

The background of the cover features a dark, atmospheric scene. Numerous silhouettes of people are scattered across the frame, many with their arms raised in a gesture of praise or excitement. A bright, jagged lightning bolt strikes down from the upper left, illuminating the scene and casting long, ethereal shadows. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues, blacks, and a warm, golden-yellow glow from the lightning and the text.

CHRIS SPARKS

The Secret Rapture

Is it Biblical?

The Secret Rapture: Is It Biblical?

The word 'rapture' is derived from the latin 'rapizo', which means to snatch up or seize away.

All Christians believe that the Lord will return to take His people to heaven. But pre-tribulation rapturists, such as Pastor John MacArthur, believe that this event will happen in *secret*.

Such claim that Christians will be ushered away from earth without prior warning to themselves or others, leaving all unbelievers eerily behind to endure a seven year period of turmoil. Consider John MacArthur's description below:

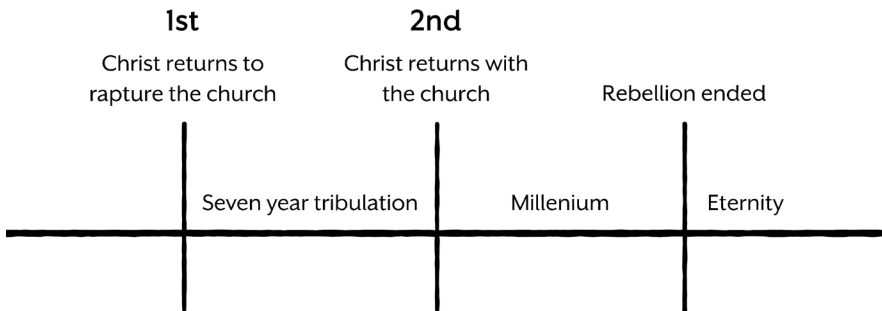
It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.... Just that fast all true Christians across this planet will disappear instantaneously....Now think about it, when that event happens, it's going to be challenging for the people left on earth, when in a flash all Christians all over the planet disappear. Yes, pilot and co-pilot. If you're flying in that plane, that will be the end....It is a signless event. It can happen at any time. Nothing prophetic needs to happen before this happens.

According to this theology, the rapture of believers is a separate event from the second coming of Christ. John MacArthur explains the course of events as follows:

It's going to be the rapture of the church. That's an unsigned event. In other words, there's no sign preliminary to that event. It's going to be suddenly—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye—snatching out the church. Then there's going to be a period of seven years of tribulation. Daniel refers to that period and that

period is laid out in the book of Revelation repeatedly. Even the numbers are laid out. And I said that's going to be followed by the return of Jesus Christ to establish His thousand-year kingdom.... And at the end of the thousand years, Satan has a rebellion. Satan's rebellion is basically ended. And then the entire universe as we know it literally implodes in an atomic implosion and the Lord creates a new heaven and the new earth.

Effectively, pre-tribulation rapturists believe in two second comings. One secret second coming for believers, and a *second* second-coming which will be observed by all who remain alive after the seven-year tribulation.



However, the Bible nowhere speaks of two second advents. John Macarthur argues for a separation of the rapture and the second coming largely because it would spare believers from suffering.

Again back to John 14, Jesus said to his disciples: 'I'm going to prepare a place for you. I'll be back to take you there'. He didn't say: 'Oh but by the way, before I do that, you're going to go through horrible judgment'. He just said: 'Wait for me. I'm coming back'. They understood that He meant to save them from the wrath to come! So this is the strong, strong basis of this glorious event.

Does God's Word guarantee the sparing of suffering? Certainly not. On the contrary, tribulation, with a peaceful assurance, is precisely what the Lord has promised His people:

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

The disciples fully realised this promise at the stoning of Stephen and then one by one with their own martyrdoms. As the years rolled on, an untold number of heroes likewise suffered under cruel torments. And shall we who live in the darkest of days expect any less?

