

When is the Rapture?

By Harold Camping

A Study of Seven Scriptural Paths
Focusing on the timing of the Rapture

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INTRODUCTION

Family Radio

The following information was copied from the Family Radio Web site:

The Ministry of Family Radio Broadcasting Christ-centered programs to the United States & around the world! Committed to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Family Radio is committed to the Person and salvation work of Jesus Christ as revealed in God's divine Word, the Bible. We are a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to obeying our Lord's command to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Family Radio programs include no commercial advertisements. Air time for other Christian broadcasters on Family Radio is free of charge. The ministry relies solely upon God working through listeners for the financial support of day-to-day operations. We as a ministry desire to be entirely faithful to God's divine, infallible Word, the Bible. Every effort is made to accurately present the Gospel of the Bible. In purpose and belief, we stand out from other radio and TV ministries in our faithful reliance on the Bible as the ONLY infallible authority.

First Broadcast in 1959

Family Radio was organized in 1958 under our official name, Family Stations, Inc., and began to broadcast February 4, 1959, over KEAR FM in San Francisco. Since then, God has enabled the ministry to purchase a number of powerful AM and FM stations and several smaller educational facilities and translators around the country. Our domestic broadcasts reach metropolitan areas such as Birmingham, Charleston, Chicago, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Omaha, Philadelphia, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

International Broadcasts

An important addition came in 1973 with the purchase of an international shortwave station, which we called WYFR, in Scituate, Massachusetts. With the use of many transmitters and antennas, the Gospel is proclaimed in ten languages from thy WYFR facility, now located in Okeechobee, Florida. In 1982, our international outreach was expanded to India and the Far East with the use of powerful transmitters in Taiwan. Family Radio has become a worldwide ministry; our broadcasts now span the globe so "That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60).

A Diversified Outreach

In addition to the broadcasts, Family Radio offers Bible-based pamphlets and tracts to teach and exhort and other diverse means of spreading the Gospel, including the following.

Family Radio School of the Bible

Primarily a correspondence school, Family Radio School of the Bible courses are designed to help laymen and professionals to minister in the church, on the job, and at home through the study of various subjects and certificate and degree programs. The school operates on the principle of Matthew 10:8, "freely ye have received, freely give." In accordance with this principle, the FRSB does not charge tuition; it is dependent upon the generosity of students and friends.

Missionary Tours

Family Radio sponsors "Missionary Tours" which provide opportunities for staff members and listeners (at their own expense) to help spread the Gospel through tract distribution. Our ambassadors for Christ have visited cities in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia (every continent except Antarctica).

On the Internet

Our Christ-centered programs are now available worldwide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the Internet. Access to the Internet may be via computer or television (with the proper equipment). In addition to the programs on the Internet, Bible studies such as "The Glorious Garden of Eden" and "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9" are on our Homepage. Downloadable books include "What God Hath Joined Together" and "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan." The Internet also has our program guide, shortwave schedule, and The Bible. Tell your friends and family that they can find Family Radio on the Internet at: <http://www.familyradio.com>

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The Open Forum is translated from English into nine other languages and broadcast by short-wave radio around the world. You can write to Family Radio, Oakland, California 94621 USA to obtain a short-wave broadcasting schedule for your area. You can also listen to prerecorded short-wave broadcasts on Family Radio's Web site.

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This Book

This book was assembled by a Family Radio listener who has grown in the knowledge his Lord and Savior over the years with help from the Bible based teaching of Mr. Harold Camping, and who desires the same for others.

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WHEN IS THE RAPTURE?

A Study of Seven Scriptural Paths Focusing on the timing of the Rapture

INTRODUCTION

As never before in history there is an increasing preoccupation with the subject of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The return of Israel to their land, the tremendous multiplication of knowledge, the brilliant success of such a Godless ideology as Communism, the potential for massive worldwide destruction by nuclear war, and the rapid increase in communication technology (permitting the Gospel to penetrate everywhere in the world) are some of the phenomena which cause serious people to wonder if the end of time has come very close.

Naturally, then, those who have placed their trust in the Bible as the only reliable source of information concerning the future will look to the Bible for information concerning the end-time events. One of these events which gives great comfort to the child of God is the Rapture of the believers. By the word "Rapture" we have in mind that moment in history when the believers in Christ who have not experienced physical death will be changed into their glorified bodies. At that time they will be caught up in the air to be with Christ, even as I Thessalonians 4:17 declares:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

A puzzling situation has developed, however, concerning the timing of the Rapture. Some hold that it will be 1007 years before the end of the world. Others believe the Bible teaches that it will be 1003.5 years before the end, while still others suggest 1000 years. Then there are those who teach that this grand event will occur right at the end of time.

One logically wonders, therefore, if the Biblical teaching concerning the timing of the Rapture is obscure, if the language of the Bible is extremely difficult to understand, and of course he would surely wish that he could understand the Bible clearly on this question. For then one could know more specifically how the believers will relate to the final tribulation period of which the Bible speaks. Moreover, a clear understanding of the timing of the Rapture would greatly help in understanding many other details relating to the end of time.

Wonderfully, the Bible has much to say about the Rapture. It is not an event which is rarely alluded to in the Bible. And the timing of the Rapture in relationship to Judgment Day and the end of time is extremely well documented in the Scriptures. We need not have any doubt whatsoever concerning its place in the sequence of events which relate to Christ's return.

In this study we will examine seven different sets of Scriptures dealing with the Rapture. As we go through these Scriptures, we will find seven independent paths which lead us to the same inescapable conclusion:

The Rapture of the believers will occur at the end of time. It will take place at the same time that our Lord comes in Judgment to judge the world. It will come right at the time that the world is beginning to collapse as God is preparing to destroy the world by fire.

