

# The Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture

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## Pieces of the Puzzle

**1Th 4:16** 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 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is the hope of believers all over the world, the promise that with the sound of a trumpet the dead in Christ shall rise first, and those that are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them at the coming of Christ.

Generally speaking there is agreement among Christians concerning the main ideas put forward in these verses. Most agree in a literal coming of Christ, that the dead in Christ shall rise from the grave, and those alive and remaining shall be caught up with them, all to occur at some point in the future.

Where it starts to become unclear is around the issue of exactly when this event occurs, as also its connection with other aspects of the coming of Christ. With Bible teachers and literature alike often presenting different views it can be difficult knowing what to believe.

It is at this point people often switch off, retreating behind the argument that it's impossible to know, or that it really doesn't matter anyway.

Is it possible to know? Absolutely, if not why did Jesus and the apostles teach on it? Surely a serious study of the scriptures should make it clear what to believe concerning the second coming of Christ. If not why didn't Jesus and the apostles just say here's a whole lot of options make up your own mind what you believe.

Paul the apostle in writing to the church of Thessalonica gives us a clue as to how accurate we can be concerning the knowledge of His coming.

**1Th 5:2** For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

The word perfectly in the Greek has the meaning exactly, what this tells us is that the believers of Thessalonica had an exact understanding concerning the events of Christ's coming, the facts of which had evidently been taught to them by Paul the apostle.

How did Paul know these things and be able to provide an accurate understanding concerning the coming of Christ?

The answer to that lies in a sound knowledge of the scriptures.

**1Th 4:14** 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.

All that Paul spoke and taught concerning the second coming of Christ came from the Word of God. This being the case it is also possible for us to come to an exact understanding by the same means.

Concerning the attitude that it doesn't really matter what we believe because it's all going to happen anyway, did Jesus share the same indifference toward the truth of His coming? Definitely not, rather He warned us of the danger of being deceived concerning that very event.

Would Jesus warn against being deceived and then fail to provide us with an accurate understanding of His coming? Such an idea would be preposterous and yet many Christians today are of the persuasion that an accurate knowledge of His coming is just not possible. This position is simply not true and really does a disservice to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

Why then are there so many different views on the coming of Christ and which one is correct? A good question and one that I hope to answer.

Perhaps the following illustration might be helpful. Have you ever put a jigsaw puzzle together?

Most people tend to tackle it the same way, they get all the edge pieces and those that share a similar colour, and then piece by piece they put the picture together. But have you ever done this and mistakenly assembled pieces that didn't fit together? What was the result? The picture became distorted, and it's not till you put the pieces together in their right place that the true picture appears.

God's Word it like a giant jigsaw puzzle and all the pieces necessary to make up the picture are there. The problem is sometimes we force pieces where they don't fit and so distort the picture. If we get it right the pieces should easily fit together producing a picture of truth, but if we get it wrong we end up with a distortion of truth which is error.

Can we get it right? Absolutely, but not on our own, we need the Holy Spirit to show us how the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

The latter part of this booklet is devoted to putting the pieces together concerning the second coming of Christ, but in the second chapter I first want to address a teaching called the rapture as this is the most prevalent teaching on the subject of Christs coming, and the view generally held by many today.

## The Rapture

The general teaching concerning the rapture is that it is of a secret nature and occurs just prior to the period of the great tribulation. It emphasises the idea that Christ could come at any moment, and as a thief that comes in the night stealthily and secretly, Christ comes and catches away his saints, taking as it were that which is of value to him, the world being oblivious till after the event the batten is then said to be passed on to the Jews involving a covenant with antichrist etc.

The teaching of a secret coming of Christ in this manner is by no means new, and has been around at least as far back as the early 1800's. It was from about 1833 and onwards that J.N. Darby and others of the Brethren movement became the major influencers and promulgators of the secret rapture teaching.

