

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the Secret Rapture Theory.

ALL over the world today there is an awakening to the near return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a growing interest in the signs of the times. As Bible believing Christians we rejoice at this phenomenon, yet sad to say, in almost every case the doctrine of the Lord's return has been mixed in with the teaching that He will return first secretly and 'rapture' or take away His Church. Although Church History will show that such a theory has only come into prominence over the last one hundred and fifty years, today it is spreading like wildfire, in books, and even films, and accounts for the teaching in 90% of Full Gospel and Fundamentalist Churches and Bible Colleges, world-wide. This being the case it is our duty as students of the Bible to examine this doctrine of the Secret Rapture, and ask ourselves -'Is it Scriptural?'

THE ORIGINS

The pretribulation rapture teaching is that there are two separate comings of Christ. The first coming is secret and occurs before the future seven year tribulation. At this coming Jesus comes *for* the saints (i.e., all genuine believers) both living and dead. These saints meet the Lord in the air and then are taken to heaven to escape the horrible judgments that take place during the seven year tribulation. At the end of the great tribulation Jesus returns to the earth *with* the saints. This coming is not secret but is observed by all. At this coming Christ crushes His opposition, judges mankind and sets up a one thousand year reign of saints upon the earth (the millennium). Some pretribulation advocates speak of two separate comings while others prefer to speak of one coming in two separate stages or phases (phase one is the secret rapture and phase two is the visible coming in judgment). Hal Lindsey likes to refer to the rapture as "the great snatch." He writes: "The word for 'caught up' actually means to 'snatch up,' and that's why I like to call this marvelous coming event 'The Great Snatch'! It's usually referred to as the 'Rapture,' from the Latin word *rapere*, which means to 'take away' or 'snatch out.'"¹

Although the pretribulation rapture doctrine is very popular and is even considered so crucial to Christianity that it is made a test of a person's orthodoxy in some denominations, Bible colleges and seminaries, the exegetical and theological arguments used by its advocates are all classic cases of forcing one's theological presuppositions onto particular texts (eisegesis). The purpose of this brief study is to show that the pretribulation rapture theory is not plainly taught or directly stated in any place in Scripture, cannot be deduced from biblical teaching, contradicts the general teaching of the Bible regarding Christ's second coming and was never taught in any branch of the church prior to 1830.

The Origin of the Pretribulation Rapture Teaching

Whenever a Christian encounters a doctrine that has not been taught by anyone in any branch of Christ's church for over eighteen centuries, one should be very suspect of that teaching. This fact in and of itself does not prove that the new teaching is false. But, it should definitely raise one's suspicions, for if something is taught in Scripture, it is not unreasonable to expect at least a few theologians and exegetes to have discovered it before. The teaching of a secret pretribulation rapture is a doctrine that never existed before 1830. Did the pretribulation rapture come into existence by a careful exegesis of Scripture? No. The first person to teach the doctrine was a young woman named Margaret Macdonald. Margaret was not a theologian or

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Bible expositor but was a prophetess in the Irvingite sect (the Catholic Apostolic Church). Christian journalist Dave MacPherson has written a book on the subject of the origin of the pre-tribulation rapture. He writes: “We have seen that a young Scottish lassie named Margaret Macdonald had a private revelation in Port Glasgow, Scotland, in the early part of 1830 that a select group of Christians would be caught up to meet Christ in the air *before* the days of Antichrist. An eye-and-ear witness, Robert Norton M.D., preserved her handwritten account of her pre-trib rapture revelation in two of his books, and said it was the *first* time anyone ever split the second coming into two distinct parts or stages. His writings, along with much other Catholic Apostolic Church literature, have been hidden many decades from the mainstream of Evangelical thought and only recently surfaced. Margaret’s views were well-known to those who visited her home, among them John Darby of the Brethren. Within a few months her distinctive prophetic outlook was mirrored in the September, 1830 issue of *The Morning Watch* and the early Brethren assembly at Plymouth, England. Early disciples of the pre-trib interpretation often called it a new doctrine.”²

