

## Signs, Theories, and Arguments that Destroy Imminency

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Two frogs fell into a deep cream bowl,  
One was an optimistic soul  
But the other took the gloomy view,  
"I shall drown" he cried, "and so will you."  
So with a last despairing cry,  
He closed his eyes and said, "Good-bye."

But the other frog, with a merry grin,  
Said, "I can't get out, but I won't give in!  
I'll swim around till my strength is spent.  
For having tried, I'll die content."  
Bravely he swam until it would seem  
His struggles began to churn the cream.  
On the top of the butter at last he stopped  
And out of the bowl he happily hopped.  
What is the moral? It's easily found.  
If you can't get out--keep swimming around!

We might chuckle at this little poem. But this is hope with optimism. It's the kind of hope that we can have as believers while waiting for the imminent (any moment) return of Jesus Christ in the Rapture. Throughout the years there have been various signs, theories, and arguments that revolve around the timing of the Rapture which destroy the teaching of the imminent return of Christ for His Church. In this study, we want to expose these signs, theories, and arguments. Those who have espoused these views, some knowingly and others unknowingly, destroy the clearly revealed teaching of the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 16:22; James 5:9; Titus 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 22:12, 20).

The imminent return of Christ in the Rapture means Christ could return at any moment. There are no signs, fulfillment of prophecies, Bible chronologies, or blood moons that need to come to pass before Jesus can return in the Rapture. All that must happen for Jesus to return in the Rapture is for Jesus to return in the Rapture! One of the characteristics of the pretribulational Rapture (Rev. 3:10) is that it's a

signless event. It could occur at any moment. Thus, by its very nature it is impossible for the Rapture to be contingent upon specific signs or events that must occur, upon date-setting, blood moons appearing in the sky or any other events. This is because when something else must happen before the Rapture can take place, it destroys the doctrine of imminence.

### **I. Signs that must occur destroy imminence.**

There are many people today who enjoy the hobby bird watching. They look at different birds, try to identify them, and know everything about them. In a similar way, we also have butterfly and bug watchers. Of course, there is nothing wrong with these hobbies. However, a great many Christians today are also caught up in sign watching. They feel that the Rapture must be preceded by multitudes of signs before it can occur. Therefore, they are always looking for more signs to be fulfilled so the Rapture can take place. This certainly is not a Biblical perspective on the Rapture. The Rapture is a “signless” and imminent event. In other words, no signs need to be fulfilled for the Rapture to occur.



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It should be noted that the Second Coming is contingent on signs – not the Rapture. The Bible actually teaches the Second Coming of Christ to earth will be preceded by many specific signs. However, the return of Jesus in the Rapture for His Church is not contingent or dependent on occurring signs. The Church is never told to look for specific signs that must be fulfilled in order for Jesus to return in the Rapture. Of course, we do see precursor signs which are pointing to the fact that the earth is headed toward the Tribulation Period. However, they are not biblical signs that must be fulfilled for Jesus to return in the Rapture. Christians down through the years and centuries have been talking about signs and Jesus still has not returned. Why is this? It's because there are no signs that prove or verify that Jesus will return at any given time in history.

Signs are specifically for a coming generation of people (the Jews) who are living during the seven-year Tribulation Period. Specific signs will be designed to let them know when Jesus is going to return to earth.

The prophetic context of Matthew 24 is the Tribulation Period.

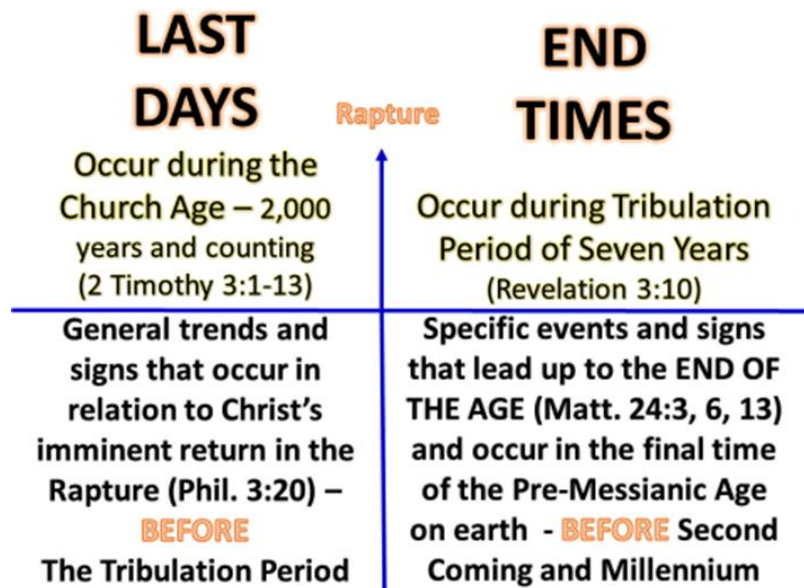
Matthew 24:21

“For then (*not today*) shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Matthew 24:15

“When ye (*the Jewish people*) therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)”

These verses are strictly dealing with the Tribulation Period as verse twenty-one clearly reveals which is the time Antichrist will set up a statue of himself in the rebuilt temple of Jerusalem. This specific period of time (seven years) with its appropriate signs will usher in His return to earth in His Second Coming. The term “end” in the context of Matthew 24 is applied to the events associated with the future seven-year Tribulation Period which precede Christ’s Second Coming to earth. The End Times (Matt. 24:3,6,13-14) are events which can only occur during the future Tribulation Period, which specifically lead up to the end of the Tribulation Period, and the age before Messiah rules the earth. Therefore, we are not living in the End Times which occur before Christ’s Second Coming. Instead, we are living during the “last days” (2 Tim. 3:1) which occur prior to the secret coming or the Rapture.



Matthew 24:29-31 gives an overview of Christ's Second Coming to planet earth: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken (*these are signs that will last an undetermined period of time and which precede the Second Coming*): And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect (*the Jewish people*) from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Of course, this is not a picture of the Rapture since the Rapture does not occur after the seven-year Tribulation Period. The Church has already been raptured to Heaven seven years prior to this event (1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 3:10). Matthew 24 is strictly dealing with the Second Coming of Christ to earth and the signs that will precede His return to earth.

Matthew 24:32-34 says:

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation (*a generation of Jews living during the Tribulation Period – not a generation within the Church*) shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

What did He mean by "this generation?" Prophetically, Jesus meant that the generation of Jewish disciples that saw these signs during the Tribulation Period would also witness His return. In Matthew 24 Jesus was speaking to his Jewish disciples and His own national people (Israelites). F. W. Grant and many others believe the thought is: "the very generation that sees the beginning of these things will see the end" (Christ's Second Coming).

It's clear that "all these things" (pertaining to the signs preceding the Second Coming) have never occurred. The completion of all these events is yet future. The generation ("genea" – a specific race or stock) of Jewish people living in that future day will see the completion of all the events. Jesus was not referring to the generation listening to Him then, for He had already said the kingdom had been taken from that group (Matt. 21:43). The first-century generation of Jews would

experience God's judgment. But the generation that will be living at the time these signs begin to take place (during the End Times or Tribulation Period) will live through this period and they will see the Lord Jesus coming as the King of glory to establish the Millennium.

Luke 13:35

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until *the time* come when ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Who are these signs really for? Signs are for Israel - not the church. I believe no person could have passed their study on Bible prophecy in the Bible Institute where I attended if they did not know the answer to this question. Signs are given to a generation of Jews who are living during the Tribulation Period. This is what Jesus is teaching. Neither the Church nor the Rapture is found in Matthew 24. Jesus was not talking about a generation of Church saints witnessing His Second Coming. Jesus was speaking to His Jewish disciples (and by extension their people) when He taught that many signs would precede His Second Coming (Matt. 24:1-2). The signs of war, persecution, an increase in iniquity, the abomination of desolation, and more specifically the astronomical signs associated with the Second Coming of Christ, which will obviously last for an unspecified period of time, are the signs that Jesus is referring to in Matthew 24.

Christ will actually return to earth during this period of time when the astronomical signs are occurring. But no person could know the exact timing of His Second Coming or return to earth since Christ returns at one point after the Tribulation has expired (Matt. 24:29).

This is why Jesus taught in Matthew 24:36:

"But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

This verse is placed within the context of Christ's Second Coming to earth and should stop date-setters from trying to predict when Christ will return in His Second Coming. Now think about this. If the people living during the Tribulation Period could not determine the exact timing of Christ's return, with all the signs that will

be given to them (Matt. 24:32-33), then how could anyone expect to calculate the time when Jesus will return in the Rapture?

Here is the point. The Jewish people living during the Tribulation Period can look at the signs and know that the Second Coming of Christ to earth is impending. These signs will act as specific indicators that Christ will return to earth very soon. However, none of these signs relate to the Rapture of the Church which occurs before the Tribulation. They are not signs that must occur or be fulfilled before the Rapture can take place.



