

When Is The Rapture?

**A Study of
Seven Scriptural Paths
that Focus on the
Timing of
the Return of Christ**

Harold Camping

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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 potential for massive worldwide destruction from nuclear war, and the rapid increase in communication technology (permitting the Gospel to penetrate everywhere in the world), are some of the phenomena that cause serious Bible students to wonder if we have come very close to the end of time.

Naturally those who have placed their trust in the Bible as the only reliable source of information concerning the future will look to the Bible in regards to the end-time events. One of the events that give 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, 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 people believe 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 people who teach that this grand event will occur right at the end of time.

Is the Biblical teaching concerning the timing of the rapture obscure? Why is the language of the Bible on this subject difficult to understand? One would surely wish to understand the Bible more clearly on these questions and thus to 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 will greatly help us to understand many other details that relate to the end of time.

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Wonderfully, the Bible has much to say about the rapture. It is not an event that is rarely alluded to in the Bible. The timing of the rapture in relation to Judgment Day and the end of time is extremely well documented in the Scriptures. We need have no doubt whatsoever concerning the rapture's place in the sequence of events that relate to Christ's return.

In this study we will examine seven different sets of Scriptures that deal with the rapture. As we go through these Scriptures, we will find seven independent paths that lead us to the same inescapable conclusion: The Rapture of the believers will occur at the end of time. The rapture will take place at the same time that our Lord comes to judge the world. It will come right at the time that the world is beginning to collapse and when God prepares to destroy the world by fire.

May we be grateful to our Lord for the abundant Biblical information He has provided on this important event. Let us look at the first of these seven paths.

The Last Trump and the Rapture

In I Corinthians 15:51-53 we read:

Behold, I shew 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 discusses the fact that not everyone will die. (To fall asleep is Biblical language that signifies death.) There will be those who will instantaneously receive their resurrected bodies without first falling asleep. This language is clearly concerned with the rapture because verse 53 speaks about the believers receiving their immortal bodies.

God tells us when this event will occur. He declares that it will be 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 search the Bible to find language that relates to the sound of the last trump. If such references can be found, perhaps they will tell us when the last trumpet will sound.

In Revelation 11:15-18 we read:

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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 sound of the seventh and last trump. At that time, the following becomes reality:

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

In other words, the sounding of the seventh trumpet signals 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; it is at the end of time that Judgment Day occurs and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire.

We will recall that God effectively declares in I Corinthians 15:51-53 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 an event that will occur simultaneously 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 will help us to see the timing of the rapture. In Luke 17:28-37 we read:

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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 housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. 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 men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men 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, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

In this passage God uses 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.

Just before the destruction of Sodom, God rescued the family of Lot (Genesis 19). On the heels of this rescue operation God rained down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and the other wicked cities and utterly destroyed them.

God declares in Luke 17:30, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Thus Christ links the destruction of Sodom to Judgment Day. 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 men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left."

The parallelism 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: The wicked, who are to be destroyed; and the believers, represented by Lot and his family, which is a tiny little remnant of the population of the wicked city.

So it is today, the world is mostly populated with those who are altogether rebellious against God. Amongst the vast population of the world there exists the believers, which consists of only a tiny percentage of the people.

Then Judgment Day came for Sodom. The cup of their iniquity was full. God utterly destroyed them for their sins, but just ahead of that judgment God rescued Lot. The rescue was so close in time to the poured-out judgment of God that Lot's wife was destroyed in the judgment. So it will be at the end of

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time. When the nations have become ripe for judgment, God will rescue the believers. Two will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. The one that is taken will be caught up in the air to be with Christ as I Thessalonians 4:17 teaches. The one that is left will be left to stand for judgment as the wicked of Sodom were left for judgment.

Thus Christ teaches that the rapture will occur simultaneously with Judgment Day. 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 occur simultaneously with Judgment Day. This is found in the language Jesus utters when 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 women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

In this passage God sets up parallel language that relates the Flood that destroyed the world of Noah's day to Jesus' return. This parallelism, which indicates 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 lusts, 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

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unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

From the Flood account given in 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 the notice was given can be learned from 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 same 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.

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.

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Certainly we can see the parallelism that exists between the Flood and Judgment Day. Noah and his family lived in a world cursed by sin; and at Judgment Day, believers will exist as a tiny remnant in a world cursed by sin. When the Flood was to begin, Noah and his family entered into the ark, a haven of safety for them; and at Judgment Day, the believers will be raptured while the unsaved will be 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 that the rapture occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day.