The Bible was not written for the careless unbeliever. It was written for those who desire to know what is to come. It was written to prepare them, not for a life of ease, but for tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Indeed, the scripture declares that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution". Yet through all this, our Lord's promise is "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

While John Macarthur declares that most of Revelation does not apply to the church, he does state that "everything else in the New Testament is directed at the church":

[Besides the book of Revelation] everything else in the New Testament is directed at the church. Every epistle; all the instruction in the New Testament is directed at the church.

Then in the exact same sermon, he makes the outrageous claim:

...the absence of any instruction or warning to the church about the tribulation. You would think if we were going to go through that, there would be instruction in the Bible about what we are to look forward to. But there isn't anything. It's always a blessed

hope. It's always that Christ is coming. It's always that blessed hope and glorious appearing of Christ. We're looking for Christ; we're not looking for antichrist.

Speaking of the days preceding His coming, our Lord foretold of many things we are to expect, and admonishes his church—those who believe the Bible—not to be concerned when they see calamity and persecution come to pass:

Mark 13:7 And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.

13:8 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.

13:9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them....

13:12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death....

13:19 For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

13:20 And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

After listing all these trials which the elect are to expect, Jesus drives it home that they ought pay attention to His words:

Mark 13:23 But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.

Yet according to pre-tribulation rapture theology, there is no need to take heed to Christ's forewarnings, for according to such, all believers will be ushered away to safety before the tribulation He foretold of even begins. As John MacArthur declares:

You would think if we were going to go through that, there would be instruction in the Bible about what we are to look forward to. But there isn't anything. It's always a blessed hope.

These smooth things are but the prophesying of deceit, that is setting millions up for the rudest of awakenings.

Rather than being discreetly whisked away before trouble comes, God's people must endure affliction and even martyrdom. They are to become the objects of universal contempt.

Matthew 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you...

Mark 13:13 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Yet at the last, these enduring saints are to be delivered from the hand of the oppressor. The persecutor shall look up with terror as the Son of God majestically descends from above:

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

The snatching of holy prey from the teeth of the wicked will be glory indeed. Yet this scene of victory will be trumped by an event yet more glorious: the ransom of the dead from their graves and the glorification of all saints.

This moment of triumph will not be in shadowy secrecy, but brilliant with ceremony. As Christ descends to raise the dead and catch up the living, He solemnly heralds all creation to witness His promise fulfilled:

1Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Hallowing the event by both the shout of His mighty voice and the blast of a trumpet, this oft quoted passage about the resurrection roars of its public nature. How an intelligent person can read secrecy into these passages is bewildering.

Prophetic Misconceptions

While the misconception of a secret rapture is in itself enough to cause serious confusion and unreadiness, what makes this theology most pernicious is the fact that the secret rapture is the linchpin of an entire structure of prophetic misunderstanding.

The subject of antichrist is a prevailing theme in the books of Daniel and Revelation. This figure is spoken of hundreds of times in Scripture.

God's people are warned that the antichrist will make war against and kill the saints, that he will deceive the world into receiving his mark, and that the wrath of God will be poured out upon all who fall for his deceptions. Yet such warnings mean little to the proponents of pre-tribulation rapture, as is pointed out by popular theologians Dr. Mark Hitchcock and Dr. John Hull, who make light of searching out the antichrist's identity:

Hitchcock: I think Satan always has a man ready in every generation. I think there's always an antichrist who's alive somewhere.... And I don't think the antichrist will be revealed until after the rapture. So all these people who try to figure out who he is, I always say: if you ever do figure out who he is, I've got bad news for you. You've been left behind'

Hull: (Laughs) Don't focus on who antichrist is, focus on who Christ is, until the rapture takes place.

This point exposes the secret rapture and the timeline that comes with it as deception of the highest order. Not surprisingly, protestant theologians weren't the first to claim that antichrist's identity will be unknown until some future time. This position traces its origins to the counter-reformation of the 16th century.