Related to occurring signs, there has been a popular theory circulating among the brethren that blood moons are another specific sign that the Rapture is going to occur, and we are the terminal generation who will be raptured from the earth. The message is found in the blood moons.

The theory concludes that blood moons are a sign and precursor that the Rapture is about to happen. The red color of a totally eclipsed moon has prompted many people in recent years to equate these blood moons with the actual fulfillment of ancient Bible prophecies recorded in Joel 2 and Acts 2 which speak about the moon turning into blood. In fact, entire books have been written on the subject of blood moons as a warning to earth's inhabitants that something dramatic is going to happen. Some have even stated that the Rapture will take place in connection with the appearance of the blood moons.

Pastor Hagee's Book "Four Blood Moons" gained a lot of attention when it was published. Observe some of the following dramatic statements from Hagee's book. "The history of THE WORLD IS ABOUT TO CHANGE FOREVER, and God is sending us messages on His high-definition billboard by speaking to us in the heavens—using the Four Blood Moons; the question is ... are we listening?" (Four Blood Moons, Kindle Locations 326-328).

Hagee asserts that God is speaking to us through the appearance of blood moons. Of course, this pure conjecture. Where does God's Word teach that He wants to send a message to the Church and world today through blood moon appearances?

“Keep reading, because THIS MESSAGE FROM GOD IS SO URGENT to Him that He sovereignly arranged the sun and the moon to perfectly align themselves to create a Tetrad— four consecutive blood moons. He didn’t do this just one time— but Tetrads linked to Jewish history have happened only three times in more than five hundred years. And it’s about to happen again” (Four Blood Moons, Kindle Locations 498-501).

Again, Hagee concludes that the blood moon appearances are an urgent message sent from God to the world. Of course, this is actually Hagee’s message; it is not God’s message! Where in the Bible does it state that the blood moons appearing TODAY are a direct message from God? Where does the Bible teach that God is sending messages to the world TODAY via the stars?

Hagee concludes with these words:

“The coming Four Blood Moons are almost here . . . ARE YOU READY?” (Four Blood Moons, p. 244).

I ask the question, “Ready for what?” What should we get ready for? The Rapture? The Tribulation Period? Are blood moons occurring today really a harbinger of some kind of dramatic event to take place? Beloved, don’t follow men who have demonstrated their lack of Scriptural knowledge and Bible prophecy. To associate blood moons with the Rapture as some are doing today is erroneous. Do not follow the blood moon madness of these last days would-be prophets. God is not speaking to us through astronomical signs but through His Word (2 Tim. 3:16).

But Pastor Hagee thinks otherwise who teaches that blood moons indicate we are the generation that will be raptured: “The world has taken a wrong turn and we need a sign from God to get back on the right track— the Four Blood Moons just may be that signal! If God gave Joshua and Hezekiah a sign in the heavens and if He posted a sign in the heavens to direct the wise men to the birthplace of our Redeemer, then why wouldn’t He continue to speak to us through signs? God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and He has declared that He will give the terminal generation a signal that something big— something earthshaking— is going to happen” (Hagee, Four Blood Moons, Kindle Location 1871).

This is a fanciful statement that lacks biblical evidence. The blood moons we see today have no indication whatsoever that we are going to be the generation that is

raptured. We might be but this is not based on the appearance of blood moons. It's based upon the biblical teaching of the imminent return of Christ for His Church. There is no need for God to give a sign in the heavens prior to the Rapture, and there is no Biblical evidence that He will do so.

The Bible clearly teaches that the blood moons that appear during the Tribulation Period will be a sign of God's judgment over the earth and become harbingers of the Second Coming of Christ to earth – not the Rapture. To associate the blood moons with Christ's return in the Rapture is to confuse the Tribulation Period with today and the Rapture with the Second Coming.

Revelation 6:12 teaches that a blood moon will occur at the sixth seal judgment during the Tribulation Period. "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood."

As a result of an unprecedented worldwide earthquake, trillions of tons of debris will drift into the sky creating the eerie effect of a red moon. A blood moon will also occur before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth.

Joel 2:31-32

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come (*the narrow view of the Day of the Lord with the Second Coming of Christ to earth*). And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call."

The blood moons that appear during the seven years (Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week) are messages that God is judging the world during the future Tribulation Period and that Christ will soon return to judge the earth at His Second Coming. They contain no prophetic messages for today nor do they indicate the Rapture is about to happen. The Rapture is not contingent upon the appearance of blood moons. It is an imminent event (Rev. 22:12). We should not get our information from books written by fallible men but from the infallible Book – the Bible! Finally, we are to be looking for the Savior (Phil. 3:20) - not for blood moons! If anything, blood



moons declare the glory and greatness of God's handiwork in creation (Ps. 19:1). They do not declare that the Rapture is about to happen.

Once again, the Rapture is a signless event. There are NO signs which are given to you and me today which indicate that Jesus MUST return in the Rapture this year or 100 hundred years from now. Therefore, it is rather silly to build a lot of hype around different signs.

## II. Date setting destroys immanence.



When people begin to look at signs today, they begin to be caught up with the error of date setting. There are many so-called and self-proclaimed prophecy experts today who claim they can find certain chronologies in the Bible which point to the actual date when Christ will return in the

Rapture or in His Second Coming. These intricate and imposed chronologies on the Bible are said to be signs which indicate when Christ will return. Those who try and date Christ's return must perform numerical gymnastics with the Bible to arrive at the time when Christ must return.

The folly of date-setting can be readily seen throughout the passing centuries. Pope Innocent III predicted that Christ would return in His Second Coming in the year 1284. Baptist preacher William Miller predicted Jesus would return to upstate New York on October 22, 1844. Jehovah Witnesses have set several dates for the end of the prophetic end and Christ's Second Coming (1919, 1915, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1925, 1941, 1975, and 1994).

In 1988 Edgar Whisenant wrote a book entitled "88 Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988." The book did not sell very well in 1989! In fact, I saw the sequel to the book, "1988 Canceled."

Harold Camping predicted that Christ would return in September 1994 and wrote an entire book imposing chronological implications on the Bible which do not exist.

More recently he set October 21, 2011, as the date for Christ's return and the end of the world. Whoops! Others base Christ's return on certain feast days and blood moons and predicted that the Rapture must occur in September 2008. The list could go on.

We have now learned that the Second Coming of Christ to earth is contingent on signs, but this is not true of the Rapture. Now we must move on in our study and understand that the Rapture is not based upon the calculations of man and the setting of dates.

It's interesting that date-setting of the Second Coming of Christ has been more prevalent down through church history than many in our day might think. Such notables as John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards are only a few of the more well-known Christians to have engaged in the art. Over the years, people have tried to set dates for the Rapture in various ways. They have invented different unscriptural theories about Christ's return which take away from the wonderful truth of Christ's imminent return.

Let me give you some examples of this.

#### **a. The budding of the fig tree and Christ's coming**

One popular theory revolves around "this generation" in Matthew 24:34. It has been taught that this is referring to a Church generation of believers who will go up in the Rapture.

I have heard preachers make the assertion that Jesus himself said that the generation that sees Israel become a nation again (in 1948) will not die out before the Rapture occurs. The idea behind this teaching is that the fig tree represents Israel (Matt. 24:32-33), and that the Church generation that sees Israel "bud" (come back to life) will not pass away until Jesus has returned in the Rapture. Of course, this is an errant position. It became popular in the 1970's

First, the Church is not found Matthew 24. Jesus is referring to the Jewish people who are under the attack of the Antichrist during the Tribulation Period (Matt. 24:15). Jesus is talking about a future Jewish generation of people living when all of these predicted events will occur.

Second, Matthew 24-25 refers to the Second Coming of Christ to earth – not the Rapture (Matt. 24:29). This is a very clear expression of the revelation of Christ to earth – not the Rapture.

Third, the fig tree analogy (Matt. 24:32-33) is not used as a symbol for Israel in Matthew 24. Jesus is using a simple illustration from nature about a budding fig tree and summer to teach the approaching time of His Second Coming to earth. The fig tree has nothing to do with Israel becoming a nation in 1948.

Fourth, people who taught this began to run into trouble after the generation was getting too long. Many calculate a generation to be 40 years. If you do the math, a 40-year generation from 1948 would get us to 1988 and many believed Jesus would return by then. Perhaps this is why books were written about Jesus returning in 1988. Of course, this is all a ruse! Any attempt to put the Church and Rapture in Matthew 24 ends up in total confusion and error. The Rapture was never contingent upon Israel becoming a nation in 1948. This is because the Rapture is an imminent event.

