

DISCOVER PROPHECY



A Thief In The Night

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A Popular Subject

Since I was a young boy, I have found the subject of the second coming of Jesus Christ very interesting. Now that I am older and have spent a great deal of time studying the biblical subject, I've discovered that it is one of the dominant themes of scripture and that there are over 2500 references to the second coming of Christ in the Bible. In fact in the New Testament alone out of the 260 chapters between Matthew and Revelation, the second coming of Christ is mentioned **331** times. That means that the second coming has one reference for every 25 verses.

Missed The First Advent

When Jesus came the first time as an infant under the shining star, in the little manger of the town of Bethlehem, the vast majority of the church, the Jewish believers, missed it. Though the Old Testament contains over 300 references to the first coming of the Messiah the people were unprepared for His advent.

Looking back on it now, we recognize that they made several key mistakes. Mistakes we can learn from to avoid repeating as we anticipate the second coming of Jesus.

First, the common people were not studying the scriptures for themselves. As we've identified a number of times throughout this series, it's important that we read the Bible for ourselves and not assume that what others teach is accurate. Unfortunately, most of the Jewish leaders misunderstood the prophecies concerning the first Advent and the common people, fell under the their influence- thus missing Jesus' coming.

Secondly, they took the prophecies that applied to Christ's second coming and applied them to His first. The religious leaders of the time came up with a theory based on several Bible texts that were taken out of context. The theory was that the messiah was going to come triumphantly, conquering the enemies of the Jews as he came and ultimately sitting upon David's throne.

How tragic. The religious leaders taught and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, but because of misunderstanding the Bible they and the vast majority of the church, not only missed His coming in Bethlehem,

but were unable to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah and not only rejected Him, but ultimately crucified Him upon the cross.

We can learn from the Jews experience. We can see how important it is that we study the Bible for ourselves so that we too may not be deceived by the people of this world, by the religious leaders of today that unintentionally misinterpret scripture. As we will discover tonight, unless people know the nature of His second advent, they may miss it as well.

My favorite passage of scripture speaks of Jesus' second coming. "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" John 14:1-3.

The Bible clearly tells us that there will be a second coming and Jesus warns us as He did to His disciples that it is possible once again to be deceived. "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' And Jesus answered and said to them, 'See to it that no one misleads you'" Matthew 24:3-4.

A Solemn Warning

Warning the disciples of the deception surrounding His second advent, Jesus says that, "many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many" Matthew 24:5. Unfortunately, this deception will be widespread because there will not only be a simple misunderstanding of the subject, but there will be those who intentionally teach falsehood.

Jesus identifies these people as false christs and prophets. "For false christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them" Matthew 24:24-26.

Five Biblical Facts

To avoid being deceived ourselves about the subject of the Christ's return, it's important to see for ourselves what the Bible says. Let me share with you five simple facts that will help clarify a great deal of misunderstanding.

1. *Literal.* "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven'" Acts 1:9-11. The same way Jesus went up into heaven is the same way He will come back to earth. A literal Jesus went and a literal Jesus will come back again. Not a spirit!
2. *Visible.* "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen" Revelation 1:7. Here the Bible tells us that at the coming of Jesus, everyone will see Him. "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" Matthew 24:30. Again we see that all the people of the earth will see Jesus when He returns.
3. *Audible.* "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" Matthew 24:31. The angels will come with the sound of a great trumpet. This will take place at the gathering together of the elect or saints. Jesus' first coming was quiet; no one knew of His coming except a few shepherds and the wise men. Other than that it was a quiet coming. Now His second coming is not going to be quiet, in fact it will be very loud and everyone will know that Jesus has come. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Again we see that the Lord is coming with the sound of a trumpet. Did you know that the trumpet is the loudest of all the musical

instruments? Not only is it going to be with a trumpet but with a shout. Both of these are loud things. So Jesus' coming will very much be audible.

4. *A Resurrecting Event.* "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Wow! The coming of Jesus is so loud that the dead are raised at the voice and trumpet of God. We'll look more at this in a future presentation, but it's important for now to note that when Jesus comes, He'll raise people from their graves.
5. *Glorious.* "May our God come and not keep silence; fire devours before Him, and it is very tempestuous around Him" Psalms 50:3. The second coming of Jesus Christ will be a glorious event, one that will not be missed by anyone. "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne" Matthew 25:31. His coming will be so bright, it will be like as of fire and He's coming with all His angels. And the Bible tells us that there are a bunch of angels! "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" Revelation 5:11.

The second coming of Jesus Christ will be an amazing event- unlike anything that we've seen before. It will be a literal, visible, audible event with an exciting resurrection of the dead and a sky filled with angels.

