

The Imminent Rapture Part 1
Examining The Hope For Christians In Every Generation

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The Definition of Imminence

Prewrath Equivocation:

“Imminence, in its simplest definition, is an overhanging event that is threatening to arrive. However, in modern eschatology, the term has morphed to mean that Christ could return for His church at any moment. Those who adhere to this sense of imminence assert that Christ’s coming for His church need not be preceded by any signs and thus could occur *at any time*” (Habben, *The Parable of The Fig Tree*, 154).

Imminence: An event COULD happen any moment – not that it MUST happen in any certain timeframe.

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Certainty: Event will happen and could at any moment.
Uncertainty: The timing of the event.

Clarifying The Debate

Question: Is there a precursor(s) that must occur before the rapture of the church?

Possible answers:

Yes – Implication: The Lord cannot return prior to precursor

No – Implication: The Lord can return at any moment

Apostolic Church Age:

“Primitive Christianity waits for the Jesus who has come already as the One who is still to come. The hope of an imminent coming of the exalted Lord in Messianic glory is, however, so much to the fore that in the NT the terms (parousia) are never used for the coming of Christ in the flesh (incarnation)” (TDNT, Parousia, Vol 5, 865).

Apostolic Church Age

“Primitive Christianity believed the event to be imminent and this belief has been revived from time to time in the history of the Church” (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, “parousia,” pg. 1034).

“...belief in the imminency of the return of Jesus was the uniform hope of the early church” (J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*, 102).

“The simple fact is that Paul did not know when Christ would return. He was in the exact position in which we are. All that he knew, and all that we know, is that Christ may come at any time” (R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 737).

The Post Apostolic Era

96 A.D. “Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, ‘Speedily will He come, and will not tarry” (*First Epistle of Clement*, quoted from *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*, J. Barton Payne, 13).

107 A.D. – Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, Syria. “Weigh carefully the times. Look for Him who is above all time” (Payne, 13)

70-90 A.D. or 120-180 A.D. Didache, chapter 16, section 1: “Watch for your life’s sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh” (Payne, 13).

90-150 A.D. Shepherd of Hermas, chapter 3 sections 9, 7 "All things around the tower must be cleansed lest the Master come suddenly and find the places about the tower dirty and be displeased" (Payne, 14).

J. Barton Payne, "The ante-Nicene fathers, in other words, were committed to the concept of the imminence of their Lord's return."

Robert Glouse, "The early church holding this premillennial view looked for the imminent return of Christ as witnessed by the writings of Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Methodus, Commodianus, and Lactantius" (*NIV Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 893).

J.L. Neve "The immediate return of Jesus was anticipated. It was this expectation which held the congregations together" (*A History of Christian Thought*, vol 1, 43).

The Scriptures

Matthew 24:3 Questions:

1. "When will these things happen"
2. "What will be the sign of Your coming..."

Matthew 24:4-35 Signs within 70th Week

Matthew 24:36-25:13 No one knows (start of 70th week)

Matt 24:36-39 **Now concerning that day and hour** no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took them all away...

"Day" and "hour" are regularly used throughout Scripture for "time" in general, not just twenty-four-hour or sixty-minute periods (in Matt cf. 7:22; 10:19; 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; 26:45). "Day" especially reflects the Old Testament "Day of the Lord" (cf. esp. throughout Zephaniah) as a stock phrase for the end of the age (cf. Matthew's "day of judgment" in 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; and cf. also Rom 10:21; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 3:14; Eph 6:13). Verses 42-44 will use "day," "time of night" (*watch*), and "hour" interchangeably. "Day" and "hour" appear in synonymous parallelism in v. 50. Hence, Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ's return to a generation or a year or even a few day's period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed (Blomberg, Craig NAC).

“Taken” In Judgment or The Rapture?

Matt 24:39-41 and they did not know until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.

“Took” = air w – take up, take away, destroy John 11:48 “If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

“Is taken” = par al arbanw – to take to oneself, John 14:3

“left” = af ihm - means to abandon with personal objects in (Matt 4:11, 22; 8:15; 13:36; 19:29; 22:22, 25; 26:56)

John 14:18 I will never leave you as orphans...