Since then Dr. C.L.Schofield and the Schofield annotated Bible has become the most influential propagator of the secret rapture teaching. In addition to this lately the world has also been heavily impacted through the novels of Tim Lahaye and his left behind series, as well as many others that teach this doctrine today.

In tracing the thought of the rapture as it is commonly taught it would be useful first to consider the origin of the word rapture itself. Though the word rapture it is not actually used in the Bible, it does express the sentiments of the words caught up as used in 1Thessalonians 4:17

**1 Thes 4:17** 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.

According to Strong's Concordance (G726) the English phrase caught up comes from the Greek word harpazo. It means "to snatch away, to catch away, catch up, pluck, pull, or take by force, to take violently or by force. As can be seen from the various shades of meaning given this word, its sense is best understood in the context in which it is used.

To understand the different ways in which it is used I have included an excerpt from Albert Barnes notes on the Bible, because I thought it well conveys the sense in which we should understand the use of the word harpazo as it relates to the saints being caught up to heaven, both living and resurrected.

Quote from Albert Barnes commentary on the Bible

"Caught up - The word used here implies that there will be the application of external force or power by which this will be done. It will not be by any power of ascending which they will themselves have; or by any tendency of their raised or changed bodies to ascend of their own accord, or even by any effort of their own will, but by a power applied to them which will cause them to rise. Compare the use of the word harpazo in Matthew 11:12, "the

violent take it by force;" in Matthew 13:19, "then cometh the wicked one and snatcheth away;" in John 6:15, "that they would come and take him by force; in John 10:12, "the wolf catcheth them;" in Acts 8:39, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; in 2Co 12:2, "such an one caught up to the third heaven;" also, in John 10:28-29; Acts 23:10; Jude 1:23; Revelation 12:5.

The verb does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. In all these instances there is the idea of either foreign force or violence effecting that which is done. What force or power is to be applied in causing the living and the dead to ascend, is not expressed. Whether it is to be by the ministry of angels, or by the direct power of the Son of God, is not intimated, though the latter seems to be most probable. The word should not be construed, however as implying that there will be any reluctance on the part of the saints to appear before the Saviour, but merely with reference to the physical fact that power will be necessary to elevate them to meet him in the air." End Quote.

In addition to this concerning the phrase caught up Thayer's Greek lexicon also gives three distinct senses of meaning.

1. To seize, to carry off by force.
2. To seize on, to claim for oneself eagerly
3. To snatch out, or take away

Concerning the English word rapture according to Webster's Dictionary (1828 edition) it comes from the Latin word *raptus*, and has the meaning of a seizing by violence.

From the meaning of the word rapture it is easy to see why it began to be used to express the idea of the phrase caught up or the Greek word *harpazo*, a seizing by violence.

It might seem that the word rapture or a seizing by violence is applicable to the phrase caught up in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but is it?

Underlying this question is the problem of linguistics, or the application of language in its original context. What was the real sense of the use of the word caught up as used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17? A study of the multiple uses of the Greek word *harpazo* in the New Testament reveals that it did not always involve the meaning of a seizing by violence. For instance in Acts 8:39 when the Spirit caught away Philip was this an act of seizing by violence? I don't think so, rather it was the application of an external force or power applied to him to carry him to another place. The same is true of Paul when he was caught up to the third heaven as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:2 and verse 4. Or what about the manchild of Revelation 12:5 caught up to his throne?

While it is true that many of the uses of the Greek word *harpazo* do involve an external force where there is an element of violence it is not so in every case. Concerning 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and the saints being caught up at the second coming of Christ should we think of this as involving a seizing by violence? Or should we see it simply as a catching up involving the application of an external force, ie by the power of God acting upon the saints.

All this raises the question, why did those who teach the rapture call it the rapture in the first place. The answer to this obviously lies in the fact that they believed that the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 was something that involved the act of violence or a rapture which means a seizing by violence.

What they believed led them to the use of the word rapture to express their understanding about the meaning of the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Why then did they believe that the event of the catching up of the saints would involve the application of an external force in which there was the element of violence?