May we be grateful to our Lord for the abundance of Biblical information He has provided on this important event.

Let us look together now at the first of these seven paths.

THE LAST TRUMPET AND THE RAPTURE

In I Corinthians 15:51-53 we read:

Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

In these verses God is discussing the fact that not everyone will die. (To fall asleep is Biblical language signifying death.) There will be those who will instantaneously receive their resurrected bodies without first falling asleep. This language is clearly concerned with the Rapture, for verse 53 speaks about the believers receiving their immortal bodies.

But then God tells us when this event will occur. Note the language which declares "at the sound of the last trump." This is a time clue. God is effectively saying that when the last trumpet sounds the Rapture will occur.

If we follow the Biblical principle that the Bible interprets the Bible, we must now search the Bible to find language relating to the sound of the last trumpet. If such references can be found, perhaps they will tell us when the last trumpet will sound.

In Revelation 11:15-18 we read:

And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in Heaven saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces and worshipped God saying, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come, because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power and hast reigned. 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."

In this passage God gives us an outline of the events that will accompany the sounding of the seventh or last trumpet. At that time the following becomes a reality."

- The time has come for the dead to be judged.
- The time for the rewarding of the saints has come.
- The time for destroying the destroyers has come.

In other words, the sounding of the seventh trumpet is signalling that Judgment Day has come. It signals that the time has come for the

believers to receive their reward. It is the time that the forces of evil are to be cast into Hell. Therefore, the sounding of the last trumpet must be at the end of time. For it is at the end of time that Judgment Day occurs, and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire.

Returning now to I Corinthians 15:51-53 we will recall that it effectively declares that the Rapture of believers is to occur at the sound of the last trumpet. Since we have seen from Revelation 11 that at the sound of the seventh trumpet Judgment Day occurs, we can therefore know that the Rapture is a simultaneous event with Judgment Day.

SODOM'S DESTRUCTION AND THE RAPTURE

From I Corinthians 15:51-53 we have seen that the Rapture is to occur at the time Christ returns to judge the world. Let us now look at a second path that helps us to see the timing of the Rapture. In Luke 17:28-37 we read:

Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. 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. In that day he which shall be upon the house top and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. And they answered and said unto Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said unto them, Whosoever the body is thither will the eagles be gathered together.

In this passage God is using the destruction of Sodom as a figure or type of the judgment of the last day. We will see that the saving of Lot and his family is a figure of the Rapture which will occur simultaneously with Judgment Day.

Looking at the destruction of Sodom, we can see that God sent angels to rescue the family of Lot (Genesis 19). On the heels of this rescue operation God rains down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and the other wicked cities, utterly destroying them.

God declares in Luke 17:30, "so it will be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." Thus Christ links the destruction of Sodom to Judgment Day.

But God also links the rescue of Lot and his family to the Rapture. Note that God declares in verse 34:

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

The parallelism that exists between the destruction of Sodom and the end of the world is clearly evident. Sodom, a wicked city ripe for judgment, is populated by two kinds of people: there are the wicked who are to be destroyed, and there is the church represented by Lot and his family. It is a tiny little remnant in this wicked city.

So today the world exists as a world populated by those who are

altogether rebellious against God. Amongst the vast populations of the world there exists the church. It consists of only a tiny percentage of the world's population.

Then Judgment Day comes for Sodom. The cup of their iniquity is full. God will utterly destroy them for their sins. But just ahead of that judgment God rescues Lot. So close in time is rescue to the poured out judgment of God that Lot's wife is destroyed in the judgment. So it will also be at the end of time. When the nations have become ripe for judgment, God will send His angels to rescue the believers. Two will be in one bed; one is taken, the other is left. The one that is taken is caught up in the air to be with Christ even as I Thessalonians 4:17 teaches. The one that is left is left to stand for judgment even as the wicked of Sodom were left for judgment.

Thus Christ is teaching that the Rapture comes as a simultaneous event with Judgment Day itself. There is complete agreement between the account of Jesus concerning the destruction of Sodom and the I Corinthians 15 account which speaks of the Rapture coming at the sound of the last trumpet.

THE NOACHIN FLOOD AND THE RAPTURE

A third path of the Bible continues to give us vast assurance that the Rapture will be a simultaneous event with Judgment Day. This is found in the language Jesus utters as He compares the Flood with its events to Judgment Day with its events. In Matthew 24:37-41 we read:

But as the days of Noe 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, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

In this passage God sets up parallel language relating the flood that destroyed the world of Noah's day to the event of Jesus' return. This parallelism, indicating that the destruction of the world in the Noachin Flood was a type or figure of Judgment Day, is also set forth in II Peter 3:3-7, where we read:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lust, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water perished; But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

When we look at the Flood account of Genesis 7, we see that seven days before the Flood God gave Noah notice that the Flood would come in seven days. Therefore, Noah and his family were to go into the ark.

Genesis 7:1 -- And the Lord said

unto Noah, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."

Genesis 7:4 -- For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

That the Flood did indeed come seven days after notice was given, as we read in verse 4, can be learned from the language of Genesis 7:10:

And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

The Bible then records the precise date of the Flood, together with the information that Noah actually entered the ark the selfsame day that the Flood came. We read this in Genesis 7:11-13:

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah and Shem and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark.

Thus Christ teaches that the peoples of Noah's day continued eating and drinking until the day that Noah entered the ark and the Flood swept them away. Luke 17:27 reads:

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

Certainly we can see the parallelisms that exist between the Flood and Judgment Day. Noah and his family lived in a world cursed by sin. So at Judgment Day the believers exist as a tiny remnant in a world cursed by sin. When the floods were to begin, Noah and his family entered into the ark, a haven of safety for them. So, too, at Judgment Day the believers are raptured while the unsaved are judged and removed into Hell. "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left." Matthew 24:40. The one taken is like Noah. Even as Noah went into the safety of the ark, so the believer is caught up to the safety of Christ. The one left is left for judgment, even as the people outside the ark were left for judgment.