“Taken” In Judgment or The Rapture?

Brown observes the use of af ihm in Matt 23:38 for the judgment of the temple. Drawing on this use, he concludes that the uses of the word in 24:40–41 serve to warn those who are unprepared like in the days of Noah that they will be forsaken in judgment like the temple.

<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2008ii/Hart.pdf>

John 14:3 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.

Luke 17:34-35 I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding...one will be taken...

The Rapture Comes Like A Thief

Matt 24:36-37, 40-41 Now concerning that day and hour no one knows...For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.

Matt 24:42-43 Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert...For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think. 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev 3:3

The Rapture Comes Like A Thief

kl ept hV= (thief) emphasizes secrecy while I hst hV (robber) stresses violence. New Inter-national Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:377.

Mark 13:34-37 It is like a man away on a journey; who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on alert. Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, Be on the alert! (exaif nhV)

Horizontal lines for notes.

The Rapture Comes Like A Thief

exaif nhV pertaining to an extremely short period of time between a previous state or event and a subsequent state or event—'suddenly, at once, immediately' (in a number of contexts there is the implication of unexpectedness)(Louw Nida, 67.112).

Luke 2:13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God...

Acts 9:3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him...

Horizontal lines for notes.

We Must "Watch"

γρηγορέω 'to stay awake, to be in continuous readiness and alertness to learn—to be alert, to be watchful, to be vigilant.' (Louw Nida 27.55)

Matt 24:42-43 Therefore be on alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming...if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on alert...

Matt 25:13 Be on the alert, then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

1 Thess 5:2, 6 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night...so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

Horizontal lines for notes.

“Watching” And Imminence

Matt 26:38, 45 Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me...” Then He came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand...”

1 Peter 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

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Paul on Imminence

1 Corinthians 1:4, 7 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus...so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

...salvation for Paul was primarily an eschatological reality, begun with Christ’s coming and to be consummated by his imminent return. (Gordon Fee, NICNT).

Apekdecomai = wait eagerly – synonymous with prosdcomai (Word Study Dictionary, New Testament G4327)

Luke 2:25, 26 (Simeon) ...and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel...it had been revealed to him by the H.S. that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

Paul on Imminence

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus...

“The present tense’s portrayal of an event ‘focuses on its development or progress and sees the occurrence in regard to its internal make-up, without beginning or end in view.’ It is sometimes called progressive: It basically represents an activity as in process (or in progress)” (Wallace, Greek Grammar, Beyond The Basics, 514).

Paul on Imminence

1 Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord he is accursed. Maranatha.

Maranatha: Aramaic – Mar = Lord, ana = our, tha = come – (Leon Morris, *The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 248).

“In light of this meaning, Charles J. Ellicott declared that ‘Maranatha’ was ‘practically equivalent to’ the expression ‘The Lord is at hand’ in Philippians 4:5” (Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord Come!*,131)

“It is strange to meet with an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek church. The explanation is that that phrase had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church...” (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 188).

Paul on Imminence

Maranatha: “It means that at any moment they may have to answer for their shortcomings” (Archibald Robertson, Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 401).

Phil 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...

“But they did eagerly wait for their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. This expectation was a constant element in the primitive apostolic preaching: the Thessalonian converts were taught to wait for the Son of God to come from heaven...who rescues His people from the coming judgment” (F.F. Bruce, *Philippians*, 108)

Preliminary Summary

Prewrath Scheme: Rapture preceded by events foretold in Revelation 6:1-17

1. Abomination 2. sun, moon, stars

Matt 24:29 But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the **sun will be darkened...**

Posttrib Scheme: Rapture preceded by events foretold in Revelation 6:1-19:10

1. Abomination 2. nations gathering against Israel

Conclusion: In both the Prewrath and Posttribulational schemes, Jesus cannot come until certain events transpire! Is that what the Biblical data suggests?
