

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH A RAPTURE?

**Wednesday Night Series on Eschatology
Westminster Presbyterian Church**

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Gal 3:7)

“Our first honor on the last day will be greater than every honor granted on granted on any day . . . Given what we do not know, and especially what we do, let us seek first the kingdom of God, and everything else will fall into place.” – Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*, p. 433

I. Review and Introduction

- A. Biblical eschatology recalls God’s ultimate goal for creation: God’s glory revealed in an *unbreakable* bond of fellowship with a holy people in a holy place under an obedient covenant representative!
- B. There is an increasingly rich disclosure of this one eschatological goal across the Old Testament era, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, being first *inaugurated* in his past coming (in weakness) and then to be *consummated* at his return (in glory and power).

Rom 1:1–2 – “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.”

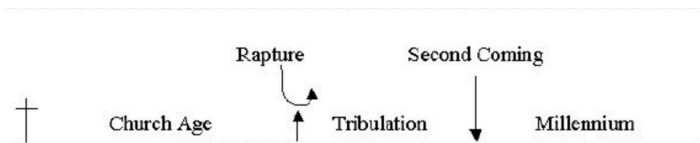
Gal 3:8 – “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”

- C. In contrast to seeing one Christ-centered gospel “organically” revealed across the OT and NT, dispensationalism holds to the church age as a “parenthesis” in history that will close before God’s earthly promises to Israel are fulfilled.

“The church and Israel are two distinct groups with whom God has a divine plan. The church is a mystery, unrevealed in the Old Testament. *This mystery program must be completed before God can resume His program with Israel and bring it to completion.* These considerations all arise from a literal method of interpretation.” – J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*

II. The Rapture

- A. Definition: the secret removal of Christians from the earth before a great tribulation (a period of terror and trial before Christ’s visible return).



III. 1 Thess 4:13–5:11

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left 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 cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up [Latin: rapiemur, from “rapere”- to snatch away] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

5:1 *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains*

come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1. What was the Thessalonians' problem in 4:13-18? In what sense were the Thessalonians tempted to grieve "as others do" (i.e., pagans)?

"I was not; I was; I am not; I care not" - Translation of common Latin abbreviation on pagan tombstones

"Irene to Taonnophiris and Philo, take heart! I grieved and wept as much over the departed [child of Taonnophiris and Philo] as for Didyman [Irene's own child]. I did everything that was fitting, as did my entire household, Epaphroditus, Thermouthion, Philon, Apollonius, and Plantas. But, for all that, there is nothing that can be done in the face of such things. Therefore comfort one another. Farewell."

- Egyptian letter from 2nd century AD.

2. What things did Paul assure the Thessalonians about deceased Christians (see v. 14)? What do we learn about the Second Coming here? What will be the order of events, according to 1 Thess 4:16-17?

Matt 25:7-10 – *"But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut."*

Acts 28:15 – *"And the brothers there [from Rome], when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage."*

3. How do you think most people think about death today? How do many Christians, right or wrong, think about death?
4. What does the Westminster Shorter Catechism say about the Christian's *soul* at death? What does it say about the Christian's *body* at death? Implications?

WSC, Q. 37 – What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.

5. How does Paul's metaphor of "sleep" teach us (careful!) about the "intermediate state" (between death and the bodily resurrection)?
6. How does Paul say a proper understanding of the return of Christ should affect our lives now?

"Is it reasonable, I ask you, that what our Lord meant to be sufficient to arouse us to rejoicing and good cheer should engender nothing but sorrow and dismay? If this is so, why do we still boast of him as our Master? Let us, then, take hold of a sounder view, and even though the blind and stupid desire of the flesh resists, let us not hesitate to await the Lord's coming, not only with longing, but also with groaning and sighs, as the happiest thing of all. He will come to us as Redeemer, and rescuing us from this boundless abyss of all evils and miseries, he will lead us into that blessed inheritance of his life and glory."

- John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.9.5, on Luke 21:28