

Jesus The Messiah: Session 11: Understanding Things To Come

And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "Take heed that no man deceives you. For many shall come in my name, saying, 'I am Christ;' and shall deceive many. And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you not be troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (Matt. 24:3-6)

1. Vocabulary for the Second Coming

The branch of theology that talks about the end times or the last things is called **eschatology**. That is a word which comes from the Greek, and it means the study of the eschaton which is the end or the last things.

2. Viewpoints of Prophecy and Christ's Return

Is prophecy literal or allegorical?

How do we know that the return of Christ is literal?

...You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

3. The elements of timing in prophetic Scripture

A. Preterism

Preterism teaches that most prophecy has been fulfilled.

B. Historicism

Another way that Christians have read the Book of Revelation is through the Historical method. Adherents of this system believe that Revelation should be read as an outline of history.

C. Futurism.

If you are a futurist, you believe that most events contained in the Book of Revelation and other prophetic passages have yet to occur. Futurists would place most of Revelation as well as other significant prophecies inside a future 70th Week of Daniel which will, as we know, last for 7 years of 360 days each.

4. Views concerning the Millennium

A. Amillennialism.

An amillennialist does not believe that there is a literal millennium. They believe that Satan is already bound. People holding this belief tend to equate the church and the Kingdom of God very closely. They would not believe that Jesus is going to come and rule in a literal, earthly kingdom from the city of

Jerusalem, etc. Groups such as Roamn Catholics and Greek Orthodox hold to this position.

B. Postmillennialism

This belief holds that the Church will act as a healthy influence on the world, resulting in a millennial age, following which Christ will come.

C. Premillennialism

Premillennial believers read literally the promises of a future earthly reign of Christ in Jerusalem, and a future earthly preeminence for literal, national Israel.

5. Viewpoints on the Rapture

The Rapture is the doctrine that, at or before Christ's return, Christians then living will not see death but will be transformed into bodies of the resurrection. Although the word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible, it is derived from the Latin translation of Paul's expression in Greek that we will be "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:

(13) But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (15) For this we say to you

by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not go before those who are asleep.

(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; (17) Then we who 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. (18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains that this transformation without undergoing death was a mystery not previously revealed.

(50) Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.

(51) Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

(53) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality. (54) So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. (55) O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?”

The vast majority of Christians who believe in a Rapture are premillennial, so they have much in common. All believe that God removes or at least preserves His people from His Divine wrath as it is poured out upon the world before Christ returns to the Earth.

Where people differ about the Rapture is about its timing with respect to the events of the 70th Week.

A. Pretribulation Rapture Viewpoint

The pretribulation rapture view holds that Christ will come for His Church at the beginning of the 70th Week, returning with the Church at its conclusion. This viewpoint sees the entire 7 years of the 70th Week as God's wrath, and adherents typically hold that the Church cannot be present because God uses those years to deal with National Israel.

B. Midtribulation Rapture Viewpoint

The midtribulation rapture view asserts that the Rapture will take place at the midpoint of the 70th Week, at the same time as the Abomination of Desolation. This view has never been as popular as pretribulationism or posttribulationism.

C. Posttribulation Rapture Viewpoint

The posttribulation rapture view is that Christ raptures the Church at the conclusion of the 70th Week of Daniel. In this scenario the Church will suffer persecution at the hands of Antichrist and, although many will presumably be martyred, believers will be preserved from the wrath of God, but not preserved from persecution.

D. Prewrath Rapture Viewpoint

A newer viewpoint which has become popular over last twenty years is the prewrath view, which has probably already eclipsed midtribulationism. Prewrath holds that the Church suffers persecution from Antichrist but is raptured at an unknown time after the Great Tribulation begins. Prewrath places the Rapture after the 6th Seal of Revelation is opened and so is sometimes referred to as a “6th seal rapture.” As with posttrib believers, prewrath believers assert that the Church will be persecuted (which is seen as man’s wrath or the Devil’s wrath) but does not suffer God’s wrath because it is removed.

6. The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is an expression often used by the prophets to describe the time of God’s judgment. There are numerous references in the Old Testament and several in the New Testament. The Rapture is seen by many as occurring at the same time as the Day of the Lord commences.

