

Will There Be A Rapture?

A Study On The End-time – first published 1992

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Over the last 150 years a great deal of time and effort has been devoted to the study of *End-Time* events. Indeed many predictive books have been written on the subject and many charts compiled in order to provide Christians with an *accurate scenario* of what is going to take place. Too many *inspired* dates have been produced, which history has shown to be wrong. Yet, so-called prophets persist with predictions concerning the return of Jesus, despite the fact that many of them have been shown to be incorrect in their predictions.

It is undeniable that we are living in a time unparalleled in human history to date. Never before has the human race experienced such a bombardment of events as now. It is not their newness alone, which produces future shock, but also the speed with which events supersede each other. One only has to consider the collapse of the Berlin Wall, as well as that of the Iron Curtain throughout Europe. Who would have ever believed that Communism as such would see its demise in Eastern Europe - indeed see the collapse of the mighty USSR.

The list could go on!

But, whatever major world event may occur, Israel is somehow involved - if not at the very centre. This has been the case since the tiny nation attained statehood in 1948. Not only has Israel been the political focal-point of the world, but she has also been at the centre of Christian attention. Christian writers and leaders have attempted to slot her into visionary Theology and then make her perform accordingly; including the *End-time* of the Age as we know it.

As a result ordinary Christians have found themselves flooded with all kinds of literature foretelling an EXACT *End-time* scenario.

One school of thought held that the Greek word translated *generation* meant a literal 40 years - beginning with the re-establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948. According to Matthew 24:34, this meant that the Lord Jesus was due to return in 1988. Not only did adherents of this view foretell the year, but they believed they also knew the exact time, namely the Feast of Tabernacles.

One of these men was known to me personally. He was a man of highest integrity and never guilty of handling the Holy Scriptures carelessly. Even though he was a very diligent expositor of the Word of God, he erred on this account when he predicted the return of the Messiah for the Feast of Tabernacles in 1988.

It is now 2006 and we are still on planet Earth.¹

What has gone wrong?

Very difficult to say!

However, despite the fact that the prophesies concerning the return of the Lord have failed to come true, so-called *accurate* predictions concerning a *Secret Rapture* of the church continue to plague a weary Christian community.

The events in Iraq in 90/91 saw a renewed flurry of **prophetic** activity. One man, who conducts a rather *high-profile* prophetic ministry, saw the Gulf war as **THE PRELUDE** to the Third World War; and as such, the beginning of the **Great Tribulation**. This justified him to announce to his readers the imminent **departure** of the saints by means of the **RAPTURE**. According to this man's crystal ball, a world conflict was to develop out of the dispute with Saddam Hussein, which would usher in the tribulation - resulting in the Church being snatched away. As far as I know, this prophet is still on earth. This means that either we all missed the rapture, or he prophesied wrongly! If we are serious about the infallibility of the Bible, we also need to ask ourselves why we continue to give credence to men who prophesy falsely, when the Scriptures have very strong things to say concerning such matters?

On July 18, 1992 an advertisement appeared in the Brisbane Courier Mail drawing people's attention to the forthcoming Rapture of Christians. The Visionaries were a group of people in Sydney who claimed world-wide affiliation with some 70 000 others who think likewise. They claim that the Lord Jesus gave them the revelation that He would return very soon in secret to snatch His 'church' away. The date of departure was given as October 29, 1992, 1 AM Sydney time.

The time came and a group misled and disillusioned Christians had to admit that something had gone wrong with their calculations.

Seventh Day Adventists already tried to predict the Lord's return toward the end of the last century. When their predictions failed, they stopped. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to advance 'sure' predictions over more than 50 years. Eventually the Watchtower halted these predictions, recognising how foolish they looked in the eyes of the world. Nevertheless, their publications still insist that Jesus came secretly in 1914 and has been on the earth ever since!??

Is it just possible that all of this talk about a *secret snatching away* of the church is merely wishful, and elitist, thinking? What if our professional interpreters of the Scriptures are wrong in the exegesis of those N.T. passages that seemingly point that way?

A disturbing fact is that no teaching concerning a *secret rapture* existed in the teachings of the church prior to the emergence of Dispensationalism in the early 1800's. This is emphasized by the realization that the sole support of this theory is the prophetic utterance of a woman during a prayer-meeting in the north of Scotland.

