from the earth. He and Noah were preserved.

In at least two parables Jesus teaches the removal of the wicked from the earth.

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Matthew 13:40-43 NKJV

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat

down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:47-50 NKJV

Jesus goes on to tell his disciples to watch for his return. In other words don't be one of those who are caught off guard by my coming and suffer the judgment awaiting the unrighteous.

Earlier, in Matthew 24, Jesus describes the tribulation of the last days.

And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:4-14 NKJV

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ! or There! do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Matthew 24:21-25 NKJV

Jesus makes no allusions to two separate tribulation periods. He only suggests one. One cannot read these passages and come to the conclusion that the righteous will not be on earth during the tribulation of the last days? Jesus plainly said to his disciples that they would be delivered up to tribulation, would be hated and killed for his name sake. He further said that those who endure to the end will be saved. Why would the days of tribulation be shortened for the sake of the elect if the elect were not there? If the gospel of the kingdom is going to be preached in all the world before the end comes, who is going to do it if the righteous are removed? How is it possible for the elect to be deceived during this time of tribulation if the elect are not around?

In the Revelation of Jesus Christ John is asked the identity of the great multitude. One of the elders answered, *These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* (Revelations 7:14 NKJV) How could this great multitude come out of the great tribulation if they were not in the great tribulation to begin with? It seems I would have to be in the bathroom before I could come out of the bathroom.

Therefore if they say to you, Look, He is in the desert! do not go out; or Look, He is in the inner rooms! do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the

Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 24:26-31 NKJV

Does Jesus describe a silent return and “snatching away” of the elect in these verses? He said that after the tribulation, the same tribulation that we have seen the elect participate, that the sun will darken, the moon will go dim, stars will fall and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then **all the people of the earth will see him** coming on the clouds. There will be a great trumpet blast by the angles and they will gather the elect. Following these verses Jesus gives the analogy of the days of Noah. Not once does Jesus suggest that he will remove the righteous from the earth before a great tribulation. Speaking of his disciples, Jesus prayed this prayer to the Father, *I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.* (John 17:15 NKJV)

Did the Apostle Paul teach a pre-tribulation rapture? There are some who would say yes. The most used scripture to support their claim is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (NKJV)

No where in this passage does Paul mention a pre-tribulation rapture. In fact he gives us the same account of the Lord’s return as Jesus did in Matthew 24:30-31. Jesus will appear in heaven, coming on the clouds. The angels will sound the trumpet and gather those who are his and we will meet the Lord in the air. Paul adds that the dead in Christ will rise first. No where do you find a secret “snatching away” of the righteous. The purpose of Paul’s exhortation was not to expound on the doctrine of the rapture, but to comfort the Thessalonian believers concerning their loved ones who had died.

The Greek word Paul uses for air in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is aer (ah-ayr’). According to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible this word means to breathe unconsciously, i.e. respire; by analogy, to blow; "air" (as naturally circumambient). Circumambient means surrounding or enclosing. Paul does not use the Greek word ouranos (oo-ran-os’) which is used in reference to the sky. Jesus used ouranos in Matthew 8:20 when he said, *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.* (NKJV) Instead, Paul uses the same word, aer, in Ephesians 2:2 as he does in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 when he speaks of Satan being the prince of the power of the air. He also uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 9:26 where he says he fights not as one who beats the air.

It is my perception that Paul was not speaking here of the righteous floating up into the sky. The way Paul uses this word seems to suggest that the event of being “caught up” is more dimensional than directional; being caught up in the spirit. It is at the point of being “caught up” that the bodies of the righteous will be changed from mortal to immortal.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we

shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 NKJV

Regardless of how you interpret “being caught up” there is nothing to suggest the secret removal of the church before the final days of tribulation on earth.

Paul continues in chapter 5 of Thessalonians.