The answer to this lies in a misapplication of what the Bible teaches concerning the coming of Christ as a thief in the night. If Christ is coming as a thief in the night to catch away His saints, then it sounds like harpazo or a rapture, like a thief who would come and violently snatch away that which is of value, so it is believed by those that teach the rapture that Christ will come secretly and snatch away the saints before anyone realises what has happened.

But what if Christ coming as a thief in the night does not apply to the catching up of the saints as it is in 1 Thessalonians 4:17? If it can be proved that it doesn't then those who teach the rapture have got it wrong, and have taken Christ's coming as a thief in the night and mistakenly applied it to His catching away of the saints.

In terms of unravelling the teaching of a pre tribulation rapture, a good place to start then is by addressing the question concerning Christ coming as a thief in the night, is His coming in this respect to the saved or to the unsaved?

Let us consider what the bible reveals on this matter.

**Mat 24:42** 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.

Jesus here is speaking in the context of his second coming and the responsibility of believers to watch that they are not caught unaware.

**Luk 12:39** And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

**40** Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

The basic teaching of these two scriptures is to encourage the believer to be watchful and waiting for the Lords return so as not to be caught unaware. In both instances it is a warning to believers to be aware of the coming of Christ lest His coming impacts upon them in a way that is negative i.e like a thief who comes and breaks up a house.

Before considering our next verse on Christ coming as a thief in the night let me also mention, that if His coming as a thief is to catch away or rapture the saints to heaven, why would Christ warn us it could negatively impact upon those that believe? Surely He would speak of it as a positive thing, rather in each instance we are warned of it as something that is negative.

Let us turn to a further development of the thought of Christ coming as thief in the night as we find it in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9

**1Th 5:1** But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

**5:2** For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

**5:3** 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.

**5:4** But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

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

**5:6** Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

**5:7** For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

**5:8** 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.

**5:9** For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

The first thing we notice here in reading these verses is that the emphasis of the Lord coming as a thief in the night is not applicable to the righteous, but rather to the unrighteous, Paul in verses 2-3 concerning the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night stresses the fact that those subject to the Lords coming as a thief are the object of His judgment.

Verse 4 reveals that such a coming is not aimed at the righteous, “but ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief” Christ coming as a thief is aimed at the wicked, yes it will be sudden, yes it will be unexpected, yes it will be of a destructive nature and yes they will be caught unaware!

Verses 5-8 describes the characteristics of two types of people the wicked who sleep and are drunken and the righteous who are awake, watching and sober (compare this with Matthew 24:42-51)



Verse 9 reveals that God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous are not the object of Christ's coming as a thief, if that day were ever to overtake us as a thief then like the householder who failed to watch we have become caught up in the judgments of God upon the wicked.

In consideration of what is mentioned in verse 2 let me clarify the meaning of the thought "the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night", as the text speaks of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night rather than a person.

A comparative phrase which sheds light on this mention of a day is found in 2 Peter 3:10

**2Pe 3:7** But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

**3:8** 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.

**3:9** 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.

**3:10** 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.

**3:11** Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

**3:12** Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

**3:13** Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Relative to the thought of the day of the Lord it is important we understand it in the context of God's day or the day of rest, the seventh day. Verse 8 informs us that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

In consideration of this from scripture it appears that as God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, so God is working for another six one thousand year days after which He will again rest on the seventh.

It is my belief that we are living in the closing stages of the sixth day of redemption, a period of six thousand years from the fall of man to the second coming of Christ. This involves four thousand years from Adam to Christ and then the two thousand years of the church age (2000 years measured from the resurrection of Christ AD 30).

The event of Christ's second coming will usher in the seventh day, called the day of the Lord, the day of God or the day of Christ. During that day it is generally understood from Revelation 20:4-6 that the saints will reign on earth with Christ as kings and priests a thousand years.