Dave MacPherson, in his book **The Incredible Cover-Up**, wrote the following:

*'To date no solid evidence has been found that proves that anyone other than this young Scottish woman was the first person to teach a future coming of Christ before the days of Antichrist. Before 1830 Christians had always believed in a single future coming of the Son of Man when He shall send His angels to gather together all of His elect.'*¹

The idea of a secret rapture is certainly a most appealing one. Who in his right mind would not gladly exchange the strife and turmoil of this earth for the glories of heaven - especially in such a spectacular way.

An Unbiblical View?

A careful reading of all available Bible translations of the New Testament, in relation to a '*Secret Rapture*' reveals only this, that the texts themselves do not speak of, or even indicate such an event. On the contrary, it is necessary to do force to the Biblical text, to make it fit into - and around these theories. Indeed there is nothing in the best available Greek Text of the New Testament that even remotely suggests such an event.

The basis of all Hermeneutics, and good Biblical Exegesis, is to let the simplicity of the text speak for itself. It is only, when a simple reading does not reveal anything, that we must search for a deeper meaning.

In the scheme of things it is relatively unimportant what our personal feelings are concerning these events. God alone knows the times and seasons for the unfolding of His plan. What does matter though are the words of the Master. Let us look then briefly at the words of the Lord Jesus Himself concerning His return:

"For just as the lightening comes from the east and flashes to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be...and the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet - they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other..."

Matth.24:27-31

From this we have the certainty that the Messiah SHALL RETURN. His coming in the clouds was even foretold by the Prophet Daniel more than 500 years before Jesus; it is thereby firmly rooted in the prophetic scriptures of Israel. By this, all guesswork is removed as to how the Lord shall come again.

Regrettably, most Christian theologians are just as one-eyed as the scribes and priests of Jesus' day. As a result they will - as the Rabbis did - rather follow a lie, than search for the truth.

Specific Events

Jesus Himself foretold that certain events will surround His Second Coming. To know, and understand these, is a challenge for every true Christian.

1) HIS COMING WILL BE SUDDEN: c/f Matth.24:40-44; 25:1-11; Luke 12:37-38;17:34; 1 Thess.5:4

a) like a thief:

In His Mt. Olivet discourse Jesus warns His listeners, "...*be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming...like a thief in the night...for this reason you too be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will...*".

b) as a surprise and shock to the (spiritually) careless:

The Lord told the Parable of the ten virgins stressing the need to be prudent as the bridegroom may take longer than expected; i.e. "*Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out...'*" Matt. 25:1-8ff.

It is wise to bear this parable in mind in any discussion on the subject of the 'rapture', for Jesus tells us to be '*dressed in readiness, and KEEP YOUR LAMPS ALIGHT...*' meaning, we are to keep our spiritual fervour burning! "*Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching...*" Luke 12:35-37.

From the early to the mid-1980's there was great fervour among Christians everywhere. Most expected the Lord to come at any moment — at the latest by the Feast of Tabernacles 1988.³ But, the years dragged on and the Lord still has not come...! Sadly, in many, love and fervour for Jesus has now grown cold.

History shows that the belief in the imminent return of Jesus was equally great in the mid-1800's; indeed prophecies thereto were plentiful. Since we know that the Holy Spirit does NOT lie, we must assume that all these prophets spoke purely out of their own desires and **MUST** therefore to be ignored.

'But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?"

When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously...' Deut.18:20-22 (c/f.13:1-5)

The non-fulfilment of these prophecies has created a vacuum into which a new generation of prophets is now preaching a new - but yet old - message, a new crowd pleaser: 'KINGDOM-NOW' theology.

According to that view, the literal Millennium is a mistake, it is up to us to change this earth for the better, for we are all *little Christs*.

These people are certainly not expecting their master to return at any moment. Despite the efforts of Amillennialists and Greenies, the evidence around us shows that this Earth is a long way before it will be a fit place for all to inhabit if left to human effort alone.

A further warning against spiritual carelessness is given when Jesus shows how men will retire side by side and how women will work side by side; yet one will be taken and one will be left behind. Jesus uses a metaphor here, meaning: '*one out of two*'; thereby underlining the suddenness of His coming. Unless we are prepared to go at anytime, there won't be a chance to warn anybody, even if they sleep or work right alongside us. Pre-trib advocates see this passage as a proof of a secret snatching away. This proof however will not hold when we consider that the return of the Lord is a **GLOBAL EVENT**. It is therefore only logical that some people will be physically asleep when this takes place because there is always night on some part of the planet, while others work. For those asleep, one will awake with great joy to meet his Lord and Saviour - and the other with great terror to meet his Judge. How will it be? I don't know, but **ALL WILL SEE HIS COMING**. Thereafter, His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, according to Zechariah 14:4.