I really don't need to write to you about how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, Everything is peaceful and secure, then disaster will fall upon them as suddenly as a woman's birth pains begin when her child is about to be born. And there will be no escape. But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 NLT

In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul writes this:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 NKJV

Paul told the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord would not come until the falling away comes first and the son of perdition is revealed. So, until you see these things happen don't believe anyone who tells you that the day of the Lord has begun. When these things happen know that the time for us to be gathered to Jesus is near. Paul was not teaching the believers that they would be meet the Lord before the appearance of an antichrist. (Note: Paul never uses the word antichrist.) In fact he says right the opposite. First the falling away; second the “man of sin” is revealed; third the church is gathered.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul wrote, *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.* Many bible teachers interpret the restrainer as being the Holy Spirit. They teach that it is not until the Holy Spirit is removed from the earth, the rapture of the church, that the antichrist will be revealed. The problem with this theology is that it contradicts what Paul wrote just a few verses before. He said that the gathering of the believers to Jesus would not happen until the “man of sin, the son of perdition” is revealed. He warned the Thessalonian believers not to be deceived by anyone who would tell them otherwise.

To believe that Paul was speaking in verse one of the gathering to Jesus after a seven year tribulation period one would have to believe that Paul was telling the Thessalonians they would be “left behind” in the pre-tribulation rapture. Why? Their gathering was not going to happen until after the revelation of the “man of sin.” Also, if the gathering to Jesus in verse one is post-rapture how is the “falling away” justified?

If the church is “snatched away” who falls away? All that is left is non-Christians. How do non-Christians fall away from the faith? The only conclusion one can draw is that Paul was speaking of only one return of Christ that would take place after a falling away and the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. No where in the letters to the Thessalonians does Paul even mention seven years of tribulation.

Many biblical scholars also teach that the rapture of the church happens after the third chapter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. They conclude this because, in their opinion, the church is not mentioned after this point. This would mean the church would not be on earth during the final tribulation and would not be subject to the terror of an antichrist. (Note: The word antichrist is not used in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.)

Is that what the Revelation teaches? In Revelation 12:17 the dragon or Satan made war with *all who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.* (NKJV) According to pre-tribulation rapture scholars this would have to take place after the church is raptured. Revelation 13:7 says the beast was *allowed make war with the saints.* Revelation 13:10 reads, *This means that God’s holy people must endure persecution patiently and remain faithful.* (NLT) We find almost these exact words in Revelation 14:12; *This means that God’s holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus.* (NLT) Again in Revelation 18:4 we find another reference to the church. With the fall of the sinful city Babylon a voice from heaven cries, *Come away from her my people. Do not take part in her sins.* This is the same admonishment the Apostle Paul makes to the Corinthian church.

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:17-18 NLT

In Revelation 16:15 Jesus says, *Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.* He speaks these words while the angels are pouring out the seven bowls of the seven last plagues. This surely takes place during the tribulation which means that Jesus had not yet returned. It further indicates that the saints were present during this time of tribulation. Where there are saints there is the church.

Some may argue that these passages in Revelations are references to “tribulation saints.” These are people who became believers after the rapture. However, we have already seen that Jesus said when he returns it will be like the days of Noah; there will be no more chances for salvation. The Apostle Paul agrees with this *And there will be no escape.* (I Thessalonians 5:3)

I recently read an article in which the author made this statement: “I believe there will be some saints left to help some repent and be saved in the Great Tribulation, but not many will convert because the Holy Spirit has been removed from the earth.” Not only is this statement contrary to scripture it is contradictory to itself.

The following was my response to the statement:

The premise for the Holy Spirit being removed from the earth is the "rapture" of the saints. So I ask, what spirit do the saints have who, according to this statement, are left behind? They can't be saints without having the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), hence the Holy Spirit cannot be removed from the earth unless all the saints are removed. In other words, it is impossible for saints to be left behind without the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit lives in them.

My next question is this: How did these "left behind" saints become saints? The answer: The Holy Spirit convicted them of sin (John 16:8) and they were born again by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). That is the only way a person can become a saint. So, if the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, then births us into the kingdom of God, how would it be possible

for anyone to be converted if the Holy Spirit is removed from the earth? The answer: They can't. Thus, no one left behind during a "great tribulation" can be saved if the Holy Spirit is not present.

Jesus nor Paul, nor John's revelation teach a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Those who do teach it do so only with the pre-conceived idea that there will be such an event. The scriptures, when read as they are written and within the context of their intention, do not support a pre-tribulation rapture theology.

There is only one more coming of Jesus and it won't be a secret. Before he comes there will be tribulation like we have never witnessed before. At least some Christians will most likely suffer immense persecution and some may even abandon the faith. But, those who endure to preach the gospel of the kingdom as a witness to the nations will be saved from the pending judgment that Jesus will release on those who have not loved his appearing.

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