**Rev 20:4** 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.

**20:5** But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

**20:6** 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.

This thousand years constitutes the seventh day, it begins with the second coming of Christ, the first resurrection of the dead, with those alive and remaining being caught up together with them at that time, the day ends with the second resurrection ( implied in verse 5-6 revealed and in Revelation 20:11-15). With the end of the seventh day and the judgment of the ungodly, God ushers in the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21).

Understanding the events of the day of the Lord let us reconsider 2 Peter 3:10

**2Pe 3:10** 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.

This verse reveals a time span of a thousand years, in the same verse it refers to the beginning of the day as a thief in the night (the day begins with Christ's second coming as a thief bringing swift judgment upon the ungodly) it then speaks of the end of the day in which the heavens and earth pass away with a great noise. In verse 13 mention is then made of the new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

To understand the day of the Lord coming as thief in the night is to understand the day beginning with Christ's second coming as he comes in judgment and destruction upon the ungodly and is not applicable to the saints.

Let us consider a further verse on Christ Coming as a thief

**Rev 3:3** Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Jesus speaks this warning to the church not the ungodly, if you don't watch I will come on thee as a thief. This warning is addressed to the church of Sardis, this church was characterised by spiritual death in other words the ones to whom Christ will return to as a thief are those who are in a condition of spiritual death and not watching. If Christ coming as a thief was a good thing for the church why would He warn the church at Sardis to avoid it happening to them?

Note an emphasis of Revelation 3:3 “I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” Jesus coming as a thief always involves the idea of an unknown hour, what would be the result of Jesus coming for somebody as a thief?

**Mat 24:50** The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,  
**51** And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The only way any of us will become the object of Christ’s coming as a thief is if we do not take heed to Christ’s warning to watch, our portion then would become one of judgment, as Christ comes in judgment upon the world.

How can we watch if it is not something that is possible through the knowledge of the scriptures, the Bible is the only thing that can give us eyes to see.

One other scripture on Christ’s coming as thief that needs to be considered is in Revelation 16:15.

**Rev 16:15** Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed *is* he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Revelation 16:15 needs to be seen in the context of the vials which are to be poured out during the tribulation, to suggest the coming of Christ as a thief relates to his rapturing of the saints secretly pre-tribulation would tend to put verse 15 in the wrong place. However if we understand Christ’s coming as a thief in the night relative to a coming in judgment upon the ungodly, then this verse can easily be understood particularly in the context of the previous verse, see verse 14

**Rev 16:14** 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

His coming as a thief relates to the great day of God Almighty, the seventh day, which begins with the battle of Armageddon and the destruction of the ungodly. With the world cleansed of the unrighteous Christ will establish His kingdom upon the earth.

As we bring the theme of Christ coming as a thief to a conclusion, there is one final question that needs to be asked. Is Christ really coming as a thief in the way the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine would have us believe? I mean will Christ come to secretly steal believers from the earth? If this is so then we have a major problem, because to do so would make Jesus a transgressor of law for it says thou shalt not steal.

The idea of Christ coming as a thief then has got nothing to do with stealing away the church because Christ is not a thief, but Christ coming as a thief has got everything to do with the fact that His coming will be of a destructive nature.

When all the verses concerning Christ's coming as thief are considered there are really two main areas of emphasis.

- 1) The coming of Christ will be of destructive nature
- 2) The coming of Christ will take people by surprise

These two things are the only likeness that Christ's coming shares with a thief, because Christ is not a thief.

Having established the thought that Christ's coming as a thief relates to a coming in judgment upon the ungodly and is not applicable to the righteous, we can now consider that coming from the scriptures to decide whether it involves two comings or one, for generally it is held by those who believe in a secret rapture, that Christ comes twice, once secretly to catch the believer away, and then seven years later in judgment upon the ungodly.

The question is are there two comings of Christ or one? Or can what the scriptures teach on the dual aspect of the gathering his saints and the judging of the ungodly be reconciled in the one event. The best judge of that question is the scriptures

As we have already established Christ's second coming is one of judgment and death as far as the unbeliever is concerned.