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who was the leader of the Brethren movement and the “father of modern Dispensationalism,” took Margaret Macdonald’s new teaching on the rapture, made some changes (she taught a partial rapture of believers while he taught that all believers would be raptured) and incorporated it into his Dispensational understanding of Scripture and prophecy. Darby would spend the rest of his life speaking, writing and traveling, spreading the new rapture theory. The Plymouth Brethren openly admitted and were even proud of the fact that among their teachings were totally new ones which had never been taught by the church fathers, medieval scholastics, Protestant Reformers or the many commentators.

The person most responsible for the rather widespread acceptance of Pretribulationism and Dispensationalism among Evangelicals is Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921). C. I. Scofield published his *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909. This Bible, which espoused the doctrines of Darby in its notes, became very popular in Fundamentalist circles. In the minds of many a Bible teacher, fundamentalist pastor and multitudes of professing Christians, Scofield’s notes were practically equated with the word of God itself. If a person did not adhere to the Dispensational, Pretribulation scheme he or she would almost automatically be labeled a modernist.

Today there is a whole plethora of books advocating the pretribulation rapture theory and the Dispensational understanding of the end times. Given the fact that among professing Christians the pre-trib rapture is still wildly popular, a comparison of this theory with scriptural teaching is warranted. We will see that the typical arguments offered in favor of this theory are in conflict with the Bible.

However the Bible is clear that dramatic are the signs that accompany Christ’s second coming and every eyes shall see him.

When we remember that the Secret Rapture theory was virtually unheard of and untaught until around 1830. Such a teaching was unknown to the early Church Fathers e.g. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, who were convinced that the Christian Church would pass through great tribulation at the hands of the antichrist system before the return of the Lord. Furthermore the

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Rapture theory was not taught by the great stalwarts of the Reformed Faith - Huss, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Cranmer or even by the Wesley brothers in the 18th Century.

THE PROOF TEXTS EXAMINED

Devotees of this teaching have a number of proof texts to support the idea of a secret return of Jesus Christ, but as we compare scripture with scripture, biblical texts with biblical texts do those texts actually support a secret coming of Jesus?

(A) Coming as a Thief

Our blessed Lord said: 'But know this, that if the good man of the house, had known in what hour the thief would come he would have watched and not have suffered the house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not your Lord will come.' Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40.

The Secret Rapture theorists tell us, that this shows the secret nature of the Lord's '*coming for*' His people, but does it? The only secrecy implied in the texts is in relation to the day and hour of Christ's coming and there is nothing to indicate that the coming itself is a secret. In fact we are told:

'The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a SHOUT, with the VOICE of an Archangel and the TRUMP of God.' I Thess. 4:16. Nothing quiet about that, is there?

Again they refer us to the words: *'I will come on thee as a thief in the night and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.'* Rev. 3:3. Or again:

'Behold I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth.' Rev. 16:15.

However, in both instances just quoted, the secrecy is in connection with the timing not the nature of the event, and it is exactly the same in the other '*thief text*'.

'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night' II Peter 3:10

Here again it is the element of surprise that leads to the use of the thief as a symbol. Peter himself finishes this very same '*thief text*' by saying that at the time of the Lord's coming:

'The heavens shall pass away with a GREAT NOISE'

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Not much secrecy about that is there? After all did not Paul tell his readers:

'But ye brethren ARE NOT in darkness that, that day shall overtake you as a thief.' I Thess. 5:4.

You see, as Christians, they were studying the signs of the times as we should be doing and were ready for Christ's return. He will only come as a thief for those who are not prepared for Him.

(B) As in the Days of Noah

Secret return teachers would have us believe that the Lord comes secretly to rescue His people before what they call 'the great tribulation' or time of trouble begins. To support this idea they quote the Lord Jesus as saying: *'As the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be ... then shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken, the other left. Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.'* Matt. 24:37-42.