Once again, therefore, we see clearly that the Rapture is simultaneous with Judgment Day.

When Christ rose from the grave, he showed the resurrection to be a fact by many proofs (Acts 1:3). Likewise the Bible's teaching concerning the timetable of the Rapture is set forth in many places in the Bible. Thus we shall now look at a fourth path in the Bible where this truth is taught.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE RAPTURE

In I Thessalonians 4:14-17 we find recorded one of the most frequently quoted passages concerning the Rapture. We shall begin with this passage as we discuss a fourth path

that shows the timing of the Rapture. There we read:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The first truth that we would look at in this passage is the fact that the Rapture will be a simultaneous event with the resurrection of our bodies. God indicates that at His coming He will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. Elsewhere (II Corinthians 5:8) God teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When Christians die, because they were given their resurrected souls at the time of their salvation, in their souls they can go to be with Christ. In this condition they live and reign with Him in Heaven.

But at Christ's return all these who have died, that is, who have fallen asleep, and who have been living with Christ in Heaven, will come with Him, as I Thessalonians 4:14 teaches. Then the graves are to be opened and the bodies of those who have died will be resurrected. At the same time the believers who have not died are given their resurrected bodies. Immediately following this, the resurrected bodies from the graves, together with the believers who have not died but who have instantaneously been given their new bodies, are caught up in the air to be with the Lord forever. Only the unsaved will still remain on the earth to face the wrath of God, which will be poured out upon them because of their sins.

But now we want to look more closely at the fact of these resurrected bodies. For the Bible teaches elsewhere the precise time when these bodies will be resurrected. And since, as we have just seen, the Rapture is simultaneous with the resurrection of the bodies of the believers, the determination of the time of the resurrection of the bodies of the believers will also give us the timetable of the Rapture.

In John 6 Jesus declares four times that the resurrection of believers' bodies would occur the last day.

John 6:39 -- And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

John 6:40 -- And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:44 -- No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:54 -- Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

The phrase "the last day" is quite significant. It is found only eight times in the whole Bible. Since God chooses words very carefully, we know this phrase has been selected to signify important truth.

Let us look at this phrase for a moment. Four times it is used in John 6 as we have already seen. The other four references are as follows:

John 11:24 -- Martha saith unto Him, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

John 12:48 -- He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

John 7:37 -- In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

Neh. 8:18 -- Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly unto the manner.

Quickly we see that in John 11:24 God is showing us that Martha understood clearly the truth that is offered in the four verses of John 6. The resurrection of believers is the last day.

From John 12:48, the sixth verse named above, we discover that the last day is Judgment Day. It is then that God will have all the unsaved give account of their sins and remove them into Hell to pay for their sins. Thus we see that the resurrection of believers, which also is to occur the last day, is simultaneous with Judgment Day. And since we saw from I Thessalonians 4:14-17 that the resurrection of our bodies is simultaneous with the Rapture, we can therefore know from these verses that the Rapture is simultaneous with Judgment Day.

Before we look at the remaining two references to the "last day," let us continue our thinking a bit longer on John 12:48. If Judgment Day is the last day, then the resurrection of the unsaved must also be the last day. For Revelation 20:13 indicates that the sea gave up the dead, and death and Hades gave up the dead, and all were judged and cast into the lake of fire. But if this is so, then the resurrection of unbelievers is the last day. Then there must be one general resurrection of both the saved and unsaved on the last day. Under no circumstance are we to understand that the believers are resurrected at one time and the wicked another.

Clearly this is precisely what the Bible teaches. In John 5:28-29 we read that "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth." In other words, everyone will be resurrected at the moment of Christ's return. There will be no one left in the grave. In I Thessalonians 4:17 we read that the believers will hear the shout of the command. John 5:28,29 shows, however, that the unbelievers too will hear that shout. For there our Lord declares, "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice."

John 5:29 does add that there are two destinations for these who come forth from the tombs. Those who have done good, that is, those

who have had their sins covered by Christ's righteousness, will be resurrected to life. But those who have done evil, that is, the unsaved who have not had their sins covered, will be resurrected to damnation in judgment.

As we have compared these Scriptures which speak of the "last day" with I Thessalonians 4:14-17 and John 5:28,29, we have discovered that the Bible is clearly teaching that the Rapture, the resurrection of believers, the resurrection of unbelievers, and Judgment Day are simultaneous events at the end of time. Isn't it marvelous how all these verses fit together so perfectly?

We have looked at six of the eight verses in the Bible which are the phrase "last day." The remaining two are:

John 7:37 -- In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Neh. 8:18 -- Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly according unto the manner.

We should also look at these to make certain that we are checking everything that relates to the phrase "last day." These two remaining references are both related to the Feast of Tabernacles. The fact is, both speak of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

But what does the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles have to do with the Rapture or Judgment Day? We shall see that it is intimately involved with these subjects.

Let us first look at the nature of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a feast commemorating two events. First, it looked back upon the sojournings of Israel in the wilderness, and secondly it was the time of the completion of the harvest.

In Leviticus 23:42,43 we read:

Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

These verses teach that it was a feast that looked back on the wilderness sojourn of Israel. But now they have entered the promised land, the land of rest. So, too, believers today are living in the wilderness of this world. When Christ comes, our rest in Him will be complete. We are strangers and pilgrims now; but when we receive our resurrected bodies we will be forever with Christ (I Thessalonians 4:17). Therefore, we can see how this Feast identifies with Christ's return. For it is then we receive our resurrected bodies. It is then our salvation is complete. It is then our wilderness sojourn is ended.