**2Th 1:7** And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,  
**8** In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:  
**9** Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his angels in flaming fire taking vengeance upon the ungodly, a thought similar to what we have here can also be found in Psalm 50:3-5

**Psa 50:3** Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.  
**4** He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.  
**5** Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.  
**6** And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

Like 2 Thessalonians 1:8 His coming is as a fire devouring before him, in verse 4 we see a connection with 1 Thessalonians 4:17 a call to the heavens and the earth, this involves a call to the dead in Christ and those alive and remaining, verse 5 then speaks of the gathering of the saints, all part of the one and same event.

The New Testament reveals this aspect of our gathering to him at His coming

**2Th 2:1** 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.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 the gathering of the saints coincides with the second coming of Christ, in verse 2 that coming is to be seen in the context of the day of Christ, the seventh day, for this is the day that the second coming ushers in.

Let us now consider what Jesus says in the gospel relative to his coming, keeping in mind that there are two distinct aspects involved

- 1) The gathering of his saints
- 2) The destruction of the ungodly.

Do these events happen at the same time or are they separated by a period of seven years as is often taught by those who believe in a pretribulation rapture? To answer this let us turn our attention to Matthew 24 where Jesus specifically speaks of events to occur down this end of time, in particular his second coming, Matthew 24:3 gives us the context for the teaching of the chapter.

**Mat 24:3** And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Notice verses 27-31

**Mat 24:27** For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

**28** For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

**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.

The two aspects of Christ's one coming are clearly seen in these verses as occurring in connection with one another.

In the first instance His coming is revealed like unto the lightning that cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west. A coming which according to verse 30 will be visible to all, this is also confirmed in Revelation 1:7

**Rev 1:7** Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

There is nothing secret about the coming of the Lord, every eye shall see him! Yet it occurs at the same time the saints are being gathered from all over the earth as revealed in Matthew 24:31

**Mat 24:31** 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

What we have here in verse 31 is obviously the fulfilment of 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 involving the sound of the trumpet and the gathering of the saints.

**1Th 4:15** 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.

Matthew 13 also becomes another chapter that addresses the subject of Christ's coming involving both the righteous and the wicked at the same time.

**Mat 13:37** 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.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares the wicked are gathered first, there is no indication here of any secret coming, both the tares and the wheat grow together in the kingdom until the time of the end, when God separates them, so the current condition of mixture in the kingdom continues till Christ returns and gathers the wicked out of his kingdom.

Another portion of scripture that is often used in the support of a secret rapture is also found in Luke 17:26-37. Here we find the main text used for the left behind doctrine. The idea being that when the rapture occurs some Christians will be taken and some will be left. Let us consider the text and see whether it supports such an interpretation.

**Luk 17:26** And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.

**27** They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

**28** Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

**29** But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

**30** Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

**31** In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

**32** Remember Lot's wife.

**33** Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

**34** I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

**35** Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

**36** Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

**37** And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

The main thought used here to support a secret rapture teaching is found in verses 34-36 "the one shall be taken, and the other left" hence the left behind doctrine.

There is no doubt these scriptures relate to the second coming of Christ, but the question is, do they reveal a secret coming to the saints, or do they reveal a general coming that has an aspect to both saint and sinner.

To understand and apply verses 34-36 in their correct context we must first read them in the light of the proceeding verses.

Beginning in verse 26 our attention is drawn to the days of Noah, it is in the plural, as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.

Here Jesus is making a comparison between the days of the Son of man and the days of Noah, in the days (plural) of the Noah they were eating, drinking, and giving in marriage until the day (singular) that Noah entered into the ark, that day being a single 24hr day.

What happened on that day? A separation occurred between the godly and the ungodly, the godly were delivered and the ungodly were judged, and it all happened in the one 24hr day

Consider verse 28 Jesus now makes a comparison with the days (plural) of Lot and the days of the Son of man, they bought, they sold, they builded, they planted.

Verse 29 but the same day (singular) that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven (some barbecue!) and destroyed them all.

