

The Eschatological Dispensations

ESCHATOLOGY—the study of what will happen when all things are consummated at the end of history, particularly centering on the event known as the Second Coming of Christ ... “the study of last things.”¹

DOCTRINE OF THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

A. Definition.

1. While the Rapture is defined as the act of being transported, it is also defined as the state of being rapt or carried out of oneself. However, these definitions do not apply here. Rapture is used here in a technical theological sense for the resurrection of the royal family of God.
2. Since the Church, or royal family of God, is the first spiritual building to be completed, it is resurrected after our Lord. It is the second phase of the first resurrection following the resurrection of Christ.
3. Christ is resurrected, ascended, and seated at the right hand of the Father as part of the strategic victory of the angelic conflict.
4. This is known as our Lord’s battlefield royalty. This is His only royalty with no family. Therefore, God interrupted the Jewish Age with the Church Age to call out and provide a royal family of God.
5. Once the royal family of God is completed, the Church is resurrected as the body of Christ to become the bride of Christ.
6. The Church Age is that period of human history when the royal family of God is being formed on earth:

Ephesians 1:22 God the Father has subordinated all things under the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ; furthermore, God has appointed Jesus ruler over all thing to the Church,

v. 23 which is His body, the fullness [πλήρωμα (*plērōma*)] of Him Who has filled all winner-believers with all things. (EXT)

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling,

v. 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

¹ *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 413.



v. 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (NET)

Colossians 1:18 Jesus Christ is the head of the body [i.e., believers of the Church Age], the universal church, Who is the Beginning of the beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.

Colossians 1: 24 Now I, Paul, keep on rejoicing in my sufferings on behalf of you [the church] and keep on supplementing the kind of adversities experienced by Christ—in this body of mine on behalf of His body [the church]. (EXT)

7. When the royal family of God is completed, then the Rapture occurs:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the ἀρχάγγελος (*archángelos*): “archangel” [highest rank among the elect angels; the only two named are Michael and Gabriel²] Gabriel and with the trumpet of God. In fact, the dead in Christ shall rise first.

v. 17 And then we who are living and remain on earth shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord.

v. 18 Therefore, comfort each other with these doctrines regarding the exit resurrection of all Church-Age believers. (EXT) [also see; 1 Corinthians 15:51–58]

8. During the conclusion of the Jewish Age, the bride is prepared in heaven by receiving a resurrection body exactly like that of the Lord.
9. Then comes the collective Genuflection the resurrected Church’s acknowledgment of Christ. Next comes the Judgment Seat of Christ when all Church Age believers are evaluated and rewarded:

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil. (NET)

B. The Promise of the Rapture:

² This verse refers to events regarding the Rapture of Church-Age believers. This angelic order of battle will be the same as that at the First Advent before the shepherds. They were led by Michael, the “voice of the archangel,” because he is the Prince of Israel (Daniel 10:21; 12:1). Gabriel will lead the exit-resurrection at the Rapture because he is the prince of Church-Age believers (Luke 1:19, 26). The Rapture is imminent. No prophecy has to be fulfilled first; therefore, it can happen at any time. The Church Age is the dispensation of no prophecy but rather of historical trends. The next prophecy to be fulfilled is the resurrection of the Church which ends the Church Age and inaugurates the seven-year dispensation of the Tribulation.



John 14:1 Don't let your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Now believe also in Me [for salvation].

John 14:2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

v. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself in order that where I am, there you may be also. (EXT)

C. The Imminency of the Rapture.

1. Imminency means impending or *threatening* to occur. It does not mean immediately.
2. Rapture is used technically for the fact that no prophecy has to be fulfilled before the Rapture occurs. The Rapture will occur when the last member of the body of Christ is saved.
3. The Church Age is the only dispensation in which there are historical trends and no prophecy. The Church Age began with an event that was prophesied, namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
4. Our Lord prophesied this in the Upper Room Discourse just before He ascended. The Church Age terminates with the Rapture, which was also prophesied. There is no prophecy between these two events. This is the dispensation of the mystery doctrine.
5. No prophecy between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Rapture means that the Rapture is imminent. It could occur at any time; no one knows the day or the hour.
6. The resurrection of the Church, like our dying, is completely out of our control. Just as we have no control over the time and manner of our death, so we have no control over the time and manner of the Rapture.
7. The resurrection of the Church is totally beyond our control because resurrection is the Lord's victory:

1 Corinthians 15:57 Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (NET)

8. While the Rapture is imminent, the Second Advent is not. Before the Second Advent occurs, there are many prophecies which must occur first, e.g., the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Judgment Seat of Christ. These are reported in Revelation, chapters 6 through 19.
9. The Rapture could have occurred at the time of James or Paul because no prophecy had to be fulfilled before the resurrection may occur.
10. Distortion of the imminency of the Rapture results in instability and foolish



explanations or speculations about the time of the Rapture; hence, James gives us His advice in:

James 5:7 Have patience, therefore, members of the family of God, until the coming of the Lord at the Rapture. Behold, the farmers wait with expectation for the precious and valuable production of the soil, constantly being patient over it until he has received the early and latter rains.