When Christ rose from the grave, He showed the resurrection to be a fact by many proofs (Acts 1:3). Likewise, His teaching concerning the timetable of the rapture is set forth in many places in the Bible. 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 one of the most frequently quoted passages concerning the rapture. We shall begin with this passage in our discussion of the 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 shall look at in this passage is the fact that the rapture will be on the same day as the resurrection of our bodies. God indicates that at His coming He will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. In II Corinthians 5:8 God clearly teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When Christians die, because they were given their resurrection 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.

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At Christ's return all those 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, all the believers who have not died will be given their resurrected bodies. Immediately following this, the resurrected bodies from the graves, together with the believers who have not died but who have been given their new bodies instantaneously, will be caught up in the air to be with the Lord forever. Only the unsaved will remain on the earth to face the wrath of God, which will be poured out upon them because of their sins.

We want to look more closely at the fact of these resurrected bodies. The Bible teaches the precise time when these bodies will be resurrected, and since, as we have just seen, the rapture will occur simultaneously with the resurrection of the bodies of the believers, the determination of the time of the resurrection of the bodies of the believers will give us the timetable of the rapture. In John 6 Jesus declares four times that the resurrection of believers' bodies will occur on 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 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. As we have already seen, it is used four times in John 6. 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.

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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.*

Nehemiah 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.*

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

From John 12:48, we discover that the last day is Judgment Day, when God will have all the unsaved give account of their sins, and He will remove them into hell to pay for their sins. Thus we see that the resurrection of believers, which is also to occur the last day, is simultaneous with Judgment Day. Since we saw from I Thessalonians 4:14-17 that the resurrection of our bodies is the same day as the rapture, we know from these verses that the rapture occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day.

Before we look at the remaining two references to the “last day,” let us think a bit longer on John 12:48. If Judgment Day is the last day, then the resurrection of the unsaved must be the last day, for Revelation 20:13 indicates that the sea gave up the dead, and death and hell gave up the dead, and all were judged and cast into the lake of fire. So, the resurrection of unbelievers is the last day. There must be one general resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved on the last day. Under no circumstances are we to understand that the believers are resurrected at one time and the wicked another time.

The Bible teaches in John 5:28-29:

The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

In other words, everyone will be resurrected at the moment of Christ’s return. No one will be left in the grave. In I Thessalonians 4:16 we read that the believers will hear the shout of a command. John 5:28-29 shows that the unbe-

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lievers, too, will hear that shout, for there our Lord declares, “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice.”

John 5:29 says that those who come forth from the tombs will go to one of two destinations. Those who have done good, that is, those who have had their sins covered by Christ’s righteousness, will be resurrected to life. Those who have done evil, that is, the unsaved, who have not had their sins covered, will be resurrected to damnation in judgment.

We have compared the Scriptures that speak of the “last day” with I Thessalonians 4:14-17 and John 5:28-29 and discovered that the Bible clearly teaches that the rapture, the resurrection of believers, the resurrection of unbelievers, and Judgment Day all occur 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 that use the phrase “last day.” The two remaining 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.

Nehemiah 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.” Both of these references are related to the Feast of Tabernacles. The fact is, both speak of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

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 look at the nature of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a feast commemorating two events. First, it looked back upon the sojourning of Israel in the wilderness, and second, 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

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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, and how they 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: It is then that we receive our resurrected bodies. It is then that our salvation is complete; it is then that 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 of, "The feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field." This is a surprising verse because it speaks of the Feast of Ingathering, which is the same as the Feast of Tabernacles, as the end of the year.

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated during the seventh month (Leviticus 23:34). The seventh month is many months from the end of the year and yet God speaks of it as the "end" or "going out" of the year (Exodus 23:16).

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).

Matthew 13:30 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.

Matthew 13:39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Since the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated the harvest and related it to the end of the year, and since Christ speaks of the end of the world as a harvest time, we can see that a beautiful relationship exists between the Feast of Tabernacles and the end of the world.

It is no wonder, then, that the phrase "last day" is found in connection with the resurrection of believers, Judgment Day, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The following chart shows these relationships:

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Feast of Tabernacles	End of world
End of year	End of time
Harvest time for crops	Harvest time for mankind
End of wilderness sojourn for Israel	End of wilderness sojourn for believers
Last day (Exodus 23:16)	Last day (John 12:48, John 6:39-40)

Thus we can see why in Nehemiah 8:18 and 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, all the men of Israel were required to appear before the Lord three times during the year, as is recorded in Exodus 23:14-17:

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the 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 labours, 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 labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy 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 the Passover Lamb to take away the sins of the world.

The second feast 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 was fifty days after the Passover, it was also called Pentecost (penta is groups of five). It was a day that anticipated the spiritual harvest that would begin as a result of Christ going to the cross.