The second reason for the Feast of Tabernacles was the celebration of the end of the harvest.

In Exodus 23:16 we read:

and the feast of the ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labors out of the field.

This is a surprising verse, for it speaks of the Feast of Ingathering, which is the same as the Feast of Tabernacles, as the end of the year.

But the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated during the seventh month (Leviticus 23:39). And the seventh month is many months from the end of the year. Yet God speaks of it as the "end" or "going out" of the year.

When we see how intimately this feast is related to the end of time, we can see why God speaks of it as the end of the year. Jesus speaks in Matthew 13 of His return at the harvest time (Matthew 13:30 and 39).

Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of 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 my barn." The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Since the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrating the harvest, relating it to the end of the year, and since Christ speaks of the end of the world as a harvest time, we can see a beautiful relationship which exists between the Feast of Tabernacles and the end of the world. No wonder then that the phrase "last day" is found in connection with the resurrection of believers, Judgment Day, and the Feast of Tabernacles. We can make a chart to show these relationships:

Feast of Tabernacles

End of World

End of year

End of time

Harvest time for crops

Harvest time for mankind

End of wilderness sojourn

End of wilderness sojourn for believers

Last day (Exodus 23:16)

Last day (John 12:48, John 6:39,40)

No wonder then that in Nehemiah 8:18 and in John 7:37 God used the phrase "last day" in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Before we leave the Feast of Tabernacles, one other important fact should be noted which links the Feast of Tabernacles to the last day or the end of time. In the Old Testament there were three

times during the year when all the men were required to appear before the Lord as recorded in Exodus 23:14-17:

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto Me in the year. Thou shalt keep a feast of unleavened bread: (Thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty); and the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labors, which thou hast sown in the field; and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labors out of the field. Three times in the year all they males shall appear before the Lord God.

The first feast was the Feast of Unleavened Bread that began with, and was identified with, the Passover. This feast began in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month (Leviticus 23:5) and continued for seven days after the fifteenth day (Leviticus 23:6, Deuteronomy 16:1-3) It was the day that anticipated the shedding of Christ's blood as Passover Lamb

that would take away the sins of the world.

The second was the Feast of Harvest or the "firstfruits" or "Feast of Weeks." This feast was observed seven full weeks from the morrow after the Sabbath that is, the Sabbath that occurred during the Passover week (Leviticus 23:15,16 and Deuteronomy 16:9). Because this feast day was fifty days after the Passover, it was also called Pentecost. It was a day that anticipated the spiritual harvest that would begin as a result of Christ going to the cross.

The third feast as which the males had to appear before the Lord was the Feast of Tabernacles, which was preceded by the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month). The Feast of Tabernacles continued from the fifteenth day for eight days of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27,34,39). It was a feast day, as we shall see, that anticipated the completion of the spiritual harvest that would result because God provided salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The awe-inspiring fact that now faces us is that, while these feast days anticipated and pointed to the historical accomplishment of the atonement, on the very same days the nation of Israel was celebrating these feasts God brought to pass the spiritual reality to which these days pointed. For it was on the Passover in A.D. 33, while the Jews were keeping the Passover, that Jesus hung on the cross as the Passover Lamb.

And it was on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and the harvesting of souls began. It was at that time that the firstfruits of the harvest were seen--3000 from eighteen nations were saved (Acts 2).

So we see that two of the three most important feasts, those specifically emphasized as times when the Jewish men must come to Jerusalem, were the literal times when God's program of redemption was being carried out. The Jewish Passover was celebrated the very day Christ, the Passover Lamb, was slain. The Jewish Feast of firstfruits, Pentecost, was observed the very day that God poured out His Holy Spirit, and the firstfruits of the spiritual harvest were seen.

But that leaves one remaining feast day, the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Ingathering. Surely the Bible is suggesting that Christ will return in literal fulfillment of this feast, even as there was literal identification with the other two important feasts.

No wonder then that God uses the phrase "last day" in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles is identified with Christ's return, just as the resurrection of our bodies is, or Judgment Day is.

We see, therefore, that in all eight places where the phrase "last day" is found in the Bible, it is pointing to the end of time. It is pointing to the end of this earth's existence, when Christ returns in Judgment.

Returning now to I Thessalonians 4:14-17, we have seen that the Rapture is simultaneous with the resurrection of believers. From John 6 we saw that the resurrection of believers is the last day. From John 12 and from the "last day" references to the Feast of Tabernacles, we have seen that the "last day" is Judgment Day. Moreover, we saw that these truths agree precisely with the statement of John 5:28,29, which speaks of

one general resurrection at Christ's return.

We have thus seen that I Thessalonians 4, when looked at in the light of John 6 and the other passages which tell us when the resurrection of believers will occur, ties the Rapture to a simultaneous time with Judgment Day and the end of time. Thus, this fourth path we have followed agrees precisely with the three we examined earlier.

THE TRIBULATION AND THE RAPTURE

We have thus far seen from four separate and distinct Biblical paths that the Rapture must be the last day of this world's existence. It must be a simultaneous event with the resurrection of all humanity and with Judgment Day. But the Bible has more to say about this. Let us now look at this question from another viewpoint.

In Matthew 24 Christ gives to us an outline of the signs of events that must take place just before the end of the world. He declares in Matthew 24:21-31:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders; inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert, go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For whosoever the carcass is there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

When we examine these verses, we shall see that the Rapture not only immediately follows the final tribulation believers must endure, but that it is simultaneous with the end of the world. Thus it must be simultaneous with Judgment Day.

In verses 21 and 22 God speaks of an increasingly great tribulation which must come upon the earth. For the sake of the elect this tribulation will be shortened. We will not discuss at this time the implication of this tribulation, but we do know it must come. No other passage in the Bible speaks more plainly of it.

