

# The Antipas Papers

## CHAPTER IV THE GREAT ESCAPE: MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE RAPTURE \*

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### Before or After?

Now that we have made the distinction between Israel and the church, the second thing we must do is answer the question, will Christians go through the Tribulation? - after all, why prepare for something which, in the end, we think we're going to escape. We need to be clear with regard to this matter because - although we don't like to admit it - nothing so focuses the mind as preparing for something we know is going to affect the future course of our lives. The fact is, if we don't think something we are studying is really going to affect us one way or another, we probably will acquire a rather cavalier attitude towards it: it's like taking a course of instruction on some particular subject without at the end having to face an examination.

Of course, we would like to think that as "mature" Christians, we're above trivializing the search for truth in such a way - and, no doubt, some are. But most of us aren't. Tell us, however, that there is a final examination, and that if we don't pass the examination, we will fail the course - that will get our attention. Add to that the fact that if we fail the course, we will be dropped from school, then our minds really get focused. That's what makes the rapture question so important - the question of the rapture's timing is as essential to arriving at a meaningful understanding of the prophetic Scriptures as is differentiating between Israel and the church. To a large extent, it determines how important we take the question of the "End of Days."

That's why one of the most damaging deceptions to which Christians have fallen prey in recent years is the thought that they will escape the Tribulation by means of a *Secret Rapture*. \*\* To those who have "bought into" such thinking, the study of the prophetic Scriptures is, at best, academic - nice to know information if there is time for it, but relatively useless in any practical way since they will be gone because of the Rapture. While Christians who hold such views would never admit it, what they have done is to effectively consign as useless a great portion of the Word of God - at least as it pertains to them personally.

Consider for a moment the following facts. The Bible, taken as a whole, is a relatively small book in the sum total of things - a book which could be lost in any public library. Think of all the things that God could have written about - medicine, science, history, ethics, etc. All the libraries of the world could not even begin to contain the smallest fraction of the knowledge and wisdom of God. Yet God reduced the essence of all His wisdom and knowledge to one small book; that portion which He considered indispensable to our salvation and spirituality. That means that every word in the Bible must be of inestimable value. Yet we must throw out as unimportant to us a great portion of this book; that portion which deals with the Last Days [more than one-half of the prophetic Scriptures - almost one-fourth of the entire Bible] if we accept the argument of those who say we will not go through the Tribulation. Such thinking is absurd - even on the face of it.

Many fine Christians have accepted the teaching of the Secret Rapture theory with little or no investigation and with little realization of its ultimate consequences. But this teaching was not taught by the early church - indeed, it was not taught by anyone until around the year 1830. Every church Father expected the church to suffer at the hands of the Antichrist and they fully expected to suffer material privation and tribulation in their daily lives as a NORMAL CONSEQUENCE of their choice to follow Jesus. There is no trace of the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory in the early church, and no adherent of the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory has ever successfully proven that this particular doctrine was ever held by any of the church Fathers or by any student of the Word before the last century. Indeed, John Walvoord, in his book, *The Rapture Question*, has admitted as much. He writes: "... it may be conceded that ... [the] pre-tribulationism [i.e. the Secret Rapture theory] of today is not found in the early church Fathers ..." <sup>1</sup>

The *Didache* and the *Letters of Barnabas* [both written in the First Century] attest to the fact that the early Christian church fully expected the church to go through the Tribulation and to suffer at the hands of the Antichrist. Justin Martyr (100-165), Irenaeus (130-202), Tertullian (160-240), Hippolytus (170-236), Cyprian (200-258), Lactantius (260-330), and Cyril (315-286) all expected the same. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin believed the church would go through the Tribulation. More recently, such Christians as Charles Finney, George Whitefield, D.L. Moody, Charles Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, B.B. Warfield, Robert Gundry, Carl Henry, and Walter Martin [to name but a few] could not bring themselves to believe that the church would escape the Tribulation.

As a result of the controversy which now surrounds the question of the Secret Pre-tribulation Rapture Theory, many Christians have begun to take a very flippant and offhand attitude towards the matter. Again and again one hears the rather mocking and acerbic remark, "I'm a pan-rapturist - I believe it will all 'pan out' in the end." Such statements expose a very nonchalant and indifferent attitude towards a question that the Bible considers very important. People who adopt such an attitude may someday live to regret it. For those, however, who are serious about these matters, they need to make their minds up one way or the other (i.e., whether or not the church will go through the Tribulation), because if the church is not destined to go through the Tribulation, why should Christians take the Prophetic Scriptures seriously? - **again, why prepare for something that's not going to affect us personally?**

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## THE RAPTURE: A PLAY IN TWO ACTS?

Those who hold what is called the "Pre-Tribulation Rapture" interpretation of prophecy [or for that matter, the "Mid-Tribulation Rapture," the "Partial Rapture" and the "Split Rapture" Theories] teach the *incredibly convoluted, complex and perplexing notion* that the Second Coming of Christ will be in two stages: first, the **RAPTURE** (His coming **FOR** the saints), and then later the **REVELATION** (His coming **WITH** the saints). The interval between these two events is the seven-year period of Daniel's Seventieth Week - i.e., the Tribulation. [We will concentrate initially only on the "Pre-Tribulation Rapture" Theory; but it should be noted that almost everything we have to say below applies with equal logic to the so-called Mid-Tribulation Rapture Theory, the Split Rapture Theory, and the Partial Rapture Theory; placing the time of the rapture at any other time than on "the last day" does not remove the problem that one is forced to deal with "two second comings" rather than one.]

Those who assume that the Second Coming of Christ will be really two events rather than one (which is something that all adherents of the Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation, Partial Rapture and Split Rapture theories suppose), believe that verses such as Revelation 1:7. "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him," refer to the **REVELATION** - His coming in open power and glory.

The **RAPTURE**, on the other hand, is presented as a quiet, invisible and secret coming of Christ for His Church. The following quotations from Pre-Tribulation writers are representative of this interpretation:

- "Quickly and **INVISIBLY**, unperceived by the world, the Lord will come as a thief in the night and catch away His waiting saints." (Silver, *The Lord's Return*, pg. 260.)

- "His appearance in the clouds will be veiled to the human eye and NO ONE WILL SEE HIM. He will slip in, and slip out, move in to get His jewels and slip out as under the cover of night." (Roberts, *How to be Personally Prepared for the Second Coming of Christ*, pg. 341.)
- "(The Rapture) will be a **SECRET** rapture - **QUIET, NOISELESS**, sudden as the steps of a thief in the night. All that the world will know will be that multitudes at once have gone." (Bishop, *The Doctrine of Grace*, pg. 341.)

**THE RAPTURE IS TO BE A LOUD AND NOISY EVENT; NOT A SECRET AND HIDDEN AFFAIR**

But do the Scriptures really teach that the Rapture will be a secret, invisible, and quiet event? Let's look at the main verse on the Rapture and see: "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 (i.e., the resurrection): then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds (i.e., the rapture), to meet the Lord in the air." (I Thess. 4:16-17)

To us, these verses indicate anything but a quiet, secret rapture. Whether we take the "shout," the "voice," and the "trump" in a literal sense or as having a figurative meaning, either way, this passage does not convey the idea of a secret and quiet event. If anything, it would indicate that the coming of the Lord will be a loud, noisy, open and wondrous happening. Amid the sound of the Lord Himself descending from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God, there will be the sounds of praise and rejoicing from the vast multitudes of saints caught up to meet the Lord, Where is any secrecy here? This is not the description of a hidden and quiet event. Nevertheless, in spite of every indication to the contrary, this verse is constantly used as a text for sermons which describe the Rapture as a secret, hidden, and quiet coming of Christ.

The Scriptures do teach, of course, that Christ will return "as a thief in the night." *This means that the time of His coming is unknown.* It will come as a complete surprise to those that are not watching for His return. *But the use of this term never indicates in any way that the event itself will be a secret and quiet occurrence.* The "thief" passages are found in the words of Jesus, Peter and Paul, which we will now consider.

**Jesus**

First, let's look at the words of Jesus Himself: "But know this, that if the good man 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 into. Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh" (Matt. 24:43, 44; also Lk. 12:39, 40) The return of Christ will be like the coming of a thief in the sense that we know not WHEN it will be. We must watch at all times. But there is nothing here to indicate the EVENT ITSELF will be secret. (Remember here, Silver, Roberts, Bishop *et. al.* insist that both the time and the event will be secret; but obviously, *according to this passage*, once the thief arrives and begins "breaking up the house," the secrecy will end and the event will be known by all. Instead of teaching that His coming would be shrouded in secrecy, Jesus actually warned against this concept: "If any man say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not ... If they shall say ... behold, it is in the SECRET chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt 24:23, 26, 27) Whatever else may be included in these statements, one thing is certain; such wording is surely contrary to the idea of secrecy and quietness in connection with the coming of Christ.

Also in the context of Matthew 24, Jesus stressed that men do not know the day nor the hour of the Second Coming. (Matt. 24:36) It will be "as in the days of Noah" when people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage - not expecting the destruction to fall. They "knew not UNTIL the flood came, and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." (verses 38, 39) The wicked knew not until the flood came - but obviously when it came they knew it. It was no secret, quiet event. [And again, it must be stressed that pre-tribulationists like Silver, Roberts and Bishop insist that both the timing *and* the event will be secret] It was observed by believers and unbelievers alike.

"If therefore thou shalt not watch," Jesus said, "I will come on thee as a THIEF, and thou shalt not know what hour I shall come upon thee." (Rev. 3:3) "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth." (Rev. 16:15) Here again is the warning to "watch," for we know not the time of His coming. He will come as a thief. But there is nothing here to indicate a secret and quiet coming of Christ in which He will mysteriously take believers out of this world so that no one will know what happened to them or who took them. The meaning is that He will COME "as a thief," not that He will ACT AS A THIEF.

**Peter**

Next, we look at the words of Peter. Though scoffers will say: "Where is the promise of His coming?" Peter assures us that the day of the Lord will come. We do not know when, however, for "the day of the Lord will come AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT." (II Peter 3:10) But it is evident that Peter did not mean that the event itself will be quiet, for he goes on to say that it will be accompanied with a great NOISE - "in which the heavens shall pass away with a GREAT NOISE." Where is there any secrecy here? - and it should be emphasized that Peter is specifically talking about both the timing *and* the event as a loud and noisy affair. This is just the opposite of what Silver, Roberts and Bishop teach.

**Paul**

The final New Testament "thief" passage is found in the words of Paul. Turning again to the noted rapture passage (I Thess. 4), we find that speaking of the Lord's coming with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of

God, Paul goes on to explain that we do not know WHEN this will be, for that day will come as a thief in the night: "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT" (I Thess. 5:1-2). What is unknown and hidden? It cannot be that the coming of Christ will be a secret event, for the context speaks of this as being glorious, open and noisy. Again, we see that it is the TIME that is hidden. We know not the day nor the hour.

Paul continues with these words: "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 ... But ye, brethren, are NOT IN DARKNESS, that that day should overtake you as a thief;" (verses 3 and 4) for those that truly follow Christ will "watch at all times and seasons."