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The third feast at 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 for eight days from the fifteenth day 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 from the salvation God provided 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 accomplishments of the atonement, on the very same days that the nation of Israel was celebrating these feasts, God brought to pass the spiritual reality to which these days pointed. On the Passover in 33 A.D., while the Jews were keeping the Passover, Jesus hung on the cross as the Passover Lamb. On the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, the Holy Spirit was poured out and the harvest of souls began. It was at that time that the firstfruits of the harvest were seen: 3000 from eighteen nations were saved (Acts 2:41).

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

The one remaining feast day is 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!

It is 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 and Judgment Day are identified with Christ's return.

We see, therefore, that in all eight places where the phrase "last day" is found in the Bible, it points to the end of time. It points to the end of the earth's existence, when Christ will return in judgment.

Returning now to I Thessalonians 4:14-17, we have seen that the rapture will occur simultaneously with the resurrection of believers. From John 6 we have seen 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 have seen that these truths

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agree precisely with the statement of John 5:28-29, which speaks of one general resurrection at Christ's return.

We have seen that I Thessalonians 4, when looked at in the light of John 6 and the other passages that tell us when the resurrection of believers will occur, ties the rapture to the same day as 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

Thus far we have seen from four separate and distinct Biblical paths that the rapture must be on the last day of this earth's existence. It must be simultaneous with the resurrection of all humanity and with Judgment Day. But the Bible has more to say about this. Let us look at this question from another viewpoint.

In Matthew 24 Christ gives us an outline of the signs or events that will 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 Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch 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 wheresoever the carcase 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

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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, which believers must endure, but that it will occur simultaneously with the end of the world. Thus, it must occur simultaneously with Judgment Day.

In verses 21 and 22 God speaks of the increasingly great tribulation that will come upon the earth. For the sake of the elect, this tribulation will be shortened. At this time, we will not discuss the implication of this tribulation, but we 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 the word elect, which is the Greek *eklektos*, some twenty-three times in the New Testament.

Some teach that the “elect” refers only to believing Jews on the grounds that Matthew 24 relates only to the nation of Israel and not to the Gentiles. If we were to follow this procedure, and declare Matthew 24 is only for the Jews inasmuch as Jesus was speaking to the disciples who were Jews, then we could logically argue that John 3 has no reference to Gentiles because Christ was speaking to Nicodemus, who was a Jew. On that basis, only Jews must be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Likewise, the Book of Romans has no import for us today because it was 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 only certain books of the Bible would be considered pertinent and authoritative for the New Testament believers.

We immediately sense the error of this line of Biblical interpretation. The Bible says in II Timothy 3:16 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 and 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 29-31 He speaks of His return in power and great glory. He will not return to the Jews only. He will return 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 to the Greek word for “elect,” as 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

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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 any thing 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 mercies, 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 see that the believers will be present through the final tribulation. Thus, on the basis of this verse alone, we have trouble with a doctrine that teaches that the rapture will occur before the final tribulation.

Returning to Matthew 24, we see that God gives us a very careful chronology that covers the relationship of the final tribulation to the return of Christ. In Matthew 24:29-30 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 emphatically that the last event before the return of Christ is the tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24:21-22. The words "immediately after" do not allow for any passage of time between the tribulation and the events spoken of in verses 29-31.

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The events that immediately follow the tribulation, the sun is darkened and the moon does not give its light, indicate that it is the end of time. The sun and the moon regulate the passage of time. When time is no more, 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 the universe. God gives us further amplification of this event 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 be language of Judgment Day only. 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 hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

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. Viruses, earthquakes, tornadoes, and famines are present because mankind

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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 in 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 are judged and removed into hell, the redemption of the earth, its destruction and re-creation as a new earth, along with the new heavens, must take place.

Therefore, we are not surprised to read that the stars will fall from heaven and the heavens will be rolled up when Christ returns. From Matthew 24:29 we know that this is immediately after the tribulation.

Any system of teaching that suggests that following the tribulation Christ will return to this sin-cursed earth to set up an earthly throne, offers 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, when 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 6:15-16 we read that all the peoples are in abject terror and call upon the mountains to hide them and the hills to fall on them. No wonder they are in great terror. It is the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. It is Judgment Day, when they must give an account of their sins and receive the righteous condemnation of God as payment for their sins.

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. Note how parallel the language in this verse is to I Thessalonians 4:16-17; both passages speak of the rapture. We read in the Matthew account that Christ will send His angels. I Thessalonians 4:16 speaks of the sound of the trumpet.