We should ascertain who the elect are who are spoken of in verse 22. God uses this word "elect," which is the Greek "eklektos," some twenty-three times in the New Testament. Some would teach that the "elect" refers only to believing Jews on the ground that Matthew 24 relates only to the Nation of Israel, not to the Gentiles. If we would follow this procedure, declaring Matthew 24 is

only for the Jews inasmuch as Jesus was speaking to the disciples who were Jews, we could then logically argue the John 3 has no reference to Gentiles because Christ was speaking to Nicodemus, who was a Jew. On that basis, only Jews are to be born again, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Likewise the book of Romans has no import for us today because it is addressed to the church at Rome. And Isaiah and Jeremiah have no interest for Gentiles because these prophets were sent primarily to Israel.

On this basis then, only certain books of the Bible are to be considered pertinent and authoritative for the New Testament believers.

We immediately sense the error of this line of Biblical interpretation. The Bible says that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for teaching, etc. All the Bible is to be studied and obeyed. Matthew 24 is to be read and studied by Gentiles as well as Jews, as carefully as John 3 or any other part of the Bible. The fact is, when we read Matthew 24 carefully, we see that God is discussing the whole world. In verse 14 He speaks of the Gospel going to every nation. In verses 28-31 He speaks of His return in power and great glory. He does not return to Jews only. He returns to the whole world. Therefore the warnings of Matthew 24 are to the whole world. The statement of Matthew 24 is as important to Gentiles as I Thessalonians 4:14 or any other passage of the Bible.

Returning now to the word "elect" found in Matthew 24:22, we find that in the King James Bible it is translated as "chosen" or as "elect." Examining the twenty-three places where "eklektos" is used, we see very quickly that the Bible is speaking of those who are elected of God to be believers. This can be seen in such passages as:

Matthew 20:16 -- So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen.

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

Romans 8:33 -- Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

Colossians 3:12 -- Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Titus 1:1 -- Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth, which is after godliness.

Since the believers are the elect, and since Matthew 24:22 teaches that the tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect, we already see that the believers will be present through the tribulation. Thus, on the basis of this verse alone, we would have trouble with a doctrine that teaches that the Rapture will occur before this tribulation.

Returning to Matthew 24 we see that God gives us a very careful chronology covering the relationship of the tribulation to the

return of Christ. In Matthew 24:29 God declares:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

This tells us very emphatically that the last event that occurs before the return of Christ is the tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24:21,22. The language "immediately after" does not allow for any passage of time between the tribulation and the events spoken of in verses 29-31.

When we look carefully at the events that immediately follow the tribulation, we see that the sun is darkened and the moon does not give its light. This indicates that it is the end of time. The sun and the moon regulate the passage of time. Now time is no more, for Christ has returned. It is the last day of this world's existence. Then we read that the stars begin to fall from heaven. This is language of Judgment Day and the destruction of this universe. God gives us further amplification of this even in Revelation 6:12-17, where He declares:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the rich men and the chief captains and the mighty men and every bondman and every free man hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

This can only be language of Judgment Day. We are not surprised to read of the collapse of the universe. In II Peter 3:10-13 we read:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, 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? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Thus we see that one fact stands out. This universe will be destroyed when Christ comes again. It must be destroyed because it is under the curse of sin. The viruses, earthquakes, tornadoes and famines experienced are present because mankind has rebelled against God. Therefore, not only was man cursed, but the universe over which man ruled was also cursed. We read in Romans 8:20-22:

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same

hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

The creation looks with eager longing at the revealing of the sons of glory (the believers) because it is at that time that the universe will be made free from the curse. Immediately after the unsaved have been judged and removed into Hell, the redemption of this earth, its destruction and recreation as new heavens and a new earth must take place.

Therefore, we are not surprised to read that the stars are falling from heaven, and the heaven is being rolled up when Christ returns. From Matthew 24:29 we know that this is immediately following the tribulation. Any system of teaching which suggests that following the tribulation Christ will return to this sin-cursed earth to set up an earthly throne is offering an impossible suggestion. The return of Christ immediately following the tribulation signals the end of the present universe.

We might note the conduct of the unsaved immediately after the tribulation at the time the universe is collapsing and Christ comes in power and great glory. In Matthew 24:30 we read that all the tribes of earth mourn. In Revelation 12:8,9 we read that all the peoples are in abject terror, calling to the mountains to hide them and the hills to crush them. No wonder they are in great terror. It is the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. It is Judgment Day, at which time they must give an account of their sins and receive the righteous condemnation of God as payment for their sins.

But now let us look more carefully at Matthew 24:31, for there God reveals the first thing that Christ will do when He comes in great power and glory. And as we look at this verse more carefully, let us note how parallel in language it is to I Thessalonians 4:16,17, which speaks of the Rapture.

First we read in the Matthew account that Christ will send His angels. I Thessalonians 4:16 speaks of the sound of the trumpet. Christ then speaks in Matthew 24 of gathering the elect from the four winds under heaven. I Thessalonians 4:17 speaks of those who are alive being caught up to be with Christ. As we saw earlier, the elect are the believers who are being raptured from all over the earth. The phrase "under heaven" could simply be translated "under the sky." In any case these are the believers living on the earth whose commonwealth is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20)

So we see that there is parallel language in Matthew 24:31 and I Thessalonians 4:16,17 concerning angel activity, the sound of the trumpet at Christ's return, and the rapture of believers.

Thus in our study of Matthew 24 we can see very clearly that God's timetable for the rapture of believers is at the end of time. It is immediately after the great tribulation and coincides with Judgment Day. How marvelous God is in giving so many proofs concerning the timing of the Rapture.