### **WHEN WILL THE RAPTURE BE? BEFORE OR AFTER THE TRIBULATION?**

Having now examined the rapture passage (I Thess. 4) and all of the "thief" passages, we fail to find any scriptural basis for the teaching that the Rapture will be a secret, invisible, quiet event. If anything, the evidence is to the contrary. Where, then, do the Scriptures place the Rapture? - will it be before the Tribulation (Daniel's Seventieth Week - a period of seven years) or will it be at the end of this period?

### **TRIBULATION - GOD'S WAY OF DELIVERANCE**

Shortly before His death, Jesus spoke these words to His disciples: "In the world ye shall have tribulation ..." (John 16:33) The verses that follow the prayer in which Jesus prayed for His disciples record what He prayed to the Heavenly Father. He said, "I pray NOT that thou TAKE THEM OUT OF THE WORLD, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John 17:15) Though it would be no easy task to take a stand for Jesus Christ, though they would be persecuted, though in the world they would have tribulation, yet Jesus did not pray that the Church would be taken out of the world. The Church was to remain in the world, but it would not be of the world.

Some might object, however, that Jesus was praying only for His immediate disciples of that time. But not so. "Neither pray I for these alone," He said, "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (verse 20). Does this not include us today? - have not we believed on Christ as a result of the message that was handed down to us from those original disciples of Christ? Indeed, we have. So Jesus was praying for us too. He said so. He prayed that we would be kept from the evil of the world, but He did not pray that we would be taken out of the world - even though in the world we would have tribulation.

Let us suppose for a moment that Jesus had told believers, "In the world there shall be tribulation, but I will pray that you will be taken out of the world." If Jesus said this, those who teach the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory would have a basis for their position - and this statement would no doubt be quoted often as a proof text. But since this is NOT what the verse says - but just the OPPOSITE - surely this should be regarded as evidence against the idea of the special "Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture" designed to take the Church out of this world so that it would escape the suffering and tribulation of the Antichrist.

### **THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO REMAIN UNTIL THE "END OF THE WORLD"**

Instead of the Church being taken out of the world, Jesus taught that it would remain in the world to accomplish a definite purpose: to preach the Gospel. Jesus commissioned His disciples to "go ... and teach all nations" and in connection with this commission He promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the END of the world (*Aion* - age)." (Matt. 28:19-20) According to this, how long will the Church be in the world fulfilling this divine commission? The answer is that the Church will remain in the world until the END of the age. Surely His promise to be with the Church until the END of the age would be strange if it is His plan to remove the Church seven years before that time (or even three and a half years before, as those who subscribe to the Mid-Tribulation Rapture Theory suggest). If, when the end of the age comes, the Church would no longer be on the earth, a promise such as this would be meaningless.

### **Parable of the Wheat and the Tares**

Earlier, in the Book of Matthew, Jesus made it very clear that the righteous would not be separated from the wicked until the end of the age. Jesus spoke a parable about "a man which sowed good seed in his field" and while men slept, "his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." When the crop had grown a little, the servants discovered what had happened. So the servants of the householder came and said, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them (i.e., the tares) up?" But He said, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together **first** the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into the barn." (Matt. 13:24-30)

We are not left to speculate as to the proper meaning of this parable, for Jesus Himself gave the interpretation. The "good seed" (the wheat) is sown by "the Son of Man" - Jesus Christ. The tares, "the children of the wicked one," are sown by the enemy - the devil." They are sown in the same field - "the world," where both grow together until the harvest. And when will this be? - "the harvest is the END OF THE AGE" (verses 37-39).

"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in THE END OF THE WORLD. 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; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire ... THEN (after the tares are gathered out) shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (verses 40-43). Plainly, the time of separation between those which do iniquity and the righteous is at the END of this age.

Jesus said that "BOTH" would grow "TOGETHER" until the "END OF THE WORLD" - and THEN the harvest would occur, producing the great separation. The harvest occurs at the end of the age, and it is at the time of the harvest that the rapture will occur - right **after** the tares have been gathered up and burned (Matthew 13:24-30). This is the Biblical teaching. But the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position says that BOTH will NOT grow together in the field until the end of the age, for they teach that the wheat portion will be harvested sooner, being separated from the wicked seven years BEFORE the end of the world (or three and a half years before as the Mid-Tribulation Rapture Theory so ridiculously postulates).

In other words, instead of teaching that the separation of the wheat and the tares will be at "the end of the world," those that hold the Secret Rapture position say that the wheat will be gathered FIRST, and then, seven years later, the tares will be gathered out. This is the point that C.I. Scofield attempts to make in his footnote on page 1016 of the Scofield Reference Bible: "At the end of this age (v. 40), the tares are set apart for burning, but FIRST the wheat is gathered into the barn." But if anything might be implied as coming first, it would be that the wicked would be separated out first. For in the parable portion it said, "Gather ye together FIRST the TARES (for destruction), but gather the wheat into the barn" (Matthew 13:30).

What? The Scripture says, "First the tares," Scofield says just the opposite. He says, "First the wheat is gathered." Such direct contradiction to what the Bible itself says ought to be enough to make any Christian suspicious. And such a twisting of terms to uphold a theory ought to immediately make us see how weak the teaching of a rapture seven years before the end of the age really is. We repeat: according to Jesus, the righteous and the wicked will both be in the world until the harvest - "the end of the world." And if the great separation is not until the end of the world, the idea of the Church being removed from the earth seven (or even three and a half years) before that time is an impossibility.

#### **The Parable of the good Fish & the bad Fish**

Looking further in Matthew 13, we find another parable and its interpretation which stresses the end of the world as the time of the great separation. Jesus likened the kingdom to a net which was cast into the sea. It gathered fish of every kind - some good and some bad. Finally, the good were placed into vessels (pots or containers) and the bad were cast away. And WHEN, according to the interpretation that Jesus gave, will this great separation occur? "So shall it be at the END of the world, the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:47-50) - and once again, the implication here is that the bad fish are separated out **first**, leaving the good fish which are then placed in separate vessels (pots or containers). How then can it possibly be maintained that Christians (the good fish) are separated out seven years (or 3 1/2 years) **before** the bad fish (the unbelievers)? Such thinking is absurd, even on the face of it!

We see, then, that the parable of the wheat and the tares, as well as the parable of the good fish and the bad fish, clearly pinpoint the time of separation as the end of the world. It should also be noted that the time of this event is based on the words that Jesus gave in explaining these parables. This is important, for doctrine must always be based upon clear statements, not upon symbolic or parabolic expressions which might be capable of several meanings. According to Jesus, at the end of the world (not seven years before the end of the world), those that belong to Him will be spared, while destruction shall fall upon the wicked.

#### **The Days of Lot**

Jesus further likened this time to the days of Lot. "As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built" - those common routine things that people have been doing all along, not expecting any catastrophe. "But the same DAY that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the DAY when the Son of Man is revealed." (Luke 17:28-30)

Even as Lot, the believer, was spared and all the unbelievers of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, so when Christ returns, believers will be spared (caught up to meet the Lord in the air) while THAT "SAME DAY" fiery destruction shall fall upon the unbelievers. Needless to say, this passage does NOT say that Lot went out of Sodom and then, seven years later, fiery destruction fell upon them. No, it says that all these things happened the SAME DAY.

#### **The Days of Noah**

Jesus also likened His Second Coming to the destruction of the flood in the days of Noah. "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage ... and knew not until the flood came and took them all away (or, as Luke's account says, "destroyed them all," (Luke 17:27) ... So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37-40). When the flood came, Noah was spared and the unbelievers were destroyed. That destruction produced a great separation. So shall it be at the Second Coming of Christ. Christians will be caught up to meet Christ; unbelievers will be destroyed. Though the "world" was formerly destroyed by water, Peter now points out that the destruction that the world now faces will be by FIRE. (II Peter 3:6-7)

#### **The Church is called to remain until the "Day of the Lord" or "The Day of God"**

Peter had personally heard Jesus give the promise: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." (John 14:3) Years had passed and apparently some began to scoff at this promise, saying: "Where is the PROMISE of His coming?" To this, Peter replied: "THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME ..." (II Pet. 3:4-10) Let us notice the way in which Peter said this promise would be fulfilled: "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 ... all these things shall be dissolved ..." (II Peter 3:10-11) **Peter believed the coming of the Lord (i.e., the rapture) would be at the very end, when the present "heavens and earth shall pass away," at the end of the age.**

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved," Peter continues, "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, LOOKING FOR and hastening 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?" (verses 11 and 12) **This day shall bring destruction upon unbelievers and deliverance for those who believe. But if believers were to be taken out of the world seven years BEFORE the end, why would Peter exhort them to be "looking for" the coming of the day of God in which the heavens shall pass away?** Surely he would not attempt to encourage them by something that will happen at the END of the age, if their real hope was an event to take place seven years earlier.

**According to Peter, "the day of the Lord" which will come "as a thief in the night" is the time when the heavens shall pass away and the earth shall melt with fervent heat. And according to Paul, "the day of the Lord" which "cometh as a thief in the night" (the SAME expression) is the time of the Rapture:** "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ... then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up ... in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. But of the times and seasons (when this shall happen), brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly well that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 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." (I Thess. 4:16-17; 5:3) This passage is all connected together.

**A study of II Peter 3 and I Thessalonians 4-5 plainly reveals that the "day of the Lord that cometh as a thief in the night" is the time when Christ will descend from heaven with a shout, believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, destruction will fall upon the unbelievers and the present heavens and earth shall pass away with a great noise.**

#### **The Church is called to remain until the "Last Day"**

Jesus also linked His Second Coming with the time when heaven and earth shall pass away. "Heaven and earth shall pass away ... But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only ... Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matt. 24:35-36, 42) This passage clearly refers to the time when Christ will return and gather believers - the time of which NO MAN KNOWETH, and for which we must "watch." Did Jesus say that this would happen before the seven-year tribulation period? No. Instead, this passage points to the END of the age - when heaven and earth shall pass away - as the time when Christ will return. Even the ancient Job implied that the Resurrection would not take place until the heavens shall pass away - the end of the age. "Man dieth, Man lieth down, and riseth not: TILL THE HEAVENS BE NO MORE, they shall not awake, nor be raised from their sleep." (Job 14:10-12; 19:26-27)

Expressions such as "till the heavens be no more," "heaven and earth shall pass away," and similar expressions all seem to indicate the very end of things as we know them now - the end of the age. Until that time, the dead shall not be resurrected. This conclusion is also seen in the Scriptures which say the Resurrection will occur on the "LAST DAY." Martha, for example, believed her brother, Lazarus, would "rise again in the resurrection AT THE LAST DAY." (John 6:39)

"And this is the will of Him that sent me," Jesus said, "that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up "AT THE LAST DAY." (John 6:40, 44) And again, He repeated the words in verse 54: "I will raise him up AT THE LAST DAY." With this evidence in mind, certain conclusions are apparent. **Since the "catching up" or Rapture occurs at the same time as the Resurrection of the dead in Christ (I Thess. 4:16, 17), it is plain to see that the Rapture will take place AT THE LAST DAY and not seven years (or 3 1/2 years) BEFORE the last day.**

#### **The Church is called to remain until the "Last Trump"**

Turning again to I Thessalonians 4:16-17, we read, "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: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." Notice three things that are mentioned here: (1) the TRUMPET sounds; (2) the RESURRECTION of the dead in Christ; (3) the living saints are CHANGED (which all agree, is when this mortal puts on immortality and believers rise to meet the Lord in the air).