Verse 30 even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed (His second coming).

In what Jesus says here He reveals one coming in which there will be a deliverance of the righteous and a judgment of the ungodly, both occurring in the one single 24 hr day.

This then becomes the context in which we apply verses 34-37

**Luk 17:34** I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

**35** Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

**36** Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

**37** And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

Considered in the context of the previous verses it is evident that in verses 34-37 Jesus is speaking of a separation between the righteous and the unrighteous not ready and unready Christians

In Noah's day the ungodly were destroyed in judgment, and the righteous were spared, in Sodom's day the ungodly were taken in judgment, but Lot was spared. All of which took place on the same day.

In Noah's day one is taken and the other is left, the ungodly were taken away by a flood, Noah and his family were left. In Lots day one is taken and the other is left, Lot and his family were taken out of Sodom and those left behind suffered the judgment of fire.

So far most of what I have written has really been about what the second coming of Christ is not, it is not a rapture as such, and while it is useful to establish the error of the rapture teaching, probably more important than this is making sure that we properly understand what the second coming of Christ is.



## The Second Coming of Christ

Let's begin again with 1Thessalonians 4:16 -17 and bring together the various parts of the puzzle that we might gain an accurate understanding of the second coming of Christ

**1Th 4:16** 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.

As already mentioned the second coming of Christ for his saints has to be seen in conjunction with his coming in destruction upon the ungodly.

To bring this into sharper focus, let us first piece together the order of events as it relates to the saints of God and the second coming of Christ

From 1Thessalonians 4:16-17 it is evident the event described here involves two companies of people, those dead who are resurrected first, and those alive and remaining who are caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

What happens at this event can be understood by a comparison of other scriptures on the same subject.

For more insight on this aspect of Christ's coming for His saints let us consider 1Co 15:50-54

**1Co 15:50** Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

**51** Behold, I show 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.

**54** So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is particularly defending the resurrection of Christ, building upon this he proceeds to establish the teaching of each believers own personal resurrection should they be dead at the return of Christ.

In verse 51 we find mention of the trumpet giving us a definite link with the last or seventh trumpet as sounded in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Matthew 24:31

In verse 51 Paul speaks in the same language as 1 Thessalonians 4:15 when he tells us that we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed

**1Th 4:15** 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.

1 Corinthians 15:51 reveals two companies of people, we shall not all sleep (the dead in Christ who will be resurrected) but we shall all be changed, this change then refers to both those resurrected and those alive and remaining at the second coming of Christ.

Changed what does this mean? The next verse speaks of the believer putting on incorruption and just previous to these verses Paul speaks of the putting on of a heavenly body as opposed to an earthly one. At the second coming of Christ as the resurrected and those alive and remaining are caught up, a change is going to take place in the twinkling of an eye, a change involving the body of the believer from an earthly one to an heavenly one. It is also at this point that the believer will appear before the judgment seat of Christ

**2Co 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

This must be seen as having a heavenly aspect as the judgment seat of Christ for the Christian relates to the mercy seat and the Ark of the Covenant.

Let me just briefly comment on the believer's appearance before the judgment seat of Christ, for it is not a drawn out affair. It will occur instantaneously as each is caught up and perfectly known of Christ, judged each will receive the reward of their deeds done in their body. This is a judgment as to reward and not unto condemnation.

Having considered the coming of Christ for His saints, let us now turn our attention to the second aspect of Christ's coming involving his judgment upon the ungodly. This is represented in the scriptures with particular reference to the battle of Armageddon as found in Revelation 16:16

**Rev 16:15** 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.

Armageddon is symbolic of a battle or conflict, the picture we have in the scriptures is that of an ungodly confederacy headed up by antichrist that makes war against Christ at his second coming (compare Revelation 19:19).