### **b. The Millennial Day Theory of Christ's coming**

The Millennial day theory is a teaching that the earth is about 6,000 years old and therefore the Second Coming of Christ will occur 6,000 years after the creation of mankind, which will be followed by 1,000 years of peace and harmony on earth (the Millennium). I had a man at our annual Ephrata Fair ministry try and explain this to me in great detail. He went on and on and I graciously listened to him before trying to give him some Biblical advice.

This is a somewhat popular belief that is accepted by certain premillennialists who promote young earth creationism. I believe in a young earth and do not accept the evolutionary myth that the earth is billions of years old. Nevertheless, we cannot assume that Jesus is going to return after 6,000 years of earth's history.

This view believes that God always works in sevens. This means that each millennium is actually a day according to God's reckoning (as found in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8), and that eventually at the end of the 6,000 years since the creation, Jesus will return. Of course, just because God views a day as a thousand

years does not give us the interpretive license to create a 7,000-year Millennial history of the earth!

This view teaches that the 7th millennium is actually called the Sabbath Millennium, in which Jesus will ultimately set up his perfect kingdom and allow his followers to rest. The Sabbath Millennium is believed to be synonymous with the Millennial Reign of Christ that is found in Revelation 20:1-6.

Therefore, after six thousand years of earth's history (six days according to God's reckoning of time), Jesus will return and then the final 1,000-year Sabbath rest will occur. Just as God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day and commanded man to work six days and rest on the seventh day, likewise, our planet will labor six thousand years and rest on the seventh millennium.

The Epistle of Barnabas taught this in the first century A.D. by stating that "in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished . . . This meaneth: when His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the-sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day." (Epistle of Barnabas, XV verses 4-6) Irenaeus taught it in the second century and in the fourth century Lactantius wrote that "the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years . . . at the end of the six thousandth year all wickedness must be abolished from the earth, and righteousness reign for a thousand years..." (The Epitome of the Divine Institutes, Chapter 70)

Of course, all of this is pure conjecture. The Bible nowhere teaches that human history will only have a total of 7,000 years (6,000 years + 1,000 years for the Millennium). These are manmade ideas not based upon any Scripture. If Jesus must return after 6,000 years of earth's history, then what the epistles teach regarding the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture cannot be true. I will choose the Bible over manmade theories.

Paul was looking for the Savior to return. He did not say "we look for the Saviour" (Phil. 3:20) after six thousand years of earth's history. We can be sure Paul was not counting down the millenniums of earth's history and predicting Christ's return before a coming millennial sabbath day. We are to be looking for the imminent return of our Savior – not the end of 6,000 years of earth's history.

One Baptist website has this as its headline: “God’s 7,000 Year Plan. The preacher concluded with these words when referring to the Millennial Day teaching: “Our position is that a Bible doctrine is a Bible doctrine, regardless of what people think of it, and it should be taught. God’s prophetic plan fits into the timeframe of 7,000 years.

So, this man equates the millennial day theory with doctrine. No, this is not doctrine; It’s pure conjecture and has nothing to do with the timing of Christ’s return. This man may mean well in teaching this, but we should not be caught up in these unscriptural theories that have no bearing on Scripture.

The preacher then concludes with a what I call word salad:

“My guess is that we haven’t yet reached the true year 6,000, and there are calendars from other cultures that agree, but that’s only a guess. Also, it might be that God’s prophetic plan is to be taken generally, not specifically, at least as it fits into the 7,000 year system. That is, the seventh millennial day might not begin at exactly the end of the 6,000 years, but, when rounded off, it falls closer to the 6,000 year end than anything else. However, I tend to doubt this since God is so exact with so many other things, including dates. My best guess is that we have not yet completed 6,000 years. All of this makes the 7,000 year plan more believable than ever, especially since we are at the threshold of the seventh millennial day.”

We must stop all the nonsense about this millennial day theory. These theories take away from the imminent return of Christ. No person can ever know the exact time between creation and the Millennium because God in His word has not told us how long this will be. Within this timeframe God has purposed to build His Church and this would occur during an undetermined period of time (the Church Age). Let’s not impose on God’s providence and way of doing things. God in His providential plan will bring the Church Age to a close with the Rapture and the judgment of the Tribulation Period and finally bring us into the Millennium. But none of us in our wildest dreams could ever know when this will happen by counting the millenniums of earth’s history.

#### **d. Israel’s feast days and the coming of Christ**

Another approach is the notion that the annual feasts of Israel have typical significance which relates to the Church and Rapture. Most evangelicals have no

objection to the view the feast days as having a connection with specific future fulfillments related to Christ's life and Second Coming to earth but not the Rapture.

I am not getting into all the details of this in our present study. But I would agree that the first FOUR feasts (the Spring cycle) were fulfilled at the time of Christ's first coming, and that the final THREE feasts (the Fall cycle) will be fulfilled in relation to His Second Coming (not the Rapture). It seems very clear that the feast days relate to Israel (not the Church) and they are fulfilled in the context of Israel's history and future.

It's a common practice to equate the Feast of Trumpets with the Rapture but we must remember that the feast days were given to Israel and for Israel – not the Church. Terry C. Hulbert wrote a doctoral dissertation in 1965 at Dallas Theological Seminary entitled "The Eschatological Significance of Israel's Annual Feasts." It's probably not bedtime reading for most of us. But Hulbert declares, "The seven appointed times were given as a typical presentation of the commitments made to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant and those which amplified it. As these can be fulfilled only by Israel, so the typology of the feasts can relate only to that nation." I think he is correct.

In her book, "Forbidden Knowledge" Dorothy Miller suggests "the day of the year that the Rapture occurs." She says in another book "Watch & Be Ready" (written in 1992) that "Believers may hear that trumpet call on September 28, 1992" basing this on the fact that September 28th is the day scheduled for the Feast of Trumpets in 1992. This is another example of an attempt to set a date for the Rapture by aligning it with Israel's Feast of Trumpets.

The Feast of Pentecost is usually seen as being fulfilled by the Church at her birthday in Acts 2 by many dispensationalists. However, this creates a problem since we are to maintain a consistent distinction between God's plan for Israel and His plan for the Church. The notion that the Church fulfills the Feast of Pentecost gives ground and a basis to Miller's perspective that the Church also fulfills the Feast of Trumpets in the Rapture.

If this were true, then it would also follow that the Rapture would have to occur on the day in which that feast is celebrated. However, the Church is not revealed in the typology of any of the feasts or any of the unconditional covenants given to

Israel. Of course, the Church benefits from God fulfilling these covenants with the nation of Israel, but the Church is still distinct from Israel and the fulfillment of these covenants.

If we are going to consistently apply the grammatical, historical, and literal method of interpretation (a literal hermeneutic) to Israel and the Church, then we CANNOT see any of Israel's feasts being fulfilled by God's program for the Church. Why? It's because these feasts are given in Leviticus 23 to Israel as part of her law. Actually, the Church has been given the Lord's Table as the feast we are to celebrate until the kingdom of God (Millennium) is established over the earth (Luke 22:18).

Now think about this. If we see any of the feasts being fulfilled by the Church then we are in some sense practicing the same kind of "replacement theology" which many practice today, replacing Israel with the Church in God's plan. Nowhere does the New Testament speak of the Church fulfilling any of Israel's feasts or covenants.

Romans 9:4

“Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law (which include the Feast Days), and the service *of God*, and the promises.”

This means that Rosh HaShanah or the Feast of Trumpets cannot be a prediction of the Rapture of the Church. Israel's fifth feast does not give any insight into the day or the year on which the Rapture will occur. Rather, it relates to the Tribulation Period and is the trumpet warning given to Israel of her persecution and need to repent in view of Messiah's Second Coming to earth.

Hulbert's summary of the purpose for the fulfillment of Israel's feast makes the best sense within the framework of a consistent literal hermeneutic. He writes:

“When God fulfilled the first four feasts He had provided everything necessary for Israel to enter into literal kingdom blessing--redemption, separation, resurrection, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Israel's rejection of these, however, made necessary a national change of heart before the Kingdom could be established. Foreknowing this, God included the Feasts of Trumpets and Day of Atonement in the annual cycle. Thus, the Feast of Trumpets predicted God's alerting of the nation for the impending event which would bring about repentance. The Feast of the Day of Atonement predicted, not the death of Christ which had already been typified in

the Passover, but the new reaction of Israel to the Redeemer's death. This change will take place when the believing Remnant repents during the Tribulation period. The event which fulfills this sixth feast is identified as God's intervention to save Israel from destruction as Gentile armies attack Jerusalem.”

I believe the Rapture could happen at any moment. When it does, it's then God will complete His plan for Israel as forecasted in the three Fall Feasts of Israel. But in the meanwhile, we must realize that the Feast of Trumpets does not in any way relate to the Rapture of the Church.

As already mentioned, a number of years ago, retired rocket engineer NASA engineer Edgar C. Whisenant wrote a book called 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988. The book, which he self-published, placed the expected date of the Rapture between September 11 and September 13 of 1988, and became a massive bestseller. Some people actually sold their farms because of this book. By the time the end of the year was reached, more than 4.5 million copies had been sold. Whisenant was certain he had the date right. He said, “Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town. I would stake my life on Rosh Hashanah 1988.”

