

## WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN!

What a day that will be when Jesus returns as he promised: The trumpet of God will blast forth and one of His mighty archangels will herald the arrival of King Jesus who himself will command the dead in Christ to be raised up, and we who are alive at that time will be caught up ('raptured') together in the clouds with them. We will then escort King Jesus back to earth and he will sit on the throne in Jerusalem and the nations of the earth will enjoy world-wide righteousness and peace. As a young teenage believer I used to holler at the top of my singing voice,

“When we all see Jesus, what a day of rejoicing that will be; when we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory!”

Each day for me this Hope grows brighter. I can't wait for the Day when our glorious Saviour comes back and the saints go marching into the Kingdom of God. Oh, how I want to be in that number. I know you do too.

However, the Church of Jesus Christ is being lulled into a deadly slumber these days. We are told we are going to be caught up into the sky to meet our Lord in the air so as to escape the Time of the Big

Trouble, the Great Tribulation (GT for short), before it starts. Get ready, we are told. Jesus might come this minute, this day, any time, any moment. Lift off is coming.

So, the great Hope has become the great escape! Read any popular book from Christian book shelves (Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsay *et al* ), listen to the prevailing message from the pulpits of the best known evangelical preachers (Joseph Prince, Charles Stanley, Robert Jeffress, John Hagee, *et al* ) and this is our great Hope: The saints will go marching into the Kingdom before the Antichrist can get his wicked hands on the Church. Poor Israel is going to go through “Jacob’s Big Trouble”, but not the blood-bought believer in Christ’s Church. Won’t it be wonderful?

Well, sorry to sound a contrary voice, but read on please, for it might just wake you up from big-time coma injected into the veins of your spiritual life by the doctrine of men and not according to the sound words of Scripture.

I understand the confusion that genuine seeking Christians feel when it comes to the Second Coming prophecies. There are so many theories and permutations. What a muddle ... Are you pre-trib,

mid-trib, post-trib, partial rapture, full rapture ...  
Are you pre-mill., post-mill, a-mill. ... is the book of Revelation to be understood in an Historical, Ideal, Preterist or Futurist grid...? Etc. etc. etc. No wonder a lot of folks give up and say we can never understand prophecy, so why waste our time even trying?

This is a tragedy because 1 in 4 verses in the New Testament prophesies the Second Coming of Jesus and the End Time events preceding it. God wants us to understand. Surely He is not the Author of confusion of a Hope meant to comfort the saints and fortify us through trouble?

Now, I want to be fair to my brothers in Christ who read the Scriptures differently. I want to represent their pre-tribulation rapture view accurately. I don't want to knock down any straw man. And I want you to know I really believe they are genuine and have clear consciences when they announce that the saints will go marching out of this world before the Great Tribulation (GT). But as always, our question should be, what say the Scriptures? And please, feel free to test my interpretation by the very Scriptures we all love and appeal to. Do let me know where and if I am mis-reading, please. So here goes ...

The popular idea is that the Second Coming of Jesus will be in two phases. The first phase is a secret, unheralded, sign-less, imminent, any-moment phase called the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church. The second phase happens after the GT when Christ returns visibly and gloriously revealed with His saints to set up God's world-wide Kingdom. Meantime, the saints have been having a wonderful time in "heaven" at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, have received their rewards (in a 'spiritual', or non-material, body for they are not yet 're-united' to their new resurrected and immortalised bodies), and seem to be blissfully unaware the tragic and bloody events still happening back on earth.

You can search all you like prior to 1830 in the annals of Church history and you won't find this two-phase coming of Jesus anywhere. To be blunt then, the secret rapture theory is a Johnny-come-lately doctrine. In the 1830's in England the secret rapture interpretation was launched by members of a small denomination called The Brethren. Names like J.N. Darby and Schofield popularised the theory. However, there were certain of their number who abominated it. No less a name than George Muller of Bristol was one of the dissenters.

But the theory of the pre-trib rapture won the day and now it is the widely held view amongst The Brethren and evangelical Christianity as a whole.

Proponents of the theory (e.g. Ron Rhodes in his *The 8 Great Debates of Bible Prophecy: Understanding the Ongoing Controversies*) try to rescue this charge of it only being a recent fad, by saying that from time to time the Church has forgotten the great doctrines of the Bible, and they need to be rediscovered. Remember the Reformation and the doctrine of justification by faith? There you go. See. Sometimes you just have to dig up what has been buried from sight. It is likewise argued the pre-trib rapture is in the Scriptures, (even though nobody in the post-apostolic writers mentioned it) but it got lost, and just because nobody wrote about it during all the centuries since the apostles, that doesn't mean it isn't in the Bible after all. Hmm. I wonder ....

Perhaps the truth is much simpler. Perhaps the early Church Fathers didn't write about it because they never heard of it or knew about and it wasn't handed down from Jesus and his apostles? Perhaps they are just reading into Scripture something that never was there? I will shortly prove this is the

case. But let us state the pre-tribulation rapture view succinctly first.