Thus far we have found five very plain and distinctive paths revealing

that the Rapture will be at the end of time. Let us now look at a sixth path found in the Bible.

THE MAN OF SIN AND THE RAPTURE

As we look at II Thessalonians 2, we discover more information that points to the Rapture at the end of time. In this passage God is teaching us that two events must happen before He is ready to come for His believers. The first is the rebellion, and the second is that the man of sin must be revealed. He will be revealed at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, at which time Christ will slay him with the breath of His mouth. That is, the wicked will be cast into Hell. Let us read these verses of II Thessalonians 2:1-9:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by 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, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that, when I was with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time: For the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.

Who is the "man of sin"? If we see that he is Satan himself, as he works through his emissaries called false prophets or false Christs, we will find total Biblical validation. We find in these verses that he is worshipped as God. Revelation 13:4 speaks of the dragon, who is Satan, being worshipped.

And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

Thus the language of II Thessalonians 2, which speaks of the man of sin being worshipped, points us to Satan as being the man of sin. But how can Satan be called a man? Isn't he indeed a fallen angel? We shall see that he is called a man because he was typified by the king of Babylon who, of course, was a man.

In Isaiah 14 we read of the fall of Lucifer. From the context we know that this Lucifer is Satan himself. But as Isaiah 14 discusses the fall of Lucifer, God speaks of Lucifer as a man. We read in Isaiah 14:16:

They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee and consider thee saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?

He undoubtedly is called a man because he was prefigured by the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4). As Revelation 18 teaches, Babylon is often used in the Bible as a figure of the kingdom of Satan. Thus we immediately see the parallelism that exists. On the one hand we have

Babylon, which is ruled over by the king of Babylon. On the other we have Satan's dominion, ruled over by Satan.

This man of sin, whom we see to be Satan, takes his seat in the temple. What does taking one's seat refer to? Jesus is seated at the right hand of God ruling over everything (Ephesians 1:20). Thus, to take a seat is Biblical language meaning to rule or have authority. The man of sin, Satan, takes his seat or rules in the temple.

But to what does the "temple" refer? Is there to be a literal reconstruction of the temple? Nowhere is the Bible do we read of a future reconstruction of the temple. The fact is, since the veil of the temple was rent at the time Jesus hung on the cross, the temple in Jerusalem ceased to have any significance as a holy place. Rather, the Bible speaks of the body of believers as being the temple. We read in Ephesians 2:19-21:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.

In I Peter 2:5 we read:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

And in I Corinthians 3:16 God emphasizes that the body of believers is the temple, as He declares:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

Therefore we see very clearly that the temple is the church, the corporate body of believers. It is here that Satan will operate as the man of sin. Thus we know that before Christ comes again, the man of sin (Satan) must take his seat (rule) in the temple (the church or body of believers) where he will be worshipped as God. Since he is a spirit, he cannot be seen to literally rule amongst the body of believers. He can rule, however, through false prophets and pseudo Christs who are bringing another gospel than the true Gospel. The Bible speaks of this kind of activity in II Corinthians 11:13,14:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Similarly we read in Matthew 24:24:

For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders, inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

These verses emphasize the utter deceitfulness of Satan in this effort. The gospel he brings will be so much like the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible.

Note in the Matthew 24 verse that these false prophets will come with signs and wonders. Satan will not only come with a gospel so closely patterned after the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible, but he also will give life and vitality to it through signs and wonders. Even as Jesus came 2,000 years ago with signs and wonders as He brought us the true Gospel, so Satan will attest to

the seemingly God-like, Jesus-related character of his gospel by coming with signs and wonders.

The passage we are presently studying, II Thessalonians 2:1-9, also speaks of signs and wonders. The false prophets who represent him will come with signs and wonders even as verse 9 teaches:

Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.

We must realize, of course, that these false prophets have been so deceived that they are convinced they are servants of Christ. Satan is the great deceiver, the father of lies (John 8:44). Moreover, II Thessalonians 2:10,11 teaches that God himself blinds those who come because they refuse to believe the truth.

Thus we see that God is declaring in II Thessalonians 2 that before Christ comes there must be evidenced the activity of Satan, as those who come with signs and wonders, and who in fact are his servants, will rule or have authority among the body of believers where the true Gospel ought to be proclaimed. These false prophets will be convinced that they are true prophets of Christ. But because they are coming with a gospel other than the true Gospel, they will in actuality be causing people to worship Satan. This is the chief nature of the rebellion which must come before Christ returns. The church, consisting of congregations and denominations all over the world, will be infiltrated and finally overrun by those who bring other gospels. The chief method of immediately recognizing this threat is especially in relationship to the focus on signs and wonders.

We probably should insert here a paragraph on the definition of the true Gospel. In Revelation 22:18 God declares:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Before these verses were penned, God was declaring His Word by the Scriptures which were available to that time in history. But in addition He brought His divine Word by special visitations of angels, by dreams, by visions, by voices, and by unknown heavenly languages called tongues. Thus Peter and Paul or some of the members of the church in Corinth could receive direct revelation from God. But then God came to the last chapter of His revealed Word. When God wrote Revelation 22 utilizing the Apostle John as His scribe, He indicated His Word had been completed. Never again could there be a vision or a voice or a tongue from God. Thus the true Gospel is circumscribed by the Bible. It alone and in its entirety is the articulated, verbalized Word of God. Therefore, anyone who comes with a gospel based upon the Bible, but to which he has added the possibility of signs and wonders from other sources such as visions, voices, tongues, dreams, or infallible utterances of church leaders, is bringing what is by definition another gospel. The moment we consider anything at all to be as authoritative as the Bible itself, we then have a gospel consisting of the Bible plus our other source of supposed divine truth. The Bible will then be

interpreted not only by itself, but by these other supposed sources of divine truth. Obviously, doctrines will then be forthcoming which will be different from those that come when the Bible alone is considered to be the Word of God. In view of the teaching of Revelation 22:18, these supposed extra-Biblical sources of divine truth (visions, voices, etc.) cannot be of God. Even though they may be from the recipient's own mind, nevertheless they are ultimately from Satan. Those who listen to these other sources are unwittingly serving Satan rather than God.

