

Is the Secret Rapture in the Bible?

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[0:00] This morning, then, we want to look and examine at least one of these foundational truths to the secret rapture, why they can come up with this secret rapture that is not explicitly taught in any verse of the Bible.

And it's because they believe that the church will not go through the great tribulation. If you have your chart, we're looking at the bottom view, and we're noticing right in the center this pre-tribulation coming and secret rapture.

And immediately following is the great tribulation. Most would hold that it's a seven-year tribulation, but you see that. And it's only after that that they believe Christ comes all the way down to the earth and is revealed in glory.

So, why do they believe in a secret rapture of the church? Because they don't believe the church goes through the great tribulation. And the great tribulation comes before the return of Christ.

So, they deduce that surely, then, the church must be raptured out before the great tribulation. Do you see the logic, the inference, the deduction that's being made there?

[1:14] Now, first, let's just think briefly about this great tribulation. What is that? Well, it's a period that they describe as unparalleled distress coming upon the earth in the end times.

Now, you may or may not believe all the things that the dispensationalists believe about what's going to happen during this time. You might not hold to all the texts that they point to as describing this period of tribulation, nor even the length of time as they would hold that it's seven years.

You might have differing views on that. But the Bible does speak in many places of a great tribulation that is coming in the end. The time when the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, appears. A time of great persecution of believers, calamitous judgments of God. A time of great apostasy and falling away from the truth by many who profess to be Christians.

So, it's this period of tribulation toward the end of time that we're speaking of. And it is the strong belief of most dispensationalists that the church will not go through this tribulation, but will be raptured to heaven before it begins.

[2:39] Hence the title, pre-tribulation rapture. A friend of mine at college was raised in a very dispensational home, a dispensational church, very strong views that believed in a secret rapture of the church before the tribulation.

He was attending a very dispensational college. And yet it was while he was at college that he began to study the scriptures with regard to these things. And he came to the conclusion that the Bible does not anywhere teach a secret rapture of the church before the tribulation, but that the church will go through the tribulation and then Christ will come.

And so, on one of the breaks from college, he went home to tell his father about his change in beliefs. And told him, you know, that he didn't believe that the scripture taught anywhere, that the church is secretly raptured before the tribulation, but that it must go through that tribulation.

Then Christ will come and judge the whole earth and bring in the eternal state. And upon hearing what his son now believed, the father asked in disbelief, well, why would anyone want to go through the tribulation?

I want to assure you that I don't want to go through the tribulation. But we don't choose our eschatology based on our personal preferences of what we would like to do and rather not like to do.

[4:15] So, what we do learn, or let me ask this. If you take the scheme that we've been looking at, the simple basic floor plan of eschatology that the New Testament presents, all of time is divided into what two groups?

This age and the age to come. And the dividing line is the return of Christ, judgment, resurrection, and we'll see again, I think, next week, the new heavens and the new earth.

Based upon that, which I trust that you've seen, we've tried to hammer that out from the clear and literal passages of the New Testament. Based upon that alone, where does the tribulation fall?

Where are you going to put it on that scheme? This age, I'm hearing. And why? Why does it have to be in this age?

It's before Christ's return? It's before Christ's return? Before judgment? Alright.

[5:44] What we know about the age to come is that there will be no pain and no judgment. There will be no evil people mixed with the righteous, will there?

And yet that's what's taught about this tribulation period. You have the evil persecuting the righteous. So it's before the net is brought in and the bad fish are thrown out and the good fish are kept.

It's before the burning of the tares, the separating of the tares from the wheat. So we know it's got to be in this age. So if it's in this age then, does the tribulation happen before or after the return of Christ?

And the gathering of the saints unto the Savior? Well, again, the simple eschatology of the New Testament would make us conclude it happens, this tribulation happens before the return of Christ, not after.

So, again, I trust that you'll see how helpful the Bible's simple timeline is to any of these perplexing questions that we must face when we come to the scriptures and we see something.

[7:00] We say, well, where does that fit in the whole scheme? Well, take the simple basic scheme and what you know of it from the New Testament and apply it. Now, let's turn to the most important passage on this issue.

It's one we looked at last week and that's why, again, we don't have a separate outline, but it's 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

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1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

[8:54] 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

The love of many will grow cold. That there's going to be an increase of wickedness that will have the effect among even the professing church to make their love grow cold.

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. This is a huge falling away.

This is a huge apostasy. But he who stands firm to the end shall be saved.

