

Loris First Baptist Church
“52 Vital Doctrines of The Bible”

Doctrine #12: “God the Son: His Coming for His Saints”

Note: Based on pages 76-81 of the book “Major Bible Themes” by Lewis Sperry Chaffer.

Some Important Facts:

1. The doctrine of Jesus’ return is one of the most important themes of unfulfilled prophecy.
2. We should be reminded that prophecy is God’s prewritten history and is therefore as credible as other parts of Scripture.
3. Almost one-fourth of the Bible was in the form of prediction when it was written.
4. Much has been fulfilled, and in every case its fulfillment has been the most literal realization of all that was prophesied.
5. As announced many centuries before the birth of Christ, He, when He came, was of the tribe of Judah, a son of Abraham, a son of David, born of a virgin in Bethlehem. In like manner, the explicit details of His death foretold in Psalm 22, a thousand years before, were precisely fulfilled.

Unfulfilled Prophecy

1. The Word of God also presents much prophecy which at the present time is unfulfilled, and it is reasonable as well as honoring to God to believe that it will be fulfilled in the same faithfulness which has characterized all His works to the present hour.
2. The fact that Christ is to return to this earth as He went—“this same Jesus,” in His resurrection body, and on the clouds of heaven (Acts 1:11)—is so clearly and extensively taught in the prophetic Scripture that this truth has been included in all the great creeds of Christendom. However, the doctrine of the return of Christ demands most careful and discriminating consideration.
3. In considering prophecy as it relates to the future coming of Jesus Christ, many Bible students distinguish Christ coming for His church, referring to the rapture (the catching up of the saints to heaven), from His coming with His saints to set up His kingdom (His formal second coming to the earth) to reign for a thousand years.
4. Between these two events many important events are predicted such as:
 - a. The emergence of a world (i.e. “universal” and “ecumenical”) church
 - b. The formation of a world government with a world dictator (i.e. “The Antichrist”)

- c. A gigantic world war which will be underway at the time Christ comes to set up His kingdom.
5. Christ coming for His church is the first event in this series, if the prophecies are interpreted literally.
 6. The end-time events, which occur after the rapture of the church, are given in many prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments, the truth that Christ would come for His church first was not revealed in the Old Testament and is distinctly a New Testament revelation.

Prophecies of the Rapture

1. The first revelation that Christ would come for His saints before end-time events were fulfilled was given to the disciples in the Upper Room the night before Christ's crucifixion:

John 14:2-3 *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."*

2. The disciples were totally unprepared for this prophecy
 - a. Even though Jesus had already instructed them previously concerning the glorious return of Christ to set up His kingdom:

Matthew 24:26-31 *"So if anyone tells you, 'There He is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here He is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn WHEN THEY SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN, WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."*

- b. Up to this time they had had no indication that Christ would come first to take them from earth to heaven and by this means remove them from the earth during the time of trouble which characterizes the end of the age.
 - c. In John 14 it is clear that the Father's house refers to heaven; that Christ was leaving them to prepare a place for His disciples there. He promises that, having prepared a place, He would come again to receive them. The implication is that His purpose is to take them from earth to the Father's house in heaven.

3. This preliminary announcement is given further detail by the Apostle Paul.

- a. In writing to the Thessalonians concerning their questions of the relationship of the resurrection of the saints and Christ's coming for saints living on earth, Paul gives the details of this important future event:

1Thessalonians 3:16-17 *"FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."*

4. The order of events for Christ coming for His saints begins with the Lord leaving His throne in heaven and descending to the air above the earth.

- a. He will give a shout—literally, “a shout of command.”
- b. This will be accompanied by the triumphant voice of the archangel Michael and the sounding of the trump of God.
- c. In obedience to the command of Christ, Christians who have died will be raised from the dead.

John 5:28-29 *"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—THOSE WHO HAVE DONE WHAT IS GOOD WILL RISE TO LIFE, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."*

- d. The souls of the previously dead will accompany Christ from heaven

1Thessalonians 4:14 *"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God WILL BRING WITH JESUS THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN HIM."*

- e. A moment after the dead in Christ are raised, living Christians *"shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."* (1Thess 4:17)
- f. In this manner the entire church will be removed from the scene of earth and will fulfill the promise of John 14 of being with Christ in the Father's house in heaven.

