

SIGNS *of the Times*

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?

Look Up

Some may remember seeing the billboards predicting that Jesus would return on May 21, 2011, and take the saved to heaven in the “rapture.” Five months of fire, brimstone and plagues were to follow until the world met its final end on October 21. Although Jesus failed to return in 2011 as predicted, thousands of Christians do believe that Jesus’ coming will take place in two separate events.

According to this view, called the “secret rapture,” Jesus will first come secretly to take the church to heaven. Then, seven years later, He will come openly in power and glory. Between these two “comings,” the antichrist will arise and a period of great tribulation will occur.

Interestingly, this idea of a two-part second coming arose only about 200 years ago. Does the Bible support this teaching?

FINDING A FIRM FOUNDATION

1. Where do we find the truth about spiritual things? (**John 17:17; Psalm 33:4**)
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2. How can we recognize spiritual error? (**Isaiah 8:20**)
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God’s Word is truth. If a belief or doctrine is contrary to the Bible, it is because “there is no light in them.” The Bible nowhere teaches two separate comings of Jesus—one secret and one public. How, then, did this teaching come about?

The theory of a two-phase coming of Jesus can be traced back to something that happened in the centuries during which the established Christian church moved away from the pure faith and persecuted those who challenged its power or teachings. Bible scholars noticed that the Bible predicted this would happen.

As a result, two church scholars came up with theories to prove that Bible prophecy wasn't really pointing to problems in the Christian church. One of these men, Luis de Alcazar, argued that most of the Bible's prophecies had already been fulfilled in the distant past—and thus couldn't be referring to the Christian church. The other, Francisco Ribera, taught that most of the Bible's prophecies would be fulfilled in a short burst of history down at the end of time—and therefore couldn't be pointing to the church.

Although nothing in the Bible supports either idea, the thinking of these two scholars is still with us today. It was revived in the early 19th century. Ribera's idea that most of the Bible's prophecies refer to events taking place shortly before the end of time has given rise to the theory of a two-part second coming—the "secret rapture." But the truth is that the Bible nowhere speaks of two separate comings of Jesus seven years apart.



JESUS' COMING WILL BE LITERAL

3. What did the angels tell Jesus' disciples about the reality of the second coming? (**Acts 1:10, 11; Luke 24:38, 39**)

When Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, the disciples watched Him ascend bodily until He was lost to their view. He didn't ascend spiritually; He went to heaven bodily and literally. The angels assured the disciples that He would return the same way.

JESUS' COMING WILL BE VISIBLE

4. How many of the people living on earth will see Jesus when He comes? (**Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:30**)

Jesus' coming will be visible to every person on earth—not only to those who are saved, but also to those who have rejected Him. (Revelation 6:14-17) In fact, the Bible says that Jesus' coming will be as visible as lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:27)



JESUS' COMING WILL BE AUDIBLE

5. What three sounds will accompany the return of Jesus? (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; Matthew 24:31; Psalm 50:3, 4)

The second coming of Jesus will be a noisy event—not a secret one!

JESUS' COMING WILL BE GLORIOUS

6. Who will accompany Jesus when He returns to earth? (Matthew 16:27; 25:31; Luke 21:27)

At Jesus' resurrection, a single angel caused the Roman guards to shake with fear and become "like dead men." (Matthew 28:2-4) Just imagine the scene when Jesus returns "with power and great glory" and is accompanied by all the holy angels of heaven!

JESUS' COMING WILL BE FINAL

7. Will there be any opportunity for salvation after Jesus returns? (Revelation 22:11, 12)

When Jesus returns, everyone will have made his or her final decision regarding salvation. Matthew 25:31-46 describes Jesus dividing the

sheep (the saved) from the goats (the lost) at His coming. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that the saved will be taken to heaven at a secret coming of Jesus, and that the lost will be destroyed at another coming seven years later. In fact, Matthew 24:30, 31, says that “all the tribes of the earth”—everyone—will see Jesus return. Some will mourn because they are lost, while Jesus will gather to Himself “His elect,” the saved.

THE ANTICHRIST AND JESUS’ COMING

8. What are names for the antichrist? (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8, 9)

“man of _____” and “son of _____”
and “lawless _____”

According to the teaching of the secret rapture, the antichrist will rise to power after the secret coming of Jesus and rule the earth during seven years of tribulation. He will then be destroyed when Jesus comes yet again at the close of the seven years. However, the Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that the “son of perdition” (the antichrist) will appear before Jesus returns and that he will be destroyed by “the brightness of His [Jesus’] coming.” (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Is it important to know the truth about how Jesus will come? Yes. It matters because if you are confused about Jesus’ coming, it is easier for the devil to tempt and deceive you in other ways. It matters because it is important to stand firmly on Bible truth and look to God’s Word for what you believe.

Are you ready to meet Jesus? Do you want to be ready?

MY DECISION

Jesus, I choose to accept Your Word as the Source of all truth. I want to be ready to meet You when You come. Thank You for keeping me close to You.

MY PRAYER

Father, help me to live each day as if Jesus might come at any moment. Help me to trust You and Your Word in all things. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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