Both of these passages mention the sounding of the trumpet, but the latter passage specifies that this trumpet is the LAST TRUMPET. Bearing this in mind, we turn to Revelation 8:2 in which we read, "And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets - so the LAST trumpet (in linking this passage with the others) would be the seventh.

Let us now notice what events are connected with the sound of the LAST trumpet: "The seventh angel sounded and there were great voices in heaven, saying the Kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever ... And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and THE TIME OF THE DEAD, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give REWARD unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." (Rev. 11:15-18) Again, we notice the same three things that were included in the other three passages: (1) the

TRUMPET sounds (the seventh - the LAST TRUMPET); (2) the time of the dead to be raised - the RESURRECTION); and (3) the saints REWARDED, which would include their having changed from mortality to immortality; caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

These things indicate that the Rapture will be at the END of the age; at the LAST DAY, at the LAST TRUMP. But according to the Pre-Tribulationists, the Rapture would have to take place at the time of the FIRST trumpet or EVEN BEFORE, since - according to this interpretation - the Church will be gone when the trumpets of Revelation sound. Revelation 11:18 says that the sounding of the seventh trumpet - the LAST trumpet - will be the time of the dead to be resurrected. God will then "give reward unto ... the saints." Where, then, is there any room for the idea that before any of these trumpets sound the saints will have already been raptured to heaven to be rewarded?

Jesus made it clear that there will be no "secret" coming before His coming in glory with the holy angels. "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation," He said, "of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38) In that day, Christ shall be ashamed of some, of others He will not be ashamed. Some will be accepted and some will be rejected. WHEN? "When He cometh in the glory of His Father." It is agreed that the coming of Christ in glory with the holy angels is at the END of the age, and this verse actually shows that there will be no secret coming prior to this. Why? Because if there had been a secret coming of Christ seven years before His coming in glory with the angels, whether Christ would be ashamed of people or not would have ALREADY taken place.

### **The Church is called to remain until Christ is revealed**

Finally, the Christians at Thessalonica were enduring "persecutions and tribulations" and were being troubled by unbelievers. But Paul encouraged them with the truth that they would be given rest from their troubles "... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taken vengeance on them that know not God," for "He shall come to be glorified in His saints." (see II Thess. I:7-10) In this passage, we notice - as in the others - that the reward of the righteous and the destruction that shall befall the wicked are interwoven with each other as to time. BOTH occurring at the deliverance of His troubled saints when He comes in FLAMING FIRE. No "secret" rapture here.

When will the Lord render vengeance to the wicked on one hand and comfort to the saints on the other? The answer is clear. "WHEN the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them which know not God." The time of His being glorified in His saints is also the time when destruction will befall the wicked. There is no interval of seven years (or even 3 1/2 years) between the two. It does not say that Christ will come to be glorified in His saints and then come again seven (or 3 1/2) years later to bring destruction upon the oppressors.

### **WILL THE RETURN OF CHRIST BE IN TWO STAGES?**

When Jesus ascended into heaven and His disciples stood watching, two angels said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven. This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in LIKE MANNER as ye have SEEN Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) According to this verse, the same Jesus that those disciples knew and loved will return "in like manner" as they saw Him go into heaven. They did not see Him go into heaven in two separate ascensions, and so it is clearly implied that His return will not be in two separate comings. "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many - at His FIRST coming - "and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the SECOND time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9:28) Here we read of the SECOND coming of Christ. Those who hold that Christ will return for His Church, and return AGAIN seven years later, are actually teaching a doctrine not only of the SECOND coming of Christ, but a THIRD coming as well. However, the idea of a THIRD coming of Christ is nowhere mentioned in the Bible. Such terminology is completely foreign to the Scriptures.

Some explain that they believe in ONE Second Coming, but that it will be in "two stages." However, this does not really solve the problem. If the Rapture is a separate "stage" from the coming of Christ in power and glory, how could each stage be the SECOND COMING? If they are separate and distinct events, each could not be the Second Coming, for the coming that would follow the second would still be the third. But some teach that there will be TWO second comings. Surely this is a contradiction in terms. The Scriptures speak of the Lord's Second Coming (singular), never of the second comings (plural). We repeat, the term "two second comings" is in itself contradictory.

### **False Argument #1: the Rapture is not the Second Coming of the Lord**

In attempting to explain this difficulty which the Pre-Tribulationists must face, we have actually heard it argued that the Rapture is not the COMING of the Lord. One writer puts it this way: "Strictly speaking, the Rapture is NOT THE SECOND COMING AT ALL. The Second Coming is the visible, local, bodily appearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven as He returns to this earth ... in power and glory." (Boyd, *Ages and Dispensations*, pg. 60)

Another says, "The thrilling event which will both mark the end of the day of Grace and open the door of the Great Tribulation is the Rapture ... Specifically speaking, THIS IS NOT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. Rather, this is the Rapture, or the catching up of the true church." (Orr, *Antichrist, Armageddon, and the End of the World*, pg. 9) Another emphatically states that the Rapture is NOT the Second Coming and that "the Scriptures referring to the Rapture could NOT refer to the second coming." (Hall, *Prophecy Marches On*, Vol. 2, pgs. 36, 39)

According to these Pre-Tribulationist writers, the Rapture will take place first, and the COMING of Christ will take place seven years later. But attempting to make the Rapture a SEPARATE and earlier event from the coming of Christ

is a teaching that is totally contrary to the united testimony of the Bible. For example, Jesus said, "Be ye therefore also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man COMETH." (Matt. 24:44) Why should Jesus warn about being ready for the COMING of the Son of Man, if really what we are to be ready for is a Secret Rapture that is to take place seven years (or even 3 1/2 years, as the Mid-Tribulation Rapture people so senselessly contend) BEFORE His coming? This same point can be seen in Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I COME as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth." Why would such a warning be given about his COMING if seven years BEFORE his COMING believers would have already been taken to heaven?

Or notice Hebrews 10:36-37: "For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall COME will COME, and will not tarry." Believers are thus exhorted to be patient until the COMING of Christ. But why point them to the COMING of the Lord if their real hope was something that was to occur seven years earlier? "Be patient then, brethren, unto the COMING of the Lord. (James 5:7) Again, why exhort the brethren to be patient unto the COMING of the Lord, if a Secret Rapture BEFORE His coming was when they would be gathered unto Him?

Jesus said, "Occupy till I COME." (Luke 19:13) But how could the CHURCH occupy until he COMES if the Church will be taken away seven years BEFORE His coming? [and remember here, according to Pre-Tribulationists, the "Coming" of the Lord is the event which is supposed to happen at the "end of the Tribulation, while the Rapture occurs seven years earlier at the beginning of the Tribulation - see Ord, Boyd, Hall, etc.] Paul speaks of Christians as "waiting for the COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 1:7) If Paul believed Christians would be caught up to heaven in a Secret Rapture seven years before the Lord's COMING, why did he not speak of Christians as waiting for that? Why would he tell them to wait for something that would take place seven years after they had already been raptured? Obviously, to Paul, the coming of the Lord and the Rapture were considered as one and the same event.

Paul prayed the Christians at Thessalonica would be "preserved blameless unto the COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thess. 5:23) Again, the event for which they were watching was the "COMING" of Christ. Why pray for them to be preserved blameless unto the coming of Christ if the Rapture is an event that will take place seven years before the Lord's coming? Such expressions as these we have given - "be ready for the coming of the Lord," "watch for the coming of the Lord," "be patient for His coming," "waiting for His coming," "preserved unto His coming," "occupy until His coming," etc. - all show that it is when Christ COMES that believers are gathered to meet the Lord. In view of this, the concept that the RAPTURE is a SEPARATE event from the COMING of the Lord is simply not true. **The Rapture of believers to meet the Lord in the air and the coming of the Lord are one and the same event.**

#### **False Argument #2: The misuse of the Greek**

But what about the MEANING of the Greek words that are used to describe the Second Coming? Those who believe that Christ will return in two separate stages, commonly teach that a study of the original Greek makes this distinction clear. One writer, for example, says, "The TWO PHASES of Christ's Second Coming are CLEARLY distinguished in the Greek. The *PAROUSIA*... is His coming for His saints. The *APOKALUPSIS* (the revealing, unveiling, making manifest) is His coming with the saints." (Sabiers, *Where are the Dead?* pgs. 123-124) But instead of the Greek terms used in describing the Second Coming indicating two separate events, we find that these terms are used INTERCHANGEABLY in such a way that they show there is but ONE Second Coming - NOT TWO! The following is a list of the six words that are used to describe the Second Coming of Christ and the shades of meaning they present.

**PAROUSIA** - This word stresses the actual personal presence of one who comes and arrives. It is used in James 5:7 "Be patient ... unto the COMING of the Lord ..."

**APOKALUPSIS** - This word stresses appearing, revelation. It is used in II Thess. 1:7 - "The Lord shall be REVEALED from heaven with His mighty angels ..."

**EPIPHANEIA** - This word means manifestation and speaks of the glory that will attend Christ when He comes. It is used in I Timothy 6:14 - "The APPEARING of our Lord Jesus Christ ..."

**PHANEROO** - This word means to render apparent. It is used in I John 3:2 - "When He shall APPEAR we shall be like Him."

**ERCHOMAI** - This word indicates the act of coming, to come from one place to another. It is used in Luke 19:13 - "Occupy till I COME."

**HEKO** - This word stresses the point of arrival, as "I am come and I am now here." It is used in Revelation 2:25 - "Hold fast till I COME."

**PAROUSIA**. This first word on our list, *PAROUSIA*, is the one most commonly used in reference to the "first stage" of the second advent or Rapture as opposed to the words *APOKALUPSIS* or *EPIPHANEIA* which are supposed to refer to the "second stage" of the second advent or coming of the Lord. *PAROUSIA* stresses the actual personal presence of one that has come and arrived. There is nothing in this word to convey the idea of secrecy. Paul, for example, was comforted by the "coming (*PAROUSIA*) of Titus" who brought word to him from the Corinthian Christians. (II Cor. 7:6) Likewise he spoke of the "coming (*PAROUSIA*) of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus." (I Cor. 16:17) In writing to the Philippians, Paul said he would be "coming (*PAROUSIA*) to see them again." (Phil. 1:26)

Paul used this word in the noted "Rapture" chapter which speaks of the "coming (*PAROUSIA*) of the Lord" when the dead in Christ will be raised and believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess. 4:15-17). But was

the *PAROUSIA* here to be a Pre-Tribulational coming? No! Turning to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian believers, Paul again wrote about "the coming (*PAROUSIA*) of our Lord" and "our gathering together unto Him." (II Thess. 2:1) Here he explained that the "*PAROUSIA*" will not take place until AFTER THE MAN OF SIN IS REVEALED AND HAS CARRIED OUT HIS EVIL WORK: "The Lord shall destroy (the man of sin) with the brightness of His coming (*PAROUSIA*)." (II Thess. 2:8) According to this, the coming (*PAROUSIA*) of the Lord, the Resurrection and the Rapture, will come AFTER the reign of the man of sin - NOT BEFORE.