5. Further details are given by Paul in his letter to the Corinthian Christians:

1 Corinthians 15:51-56 *"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and WE WILL BE CHANGED. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"*

- a. Here the truth of Christ's coming for His church is declared to be “a mystery,” that is, a truth not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New Testament:

Romans 16:25-26 “Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith...”

Colossians 1:26 “...THE MYSTERY THAT HAS BEEN KEPT HIDDEN for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people.”

- b. In contrast to the truth of Christ coming to the earth to set up His kingdom, which is revealed in the Old Testament, the rapture is revealed only in the New Testament.
- c. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, indicates that the event will take place in a moment of time, “in the twinkling of an eye,” that the resurrection bodies of the dead which will be raised will be incorruptible, that is, will not grow old and will be immortal, not subject to death:

1 Corinthians 15:53 “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

6. It is clear from Scripture that our new bodies will also be sinless:

Ephesians 5:27 “...and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, BUT HOLY AND BLAMELESS.”

Philippians 3:20-21 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies SO THAT THEY WILL BE LIKE HIS GLORIOUS BODY.”

- a. The bodies of those in the graves as well as those living on earth are not suited for heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:50 “I declare to you, brothers, THAT FLESH AND BLOOD CAN NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

- b. That is why Paul declares “we shall all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51).

7. In contrast with the resurrection and rapture of the church, the resurrection of saints who died before Pentecost, or who die after the rapture, is apparently delayed until the time of Christ’s coming to set up His kingdom

Daniel 12:1-2 “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. THERE WILL BE A TIME OF DISTRESS such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Revelation 20:4 *"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. THEY CAME TO LIFE AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST A THOUSAND YEARS."*

8. The wicked dead, however, are not raised until after the thousand year reign of Christ

Revelation 20:5 *"The rest of the dead (i.e. "non-believers") did not come to life until the thousand years were ended..."*

Revelation 20:12-13 *"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and DEATH AND HADES GAVE UP THE DEAD THAT WERE IN THEM, and each person was judged according to what they had done."*

Contrasts Between Christ Coming for His Saints and His Coming With His Saints

1. There are two main views amongst biblical scholars about when the "rapture" of Christian believers (i.e. "the church) takes place.
 - a. The view that the rapture occurs "before" end-time events is called the pre-tribulational view
 - b. The view that the rapture occurs "at the very end" of end-time events is called the post-tribulational view (which makes Christ's coming for His saints and with His saints one event).
2. The question of which of these two views is right depends on how literally prophecy is interpreted.

A number of differences can be seen between the two events:

- a. *Christ coming for His saints to take them to the Father's house in heaven is obviously a movement from earth to heaven, while His coming with His saints is a movement from heaven to the earth when Christ returns to the Mount of Olives and sets up His kingdom.*
- b. *At the rapture, living saints are translated (i.e. "changed from a sinful natural body to a sinless spiritual body so they can live in heaven"), while no saints are mentioned as being translated in connection with the second coming of Christ to the earth.*
- c. *At the rapture, the saints go to heaven, while at the second coming saints remain in the earth without experiencing translation.*
- d. *At the rapture, the world is unchanged and unjudged and continues in sin, while at the second coming the world is judged and righteousness is established in the earth.*

