

A Secret Rapture?

As I've spent time studying prophecy I've noticed that some people teach the idea of a "secret rapture". What they seem to mean by this is *not* that no one knows when the rapture will occur (which is very true), but rather that when the rapture happens no one will notice. They seem to think that the Lord will return for the church and take them away to Heaven without anyone noticing. The world will simply go on about its business as if nothing had happened.

As far as I can tell, this idea is apparently based on this verse:

I Thessalonians 5:2: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."

There are a number of problems with this theory. First, this verse is talking about the Day of the Lord. That's a reference to the *tribulation*, not the rapture. We know this because the Old Testament has quite a lot to say about the Day of the Lord. For example:

Isaiah 13:6: "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty."

Joel 2:1-2: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong;

there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.”

Notice that the prophets are talking about a day of “destruction” and a time of “darkness” – *not* a time when the Lord takes His church home! According to Joel, this is a period of such terrible trouble that it will be unlike anything that's ever happened before in all of history. This perfectly aligns with what Jesus said in Matthew:

Matthew 24:21-22: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

What Jesus is describing in Matthew 24 are the events of the tribulation. When Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 that the Day of the Lord comes as a “thief in the night”, he's saying that the tribulation will catch the world by surprise. When Jesus says in Matthew 24:42 that “ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”, He's talking about His return *after* the tribulation – *not* the rapture! The rapture happens *before* the tribulation, but the return that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24:30 happens *after* the tribulation.

This means 1 Thessalonians 5:2 isn't even talking about the rapture. It has an entirely different subject in mind.

The Bible teaches that the tribulation will come “as a thief in the night”. When a thief breaks into a home he catches the homeowners off-guard because they weren't expecting to be visited by a burglar. However, after the thief has come and gone the owners are *very* aware that someone has been there *because their possessions are gone*. Of course, once the thief strikes and carries off your valuables it's too late to do anything about it.

That's what Paul is saying. The tribulation will take the unbelieving world by surprise. They won't see it coming, but they will know when it's arrived because terrible things will start happening. By then, however, it will be much too late to escape it.

The same thing can be said of the rapture. No one knows when it will happen. It will come much like a thief in the night: when it occurs it will catch the world by surprise. After it happens the world will know that something big must have happened to make so many people vanish into thin air, but it will be too late to do anything about it. The opportunity to be included in the rapture will have passed.

It's simply not reasonable to think that the rapture will go unnoticed. After all, millions of people will suddenly vanish! How could that possibly go unnoticed? It will probably be the biggest news story of all time: the mass abduction of *millions* of people from all walks of life. The world will know that something just happened. It will come as a surprise, but after it happens there will be nothing *secret* about it.