Quickly following their defection from Rome, the reformers diligently interpreted the 20+ identifying marks of antichrist given in Scripture. This led them to the unanimous conclusion that the presider over the Catholic Church was the implicated figure. Martin Luther declared:

At last I know that the pope is antichrist, and that his throne is that of Satan himself. —D'Aubigne, b. 6, ch. 9. GC 141.3

Being caught red handed, Rome's scholars got to work on diversionary tactics. Since the Bible so conspicuously branded her as the system of antichrist, the only possible way to offset the protestant interpretation was to evacuate antichrist from the present day.

Rome's scholars would undertake the writing of extensive commentaries reckoning antichrist's reign in the past—before the church came to power—or they would place him far off in the distant future. The reformer Thomas Brightman (1562-1607) called out this desperate ploy:

Once they would not suffer any man to scarce touch a Bible, now they produce a commentary to explain it—to point men away from the Papal Antichrist.

Spanish Jesuit priest Luis De Alcazar (1554-1613) pioneered the position of placing all prophecy in the past. Alcazar placed antichrist's reign before the Catholic Church came to power, identifying him as Emperor Nero. He even claimed that it was the rise of the Catholic Church which put down antichrist, and that this was the establishment of Christ's kingdom mentioned in Revelation. Known as preterism, Alcazar's work was published in a 900 page book after his death in 1614.

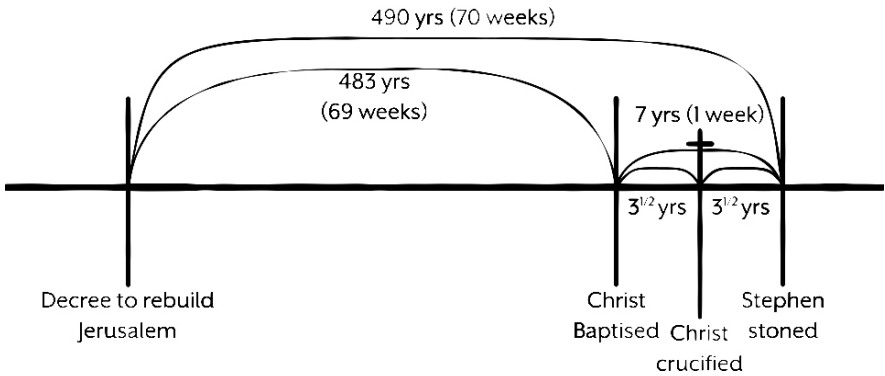
Notwithstanding the Catholic church's claim to be the infallible oracle of Biblical interpretation, a jesuit brother of Alcazar had published the exact opposite position less than a quarter of a century before. And as we shall see, it is upon this foundation that secret rapturists have built their doctrine.

Futurism

Jesuit priest Francisco Ribera pioneered Futurism. He attempted to conceal the true antichrist by claiming that all prophecy regarding him would be fulfilled at some period in the distant future.

In a feeble attempt to give credence to his reckoning, Ribera surmised that there was a large gap between the 69th and 70th week in the 70 week prophecy of Daniel 9.

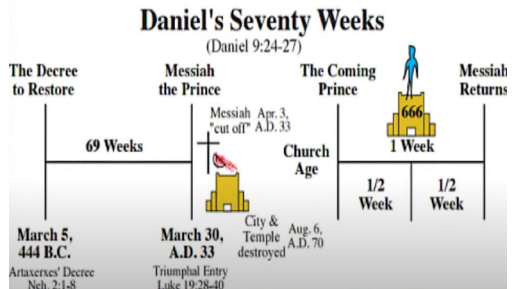
Bearing in mind the day-for-a-year principle of prophetic time, a 7-day week represents 7 literal years. The 70th week began with Christ's baptism in AD 27 and was completed in AD 34 with the stoning of Stephen.