Pretribulationist believers often see the Day of the Lord as the entire 7 years of the 70th Week and possibly extending into the Millennium. Prewrath believers see the Day of the Lord as a brief time interval after the Great Tribulation begins. In the prewrath system, persecution of the Great Tribulation is cut short by the Rapture and the Day of the Lord judgments an unknown amount of time before the end of the 70th Week. Paul says,

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, "Peace and safety;" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. (1 Thess. 5:1-4)

7. Characters in the end time drama

Antichrist: In Premillennialism, the Antichrist is a literal figure who is the main opponent of God's People during the 70th Week of Daniel. He is a dictator who persecutes the saints for three and a half years and is destroyed by the glory of Christ when Jesus returns.

False Prophet: The False Prophet is a figure who seems to be more religious than political. He induces people to follow the Antichrist and worship the Devil, doing signs and wonders.

The Two Witnesses: These are men who oppose the Antichrist and his system and give testimony of the true God during the persecution. Their identity has been much debated. In modern times the main candidates for their ministry have been considered to be Elijah, Moses and Enoch.

The Restrainer: Paul identified in 2 Thessalonians 2 a person or entity which he does not specifically name, but who has the ability to restrain the appearance or manifestation of the Antichrist until he is taken away or taken out of the midst. A number of suggestions have been put forth as to who this could be, among them being: the Roman Empire; human government in general; the Holy Spirit; the Church; and, the Archangel Michael. It appears that the Thessalonians knew to whom or to what Paul was referring.

