

# Last Things

## “What We Believe”

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## Eschatology

Notes excerpted from The Gospel Institute – learn more at [www.peoriagospelinstitute.org](http://www.peoriagospelinstitute.org) and Course Syllabi from The Master's Seminary <http://www.theologicalresources.org/the-masters-seminary/30-theology-iv/>.

### I. The Practical Value of Studying Bible Prophecy

#### A. Bible prophecy comforts those grieving over the death of loved ones.

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 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. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.*

*John 14:1-3 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

#### B. Bible prophecy helps us to live holy lives in this corrupt world.

*Colossians 3:4-5 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

*Titus 2:12-13 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

*2 Peter 3:13-14 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*

*1 John 3:2-3 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

#### C. Bible prophecy motivates us to worship God together.

*Hebrews 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

**D. Bible prophecy strengthens love among believers.**

*1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

*1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

*James 5:9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

**E. Bible prophecy encourages commitment to Christian ministry.**

*2 Timothy 4:1-2 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

*1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.*

*2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

*1 Corinthians 15:51-52 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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 shall be changed.*

*1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

**F. Bible prophecy helps us to endure in the faith.**

*1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*

*Revelation 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*

*James 5:7-8 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

Let us be diligent in studying the prophetic scriptures so that we would benefit from the blessing that God has for those who do!

### **G. Bible prophecy reveals the authority of the Scripture.**

*Micah 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

## **II. Understanding Key Events**

### **A. The Rapture and Resurrection of Church Saints (1 Thess. 4:13-18)**

- a. The first event in the series of upcoming events is the rapture.
- b. The Lord returns from heaven and will suddenly and supernaturally remove the church.
- c. Those Christians who have died in this dispensation will experience bodily resurrection and have their souls united with their bodies.

### **B. The Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10)**

- a. Following the rapture of the church the judgment seat of Christ will take place in heaven.
- b. Sometimes called the Bema seat judgment, this judgment will evaluate the quality of the works of all church saints.
  - i. Those works that are good and acceptable to Christ will be rewarded.
  - ii. Those works that are worthless will result in loss of reward.

### **C. The Marriage of the Lamb.**

- a. Following the judgment seat of Christ and before His second coming to the earth, the marriage of the Lamb will take place (Rev. 19:9).

### **D. The Tribulation**

- a. The Tribulation is a seven year period of judgment on earth following the rapture of the church.
- b. Sometimes called the 70th week of Daniel, and begins when the Antichrist signs a treaty with Israel (Dan. 9:24-27).

- c. The seven years is divided into two distinct parts of three and one-half years each.
- d. Two primary purposes for the Tribulation: (1) to bring the nation of Israel (and some Gentiles) under the New Covenant; and (2) to judge wicked people and nations.
- e. In three series of judgments, close to 80% of the world's population will be destroyed.
- f. If God had not limited the length of the Tribulation, no human being would have made it through that time alive (Matt. 24:22).

## **E. The Second Coming of Christ to Earth**

- a. The Tribulation ends when Christ comes in power and glory from heaven to the earth.
- b. Five important events occur in connection with the second coming of Christ:
  - i. The judgment of the living Gentiles
    - 1. Evaluated to see whether allowed to enter the millennial Kingdom.
    - 2. Judgment is commonly called the Sheep and Goats judgment (Mat. 25:31-46).
      - a. Saved Gentiles (sheep) are allowed into Messiah's kingdom.
      - b. Unsaved Gentiles (goats) are cast into hell.
  - ii. The judgment of living Israel
    - 1. Also evaluated to see whether they are allowed to enter the millennial kingdom.
    - 2. This judgment is described in Matthew 25:1-11, in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Saved Israelites (the wise) are allowed in, whereas unsaved Israelites (the foolish) are refused entrance into the kingdom, and cast into hell.
  - iii. The resurrection and rewarding of Old Testament saints and Tribulation martyrs (Rev. 20:4-6; Dan. 12:2, 13; Rev. 6:9).
  - iv. The binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3). Cast into the Abyss and completely incapacitated for 1000 years.
  - v. The actual establishing of the Messianic kingdom.

