

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

B0522 – June 5, 2005 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 12 – God the Son: His Coming for His Saints

We've looked at the Person of Christ: His deity and humanity and now we are currently looking at the Work of Christ: His Substitutionary Death, Ascension and Priestly Ministry have already been covered. This week we turn to the third aspect of Christ's work: His Coming *For* His Saints. If you'll notice we've been following Christ's work chronologically. Chronological thinking is indispensable to a sound mind. You want to have an organized way of thinking and a chronological as well as logical organization of doctrine is required to live a stable Christian life. So, chronologically, we have Christ's birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His priestly ministry, and now we are looking at the prophecy of His coming *for* His saints, or, what we often know as the Rapture. So, we are entering into some prophecy. About ¼ of the Bible was prophecy when originally given. What is prophecy? I like to define prophecy the way the Lord Jesus did in

Matthew 24:25 "Behold, I have told you in advance.

Prophecy is "history written in advance". This pre-written history is not so general as to leave its interpretation up in the air but is very specific. What I'm saying is that there are not multiple fulfillments of prophecies. There is only one fulfillment per prophecy. That's how detailed prophecies in the Bible are. There are about 1,000 prophecies in the Bible and almost half of these prophecies have been fulfilled in detailed ways. Each of the prophecies fulfilled so far have been fulfilled in a literal fashion. What we mean by literal is that we interpret all of Scripture according to the normal principles of grammar and facts of history, remembering the peculiar nature of predictive prophecy throughout the Bible. This does not nullify symbols and figures of speech which are common to every language. But even these symbols and figures of speech have literal ideas behind them. Thus far, all prophecy that has been fulfilled so far has been fulfilled in just the way a literal interpretation of those prophecies suggests. For example, Christ was born of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10),

a son of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), a son of David (2 Sam 7:12-16), he was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23) in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The details of His death were predicted 1,000 years in advance (Psa 22) and fulfilled precisely (cf. Gospel accounts).

Since all fulfilled prophecy has been fulfilled in a literal way then it is reasonable to expect that God will fulfill all unfulfilled prophecy in the same way, in a literal fashion. It is abundantly clear and recognized by all conservative theologians that prophecy, thus far, has been fulfilled literally. However, even recognizing this many try to justify departing from a literal fulfillment of unfulfilled prophecy. For example, Amillennialist Floyd Hamilton writes,

Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the Premillennialist pictures. That was the kind of Messianic kingdom that the Jews of the time of Christ were looking for, on the basis of a literal kingdom interpretation of the Old Testament promises.ⁱ

Of course, Hamilton does not accept the literal interpretation but, nevertheless, at least he admits that we are interpreting prophecy literally. Vern Poythress, a well-respected non-dispensationalist, says,

I claim that there is sound, solid, grammatical-historical ground for interpreting eschatological fulfillments of prophecy on a different basis than pre-eschatological fulfillments... It is therefore a move away from grammatical-historical interpretation to insist that (say) the “house of Israel” and the “house of Judah” of Jeremiah 31:31 must with dogmatic certainty be interpreted in the most prosaic biological sense, a sense that an Israelite might be likely to apply as a rule of thumb in short-term prediction.ⁱⁱ

Now, he may claim to have a sound reason, but the very fact that every single past fulfillment was fulfilled in a grammatical-historical way is clearly antithetical to his later claim that “house of Israel” and “house of Judah” don’t really mean “house of Israel” and “house of Judah”.! This is simply dishonest to the text and is a clear move *away from* grammatical-historical hermeneutics. To maintain consistency with his theological system Poythress is forced to shift from the grammatical-historical approach to a “theological interpretation”. By doing so he can satisfy the requirements of his system of theology, but as a consequence he compromises the actual Biblical text! This is reading into the text what one wants to find! For Poythress, and other covenant theologians, the system of theology

has become infallible and the word of God must be given fanciful interpretations to fit their theological system, not vice versa! So, when we approach Christ's coming *for* His saints we take a normal, straightforward approach, not a fanciful one.

As I said before Christ's coming *for* His saints is also known as the "rapture". If you've read your English Bible you'll know that you've never read the word "rapture" in your Bible. The word "rapture" actually comes from the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate and is found in several contexts (*rapit* - Matt 13:19; John 10:12; *rapiunt* - Matt 11:12; *raptum* - 2 Cor 12:2; *raptus* - 2 Cor 12:4; Rev 12:5; *rapiet* - John 10:28). Importantly it is used in 1 Thess 4:17, a key passage on the rapture (1 Thess 4:17...*rapiemur* in the Latin). The Greek word underlying the "rapture" is *harpazo* which means "to snatch, to seize, to catch up". It is used 14 times in the NT. It is used of "taking someone or something by force" (Matt 11:12; John 6:15; Acts 23:10), "stealing something" (Matt 12:29; 13:19; John 10:12; 10:28-29), "being caught up to heaven" (2 Cor 12:2, 4), "saving people by snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 1:23), of "Christ's ascension" where He was snatched up to the Father's throne (Rev 12:5), and lastly, of the sudden re-location of a person (Acts 8:39; 1 Thess 4:17). Turn with me to Acts 8:39. Philip was instructed by the Lord to travel from Jerusalem to Gaza along a desert road. While on the way he came alongside an Egyptian eunuch who was returning to Egypt from Jerusalem. He was reading from Isa 53 and Philip boarded his chariot to explain it to him. Upon hearing the exegesis the Egyptian was saved and then water baptized.