So our Lord in the Olivet Discourse speaks as well of this great apostasy and rebellion and its effects upon the professing church.

[10:39] And then Paul says not only must this rebellion, this apostasy and falling away happen, but also the man of lawlessness must first be revealed.

He's the great catalyst for this rebellion and apostasy. Most commentators will identify this man of lawlessness with the Antichrist.

I would have to agree that that's a correct identification. John says that many Antichrists are already in the world. First John 2:18 and 22.

In his day, in the first century, many Antichrists were already in the world. The spirit of Antichrist is now in the world, he says. But he also says, he also speaks of the coming of the Antichrist.

We know that the Antichrist is coming. So there are many, many Antichrists. The spirit of Antichrist, anything that opposes Christ is already in the world.

[11:42] But we know that the Antichrist is coming. So he speaks as if there's a coming of one Antichrist that will follow all these preceding ones.

And again, most identify that personage with Paul's man of lawlessness here, who again is called the man doomed to destruction.

A distinct man, a distinct individual who is to appear on the world scene just prior to the Lord's return.

You say, how do you know it's just prior to the Lord's return? Well, because verse 8 tells him that he will be overthrown at the coming of our Lord. Then the lawlessness, verse 8, then the lawless one will be revealed.

I'm here in 2nd Thess 2, 8. Whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

[12:41] So we're talking now about a figure who will appear on the world scene just before the return of Christ. For Christ will destroy him at his coming.

He was not yet revealed in Paul's day. He was being held back. Sovereignly held back. Why? So that he might be revealed at the proper time, at God's time. Even though the secret power of lawlessness, he says, was already at work.

Notice verses 5 through 8. Don't you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you these things? I used to teach you about the coming of the man of lawlessness and then how Christ would come.

And now, verse 6, you know what is holding him back so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work.

[13:39] But the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

And then the satanic influence behind this individual is stated in verses 9 to 12. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan, displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.

And in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. You see, here again is the great deception, the great apostasy that's pulling people away from the truth.

They're deceived. Verse 10 or going on, verse 10. So there's satanic influence behind this figure, this man of lawlessness.

All kinds of counterfeit miracles. Things that deceive people. The lie that will be believed because they don't love the truth and holiness, but rather want to walk in their wickedness.

[15:20] Now, you see the problem this text poses then for dispensationalists who believe that the church will not go through the tribulation. If Christ will only return after the tribulation, the rebellion and men of lawlessness, then they must get the church out of the way somehow before the return of Christ.

And the secret rapture does that, doesn't it? It takes them out of the way so that they will not go through the tribulation and then the return of Christ.

But there's a problem with that, and that's verse 1. That our text says that our being gathered unto Christ, that the churches, the saints being gathered unto Christ, will not happen until the man of lawlessness is revealed.

And this apostasy takes place. So it's not just saying that the Lord won't come until the tribulation happens. It's saying that our being gathered to him will not happen until the tribulation is revealed. So this text leaves absolutely no room for pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Then why does a great number of American evangelicals, why do a great number believe that the church will not go through the tribulation?

[16:58] Follow the syllogism. I wish I could have had this on your handout. This is what I would have put on it this morning. So there's a major premise, a minor premise, and then a conclusion. The major premise is this.

The church is saved from the wrath of God. All right? We're trying to follow their logic, why they believe the church won't go through the tribulation. The church is saved from the wrath of God. That's the major premise. The minor premise. The tribulation is the wrath of God. The conclusion. The conclusion. Therefore, the church is saved from the tribulation. Well, it's the second statement that we have problems with.

The faulty minor premise that the tribulation is the wrath of God. And that for several reasons. First of all, the passages on God's wrath used to support this view have nothing to do with the tribulation judgments.

[18:07] Look at 1 Thessalonians 5.9. Just across the page. This text is often cited by pre-tribulation dispensationalists as a promise that the church will not have to go through the final tribulation.

Listen. 1 Thessalonians 5.9. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You see it there? God did not appoint us to suffer wrath. And in their minds, wrath means tribulation. The wrath to be poured out on the earth during the seven years of tribulation. God didn't appoint us Christians to suffer that wrath. But the whole context of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is not speaking of wrath as just being seven years of wrath, but eternal. The eternal wrath of God that is to fall upon unbelievers after the tribulation, after the return of Christ and for all eternity.