Returning to II Thessalonians 2, we read in verse 7:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way.

The word "letteth" is an old English word for restrain. This passage is thus teaching that the one who restrains sin will be taken out of the way.

There are those who teach that the one who restrains is the Holy Spirit. And since He indwells the believer, they therefore suggest that this verse must be teaching the rapture of the church.

They are correct, of course, in teaching that the one who restrains sin is God Himself. We need only recall the event that occurred in Abraham's life. He had left Canaan to dwell in the land of Gerar, to escape a famine. While there, for fear of his life he told the king of Gerar that Sarah, his wife, was actually his sister. Consequently, the king of Gerar took Sarah into his palace. There he was warned of God not to touch Sarah because she was Abraham's wife. The king of Gerar responded by indicating he had not touched her. Then God declared in Genesis 20:6:

Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me; therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

We know not only from this incident that God restrains sin, but also because of what the Bible declares concerning the nature of mankind. It states that the heart of man is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). It indicates that out of the heart of man comes murder, adultery, etc. (Matthew 5:19). Only because man experiences this restraint is he able to live a reasonable life, manifesting some virtues such as love between parents and children, kindness and loyalty between friends, and compassion on the underprivileged.

We must note, however, that this restraint does not take place because of the presence of believers. While God the Holy Spirit does indeed indwell believers, the Holy Spirit is not limited to them. He does His work of restraining sin in the world completely apart from the believers.

Thus when God speaks in II Thessalonians 2 of taking Him who restrains out of the way, He is not suggesting that the believers will be raptured, for they are not the restraining power. Rather He is indicating that He will remove His hand of restraint, to permit wickedness to multiply. This is indicated by the context. For in these verses God is speaking of rebellion. Matthew 24 speaks of wickedness being multiplied. Revelation 20 speaks of Satan being loosed. All these passages teach one and the same thing. There will come the time when God will allow the world to become desperately sinful. He will accomplish this by removing His restraint on unsaved

man and on Satan and his angels. They will be seen to be more wicked than ever.

Returning to II Thessalonians 2:1-11, we see that before Christ returns to receive His own, the man of sin described above must first be revealed. God then declares in this passage that when the man of sin is revealed Jesus will destroy him by the brightness of His coming. That is, Satan and all the wicked who follow him (the unsaved) will be judged and cast into Hell when Christ comes. For it is in Hell that the wicked are punished by eternal destruction.

But notice that II Thessalonians 2:1-3 speaks of the gathering of the believers to meet the Lord Jesus. God is saying that this gathering together of believers to meet Christ will not take place until the man of sin is revealed. Since verse 8 states that when the man of sin is revealed these wicked will be destroyed (that is, judged and cast into Hell) by His coming we immediately can see the simultaneous timing of the assembling together of the believers to meet Jesus (the Rapture) and the destroying of Satan and the wicked (Judgment Day). And since the assembling of the saints together to meet Jesus must be the same event as the Rapture, we see that again we are being taught that the rapture is simultaneous with Judgment Day.

Therefore, again we find total agreement with all the other passages we have looked at which teach that the Rapture comes at the same time as Judgment Day and the end of the world.

Let us now look at one more path that emphasizes this same truth concerning the Rapture occurring at the end of the world.

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT AND THE RAPTURE

When we seek an understanding of the timing of the Rapture, we find more than sufficient information in the Bible to know that it is to occur at the end of time, when Christ returns to judge the nations. Six different paths of the Bible have been examined, and each gives the same teaching. But before we leave this question we should look at one more path. It, too, is intimately concerned with Christ's coming. It, too, will show us that the believers will be here when Christ returns in judgment.

Repeatedly the Bible speaks of Christ coming as a thief or as a thief in the night. Jesus said in Matthew 24:43 in the context of His discussion concerning His return:

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 up.

God declares in II Peter 3:10 as He discusses the destruction of the universe at the end of time:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and works that are therein shall be burned up.

In Revelation 3:3 we read the warning:

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

And in Revelation 16:15, as God is speaking of the end of the world, we find:

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

On the basis of these verses various doctrines have come forth, amongst which are those which suggest that Christ will come silently. Suddenly and quietly the Christians will be removed from this earth. This idea certainly appears to be valid in the light of the language of Christ coming as a thief in the night.

But is this really so? Certainly I Thessalonians 4:16, which speaks of the Rapture of the believers, does not suggest He will come silently as a thief. For there God speaks of the shout of command, of the trumpet of God. This is anything but a silent coming.

Wonderfully, however, the Bible is its own commentary. If we follow the Biblical rule of letting the Bible explain or interpret the Bible, an understanding of the phrase "thief in the night" can be found. We shall discover that the Biblical references which use this phrase are not at all suggesting a silent coming of Christ. Moreover, we shall discover additional support to the clear teaching of the Bible that the occurrence of the Rapture must be simultaneous to the timing of Judgment Day.

In I Thessalonians 5:1-9 we read:

But of the time 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. 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 the day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all children of light and the children of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this passage we find again a clear reference to the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night. The day of the Lord is the day when our Lord Jesus Christ will come on the clouds with power and great glory. It is the day when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords.

But in these verses God teaches that day will come as a thief in the night. Is He then teaching that He will come when no one expects Him?

Certainly this is to be true for the unsaved. Verse 3 records:

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.