But Ribera deceitfully cut off the last week from the rest of the prophecy and claimed that this final period of seven years would commence at the time of antichrist, and that it was far off in the distant future.

By severing the final seven years, Ribera destroys the wonderful predictions marking the baptism and crucifixion of Christ. This is worse than intellectual dishonesty, as it attributes to antichrist what belongs to the Saviour.

Yet notice how Dr. Mark Hitchcock changes the dates, attempting precisely the same Jesuit move:



So this prophecy is fulfilled to the very day. It's the greatest prophecy in the Bible. Now that's the first 69 weeks of years. So we start on the left over here: March 5th, 444 BC. Those first 69 weeks of years you come to March 30th, AD 33; the triumphal entry of Jesus. So one week of years is still out there. But before that seven year period begins there's an interlude, there's an indeterminate period of time that we find in verse 26...the gap between the end of the 69th and the beginning of that final week.

Ribera's Futurism may have taken hundreds of years to achieve the desired effect, but alas! Rome's former enemies have not only fallen for it, but have been transformed into her most powerful allies.

Ribera's futurism began to make its way into protestant churches early in the 19th century when anti-reformation elements in England began to promulgate the old jesuit ruse of a future antichrist.

English theologian Nelson Darby was a notable one who took up Ribera's futurism. By 1835, Darby had coupled this prophetic interpretation with 'the secret rapture'. He then set sail abroad sowing his teachings broadcast.

This antichrist-concealing doctrine is today adorned with evangelical appeal as John Macarthur elaborates:

During the time of the tribulation period, the greatest revival in human history takes place. You have more people converted in a seven year period than at any other time in history and that's laid out very clearly in Scripture. The whole nation Israel essentially comes to faith in Christ. The rebels are purged out and finally Israel embraces Jesus Christ as Messiah, looks on Him whom they pierced etc, etc.

As noble as such revivals may sound, this prophetic structure is simply the evolution of Ribera's counter-reformation theology, which is being employed to place the true antichrist beyond detection. Notice again how Pastor John Hitchcock claims that we cannot find out the identity of Antichrist:

The Bible talks about this coming world ruler: the antichrist. It's interesting he's called the little horn. So he arises first insignificantly. That's why when people always write me today and say, well who do you think the antichrist is, and you know they're trying to figure out the antichrist. We don't know who he is to-

day. He's going to rise insignificantly. If someone were significant on the scene today, that's not him.

Yet after all that, Hitchcock acknowledges that the number of the antichrist will add up to 666:

The mark of the beast is 666 there in the book of Revelation. But I think it's actually going to be the numerical value of his name. In other words, like in the Greek and Hebrew language, you can take the letters of the alphabet, they have numerical value. And so you can take a person's name and actually add that up and you come up with a number. So I think his name will actually equal 666. That's how he'll be identified.

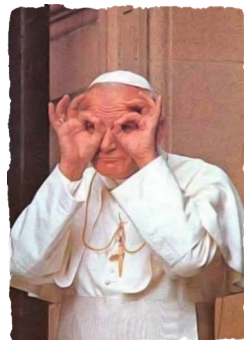
It would be an astounding thing if Hitchcock had not tried out his own method on the traditional antichrist: the Pope. According to the 'Decretum of Gratian' (a 12th century code of ecclesiastical law), the Pope's official title is 'Vicarius Filii Dei', meaning: Vicar of the Son of God. It is also testified to by many witnesses that the Pope on occasion wears a tiara bearing the same inscription, and that it has been inscribed over a door at the Vatican (see *Facts of Faith* by Christian Edwardson for these accounts).

Seeing that Latin is the official language of the church, we may conclude that this is the Pope's official title. Please notice the sum of these Latin letters below:

Vicarius Filii Dei
(Vicar of the Son of God)

V = 5	F = 0	D = 500
I = 1	I = 1	E = 0
C = 100	L = 50	I = 1
A = 0	I = 1	501
R = 0	I = 1	
I = 1	53	
U = 5		
S = 0		
112		

= 666



With all that said, what did Jesus mean in Matthew 24 when He spoke of one being taken, and the other being left? This is the primary passage—alongside its parallel in Luke—that is used to teach the secret rapture.

