

THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

dead will be raised (I Thess. 4:16; John 5:28,29); the saved will be with the Lord (John 14:3; I Thess. 4:17); the bodies of the redeemed will be changed into the likeness of the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21; I Cor. 15:52-54; Rom. 8:23-25); the world and the works therein will be burned up (II Pet. 3:11-13); a crown of glory will be given to the faithful (II Tim. 4:8; I Pet. 5:4); Christ will execute judgment upon all men (II Tim. 4:1; Jude 14,15; Acts 10:42; 17:31; John 5:22-29; II Cor. 5:10); He will reject many who thought they were saved (Matt. 7:21-23; 22:13,14; Luke 13:25-27; cf. Matt. 13:40-43 and 47-50); the door of salvation will be forever closed (Luke 13:25-28); there will be grief and terror in the hearts of many because they are unprepared to meet Him (Matt. 24:30,50,51; 25:30; Rev. 1:7; 6:14-17; Luke 13:28; I Thess. 5:3; II Thess. 1:7-9).

Whether or not all men are to be judged at one time, or whether there will be two judgments, or three or five, is relatively unimportant. Probably no man knows just how and when it will all be done, but the Lord will take care of it without our figuring it out. The important matter is to be ready for judgment by being in Christ, and to know that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10).

Let every sinner remember this fact, and contemplate what it will mean—our Savior will be our Judge! He who once served the sentence of death for us, who now makes intercession for us at the throne of God, who invites all to come unto Him and be saved—it is He who will come in flaming fire, rendering vengeance upon all that know not God and obey not the gospel!

II. A SECRET RAPTURE CONSIDERED

By Seth Wilson

I truly desire to see people awakened to the reality and tremendous significance of the second coming of our Lord. But to put all the emphasis upon a secret rapture and mysterious disappearance of the saved, as if that were certainly the nature of Christ's coming, is to teach as Bible truth what is at best a doubtful, speculative view of the implications of the Bible.

The Lord's coming is surely and clearly taught; so also is the separation of the saved from the unsaved, the resurrection of those

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in Christ, the transformation of the bodies of both the living and the resurrected saints, and their rising to meet Him, ever to be with Him. But after much restudy of the Scriptures, I agree with R.A. Torrey's statement: "The doctrine of the secret rapture of believers does not seem to have much support in Scripture."

I have seen the Baptista motion picture on the rapture and have heard the idea for years. I have had no particular reason to oppose it, and have no feeling against it, if that is what the Lord wants to do; but I just can't find that the Scripture teaches it. I have the MILLENIUM BIBLE by Biederwolf before me; and it makes the fullest study of all the implications which men have found in or read into every prophetic passage. It certainly favors a premillennial view with separate resurrections, a period of tribulation, etc.; but its comments on the rapture are divided, uncertain, and confused, not at all strong for a secret rapture.

I Thess. 4:13-17 does indeed teach that the saved (both living and resurrected) will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at His coming, but there is no indication that it is silent and secret so that it leaves the rest of the world mystified by their absence. It says that the Lord will come with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God. How can we know that this coming to meet His saints is a different coming from that described in Rev. 1:7 where it says: "Every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him"? He said that we should not believe it if one said, "He is in the secret chambers." "For as lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be." (Matt. 24:26,27; Luke 17:23,24).

Those who hold that Matt. 24:30—"They *shall see* the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"—refers to a third coming (or to a second phase of His coming) seven years after He has taken the saved out of the earth, run into serious difficulties. They must make verse 31 refer to a group called "his elect" who are not of the church or the redeemed at His coming. The parable of the ten virgins surely does not indicate that those who are unprepared at His coming will be gathered in later. I Thess. 5:3 indicates that the coming of the Lord which brings sudden destruction upon the wicked is to be in a time when they are saying, "Peace and safety," which hardly seems to be at the climax of seven years of terrible tribulations after all the righteous have disappeared.

The Scriptures most cited as teaching this seven years of tribulation are from Daniel and Matt. 24:21, 29, which in context refer to

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the Jews and the fall of Jerusalem. In Luke 17:22-37 Jesus told His disciples that they would desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, but would not be able to, until He comes upon both the godly and the ungodly by surprise when they are buying, selling, planting, and building, apparently unmindful of any impending judgments.

The Bible does not say that Jesus is coming once "for his saints" and again "with his saints." The passage in I Thess. 4:13-17, which is supposed to teach the former, says, "even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him." If "to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord" (see II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-23), then, when the Lord comes to unite the dead saints with the living ones and to transform the bodies of both (see I Cor. 15:51; Phil. 3:20, 21), why wouldn't He bring the saints with Him? Isn't it also possible that Jude 14—"The Lord came with ten thousands of His holy ones" (this is the American Standard Vers. and "saints" simply means "holy ones")—refers to the angels that come with Him, as stated in Matt. 25:31—"And all the holy angels with him" (see also Matt. 16:27)? Matt. 13:39-41 says He will send the angels to gather the wicked, and Matt. 24:31 also says that when He comes, He will with the sound of a great trumpet send forth His angels to gather His elect from all parts of the world.