Whisenant's later books predicting the Rapture in 1989, 1993, and 1994 did not sell nearly as well as the first one—but he kept right on making these predictions despite the clear teaching of Scripture that we are not meant to know the date and time of Christ's return. He should have stuck with being a rocket engineer. He was a brilliant man, but brilliant men sometimes confuse things brilliantly!

Of course, none of these theories we have mentioned support an imminent (any moment) return of Christ in the Rapture for it makes the Rapture contingent on man's errant calculations and conclusions. We are all Rapture friends, and we should be Rapture minded and Rapture ready, but we need to realize the unintended harm we can do to the overall teaching on our Blessed Hope (the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture) when we try and set dates, create specific calculations, and impose truth related to Israel upon the Church.

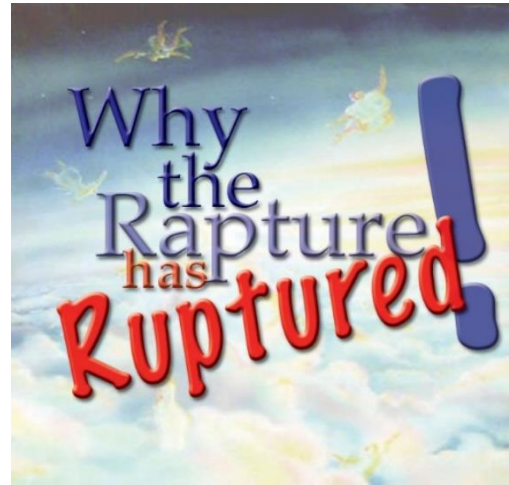
Spiros Zodhiates said:

“Our hearts will be propped up if we live in the constant expectation of His coming.”



### III. Arguments intended to destroy imminence.

In spite of the overwhelming evidence that the early church believed in an imminent return of Christ, various objections or rebuttals are given by opponents of the blessed hope. Entire books filled with many pages have been written to discredit and destroy the biblical teaching of an imminent return of Christ in the Rapture. These are arguments which try to disprove that Jesus can return at any moment and deliver His saints from the seven-year Tribulation Period. In other words, those who do not embrace imminence will use various arguments to try and disprove the any-moment return of Christ and steal the true hope of Christ's return from our hearts.



These arguments and those who present them might be called hope stealers! This is because they object to imminence in order to substantiate their beliefs in a midtribulation, pre-wrath, or posttribulation Rapture. Now to the arguments.

- **The argument that the post-apostolic church did not believe in an imminent return of Christ.**

One objection or argument to an imminent return of Christ claims that the post-apostolic church did not believe in the imminency of Christ's return. In other words, people living after the apostles did not believe in the imminent coming of Christ. This is simply a false conclusion. Without going into great detail one can easily gather facts together concerning the writings of many early church leaders. We read in the First Epistle of Clement, written about A.D. 96, "Of truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, Speedily will He come, and will not tarry." In the Epistle of Barnabas, "The Lord has cut short the times and the days that His Beloved, may hasten." He also said, "The Lord is near, and His reward." Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, refers to "the last times" and exhorts in those times to "expect Him." Clement of Rome preached the coming of Christ, and expressed the hope "that He shall come quickly and not tarry." The early Church Fathers lived in expectancy of our Lord's speedy return.

Church leaders down through the centuries have expressed their hope in the imminent return of Christ. Even John Wesley (1703–91), whose postmillennial eschatology was different than ours, still believed in an imminent arrival of Christ. He wrote those lovely words:

“Perhaps He will appear as the dayspring from on high,  
Before the morning light. Oh, do not set a time –  
Expect Him every hour, Now He is nigh, even at the doors.”

Martin Luther said:

“...let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer’s coming with longing and cheerful mind.”

John Calvin wrote:

“Scripture uniformly enjoins us to look with expectation for the advent of Christ.”

The early church fathers and reformers did not teach the details of God’s eschatological program regarding the Rapture. They simply believed in a Second Coming. However, it is important to see that they did believe in an imminent return of Christ. It’s unorthodox to reject the any moment return of Christ, to claim it was not taught by the early church, and that it was a 19th century phenomenon. Some full-blown preterists believe that the Second Coming already occurred in AD 70 and that there is no future Second Coming of Christ to earth. This theory is outside the bounds of orthodoxy.

The early church and post-apostolic church as well as the church down through the centuries have always understood that Christ might return at any moment. This has been a commonly accepted and proclaimed truth throughout the history of the Church because the Bible clearly teaches the imminency of Christ’s return.

- **The argument that Christ cannot return until the spreading of the Gospel has occurred throughout the earth.**

Another argument concludes that Christ could not return because the Gospel had to be preached throughout the entire world before He could return (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15). The reasoning is that since Christ commanded that we are to take the

Gospel into the entire earth we cannot expect an imminent (any moment) Rapture to occur because not everyone has heard the Gospel. Let's create a rebuttal of this argument.

We must remember that Jesus did not say that every person in the world must hear the Gospel or be reached by the Gospel before Jesus can return in the Rapture. This is reading into the text something that Christ never said. Jesus did not say, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel and then I will return in the Rapture." Some wrongly associate the Second Coming with the Rapture in Matthew 24 and come to the errant conclusion about the Gospel being spread throughout the earth before the Rapture.

Jesus taught in Matthew 24:13-14:

**"But he** *(the saved Jew in contrast to the deceived and unregenerate in the world – vv. 10-12)* **that shall endure unto the end** *(not spiritually endure but physically endure the persecution of the Antichrist up to the end of the Tribulation and period of time prior to His Second Coming, as confirmed in verse 22),* **the same shall be saved"** *(not talking about salvation in a spiritual but physical sense – the saved Jew shall be physically delivered to enter and populate the Millennium at the Second Advent – Dan. 12:1).* **And this gospel of the kingdom** *(the need for repentance and salvation in view of the coming earthly kingdom)* **shall be preached in all the world** *(universally)* **for a witness** *(of God's impending judgment and rule over planet earth)* **unto all nations** *(a worldwide proclamation among all humanity);* and then shall the end come" *(the end of the Tribulation Period and pre-Messianic Age with the Second Coming – Matt. 24:3).*

In the providence of God, some Jewish tribulation saints will be saved (delivered) from death and survive these terrible years of persecution (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). As a result, they will enter the earthly kingdom in their mortal/physical bodies and begin to populate the Millennium. The Jewish people, and all others living during the seven-year Tribulation Period, will be saved through the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom (the good news about Christ's death and that the kingdom is about to come to earth). This message will be preached *after* the Rapture and during the Tribulation Period, just prior to the Second Coming and establishment of the earthly kingdom.

In response to this verse, I once heard a missionary say that the Rapture could not happen until everyone in the world heard the Gospel of the Kingdom. Of course, the missionary was sincere but in this case was sincerely wrong.

First, this is not the message we preach today simply because the kingdom (Millennium) is not the next event on God's prophet calendar. The Rapture is the next event that will occur.

Second, Jesus made this statement in the context of the Tribulation Period and Second Coming – not Christ's return in the Rapture.

Third, it will be during the Tribulation Period that this Gospel will be shared throughout the earth prior to the Second Coming.

Although the Tribulation Period will be a terrible time of persecution, the Lord will have servants who will hear the good news concerning Christ and His soon-coming kingdom. In fact, they will actually be saved (remain physically alive) unto the Second Coming and then enter the Millennium (Matt. 24:13).

The "gospel of the kingdom" is the same good news that John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples had preached, which emphasized that the earthly kingdom was imminent when Jesus was on earth as the King offering the earthly theocracy to Israel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The Bible informs us that the 144,000 Jewish missionaries that God will protect during the Tribulation will provide the leadership needed in this worldwide gospel proclamation (Rev. 7:1–8; 14:1–5). Undoubtedly the message will be similar to the message John, Jesus, and the original disciples preached while on earth. They preached that people should get spiritually prepared for the inauguration of the messianic kingdom by believing in Jesus as their personal Messiah and Deliverer from sin.

Here is the point of all this. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15) does not mean that the Gospel must be presented to everyone during this Church Age before Jesus can return in the Rapture. It simply was God's plan for evangelism until Jesus returns. Jesus was not establishing an exact program and requirement that must come to fruition before He can return. Again, Jesus did not say in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature

and then I will return again.” This is obviously missing Christ’s passion and intent. It’s reading into Christ’s statement.

Christ’s return is not conditioned upon the disciple’s orders to carry out the Great Commission. Christ gave this order of evangelization without any preconceived requirements that had to be met before He could return. Paul said that the Gospel had gone out into the known Roman world of his day (Col. 1:6, 23). But a Gospel witness to every tribe and person across the earth is not a mandatory requirement for the return of Christ in the Rapture. There is absolutely no indication that the Great Commission was a barrier to the imminent return of Christ.