## **F. The Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ**

- a. The great unconditional covenants will be fulfilled in their entirety (Abrahamic, Davidic, and New). "Every promise made by God will be accomplished, and Israel in particular and Gentiles in general will enjoy the blessings of Christ's rule" (Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecies*, 151).
- b. Will be characterized by righteousness, peace, joy, ecological renewal, unprecedented prosperity, long life, absence of disease, rapid increase of population, vegetarian animals, etc.

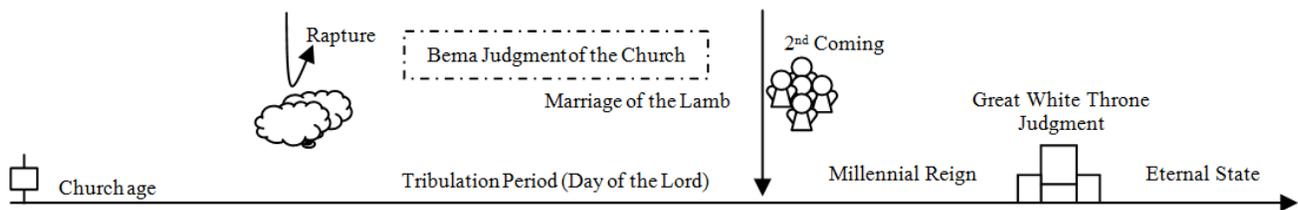
- c. At the beginning, only believers will inhabit the kingdom, though some children born in the kingdom will rebel against Christ's rule (Rev. 20:7-10).

## G. The Final Judgments

- a. After the millennial kingdom and before the final eternal kingdom begins, three judgments will take place (Rev. 20: 7-15; 1 Cor. 6:3).
  - i. The final judgment of Satan and fallen angels
  - ii. The Great White Throne Judgment of all unbelievers.
  - iii. The judgment of the heavens and the earth. Fire destroys the old heavens and the earth in preparation for the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:7-10).

## H. The Eternal State

- a. God rules over the new heaven and new earth, with our existence being on the new earth (Rev. 21-22).



## III. The Rapture of the Church

### A. The Meaning of the Term “rapture”

The term *rapture* is derived from the Latin verb *rapere*, which means “to transport from one place to another”. The term is used in the Latin Vulgate version of the New Testament in [1 Thess. 4:17](#) and is translated there “caught up.”

### B. The Contrasts Between the Rapture and the Second Coming

1. Translation of all believers vs. no translation
2. Translated believers go to heaven vs. translated believers return to earth
3. Earth not judged vs. earth judged and righteousness established
4. Imminent vs. follows specific predicted signs (i.e. tribulation)
5. Not in Old Testament vs. predicted often in OT
6. Believers only vs. affects all men
7. Before the day of wrath vs. concluding the day of wrath
8. No reference to Satan vs. Satan bound

## C. The Various Theories of the Rapture

### 1. The Partial Rapture Theory

Only believers who are watching and waiting for the Lord will be raptured at various times before and during the seven-year Tribulation. Those who are raptured are spiritually mature saints, both dead and living.

Problems:

1. Believers experience God's wrath for sin which undermines doctrine of grace
2. This divides the body of Christ.
3. 1 Thessalonians 5 comforts that this will not happen. Rapture happens "together"

### 2. The Mid-Tribulational Rapture Theory

The church is raptured in the middle of the tribulation period, prior to the Great Tribulation.

Problems:

1. Destroys the doctrine of immanency
2. The whole seven years is described as a time of God's wrath

### 3. The Post-Tribulational Rapture Theory

The church will be raptured at the second coming of Christ, which will occur at the end of the Tribulation.

Problems:

1. Destroys the doctrine of immanency
2. Leaves unexplained how the millennium is populated with believers in physical state

### 4. The Pre-Tribulational Rapture Theory

Jesus will first come for His saints, and then come with His saints. The rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation begins.

## D. The Biblical Support for the Rapture

### 1. The Rapture in the Old Testament

*Isaiah 26:19-21 Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your*

*doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.*

## 2. The Rapture in the Gospels

*John 14:1-3 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

## 3. The Rapture in Paul’s epistles

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 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. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 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. 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. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Note: The trumpet of the rapture: In the Old Testament the trumpet was used for two purposes 1) to summon to battle and 2) to call to worship. For the angels this trumpet is a summons to battle; for the believer this trumpet is a call to worship. (cf. [Num. 10:4](#))

Also note that Paul changes topics beginning in [1 Thessalonians 5](#). This is not a passage that describes the rapture, but the tribulation and the second coming.