The first plank in the pre-trib rapture armoury is that Jesus' coming for His church is *imminent* and no signs herald it because it can happen at any moment.

The second plank in their platform is that the GT will be when the wrath of God is unleashed on unbelieving humanity. It is unthinkable that believers who have been delivered from God's wrath should suffer *God's wrath* in the 7 years of the GT that ends this present evil age. Indeed, God has promised to keep us from this hour of trial hasn't He (Rev. 3:10)?

Third plank: No NT passage on the GT mentions the church (e.g. Matt. 13: 30,39-42,48-50; 24: 15-31; I Thess. 1:9-10; 5: 4-9; 2 Thess. 2:1-11.) Specifically, in the book of the Revelation the word 'church' is used 19 times in the first 3 chapters but the section dealing with the GT (chaps. 14-18) never mentions the church. The church is not mentioned again until the Second Coming of Christ in chapter 19. So the church is absent from the earth during God's outpoured great wrath on the world.

Fourth plank: God rescues His people before He judges the world. Enoch was translated before the Flood, Noah and his family were in the ark before the Flood, Lot was removed from Sodom before the fire fell, the firstborn of the Hebrews in Egypt were sheltered from the Death Angel before Egypt was judged, the spies were safely out of Jericho before the walls crumbled, etc. Will not God do that for His Church before His unleashed wrath in the GT?

So, how do we make headway through the maze? Here is the first simple and obvious key. First, the catching up of living Christians to meet the Lord in the air is *tied to the resurrection of the faithful dead*. (Better read that sentence again to be sure you really got its impact!) According to I Thess. 4: 16f the faithful Christians who are already dead at “the coming of the Lord” will “rise first” and then the living Christians “shall be caught up”.

The sequence is: Dead Christians will be raised up from their graves, and *then* the living will be snatched up with them. Yes, the two aspects are virtually simultaneous for this all happens “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Cor. 15:51f). But note the order in I Thess. 4: 16-17,

*“The dead in Christ shall rise first, **then** we who alive and remain shall be caught up together with them ...”*

**There will be no rapture until a resurrection takes place!** So, all we have to do now is locate when the resurrection of the faithful dead takes place and we will locate the timing of the rapture. Got key number 1? Good. Let's use it.

Can we find anywhere in the Bible a resurrection before the GT? Consider these facts ...

In Daniel 12:2 the resurrection of the faithful dead occurs immediately *after* the GT. Daniel 12:1 speaks of the GT as “a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time ...” Verse 2 follows the GT with the resurrection of the faithful, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life..” According to the prophet Daniel the resurrection of the faithful takes place at the conclusion of the GT. This is a *post-tribulation resurrection!*

Paul agrees with Daniel in I Cor. 15. The theme of that whole chapter is the resurrection from the dead. Christ is the first raised to immortality. Then faithful Christians will follow in one great end-time resurrection harvest (v.20,23). After discussing the

resurrection of the Christian dead Paul states this happens “in a moment of time” at the “last trumpet”. So when does “the last trumpet” blow?

Speaking of the resurrection of the faithful dead in Rev. 11:18, we learn, “the time has come to give the servants of God --- the prophets and the saints --- their reward”. John notes the timing: It happens at the last trumpet, the seventh trumpet. And this last trumpet sounds *after* the first 6 trumpets have sounded during the GT. This again is a *post*-tribulation resurrection.

Again, in Revelation 20:4 the resurrection of the dead happens *after* Jesus arrives to destroy the Beast (the Anti-Christ Man of Sin) and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20-21). I hate to sound repetitive, but this is yet again a *post* tribulation resurrection.

Paul agrees in I Thess. 5:2 – 4. The Day of the Lord brings “sudden destruction” to the unsuspecting wicked world at “the coming (*Parousia* or Presence) of the Lord (I Thess. 4:15f). Once again we observe the consistency of a *post* tribulation resurrection. Hang on ... what’s that? Do I hear a pre-trib objection? The objection runs like this: But doesn’t chapter 4 come before chapter 5, so why

can't the rapture in chapter 4 be a pre-trib. rapture before the wicked are destroyed in chapter 5?

Let's allow Paul to answer himself. It seems some folk mis-understood Paul between his First letter and his Second letter. Our modern pre-trib rapture suffers from the same mis-understanding. To clear up this falsehood Paul subsequently clarifies ...

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering (*episunagoogees* is the same word Jesus uses of the post tribulation gathering of the chosen in Matt. 24:31) together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come” (2 Thess. 2:1).

Here the “gathering” of the saints unto Jesus at His Coming will not happen until after two great signs occur. First, the great rebellion: *Apostasia* can mean the desertion from true doctrine and faith, or a rebellion depending on context. I prefer to translate it as the rebellion, because elsewhere in Scripture the man of Sin, the Anti-Christ, the Beast, rebels against the Most High God and all who receive his

mark will rage against the Lord God and His Christ. It is some rebellion too, for the Man of Sin blasphemes and boasts against the Most High God of heaven. Those who follow him do the same, hence the more appropriate translation “rebellion” rather than the usual desertion or “falling away” from the Faith, though of course both ideas are related, in that to desert God’s ways leads soon to outright rebellion, and so the one follows the other in consequence.