➤ **The argument that revolved around the prophesied death of Peter.**

Another argument revolves around the death of Peter. Some suggest that Christ’s coming is not imminent since Peter’s death was foretold and had to occur before Jesus could return.

John 21:18-19

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.”

This is an old argument from Robert Cameron in his book entitled, “Scripture Truth About the Lord’s Return” (1922). It’s assumed that this destroys imminency. But does it really? Does Jesus’ prophecy about Peter’s death assume that the Rapture would not occur before Peter died?

Paul knew about Peter’s death, but he still believed that the Lord could return for the church at any moment (1 Thess. 4:16–18; 2 Thess. 2:1). Even Peter himself believed he was living in the “last days” when scoffers would abound (2 Pet. 3:3) and therefore Jesus could return at any moment.

Peter also knew that he might die suddenly because of his older age (2 Peter 1:14). But at the same time, he never lost sight of Christ’s imminent return (1 Pet. 4:7 – “the end of all things is at hand”). Peter knew and taught that the Rapture could

occur any moment. The “end of all things” sounds like one of those old science fiction predictions of the end of the earth. My wife and I were watching one of them. It was called “The Time Tunnel.” The world was going to supposedly come to an end with Hailey’s Comet. Well, there is some truth to this when we think about what Peter was talking about. We sometimes live and act like we are going to live forever here on earth and that nothing is ever really going to change. Well, we had better get our heads out of the sand. We had better wake up. The end of all things is at hand! This means that something is impending, imminent, and could happen at any moment!

In a nutshell, this expression which says everything is “at hand” means the coming of Christ and all the prophecies of the Book of Revelation are fast approaching their prophetic fulfillment. The events described in the Book of Revelation are impending and imminent events in light of God’s viewpoint of time. The return of Christ begins God’s prophetic timeclock once again and all the events associated with the Book of Revelation (the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, the Millennium, Great White Throne Judgment, and eternal state) will be fulfilled.

Peter believed and taught the imminent coming of Christ in the Rapture (1 Pet. 1:5, 7) even though Christ told him about his death sentence. So Peter knew that Christ’s return still revolved around “imminency” even if Christ told him about his coming death.

It’s inconceivable to think that the early church, who believed in the imminent return of Christ, who was looking and waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to return from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10), would run around and ask each other the question, “Is Peter dead yet?” If he is, now Jesus can return in the Rapture!” They were not expecting Peter to die before the Rapture but the Rapture to happen before Peter dies.

Here is the point. We should understand references to future events, such as Peter’s death as being contingent on the larger purposes of God, including the Rapture. Plan A was that Peter would die but Plan B was also put into motion – the imminent coming of Christ in the Rapture. This means that Plan B could interrupt Plan A to bring about God’s greater purposes with His beloved people.

It is also worthy to note that Paul was also informed about some particular future events that he must pass through in his own life (Acts 23:11; 27:24), even his own death (“after my departure” - Acts 20:29-30). However, Paul fully expected Jesus to return at any moment (Phil. 3:20-21). This is because Paul and the other early Christians, including Peter, believed in the imminent return of Christ. Nothing had to occur before Christ’s return. The future events foretold to come to pass in connection with Peter or Paul’s lives were conditioned upon one thing: if the Lord did not return first, if the Lord did not return before the events could transpire.

We often speak this way today. We sometimes will say, “This is going to happen,” but we qualify it to mean, “unless the Lord comes first.” You will grow old, but only if it’s Lord’s will and the Lord does not come back. We will all die unless the Lord comes back. Here is what I’m getting at. Sometimes God can declare that something will take place while at the same time interrupt those plans by other overriding circumstances and events. Such was the case with Jonah and Nineveh (Jonah 3). God said that He would destroy Nineveh, but providentially, God altered His plans in accordance with the repentant hearts of the people and He did not destroy the city until some 100 years later. God allowed the human element to enter the picture. The same is true in the case with King Ahaz. God had declared that Ahaz was going to die but at the same time He allowed the human element of prayer to enter into His providential workings and He altered His previous plans for Ahaz (2 Kings 20:1-8).

This same principle should be applied to Peter or Paul’s death and the imminence of the Rapture. God has chosen to work out His decree for the Rapture in a prophetic program revolving around imminence. This means that God’s originally stated plans for the deaths of both Peter and Paul could potentially and providentially be interrupted by His overriding plans for the Rapture.

We know that God can alter His original statements and plans considering the much broader picture and scope of His purposes. This can also be proven from numerous Bible texts that speak about the Lord repenting or changing His mind (Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:35; 1 Chron. 21:15; Jer. 26:19). God does at certain times alter His previous plans. This is done within the scope of His own divine decrees. This does not limit God’s sovereignty; it adds to God’s sovereignty and wisdom.

- **The argument that Christ's followers falsely proclaimed John would be alive at the Rapture and therefore the church falsely assumed the Rapture was imminent.**

John 21:21-23 states:

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man (John) do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he (John) tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren (gossip), that that disciple (John) should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will (desire) that he tarry (remain on earth) till I come, what is that to thee?”

There is another argument that is sometimes used to reject an imminent and pretribulational Rapture return. This argument claims that there was a first century Rapture error being taught. The gist of this argument goes something like this. It was possible for erroneous ideas about a pretribulation Rapture to creep into the Church very early in its history, even during the lifetime of the apostles. The claim is made that in John 21:21-23 is an example of how erroneous teachings could prevail where certain disciples taught John would be alive at Christ's coming. In a similar way, the idea of an imminent and pretribulational Rapture is another erroneous false teaching that was eventually propagated by the Church. The error being propagated about John being alive at the Rapture means that the early church misunderstood about the imminent return of Christ. It was all a hoax and nothing but gossip among the early Christians.

In verses 18-19 the Lord Jesus told Peter about his death, which would take place when Peter was “old.” Peter then sees John (verses 20-21) and asks the Lord what will happen to his beloved friend. Peter was concerned about the will of God for John's life in the days ahead. What did Jesus have in store for him. Jesus taught Peter that he should not worry about John's life but fulfill his own duty and destiny (vs. 22).

As a result of the conversation between Christ and Peter, it began to be circulated by a number of the disciples or followers of Christ that John would not die (would not see physical death) before Jesus returns (vs. 23). This was based upon a misunderstanding of Christ's words which were spoken to Peter. It was being taught that John would remain alive until the coming of the Lord Jesus. The fact of the matter is this, Jesus did not state if John would be alive or dead at His coming. He said, “If I will that he (John) tarry till I come.” Jesus simply said that this is a



matter of God's will or purpose and is something that Peter should not be worried about.

It's interesting that John was given the privilege to write the book of Revelation which clearly taught an imminent return of Christ in the Rapture (Rev. 1:3; 22:17-20). John believed in an any moment return of Christ. The point is this. The imminent teaching of the Rapture had nothing to do with the gossip or a misunderstanding about the Rapture which was floating around during the early days of the church. So, the people's gossip was just that – gossip! But it should not be used to destroy the biblical teaching of the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture which is clearly outlined in the epistles (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:1-10; Rev. 3:10).

The general observation is made by those who oppose imminency that since the people got the teaching wrong about Christ's coming as it relates to the apostle John living until Christ's coming, it's very probable that other errors about the Rapture were circulated, such as the teaching about the Rapture of the Church occurring before the Tribulation Period, where a group of believers (like John) would remain alive and be rescued from the Tribulation Period. Of course, this is an erroneous argument built upon speculation.

Again, it was true that what the people were saying and teaching about John being alive at the Lord's coming was not accurate and turned out to be absolutely false. Apparently this erroneous doctrine and rumor was spread abroad and propagated during the early days of the Church. It had become a common saying and misconception among the brethren. Since this error was propagated, which revolves around Christ's coming, those who oppose the imminent return and Rapture of the Church before the Tribulation Period will sometimes conclude that the Rapture was also another false teaching spread throughout the early days of the apostolic church. It is believed that the Rapture is an erroneous doctrine that was formed when the original followers of Christ misunderstood and misinterpreted what Jesus actually taught. What many have said about the Rapture contains the orthodox truth about Christ's return, but it was not the exact truth that Jesus taught about His return.

This entire argument is based on the followers of Christ misunderstanding about John's departure in the Rapture. They thought he would be raptured but Jesus

never said nor taught this. Therefore, the Rapture teaching was misunderstood by the early Church.

I want to counter this argumentation.

First, this argument is pure conjecture. It's based upon speculation and not facts. There is nothing found in Scripture which signifies the early church was actually confused on the teaching regarding Christ's imminent return. Just the opposite is true. The doctrine of imminency was clearly taught regarding Christ's return (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; Phil. 4:5; James 5:7-9; Rom. 13:11; Rev. 22:17; Col. 3:4) and is part of the inspired record of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not a misunderstood and misguided teaching of the early church.