How often we have heard this text used to challenge sinners to come to Christ and of the terrible things that will happen when their Christian friends and relatives have been *'raptured'*. Let us not take the text from its context to make it a pretext. The clear setting and key to the understanding of the verse is: *'As it was in the days of Noah'*, and we all know that then it was the wicked who were taken away and the righteous left to inherit a purified earth. Such a concept of the removal of the wicked is in keeping with the clear teaching given by our Lord in two of His Kingdom Parables. In that of the Wheat and the Tares, we are told that the harvest is the end of the age, when the angels will gather out of the kingdom, the tares which represent the wicked or those who offend. Again in the same thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we find the Parable of the Dragnet. In its symbolism it is the bad or evil ones who are removed out of the Kingdom for Jesus says:

'So shall it be at the end of the world (age), the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from the just.' Matt. 13:49.

If a third witness were needed the Old Testament prophet Isaiah tells us:

'Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate, and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.'

Let me ask you to consider very carefully just who the Lord will *'rapture'* or remove. Surely it is His intention to give this earth into the possession of the righteous as He said in His Sermon on the Mount.

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CAN CHRIST COME BACK AT ANY MOMENT?

Frequently coupled with the Secret Rapture doctrine is the equally misguided notion that Christ can come back at any moment, even tonight, as we so often hear well-meaning Evangelists proclaim. Whilst we do not doubt the Lord's ability, we do believe that God is the author not of confusion, but of a great plan for the ages. This being the case, and although we are well aware that no man knows the exact day and hour of Christ's return, it is equally certain that a number of prophecies yet await their complete fulfilment and that not until we witness these things come to pass, can we expect the Lord at any moment. It was this very doctrine which had come into the Church at Thessalonica and made it necessary for Paul to write:

'Now we beseech you brethren by (concerning) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by (concerning) 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 (at any moment), let no man deceive you, for that day shall not come except there come, a falling away first and the Man of Sin be revealed.' II Thess. 2:13.

Now those who believe in the Secret Rapture and that Christ can come at any moment say He will gather the believers before antichrist appears yet the Scripture says the direct opposite.

CONCLUSION: A CALL AND A WARNING!

Dear reader, it is our sincere and earnest prayer that this article will convince you of the unscriptural nature of the Secret Rapture doctrine. Instead of preparing God's people to face the increasingly difficult days ahead, as tribulation intensifies, this doctrine has deluded millions of Christians into a false notion of escapism, and instead of obeying the Lord's command to resist evil and occupy until He comes, they have been made so Rapture-minded that they no longer even resist the evil, believing not that they will defeat it, but instead be rescued from it.

One Christian writer has penned the dramatic return of Jesus Christ in the following fashion. "Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. Not now a "Man of Sorrows," to drink the bitter cup of shame and woe, He comes, victor in heaven and earth, to judge the living and the dead. "Faithful and True," "in righteousness He doth judge and make war." And "the armies which were in heaven" ([Revelation 19:11, 14](#)) follow Him. With anthems of celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend Him on His way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms—"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor. "His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. And His brightness was as the light." [Habakkuk 3:3, 4](#). As the

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living cloud comes still nearer, every eye beholds the Prince of life. No crown of thorns now mars that sacred head; but a diadem of glory rests on His holy brow. His countenance outshines the dazzling brightness of the noonday sun. “And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, *King of kings, and Lord of lords.*” [Revelation 19:16](#).

Before His presence “all faces are turned into paleness;” upon the rejecters of God’s mercy falls the terror of eternal despair. “The heart melteth, and the knees smite together, ... and the faces of them all gather blackness.” [Jeremiah 30:6](#); [Nahum 2:10](#). The righteous cry with trembling: “Who shall be able to stand?” The angels’ song is hushed, and there is a period of awful silence. Then the voice of Jesus is heard, saying: “My grace is sufficient for you.” The faces of the righteous are lighted up, and joy fills every heart. And the angels strike a note higher and sing again as they draw still nearer to the earth.