2) Like A Thief In The Night

Matt.24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess.5:2-8; 2 Pet.3:9-10; Rev.3:2-3; 16:15

There are several passages in the Epistles that - seemingly - would support a secret coming of the Lord. However, upon a closer examination and in context of Jesus' own teachings, such assumption must be laid aside; i.e. ALL 'thief' references point to one thing: SPIRITUAL ALERTNESS.

The 'thief' passages feature prominently in matters concerning the end-time. For this reason it will be profitable to devote time and space to the study of them; e.g.

- i. *"...if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the ALERT..."*

It must be understood that the context of this passage is ALERTNESS & READINESS, e.g. "*...for this reason you be ready too...*" v.44. Jesus emphasises throughout this discourse that it is a **FAITHFUL SERVANT** who expects his masters return at any time; therefore he lives and acts accordingly. By contrast, "*It is an evil slave (that) says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time...'.*" This question was not only written for a people 2000 years ago, but it is as pertinent for each one of us today. Let us be honest in our hearts and ask, '*Do I live as if expecting the masters return today?*'

Most of us are playing a very dangerous game of 'Eternal Russian (satanic) Roulette' by trying to guess the day of the Lord's return so that we may order our lives accordingly. We are not meant to know that day (Acts 1:7), for it would lull us into a false sense of security, as God could decide to call us home by some other way.

- ii. ***"For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night...but you brethren are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief..."***

1 Thess.5:2-8

The context here is verse three. Paul speaks of people who live under a misapprehension of peace and security. DON'T BE LIKE THEM, BUT LIVE IN THE EXPECTATION OF HIS COMING! It is wrong that believers ought to live in dread and fear, as 1 John 5:18 says, "*...there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.*"

We are not people of darkness, that the day of the Lord's return should sneak up on us. So, in v.6-8 we find again an emphasis to (spiritual) **ALERTNESS**.

iii. **"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief..."**

Peter also admonishes his readers to be *'holy in conduct and godliness, looking for, and hastening the coming of the day.'* He too admonishes his readers that we ought not be fooled by the arguments of people who say, *'Nothing is going to happen, because things have gone on in the same vein for a long time.'* Again the emphasis is on the unexpectedness on the event. God is not slow as we understand slowness, rather patient toward us...., **BE ALERT!**

iv. **"Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent (i.e.turn from your old ways). If therefore you will NOT WAKE UP, I will come like a thief (suddenly, unexpected), and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you."** Rev.3:2-3

Again, the context is **ALERTNESS**, waking up from a spiritual slumber; v.2

v) **"Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame."** Rev.16:15

The context of this verse is vs.13-14, warning us against the crafty deceit coming from the satanically inspired false prophet. Again, we find here an emphasis on **BEING ALERT** (i.e. staying spiritually awake).

3) He Will Come On The Clouds Of Heaven:

There is nothing secret about someone arriving on the clouds of our planet in a great blaze of light which outshines the sun (c/f Rev.1:12-17;Acts 9:3)!

Those who favour a pre- or mid-trib-rapture hold that the Lord will first come secretly and visibly only to those He has come to translate. The basis for this teaching is allegedly found in 1 Cor.15:51-52 *'...we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed...'*

The word sleep, of course, refers to bodily death putting the statement into context. It is only to be expected that someone would have to be alive at the Lord's return. Therefore it is these who would **HAVE** to be changed, since a different dimension would become operative, once the divine and eternal enters that which is perishable.

Here too is nothing, which would indicate a secret departure of the believer On the contrary, it speaks of trumpets, thereby indicating a somewhat noisy occasion. We can know from the testimony of Scripture, that the trumpet of God is **NEVER** a silent or secret affair. When the trumpet of God sounded at Sinai, it struck terror into the hearts of the Israelites, e.g.

'...there were thunder and lightening flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who wherein the camp trembled.' Ex.19:16.

Erroneous and Arrogant

It is an erroneous and arrogant assumption that the church should be more special to God than Israel ever was. The Jewish people may have become enemies of the Gospel (Rom.11:28a), but as Paul goes on to say,

"...according to the election of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God ARE IRREVOCABLE" (Rom.11:28b-29).