[19 : 23] His wrath will fall upon them. And that's the wrath that we're saved from through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's the sudden destruction to be meted out on the day of the Lord as verses 1 through 4 speak about.

While people are saying peace and safety. Sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape. That's the wrath of God to be poured out at the coming of Christ.

The final judgment. Eternal hell. What is contrasted with wrath in verse 9? God did not appoint us to suffer wrath.

But what? What's contrasted with the wrath? Salvation. Salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, whatever the wrath is, salvation is the opposite of it. He didn't appoint us to suffer the wrath, but rather to enjoy the salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[20 : 29] Again, what is the salvation spoken of? Is the thing Paul's wanting to encourage these Thessalonians is that you guys are going to be saved from seven years of wrath coming on the earth at the end of the age?

Or is it not to say you are saved from the wrath of God that your sins deserve forever and ever? The wrath is the eternal wrath.

And salvation from wrath is not salvation from seven years of trouble on the earth. It's salvation from the eternal torments that our sins deserve. God didn't appoint us to suffer that wrath, but rather, blessed be God, He chose us and appointed us.

To share in the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ who delivers us from that wrath. And consistency demands that if the reason given in verse 10, what's the reason given in verse 10 that we escape this wrath and that we're saved?

He died for us. There is the reason we escape. It's through salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us.

[21 : 40] Well, what did His death save us from? Seven years of trouble at the end of the age? Or eternal wrath forever and ever?

No, His death saved us from eternal wrath. And consistency would demand if the dispensationalist is going to say this wrath here is the seven years of tribulation that Christ has saved His people from, then that means that no Christian should have to go through the tribulation.

That they have all kinds of people being converted and having to go through the tribulation. But if Christ's death procures salvation from wrath, why do they have to suffer wrath?

No, the wrath spoken of here is not seven years of trouble on earth. It's eternity of trouble and tribulation and wrath and distress. The other passage is 1 Thessalonians 1, 9, and 10 that speaks of this wrath to come.

And again, we're having to ask the question, what is Paul talking about? Is he talking about just seven years of trouble on the earth? Or is he speaking of eternal wrath?

[22 : 53] Speaking of the way the message went out about the conversion of these Thessalonians, the message Paul says that he received, verse 9, For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

They tell how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

I'm sorry, but if that's simply seven years of trouble on the earth, that is a great anticlimax. We're waiting for His Son from heaven.

We're serving Him. The Son from heaven who raised us from the dead. Jesus, who rescues us from seven years of trouble to come on the earth.

I'm sorry, but that doesn't flow with the passage, who rescues us from the coming wrath. The wrath of God to be poured out on sinners.

[24 : 03] That's what He rescued us from, by His own bearing of that wrath on the cross. So again, the passages on God's wrath that are used to support this idea that the church won't have to go

through the tribulation, I don't believe have anything to do with tribulational wrath at all, but rather to the destruction that sinners will experience in hell.

And then a second reason I don't see this doctrine taught in the church that are taught in the Bible that the church won't have to go through the tribulation is that the church's presence in the tribulation doesn't imply that they participate in the wrath of God.

Yes, God's wrath is being poured out on the earth during those times of distress. But the fact that the church must go through that doesn't mean that they're experiencing the wrath of God.

There is now, therefore, no condemnation, no wrath for those who are in Christ Jesus. And yet we go through great tribulation. Acts chapter 14 and verse 22, the apostles encourage their followers, we must go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God.

But that doesn't mean that we're experiencing God's wrath personally. The same event that is wrath for some may be a corrective chastisement for others.

[25 : 33] You think of the wrath that God poured out upon His Old Testament church. You think of the times that Israel experienced chastening by the rod of God by bringing in another nation, going away into captivity to Assyria, to Babylon.

Israel was being punished. And for some it was wrath. For unbelievers in Israel, it was wrath. But you know, the righteous remnant had to go through that same wrath, didn't they?

They were right in the thick of it. If they were sent away into captivity, the righteous suffered with the unrighteous. But for them it was not the wrath of God upon them. It was a trial.

It was a discipline meant to build godliness in their lives. So just the fact that we have the church going through the tribulation doesn't mean that they are now for seven years under the wrath of God in some personal sense at all.

And then the one other verse that many dispensationalists think teaches, the idea of a pre-trib rapture, is Revelation 3.10.

[26 : 52] Again, the reason they would hold it. This verse teaches clearly that the church doesn't have to go through the tribulation. So just briefly, we must touch upon it.

