

The Historical Record

Many of the contemporary writers who attack imminency try to promote the idea that this doctrine was recently dreamed up by men who were ignorant of the true meaning of Scripture.

One detractor states, "This frenzy [imminency] continues to survive today because of modern misconceptions about the purpose of these prophetic events and the time frame for their occurrence."

Post-trib believers are the most vocal in their claim that the concepts of imminency and the pre-trib rapture only date back to the early 1800s. For several years, their charges went unanswered, but recently a number of men have dusted off old manuscripts and found several early Church fathers who were clearly looking for an imminent return of the Lord Jesus.

"All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins" (Pseudo-Ephraem (374-627 AD)).

The First Epistle of Clement, 23 (written around 96 A.D. by Clement, a prominent leader of the church at Rome who knew some of the apostles personally and probably is the Clement referred to in Phil. 4:3): "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.'"

As early as 70 - 180 AD, The Didache, chapter 16, section 1, says, "Be vigilant over your life; let your lamps not be extinguished, or your loins ungirded, but be prepared, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come."

"But what a spectacle is that fast-approaching advent of our Lord, now owned by

all, now highly exalted, now a triumphant One!" (Tertullian 155 - 245 AD).

John Calvin, the reformer at Geneva during the 1500s and founder of the Presbyterian Church, made the following statements in some of his commentaries on books of the Bible: *"Be prepared to expect Him every day, or rather every moment." "As He has promised that He will return to us, we ought to hold ourselves prepared, at every moment to receive Him." "Today we must be alert to grasp the imminent return of Christ."* Commenting on 1 Thessalonians 4, the "Rapture passage," Calvin said that Paul *"means by this to arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it, nay more, to hold all believers in suspense, that they may not promise themselves some particular time . . . that believers might be prepared at all times."*

The Westminster Confession, written by the Puritans of England during the 1600s, declared that men should *"shake off all carnal security and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come."*

I'm not much of a fan of relying on what scholarly men write about the Bible. I agree with the quotes I just cited, but I don't really need a bunch of dead guys to tell me what is truth. I have over a dozen copies of the Good Book lying around the house, and I have the ability to read and understand each of them for myself.

History has proven that mankind is a dreadful biblical guide. The apostasy that swept over the Church caused a lack of prophecy commentary from about 450 AD until the 1600s. People stopped thinking for themselves. Their interpretation of the Bible became what the institutional church spoon-fed them.

Premillennialism largely disappeared after it was condemned as heretical by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. It wasn't until the reform movement of the early seventeenth century that we see a rebound in the number of statements that reflect the pretribulational view.

What Is Imminency?

In doing some research on the doctrine of imminency, I noticed few people take the time to actually define what prophetic imminency means. First, let us look at the general definition of the key word "imminent": "The quality or condition of being about to occur."

Imminency, as it relates to Bible prophecy, simply means that the return of Jesus Christ for the Church can happen at any moment. No warning signs will indicate a short-term countdown. We as Christians remain on alert 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If a wife knows her husband normally gets home from work shortly after 4:00 PM, she knows that beginning at 4:00 PM, his arrival is imminent. If the woman knows her husband has to work overtime, the imminency of his 4:00 PM return is then in doubt.

The only way for the rapture to be truly imminent is to have it transpire before the tribulation. If the Church were required to wait until after the manifestation of certain events, then there would be no doctrine of imminency.

The Granddaddy Of Proofs

The pretribulation rapture is the only view that allows for the rapture to be imminent in its timing. All the other views require a number of prophetic occurrences to take place before the rapture can be declared imminent. To be looking for the imminent return of Christ, you have to believe in a pre-trib rapture.

Jesus repeatedly said that His return for the Church would be a surprise. The Lord even went beyond that by saying He would return "as a thief" when believers generally won't be expecting Him to come for them.

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:42-46 KJV).

"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13).

"And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7).

Because we have no way to refute the fact that we will not know the timing of our Lord's return, the tribulation is a barrier to the rapture. No wonder the late John Walvoord called imminency "the heart of Pretribulationism."

This type of "any-moment" language doesn't fit a post-trib rapture. If Jesus were prevented from coming until after the battle of Magog, the rise of Antichrist, and the Mark of the Beast, we would have no need to watch for Him before the tribulation.

If the Church were required to go through the seven-year tribulation, you would expect the New Testament writers to have warned us to be prepared for trying times. On the contrary, the New Testament writers repeatedly tell the Church to be comforted by the "coming of the Lord" (1 Thes 4:18). The word "comfort" alone strongly implies the rapture will take place before the tribulation.