In II Peter 3, we find more proof that the "*PAROUSIA*" is not a secret coming that will take place BEFORE our Lord's coming in flaming fire and glory. According to Peter, "the promise of His coming (*PAROUSIA*)" will be fulfilled when "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" (verses 11 and 12). The word "*PAROUSIA*" in these places obviously cannot refer to a secret rapture seven years before the end because it speaks of the earth as we know it being destroyed, which would be impossible if one supposes that the earth is to continue on for seven more years AFTER His *Parousia*. Instead of the Rapture being a secret and invisible coming to be followed later by the Revelation, an open and visible coming, the Scriptures show that the Rapture and the Revelation are one and the same event - not two.

**APOKALUPSIS**. The word that is translated "revelation" in connection with Christ's return is *APOKALUPSIS*, which stresses appearing, revelation. Notice its use in II Thess. 1:7-10: "The Lord Jesus shall be REVEALED (*APOKALUPSIS*) from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God ... when He shall come to be glorified in His saints." According to this, the time when Christ is REVEALED in flaming fire is also the time when He comes to be glorified in His saints. If the Rapture had taken place seven years before this, the saints would have already been glorified.

Peter also spoke of the revelation of Christ in I Peter 1:13: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the REVELATION (*APOKALUPSIS*) of Jesus Christ." Again, it is evident that the Rapture is not an earlier event to take place seven years before the "Revelation." If this had been the case, these instructions about being sober and hoping until the REVELATION (*Apokalupsis*) of Christ would be meaningless. It would not be necessary for believers to hope to the end for the grace to be brought to them if they had already been raptured (*Parousia*) seven years earlier.

Likewise in verse 7, Peter spoke of Christians as being "found unto praise and honor and glory at the APPEARING (the revelation, same word, *APOKALUPSIS*) of Jesus Christ." But according to the Secret Rapture position, Christians will have already been taken to heaven and judged BEFORE the REVELATION. This is not what the Bible says. Christians are pointed to the appearing or REVELATION of Christ, a fact which clearly indicates that the Rapture IS the Revelation.

We learn from these verses that the *APOKALUPSIS* - the REVELATION - is when Christians will be gathered; this is when they will meet the Lord; this is the day for which they are waiting. **The Rapture is NOT one event and the Revelation a different event.** Instead of two phases being "clearly distinguished in the Greek" by the terms *PAROUSIA* and *APOKALUPSIS*, a study of these words and the context in which they are used reveals no such distinction whatsoever. To the contrary, both are used in a way that points us to ONE event, the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the age.

Instead of the Greek terms indicating two second comings, just the opposite is the case. This should be carefully noted. We know that the *PAROUSIA* is the SAME event as the *APOKALUPSIS* (Revelation), not only by the actual context in which these words are used (as we have seen), but by the way they are used INTERCHANGEABLY.

In Matthew 24:37, for example, we read: "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming (*PAROUSIA*) of the Son of Man be." Luke's account of the SAME passage says, "As it was in the days of Noah ... even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is REVEALED (*APOKALUPSIS*)" (Luke 17:26, 30). This shows us that the COMING (*PAROUSIA*) of Christ and the REVELATION (*APOKALUPSIS*) of Christ are the same event.

**EPIPHANEIA**. An-other word used in describing the return of Christ is *EPIPHANEIA*, meaning "manifestation" and the glory that will attend our Lord when He comes and which, like the word *APOKALUPSIS*, has been used by Pre-Tribulationists to mean the "second stage" of the Second Advent. This word is not applied to a secret, Pre-Tribulational coming, for Christ will slay the man of sin with "the BRIGHTNESS (*EPIPHANEIA*) of His coming." (II Thess. 2:8)

Bearing this in mind, let us look at I Timothy 6:14, 15, in which this same word appears: "... keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, unto the APPEARING (*EPIPHANEIA*) of our Lord Jesus Christ; which in His times He shall shew, who is the blessed and the only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." Now we ask: why would Christians be exhorted to keep the commandment until the *EPIPHANEIA* - the glorious appearing - if seven years before this there was to be a hidden, secret coming to take the Church out of the world? The *EPIPHANEIA* is when the man of sin is slain, it is when Christ comes in OPEN GLORY AND POWER, and it is until this time that Christians are exhorted to remain faithful. Such instructions would be completely out of place if Christians were to be raptured several years before the *EPIPHANEIA*.

**PHANEROO**. The fourth word on our list is *PHANEROO*, meaning "to render apparent" - which also refers to Christ's coming in open power and glory. "When the Chief Shepherd shall APPEAR (*PHANEROO*), ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (I Peter 5:4) This verse does not say that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear -

rendered apparent - that Christians will have ALREADY been raptured and crowned. No! The rewarding is when Christ shall APPEAR, and not at a supposed invisible coming seven years before. John, like Peter, makes the same point: "We know that when He shall APPEAR (*PHANEROO*), we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." (I John 3:2) As Christians, it is when Christ shall come and APPEAR - be rendered apparent - that we shall be like Him, not at a supposed invisible coming.

**ERCHOMAI**. Looking to Matthew 24 again, we find that *PAROUSIA* is used to describe the SAME event as *ERCHOMAI*. "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the COMING (*PAROUSIA*) of the Son of Man be ... Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man COMETH (*ERCHOMAI*)." (Matt. 24:37, 44)

**HEKO**. *ERCHOMAI*, in turn, is used to describe the SAME event as *HEKO*, for in Hebrew 10:37, we read; "For yet a little while, and He that shall COME (*ERCHOMAI*) will COME (*HEKO*), and will not tarry." Note again, as in the case of *APOKALUPSIS* and *EPIPHANEIA*, the way these words are all used inter-changeably. *HEKO* and *PAROUSIA* are used together by Peter. In answer to the question: "Where is the promise of His COMING (*PAROUSIA*)?" Peter answers: "The day of the Lord will COME (*HEKO*) as a thief in the night." (II Peter 3:10)

The word *PAROUSIA* and *EPIPHANEIA* are linked together in II Thess. 2:8, in which we read that the man of sin will be destroyed by the BRIGHTNESS (*EPIPHANEIA*) of Christ's COMING (*PAROUSIA*).

And finally, we noticed that the *PAROUSIA* is also the *PHANEROO*, for both expressions are used in the SAME verse, referring to the SAME event: "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall APPEAR (*PHANEROO*), we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His COMING (*PAROUSIA*)." (I John 2:28) Thus, we see that ALL of these Greek words are used INTER-CHANGEABLY. As in English, the different words present varied shades of meaning. But trying to split the Second Coming of Christ into "two stages" or "comings" on a supposed distinction in these Greek terms is completely artificial.

### **COMING "FOR" AND COMING "WITH" THE SAINTS**

According to the Pre-Tribulational interpretation, Christ will come in a secret rapture "FOR" His saints, take them to heaven for seven years (or, as in the case of the Mid-Tribulational Rapture, 3 1/2 years), and then come "WITH" the saints. The argument is, of course, that since He will come WITH His saints, He will have to come at an earlier time FOR the saints. But let us take a closer look at this argument. First of all, does the Bible anywhere use the expression "coming FOR the saints?"

Repeatedly, we have heard statements like this: "Jesus is coming back FOR His Church without spot and wrinkle," or "Soon Jesus will return FOR His Church to take it out of this world," or "The Lord comes in the Rapture FOR His Church; after the Tribulation period, He comes with His Church," etc. But the fact is, the Bible never uses the expression, "coming FOR the saints." NEVER! Surely, then, an interpretation that continually uses an expression that the Bible never uses should be subjected to close examination. Once a person has the concept in mind that there will be a special coming of Christ FOR the Church, he then reads about believers being "caught up" and immediately concludes that they will be caught up to heaven. This is not what the passage says at all.

The Rapture passage, I Thess. 4:16-17, says that believers will be "caught up ... in the clouds to meet the Lord." The place of meeting will be just above the earth - in the clouds, in the air. These verses explain WHERE believers will meet the Lord. The place of meeting will be in the clouds, in the air. There is nothing in these verses to indicate that Christ will then turn around and take the Church back to heaven for seven years.

Notice that believers will rise to MEET the Lord. The word that is here translated MEET is a word that was used in reference to the coming of a king or governor to visit a city. As he approached, the citizens would go out to meet him and then escort him on the last part of his journey into the city; the word that is here translated MEET has precisely the same meaning here. As the Lord descends from heaven, believers will rise to MEET the Lord in the air in order to come WITH Him as He CONTINUES to earth.

### **The Use of the Word "APANTESIS" (MEET)**

The word MEET in this verse is *APANTESIS*. It is used in two other passages which we will now consider to see exactly how this word is used in the Scriptures.

### **The parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins**

Matthew 25:1-6: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to MEET the Bridegroom ... And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to MEET Him." In this parable the five wise and the five foolish virgins were to take their lamps and go out to MEET the Bridegroom. What for? To have Him turn around and take them back to where He had come from? No! If this had been the case, He would have been coming to meet THEM, instead of them going out to meet HIM. The plain and simple truth is that when the Bridegroom approached, they went out to meet Him so as to escort him back to where they had been waiting to the place where the marriage was to be held. They went out to MEET Him, and after meeting Him, they returned "WITH Him." Notice here how the word MEET was used.

### **Paul's Journey to Rome**

Acts 28:14-16: "And so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to MEET us as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns ... And then we came (continued on) to Rome ..." Here the same point is seen. As Paul journeyed to Rome, certain brethren came out to meet him and then accompany him as he entered

the city. It does not say that Paul got almost to Rome and then after meeting these brethren, took them back to where he had been. No, he continued on to Rome with them.

Let us suppose these men who met Paul had explained to the others where they were going: "We have heard that Paul is coming to our city; and we are going out to MEET him and will come WITH him." Would any have understood this to mean that they would meet Paul, go back to where Paul had come from, spend several years there with him and then return once again with Paul to Rome? No. None would ever get such a meaning. Yet, this is exactly the kind of "proof" that is offered for the idea of two second comings. We are told that since the saints will come WITH Christ, that in going out to MEET Him, they must be taken back to where He was, then wait several years so as to come WITH Him! NONSENSE! In the Scriptural examples, people went out to MEET someone and escort that person to the place where he was going. In a modern context, it would not be unlike going out to the curb to meet your grandparents who had traveled a long way in their car to be with you, hug and kiss them, collect their luggage and escort them back into the house. In no case are two stages, or two comings, implied by this word. There is no room for a period of seven years between the going out to MEET the one that is coming and the coming WITH him as He continues on to His destination.

Seeing, then, how the word MEET is used in the Scriptures, we understand that when Christ comes, believers will be "caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air" and from there will descend "with Him." So, the fact that the Lord will come WITH the saints (after they rise to MEET Him) does not in any way require two separate second comings of Christ. As Wilber Smith writes in *Tribulation or Rapture - Which?*: "That theory must be deliberately read into the passage. We might go through all the writers of the New Testament and we would still fail to discover any indication of the so-called 'two stages' of our Lord's coming."