Matthew 24:40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

24:41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

To begin, let us examine the context of these two verses in Matthew 24. The thought begins with the declaration that no man knows the precise day or hour of Christ's coming. Jesus then reminds us of what befell the antedeluvians:

Matthew 24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be

It is the spirit of worldly indifference which renders men blind to impending destruction. Jesus here reminds us that it was a pleasure-seeking disregard which led men to reject the salvation offered through the ark.

After drawing this comparison, Jesus gives the illustration of the two women at the mill.

Matthew 24:40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

24:41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

The parallels between the days of Noah and the last days are clear. Those who accepted Noah's invitation entered into the ark and were saved, but those who refused were left outside. They received no second chance, and were drowned by the flood.

In like manner, the woman that is taken represents those who go to heaven with Jesus at the end of the world. While the woman that is left behind represents those who are left for destruction, just like the scoffers before the flood.

To this unheeding class, our Lord will come as a thief in the night. It is the wicked, not the saints, who will be caught off guard, as the Apostle Paul declares:

1Thessalonians 5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

5:3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

The scoffing, pleasure-loving sinner is to be met with sudden destruction. But Paul doesn't stop there. Although no man can predict the day or the hour, Paul makes clear that the faithful will not be caught off guard. In stark contrast to a man who is robbed while he sleeps, Paul declares of the righteous:

1Thessalonians 5:4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

When heavy raindrops began to fall upon the ark, Noah was not surprised. With board, nail and prayer, he had been preparing for this event for 120 years. Likewise, God's people will have taken heed to the

events heralding Christ's second coming, as are revealed in Matthew 24. Jesus will not come as a thief in the night to those who have in humility taken heed to the fulfilment of Bible prophecy.

But the secret rapture teaches that a great evangelistic work will be done after the saints are secretly whisked away. Meaning that those who miss the rapture will have a second opportunity.

However, those who were shut out of the ark received no second chance, with no opportunity left to repent. And so shall it be for those that neglect heaven-sent opportunities to learn what is truth. Like the woman that was left behind in Christ's illustration, the day approaches when probation will forever close upon an unwary world.

It has been demonstrated that it takes very little to persuade the world to receive what they neither desire, nor care to study the effects of. The Bible sternly warns of a future mandate:

Revelation 14:9 ...If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,
14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

All the world will worship the beast by receiving his mark:

Revelation 13:3 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.
13:4 And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

Once a man receives this mark, there is no turning back. After the

present fashion, all the world will insensibly consent to the eternally damning mandates of world authorities.

Revelation 13:16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

To avoid receiving the soon-coming mark of the beast, we must know who the beast is.

For a thorough explanation of the beast and his mark, please take a look at our prophecy seminar: *2020 Vision: Unveiling the Mark of the Beast*.