George Zeller explains that Jesus taught about His imminent return in the Rapture: "What did the Lord Jesus actually say? What was the exact meaning of His words? It was this: John MIGHT NOT die. Jesus said, 'If.' The Rapture may or may not have come in John's lifetime, and now, from our perspective, we know that it did not come in John's lifetime. In saying what Jesus said our Lord presented the doctrine of imminency (He might come even in John's lifetime), but He did not give any grounds for setting dates (He did not say that He had to come by a certain time or before a certain event). He did not teach that He would come before John died, but only that He might come."

Second, it's interesting to observe that John in his gospel corrected this error about himself (John 21:23), even though it would have been to his advantage if what they were saying had been true (he would not die!). In recording what Jesus said, John reminds us that Jesus did not say one way or another that He would return while John was still alive. This tells us that John did not accept this teaching as being genuine and from the lips of the Lord. Furthermore, following John's conclusion, this errant teaching did not continue to circulate throughout the future church centuries.

Third, it's also interesting that the error did not actually subvert the truth of God's word about an imminent Rapture because what they were saying could have happened (Christ could have come before John died!). The Christians certainly believed this. Likewise, it's a glorious and clear fact of Scripture that there will be a

whole generation of believers that will not see physical death because Christ will come for them before they die (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Fourth, the Scriptures repeatedly tell us that the early Church was looking and waiting for the Son's return from Heaven (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20) and they would be raptured before the Tribulation Period (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:1-10; Rev. 3:10). This is not a hoax or rumor of the early church as some have proposed! It's a biblical revelation of God's inspired Word. These Rapture verses are the direct result of God's promise given to the apostolic Church. To argue otherwise is to question the revelation and authority of God's truth.

Fifth, the real error that some embraced during the apostolic Church had to do with the church passing into the Tribulation Period. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. There were some false prophets teaching that the Church would enter the Tribulation Period. This would place the event of the Rapture during the seven-year Tribulation Period of coming judgment, when the Antichrist would be living in the world and practicing his godless works. The erroneous error being propagated during the early church did not deal with placing the Rapture *before* this coming time of judgment (Rev. 3:10) but placing the occurrence of this event *during* this period of terrible judgment.

Sixth, the error that some early disciples circulated about John living up to the Rapture was minor when compared to the serious doctrinal, eschatological, and blatant errors that were to come later such as the Church replacing Israel in God's program, there is no literal earthly kingdom, baptismal regeneration, papal authority, etc. God's discerning people know that there have been many errors propagated throughout church history, but the final analysis must be this: "What saith the scripture?" (Romans 4:3).

All over the Northeast, half a million Adventists -- disciples of New York evangelist William Miller -- awaited the end of the world on April 3, 1843. Journalists had a field day. Reportedly some disciples were on mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others were in graveyards, planning to ascend in union with their departed loved ones. Some high society ladies clustered together outside town to avoid entering God's holy kingdom amid the common herd of people. When April 4 dawned as usual, the Millerites were disillusioned, but they took heart. Their

leader had predicted a range of dates for the end -- dates that have also come and gone.

We have studied how useless and silly it is to set dates for the return of Christ for the Bible teaches that Christ's coming in the Rapture revolves around imminency. However, it's just as silly to argue against imminency (the any moment) return of Christ. But many books have written that destroy the blessed hope of the imminent return of Christ.

Dr. Renald Showers remarked:

"In light of the concept of the imminent coming of Christ and the fact that the New Testament does teach His imminent coming, we can conclude that the Pretribulation Rapture view is the only view of the Rapture of the church that comfortably fits the New Testament teaching of the imminent coming of Christ. It is the only view that can honestly say that Christ could return at any moment, because it alone teaches that Christ will come to rapture the church before the 70th week of Daniel 9 or the Tribulation period begins and that nothing else must happen before His return."

I'm amazed at the depths people will go to deny the clear teaching of the Bible on the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture and a pretribulation Rapture of the Church. Now some more arguments that try to overturn the clear teaching on the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture.

➤ **The argument of the prophesied AD 70 Judgment.**

Back to Matthew 24. Some "hope stealers" suggest that the A.D. 70 prophecy Jesus gave concerning the Roman judgment upon Israel and the temple would eliminate the possibility of an imminent return in the Rapture. If the early church had to wait for the fulfillment of the AD 70 judgment upon Israel, then the Rapture could not have been an imminent event, since it could not have occurred before this prophesied judgment came to pass.

Matthew 24:1-3

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to *him* for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon

another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (age)?”

In these verses Jesus predicted that the fall of Jerusalem would take place. This historically occurred in A.D. 70. Therefore, it’s assumed by some that Christ could not have returned in the Rapture before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Proper exegesis does not warrant this conclusion. The future fulfillment of the AD 70 judgment upon Jerusalem does not in any way interrupt God’s purpose for the Rapture, since we have already seen that the prophecy of an imminent return of Christ for Church Age saints (1 Cor. 16:22) fulfills God’s greater purpose.

We must once again contemplate how God sometimes declares that an event will transpire or take place but at the same time interrupt His plans by other overriding circumstances and events (Jonah 3, 2 Kings 20:1-8, Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:35; 1 Chron. 21:15; Jer. 26:19). Scripture repeatedly tells us that God can change His foreseen plans and interrupt these plans with other circumstances and events, which are interwoven into His own providential workings. In other words, Jesus could have still returned in the Rapture, in accordance with God’s own providential ways, even though this AD 70 event was already declared to take place.



Another important detail about the A.D. 70 Roman judgment on Jerusalem is that such an event as this could conceivably occur in the time period between the Rapture and the commencement of the Tribulation Period. We must remember that there is an unknown duration of time between the Rapture and the Antichrist’s signing of the covenant with the nation of Israel, which will last for the week of seven years (Dan. 9:27). Thus, a period of time between these two events, the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation Period, would allow for some

flexibility for such an event like this to occur. We call this time a “Bible gap.” I have written a study on different Bible gaps which available on our church website.

Here is the point. There is no reason to use these types of arguments to destroy the clear teaching of Christ’s imminent return in the Rapture. This is because an event such as this (AD 70 judgment) could conceivably take place after the Rapture and prior to the commencement of the Tribulation Period, if God had planned it this way in His providential workings. In short, the time span of about thirty-seven years, which existed between this prophecy and Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans, does not destroy imminence, since this prophecy could also be fulfilled after the Rapture.

A gentleman visiting a certain school gave out that he would give a prize to the pupil whose desk he found in the best order when he returned. “But when will you return?” some of them asked.

“That I cannot tell,” was the answer. A little girl, who had been noted for her disorderly habits, announced that she meant to win the prize. “You!” her schoolmates jeered; “why, your desk is always out of order.”  
“Oh! but I mean to clean it the first of every week.”

“But suppose he should come at the end of the week?” someone asked.

“Then I will clean it every morning.”

“But he may come at the end of the day.” For a moment the little girl was silent. “I know what I’ll do,” she said decidedly, “I’ll just keep it clean all the time.”

This should be our attitude toward the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture. We should keep ourselves clean and pure in view of His any moment return for His beloved Church (1 Pet. 3:3).

➤ **The argument that revolves around the seven-year covenant without Israel and waiting for Israel to become a nation in 1948.**

Here is the argument. Since the Antichrist is going to make a covenant with the Jews for seven years during the Tribulation Period (Dan. 9:27) and since no Jewish nation existed until 1948, the possibility for an imminent Rapture did not exist until

the nation of Israel was born in 1948. This may sound convincing on the surface but is really another argument that has a hole in its bucket.

We must remember that Daniel's prophecy deals with the Tribulation Period and has no bearing on events that MUST occur before the Rapture can take place. Since the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation Period, any events dealing with the Tribulation Period have absolutely no bearing on the timing of the Rapture. Also, the Rapture was not contingent upon Israel becoming a nation in 1948.

We must understand that the people of Israel could have just as easily been united as a nation, after the Rapture occurs, when all these actual events are scheduled to take place. In fact, as mentioned in the above argument, there will obviously be a span of time that will occur between the Rapture of the Church and the signing of the covenant with the Jewish nation, which officially marks the beginning of the seven-year period (Dan. 9:27). This gives more time for certain events to unfold and pave the way for the commencement of the Tribulation Period. So, the birth of the nation of Israel is something that could have occurred after the Rapture. In any event, the remarkable birth of the nation of Israel in 1948 does inform us that the stage is being set for the final prophetic drama to begin, which is related to God's plan for the earth.