One final New Testament reference remains to be considered in which we read of Christ's coming with the saints. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians: "Increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men (so that the Lord) may establish your heart unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ WITH ALL His saints." (I Thess. 3:12-13)

We need only to notice this passage briefly, for it is doubtful that any would attempt to use this verse as a proof text for the idea of a coming for the saints as contrasted to a coming WITH the saints at a later date. There are several reasons for this. The word that is translated COMING in this verse is *PAROUSIA* - a word which Pre-Tribulationists commonly say refers to a "secret" rapture - a coming FOR the saints - whereas in this verse we read of His coming (*PAROUSIA*) "with all the saints." Instead of teaching two second comings of Christ, if anything, this verse would indicate that the *PAROUSIA* is the coming of Christ WITH His saints.

Paul is obviously not speaking of a coming of Christ WITH all the saints as contrasted to an earlier coming FOR the saints, for if there was to be an earlier coming, why would he put stress on their being established in holiness at the coming of Christ WITH all His saints? Surely he would have mentioned the earlier coming if any such existed. The meaning intended in this passage is simply that Paul desired the Thessalonians to be established in the faith and be found unblamable at the Second Coming - along with all the other saints - those at Corinth, Colossi, Ephesus and all other believers everywhere.

#### **AN EXAMINATION OF PRE-TRIBULATIONAL "PROOF TEXTS"**

We shall now examine the so-called "proofs" or "proof texts" that are commonly used in support of the Pre-Tribulationist Rapture position.

#### **The "Absence" of the Word "Church" in Revelation 4-18**

First, Revelation 4:1: "After this I (John) looked, and behold a door opened in heaven" and the first voice which I heard was as it were a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." Now, since chapters 4-18 do not mention the word "CHURCH," this is taken as proof that the Church will be absent from the earth during this time. The verse that follows the third chapter (Rev. 4:1) tells how John in a vision was taken up to heaven and saw certain things. John is used as a TYPE of the Church and this verse is taken to mean that the chapters that follow describe things which will take place "after" the Church is gone! But trying to apply Revelation 4:1 to the Rapture is based only on ASSUMPTIONS, not plain statements. It is ASSUMED that John himself is a type of the Church, for it is taught that his being caught up to heaven pictures the Rapture of the Church. And, finally, it is ASSUMED that since John saw things which would be "hereafter," that this means after the Church is gone. But now, step by step, we will take a closer look at these points.

It is claimed that since the word CHURCH does not appear in Revelation, chapters 4-18, we are to understand that the Church is absent from the earth during this time; not coming into the picture again until chapter 19, in which we read of the marriage supper and the coming of Christ as King of Kings. But if the mere absence of the word CHURCH can prove that the Church is absent in chapters 4-18, we would have to conclude that the Church is also absent in chapter 19 too, for the word CHURCH appears NOWHERE in the entire chapter. Nor does the word appear in chapter 20. It is not even found in chapter 21. Would any contend that the Church is absent in these chapters? It is not until the last chapter of Revelation that we find the term CHURCH used again, and then only in a closing remark: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." (Rev. 22:16)

The Church is not mentioned in chapters 4-18, we are told, and this is taken as proof that the Church is IN HEAVEN during this time. What? If the Church is not mentioned, how could this prove that it is in heaven? Since the

Church is clearly on earth in chapters two and three, and since it is not expressly referred to as being in the heavens during the chapters that follow, the more natural inference would be that it is still ON EARTH during these chapters. One thing is sure: if the Church is not mentioned in these chapters, that is no proof it is in heaven during this time.

We are told that the Church is not mentioned in the chapters after Revelation 3:22. But technically, the Church (as a whole) is not mentioned in the chapters BEFORE Revelation 3:22. Instead, all of the references are to local assemblies, local churches in Asia, each being a part of the great universal Church of Jesus Christ. Here are the facts: the words CHURCH (singular) and CHURCHES (plural) occur 19 times in Revelation 1-3. The four references in Revelation 1 are about "the seven churches in Asia." The word CHURCH is used in each of the addresses to the seven churches: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus," etc., and at the conclusion of each of the letters: "Hear ... what the Spirit saith to the churches." "To all the churches," refers to all seven of the churches mentioned. Thus, the word CHURCH is never used in any of these chapters as referring to the Church in its totality. This is significant.

While it is true the word CHURCH does not appear after Revelation 3, until the last part of Revelation, it is, however, obvious that the Church is definitely referred to by other terms that are used in these chapters. Take Revelation 13:7, for example: "And it was given unto him (the beast) to make war on the SAINTS." Is not this a clear reference to the Church? Revelation 13:10 mentions the "patience and faith of the SAINTS - patience and faith in the midst of persecution! The SAINTS are again mentioned in Revelation 16:6. In Revelation 17, we read about the Babylonian woman "drunken with the blood of the SAINTS (18:24)." Here, then, are several references to the SAINTS; that is, those that make up the Church.

Ah, but those who believe that the Rapture is pictured in Revelation 4:1, commonly teach that the SAINTS in these chapters are not CHURCH SAINTS, but TRIBULATION SAINTS - people that are not part of the Church whatsoever! Yet, when we find the word SAINTS in connection with the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19, then we are told that this refers to the CHURCH SAINTS. Notice the passage: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the SAINTS." The Scofield footnote says: "The Lamb's wife here is the Bride, the Church." So, it is agreed the saints here are CHURCH SAINTS. How can some rightly argue that the saints mentioned in the chapter before (Revelation 18), the chapter before that (Revelation 17), the chapter before that (Revelation 16), and Revelation 13 are different kinds of saints? By such arbitrary methods of interpretation, ANYTHING could be proved from the Bible.

#### **John as a "Type" of the Church in Revelation 4:1**

Assuming that the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 represent seven church ages, a position generally accepted by Bible scholars, coupled with the idea that the word CHURCH does not appear in certain chapters that follow, Revelation 4:1 is then taken as a reference to the Rapture - ASSUMING that John is a type of the Church. But let us look at this verse again: "After this I (John) looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." Though this verse was plainly a message to John, many Pre-Tribulational writers feel this verse CLEARLY refers to the Rapture. Scofield, for example, says: "This call seems CLEARLY to indicate the fulfillment of I Thess. 4:14-17 (the Rapture). The word CHURCH does not again occur in the Revelation till all is fulfilled." DeHann says: "This brief passage from Revelation is one of the shortest, yet one of the clearest pictures in Scripture of the Rapture of the Church" (*35 Simple Studies of the Major Themes in Revelation*, Pg. 61).

But this verse is not talking about the Rapture, it is not talking about the Church, it is talking about John! It was John who was - in spirit - taken into the heavenly realm and saw various things which would come to pass. John being thus taken up does not prove we should look for the Church in heaven any more than being taken in the spirit into the wilderness to "Babylon" would prove that the Church was there. (Rev. 17:3-5)

Those who claim to "clearly" see a Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church in this verse must ASSUME (among other things) that John is a type of the Church. But John could not be a consistent type of the Church in heaven during this period, for sometimes he is represented as being back on EARTH. In Revelation 10:1 and also 18:1, for example, he sees an angel "come (not go) **DOWN** from heaven" - wording which apparently does not symbolize something in heaven, for it is pictured as having a court which is given to the Gentiles to tread down, unless one supposes that unsaved Gentiles have broken into heaven and are trampling down the heavenly temple - which is clearly an absurdity. This, then, would place him below heaven in this scene. In Revelation 13:1, John is standing upon the sand of the sea, and a beast rising up out of the water appears, etc. John is sometimes pictured as being in heaven and sometimes on earth. He cannot, therefore, be a consistent representation of the Church in heaven during these chapters.

#### **The Use of the Words, "Come Up Hither," in Revelation 4:1**

Adding to the foregoing Pre-Tribulational teachings (that the word CHURCH does not appear after Revelation 3, and that John is representative of the Church being taken up to heaven in Revelation 4:1), a final point is made in the attempt to establish a Pre-Tribulational Rapture from the verse under consideration. We are told that when the voice spoke to John and said: "Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be **HEREAFTER**," that the expression **HEREAFTER** means after the Church has been raptured to heaven. But the fact is, the **SAME** words in Greek - *META TAUTA* - that are translated **HEREAFTER** at the end of this verse, are exactly the same words that are rendered **AFTER THIS** at the beginning of the verse. The verse begins and ends with the same identical phrase in the original. Is it not

inconsistent, then, to attempt to make it mean "after the Church" in one instance and not in the other? And to make it mean "after the Church" in both instances would be contradictory.

The normal reading of the passage is simply that John had received specific messages to the seven churches of Asia, after this, he heard a voice saying he would be shown things which would be hereafter - that is, he would be shown events that were THEN FUTURE. It is inexcusable to try to make it mean anything more than this, for this same expression was commonly used by John. *META TAUTA*, though translated in various ways into English, appears in the following verses in John's writings: "hereafter" (John 13:7; Rev. 1:19; 4:1; 9:12); "after these things" (John 3:22; 6:1; 7:1; Rev. 7:1; 18:1; 19:1); "afterward" (John 5:14); "After that" (Rev. 15:5; 20:3); "after this" (John 5:1; Rev. 4:1). To try to force a meaning upon the expression in one instance that is completely unheard of and unrelated to the use of the word in other parts of John's writings is very unsound.

### **The Church in Philadelphia**

Another Pre-Tribulational "proof text" is found in the words of Jesus to the Church in Philadelphia: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Rev. 3:10) It is ASSUMED that since these are to be kept from the hour of temptation, that this means that they will be raptured CLEAR OUT OF THE WORLD in order for this to be fulfilled. But again, the text does not say this.

### **The actual Church in Philadelphia - Primary Example**

Let us consider this verse in its PRIMARY application - as it pertained to the Church in Philadelphia, located in Asia Minor, in the First Century. Was this church kept from a worldwide time of temptation? As sure as the promise was given, they were! But how were they kept? By being raptured to heaven? There is nothing to infer this and by any reckoning of the historical facts, they were not. They were kept by the POWER AND GRACE OF GOD.

### **The Church in Philadelphia as Representative of a "Church Age"**

Let us consider Revelation 3:10 as it would apply to the teaching that the seven churches in Asia represent several church ages. In this case, the passage again falls short of proving there will be an ESCAPE RAPTURE from the Tribulation during the last days of this age. Had this been the case, Revelation 3:10 should have been given to the LAST church of the seven. But the promise of being "kept from the hour of temptation" was addressed to the SIXTH church, not the SEVENTH. and to say, as some do, that in the last days the last several churches or church ages will coincide simultaneously does little to truly alleviate the problem here.