Some anti-imminency folks try to solve the problem they have with the rapture's any-moment occurrence by redefining it as merely indicating that Christ will return soon. The speed of Christ's advent is not the issue. If an event is required to take place before the Lord can return, there is no need to remain watchful.

If a person should make it through the tribulation until the point when the mid-trib, pre-trib, and post-trib folks expect the rapture to occur, it would then become possible for the rapture to be classified as "imminent." However, once you solve the problem of imminency, you create another one regarding the restrictions against knowing the timing of the rapture.

Because the duration of the tribulation is already known, post-tribbers have the hardest time dealing with the rapture's timing. Some of them have tried to suggest that believers who make it through the tribulation will lazily lose track of the nearness of Christ's second coming.

If a Christian has been lucky enough to survive a host of apocalyptic calamities and elude the Antichrist's secret police for at least 3 1/2 years, I cannot imagine that he would be oblivious to the nearness of the Lord's return at the 7-year mark. If I were reduced to the point of having to hide in a forest and forage through dead tree bark to find beetles and grubs to sustain myself, I'm certain my every thought would be focused on the Lord's return.

Maranatha

One of the strongest cases one can make for the early Church expecting an imminent return of Christ is to note their use of the word *maranatha*, which was used as a greeting in those days. When believers gathered or parted, they didn't say "hello" or "goodbye"; they would say "*Maranatha!*"

I've encountered some writings that say *Maranatha* is Hebrew and Greek, but it is actually an Aramaic expression. In fact, it is made up of three Aramaic words: *Mar*, which means "Lord"; *ana*, which means "our"; and *tha*, which means "come."

So when you put it together, *maranatha* means "Our Lord, come." It perfectly conveys the concept that the Lord could come at any moment. *Maranatha* is used once in the Bible by Paul as part of a curse. In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul said, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *Anathema. Maranatha.*" The word "*anathema*" means

“banned,” so Paul was saying, “Let him be banned from our Lord's coming.”

The interesting thing about *maranatha* is that it comes in the form of a petition. When a Christian in the early Church would make this statement, he was actually petitioning the Lord to come. This obviously implies the belief that it was possible for Jesus to answer the appeal.

If members of the first-century Church believed that certain events needed to take place before the Savior could return, they would have been silly to greet each other with “*maranatha*.” They lived nearly 2,000 years ago, and yet they seem to have had a deeper awareness of imminency than many of today's Christians.

16 Proofs of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Proof #1: Revelation 19:11-21 doesn't mention a resurrection.

The rapture is a resurrection of those "in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Isn't it a little bit odd that in Rev. 19:11-21, which is the clearest picture of the second coming of Christ, there is no mention of a resurrection? The rapture will be the biggest event since the resurrection of Jesus where hundreds of millions of Christians will be resurrected and translated, yet there isn't any mention here. Don't you think it deserves at least one verse? The rapture isn't mentioned because it doesn't happen at the second coming.

Proof #2: Zechariah 14:1-15 doesn't mention a resurrection.

This is an Old Testament picture of Jesus returning to earth at the second coming. Again, no mention of a resurrection. [L T L]
[SEP#SEP]

Proof #3: Two different pictures are painted.

In the Old Testament, there were two different pictures painted of the Messiah—one suffering (Isa. 53:2-10, Ps. 22:6-8, 11-18) and one reigning as King (Ps. 2:6-12, Zech. 14:9,16). As we look back on these scriptures, we see they predicted two separate comings of the Messiah—the 1st coming as a suffering Messiah and the 2nd coming (still future) as a reigning King.

In the New Testament, we have another picture added. Again, we have two pictures painted which don't look the same. These two different descriptions of Jesus' coming point to two separate events we call "the rapture" and "the second coming."

Proof #4: The Known Day and the Unknown Day

Concerning the return of Jesus, the Bible presents a day we can't know and a day we can know. Matthew 25:13 says Jesus will return at an unknown time, while Revelation

12:6 says the Jews will have to wait 1,260 days for the Lord to return. The 1,260 days begins when the Antichrist stands in the Temple and declares himself to be God (Matt. 24:15-21, 2 Thess. 2:4) This event will take place at the mid-point of the seven year Tribulation (Dan 9:27). The Antichrist has authority to rule for 42 months, which is 1,260 days (Rev. 13:4) and will be destroyed by Jesus at His second coming (Rev. 19:20, 2 Thess. 2:8). The known and unknown days must happen at different times, meaning they are two separate events.<sup>[L T L]
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Proof #5: A door open in heaven (Revelation 4:1)

