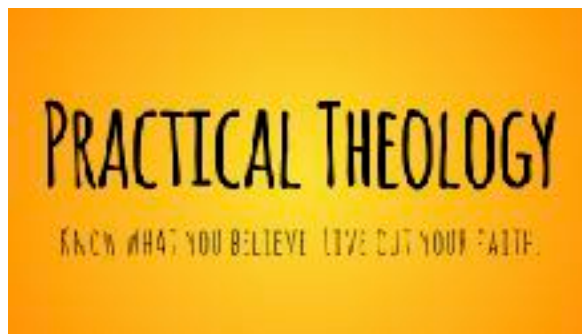


ESCHATOLOGY: Doctrine of Last Things



Eschatology is the study of future events and is often referred to as the Second Coming of Christ. This term has a *broad* understanding,¹ and a *narrow* understanding.²

Scripture speaks of Christ not only coming *for His saints* (Jn 14:3), but also *with His saints* (1 Thes 3:13). We conclude then that there must be some time-frame between the these two aspects of Christ's second coming. We will consider all the separate events of the broader Second Coming of Christ, which includes the specific event of the Second Coming of Christ.

I. The Rapture of the Church

A. Meaning

The word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word *rapturo*—from the Greek word (*harpadzo*)—translated "shall be caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The Church will be *snatched* or *caught away*. This referees to the resurrection of the saints' bodies (1 Cor 15) and not to saints souls—which are already present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6-8).

B. Timing

The rapture of the Church is the next in our understanding of prophecy. It is "imminent"—although it could happen any moment, it does not have to happen soon. Scripture indicates the believer's eager anticipation of Christ's return, resulting in a holy readiness.

1. Paul said the Thessalonians were "to wait for [God's] Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thes 1:7-10).

¹ The entire end-time event of Christ claiming His own, judging the world, establishing His kingdom, eternally defeating Satan, and dwelling with His own for all eternity.

² The specific event of Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, saving Israel and establishing His kingdom.

2. Titus was to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:11-13).

3. The Corinthians were to be “waiting [eagerly] for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:4-8).

C. Persons involved (1 Thess 4:13-18)

1. Those who are asleep in Christ: for the NT believer, death is described as “falling asleep.” All who have died in the Lord since the Cross, their bodies will be resurrected

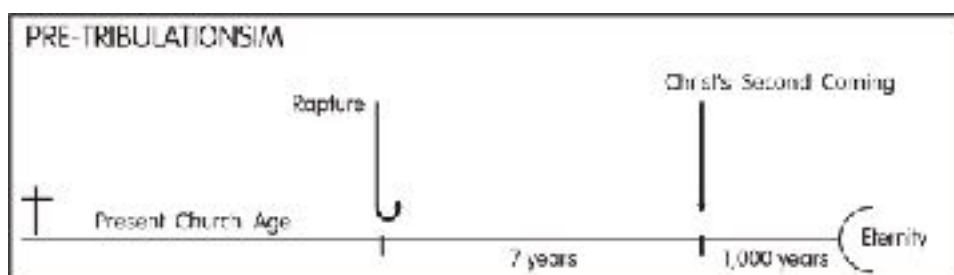
2. Those who are alive in Christ: those believers living at the time of the rapture, though having not died, they will still “be changed” and given a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:51-53).

Comparing the two previous passages we see a) that Christ descends bodily “in the clouds” and not to the earth, b) the “dead in Christ” rise first, and then c) those alive in Christ rise next, to meet the Lord in the clouds.

D. Four different views of the Rapture:

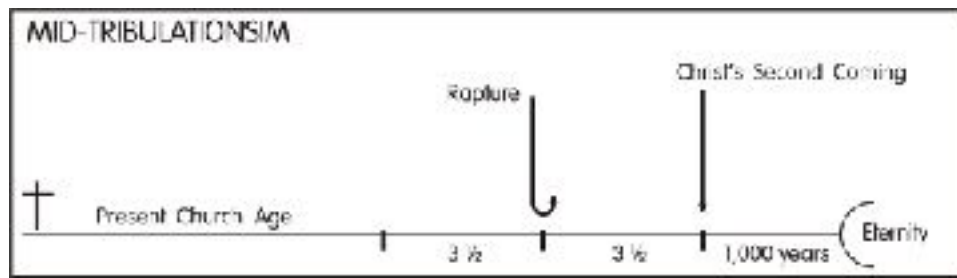
There are four views of the Rapture held by various evangelical Christians. Each view looks for Christ’s return, but place the Rapture at different times.³