Here again, we see inconsistency in the Secret Rapture teaching. When it is being stressed that Revelation 4:1 teaches the Secret Rapture, we are taught (correctly we believe) that the seven churches represent seven SUCCESSIVE ages of the Church, and that the last church age, THE SEVENTH, will end with the Rapture. Then later, when commenting on Revelation 3:10, this is contradicted by saying that the message to the SIXTH church refers to an ESCAPE for the Church at the end of the age - as though the SIXTH church was the LAST church. In other words, when commenting on Revelation 4:1, the Church ages are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Then later, in order to apply Revelation 3:10 to a Pre-Tribulational Rapture, the age would have to be twisted around like this: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 6 or at least, the last two ages very ARBITRARILY merged together (as in the note on page 1332 of the Scofield Reference Bible). Now since the Church in any century should be able to benefit from the letters to the seven churches, let us view Revelation 3:10 as setting forth truth which could apply to the churches in any century in which the same conditions might exist. This will be a more GENERAL application.

### **God's Keeping Power from Temptation**

It is a recognized method of Biblical interpretation to consider other verses that might shed light on a subject. We will apply this rule here and compare a verse that ALSO contains the WORDS OF JESUS and one that was recorded by the SAME DISCIPLE. In BOTH verses we will find basically the SAME type of promise. But in the one - and this is significant - it is plainly shown that believers can be kept from the temptation or evil of this world WITHOUT being taken out of the world. We ask the reader to carefully compare the following passages: "Because thou hast KEPT the WORD of my patience, I also will KEEP thee from the hour of TEMPTATION, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Rev. 3:10)

"They have KEPT thy WORD ... I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest KEEP them from the EVIL" (John 17:6, 15)

In both passages, the people referred to have kept the word. And because they have kept the word, God will "keep them." In the one passage, they are kept from the hour of temptation; in the other, they are kept from the evil. The fact that they are kept from temptation in the one verse and kept from evil in the other, does not materially change the meaning involved, for evil and temptation are very closely related words. Jesus, for example, taught the disciples to pray: "And lead us not into TEMPTATION, but deliver us from EVIL." (Matt. 6:13) If we are kept from temptation, then surely we are kept from evil. The two go hand in hand.

Both of the passages that we are comparing use the expression "keep from" in English, and in Greek, both use the same basic words. In both instances believers are "kept from" evil or temptation, the one expressly explains that this would be accomplished WITHOUT their being taken out of the world - the exact opposite of the Secret Rapture teaching. If it is possible to be in the world and yet be "kept from" the evil of the world, is it possible to be "kept from" the hour of temptation WITHOUT being taken out of the world? Surely!

Revelation 3:10 speaks about being kept from the hour of temptation "which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Paul also spoke of temptation as being common to all men - but with a special promise to the believer: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God ... will not suffer you (i.e., the believer) to be TEMPTED above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of ESCAPE that ye may be able to bear it." (I Cor. 10:13) Here, then, is another reference about mankind's being tempted, but He promises that through Christ we can be kept from falling into temptation. Other verses also speak of God's KEEPING power, but none imply a rapture out of this world. Jabez prayed: "KEEP me from evil ... and God granted him that which he requested." (I Chron. 4:10)

And we, today, can also be "KEPT" by the power of God through faith unto salvation," (I Peter 1:5) "for God ... is able to keep you from falling." (Jude 2:4, etc.) Thus, by a study of the key words in the text under consideration, we find that believers can be "kept from" the world's evil or temptation, can "be delivered out of temptation;" can find "a way of escape," without being taken out of this world. Some attempt to teach that the Church will be taken out of the world because Revelation 3:10 mentions temptation that will "try them that DWELL upon the earth." It is taught that those who "dwell" upon the earth are those who choose earth as a PERMANENT abode, as compared to the Christians who have spiritual objectives. But this conclusion will not stand up, for in the original, the same word is used in describing our Lord as DWELLING in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13)! None suppose that Jesus felt that Capernaum was His permanent dwelling!

The three applications we have made of Revelation 3:10, summed up, are as follows:

1. Applied SPECIFICALLY to the Philadelphian Church in Asia of the First Century, it (i.e., the Rapture) would have had its fulfillment while those people were still living, a conclusion that no Bible scholar anywhere at anytime has ever reached.
2. Applied to the seven church AGES, it falls short of reaching the last church age, which should be the SEVENTH, for the Philadelphian Church was the SIXTH in the succession, not the SEVENTH or last.
3. Applied as a GENERAL truth for the Church in any century, it could not be limited to people living just prior to the last seven years, but would be a promise of God's KEEPING POWER in any hour of temptation.

#### **The Use of the Word "Escape" in Luke 21, etc.**

One more text should be noticed here: "Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to ESCAPE all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:36) It is true that this verse speaks of ESCAPE, but it says nothing about the Church being taken to heaven in a Secret Rapture in order for this escape to be accomplished! This should be especially noticed, for this is the very thing that some have attempted to read into this passage. In this verse, Jesus said to His disciples: "PRAY always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape ..." How? By a Secret Rapture to take them to heaven seven years before the end of the age? Apparently not! For in the prayer, we read: "I PRAY NOT that thou shouldest take them OUT OF THE WORLD, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John 17:15) Would Jesus pray one way and then tell His disciples to pray another way? Surely this would be contradictory.

With what is this word ESCAPE to be connected? Is it a reference to escaping the Tribulation of the last seven years of this age? It does not say so. A look at the context shows that the reference is to THAT DAY, the time believers shall be gathered to meet Christ in the air and destruction shall fall upon the world - the end of this age. "Heaven and earth shall pass away (the end of this age) ... take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the CARES OF THIS LIFE, and so THAT DAY come upon you unawares." (Luke 21:33-34) Obviously, it could not come upon them unawares if they were to be raptured out seven years before the end of the age! "For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:34-36)

Notice that this passage also mentions THAT DAY. It will bring "sudden destruction" upon unbelievers "and they shall NOT ESCAPE." However, there will be those who will ESCAPE that sudden destruction - those who are sober, spiritually awake, and watching for the return of Christ. Matthew's account (a parallel to Luke 21) also mentions THAT DAY and that we must WATCH, for the time of this event is unrevealed. "For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage ... and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt. 24:38-39)

When God's destruction fell upon the world in Noah's day, those who heeded God's message ESCAPED - they were not destroyed with the unbelieving world. According to the Scriptures, destruction shall again fall on the earth, this time by fire - and again those who have heeded God's message shall ESCAPE and not be destroyed with the unbelieving world. Whether we think of the end that came in Noah's day or the end that shall come upon this world at Christ's return, in neither event is it a case of the righteous escaping from the tribulation, but from the DESTRUCTION that brings the end. We have, then, the words recorded in Luke, in Matthew, and by the Apostle Paul regarding THAT DAY. All speak of the uncertainty of the time. Luke records that it will come "as a snare." Matthew likens it to the days of Noah when "they knew not until the flood came" and destruction fell upon the world. And Paul says it will come "as a thief in the night," a time when men will be saying "peace and safety" - not expecting sudden destruction.

All three of these passages give warnings against the eating and drinking which would result in a condition of unconcern and spiritual neglect. Luke speaks of "surfeiting and drunkenness." Matthew speaks of "eating and drinking" and Paul's words exhort us to be sober and not drunken. All three of the passages show that the time referred to by the term THAT DAY is the end of the age. Matthew and Luke both use the expression "heaven and earth shall pass away" in this connection, while Paul speaks of it as the time when "sudden destruction" shall fall upon the wicked.

Each passage indicates that those who believe will escape the destruction. Luke's account speaks of praying to "escape these things." Matthew's account likens it to the days when Noah escaped the destruction of the flood, and Paul says the wicked "shall not escape," which implies that there will be an escape for those that are not wicked. So, looking at Luke 21:36 again, we find that an ESCAPE is taught - but the reference is to THAT DAY when SUDDEN DESTRUCTION shall fall upon the world. There is nothing in this text about escaping from the Tribulation by escaping out of this world by means of a Secret Rapture. Those who are truly devoted to Christ shall escape all these things - the neglect, the over indulgence in eating and drinking - and "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Peter 1:4), here and now, they shall also escape the fiery sudden destruction which shall bring an end to this age.

### **WILL CHRIST COME AT ANY MOMENT?**

Did the early Christians believe that the Rapture could occur at any moment? Or did they believe that there were certain things that would be fulfilled first?

### **Events which must precede the Second Coming**

We believe there is conclusive proof in the New Testament that the early Church did NOT hold the "Any-Moment" Theory. Jesus pointed out that no man knows the time of His return and that we should live a life of watchfulness and obedience at all times (Matt. 24:36, 42-51, etc.). However, Jesus Himself taught that certain things would happen first.

### **The Ascension**

When Jesus told His disciples of the Second Coming, He was still with them in PERSON. It is evident that the ASCENSION had to precede the RETURN. And before His ascension, of course, CALVARY had to have its fulfillment. Jesus likened His Second Coming to lightening and said, "But FIRST must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation." (Luke 17:25)

### **The Gift of the Holy Spirit**

Jesus told His disciples that after His ascension, He would send the Holy Spirit. They would be endowed with spiritual power to be witnesses unto Him. (Acts 1:8) These things were to take place BEFORE Christ would come again. Thus, prior to Pentecost, we see the disciples awaiting, not the coming of Christ (in His Second Advent), but the coming of the Holy Spirit - even as Jesus had promised.

### **The Preaching of the Gospel to all the World**

Then, being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were to go into all the world and teach all nations. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) Time had to be allowed for travel, preaching, baptizing, instructing converts, etc. Surely, Christ was not going to return before they would even have time to get properly started on what He had commissioned them to do!

### **The Destruction of the Temple**

Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and told His disciples: "When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." (Luke 21:21) At the Second Coming, there will be no need for Christians to flee into the mountains, for they shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air! The destruction of Jerusalem, then, was to be an event which would take place before the SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

### **The Death of Peter**

Jesus also explained that Peter would grow old and die BEFORE the Second Coming. In speaking to Peter, Jesus said: "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he would glorify God." (John 21:18, 19; see also II Peter 1:14) According to this, though the time of the Second Coming was unknown, it was definitely implied that it would NOT take place before Peter's death.

### **Concerning John**

Then Peter asked a question about John. He wondered if John would live to see the day of Christ's return: Jesus replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is it to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that this disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:20-23) Concerning John, Jesus simply did not reveal whether he would or would not live until the Second Coming - though a rumor spread that he would live to see that day. But concerning Peter, it was definitely stated that he would grow old and die - and that he would not live to see the Second Coming.

We believe that early Christians lived in an expectation and HOPE of the Second Coming. For, whether alive at that time, or because of the resurrection, they knew that they would all ultimately share in the glory of that day. But they did not believe in the "Any-Moment Theory." They knew certain things would occur in their day.

### **The Great Falling Away (the Apostasy) and the Revelation of the Man of Sin**

Even more positive evidence of this fact is found in Paul's writings to the Thessalonians. In his first epistle, he had explained to them about the resurrection and the catching up of believers to meet the Lord in the air. (I Thess. 4:16. 17) Later, some confusion had apparently developed in the minds of the people concerning this glorious event, so Paul wrote his second epistle to them in which he clarified the matter. In his remarks, he clearly rejected the "Any-Moment Theory."