The unsaved are not looking for Christ to come in judgment. They may not even be looking for His return at all. They may believe, in their evolution theory-blinded minds, that mankind is finding answers to living in this world. These answers may assure him that, by exercising careful diligence, mankind can continue another million years or more on this earth. And certainly they are convinced that insofar as a Judgment Day is concerned, if it exists at all, it is probably millions of years away. In

their own minds they have concluded that God need not be reckoned with. They are safe and secure to follow their own lustful pleasures.

If they are those who relate to the Bible but are unsaved, inasmuch as they are following other gospels than the true Gospel, they will also be quite sure that Judgment Day is of no real concern. After all, God is a loving God. He does not wish that any should perish. Somehow God has a marvelous plan for this earth and its inhabitants which will insure maximum love for all. In their blindness, by their false gospels which seem so successful and so God-ordained, they will be certain that there is still hope for a utopia on this present earth. Again, as in the case of those who wish to deny God altogether, they will feel all is secure.

Revelation 11:9,10 speaks of the killing of the two witnesses, an event which can be shown to be signifying the silencing of the Gospel all over the world. Note the world's reaction to this in Revelation 11:10:

And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth.

This passage indicates that before Christ returns the Gospel is silenced. That is, the true Gospel is silenced. It, of course, is unacceptable to all kinds of people. For even though it teaches the love of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, it also teaches that mankind is under the wrath of God. It teaches that unsaved men are the slaves of Satan who must spend an eternity in Hell paying for their sins. These are ideas that are repugnant to mankind. It is so much nicer and more joyful to talk about God's love and mercy. They fail to understand that God's love and mercy have no meaning apart from a clear declaration of God's wrath.

So for the unsaved, too, Christ comes unexpectedly. As a matter of fact, His coming will be a horrible surprise. For those who are not saved will discover they are to stand for judgment. They will discover that, while perhaps they thought all was well between them and the Lord, they actually had been following a salvation designed to their own liking rather than a salvation designed by the Bible. At Christ's coming it will be a moment of truth. They will realize they had never served Him as Lord. They had been obeying the Bible only when it was convenient. They had never trusted Christ as the only one who could save them. Rather, they had been seeking a salvation based on the grace of God plus their own meritorious efforts. They had thought they were at peace with God and secure in Christ, but it was a false peace, a false security. At His coming the terrible truth will come to them that they never had been born from above.

For all these, Christ's coming will be as a thief in the night. Notice what will happen to those for whom His coming is as a thief in the night. "Sudden destruction will come upon them, and there will be no escape."

This is the language of Judgment Day. Remember what happened to the people of Noah's day. Suddenly they were deluged with water and destroyed. Remember Sodom. It, too, experienced sudden destruction. Remember the language Jesus uses as He speaks of Judgment Day in Matthew 7:13:

Enter ye in at the strait gate; for

wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

And in II Thessalonians 1:9 God declares:

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

What an awful moment! What a terrible place to be! No wonder we read in Revelation 6:16 of men calling upon the rocks to crush them and the hills to cover them. No experience of trauma that mankind has ever experienced can approach the awfulness of Judgment Day.

But the Bible goes on to disclose other news relating to this momentous occasion. It indicates there are others present for whom our Lord's coming is not as a thief in the night. These are the true believers. These are the ones who are ready for His coming because their sins have been washed away in Christ's blood.

These are the ones who are not under the dominion of darkness. They are children of the day (a synonym for Christ Himself). They are children of the light. (Jesus is the light.) So they are the ones who belong to the Lord.

We read in these verses that the day of the Lord will not overtake them as a thief. For they have anticipated His coming and are ready for it.

We thus see that when Christ returns in judgment, the believers will still be here. Therefore these believers could not have been raptured earlier. And since Judgment Day is the end of time, we can know that these believers must now be raptured. They in no sense are to experience judgment, even as I Thessalonians 5:9 declares:

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The wrath spoken of in this verse is not the tribulation period as some would suppose. With the sure knowledge that the Rapture will be simultaneous with Judgment Day, we know believers will go through the final tribulation period. But that period is not the wrath of God that must be visited upon unbelievers as payment for their sins. The wrath of God is the punishment the unsaved are to experience eternally as a result of their sins. The true believers in no way are to experience this. For Christ has covered all their sins by His blood.

Revelation 6:15-17 speaks eloquently of the wrath of God:

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

This is the wrath from which the saved are free. Praise God for such a wonderful salvation!

In summary then we see that the verses of I Thessalonians 5 can be understood very readily when we recognize that there is a simultaneous occurrence of the Rapture and Judgment Day. While Christ comes as a thief in the night to bring judgment upon the unbelievers, the believers are ready for His coming. For them He does not come as a thief in the night. For them it is the marvelous moment when their salvation is completed,

as they are raptured to be forever with Christ.

CONCLUSION

We have patiently looked at seven different paths in the Scriptures concerning the timing of the Rapture. Each of them shows us that the Rapture of believers is simultaneous with Judgment Day. God has indeed given us ample evidence of this.

Because this truth is so very clearly documented in the Bible, all other teachings concerning the details of our Savior's return should be studied in the light of this truth. The fact is, we should find, as we study the Bible to discover aspects of His return, that there should be continuous agreement. This is so because the Bible is perfect in its truth and trustworthiness.

The big question we all must face is whether or not we are ready for our Lord's return. Have we seen ourselves as the sinners we are? Have we repented of our sins, believing in the Lord Jesus as our sin-bearer? Have we turned away from our sins, earnestly desiring to be obedient to Christ?

If we haven't, we are not ready for His return. We still are included amongst those who are subject to judgment. Our condition is indeed dangerous.

Praise God for His love that it is still the day of salvation, that forgiveness is available for any who call upon the Lord. Praise God for such a Savior!