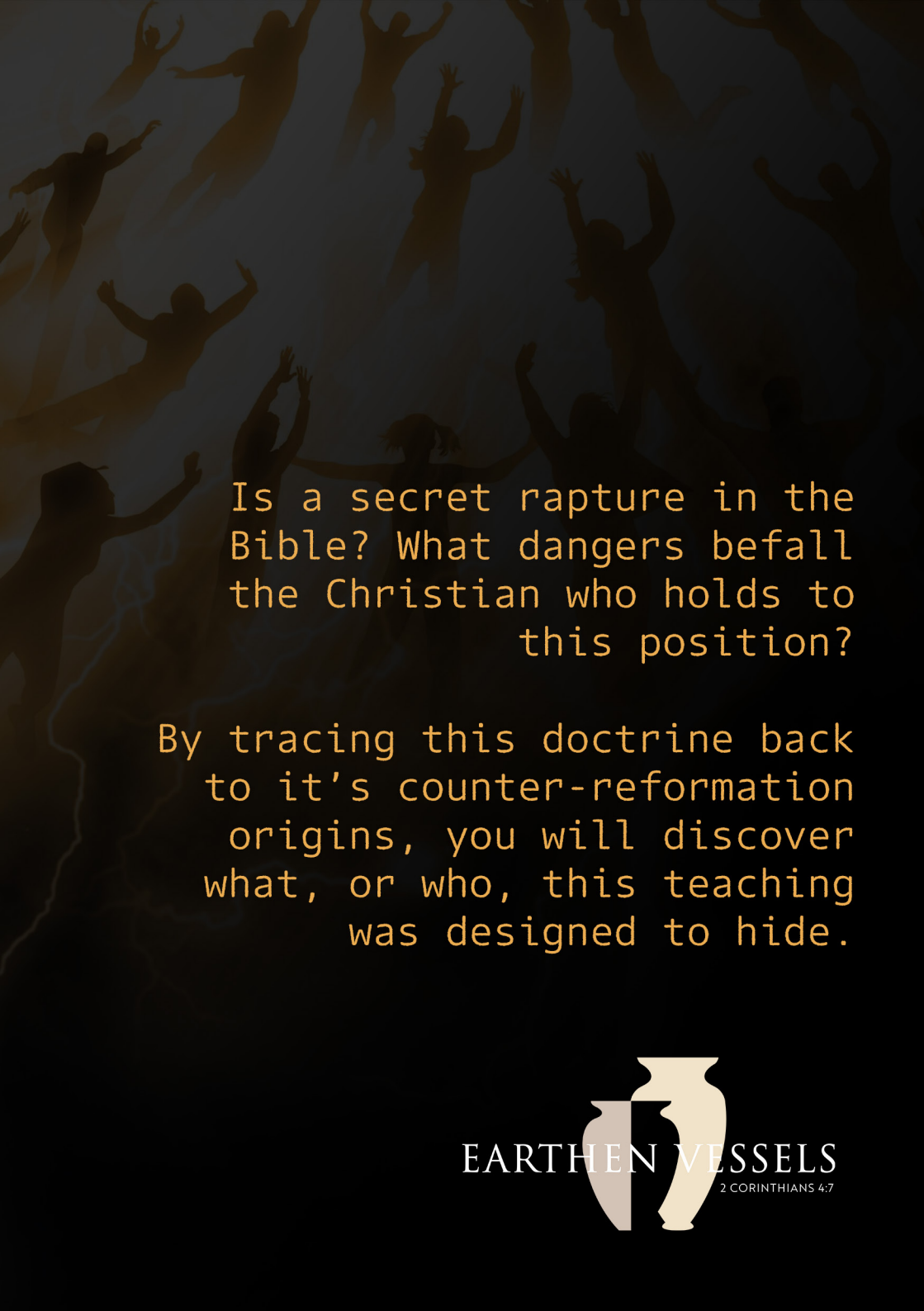
Interestingly, John Macarthur's ministry *Grace to You* is among the loudest promoters of Ribera's counter-reformation deception. Yet they praise the work of Luther and the protestant reformers, stating in an article: "If not for the work of those faithful servants, we might still be living under the dark dominion of Catholic lies today."

How ironic that these ministers, in direct opposition to the servants they call faithful, busy themselves promoting the darkest lies of the counter reformation!

Indeed, secret rapture theology has blinded their flocks to the identity of their enemy, who is leading them by the hand over an eternal precipice.

Revelation 13:4 And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

For more information:
www.earthenvessels.org.au



Is a secret rapture in the Bible? What dangers befall the Christian who holds to this position?

By tracing this doctrine back to it's counter-reformation origins, you will discover what, or who, this teaching was designed to hide.

EARTHEN VESSELS

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7