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by (concerning) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by (concerning) our GATHERING TOGETHER unto Him, 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. Let no man deceive you by any means, FOR THAT DAY SHALL NOT COME, EXCEPT THERE COME A FALLING AWAY FIRST, AND THAT MAN OF SIN BE REVEALED, THE SON OF PERDITION." (II Thess. 2:1-3) Here, then, is mention of two things Christians would CLEARLY witness BEFORE the day of Christ's coming to gather believers unto Himself. There would be a falling away and the man of sin would be revealed. Concerning these very things, the inspired apostle said, "Let no man deceive you." Let us beware, then, of a teaching which says that the Church will be raptured to heaven BEFORE the man of sin is revealed, for such is the exact OPPOSITE of what Paul taught.

According to Paul, the order of events would be: (1) a falling away; (2) the man of sin would be revealed; and (3) the coming of Christ and our gathering together unto Him. It is plain. But, according to the "Any-Moment" Theory, instead of these events being in order, they would have to be 3, then 1 and then 2. That is, (3) the coming of Christ and gathering together unto Him; (1) a falling away; and (2) the man of sin revealed: 3, 1, 2 or perhaps 3, 2, 1 instead of 1, 2, 3. Bible students link the "man of sin" with the Beast of Revelation 13. Pre-Tribulationists claim that when the Beast takes over, the Church will have been raptured. But this is not what the Bible says. According to Scriptures, the Beast will make war with the SAINTS: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them ..." (Rev. 13:7) The Beast could not make war with the saints and overcome them if they had been taken to Heaven before the Beast comes to power. Paul knew that the man of sin would be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming. (II Thess, 1:7, 8; 2:8) Therefore, he knew that the man of sin would have to come to power BEFORE the Second Coming.

#### **TERMS USED INTERCHANGEABLY**

Being "troubled" with "persecutions and tribulations,": the Thessalonian believers wondered if the day of Christ was not "right at hand." (II Thess. 1-2) If Paul had believed in the "Any-Moment" Theory, here was his perfect opportunity to encourage them with the teaching that the day of Christ was possibly right at hand. He might have said something like this: "Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, for NOTHING NEEDS TO HAPPEN FIRST. That day shall come BEFORE the man of sin is revealed. Yes, our gathering together unto Him could happen at any moment." But, to the contrary, this was NOT his answer. Instead, he explained that the day of the Lord's coming, the day of Christ, when they would be "gathered unto Him," would NOT take place until there would be a falling away first, and the man of sin revealed. This is just the OPPOSITE of the "Any-Moment" Theory.

There can be no mistake that the DAY OF CHRIST refers to the Rapture, for it is used in reference to "our gathering together unto Him." (II Thess 2) Christians are "waiting" for the "day of the Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 1:8, 9) It is "in the day of the Lord Jesus" that they will be gathered and "rejoice" at seeing each other. (II Cor. 1:14) The "good work" begun in Christians must continue "until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil 1:6) Paul exhorted the Philippian believers to be "sincere and without offense" until "the day of Christ" (verse 10) and mentioned that when he would see them "in the day of Christ" he would "rejoice," knowing that his labor had not been in vain. (2:16) All of these verses plainly show that the "day of Christ" is the time when believers are gathered to meet Christ. And the same inspired apostle that wrote these things tells us that "the day of Christ" will NOT come except first the "man of sin be revealed." (II Thess. 2:1-3)

This conclusion is so obvious that those who hold the "Any-Moment Theory" try to make the "day of Christ" (in II Thess. 2:2) refer to something else! Scofield, for example, says that the authorized version "has 'day of Christ' - II Thess. 2:2 - incorrectly for 'day of the lord'." (Scofield Reference Bible, pg. 1212) Another Pre-Tribulationist writer says that the "day of Christ" according to the Greek is really "the day of the Lord" in this passage (Chafer, *The Coming and Reign of our Lord Jesus Christ*, pg. 32, 60). But a look at *Strong's Concordance* reveals that the word translated "Christ" in this verse is CHRISTOS (number 5547 in *Strong's*). This word is used over 500 times in the New Testament and is translated CHRIST. (The Greek word that is translated LORD in the New Testament is a different word altogether, number 2962 in *Strong's*) "Day of Christ" is a correct translation.

But what if it did say: "the day of the Lord?" What difference would this make? We use the expression "the coming of the Lord" when referring to "the coming of Christ." Why, then, should some try to make the New Testament expression "the day of the Lord" mean something different from the "the day of Christ?" The following terms are used INTERCHANGEABLY in the New Testament in reference to the Lord's coming to gather believers:

"The day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10)

"The day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6)

"The day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:8)

"The day of the Lord Jesus" (II Cor. 1:14)

"The day of the Lord" (I Thess. 5:2)

We think it very inconsistent to try to make the last expression mean a different "Lord" or a different time than what the other terms describe. The "day of the Lord" IS the "day of Christ." And according to Paul, the "day of Christ" - when believers will be gathered unto Him - will NOT come until AFTER the man of sin has been revealed.

### **OTHER RAPTURE VIEWS**

A passing comment is now perhaps in order concerning the "three children" of the Secret Pre-Tribulational Rapture doctrine: the Mid-Tribulational Rapture, the Split Rapture, and the Partial Rapture. All that has been said previously concerning the Pre-Tribulational Rapture applies with EQUAL FORCE to these doctrines. But with the last two, the Split Rapture and the Partial Rapture, we encounter an insidious evil which goes far beyond the mischief of the teaching of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture. The teaching behind the doctrine of both the Split Rapture and the Partial Rapture contends that the Rapture of the saints is based upon personal merit and not upon the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Nowhere in the Word is such a doctrine taught. In every instance where the rapture is mentioned, it is mentioned as only one single event, and like the Resurrection, the Rapture is based not on merit, but on the finished work of Christ on the Cross. In this regard, it is of the utmost importance to remember that the object of both the Rapture and the Resurrection is quite simple: to usher the saints of God into His presence at the end of the age. The only difference between the two is that one of necessity deals with the dead in Christ while the other deals with those that happen to be still alive at the Second Coming. Thus, just as the Resurrection has always been considered a part of the finished work of Christ, so the Rapture must likewise be so considered; both events are part of THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS, having nothing to do with the awards at the Judgment Seat of Christ as such.

The Mid-Tribulational Rapture position is attractive to some who naively suppose that by choosing it, they have adopted the "best-of-both worlds" insofar as the Pre-Tribulational and Post-Tribulational positions are concerned. But such thinking is exceedingly superficial! The exegetical problems relating to the Mid-Tribulational Rapture remain exactly as those which relate to the Pre-Tribulational Rapture: one is still left with two "Second Comings" (semantics not withstanding) and a rapture which while three and half years closer to the "Last Day" is still not on the "Last Day."

Those that hold to the doctrine of the Split or Partial Rapture of the Church base their teachings in part on the parable of the ten virgins. They ASSUME that because all are virgins and all are able at first to light their lamps, that all ten virgins are Christians. But the text does not say this! This is merely an assumption. The better assumption would be that this parable parallels and reinforces the parable of the wheat and the tares: both look and act like Christians. A careful re-reading of the Prophetic Scriptures, especially those dealing with the parables of Christ in Matthew, chapters 13 and 24, reveals that from all OUTWARD appearances, it will be exceedingly difficult to separate the hypocrites from the believers in the last days - a task far beyond our poor abilities and imaginations, a task for which only Christ is equipped. **[The material in this section (Chapter IV) has been used by permission of Ralph Woodrow of the Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Riverside, California; it was taken from Mr. Woodrow's excellent book, *Great Prophecies of the Bible*, the first five chapters.]**

It seems, then, that - rather than being ambiguous - the Scriptures are very clear about the Secret Rapture theory - it's simply unscriptural.

### **A SURPRISING TURN OF EVENTS MOST EVANGELICAL "LAY PEOPLE" ARE NOT AWARE OF**

Finally, I wonder how many who - despite the facts so clearly presented above - continue to hold to the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory realize that many - if not most - of their leaders no longer believe in the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, and while they may - from time to time - mouth support for such thinking, they no longer embrace it as a viable eschatology. The fact is, whether most "lay evangelicals" realize it or not, many of their leaders have adopted a "dominionist" or "post-millennial" mind-set very similar to the eschatology espoused by the Roman Catholic Church - and, as a result, have abandoned pre-millennialism (the eschatology upon which the pre-tribulation rapture theory is erroneously linked) altogether.

Christian leaders who embrace political activity have very little choice in the matter. Logic dictates that if they espouse political activity, they must at the same time embrace an eschatology which will support that activity - after all, why fight to return the nation to "Christ and the church" if after they capture it, they are going to then surrender it to the Antichrist and be raptured out of the world - which pre-millennialism postulates whether one speaks of a rapture which occurs at the beginning, the middle, or even the end of the Tribulation period. After all, pre-millennialists of all persuasions postulate that with the seven vials, judgment will fall on the world, which - *ipso facto* - must mean that the earth which post-millennialists and dominionists have labored so hard to "restore" will then be destroyed, rendering all their work (i.e., political activity) meaningless. Typical of those leaders who espouse political activity to "take the nation back for Christ and the church" (and are willing to ally themselves with the Catholics in order to do so) and have - as a result - adopted a "post-millennial" or "dominionist" mindset is Pat Robertson. Many recognize this transformation in Robertson's thinking. Clearly, Harvey Cox of Harvard University thinks Robertson is now - for all practical purposes, whether he admits it or not - a "dominionist." Moreover, according to Cox, it's not just Robertson, but almost everyone who is currently associated with Robertson at CBN and Regent University - and it's not only Cox, but "outsiders" like Jeremy Rifkin who recognize Robertson's transition.

### **THE NEW DOMINIONIST MINDSET OF TODAY'S EVANGELICAL LEADERS**

"Dominionism" is a militant **post-millennial** eschatology ("doctrine of end times") which pictures the seizure of earthly (temporal) power by the church as the only means through which the world can be rescued; **only after the world has been thus "rescued" can Christ return to "rule and reign."** (Some dominionists see the seizure of the earth as the result of "signs, wonders, and miracles;" others picture it as the result of military and political conquest; most see it as a combination of both.) Dominionists - whether subtly or otherwise - discount *altogether* the possibility of a rapture. They have rejected pre-millennialism completely - and in doing so, they have not only rejected the possibility of a pre-tribulational rapture of the church, but also the possibility of a mid-tribulational rapture and a post-tribulational rapture. This is post-millennialism - the historic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Al Dager, a recognized expert on the dominionist mindset, writes, "Some two decades before Pentecostalism found its way into the (mainstream) denominations (i.e., the Episcopalians, the Catholic Church, etc.) as the 'Charismatic Renewal', it experienced a new surge of experience-oriented theology within its own ranks. It was from this neo-Pentecostal experience - what came to be called the '**Latter Rain Movement**' - that Charismatic Dominionism sprang. The more prominent leaders of that movement blended Pentecostal fervor with teachings that the church was on the brink of a worldwide revival. That revival would result in a victorious church without spot or wrinkle ... (which) would inherit the earth and rule over the nations with a rod of iron."