The Apostle then goes on to say, "*For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all...*", v.32. Does this indicate in any shape or form that God would favour the church over His elect, Israel? Not unless God has changed over the last 1900 years.

Therefore it is a most serious error to assume that God would engage Himself in some secret activity favouring the church whilst condemning the other - Israel - to the horrors of the tribulation. If Christians truly loved Israel they would pray, '*Lord, please do not take me away, that I may be a source of comfort to Israel, for it is through her that I have come to know you. I am part of this olive tree.*' As Abraham interceded for Sodom, so should all true believers reason with God on Israel's behalf.

The Scriptures are clear; there will be one trumpet sound, and that at the Lord's return. When this happens ALL will hear. To some it will be the beginning of eternal joy, to most Jewish people (Israel) it will mean a time of mourning (c/f Zech.12:10) and to the bulk of mankind it will mean the beginning of eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth over the rejection of the Saviour.

4) With A Great Trumpet To Gather In:

Matth.24:31;1 Cor.15:52;1 Thess.4:16

In contrast to the advocates of a secret rapture, Jesus Himself says that **when He comes in power and glory**, that He Himself will send forth His angels to gather in His elect from the four corners of the earth. How will He send His angels? **WITH GREAT TRUMPET BLASTS!** The Apostle Paul continues this theme in 1 Cor.15:51-52 and in 1 Thess.4:16, where He states to the early church, that: '*the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Messiah (or Christ) shall rise first...*'.

5) Concerning The Wrath Of God:

The main argument in favour of a secret rapture is 1 Thess.5:9; viz. '*...for God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus, the Messiah...*'; which is supported from 1 Cor.15:51-52. Those who argue thus ignore the combined weight of Scripture concerning the trumpet of God. However, they seemingly have one point in their favour, which speaks about the wrath of God.

There is no truer statement than to say that we are not destined for wrath, viz.

'...Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus, the Messiah.' 1 Thess.1:10;5:9

Those who favour the doctrine of the secret rapture link the 'wrath' in v.9 with the wrath spoken of in the book of Revelation, thereby assuming that a physical removal of all believers would have to take place to avoid the wrath of God coming upon them. However, they ignore the context, which is SALVATION, not a physical removal from the planet. It is salvation through a '*spiritual rebirth*' which preserves us from the wrath of God, nothing else.

The apostle Paul makes it abundantly clear that those who continue to dwell in the kingdom of darkness because of their unrepentant hearts shall meet with the wrath of God. But he goes on to say that those who believed, '*...He delivered (us) from the authority of satan and translated, or transferred us, into the kingdom of His beloved Son...*' (Col.1:14). This, together with the verses from Thessalonians, says clearly that the **TRUE BELIEVER** will **NEVER AGAIN** be exposed to the wrath of God, for '*...He seated us with Him in heavenly places with Messiah Jesus.*' The Lord Jesus told a parable about wheat and tares, which is part of a series He taught on the Kingdom of God. He declares here categorically that the tares shall be gathered up **first**, and **then** the wheat. He leaves absolutely no room for doubt that He is

speaking about the harvest of souls at the end of the age. His statement is clear, apart from saying that the reapers are the angels. And again, is this not confirmed in His discourse on the end-time?

"Just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumblingblocks, and those who transgress against the standard of God, i.e. His commandments and ordinances (heb.Torah). And He will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun** in the kingdom of their Father..."Matth.13:40-43

Please take note here of the emphasis placed here by the Lord Jesus,

"He who has ears, let him hear!"

There are schools of thought on this that stretch, in this parable to impossible lengths. However, if we apply the exegetical method of ear we find it impossible to arrive at any other conclusion than that there is but one harvest of souls; not a secret one, but one visible to all - in blazing lights and with mighty trumpet sounds.

You may want to ask, what then about the tribulation? There are three significant indicators which show that all of mankind will have to pass through the tribulation period, viz.

Scripture

The Jewish People

The Early church.

It is a forced exegesis to declare that all the church will go secretly, but 144 000 Jewish believers will stay behind to evangelize the rest of the world whilst the church parties with the Lord in heaven at a *'marriage feast'*. As I have shown above, there is nothing in the Scriptures to substantiate such a claim. Therefore, let us examine then how the Bible and church history testify against a secret rapture of the church.

a) **The Bible:**

If we see the redemptive work of God only from a Christian perspective we have failed to understand the message of the Bible, and we are motivated by the selfish intent of creating an elitist society on this planet. In fact, it is nothing short of blasphemy to even attempt making God party to such a plan.