The King of kings descends upon the cloud, wrapped in flaming fire. The heavens are rolled together as a scroll, the earth trembles before Him, and every mountain and island is moved out of its place. “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people.” [Psalm 50:3, 4](#).

“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 freeman, 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?” [Revelation 6:15-17](#).

The derisive jests have ceased. Lying lips are hushed into silence. The clash of arms, the tumult of battle, “with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood” ([Isaiah 9:5](#)), is stilled. Nought now is heard but the voice of prayer and the sound of weeping and lamentation. The cry bursts forth from lips so lately scoffing: “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” The wicked pray to be buried beneath the rocks of the mountains rather than meet the face of Him whom they have despised and rejected.

That voice which penetrates the ear of the dead, they know. How often have its plaintive, tender tones called them to repentance. How often has it been heard in the touching entreaties of a friend, a brother, a Redeemer. To the rejecters of His grace no other could be so full of condemnation, so burdened with denunciation, as that voice which has so long pleaded: “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” [Ezekiel 33:11](#). Oh, that it were to them the voice of a stranger! Says Jesus: “I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof.” [Proverbs 1:24, 25](#). That voice awakens memories which they would fain blot out—warnings despised, invitations refused, privileges slighted.

There are those who mocked Christ in His humiliation. With thrilling power come to their minds the Sufferer’s words, when, adjured by the high priest, He solemnly declared: “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of

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heaven.” [Matthew 26:64](#). Now they behold Him in His glory, and they are yet to see Him sitting on the right hand of power.

Those who derided His claim to be the Son of God are speechless now. There is the haughty Herod who jeered at His royal title and bade the mocking soldiers crown Him king. There are the very men who with impious hands placed upon His form the purple robe, upon His sacred brow the thorny crown, and in His unresisting hand the mimic scepter, and bowed before Him in blasphemous mockery. The men who smote and spit upon the Prince of life now turn from His piercing gaze and seek to flee from the overpowering glory of His presence. Those who drove the nails through His hands and feet, the soldier who pierced His side, behold these marks with terror and remorse.

With awful distinctness do priests and rulers recall the events of Calvary. With shuddering horror they remember how, wagging their heads in satanic exultation, they exclaimed: “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him.” [Matthew 27:42, 43](#).

Vividly they recall the Saviour’s parable of the husbandmen who refused to render to their lord the fruit of the vineyard, who abused his servants and slew his son. They remember, too, the sentence which they themselves pronounced: The lord of the vineyard “will miserably destroy those wicked men.” In the sin and punishment of those unfaithful men the priests and elders see their own course and their own just doom. And now there rises a cry of mortal agony. Louder than the shout, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” which rang through the streets of Jerusalem, swells the awful, despairing wail, “He is the Son of God! He is the true Messiah!” They seek to flee from the presence of the King of kings. In the deep caverns of the earth, rent asunder by the warring of the elements, they vainly attempt to hide.

In the lives of all who reject truth there are moments when conscience awakens, when memory presents the torturing recollection of a life of hypocrisy and the soul is harassed with vain regrets. But what are these compared with the remorse of that day when “fear cometh as desolation,” when “destruction cometh as a whirlwind”! [Proverbs 1:27](#). Those who would have destroyed Christ and His faithful people now witness the glory which rests upon them. In the midst of their terror they hear the voices of the saints in joyful strains exclaiming: “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us.” [Isaiah 25:9](#).

Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: “Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!” Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” [1](#)

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[Corinthians 15:55](#). And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.

All come forth from their graves the same in stature as when they entered the tomb. Adam, who stands among the risen throng, is of lofty height and majestic form, in stature but little below the Son of God. He presents a marked contrast to the people of later generations; in this one respect is shown the great degeneracy of the race. But all arise with the freshness and vigor of eternal youth. In the beginning, man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature. Sin defaced and almost obliterated the divine image; but Christ came to restore that which had been lost. He will change our vile bodies and fashion them like unto His glorious body. The mortal, corruptible form, devoid of comeliness, once polluted with sin, becomes perfect, beautiful, and immortal. All blemishes and deformities are left in the grave. Restored to the tree of life in the long-lost Eden, the redeemed will “grow up” ([Malachi 4:2](#)) to the full stature of the race in its primeval glory. The last lingering traces of the curse of sin will be removed, and Christ’s faithful ones will appear in “the beauty of the Lord our God,” in mind and soul and body reflecting the perfect image of their Lord. Oh, wonderful redemption! long talked of, long hoped for, contemplated with eager anticipation, but never fully understood.