The statements about one being taken and another left (Matt. 24:40, 41; Luke 17:34, 35) do not necessarily picture a secret rapture. The word which is translated "taken" in each of these verses is the same word exactly which is used in John 14:3—"I will come again and receive you unto myself." These verses may only say that of people who live and work together here, one will be received by the Lord and the other left out, when Jesus comes for His own.

When the Scripture says that His coming will be as a thief in the night, it explains that it means suddenly and unannounced upon those who are not looking for Him, but it never indicates that it means stealthily and unseen. (See I Thess. 5:1-3; Luke 12:39-46; Matt. 24:42-44; Rev. 16:15). In fact, Peter says: "But the day of the Lord shall come as a *thief*; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; and the elements shall be dissolved with a fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up." All this comes "as a thief!"

There may be some time between events that are associated with the Lord's coming, the resurrection of the saved, the resurrection of the wicked, the judgments of men, destruction of the earth, estab-

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lishment of a new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (II Pet. 3:13), etc. But the time tables which men offer on the "rapture," the "tribulation," the "revelation of Christ with the saints," the "millenium," the "judgment of the nations," etc., is all speculative. It is not found in the Scripture and the advocates of all these things cannot find grounds enough to agree among themselves concerning the order and timing of them.

Even the expression in I Thess. 4:16—"the dead in Christ shall rise first"—does not necessarily depict a second resurrection. The contrast which is stated in the context is between the living believers and the dead believers. The living will not precede the dead, because the dead will be raised first. Then (next) the living will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air. Nothing at all is said about the resurrection of the unbelievers in the entire chapter.

I know that Rev. 20:5 says, "The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection." I am not at all sure exactly what many verses of this chapter refer to, although their general intent is clear. But I do notice that it does not say, or even clearly imply, that the reigning with Christ for one thousand years to take place upon the earth. And it does not say, or even clearly imply, that the thousand years of reign begins at the second coming of Christ. It says that John saw the "souls" of martyrs and of undefiled worshippers of Jesus reigning with Him. Jesus is reigning even now, at the right hand of God, far above all rule, and authority, and power (Eph. 1:20-23). Long ago He told the church in a letter, that He had overcome and sat down on His Father's throne with him. (Rev. 3:21). Jesus said on earth that He was a king, and that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:33-37). He also solemnly promised that the kingdom would come with power while many that heard Him speak were still alive (Mark 9:1). The apostles preached that the Christians of their day were in the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17), although they looked forward to the kingdom of the future also (II Pet. 1:11, and others). They considered that the universal gospel of their day fulfilled the prophecy of Amos 9:11, 12 about God's building again the tabernacle of David (Acts 15:15-18). Rev. 1:6 cites it as a fact in John's day that "He made us to be a kingdom and priests." They even speak (rather mystically) of the fact that He has raised us up with Christ and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). The first resurrection of Rev. 20:5 could be the resur-

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rection of the believer when he is "raised with him (Christ)" and "made alive together with him" (Col. 2:12,13; 3:1; Eph. 2:5). Or why couldn't it?

III. WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN JESUS COMES BACK?

By Wilbur Fields

1. Every eye will see him. Rev. 1:7
 - a. He will come visibly. Matt. 24:27
 - b. He will come with angels (Matt. 16:27), and with clouds, and power, and great glory. (Matt. 24:30)
2. He will come with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel (Michael; Jude 9), and the trumpet of God. I Thess. 4:16; Matt. 24:31; I Cor. 15:52
3. Many will wail when they see Him. Rev. 1:7
4. All who are in the graves will come forth. John 5:28-29
 - a. Both the just and the unjust. Acts 24:15
 - b. The dead are raised incorruptible. I Cor. 15:52
 - c. The dead in Christ are resurrected first, before we that remain are caught up. I Thess. 4:16-17.
5. Our bodies shall be instantly changed to become immortal (I Cor. 15:52-53), powerful (I Cor. 15:43), and spiritual (I Cor. 15:44).
6. The saved shall be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. I Thess. 4:17. Angels will gather together the Lord's chosen ones. Matt. 24:31.
7. There will be a separation on earth. The saved will be taken and the wicked left. Matt. 24:40-41; 13:49; Luke 17:34-36.
8. Angels shall gather the wicked, like reapers gather up tares. Matt. 13:40-41.
9. All nations shall be gathered before the judgment throne. Matt. 25:31-32.
10. The judgment will follow. Matt. 25:33-46; Rev. 20:11-13.
 - a. Christ will be the judge. Matt. 25:31-32; Acts 10:42; John 5:22.
 - b. At the judgment those who are saved will face no condemnation, and have no sins to give account for. But they