The purpose of the Almighty has been from the beginning - and especially since Noah - to redeem and restore mankind to its originally intended position. To commence the work of redemption God chose Abraham to be - as it were - the proverbial pebble in the pond of humanity. Like the waves created by a stone dropped into a pool of water eventually reach all the edges, so would the mercy shown to Abraham, and the effects of this faith, eventually touch all of mankind.

Now we know that we are not saved by faith in Abraham, but if we have **his kind of faith** in the Son of God and the sacrifice of calvary. However, if we **ignore** the work of God in the physical descendants of Abraham, we fail to understand the mind of the Creator God and are prone to fall prey to philosophical interpretation of the purpose-, and work of redemption.

One of the most central messages of the Hebrew Bible (O.T.) is Mal.3:

"For I am the Eternal One and I do not change; therefore you sons of Jacob you are not consumed".

Surely, this must tell any thinking believer that the ways of God are therefore also unchanging. Were they not so, we would have the dreadful misfortune of having to deal with a capricious deity like all pagan people. It is not so with us! Thanks be to Him that He will still be the same a thousand years from today as He was a thousand years ago.

Having said this, let us look how Scripture supports this view. We only need to look to Noah to observe the wrath of God in action. God did not remove Noah from the earth, but He provided a way for him and his family through the tribulation and judgment which fell upon a wicked and evil humankind.

The next time we see the wrath of God in action is in Egypt when He brings judgment against the false gods of the land. Ten times are Pharaoh and his people exposed to terrible plagues including the angel of death. Each and every time do we see the grace and power of God in action preserving the Children of Israel, c/f Ex.8:22-23;9:7,26;10:23; 2:12-13; viz.

"But on that day I will set apart the Land of Goshen where My people are living...and I will put a division between My people and your people. And Pharaoh sent and behold there was not one Israel's livestock dead. Only in the Land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail. They did not see one another...but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt".

do they testify

b) The Jewish People:

Each year at passover the Jewish people testify to the keeping power of God described in the above Scripture. Not only to the workings of God among their forefathers, but their very existence shows that God does not remove His people from tribulation, but through it He refines their faith and perfects them.

In a devotional book written by a Hebrew **Ben Sirach** in 132 B.C.E., we read the following:

'My son, if you aspire to serve the Eternal One, prepare yourself for an ordeal.

Be sincere of heart, be steadfast, and do not be alarmed when disaster comes. Cling to Him and do not leave Him, so that you may be honoured at the end of your days.

*Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainty of your humble state, be patient; since **gold is tested** in the fire, and **chosen men in the furnace** of humiliation.*

Trust Him and He will uphold you...' Sirach 2:1-6a

It is the Hebrew Bible which tells us that 'the righteous shall live by (his) faith', Hab.2:4. This is then followed up by the Book of Hebrew in the N.T. where we are told that the ancient ones *'...by faith, received the trial of mockings and scourgings, yes also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted. They were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, illtreated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground...so that apart from us they should not be made perfect!' Heb.11:36-40.*

The Children Of Israel in Biblical times, as well as their descendants among the Jewish people throughout the Christian era, have been and still are the elect of God; *'...beloved for the sake of the fathers (Patriarchs), for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable'*. Yet, persecution and tribulation have been the lot of the Jewish people irrespective of time and place in history - especially at the hands of (so called) Christians.

Nowhere do the Scriptures indicate that God's Chosen People are now less important to God than the **Church**, which was *grafted* into the **Good Olive Tree**. Did God remove them from tribulation? No, but He kept them through it!

c) The Early Church:

The Bible is not specific on these matters, rather only indicates the persecution which came upon the early believers.