The door in heaven is opened to let John into heaven. We believe John's call into heaven is prophetic of the church being caught up at the rapture (see proof #6). In Revelation 19:11, heaven is opened again, this time to let the armies which are already in heaven out. This is the Church, which has been raptured at a previous time, following Jesus out of heaven at the second coming.<sup>[L T L]
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Proof #6: "Come up here." (Revelation 4:1)

A voice called for the apostle John to "Come up here," and immediately he was in heaven. This could be a prophetic reference to the rapture of the Church. The words "Come up here" are spoken to the two witnesses who are killed in the middle of the Tribulation, who are resurrected and ascend into heaven (Rev. 11:12). Therefore, the phrase "Come up here" could mean the church is raptured in Rev. 4:1. The word "church" is mentioned 22 times in Rev. 1-3, but is not mentioned again until Rev. 22:17.<sup>[L T L]
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Proof #7: The 24 elders have their crowns.

After John is called up into heaven, he sees the 24 elders with their crowns (Rev. 4:4-10). We know that Christians will receive their rewards (crowns) at the rapture (2 Tim. 4:8, 1 Pet. 5:4). We will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14). The elders couldn't receive their crowns unless the resurrection (rapture) has taken

place. [L T L]
[SEP SEP]

Proof #8 Holy ones are already with Jesus in heaven (Zech. 14:5, Rev. 19:14)

The armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, follow Jesus out of heaven at His second coming (Rev. 19:14, Zech. 14:5, Col. 3:4). These are not angels because Rev. 19:8 tells us the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. In order to come out of heaven we first have to go in, indicating a previous rapture. [L T L]
[SEP SEP]

Proof #9: Kept from the hour of testing (Rev. 3:10)

Revelation 3:10 says we will be kept out of the hour of testing which will come upon the whole earth (the Tribulation). Some have wrongly believed "keep" means to keep through, or protect through the Tribulation. Suppose you approach a high voltage area with a sign that says, "Keep Out." Does that mean you can enter and be protected? No, it means you are forbidden from entering the area. But this verse also says He will keep us from the hour of testing. It is not just the testing, but the time period. If a student is excused from a test, he still may have to sit in the class while others take the test. But if he is excused from the hour of testing, he can go home. The Church will be called home before the hour of testing.

Proof #10: Angels don't resurrect people when they gather them for judgment.

When the angels are sent forth to gather the elect at the second coming (Matt. 24:29-31), some have wrongly interpreted this as the rapture. There is one huge problem with this interpretation. If we are resurrected at this time, why would we need angels to gather us? In the resurrection, we will be like the angels (Matt. 22:30), able to travel in the air at will. Obviously, these people who are gathered are not resurrected, therefore it can't be the rapture. No one would claim the wicked are raptured at this time, yet Matthew 13:39-41, 49 says the angels will not only gather the elect, but also the wicked. This gathering is not a resurrection. [L T L]
[SEP SEP]

Proof #11: Both the wicked and the righteous can't be taken first.

First Thessalonians 4:13-17 says the righteous are taken and the wicked are left behind. Matthew 13:30, 49 says the wicked are taken first and righteous are left behind. This points to two separate events, the rapture and the second coming. [L T L] [SEP SEP]

Proof #12: Jesus returns from the wedding.

When Jesus returns to earth at the second coming, He will return from a wedding (Luke 12:36). At the rapture, Jesus is married to His bride, the Church. After the wedding, He will return to earth. [L T L] [SEP SEP]

Proof #13: Jesus will receive us to Himself, not us to receive Him (John 14:2-3).

Jesus said He would prepare a place for the Church in heaven, then He would come again to receive us to Himself. Why would Jesus prepare a place for us in heaven and then not take us there? At the rapture, He will come to receive us to Himself, "that where I am (heaven), there you may be also." If the rapture occurred at the same time as the second coming, we would go up to the clouds and then immediately come back to earth. That would contradict John 14:2-3. [L T L] [SEP SEP]

Proof #14: The one who restrains is taken out of the way.

In 2 Thess. 2:6-7, Paul says "the one who restrains will be taken out of the way" before the Antichrist can be revealed. We believe this refers to the rapture because the Church is clearly the biggest obstacle to the Antichrist becoming a world ruler. [L T L] [SEP SEP]

Proof #15: The separation of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46)

If the rapture occurred at the second coming, why would the sheep and the goats need to be separated immediately after the second coming? A rapture at the second coming would have already separated the sheep and the goats. With a Pre-Tribulation rapture, the people saved after the rapture will need to be separated after the second coming. [L T L] [SEP SEP]

Proof #16: Who will populate the Millennium?