Christ speaks in Matthew 24 of gathering the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. 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. These are the believers living on earth, whose commonwealth is heaven (Philippians 3:20).

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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 the believers.

From our study of Matthew 24, we see 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 to give us so many proofs concerning the timing of the rapture! Thus far we have found five plain and distinctive paths that reveal 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

In II Thessalonians 2 we discover more information that points to the rapture at the end of time. In this passage God teaches us that two events must happen before He will come for His believers. The first is the rebellion and the second is that the man of sin must be revealed. The man of sin has been revealed. We know who he is. He is the devil, who comes as the AntiChrist, the pseudo Christ. Christ will slay the devil with the breath of His mouth. That is, he will be cast into hell. Let us read these verses, II Thessalonians 2:1-9:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our 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, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet 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.

If we understand that the man of sin is Satan himself, as he works through his emissaries called false prophets or false Christs, we will have total

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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 to Satan as being the man of sin. How can Satan be called a man? Isn't he 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 and from the context we know that Lucifer is Satan. God refers to Lucifer as a man 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?

Satan is called a man because this activity was prefigured by the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4). As Revelation 18 teaches, Babylon is used often in the Bible as a figure of the kingdom of Satan. Thus, we see the parallelism that exists. On the one hand we have Babylon, which is ruled over by the king of Babylon. On the other hand we have Satan's dominion, which is ruled over by Satan.

The man of sin, Satan, takes his seat in the temple. To what does taking one's seat refer? Jesus is seated at the right hand of God and rules over everything (Ephesians 1:20-22). Thus, to take a seat is Biblical language that means to rule or have authority. The man of sin, Satan, takes his seat or rules in the temple.

To what does the "temple" refer? Is there to be a literal reconstruction of the temple? Nowhere in the Bible do we read of a future reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The fact is, since the veil of the temple was rent when Jesus hung on the cross, the temple in Jerusalem ceased to have 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 fellowcitizens 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 corner stone; In whom all

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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.

In I Corinthians 3:16 God emphasizes that the body of believers is the temple. 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. 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 literally to rule amongst the body of believers. He can rule, however, through false prophets and pseudo-Christes who bring a gospel other 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 the 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 shew great signs and wonders; insomuch 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 is so much like the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible.

Note in Matthew 24:24 that these false prophets will come with signs and wonders. Satan will come not only with a gospel so closely patterned after the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible, but he will give life and vitality to his gospel with signs and wonders. Even as Jesus came 2000 years ago with signs and wonders when 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.

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The passage we are presently studying, II Thessalonians 2:1-9, also speaks of signs and wonders. The false prophets who represent Satan will come with signs and wonders, 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 that 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 blinds those who come with signs and lying wonders because they refuse to believe the truth.

Thus we see that God declares in II Thessalonians 2 that before Christ comes there must be specific evidence of the activity of Satan: Those who come with signs and wonders and who in fact are Satan's 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 come with a gospel other than the true Gospel, they will cause people to worship Satan. This is the primary nature of the rebellion that must come before Christ returns. The church, which consists of congregations and denominations all over the world, is infiltrated and overrun by those who bring false gospels. The church is now dead. One of the methods of recognizing this threat is to look at its focus on signs and wonders.

We will include here a definition of the true Gospel. In Revelation 22:18-19 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 declared His Word by the Scriptures that were available at that time in history. In addition, He brought His divine Word by special visitation of angels, by dreams, by visions, by voices, and by unknown heavenly languages called tongues. Thus Peter or 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 that 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,

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anyone who comes with a gospel based upon the Bible but to which he has added the idea of the possibility of divine truth from other sources, such as visions, voices, tongues, dreams, or so-called infallible utterances of church leaders, comes with what is by definition another gospel.

The moment we consider anything at all to be as authoritative as the Bible, we have a gospel that consists of the Bible plus the 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 that will be different from those that come when the Bible alone is considered 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 sin is the Holy Spirit, and since He indwells the believer, they therefore suggest that this verse must refer to 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 recorded in Genesis 20 involving Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech, king of Gerar. Abraham 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. Then the king was warned of God not to touch Sarah because she was Abraham's wife. The king responded by indicating he had not touched her, and 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.

From this incident and from what the Bible declares concerning the nature of mankind, we know that God restrains sin. The Bible states that the heart of man is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). The Bible indicates that out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies (Matthew 15:19). Because man experiences this

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restraint is he able to live a reasonable life and manifest some virtues such as love between parents and children, kindness and loyalty between friends, and compassion for 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 (or more correctly translated as “midst of”), 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, especially in the church. 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 a 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. For more information on this theme, please contact Family Radio for the book “The End of the Church Age... and After”.