However, there is sufficient evidence available from history to inform us graphically of the horrendous suffering these saints endured over the first three and a half centuries of the Christian era. Writers like Peter and John foresaw the extent of these persecutions, that is why the second epistle of Peter, as well as the book of Revelation are included in the canon of the Bible. In fact, many theologians to this day hold fast to the belief that '**Revelation**' has already been fulfilled and that the book is no more than an historical account. Of course such a theory must be rejected outright for its fulfilment is at best partial. Therefore most things remain yet to be fulfilled and thus are still in the future. I do not wish to enter into a theological discourse on that book here, I merely made reference to it to point to the **TRIBULATION** which had come upon the early church. Did God make any attempt to deliver them from the Lions of the Roman circus, or any other trial? No! All the N.T. writings we have in our possession today came into being to deal with the needs of those saints. Surely Paul, Peter and John did not prefix their writings, '**valid only 2000 years from now!**' ? Where they subjected to the wrath of God? Of course not! No true believer ever is, for there is nothing that '*shall separate us from the love of God.*' **God gave them grace in the midst of their trials.**

'Shall TRIBULATION, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword?...but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US '. Rom.8:35-39

If then God did not see fit to remove those saints, who were truly on fire for God, out of their tribulation, why then should He remove the lukewarm body of believers which we have become?

No, I am not advocating an earthly purgatory, but I am suggesting that if more believers considered the possibility of persecution in the near future we would become a little bit more fervent in seeking the face of God.

SUMMARY

The chief principle of all exegesis is to accept the most simple reading of any Bible passage (in the right context) as the truest one.

When we look at the problem before us from this position, one cannot but wonder, how the teaching of the (secret) rapture - prior to the tribulation (or even mid-trib) and the official return of the Messiah - could ever have been accepted into the official teaching of some prominent sectors of the protestant movement. Not only this, but how learned men continue to insist on the infallibility of this teaching which is not founded on sound Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, but merely on an obscure prophecy given some 150 years ago. The answer to this must be, of course, that the Pauline passages have been read and studied out of context with what Jesus and the rest of the Scriptures teach. This theory was made to fit into Biblical doctrine simply because **suffering** is not meant to be part of the Christian vocabulary.

How wonderful it would be if suffering ceased for all believers. I am sure that the whole world would instantly believe. However, Christians continue to suffer and the world continues to doubt!

Throughout the centuries true Christians have suffered grievously at the hands of the Roman Church, in the torture chambers and on the pyres of the Dominicans and Jesuits, as well as at the hands of kings and rulers. Did God remove the suffering church out of communist Russia, or China, or Rumania? No, rather He blessed them and made them strong!

I am not advocating martyrdom of any kind, but I am writing this, so that you may not be deceived. If the '*secret-rapture*' teachers are right, I have lost nothing, but I will rejoice at the great mercy of our God who would bestow such an unmerited favour upon us.

However, what if they are wrong and you enter that period of tribulation totally unprepared in your heart, will not your faith in God be greatly shaken and possibly cause you to fall away? The issue involved

here is of fundamental significance. It is not a question of which doctrine is more attractive, or whether there is a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture. Rather, are we prepared to go through such an ordeal if the preachers of this '*secret rapture*' theory are wrong?

If you steadfastly expect that there will be a '**secret**' rapture, how will you recognise the working of **THE BEAST & THE FALSE PROPHET** if that rapture does not eventuate?

We, the redeemed are the servants of God Most High. Who are we to dictate to Him how He should deal with us at that time? What do we have to fear? Do not the Scriptures say otherwise? Does not the Prophet Isaiah declare:

'But now, thus says the Eternal One, your Creator O Jacob, and He Who formed you O Israel (which includes us who are grafted into the Commonwealth and the Promises) "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched; nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Eternal One, your God, the Holy One of Israel, YOUR SAVIOUR...!' Isa.43:1-3a.

The Prophet Malachi also writes:

'For behold the day is coming, burning like a furnace and all the arrogant and evildoers will be like chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze', says the LORD of Hosts...'but for you who revere (i.e. reverentially fear) My Name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.' Mal.4:1-2

The sum total of all this is that God will pronounce His judgment against a wicked humanity; an act that will strike terror in every unredeemed heart. In the midst of all this God will keep His people, who will come out of it shining like the stars. As the Apostle says, "*Who shall separate us from the love of God?*" (Rom.8:35).

Who are we then, who live at the end of this horrible age, to exalt ourselves above the Apostle Paul who was able to say:

'...it is written, for your sake we are being put to death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered...' Rom.8:36

Friend, do not permit yourself to be lulled into a false sense of security. Be watchful, vigilant in prayer and search the Scriptures. As the apostle Peter says, "*The devil goes around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour!*"

The Grace and Shalom of God be with you
through

Jesus The Messiah

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MARANATHA !

Endnotes:

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³ Hal Lindsay, The Great Late Planet Earth.....