- e. *The rapture of the church is a deliverance from the day of wrath which follows, while the second coming is a deliverance of those who have believed in Christ during the time of trouble and have survived the tribulation period.*
 - f. *The rapture is always described as an event which is imminent, that is, could occur at any moment, while the second coming of Christ to the earth is preceded by many preceding signs and events.*
 - g. *The rapture of the saints is a truth revealed only in the New Testament while Christ's second coming to the earth with events preceding and following is a prominent doctrine of both testaments.*
 - h. *The rapture relates only to those who are saved, while the second coming of Christ to the earth deals with both saved and unsaved.*
 - i. *At the rapture Satan is not bound but is very active in the period which follows, while at the second coming Satan is bound and rendered inactive.*
 - j. *As presented in the New Testament, no unfulfilled prophecy is given as standing between the church and the time of its rapture, which it is presented as an imminent event, while many signs must be fulfilled before Christ's second coming to set up His kingdom.*
 - k. *Concerning the resurrection of saints in relation to Christ coming to set up His kingdom in both the Old and New Testaments, no mention is ever made of the translation of living saints at the same time. In fact, such a doctrine would be impossible as the living saints need to retain their natural bodies in order to function in the millennial kingdom.*
 - l. *In the sequence of events describing the second coming of Christ to the earth, there is no adequate place for an event like the rapture. According to Matthew 25:31-46, believers and unbelievers are still intermingled at the time of this judgment, which comes after Christ's coming to the earth, and it is obvious that no rapture or separation of the saved from the unsaved has taken place in the descent of Christ from heaven to the earth.*
 - m. *A study of the doctrine of Christ's coming to set up His kingdom with the events which precede and follow make clear that these events do not relate to the church but rather to Israel and Gentile believers and unbelievers. This will be explained in the next chapter.*
2. The truth of the imminent coming of Christ for His church is a very practical truth taught by Paul to churches like those in Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 1:10 "...to wait FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivers us FROM THE WRATH TO COME."

NOTE: Their hope was not survival “through” the tribulation, but deliverance “from” the wrath of God which would be poured out upon the earth:

1 Thessalonians 5:9 “For God DID NOT APPOINT US TO SUFFER WRATH but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Revelation 3:10 “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I WILL ALSO KEEP YOU FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.”

3. As presented in the New Testament, the rapture is:

a. A comforting hope

John 14:1-3 “DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME BACK AND TAKE YOU TO BE WITH ME that you also may be where I am.”

1 Thessalonians 4:18 “Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

b. A purifying hope

1 John 3:1-3 “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ALL WHO HAVE THIS HOPE IN HIM PURIFY THEMSELVES, JUST AS HE IS PURE.”

c. A blessed or happy expectation

Titus 2:13 “...while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...”

Conclusion

While the world will not see Christ until His second coming to set up His kingdom, **Christians will see Christ in His glory at the time of the rapture** and to them it will be “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Note: For a detailed study of the doctrine of the rapture see *The Rapture Question* by Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957).

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Doctrine # 12 God the Son: His Coming For His Saints

1. Read Pages 1-7 from the Doctrine#12 Study Guide by next Wednesday.

2. Answer the following Questions about “God the Son” as you read:

a. The Facts of the Second Coming of Christ:

- 1) True or False. Because the “prophecies” of Scripture are the writers’ best guesses, they are not as “credible” as the rest of Scripture and should be read with caution. (page 1, top)

- 2) About how much of the Bible was in the form of “prediction” (i.e. “prophecies”) when it was written? (page 1, top)

- 3) True or False. All of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled, even if some of them were not fulfilled “exactly” as they were “literally” written. (page 1, top)

b. Unfulfilled Prophecy

- 1) What did the angels tell Jesus’ disciples when they were watching Him “ascend” into heaven? (Acts 1:11b)

- 2) In considering prophecy as it relates to the future coming of Jesus Christ, many bible students distinguish what two separate “returns” of Christ? (page 1, bottom)

- 3) Between the “rapture” of the church and Christ’s coming to earth to set up His millennial kingdom, what are at least three things that occur on this earth (i.e. during the “tribulation period”)?
(page 1, bottom and page 2, top)

- 4) If prophecies about Christ’s second coming are taken “literally”, what is the FIRST EVENT that takes place regarding His second coming? (page 2, top)

- 5) True or False. The revelation of Christ coming for His church before He comes to set up His kingdom on earth (separated by a 7 year tribulation period) was not revealed in the Old Testament. It is strictly a New Testament prophecy. (page 2, top)

c. Prophecies of the Rapture

- 1) Where and when was the first revelation given by Christ that He would come for His saints “before” all the end-time events would be fulfilled? (page 2, middle; see also John 14:2-3)

- 2) According to John 14:2-3, what did Jesus promise He would do after He had “prepared a place for His disciples in heaven”?