Returning to II Thessalonians 2:1-11, we see that before Christ returns to receive His own, the man of sin 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, because it is in hell that the wicked are punished by eternal destruction.

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 the wicked will be destroyed (that is, judged and cast into hell), by Christ’s coming, we can see the simultaneous timing of the assembling together of the believers to meet Jesus (the rapture) and the destruction of Satan and the wicked (Judgment Day). Since the assembling of the saints together to meet Jesus must be the same event as the rapture, we see again that the Bible teaches the rapture will coincide with Judgment Day.

Therefore, we find total agreement with the other passages that we studied, all of 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 the truth that the rapture will occur at the end of the world.

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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 one gives the same teaching. We will look at one more path intimately concerned with Christ's coming. It, too, will show us that believers will be here when Christ returns in judgment.

The Bible speaks repeatedly of Christ coming as a thief or as a thief in the night. Jesus says in Matthew 24:43 (the context concerns His return):

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

God declares in II Peter 3:10, regarding 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 the works that are therein shall be burned up.

In Revelation 3:3 we read this 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.

In Revelation 16:15, God speaks of the end of the world, and He says:

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 them is the suggestion that Christ will come silently: Suddenly and quietly the Christians will be removed from the 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? I Thessalonians 4:16, which speaks of the rapture of the believers, does not suggest that He will come silently as a thief. There

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God speaks of the shout of command and the trumpet of God. This is anything but a silent coming.

Wonderfully, 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 that use this phrase are not at all suggesting a silent coming of Christ. Moreover, we shall discover additional support for the clear teaching of the Bible that the rapture will occur simultaneously with the timing of Judgment Day.

In I Thessalonians 5:1-9 we read:

But of the times and the 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 that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the 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 an 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 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.

In these verses God teaches that 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 be looking for His return at all. They may believe, in their

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evolution-theory-blinded minds, that mankind is finding answers to living in this world. These answers may assure them that, by exercising careful diligence, mankind can continue a million years or more on this earth. Certainly they are convinced that insofar as Judgment Day is concerned, if it happens at all, it is probably millions of years away. In their own minds they have concluded that they need not reckon with God; they think they are secure and may safely pursue their lustful pleasures.

If they relate to the Bible but are unsaved because they follow a gospel other than the true Gospel, they, too, will 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 that will ensure maximum love for all. In their blindness, by their false gospels, which seem so successful and 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 that all is secure.

Revelation 11:9-10 speaks of the killing of the two witnesses, an event that can be shown to signify 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 dwelt on the earth.

This passage indicates that before Christ returns, the Gospel is virtually silenced. That is, the true gospel is almost silenced during the first part of the Tribulation (For more information on the Tribulation, please contact Family Radio for the book, "Time Has An End".) It is, of course, unacceptable to all kinds of people because 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 and they must spend an eternity in hell paying for their sins. These ideas are repugnant to mankind - it is 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 understanding of God's wrath.

So, for the unsaved, Christ comes unexpectedly. As a matter of fact, His coming will be a horrible surprise, for then 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 plan designed to their own liking rather than the salvation designed by the Bible. Christ's coming will be a moment of truth. They will

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realize that 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 sense of security. At His coming the terrible truth will come to them that they never had been born from above.

For all these people, 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.

In II Thessalonians 1:9 God writes:

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 fall on them and the hills to hide them. No experience of trauma that mankind has ever experienced can approach the awfulness of Judgment Day.

The Bible discloses more that relates to this momentous occasion. It indicates that there will be people present for whom our Lord's coming is not as a thief in the night: These people are the true believers. They are ready for His coming because their sins have been washed away in Christ's blood. They are the ones who are not under the dominion of darkness. They are the children of the day (a synonym for Christ Himself). They are the children of the light. (Jesus is the light.) They 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, believers will still be here. Therefore these believers could not have been raptured earlier. Since Judgment Day is the end of time, we know that the believers will now be

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raptured. They in no sense are to experience judgment, 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 occur simultaneously with Judgment Day, we know that believers will go through the final tribulation period. 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 believers He does not come as a thief in the night. For them it is the marvelous moment when their salvation is completed: They are raptured to be forever with Christ.

Conclusion

We have patiently looked at seven different paths in the Scriptures that are concerned with the timing of the rapture. Each of them shows us that the rapture of believers occurs simultaneously 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 that are concerned with the details of our Savior's return should be studied in the light of this truth. The fact is, as we study the Bible to discover

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aspects of His return, 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 Christ as our sin-bearer? Have we turned away from our sins, earnestly desiring to be obedient to Christ? If we have not, we are not ready for His return. We 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. Praise God for such a Savior!