Second sign: The Man of Sin is revealed on the world’s stage, “before” the Day of the Lord comes.

Note it well. Paul says the Day of the Lord will not come until the great rebellion and the Man of Sin is on the world’s stage for the last 7 years of this present Age. So, the Day of the Lord’s Coming will not happen until the head of that rebellion, the Man of Sin, is revealed. Paul then goes on to say that destruction of the Man of Sin occurs at “the appearance of Christ’s Coming” (v. 8).

Putting this together with his earlier statements in I Thess. Chapters 4 & 5, Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 is speaking of a rapture or a gathering up that is *post* tribulation. The Day of the Lord is at the end of the GT.

The astute reader will have already spotted that we have given enough evidence to have answered the first plank of the pre-tribulation rapture theory. Under no stretch of the imagination does Scripture say the rapture of the Church is sign-less and imminent-at-any-moment. The rapture of the church into the clouds is *always tied to the resurrection of the saints*. There is only one resurrection of the faithful dead and it is *after* the GT. It follows there will be no pre-tribulation rapture. Because the resurrection of the saints occurs after the GT, we have located the precise timing of the rapturing of the people of God. It will be *post*-the Great Tribulation. Our first interpretive key has brought a whole lot of light onto our search for sane interpretation.

There is one more little loose matter to tie up. Have I missed the real possibility that in I Thessalonians 4: 16f Paul is revealing a “new truth” to the Church hitherto not known? Could he after all this evidence for a post-trib rapture be really saying, (to put in the modern way our popular evangelicals do), “But hang on a minute. Let me tell you that the Coming of Jesus is really in two stages, and the first is a secret, hidden coming for the saints that the world will know nothing about. Christian pilots are

going to be snatched out of their cockpits and aeroplanes are going to crash. Christians who are driving along the motorway the moment of this rapture will fly up to the sky and there will be car wrecks everywhere, trains derailed, buses rolling.”

Now I will not deny that Paul made a “special” revelation in I Thess. 4. But it is not a truth that has been buried under lost church tradition all these centuries and since 1830 come to light again.

Context as always will settle what the “new revelation” is that Paul is communicating. The specific question Paul is addressing is this: The church at Thessalonica was concerned about their loved ones who had already died in the Lord. Would they be disadvantaged or even miss out on the Kingdom Presence of Jesus at His Coming (v.13)? Paul answers,

“I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope” (I Thess. 4:13).

The question Paul addresses is this: Will the Christians who die before the Coming of Christ be at a disadvantage compared to those who are still alive when Jesus comes again? Paul gives a new

detail concerning the resurrection of the dead. He shows the real blessedness of the dead saints. They are certainly not disadvantaged. They will rise *first* and be caught up *before* the living believers are gathered up. That is, when Jesus comes again, the living will have no precedence or advantage over the dead. Our dead loved ones will be with us. The Coming of the Lord synchronises with the resurrection of the saints. And the rapture synchronises with the resurrection of the dead saints.

So let's end all confusion once for all. *The question of the Rapture is a question about the resurrection of the sleeping Christian.* The time of the Rapture stands or falls with the time of the saints' resurrection. And always in Scripture, the resurrection of the saints is *post*-the Great Tribulation. That's the key to the question!

But sadly it would appear Paul has miserably failed to communicate this great hope and comfort judging by the popular idea that we can have a rapture and a resurrection before Jesus actually and visibly and before the public eyes of the whole world returns to earth.

To close this little section off, as is my habit, I would like to let Jesus have the final say. Let's ask Jesus himself shall we? Dear Lord Jesus, did you teach that your Second coming will be in two phases, the first being a silent, secret, snatching away of the saints before the Great Trouble at the end followed 7 years later by your glorious and visible Return?

I hear him answer:

“Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go forth, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:25-27).

Can't get any clearer than that! His Coming for the saints will not be secret and hidden from the world.

We won't disappear in a whimper! The saints go marching in with great fan fare, when the last great trumpet blows, when the mighty archangel announces the royal Arrival of King Jesus, when the voice of the Son of man commands all Christians who are in the tombs to come forth and the angels gather from the four corners of the earth all the living believers ...

“When we all see Jesus, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory!”

The saints all go marching into the Kingdom *together* at the Second Coming.

And it will be after the Great Tribulation. Hear Jesus again,

“Immediately ***after*** the tribulation of those days...” (verse 29) and ***after*** Jesus’ visible “coming on the clouds...” (verse 30), Jesus says in the very next verse the elect are gathered then to be together in the Kingdom (Matt. 24:29-31).

This “gathering” is a *post*-tribulation rapture and resurrection. As always, the rapture is tied to the resurrection of the faithful dead. Got the key? Good. Keep it in your pocket, I mean, in your heart and mind. It will keep you from a false promise of peace.

In the next session, I will address the other planks in the pre-tribulation rapture platform. A word of warning ... these planks have white ants in them too, so don’t put your weight on them either!