Revelation 3.10, the Lord Jesus is writing a letter to the church, the seven churches, and now he comes to the church in Philadelphia and he speaks of their faithfulness and he rewards them in verse 10.

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

And so they would say, here's the proof text that the church will not have to go through the tribulation that is coming on those who live on the earth.

The language that is used here, I will keep you from, I will keep you from the hour.

[27 : 58] They're translating that as if it means I will keep you from having to go through it. But the word therefore keep is the same word as protect. I will protect you from something.

And the idea is not that I will keep you from having to go through it, but I will protect you from the danger. Why must the church be kept and protected if she doesn't have to go through the dangerous test that's coming on the earth?

The reason they need to be kept and guarded and protected is because they must go through, but they will be kept and preserved. Now, there's only one other place in the New Testament where that Greek construction to be kept from is used.

And it's conveniently in John 15, a passage that we have recently come through. I'm sorry, John 17, in Jesus' prayer for His church.

John 17, verse 15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

[29 : 11] Now, that word protect from is the very same Greek construction as you have in Revelation 3.10. What is Jesus saying here that He's praying the Father to do when He says, I'm praying that you will keep them from the evil one?

Does He want the Father to take them out of the world so that they won't have any contact with the evil one? Not at all. He says, I'm not praying that you take them out of the world.

Whatever keeping them from means here, it doesn't mean taking them out so that they won't have contact with the evil. No. What it means is that I'm praying not that you take them out, but that as you leave them in, that they will be kept and guarded and protected from the onslaughts of the enemy.

So that though they come upon them, they will not overcome them and overturn them. That's the same construction that is found in Jesus' words to this church in Philadelphia, that they would be kept, protected from, protected in the very midst of this great trial that is to come upon the end of the earth.

So it's this belief that the church will not have to go through the tribulation that becomes the basis then for deducing there must be a secret rapture, there must be a time when the church is brought out of the world before this period of tribulation.

[30 : 43] So do you understand how it's not so much taught directly and explicitly, this secret rapture, but it's a deduction based upon the understanding that they have that the church won't have to go through the tribulation.

Now, none of the other three views of eschatology believe in a secret pre-tribulational rapture. None of the other three views have such an event in their scheme.

And yet, isn't it strange that we find that it is this one, out of the four, it's this one that tends to get the press and indeed be the popular view of present evangelicalism in America.

And indeed, Waldron and others have raised the question and said, could it be that this view is the popular view today because it's so appealing to the soft American evangelicalism?

It's easy Christianity without a cross, with no self-denial. That's what's in today, isn't it? It's eternal security.

[31 : 56] I prayed a prayer once, I'm saved forever. Rather than perseverance in holiness that's being taught, persevering to the end. It's easy believism in the carnal Christian theory rather than the lordship of Jesus Christ over every believer.

It's a god of all love. It's entertainment worship. It's a judgment in the end based upon a decision I made rather than based upon the works of my life that reflect my faith.

And so to be raptured before the tribulation just fits our carnal love of these and the popular no-cost Christianity.

Like my friend's father, we don't want to go through the tribulation. And this view tells us what we want to hear. Now I'm not by any means accusing anyone's personal motives, but the question is legitimately to be raised when we see a whole generation of Christians, and I must say I was one of them, being swept into this.

Is it because scripture demands that I believe this? Or is it that I rather like not having to go through the tribulation?

[33 : 11] Well, each man, each woman must answer that for themselves. But the message of the Bible is clear, that trouble is ahead for the godly. Trouble is ahead for the godly.

And yet this popular teaching is leaving Christians unprepared for this coming persecution by telling them they will escape it all, they won't have to go through it, for after all the church will be raptured first.

And that, I think, is perhaps one of its gravest dangers, that it's leaving a generation, it's leaving a large portion of Christ's church unprepared for a great trial that is coming, that will sift many and cause their love for Christ to grow cold and will cause them to follow the lie because they love wickedness and do not love the truth.

Daniel 7, verse 21. Sobering words. It happened somewhere during this age. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them.

Can you believe that? This horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them until the ancient of days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

[34 : 39] Back to Revelation 13. And I know I'm into the visions and the dreams and the less literal portions, but I just want to show you that the Scriptures are speaking of tough times ahead for the church.

Revelation 13 and verse 5. The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for 42 months.

He opened his mouth to blaspheme God and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.