1. A Pre-tribulation Rapture: The rapture will precede the beginning of the entire seven year tribulation period.

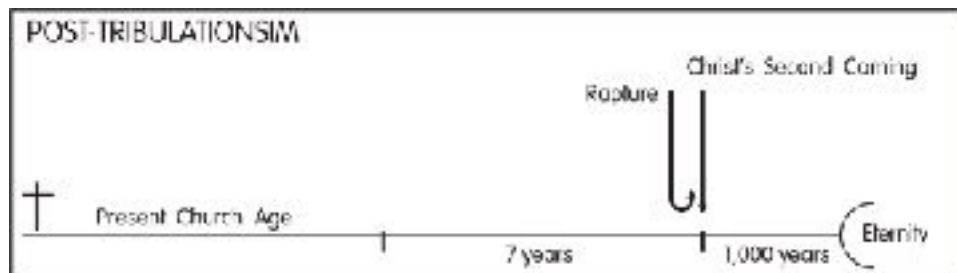


2. A Mid-tribulation Rapture: Also called “Pre-wrath” Rapture, the Church will endure the first 3½ years of the tribulation, but will be raptured at that point (escaping the last half of the Tribulation, or the “wrath”).

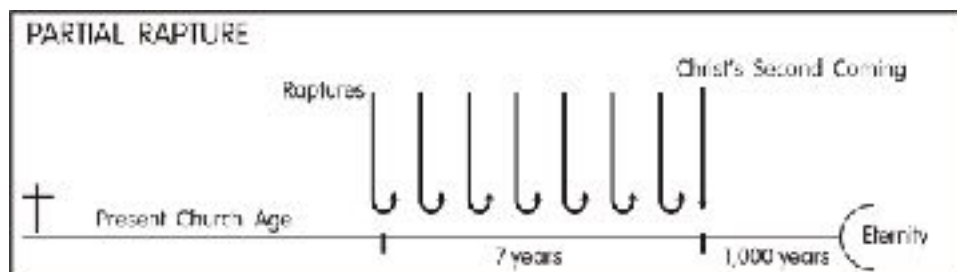
³ The diagram and definitions are adapted from the concise comparison and defence of the Pre-tribulationist view in Charles C. Ryrie’s, *Basic Theology*, (Chicago, Ill: Moody Press, 1999) p. 559-561.



3. A Post-tribulation Rapture: There will be a Rapture of the Church, but this will occur at the end of the tribulation period, followed by the immediate second Coming.



4. A Partial Rapture: Only believers, who are looking and longing for Christ, will be raptured and delivered from the Tribulation period. This differs not only in the timing of the Church's rapture, but also in the extent of the rapture.



E. Support for a Pre-tribulation Rapture:

The Church is raptured before the Tribulation (Jn 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15:50-58; 1 Thes 4:13-18).

1. Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 weeks: If the first 69 weeks of Daniel's prophecy involved Israel—why would the 70th week involve the Church?
2. The Tribulation Period (the 70th week of Daniel) is called "The time of Jacob's trouble," not the "Time of the Church's trouble" (Jer 30:7).
3. Revelation ch. 2-3 mentions the church 16 x's times; after these two chapters, the church is not mentioned again.

4. The evangelistic work during the Tribulation period is done by the 144,000 Jewish witness, not the Church (Rev 7:1-8).
5. The Church is called a "Mystery." The Church is a parentheses between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 15:51-58; Eph 3:1-21).
6. The Marriage of the Lamb: Scripture teaches that the Lord Jesus is accompanied by His Bride (the Church) at His Second Coming (Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:7-14).
7. There is a distinction between Christ's coming "in the air... in the clouds" to catch away His saints (Jn 14:1-3; 1 Thes 4:13-18), and His coming "to the earth" to establish His kingdom (Zech 14:4).