v. 8 Have patience, all of you, and have stability in your souls; because the coming of the Lord at the Rapture has approached with the result that it keeps on drawing nearer and nearer. (EXT)

11. The farmer waits with anticipation for the valuable production of the soil, constantly being patient until it has received the early and the latter rains. Furthermore, all of you become stabilized in your heart because the coming of the Lord is drawing nearer and nearer, i.e., the doctrine of the “imminency of the Rapture.”
 - a. To have patience means to apply what you know. Patience is a system of thinking Bible doctrine, a system of concentration, and the application of doctrine to experience. In effect, application says, “As long as I am alive, I have control over my life. I can, by positive volition, execute the protocol plan of God or, by negative volition, be a cosmic believer.
 - b. The farmer invests by breaking up the soil and sowing the seed, then he must wait. There’s nothing he can do while waiting; the seed will either come up or not. Either he will have good production or will not. The result depended upon the soil and the rains. The farmer did not have control over those elements.
 - c. James 4:8 goes on to tell us how to have patience. You cannot have patience without a stabilized mentality.
 - d. “Drawing nearer and nearer” means, “to be approaching.” Or imminent. Every day in the Church Age, the Rapture draws closer. Every day that the Rapture approaches, you still have control over your life as long as you live. You have control in the sense that you can be a winner or a loser.
12. Because there was no unfulfilled prophecy before the Rapture could occur, the early Church anticipated the Rapture under the concept of imminence:³

³ “Imminence: The fact or condition of being imminent or impending. Imminent: impending threateningly, hanging over one’s head; ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand in its incidence” (New York: *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. 1971), vol. 1, 1380.



1 Corinthians 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

1 Corinthians 1:5 that in everything you were enriched [culminative aorist passive indicative of the verb, *πλουτίζω* (*ploutizō*): “in every way”] in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,

v. 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,

v. 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

v. 8 Who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB)

- a. The Corinthian church was made up of losers, yet Paul thanked God concerning them because they were the beneficiaries of phenomenal grace, were in union with Christ, and most of all, were “enriched by Him.”
 - b. Each had a portfolio of invisible assets **(1)** his very own palace which is the operational divine dynasphere, **(2)** the indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and **(3)** the always available divine omnipotence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - c. Enrichment in the Christian life is not measured in terms of work and Christian service, but in terms of doctrine and knowledge. Yet most of the Corinthian believers rejected that doctrine.
 - d. To be “strengthened to the end” refers not to the end of their lives, but to the end of the Church Age. Since they died before then, what does this mean? Every believer has equal privilege and equal opportunity to execute the protocol plan of God.
 - e. This cannot be executed in human power, dynamics, energy, works, or personality; it is executed in that knowledge of doctrine and in the omnipotence of God the Father, in the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, and in the omnipotence of God the Holy Spirit.
 - f. The omnipotence of Jesus Christ personally preserves history and perpetuates it, and so guarantees that the Church Age will run its course.
 - g. In a resurrection body, you will be “blameless” forever.
13. So, while the Rapture is imminent, no one really knows when it will occur. In the meantime, the royal family of God lives in this dispensation of historical trends, the Church Age. (Revelation 2:1–3:19).

14. Three times in Revelation is the phrase, “I am coming soon”: Revelation 22:7, 12, 20. Remember, to the Lord, a day is a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. This statement was made in A.D. 96, and this is now A.D. 2023. Therefore, “soon” connotes imminency, not immediacy.
15. The Rapture of the Church is the next prophetic event to occur in history.
Titus 2:13 “Waiting with keen anticipation for that blessed hope [the Rapture], even the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” (EXT)
 - a. How do you wait with keen anticipation? You wait by thinking; you wait with patience, which is the application of doctrine. You know the Rapture is coming. It may not occur in your lifetime, but you still know it *is* coming. In this way you apply doctrine, are occupied with the Person of Jesus Christ, utilize plus-H, and virtue love, so that you have a wonderful life and death.
 - b. *Sic transit gloria mundi*: Latin: “Thus passes away the glory of the world” is true because it is based on the achievement of man, on visible heroes. But we are called to become invisible heroes by advancing to spiritual maturity.
 - c. Jesus Christ is the glory, the resurrection, and the life.
16. The imminency of the Rapture is a doctrine for mature believers only. A mature believer is eager for the Rapture to occur. He is so occupied with Christ that he looks for the Rapture.
17. Only the Trinity knows when the Rapture is going to occur.

D. The Power of Resurrection.

1. The power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the same power that resurrects each of us at the Rapture or resurrection of the Church.
2. Both the great power experiment of the Hypostatic Union and the great power experiment of the Church Age terminate in resurrections. Our Lord’s resurrection at the end of the great power experiment of the Hypostatic Union was the first resurrection in history. The Rapture of the Church is the first mass resurrection, when all Church Age believers receive their resurrection bodies.
3. Between the first two resurrections in history is the unique Church Age, the time when maximum divine power is available to every believer.

1 Corinthians 6:14 “Now God has not only raised the Lord, but He will raise us up through His power.” (NASB)