That's what we just read in Daniel. To conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. Nations and nation.

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast. All whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the land that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go.

[35 : 44] If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. The blood of the martyrs is to flow again. And now, the concluding word at the end of verse 10.

This calls for something. What is coming upon the earth for the people of God calls for something. It calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

This first century church that received this letter first was going to go through those three centuries of persecutions from Rome. And that persecution would call upon and would require great endurance, patient endurance and faithfulness on their part, lest they be washed away by the pressures of persecution that were coming upon them.

But it's also needed for the persecution that's to arise at the end. These events call for patient endurance and faithfulness.

You're going to need those two things in great supply. John is saying. Enduring satanic persecution is no cakewalk. You're going to need plenty of patient endurance and faithfulness.

[37 : 10] It calls for not loving your life so much as to shrink from death. Revelation 12, 11. That's what these times call for. Not loving your life so much that you shrink back from death.

Oh, if it's Christ or death, I'll shrink back from Christ because I don't want to die. No, these times that are coming upon the earth will require you to so love Christ that you will not shrink back from death.

And so I ask you, are we training our children to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ? Or are we spoiling them and pampering them and feeding their flesh and letting them be softies? What about ourselves? Are we preparing ourselves? Are we ready for this kind of trouble coming upon the earth? What do we know of the graces of patient endurance and faithfulness?

Under our present trials. Under our present difficulties. Is the muscle of endurance under trial being built? You're going to need it if you're still alive.

[38 : 11] When tribulation comes. What about faithfulness? Holding to the truth. No matter what winds are blowing contrary.

No matter what everyone else around you is doing. No matter that wickedness is abounding. It's your love for Jesus holding firm. Daniel. Daniel.

Matthew 24. 2 Thessalonians 2. Revelation. All tell us to prepare for a rough ride ahead. Dark days. Awful days. Are ahead for the church of Christ.

Evil men will wax worse and worse. 2 Timothy 3. And because the increase of wickedness. The love of most will grow cold. But he who stands firm to the end.

Will be saved. Post millennialism has little to prepare us for this. Why not? Because it's expecting a gradual Christianization of the world.

[39 : 06] Where the wicked are ruled over by the righteous. And most of the nations have a government that's righteous. Well that's not preparing us for trouble. A pre-tribulational rapture has little to prepare us.

For what we're going to need in the end. None of this is for you. You're just raptured out before it all happens. But the Bible records these things to prepare us.

Not to entertain our curiosity of what some poor suckers at the end of the year. They're going to have to go through if they're in the tribulation period of seven years. No. It's written for us. It's why Revelation is in our Bibles.

And why Daniel is in our. The people of Daniel's day were prepared for the sufferings that they were to go through in captivity. With the knowledge that at the end the Ancient of Days would come and would destroy the Antichrist.

And God is ruling history. And so the Bible records these things to stir us up. To be ready. To be prepared. Our friend Stuart Elliott says this.

[40 : 13] Nobody should embark on the Christian life without calling these facts to mind. And without counting the cost. I found those to be sobering words from our brother.

Nobody ought to take step one in the Christian life until he has thought. Would I be willing to die for Christ? Should I face that issue in this great tribulation that's coming upon the earth?

Our brother Stuart has written a book, Dear to Stand Alone, a commentary on Daniel. Let me commend it to you. Roger, do we have that in our library?

We'll need to get a copy. But he lays out how Daniel speaks of two little horns. And the little horn that he speaks of in his book refers to the Antichrist who's coming.

And you can trace out what he says there in Daniel in his proud speech with what 2 Thessalonians talks about. How he claims to be God and puts himself in the place of God. And yet at the end of the day, what happens?

[41:25] He's destroyed by the splendor of the coming of Christ. It's all taught there in Daniel. And our brother has written a very simple commentary. Straightforward. Tom has recently read it with great prophets and has commended it.

And I, too, have profited from that and would commend it to you. Excellent for family as well, teaching our young people to stand alone.

Indeed, we're going to be called to stand alone should we live in those days. Well, may the Lord help us then and prepare us for what is ahead in our day.

And in the end, this great Antichrist who wields so much power, what is he? A beautiful picture. He's just a little horn. He's just small potatoes in the end.

And a word from our Savior will destroy him. Wonderful thing to be in Christ and on the side of righteousness. There's no history or there's no future to Antichrist.

[42:29] The future is with Christ and his bride. Be sure that you're in Christ. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.