The living righteous are changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels “gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers’ arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God.”

Remember one in twenty five verses in the New Testament speaks about the second coming, whole chapters devoted to the subject, 1500 times God keeps reminding us throughout the bible that it is going to happen. Obviously this is one of the most important subjects within the Bible and God wants us to know how its going to happen and what we need to do to be ready. In the book of John, Jesus left His followers with a promise the New Testament Writers fondly referred to as the blessed Hope, when He said in John 14:1-3

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. “And 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 NKJV

“I will come again” this is the promise that Christians have clung to for 2 millennia; this is the blessed hope of Christianity that Jesus will make good his word. This is the promise of promises that Jesus would come back to this world again. All of the New Testament Writers

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believed in and preached on the visible, literal second coming of Christ. Notice an incident that occurred at the time of Christ's ascension this is 40 days after the crucifixion and is found in the book of Acts

9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Acts 1:9-11 NKJV

Here are two men in white apparel, lets pause for a moment as we compare scripture with scripture we know that these two men in white are angels, and they say to the disciples just as Jesus ascended to heaven that is how He will return in other words it will be something that we will see, it will be visible. All of the New Testament Writers believed in and preached on the visible, literal second coming of Christ. Furthermore some of the most powerful words in Scripture about the Second Coming are recorded by the Apostle Paul and note how he describes the second coming 1 Thess. 4:16,17

16 For 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 Christ will rise first.17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord

1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 NKJV

The Apostle Paul inspired by God describes the second coming of Christ in a way that could never be construed as secretive. Paul says that when the Lord descends from heaven the righteous who are dead will be resurrected, and those that are faithful who are alive will be gathered up in the air with them to meet the Lord in air. There will be noise, there will angels, there is the sound of a trumpet the shout of the archangel. My friends there will be lots of activity and noise, and no one will say on that day is that the second coming of Jesus Christ? In fact if we turn to Revelation 1:7

7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

Revelation 1:7 NKJV

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In this passage John sets down the motto and the text of his whole book of Revelation, which is his confidence in the triumphant return of Christ. But notice the words every eye will see Him, my friends there will be nothing secretive about the second coming of Christ, as we have already seen. But did you know Jesus actually preached against the idea that His return would be a secret event! Let's go to the book of Matthew 24:23

.23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it.24 "For false Christ's and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.25 "See, I have told you beforehand.26 "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matthew 24:21-27 NKJV

Jesus said if anyone says to you that Jesus returning in secret or Jesus Christ has returned, and He is in a secret place or out in the desert what does the end of verse 26 say, "Don't believe it" If someone says to you that Christ's coming will be in secret Jesus said don't believe them, Why Lord? because just as the lightning flashes from the East to West so also will My coming be, Jesus said.. He was here once and the world has never forgotten it, but He promised He was coming back and this marks the end of this world. Matthew 24:29-31

*(Mat 24:29 KJV) 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:
(Mat 24:30 KJV) 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.
(Mat 24:31 KJV) And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

This is how the Bible says the world will end there will be a great tribulation. Following the tribulation there will signs and wonders in the heavens and then Jesus will return with His angels, to gather the righteous into His kingdom. This is how our world will end according to the Bible and we have seen that when the Bible promises something it will happen. We have seen that there are signs that precede the second coming and we know that those signs are

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happening all around us today and others are in the process of being fulfilled. Certainly no man or woman knows the day or the hour when Jesus will return, but the signs of the times warn us that we are living in the last days.