Dager explains that at the core of the dominionist mindset is - "... a ... premise ... that when Adam sinned, not only did man lose dominion over the earth, but God also lost control of the earth to Satan. Since that time ... God has been on the outside looking in, searching for a 'covenant people' who will be His 'extension' or 'expression' in the earth to take dominion back from Satan ..." [Dager, *Vengeance Is Ours*, pgs. 43-44. ]

According to Dager, the basic dominionist model is as follows:

1. The world is plunged into a time of political and spiritual crisis, one which threatens the world with chaos and the church with destruction.
2. The Lord brings revival to the church.
3. This revival results in the end of the church's divisions and the rule of the "apostles and prophets."
4. The "Gospel of the Kingdom" is preached to the whole earth **which leads to the con-version of Israel**, the conquest of the world, and the judgment of those who refuse to convert.
5. The Lord returns.

Jewel van der Merwe of *Discernment Magazine*, elaborates; she writes that the "New Charismatics" are actively pushing a belief system which prophesies that - "... (1) the greatest revival the church has ever known (is about to occur); (2) the greatest baptism of the Spirit the church has ever experienced (will shortly happen); (3) the greatest army (Joel's Army) distinguished by invincibility, immortality and divinity (will be raised up); (4) the greatest purging ... in the history of the church (will shortly begin); (5) the greatest ministry - the Prize of all Ages (is about to break forth); and (6) the greatest miracles, super-natural signs and wonders far exceeding that of the Apostles and Prophets of old (will shortly take place)." [Jewel van der Merwe, "Joel's Army," (Holly, Michigan: *Discernment News-letter* Publications, pg. 1.)

#### The Dominionist Mindset

The dominionist model, however, is at total variance with the older pre-millennial model. The pre-millennial model pictures:

1. The world is plunged into a time of spiritual and political crisis.
2. The church is apostatized.
3. The apostatized church unites with the anti-Christ and seizes control of the world.
4. A great tribulation breaks out against those Christians who refuse to become a part of the apostatized church, resulting in their persecution and finally their destruction - after which the anti-Christ, who had at first appeared as the champion of Israel (and the church), turns on Israel (and the "apostate" church) to destroy her (them).
5. The rapture occurs for those Christians who "remain," (i.e., those who have not been killed off) and Christ returns to bring judgment on those who had destroyed Israel and persecuted those Christians who had refused to be apostatized.

[This model is essentially the model of Hal Lindsay's *Late Great Planet Earth*, with the exception that Lindsey postulates that Christians will be raptured out of the world prior to the beginning of the persecution of the anti-Christ. As we have already shown, pre-millennialists are divided on this point: some argue that the rapture will occur before the tribulation, some say during, and some say afterwards - but the essential elements of the rest of the model remain. It should also be noted in this connection that in the dominionist model, the church is the "main player," while in the pre-millennialist model, Christ is the "main player."]

In one way or another Franklin Hall, William Branham, George Hawtin, Percy G. Hunt, Herrick Holt, George Warnock, Bill Britton, Kathryn Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, Ern Baxter, Don Basham, Bob Mumford, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, D. James Kennedy, William Banks, Marilyn Hickey, Demos Shakarian, Ralph Martin, Steve Clark, Kevin Ranaghan, etc. have all been involved in "Dominionism" and "Latter Rain." [Dager, *Vengeance Is Ours*, pgs. 49-50.]

#### **"STAYING POWER" OF THE SECRET, PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE THEORY**

Still, most evangelical "lay-people" - **in contrast to their leaders** - continue to embrace the theory of the Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. What then gives this theory such "staying-power," even in the face of all the evidence to the contrary? - well, it's not that difficult to understand, and to this extent there is very little room for evangelical lay people to blame their leaders; they have only themselves to blame if they get caught some day by the events of the "end of days." And the reason that they may be caught? - because some how or other they have come to believe that God would never allow them to suffer at the hands of the anti-Christ. And how did they come to believe this? - especially in light of the clear record of both Scripture and history that God HAS very plainly allowed countless numbers of his most cherished followers to be horribly persecuted and even murdered! The reason is that Christians in America have linked material prosperity to successful Christian living! - and all this despite the fact that many of Christ's most ardent followers have suffered terrible privation as a result of their walk with the Lord. While it defies all logic to believe such a thing, nevertheless - and quite sadly - countless numbers of American Christians have come to believe that God's stamp of approval and blessing on the conduct of one's daily life will be manifested in financial stability, a split-level home, two cars, and membership in the local country club. But such thinking is a great travesty of the Christian witness and has opened the doors of the American Church to spiritual decay and even apostasy.

**In teaching and in practice there has been in America - even among TRUE BELIEVERS - a stress upon earthly prosperity that in essence repudiates the truth of the gospel - and this, more than anything else - is as the root of the popularity of the Secret Rapture Theory.** How could a loving God, the saying goes, allow His children to suffer the horrors of the Tribulation? But Christ taught no such thing. Jesus promised us only one sure thing in our pilgrimage through this life if we possessed the courage to be His witnesses - TRIBULATION, TRIBULATION, and more TRIBULATION. Christ said to His disciples, indeed He promised them: "In the world, you will have tribulation ..." (John 16:33) [Indeed, according to the plain teaching of John 16:33, it may fairly be said that if real tribulation and persecution are absent from a Christian's life, one may have concern as to his Christianity.]

The wealth that Jesus promised us was spiritual wealth, not material wealth. Only in America could such false doctrine - the Gospel of Material Prosperity - be preached to Christians with any semblance of success. It certainly could not be preached with any degree of honesty or success to Christians in Cambodia, Uganda, Russia, and China. But much more than this, Jesus specifically warned His disciples against material wealth - the heaping up of earthly treasures: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal ..." (Matt. 6:19).

Rather, He taught His followers the EXACT OPPOSITE - to lay up spiritual treasures in heaven: "... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matt. 6:20).

### **THE RICH, YOUNG RULER - A PARABLE OF THE AMERICAN CHURCH**

But didn't Jesus promise that any man who left father, mother, sister, brother, home, lands, etc., would receive once again in this life all these things back again - and much more? No, that's not what He taught. The clear meaning behind these verses (Mark 10:20-31) is not that we as Christians would necessarily receive back our EARTHLY family, our EARTHLY home, our EARTHLY land, etc., which many of us lost [if not physically, than psychologically through loss of our earthly family's respect] when we decided to follow Jesus, but rather that we would receive, in return, a SPIRITUAL and HEAVENLY family, home, and land which would far surpass, both in this life and in the life to come, the earthly life and treasures that we left behind when we became Christians - and all this with PERSECUTIONS beside: "... Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time - houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, WITH PERSECUTIONS - and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30)

And those who contend otherwise [i.e., that these verses refer to material prosperity rather than spiritual prosperity] somehow always fail to point out what perhaps is the most salient feature of these verses - their context! All these verses were spoken by Jesus in the context of His conversation with the "rich, young ruler:" "Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' "So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. "'You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother'. "And he answered and said to Him, 'Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth'. "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me'. "But he was sad at this word, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions. "Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' "And the disciples were astonished at His word. But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! "'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:17-25)

As with the prophetic Scriptures, the American Church somehow feels it is immune from these verses. Why? - because like the rich, young ruler, the American Church wants the best of both worlds - its wealth as well as the desire to be a follower of Jesus. But Jesus said: "... You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt. 6:24)

As Pastor Joseph Magliato has written in his excellent booklet, *Ye Shall Know Them By Their Cadillacs*: "There is a strange teaching going around that tells us that we have been freed from poverty. We should be driving Cadillacs [now BMWs, Volvos, Lexuses, Jeep Cherokees, etc.] ... We are told that we can serve God and get rich. In fact, God wants us to be prosperous. The more prosperous we are, the more glory God gets. I can imagine someone listening to this line of reasoning and thinking to himself, 'Well get out of the way and let me be an instrument to bring God lots of glory ...' Obviously, this is going to have a lot of appeal, especially for those who are looking for and believing there must be a shortcut to the American Dream. [But] this is not the gospel that we read in the New Testament, it is the Gospel according to Fortune Magazine; the Gospel according to Wall Street, Madison Avenue and the Prosperity Seekers."<sup>2</sup>

The Secret Pre-Tribulation Rapture JUSTIFIES a habit of thinking which has resulted from our experience with the great material [worldly] wealth and prosperity that we as Americans have come to enjoy as citizens of the richest and most powerful nation on earth. We have come to believe that our present prosperity is the result of God's blessing in our lives. We have to believe this or there is no way we as Christians can justify our great worldly wealth while almost everyone else on earth goes hungry in the grip of grinding poverty, many of whom are our own Christian brethren. We have unwittingly created the myth that poverty is the result of ungodliness, that suffering in the Christian life is merely the result of a life that is not wholly given over to Christ; therefore, God would never permit true Christians to suffer in the Tribulation. What hypocrisy! We as Christians are heading for a terrible disaster if we persist in this belief. We must reject this belief. Our wallet has become our god, and we have entered into idolatry in our attempt defend it. No common sense reading of the Bible could possibly justify such beliefs. We have allowed ourselves to be blinded to the truth and have sacrificed our faith on the altar of the almighty dollar.

### **LAODICEAN<sup>3</sup> CHRISTIANITY AND THE AMERICAN CHURCH**

What a sham in which we persist! Deep down in our hearts we know that our own comfort, career, home, bank accounts, and vacations come before the Lord. All these things come first in our lives - and the occasional threat of their absence demonstrates the preeminent position they occupy within us. Only after we have satisfied ourselves is there any money or effort left over for the Lord - and even here it is most likely spent on churches which reinforce our way of thinking and mode of living. **OUR RELIGION EXISTS MERELY TO JUSTIFY OUR ENTANGLEMENT WITH THE WORLD - SUCH IS THE CENTRAL PILLAR OF THE LAODICEAN CHURCH.** Suffering for the sake of the Gospel, the giving of our time and money to the point where it really hurts is alien to us. Can it really be any wonder that God is so little with us? We must have a radical change in our thinking and manner of living. We must begin now to affect a change in our lives. If we wait until the last minute, we may wait too long. What we do with our lives now will affect all eternity for us. Yes, it's true that if we wholly choose Christ today, **WE WILL SUFFER!** (II Timothy 3:12). But not many days hence, we will all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and when we finally see Him face to face, when we finally come fully into His presence and experience completely His grace and love, I fear that many a bitter tear will be shed at all the lost opportunities. Instead, let us today decide to embrace our suffering and material privations as a unique and wonderful gift of God which once given and rejected may never be offered again.

Paul wrote: "But what things were gain to me these I have counted loss for Christ. "... indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:7-8).

### **FOOTNOTES**

1. As quoted in Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1965. p. 47.
2. Joseph Magliato, *Ye Shall Know Them by Their Cadillacs*. Orange, California: Son Light Christian Center, 1979. p. 5.
3. The Laodicean Church is referred to in the Revelation (Rev. 3:14-22) by Jesus Himself as being a particularly APOSTATE church which nonetheless thought of itself as being blessed by God because of its great wealth; but Christ condemned it in very specific terms as lukewarm and worthy only of being VOMITED out of His mouth. The reason for the "Luke-warmness" of the Laodicean church was that it had confused material wealth for spiritual wealth.