Comparison of Christian Tribulation Views

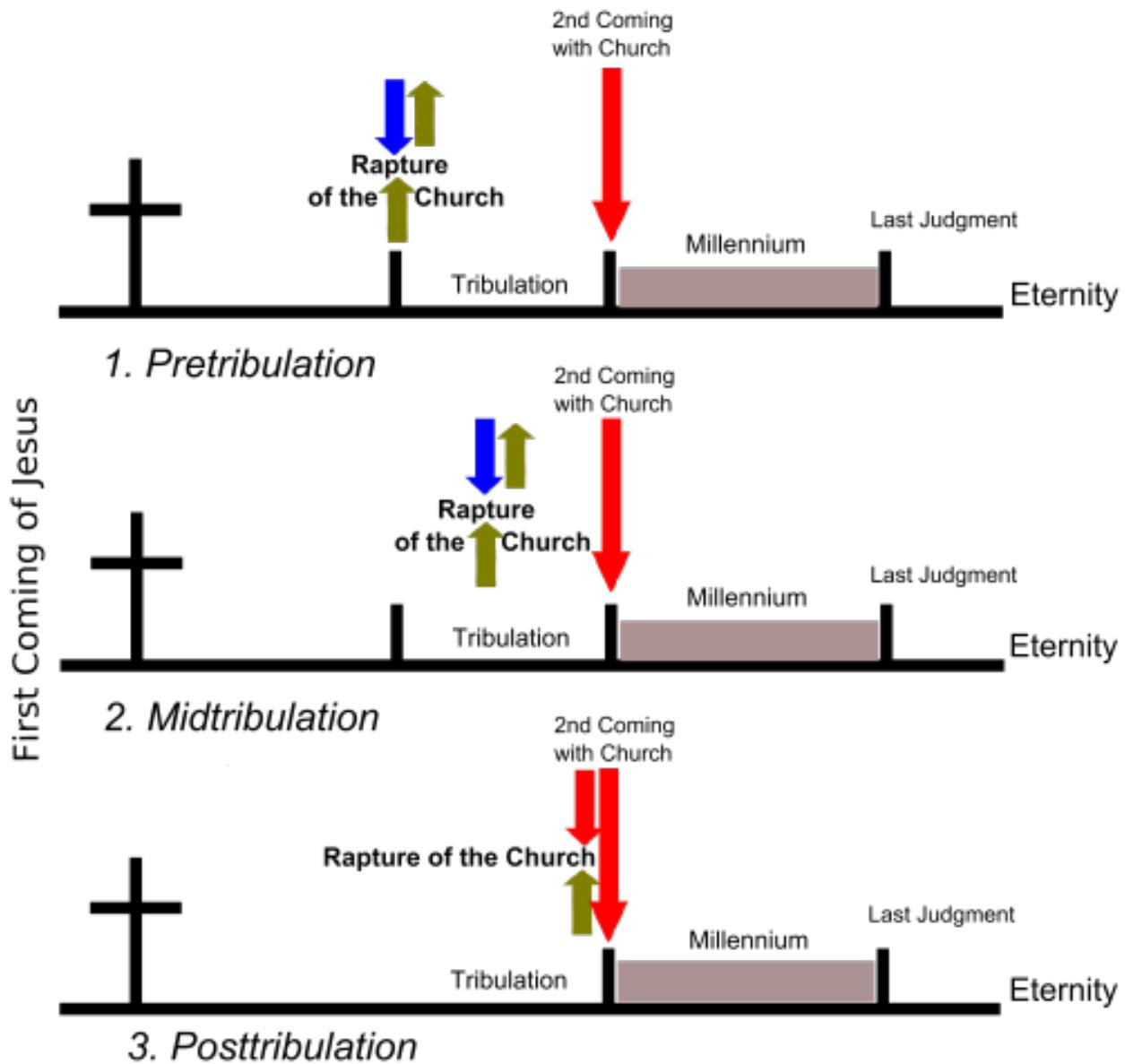


Chart © User: Lamorak, used under Creative Commons License; source:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tribulation_views.svg; retrieved December 4, 2012.

Prewrath Rapture Position

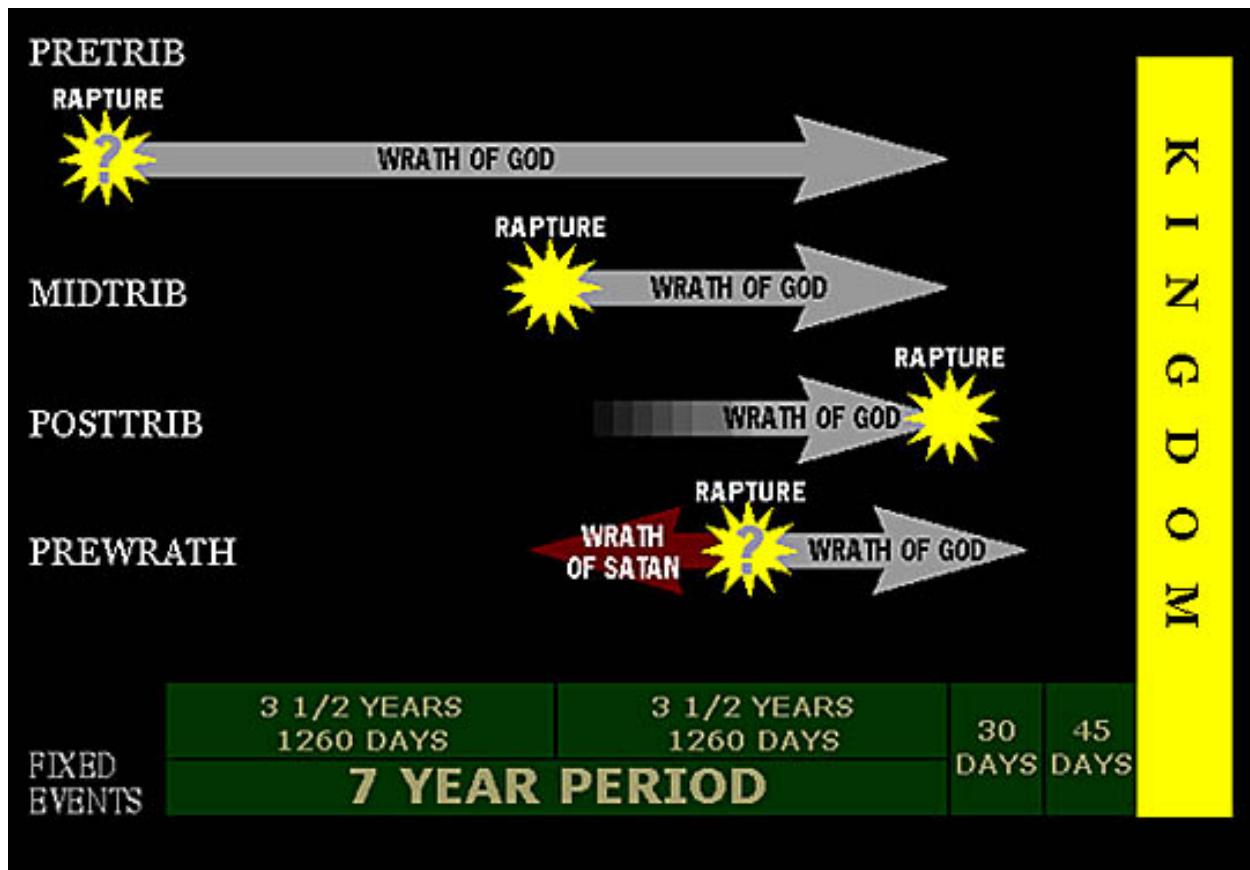


Chart © SolaGroup.org

No copyright claimed; to be used for educational purposes only.