Truth Left Behind

Based upon the texts we've looked at thus far, the Bible is clear on the nature of Jesus' coming, but some may be wondering about the popular theory known as the secret rapture- popularized from the "Left Behind" fictional book and movie series. If the Bible doesn't teach a secret rapture, where did it come from?

First, I think it's important that we understand that the word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible. The world rapture means a catching up or a snatching away, which the Bible does describe. We will be caught up together in the clouds. However, there is no indication that it will be secret.

The notion of a secret rapture doesn't come into Christian churches or literature until the 1830's. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield is the man who made the teaching most known. He learned this teaching from a preacher named John Nelson Darby which learned it from a woman named Miss Margaret McDonald, who was

said to have had a vision of the two phase 2nd coming. Scofield studied this out and made notes on this theory, putting it into the margins of his Bible. Then his notes got published in the wide-spread Scofield reference Bible Published in 1909. Unfortunately, no one knew if Scofield actually believed it himself or verified the teachings with scripture.

A Thief in the Night

The theory of a secret rapture has largely been based on bible texts that are taken out of their context. It would be good for us to take a look at some of them.

Some may ask, "What about the Bible verse that says Jesus is going to come as a thief in the night? Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus is going to come as a thief?" Yes, it does. The Bible says that Jesus is going to come as a thief. But what does that mean? Let's look at it together-remembering the importance of studying for yourself. You can find the reference to Jesus coming as a thief in Matthew 24:42-44, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that 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 and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

OK Let's ask a few questions, letting the text answer for itself. According to the Bible, does Jesus come as a thief? Yes. Does Jesus come quietly? The text doesn't say. Do the lost not know where the others are? It doesn't say. Does Jesus come unexpectedly? Yes. Anything else is added to the text, which is not true to Bible study. The Bible does not say Jesus comes secretly, but that He comes at a time when you do not know. That is the point. Look at another passage...

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up" 2 Peter 3:10. This text, like the previous, says Jesus will come like a thief. But does it mean quietly or secretly? No. Here we see that the heavens will pass away, there will be a big roar and the earth burned up. Doesn't sound like a secret. But it will be at a time that no one knows. That is what it means by His coming like a thief.

Therefore, be ready. The reason Jesus is described as a thief is that he'll come at an unknown time, therefore, be on the alert. Ready for His coming. I want to be ready for Jesus' coming, don't you?

Let's look at another well known thief passage. Again, as we look at the Bible describing Jesus coming as a thief, ask yourself, is it saying that Jesus' coming will be a secret or that He's coming at an unknown time, therefore, be ready. "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober" 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6. Again this is talking of the time of Christ's coming and not the manner.

One Taken, One Left

There is another well-known passage of scripture that is often used to defend the secret manner of Jesus' return. Let's look at this together and ask the question as to the Bible's description of His return. Do we see the secret rapture described here or are people adding to the meaning of the text?

"I tell you, on that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left" Luke 17:34-36. Here we see that the Bible, in describing the nature of Jesus return says that there will be two people. One taken, one left. But, what does the Bible say about the two different people? Who is taken? Who is left? Where is the one taken to? How is the one left behind? Let's let the Bible tell us. In verse 37, the disciples ask about the one taken, "Where, Lord?" And Jesus replies, "Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered." Those taken are taken where according to the Bible? "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" Matthew 24:28. Here we see an expanding version of what Jesus said, but it uses the word "carcass." Let me ask you, would you want to go where these ones are taken?

Matthew also gives us the story of the two people. Let's look at his account. "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left" Matthew 24:40-41. Now we know from Luke's account that the one taken is taken away to death- not

heaven. But does this verse indicate whether the coming of Jesus will be silent? No.

Let's read a little more of the context, backing up to verses 36-39, getting a bit more detail on this story. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be" Matthew 24: 36-39.

According to verse 36, the point of this whole passage is once again to prepare people for His coming, since we do not know the day or hour. Then Jesus goes back to Noah's flood to explain why it's important to be ready. The soon coming will be just like Noah's ark. Some will be taken, some will be lost. Noah's flood tells us that those taken were taken away to their death, those left behind were left alive- safe in the ark.

Looking back at Noah's flood, "Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark" Genesis 7:23. After the wicked were all destroyed the Bible says that "Noah only remained alive." Therefore at the second coming of Jesus Christ, we will have two groups. One taken away to death, the other left, safe in the presence of Jesus. This will be in heaven with Him.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, those that are saved at the second coming of Christ are the ones that remain, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

Coming Again

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" John 14:1-3.

I look forward to Jesus coming, don't you? I want to

be ready when Jesus comes, don't you? Jesus has been waiting for you to be ready for His coming. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" 2 Peter 3:9. He will come again and He wants you to be ready. Won't you choose to be ready with me?