II. The Judgment Seat of Christ

In his message at Mars hill Paul stated that God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Christ] whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). Although Christ will be ultimately the Judge of all men, twice Paul mentions Christ's "judgment seat" as having a specific application to the believer (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10).

A. When will this occur?

Scripture points to the believer being judged for his works prior to the final judgement at the end of time (1 Cor 3:10-15; 1 Thes 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4).⁴ These indicate that upon Christ's coming for His saints (the Rapture), the believer is immediately tried and rewarded according to his deeds.

When Christ comes to claim the kingdoms of this world (Rev 19), the Church is pictured as a wife robed in righteousness—the Church has already been "tried" and rewarded.⁵

2 Corinthians 5:10 points to the probability of the believer's judgement occurring after the resurrection of the saints at the rapture—appearing in their spiritual bodies, giving account for the life lived in their physical bodies.

⁴ This author understands the meaning of 1 Corinthians 13 to relate primarily to the church leaders (Paul, Apollos) and how they had laboured to build the Corinthians upon Christ—not using the tangible materials of this world's wisdom (vv. 18-19). The application is definitely available to all believers who serve the Lord.

⁵ Christ always sits in His seat of Judgement; it is not necessarily a one-time occurrence.

B. Who will be there?

Each believer will give account for “the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” The Judgement Seat of Christ does not determine a person’s salvation, but the believer’s reward (cf. 1 Cor 3:8-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). This appears to be in preparation for the Marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19).

III. The Marriage of the Lamb

A. When will this occur?

Revelation 19:7-9 mentions the coming “marriage of the Lamb” in heaven. The event is said to occur “after these things” (19:1)—the tribulation period—and is preparatory for Christ’s Second Coming.⁶

B. Who is involved?

This marriage is between the Lamb (Christ) and the “saints” (the Church). Ephesians 5:23-33 clearly teaches the relationship of this Church to Christ; she is to keep herself pure, to be presented as the Bride of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2).

C. The Preparation for the Marriage

The “wife” (the Church) is said to have “made herself ready” (19:7). We assume that the Judgement Seat of Christ has occurred previously as a time of preparation and purging. The “wedding gown” is made of the “righteousness of the saints”—lit. their *righteous deeds*, being already proved by fire of Christ’s judgement.

IV. The Great Tribulation

In answer to the disciples three questions, Jesus spoke of a “great tribulation” coming upon the Jewish people at the end times (Matt 24). He does not seem to address the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, but rather the final destruction of Jerusalem.⁷ Jeremiah also spoke of a coming persecution, calling it “the time of Jacob’s trouble”, which

⁶ Some understand this “marriage” only to be finally consummated in Revelation 21:2-9. Although possible, it seems that the marriage is finalized here because of the marriage supper (19:7-9). Chapter 21 only mentions the new city also being like an adorned bride.

⁷ Those who apply the whole first portion of the chapter to the first question (destruction of Temple) ignore the second and third questions. Christ answered all three questions, indicating that the first would also apply to His coming and the end of all things, and thus, could in no way refer primarily to the events of AD 70.

could in not way speak merely to the AD 70 events (Jer 30:7).

Christ said that Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks (ch. 9, 12) spoke of this time (Matt 24:15). Dispensationalism understands Daniel's 70 weeks to refer to 490 years determined upon the nation of Israel. There was to be a space of 69 weeks (483 yrs) from the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah would "cut off." This corresponds exactly to the time of Christ's crucifixion. The 70th week (7 yrs), yet to come, corresponding to the time that the "prince that shall come" destroys Jerusalem and persecutes her people (Dan 9:24-27; Rev 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). This corresponds to the tribulation prior to Christ's coming.

A. When will this occur?

Although the last 3½ years will likely be the actual time of the great tribulation, the 70th week of seven years will begin immediately following the rapture. Daniel refers to a seven-year covenant made by the "prince that shall come" (the Anti-christ), who shall actually seek to "destroy the city and the sanctuary." In the midst of the "week," he will break the covenant and initiate the "great tribulation" of which Christ spoke (Dan 9:26-27; Matt 24).

B. Who is involved?

1. The unbelieving nation of Israel_____:

The Church is not mentioned in all of Revelation 4-18; this is a time of Israel's persecution (Rev 12). She will finally turn to her Messiah in faith (Rom 11:26; Isa 59:20; Joel 3:16; Rev 14:1).