- 3) Read Matthew 24:26-31. What will “all” the peoples of the earth see...and what will they “do” when they see it? (Matthew 24:30)

- 4) According to John 14:2-3, when Jesus comes back for His disciples, where does He say (by implication) that He is taking them? (page 2, bottom)

- 5) According to the revelation given to the Apostle Paul, who will come down from heaven “with a loud command” to raise the dead and call up His believers? (1Thessalonians 4:16)

- 6) What does the Apostle Paul say will happen to believers, who are “still alive”, at Christ’s second coming? (1Thessalonians 4:17)

- 7) What happens immediately “before” living believers are “taken up” to be with the Lord at His second coming? (1Thessalonians 4:14-16)

- 8) According to 1Corinthians 15:51-56, “we” (i.e. believers) will not all “sleep” (i.e. “die” before the Lord comes), but we will all be “changed”. In what way are believers going to be “changed” when the Lord comes for His church? (1Corinthians 15:53)

- 9) Why is the truth of Christ coming for His church declared to be a “mystery” in 1Corinthians 15:51? (page 4, top)

- 10) True or False. Throughout the Old Testament, the main prophecy that was proclaimed was about the Christ returning to the earth to set up His kingdom on earth. In the New Testament, now that a new thing called the “church” (body of “believers” made up of both Jews and Gentiles) was established upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the “rapture” of the church was added to Christ’s return prior to His establishing His kingdom. (page 4, top)

- 11) How long will it take for believers to be “raptured” and “changed” (to having immortal bodies) when Christ comes for His church? (1Corinthians 15:52)

- 12) According to Ephesians 5:27, what are the main characteristics of a believers new “resurrected” body?

- 13) According to Philippians 3:21, the Lord Jesus Christ is going to “transform” believers’ “lowly” (i.e. sinful) bodies into the “likeness” of what?

- 14) Why must the bodies of all believers (those dead and those alive) be changed at the coming of the Lord “before” we can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? (1Corinthians 15:50)

- 15) In contrast with the “resurrection” and “rapture” of the church, when does Scripture seem to say that the bodies of saints will be resurrected who died “before” Pentecost?
(page 4, bottom; see also Daniel 12:1-2)

- 16) According to Revelation 20:4, after the resurrection of all saints from the dead, what happens when they come to “life” (i.e. their souls are united with their new sinless bodies)?

- 17) When will the bodies of the “wicked” dead be risen from the dead?
(page 5, top; see Revelation 20:5, 12-13)

d. Contrasts Between Christ Coming “For” His Saints and His Coming “With” His Saints

- 1) What is the view of bible scholars called for those who believe the rapture occurs “before” the “end-time” events (i.e. tribulation period)? (page 5, middle)

- 2) What is the view of bible scholars called for those who believe the rapture occurs “at the very end” of the “end-time” events (i.e. tribulation period)? (page 5, middle)

- 3) At the rapture, Scripture reveals that saints on earth are “translated” and are going “where”, while at the second coming of Christ saints “remain” where and are not translated? (page 5, bottom, “c”)

- 4) What is a major difference between the “rapture” and Christ’s “second coming” as it relates to timing? (page 6, “f”)

- 5) What are some differences between the “rapture” and Christ’s “second coming” as it relates to Satan? (page 6, “i”)

- 6) According to 1Thessalonians 1:10, Jesus will do what for the living “believers” just before He returns?

- 7) According to 1Thessalonians 5:9, what did God not “appoint” for “believers” in Christ?

- 8) According to Revelation 3:10, believers will be kept “from” what before Christ comes to set up His kingdom?

- 9) As presented in the New Testament, the rapture should be viewed by believers in what “3” ways? (page 7, middle-bottom; see also John 14:1-3; 1Thessalonians 4:18; 1John 3:1-3; Titus 2:13)