➤ **The argument that revolves around the prediction of apostasy.**

The argument is also given which states that the "apostasy" which was spoken about in the book of Acts and the epistles had to come to fruition or set in before Jesus could return (Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Peter 3:1-2). This is another empty argument simply because Paul, Peter, John, and Jude realized and understood that they were already living in the last days even during their own lifetime (2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18; 4:3; Jude vs. 18). Paul recognized in his own time that there was evil (Eph. 5:16). Both John and Paul understood that the departure had already begun and would continue to manifest its ugly head in the Church.

John taught in 1 John 4:3:

"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (*as the incarnate God and Savior*) is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist (*demonic*)

*spirits working during the last days who are against Christ*), whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

Paul predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:7:

“For the mystery of iniquity (lawlessness) doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

Paul also predicted that apostasy would continue to grow and expand (“wax worse and worse” – 2 Tim. 3:13) during the last days until Jesus decides to return in the Rapture. Paul did NOT say that apostasy MUST reach a certain level or climax before Jesus could return in the Rapture.

2 Timothy 3:1

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.”

It should be noted that Paul was not predicting the “last days” to come upon the church in the future. He was confirming that they already began and would continue on until the Rapture, with an increasing level of wickedness and evil. The fact that these days “shall come” was one way of saying, “They are already here!” Paul confirmed he was already living in the last days. This is why he informs Timothy of specific apostate people in the Church already (2 Tim. 3:6-8). The early church would not wait for the “last days” to happen – they were already part of the “last days” apostasy. The last days began with Christ’s ascent into Heaven and they will end when He returns in the Rapture. Neither Paul, Peter, or John predicted the last days would be in the future but that they were already occurring in their own day and time.

In other words, Paul taught that the “last days” which precede Christ’s return in the Rapture would be increasingly perilous and difficult (2 Timothy 3:1-7). These events and the last days were already occurring in Timothy’s day and would continue to transpire until Jesus returns. But none of the “perilous times” of the “last days” were intended to be specific signs or fulfilled events that must be fulfilled for the Rapture to happen. Paul was simply teaching that there would be a constant emergence of wicked and sinful things occurring in the world during the period of time known as the last days which occur on earth between Christ’s return to Heaven and return in the Rapture.



So, Paul did not give us the details of the “last days” to create specific signs that must be fulfilled before the Rapture can occur. He was looking for Jesus to return in His own way (Phil. 3:20-21). The “last days” handbook that Paul gave to us simply reminds us that things will continually get worse until the Rapture occurs, and Christ takes away His Bride (the Church). The general trend of the last days is evil, wickedness, and moral degradation. This is exactly what we see happening today.

The believers of the early Church did not wait for the “last days” to be fulfilled, at a future time, so that Jesus could return. They knew that they were living in the commencement of this era or epoch of time when defection from truth would begin and would continue to exist until Jesus returns. Paul’s prediction of future apostasy simply means that the same trends would continue until Christ returns.

Paul makes it very clear that the final apostasy or total abandonment of truth will occur AFTER the Church is raptured, resulting in the worship of Antichrist throughout the earth (2 Thess. 2:4, 10-12). Until then there would be a steady defection from the truth and deception would “wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). The time would come and was already present in its infant stages, in the apostle’s opinion, when men would no longer put up with the sound of healthy teaching of Scripture (2 Tim. 4:3). People would develop distaste for healthy teaching. In fact, this would continue to be a deteriorating process until Jesus returns.

Nobody knows how bad it will get before the Rapture occurs. But hundreds of years later we are still living in the era of time known as the “last days” and continue to witness the deterioration of doctrine, the disinterest in healthy teaching and experience the “doctrines of demons” which are associated with the last days (1 Tim. 4:1). Paul said all of this would happen in his own day and continue to spread until Jesus breaks through the blue and rescued His beloved Church.

➤ **The argument of Paul taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.**

Another argument that is posed as destroying imminency involves Christ’s promise to Paul to evangelize the Gentiles as he would travel to faraway lands over a span of many years (Acts. 9:15; 22:21).

This command for Paul to evangelize Gentiles presumably destroys the possibility of any imminent return. Of course, we do know that Paul completed three

missionary journeys. He also planned to visit the saints at Jerusalem, Rome, and journey onto Spain (Rom. 15:23-25). What do we make of these plans and Christ's commission to Paul? Does this pose a problem to imminency? Of course not! Remember, the plan and program of God for Paul, or for any other person, is always based upon His greater purpose which revolves around imminency.

The fulfillment of God's earthly plan is always contingent upon the fulfillment of God's Rapture plan and the imminent arrival of His Son from Heaven (1 Thess. 1:10). All the plans and proposed programs for Paul were still conditioned upon the glorious truth that Christ could return at any moment. This is why Paul was looking for the Savior (Phil. 3:20) while he went about to fulfill God's earthly plans for his life. He knew very well that God could interrupt his plan at any time and rapture the Church back to Heaven.

Similar to the Great Commission (Mark 16:15), Jesus was not establishing an exact program and requirement that must come to pass before He could return. He simply was teaching that Gospel witness would occur until the Rapture happens. Furthermore, we must remember that Paul always based His future moves in accordance with God's overall will and program for his life (Acts 18:21; James 4:15) and the length of his own life (1 Cor. 15:30 - "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?").

1 Corinthians 4:19

"But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will ..."

Paul served in the spirit of the exhortation, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). He knew about the Lord's plans for his earthly life but also lived in the light of Christ's heavenly plan for His imminent coming on "that day" (2 Tim. 4:8). The promise of Christ's imminent return outshined His earthly command to be the apostle to the Gentiles. The commands associated with his earthly life did not overshadow the glorious prospect and promise of Christ's imminent return. Paul knew that God had synchronized his earthly plan with the heavenly promise!

Like gears working together inside a piece of machinery, God has synchronized His earthly plans with the imminent return of His Son in the Rapture. By the way, from the perspective of men, such things as the commands given to Paul and the prophecy about Peter's death may at first seem to destroy imminency, but from

God's perspective they never can destroy imminence, since God has on His calendar "that day" (2 Tim. 4:8) when His Son will return.

Winston Churchill planned his funeral before he died. His wishes called for a bugler, positioned high in the dome of Saint Paul's to play the taps after the benediction. The taps were meant to represent that his physical life was over. But then came the most dramatic turn: as soon as the taps was finished, another bugler, placed on the other side of the great dome, played the notes of reveille—It's time to get up. It's time to get up. It's time to get up in the morning. At the end of history, the last note will not be taps; it will be reveille. The Rapture trumpet will be a note of reveille. And we will go up and live with the Lord at this point forward!

➤ **The argument that Christ cannot return until God saves the last person prior to the Rapture.**

Some suggest that Jesus cannot return in the Rapture until the last person that Jesus plans to save becomes a Christian. It is then taught that this factual conclusion does away with imminency. In other words, it is sometimes assumed that Jesus cannot return in the Rapture until the last person is saved that God knows and planned to be saved. How do we deal with this kind of circular reasoning? We might answer this argument in several ways.

First, God's decrees cannot be changed by individual decisions. God knows the last person who will be saved before the Rapture takes place. However, at the same time God does not base His Son's return in the Rapture on the salvation of any particular individual. This is because He has already determined by His own sovereign decrees when He would return.

Isaiah 14:24

"The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand."

Hebrews 10:37

"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

This is another verse that clearly teaches imminency – "he shall come will come". We have all been found guilty saying, "We will do this unless the Lord tarries." But

actually the Lord will not tarry when it comes to the Rapture. He will return right on schedule. Since this is true, the Son will return in the Rapture whenever He chooses, even though it will take place after the salvation of certain individuals.

Yes, it's true that God knows the last person who will be saved before the Son returns in the Rapture (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2). However, He also already the exact time when the Son is going to return in the Rapture. If He did not possess knowledge about these things, He would not be God (1 John 3:20). However, since none of us know the intricate decrees of God in relationship to His salvation program for individuals, the whole matter of Christ's return not being impending or imminent because of the future salvation of souls is a futile and debunked argument.

Second, we must once again reiterate the difference between God's perspective and man's perspective. From God's perspective there is no imminency. This is because His decrees are already established concerning the Rapture and who will be the final person to be saved prior to His return. However, from man's perspective, he must view the Rapture as an imminent event for he does not know when the Rapture will occur. In fact, God has chosen to work out His decrees, in relationship to the Rapture, in a prophetic earthly program revolving around imminency. From man's vantage point Jesus could return at any moment and this is the way God has chosen to present the truth about His Son's return in the Rapture to his earthly followers.

Think of it this way. From God's perspective, Who knows all things and decrees all things (Isa. 46:9-10), there can be no surprises, such as Christ's sudden return in the Rapture, or who the last person will be that is saved prior to the Rapture. These are things God already knows because of His own established decrees. But from man's perspective, Christ could come at any moment (Rev. 22:10), since God has determined that nothing needs to happen before Jesus returns. This means God has not placed any limits upon Himself in connection with His Son's return in the Rapture.