2. The unbelieving nations of the earth_____:

Those who have consciously refused the gospel, will "believe a lie" and not receive Christ during the tribulation (2 Thes 2:8-12). The Revelation records that amidst God's judgement of mankind, mankind follows the example of the Antichrist in continually blaspheming and rebelling against God (13:6; 16:6, 11, 21).

V. The Second Coming of Christ

A. When will this occur?

Within the *broad* understanding of the Second Coming of Christ is contained the *narrow* aspect of His coming at the end of the tribulation to judge the nations and claim for Himself the kingdoms of this world (Rev 11:15; 19:11-21).

This event is distinct from the Rapture, in which Christ comes in the clouds for take His own unto Himself. It is the culmination of the great tribulation (Mat 24:29-31).

The Rapture	The Second Coming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the Air ▪ For the Church ▪ Preceded by No Signs ▪ Known as the “Blessed Hope” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To the Earth ▪ With the Church ▪ Preceded by Many Signs ▪ Known as a Time of Judgement

B. What will this involve? (Rev 19:11-20:7)

1. Christ returns with His saints.
2. Christ destroys the wicked nations.
3. Christ condemns the Beast and false Prophet to the lake of fire.
4. Christ has Satan bound for 1,000 years.
5. Christ established His reign on earth for 1,000 years.

VI. The Millennium

The word “millennium” is not found in Scripture. It is derived from two Latin words meaning *a thousand years* (Rev 20:3-7).

A. When will this occur?

The word “millennium” is not found in Scripture, but comes from two Latin words meaning *a thousand years* (Rev 20:3-7). Satan will be bound, and Christ will rule and reign on earth during this time.

B. What will this involve?

Although this millennial kingdom will involve all believers, it relates in a very unique way to the Jewish nation. The 1,000 year Kingdom is established in fulfilment of God’s promises to Abraham and to his seed (the Abrahamic, Deuteronomic, and Davidic covenants that have never been fulfilled). This involves two basic aspects:

1. Their relationship to the promised Messiah.

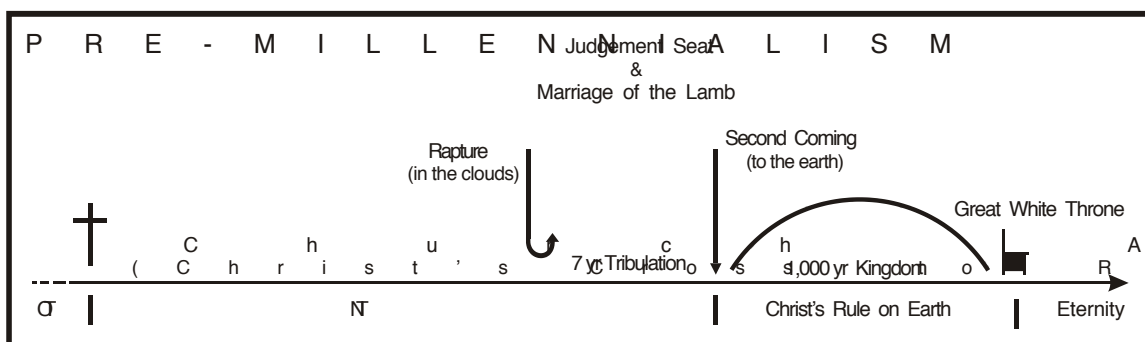
Romans 11:25-29 speaks of God’s fulfilment of His covenant with Israel that will involve their turning to Christ and the cleansing of their sin.

