

The Left Behind Saga Is it Fact or Fiction?

Have millions of readers been left behind in a whirlwind of apocalyptic fantasy and revisionist theology?

Another Look at Left Behind By Steve Wohlberg

The cover of the May 24, 2004 issue of *Newsweek* pictured Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, co-authors of the bestselling *Left Behind* novels, standing behind this headline: "The New Prophets of Revelation: Why Their Biblical *Left Behind* Novels Have Sold 62 Million Copies – And Counting." Since September 11, 2001, many Americans have wondered if the apocalypse is near. Mel Gibson's hard-hitting *The Passion of the Christ* film focused on our Lord's first coming. Will He come again? In the New Testament, the answer is superbly clear. Jesus Christ Himself said, "I will come again" (John 14:3).

But how will He come? *Left Behind* teaches a two-phase return. First, Jesus will supposedly come silently, invisibly, unknown to the world. At that mysterious moment millions of believers will vanish – being raptured to heaven – while the majority will have no clue which way they went. All who are 'left behind' will have to endure a nightmarish 7-year period of apocalyptic terror called 'the Tribulation.' Times will be tough, yet they will have seven years to get right with God. At the end of this Tribulation, 'phase two' will then supposedly kick in – the visible return of Jesus (the Second Coming) to rescue all who have accepted Him during the Tribulation, no matter the cost.

Thus *Left Behind's* basic view is: Rapture first, *then* seven years of Tribulation, *then* the visible Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Inherent within this teaching is the 'second chance' idea. While *Left Behind* is clearly fiction, its basic sequence isn't, and this scenario is now believed by millions of searching readers and prophecy-minded Christians around the globe. Those who challenge this view are sometimes labeled 'liberals' who simply don't believe what the Bible plainly says.

But is this really what the Bible plainly says? Personally, I have studied this intriguing topic for many years and my conclusions differ from that of Tim LaHaye (and other 'pre-trib' teachers). Briefly, here's why. There are three major verses used to support the Jesus-will-come-invisibly Rapture doctrine: 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 (which says believers will be "caught up"), 1 Corinthians 15:52 (where something happens "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"), and Matthew 24:40 (when "one shall be taken, and the other left"). Rapturists apply these verses to a silent, invisible return of Christ before a seven-year Tribulation. Is this interpretation correct?

A careful analysis of the context of each passage proves otherwise. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17 reveals that true believers will be "caught up" when Jesus Christ literally comes down from heaven with a "shout," "voice," and "trumpet" blast. Does this sound silent to you? Throughout Christian history (until the 1800s), most interpreters didn't think so. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet," wrote Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:52. Yet the rest of the verse says, "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Sounds pretty loud again, don't you think? Notice also that Christians are not pictured as *disappearing*, leaving their clothes on earth. Rather their physical bodies are changed in a moment or twinkling of an eye from being sin-affected into a long-awaited state of immortal health. The last text in Matthew 24:40, where "one is taken and the other left," follows right after Jesus Christ's strong warning about those who teach a "secret" coming (verse 26) and His cataclysmic description of His return in "power and great glory," with "a great sound of a trumpet," when "all the tribes of the

earth” will literally behold His descent (see verses 30, 31).

The context of each passage above reveals *no two-phase return*, but only one phase, which is loud and visible at the end of the world. In other words, there’s no ‘secret’ Rapture, only the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This would imply no subsequent seven years either and no “second chance” for those who miss the event. The very same *Newsweek* issue featuring LaHaye and Jenkins on the cover also contained a feature article showing a “Glossary” of terms labeled, “Decoding the Evangelical Lingo.” Below “Rapture” and “Tribulation” was the word, “Pretribulationism,” which was then correctly defined as a doctrine “...popularized by 19th century British evangelist John Darby, [who taught] that Jesus would Rapture the faithful before the Tribulation” (*Newsweek*, May 24, 2004, p. 47).

The truth is, *Left Behind’s* entire Rapture-Tribulation scenario can be traced – not to Scripture – but to Darby, just like *Newsweek* reported. Bottom line: Jesus Christ will not return twice, we won’t disappear, and nobody will be ‘left behind’ wondering ‘which way did all the Christians go?’ Such ideas may make great novels, but actually reflect poor scholarship. With the present popularity of the ‘pre-trib’ view, you may find this hard to believe. But there are more people out there than you imagine who agree with my position. Do some homework (in history and through research on the World Wide Web) and you will discover that the majority of Christians throughout history have looked forward to *only one visible Second Coming of Jesus Christ*.

Paul wrote:

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

Jesus Christ said,

As the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, *so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be* (Matthew 24:27, italics added).

May God help us all to be ready for the great day!

Steve Wohlberg is Speaker/Director of *Endtime Insights Radio and TV Ministry*, has authored ten books, and hosts the national radio show, *World News and the Bible*. For a fuller treatment of these Rapture-Tribulation issues, see his eye-opening book, *End Time Delusions: The Rapture, the Antichrist, Israel, and the End of the World* (Destiny Image, 2004). www.endtimeinsights.com