Acts 8:39-40 ³⁹ When they came up out of the water [immersion], the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus,

Azotus was a minimum of 20 miles away. Philip was snatched up (*harpazo*) and re-located to Azotus. This is what we mean by "rapture". It is the snatching away and re-locating of someone or something. When we talk about the rapture of the Church we are talking about the snatching up of all Church saints to heaven. Many Bible students distinguish the timing of the Rapture from the Coming of Christ to earth to set up His earthly kingdom.

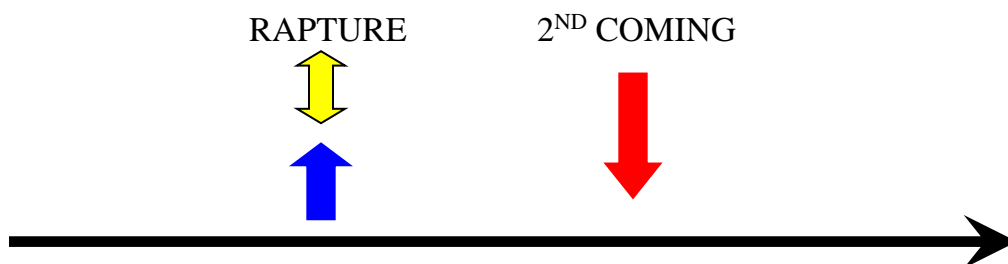


Fig 1 Pre-Tribulationism, Mid-Tribulationism, Pre-Wrath Rapture

Others see these two events as simultaneous.

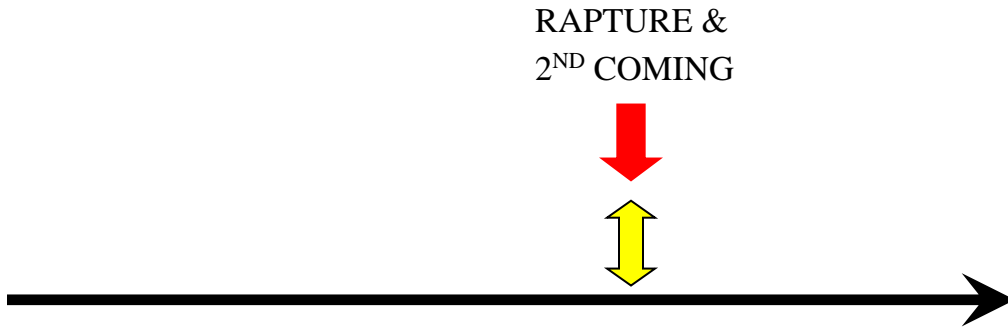
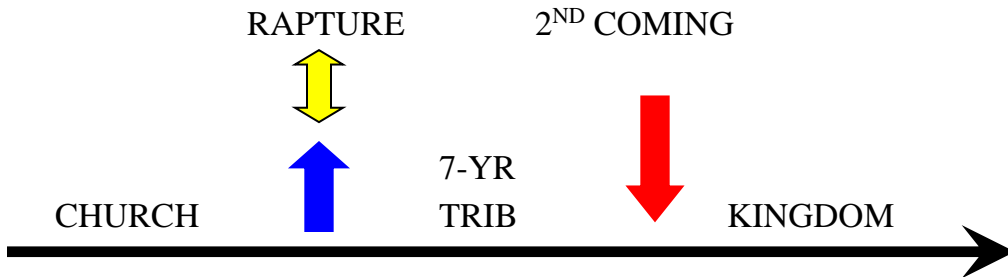


Fig 2 Postribulationism, Covenant Amillennialism, Covenant Postmillennialism, and Covenant Premillennialism

The difference between Fig 1 and Fig 2 really boils down to literal interpretation. The most consistent literal interpretation is Pre-Tribulationism. The word pre-tribulation means that the rapture will take place *before* the *Tribulation* so that the diagram would look like this:



Turn with me to the first passage concerning the rapture of the Church in John 14:1-3. I should mention that there are NO passages referring to the rapture of the Church in the OT. In fact, there are NO passages referring to the Church in the OT either. Both of these revelations are exclusively revealed in the NT (Eph 3:5-6; 1 Cor 15:51-52). The Church and the rapture were mysteries in the OT. This means they were not revealed at all. The Church is first revealed in Matt 16:18 and the rapture is first revealed in John 14:1-3. It is therefore doubtful that the apostles grasped all that Jesus was saying at this time. They were still looking for the earthly kingdom of God. They knew very little about the Church and nothing about the rapture at this time. Their worldview looked like this.