Let us consider some more verses that shed further light on Christ's coming in judgment upon the ungodly

**2Th 1:7** And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

Here we are told that Christ is coming back with his mighty angels. Consistent with this are the words of Christ in Matthew 25:31

**Mat 25:31** When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

Christ is coming back with his saints according to Jude 14-15

**Jud 1:14** And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

**15** To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

Let us consider how the book of Revelation portrays Christ coming with his saints.

**Rev 19:11** And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

**12** His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

**13** And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

**14** And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

**15** And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

**16** And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Christ is obviously the one riding the white horse leading this host as he comes in judgment against the ungodly. The armies following him are clothed in fine linen, white and clean, who are these then that are clothed in the fine linen white and clean?

**Rev 19:7** Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

**8** And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Verse 8 reveals those clothed in fine linen, clean and white to be the saints of God, Revelation 19:14 then reveals the saints of God accompanying Jesus Christ in judgment and destruction upon the ungodly.

Revelation 17:14 also provides a comparative thought confirming the identity of those returning with Christ in judgment upon the ungodly.

**Rev 17:14** These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful.

Other verses also reveal the saints accompanying Christ in the judgment of the world.

**Psa 149:6** Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand;  
**7** To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people;  
**8** To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;  
**9** To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.

**1Co 6:2** Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

A further perspective on the saint's part with Christ judging the world is also spoken of in the book of Joel

**Joe 2:1** Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for *it is* nigh at hand;  
**2** A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, *even* to the years of many generations.  
**3** A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land *is* as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.  
**4** The appearance of them *is* as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run.

Joel 2:1 provides the context of the verses beginning with a sounding of a trumpet and then a revelation of the day of the Lord (the seventh day). Joel moves on to describe that day, a day that begins with Christ coming with his saints in destruction upon the ungodly

The language of verse 4 is consistent with the language of Revelation 19:14 the appearance of them is as horses and as horsemen shall they run and in verse 9 we find them entering the houses like a thief.

**Joe 2:9** They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.

Christ's coming as a thief then evidently involves Him returning with His saints in judgment upon the world

This picture of Christ's coming in judgment upon the world is also further developed in other verses.

**1Th 5:2** For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

**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.

**Isa 13:9** Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

This confirms that there will be no sinners in the millennial age to come, all ungodly flesh will be destroyed at the second coming of Christ.

**Isa 11:4** But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

**Psalms 110: 6** He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill *the places* with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.

(Also compare Revelation 19:21)

The day of Christ's coming will be a day of gladness for the Christian but it will be a day of sorrow and destruction for the unbeliever.

In summary of this section, the events of the second coming of Christ involving the gathering of the saints and the destruction of the ungodly are as follows.

The Seventh day begins with the sounding of the trumpet and the gathering of the saints, this involves those resurrected and those alive and remaining. As the believer is caught up each appears before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged in their body according to the deeds they have done, this takes place instantaneously and coincides with the changeover of the body from mortality to immortality.

This accomplished each believer meeting with Christ in the air takes their place in His great army upon white horses, the army assembles behind Christ, the entire host including His mighty angels descend with Him to execute the judgment written. At this point the earth will be made desolate and completely cleansed of all sinners. Christ will then establish His literal Kingdom upon the earth and the believer will rule and reign with Him for a thousand years.

## The Divine Protection of the Church

One final question remains, if the church is not raptured out pre-tribulation then what happens to her during the 3 ½ year reign of the antichrist?

For the answer to this we must turn to Revelation 12

**Rev 12:1** And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

**2** And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

These verses refer to the church the bride of Christ just prior to the tribulation period.

**Rev 12:3** And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

Verse 3 reveals another entity, the antichrist and his beastly kingdom, much could be said about both the woman and the antichrist however suffice to say the chapter is particularly centres around a conflict between these two entities

Just concerning ourselves with the church at this point, two specific references are made concerning a period of time involving the church. They are in verse 6 and verse 14 in these are revealed Gods provision and protection for the church when antichrist sits upon the kingdom of the world.

**Rev 12:6** And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days.

In verse 6 we have mention of 1260 days, this is equal to a period of three and a half years.