From man's perspective, not knowing the time of the Son's return, or who will be the final person that is saved before the Rapture, means that the believer can honestly "look for the Saviour" (Phil. 3:20) from Heaven and know that He could return at any moment. Man's perspective of the Rapture and return of Christ is

imminent but from God's perspective the Rapture is already decreed and set to take place according to His perfect timetable. In relationship to man's perspective the coming of Jesus Christ could happen at any moment and nothing needs to take place before He comes, not even the salvation of certain people. This is why the coming of Christ is a blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

➤ **The argument of waiting for the harvest.**

Another shallow argument is given which stresses that the early Church needed to wait for the tares to be sown among the wheat and grow up among the true harvest before Jesus could return (Matt. 13:24-30).

Matthew 13:24-30

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

Little comment must be made about this speculative argument simply because the eschatological time period involving the harvesting in Matthew chapter thirteen involves the Lord's Second Coming to earth and not His coming in the Rapture. The Rapture is not going to occur at the "end of the world" ("age") which is pointing to the end of the Tribulation Period (Matt. 13:39-40, 49). This is when the actual harvesting will occur in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ to earth.

Those who reject the imminent return of Christ seem to mix the Rapture with Christ's Second Coming to earth in the parabolic teachings of Christ (Matthew 13, 24). This causes great confusion regarding God's prophetic program. This sowing of the tares among the wheat in no way would hinder or prevent the Rapture from

occurring since the Rapture is not in view in Christ's parables which relate to the earthly kingdom program and His Second Coming to earth.

As already explained, the mixing between the true and the false already began to occur during the apostolic era (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4;) along with the apostasy within the Church Age (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:3; 2 Tim. 3:1-15). In other words, this mixing was already coming to pass during the apostolic church and would not negate an imminent return of Christ.

This is part of the "mysteries of the kingdom" that Jesus spoke about (Matt. 13:11) which refers to the sacred secrets that were unknown to Old Testament saints in relationship to the establishment of the kingdom over the earth. Jesus was teaching that there would be a mixing together of the true and the false before the kingdom would be established upon earth. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the Rapture was not contingent upon a future fulfillment of the last days any more than it is contingent upon the tares being sown among the wheat.

Furthermore, the end of this mixing will occur during the Tribulation Period and the time of harvesting in this parable will occur at the end of the Tribulation Period in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ to earth (Matt. 13:39). For this reason alone, it has no bearing on the imminence of the Rapture.

We are to work while we wait for the Rapture. A gardener for a large estate in northern Italy was showing a visitor through the castle and the beautiful, well-groomed grounds. As the visitor had lunch with the gardener and his wife, he commended them for the beautiful way they were keeping the gardens. He asked, "By the way, when was the last time the owner was here?"

"About ten years ago." The gardener replied.

The visitor asked, "Then why do you keep the gardens in such an immaculate, lovely manner?"

The gardener replied, "Because I'm expecting him to return."

"Is he coming next week?"

The gardener replied, "I don't know when he is coming, but I am expecting him today."

➤ **The argument of looking forward to Christ's coming (expectant) but not looking for Him to return (imminence).**

Some who reject the imminent return of the Rapture will teach that the Rapture is portrayed as an expectant event (looking forward to the Rapture) but not an imminent even (looking for Him to return at any moment. In other words, we should look forward to Christ's coming with excited feelings but not necessarily expect it to happen at any moment. The opponents of the imminent return of Christ try to make a distinction between the terms imminent and expectant.

The thrust of this argument is that the early church looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, but they did not look for Him possessing a spirit of imminency. This allows room for pre-wrath, midtribulational and even posttribulational views to be embraced. In other words, one can hold to these aberrant views or positions on the Lord's coming by expecting Christ to return at a certain point of time but not necessarily at any moment. Everyone can look forward to Christ's coming but not believe it will happen in their own day and time.

Philippians 3:20

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

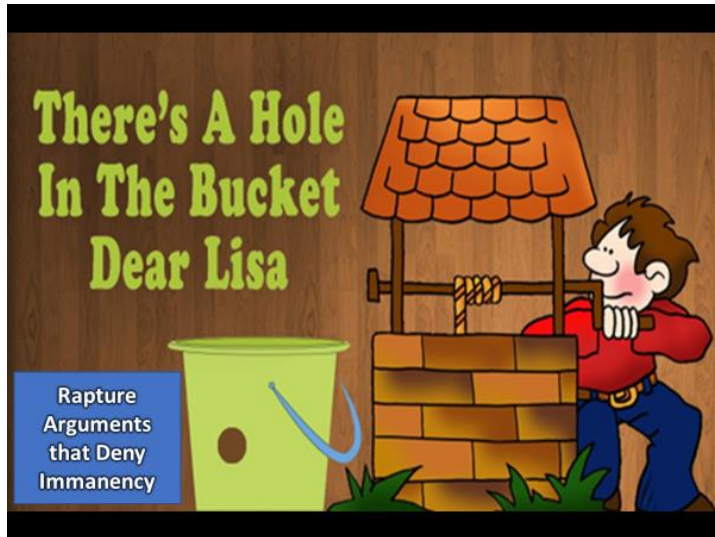
Titus 2:13

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"

These verses are not teaching that we can only look forward to the return of Christ in the Rapture. They are teaching that the early Christians were looking for Him to return at any moment. When you "look for the Saviour" and are "Looking for the blessed hope" it speaks of nature of the event of the Rapture. The event is imminent and therefore the saints were looking for Him to appear ("when he shall appear" - 1 John 2:28; 3:2). This is not merely being expectant (looking forward to His return) but proves the saints were looking for the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture. The event was going to happen, and they believed it could happen at any moment.

This argument is weak simply because the term imminent is an adjective describing the nature of an event whereas the term expectant is an adjective describing a

person's attitude toward any event. Actually, an imminent event such as the Rapture can also be an expectant event in the hearts and lives of people (Rev. 22:20). But in trying to destroy imminency some have tried to create these weak arguments which do not hold water. The old and funny song fits these arguments.



“There's a hole in the bucket,  
dear Lisa, dear Lisa,  
There's a hole in the bucket,  
dear Lisa a hole.”

The key terms and phrases connected with Christ's coming (looking, look, waiting, wait, Maranatha, near, nearer, quickly) all teach about the imminent nature of Christ's return. It could happen at any

moment. The early church was not only looking forward to Christ's return in the Rapture but also believed He could return at any moment (1 Cor. 16:22; Phil. 3:20-21). The very fact that believers were called upon to keep their lives in order in view of Christ's return and their reward would indicate that this event was impending or imminent (James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28).

Dr. Wilbur Smith once said this about arguments attempting to discredit the imminent nature of the Rapture: “If the church is to experience the Tribulation, the idea of the imminency of Christ's appearing must be given up. I think that no man can say from the Scriptures that Christ cannot come today. And if He could return today, it is not necessary to argue that He will come at the end of the dreadful period of suffering and satanic rule.”

The point is this, all these arguments are “straw man” arguments that do not address the clear proposition or teaching on the imminency of Christ return. These arguments are designed to protect an erroneous eschatology of the Last Days and End Times. The mid-tribulational, pre-wrath, and post-tribulational view of Christ's coming destroys the blessed hope of the imminent or any moment return of Christ. There is not one ounce or drop of imminency left in these false theories and conclusions about the coming of Christ. They steal the true meaning of the blessed



hope of Christ's coming away from our hearts. Yes, these anti-imminent views of Christ's coming are hope stealers! This is because the blessed hope relates to the imminent return of Christ's for Church Age saints and the subsequent redemption of their bodies and rescue from all earthly harm and trials – even the greatest trial of the Tribulation Period that is going to “try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:1-10).

Gerald B. Stanton wrote:

“There is not a little wrong with any system of interpretation which destroys the force of exhortations such as these, painting over the bright hues of the hope of an imminent return of Christ with the somber shades of impending Tribulation.”

Proverbs 13:12 says this about hope:

“Hope deferred (*prolonged, postponed, delayed*) maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.”

Repeated postponement of one's expectations can become disheartening; but when the desire is at last fulfilled, it is a source of tremendous satisfaction. We can apply this to the coming of the Lord in the Rapture. The imminent return of Christ in the Rapture does not create a sense of hopelessness and despair. Why is this? It's because Jesus may come today! There is always an expectancy that He will return today because the coming of Christ is imminent. Perhaps Today!

“Jesus may come today,  
Glad day! Glad day!  
And I would see my Friend;  
Dangers and troubles would end  
If Jesus should come today.

Why should I anxious be?  
Glad day! Glad day!  
Lights appear on the shore,  
Storms will affright nevermore,  
For He is "at hand" today.

Glad day! Glad day!  
Is it the crowning day?  
I'll live for today, nor anxious be,  
Jesus my Lord I soon shall see;  
Glad day! Glad day!  
Is it the crowning day?”