MESSIAH'S
COMING



John 14:1-3 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.
² "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ "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.

Alright, so here the Messiah, who they expected was going to set up the Kingdom reveals that He is going to leave and go prepare a place for His apostles and that He “will come again and receive” them to Himself so that where Christ is going to there they “may be also”. Are you following what Christ is saying? Let’s walk through the sequence carefully.

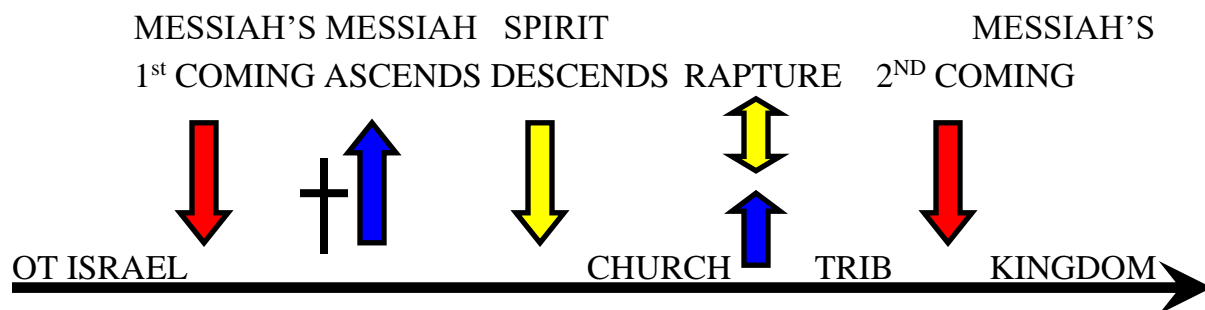
- 1) I’m leaving and going to My Father’s house (which is heaven).
- 2) I’m going to prepare a place for you in My Father’s house (in heaven).
- 3) I will come again and receive you to Myself.
- 4) So that you will also be in the Father’s house (in heaven).

They had been taught that the Messiah would return at the end of the age in Matt 24:26-31 which assumes that He must first leave. The apostles must have had many questions and the gospels are clear that they did. They did a lot of discussing trying to figure this out. They were extremely interested in doctrine and God’s plan for the ages. After this revelation in John 14:1-3 their worldview was getting radically changed. Now they knew about some new elements but did not know where to place them on their diagram.

- 1) Church (Matt 16:18; 18:15-17)
- 2) Departure of Messiah (Matt 24:26-31; John 14:1-3)
- 3) A trip to heaven to be with the Messiah (John 14:1-3)
- 4) A 2nd Advent of the Messiah (Matt 24:26-31)
- 5) The Kingdom would follow the 2nd Advent (OT; Acts 3:20-21)

They understood #2, the departure of the Messiah when He ascended in Acts 1:9-11. He had to ascend so He could send the Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7). Just before His ascension He taught them that He was going to send the Spirit not many days from now (it ended up

being 10 days) and that when the Spirit came that would not be the Kingdom (Acts 1:5-8) because that time was not for them to know. The Spirit came on Pentecost and it required later revelation that came through Paul for them to completely understand what the Church was (Acts 1:5; 11:15; Col 1:22-23; 1 Cor 12:13). Then Paul gave more revelation about #3 a trip to heaven to be with the Messiah. What we know as the “rapture”. Once the NT was completed the sequence became clear but until then it was pretty difficult for the apostles to re-organize their worldview to accommodate all these new elements. But this is what they came up with.



Let's look at some of Paul's further revelation regarding the rapture. I'll show you in a minute that there have been studies that show that 1 Thess 4:13-18 is a parallel passage with John 14:1-3. Let's read...

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Verses 16-17 give a four-fold sequence.

- 1) The Lord will descend from heaven
- 2) The dead in Christ will rise first (resurrection)
- 3) We who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them
- 4) We will always be with the Lord

Every Church saint will be raptured. No one will miss out on this glorious event! At this point John 14:1-3 will be fulfilled. We will return with Christ to heaven where He has prepared a place for us. Now, I want to show you some studies that show that John 14:1-3 and 1 Thess 4:13-18 are parallel passages, must refer to the same event and that event cannot be the 2nd Coming of Christ to earth. The reason we are doing this is because many people take John 14:1-3 to simply mean “death for the believer” and many take 1 Thess 4:13-18 and claim it is parallel to the 2nd Coming in Rev 19:11-21. The reality of the fact is that Jesus in John 14:1-3 and Paul in 1 Thess 4:13-18 are describing an event that is totally distinct from John’s 2nd Coming in Rev 19:11-21.