If the rapture occurs at the second coming and the wicked are cast into hell at that time, who will be left to populate the millennium? Only people in their natural (non-resurrected) bodies will be able to have children (Matt. 22:30). With a Pre-Tribulation rapture, the people saved after the rapture who are alive at the second coming will populate the earth during the Millennium.

The Rapture vs. The Glorious Appearing

There are many questions asked concerning the difference between the Rapture and the Glorious Appearing of Jesus Christ. To demonstrate the differences between the two, I've prepared the following questions with scriptural references to each.

1. Where is the Church found in each event?

- At the Rapture, Jesus comes FOR His Church. (John 14:1-3, 1 Thess 4:14-17)
- At the Glorious Appearing, Jesus comes WITH His Church. (Zech 14:5, Col 3:4, Jude 14, Rev 19:14)

2. Where does Jesus appear in each event?

- At the Rapture, Christians are caught up to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess 4:13-18)
- At the Glorious Appearing, Jesus' feet touch the earth (Zech 14:4, Rev:19:11-21)

3. Who is taken and who is left behind?

- At the Rapture, Christians are taken first and unbelievers are left behind. (1 Thess 4:13-18)
- At the Glorious Appearing, the wicked are taken first, but the righteous (the tribulation saints) are left behind. (Matt 13:28-30)

4. What will Jesus do at each event?

- At the Rapture, Jesus will gather His Bride, the Church, unto Himself in preparation of the Marriage of the Lamb. (Rev. 19:6-9)
- At the Glorious Appearing, Jesus will execute judgment on the earth and establish His Kingdom. (Zech 14:3-4, Jude 14-15, Rev 19:11-21)

5. When does the Marriage of the Lamb take place?

- The Marriage of the Lamb takes place in Heaven AFTER the Rapture of the Church. (Revelation 19:6-9)
- War on earth comes AFTER the Marriage of the Lamb at the Glorious Appearing when the King of Kings and Lord of Lords lays the smackdown on evil! (Revelation 19:11-21)

6. How long will each event be?

- The Rapture will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (Blink. It's over!). (1 Cor 15:52)
- The Glorious Appearing will be a slow coming. Everyone will see Jesus coming with great power and great glory! (Zech 12:10, Matt 24:30, Rev 1:7)

7. Who will see Jesus at each event?

- At the Rapture, only those who are looking for Him (Christians) will see Him. (1 John 3:2, 1 Cor 15:52)
- At the Glorious Appearing, every eye will see Him and those who have rejected Him will wail. (Rev. 1:7)

8. Will Jesus shout?

- At the Rapture, Jesus will descend from Heaven with a shout (calling for the saints at the resurrection). (1 Thess 4:16)
- At the Glorious Appearing, no shout is mentioned, although the Lord does slay the wicked with the sword of His mouth. (Rev. 19:11-21)

9. Will there be a resurrection at each?

- At the Rapture, a resurrection will take place. (1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Cor 15:51-54)
- At the Glorious Appearing, there is no resurrection spoken of. (Zech. 12:10, Zech. 14:4-5, Rev 1:7, 19:11-21)

10. What about the timing of each event?

- The Rapture can happen at any time...maybe even now which is why we are to be WATCHING for the return of Jesus Christ! (Rev 3:3, 1 Thess 5:4-6)
- The Glorious Appearing will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation period. (Dan 9:24-27, Matt 24:29-30, 2 Thess 2:3-8)

11. What role will the angels of Heaven have?

- At the Rapture, no angels are sent to gather the Church.
- At the Glorious Appearing, angels will be sent to gather people together for judgment. (Matt 13:39, 41 & 49, Matt. 24:31, Matt. 25:31, 2 Thess 1:7-10)

12. What about the resurrected bodies?

- At the Rapture, those who died in Christ will return with Jesus to recover their resurrected bodies. (1 Thess 4:14-16)
- At the Glorious Appearing, Christians will return with Jesus already in their resurrected bodies riding on white horses. (Rev 19:11-21)

13. White horse for Jesus or no white horse for Jesus?

- At the Rapture, Jesus doesn't return riding a white horse.
- At the Glorious Appearing, Jesus will return riding a white horse. (Rev 19:11)

14. What is the message each event will bring for mankind?

- The Rapture will bring with it a message of hope and comfort. (1 Thess 4:18, Titus 2:13, 1 John 3:3)
- The Glorious Appearing will bring with it a message of judgment. (Joel 3:12-16, Mal 4:5, Rev 19:11-21)