Compare verse 14

**Rev 12:14** And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

In verse 14 our attention is drawn to the same period of time but here it is referred to as time, times and half a time. This same period of three and a half years is also mentioned in Revelation 11:2-3

**Rev 11:2** But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

**3** And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

In verse two reference is made to forty two months and in verse 3 the same period of time is said to be a thousand two hundred and threescore days, both speaking of a period of three and a half years

Daniel also speaks of the same period of time in Daniel 7:25 and Daniel 12:7

**Dan 7:25** And he shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

**Dan 12:7** And I heard the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth forever that *it shall be* for a time, times, and a half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these *things* shall be finished.

All speaking of the same period of time equalling three and a half years,

This period of three and a half years is the last half of the week of Daniel's seventy week prophecy revealed in Daniel 9:24-27.

Note Dan 9:27 speaks of Jesus who was cut off in the midst of the week, a week in the context of Daniel's seventy week prophecy is a period of seven years. According to the prophecy three and a half years being half of seven years were fulfilled in the ministry of Christ. Half way through the week he was cut off this speaks of the crucifixion of Christ. The second part of the week or the remaining three and a half years are yet to be fulfilled, the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation both reveal a three and a half year period to be fulfilled just prior to the second coming of Christ. It is during this period in which antichrist will reign, and according to Revelation 12 the church will be in a place of divine protection.

This will be the company of people who are alive and remaining at the second coming of Christ. In addition to these there are some saints who for whatever reason go into the tribulation and suffer as martyrs rather than receiving the mark of the beast. These are referred to as the remnant of Revelation 12:17 and those overcome in the context of death in Revelation 13:5

**Rev 12:17** 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 13:5** And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

**6** And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

**7** And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

These verses must be seen in the context of the reign of the antichrist, notice verse 5 he continues forty and two months a period of three and a half years. Note verse 7 under antichrist's reign the saints are overcome, who are these saints that are overcome? They are the remnant of the women of Revelation 12:17 with whom the dragon makes war.

Compare this with Daniel 7:20-21

**Dan 7:20** And of the ten horns that *were* in his head, and *of* the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even *of* that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spoke very great things, whose look *was* more stout than his fellows.

**21** I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them;

Daniel is a companion book to the Revelation, much in each book is understood by the other.

To those who hold to a seven year tribulation, a careful study of Daniel's seventy week prophecy and its correct interpretation soon clears up all misunderstandings. It should be said of Daniel's seventy week's prophecy that it is a major key to a correct interpretation of end time events and should be studied carefully and thoroughly.

In summary of the tribulation period, there are some saints that will suffer as martyrs, and there is the bride of Christ and those in company with her that will be divinely preserved to be alive and remaining at the second coming of Christ.

In conclusion, as I said at the beginning of this booklet it is often said by many that it doesn't really matter what you believe because it's all going to happen anyway. It is true that God's Word will be fulfilled, however the scriptures warn us to watch lest that day come upon us unawares, and the only way to watch is through the eyes of the Spirit, as he reveals the unfolding of events through the Word.

It is our responsibility to adequately equip ourselves with the truth, we must prove all things and hold fast that which is good. Let us be like Paul who understood the things he did concerning Christ's coming by the Word of the Lord



**1Th 4:15** 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.

Or let us be like the noble Bereans who searched the scriptures to establish the truth of the things they were taught.

**Act 17:11** These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

It is not beyond anybody to understand the Word of God, nor is understanding the sole dominion of Bible teachers, they may help us, but to each has been given the Holy Spirit whose ministry is to lead and guide into all truth.

Somebody once told me it was beyond them to comprehend such things, to which I replied that they should not underestimate the ministry of the Holy Spirit to open their understanding, we do Him a disservice when we say such things.

It might take some effort, we may need the help of others in getting the pieces in their right place, but it is not beyond any of us to see by the Spirit what God has said in His Word.

God bless you as you seek to understand the subject of His second coming.