John 14:1-3		1 Thess 4:13-18	
Trouble	v. 1	Sorrow	v. 13
Believe	v. 1	Believe	v. 14
God, me	v. 1	Jesus, God	v. 14
Told you	v. 2	Say to you	v. 15
Come again	v. 3	Coming of the Lord	v. 15
Receive you	v. 3	Caught up	v. 17
To myself	v. 3	To meet the Lord	v. 17
Be where I am	v. 3	Ever be with the Lord	v. 17

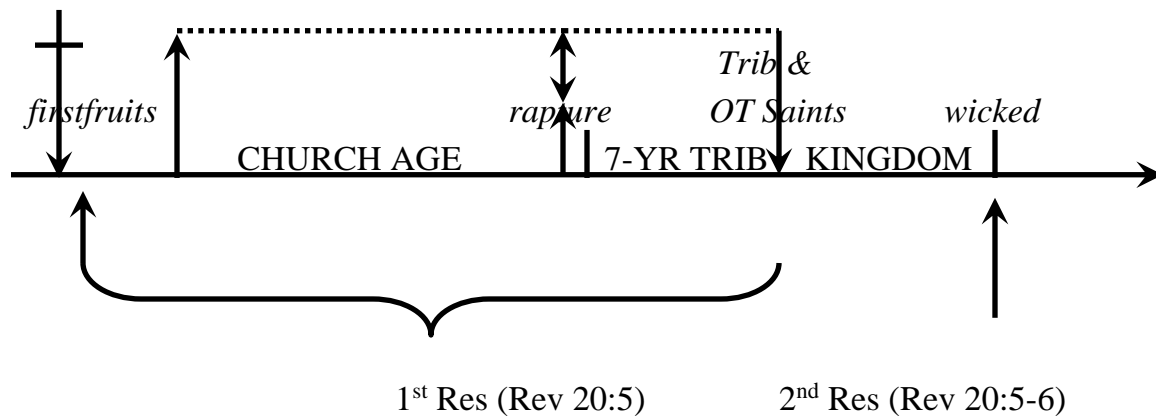
The sequence of thoughts and words is exactly the same in each passage. In both texts only the righteous are in view. In Rev 19:11-21 none of these words are used at all. The wicked are also in view. Dr. J.B. Smith comments “It would be difficult if not impossible to find elsewhere any two important passages of Scripture that are so diverse in the words employed and so opposite in their implications... We believe the comparison of the words of these two passages... describe different events.” Therefore, there is no way the rapture and 2nd coming can be taking place at the same time.

Further details about the rapture are given in 1 Cor 15:51-58.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

First of all, Paul tells us that the rapture doctrine was “a mystery”. A “mystery” was something that was totally unknown in the OT because totally unrevealed. Just like the

church was a mystery in the OT so this distinctive church truth was also a mystery in the OT. Paul reveals this mystery to us. The mystery is this: that all believers will not die, but all will be changed. This means some Christians will be left on the earth when Christ descends from heaven with the dead in Christ and snatches those who are alive and remain up to Himself and we will all go to the Father's house. Second, Paul reveals how quickly this event will take place "in the twinkling of an eye". Third, Paul reveals that we will have imperishable immortal bodies. Thus, our resurrection will take place at the Rapture.



Revelation 20:4-6 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Finally, let's conclude with some distinctions between Christ's coming for His saints and Christ's coming with His saints

His Coming <i>for</i> His Saints	His Coming <i>with</i> His Saints
Removal from earth	Return to earth
Imminent	Signs
Comfort	Judgment
Mystery	Revealed
Creation unchanged	Creation changed

Church	Jews and Gentiles
Church judged in heaven	Gentile nations judged on earth
Israel's covenants unfulfilled	Israel's covenants fulfilled
Before day of wrath	After day of wrath
Lord is at hand	Kingdom is at hand
He comes in the air	He comes to the earth
Relates to saved only	Relates to saved and unsaved
Only believers will see Him	Every eye will see Him
Tribulation immediately follows	Kingdom immediately follows
Satan immediately becomes very active	Satan immediately bound

Next week we will look at the 2nd Coming of Christ and hopefully that will help give you a more complete and full picture of the end-times and why the Rapture and 2nd Coming are distinct events.

ⁱ Hamilton, Floyd E., *The Basis of Millennial Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 38.

ⁱⁱ Poythress, Vern S, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 105-106.

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