2. Their relationship to the promised land.

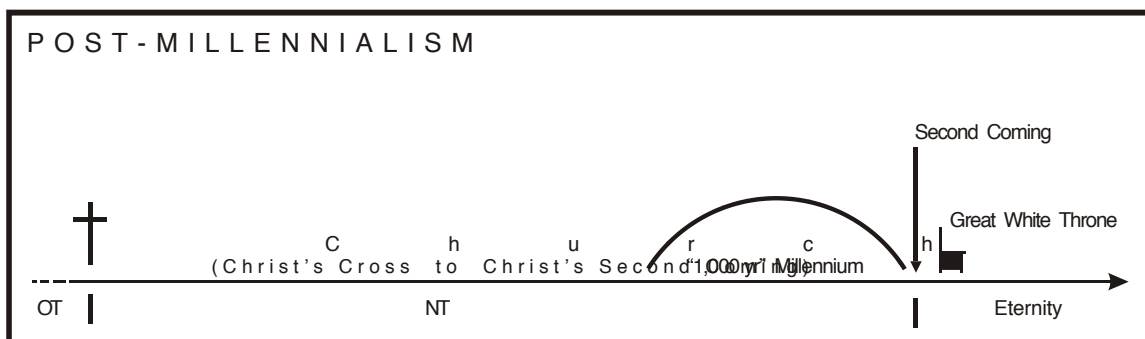
The land is said to “blossom” as the rose (Isa 35:1), the valleys rise and become a fertile place (Zech 14:10), and the curse upon the ground is removed (Isa 35:1-2; Joel 3:18). The Jewish people will build, plant, and fully enjoy their labour and their land (Isa 65:17-25). Animal life and living conditions are similar to that of Eden; the wolf and lamb lie together, health and life are prolonged (Isa 11:6-9; 65:20, 25; Jer 30:20; Ezek 47:22)

C. Three views of the Millennium: ⁸

1. Premillennialism: Christ comes *before* the millennium; this is a more literal interpretation of Scripture and prophecy.

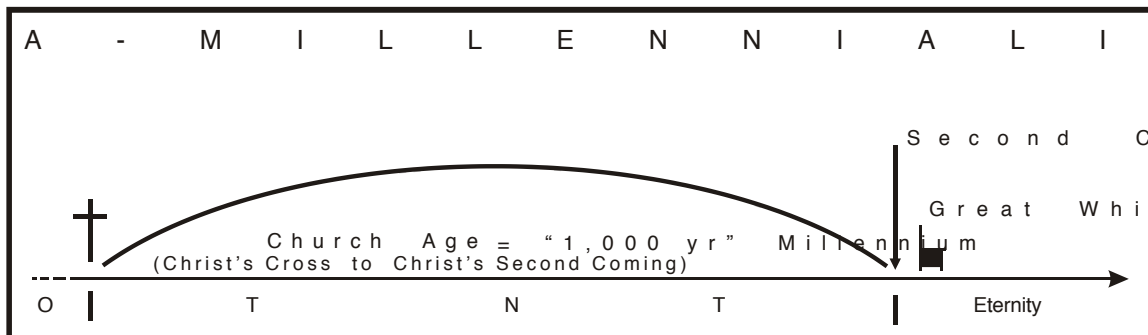


2. Postmillennialism: Christ comes *after* the millennium; the Kingdom is not yet come, but the Church is working towards it.



⁸ Amillennialism and Postmillennialism see Christ’s second coming as a single event, followed by a general resurrection and judgment; there is no distinct rapture of the Church, nor is there a literal Kingdom established fulfilling the OT covenant promises.

3. Amillennialism: There is no literal, earthly Kingdom/Millennium. The Church is the kingdom, for the “word of the kingdom” is “sown” in men’s hearts (Mat 13:19); this method of interpretation spiritualizes much of prophecy (the 1,000 years merely pictures a great time between the two advents of Christ).



VII. The Great White Throne Judgment

A. When will this occur?

At the end of the Millennium, when the Devil is cast into the Lake of Fire, John saw “a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev 20:11). This is the last event before the eternal state.

B. Who is involved?

The dead, “small and great,” stand before God and are judged out of the Book of Life and the books which contain all of man’s works (Rev 20:12-15). These individuals are those whose names are “not found written in the book of life.” These are the lost persons of all ages. These individuals are then judged “according to their works”; not for salvation, but for their just sentence and punishment.

Death and Hell, with those that they hold, are then cast forever into the “lake of fire.”

Judgement Seat of Christ	Great White Throne Judgement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For Believers (1 Cor 13) ▪ According to each person’s works ▪ To receive reward of Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For Unbelievers (Rev 20:11-15) ▪ According to each person’s works ▪ To receive condemnation of Christ

VIII. The Eternal State...

Revelation chapters 21-22 describes the eternal state of the believer:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev 21:3-5)