*2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the*

*Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

*Titus 2:13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*

*1 Corinthians 15:51-58 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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 shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

Note: The term "mystery" refers to something that was previously unknown, but now is revealed. Resurrection of the body was not "mystery" as it was clearly taught in the Old Testament ([Job 19:25](#); [Isa. 26:19](#); [Dan 12:2](#)). But the Old Testament did not reveal that a number of people would go into God's presence without experiencing death. That is why the truth that "we shall not all sleep" is a mystery.

#### 4. The Rapture in Revelation

*Revelation 3:10-11 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*

**\*\***The argument from silence in Revelation is particularly powerful. In chapters 1-3, the church is mentioned by name 18 times. The church does not appear again by name or reference from chapters 4 – 21 which cover the tribulation and the millennial reign.

## E. The arguments supporting a pre-tribulational rapture of the church

### 1. The doctrine of immanency

*James 5:7-9 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

*Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.*

*Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

The hope of the return of Christ to take the saints to heaven is presented in [John 14](#) as an imminent hope. There is no teaching of an intervening event. On this basis the disciples are exhorted to take comfort. This is contrasted with the counsel of Jesus to those living in the tribulation to flee from persecutors ([Matt. 24:15-22](#)). The imminent return of Jesus is the expectation that believers are encouraged to wait for in [1 Thess. 1:10](#) and [Titus 2:13](#). The call to look for Jesus' return loses its significance if the tribulation must occur first. The immanent return is the impetus for believers to purify themselves in [1 John 3:1-3](#).

The saints at Thessalonica had a clear view of the immanent return of Jesus as seen by their concern that those who died may miss out on the blessings of His return. This same expectation of Christ's immanent return is witnessed in many of the church fathers, for instance, in the Didache (circa 120 A.D.) Christians are exhorted, "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." (cf. Ante-Nicene Fathers, VII, 382)

### 2. God's plan for the church

*Revelation 6:17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?*

*1 Thessalonians 1:10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*

Note: it is characteristic of God's working to release his people before divine judgment is poured out on the world rather than to include them in it. (cf. Noah, Lot, Rahab, Passover, etc.)

### 3. The nature of the tribulation

The tribulation concerns Israel, not the church. The tribulation is a prelude to Israel's restoration in the millennial kingdom. (cf. [Deut. 4:29-30](#); [Jer. 30:4-11](#)) This is why none of the New Testament passages on the tribulation mentions the church (cf. [Matt. 13, 24](#); [1 Thess. 5](#); [2 Thess. 2](#); [Rev 4-18](#))

### 4. The specific promises of God to His church

*Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.*

Note: The promise is to keep the saints from the hour of trial, not just from trial. The phrase "keep you from" is used only one other place in the New Testament in [John 17:15](#) where Jesus prayed that believers would be kept from the evil one.

### 5. The removal of the Holy Spirit

In [2 Thessalonians 2](#) the Bible sets up an important chronological sequence. Paul says the Day of the Lord cannot come until certain things happen. One is that the man of sin must be revealed first. But the man of sin cannot be revealed until something and someone is taken out of the way. This restrainer must be one who is stronger than Satan himself.

### 6. The strong emphasis upon the church in Revelation 1-3 and the absence of the church in Revelation 4-18 during the vision of the Tribulation period

## IV. The Description of the Second Coming of Jesus

### A. The return of Christ occurs after the tribulation

*Matthew 24:21-23 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it.*

*Matthew 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

(This same order appears in [Mark 13:24-26](#), [Luke 21:25-27](#), and [Rev. 6-19](#))

### B. The return of Christ is personal and bodily

*Acts 1:11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

*Zechariah 14:4 On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.*

### C. The return of Christ is visible and glorious

*Matthew 24:27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

*Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.*

*Revelation 19:11-12 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.*

#### **D. The return of Christ is geographical**

*Romans 11:26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"*

*Zechariah 14:1-4 Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.*

#### **E. The return of Christ is accompanied by the angels and the saints**

*Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.*

*Jude 14-15 It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."*

*1 Thessalonians 3:13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

(cf. [Rev. 19:7-21](#))