



Analysis of Matt 24:1-35 Continued; Mal Couch: History of the Rapture; Imminency & Pretribulationism Was Taught in the Early Churches

7. Biblical passages that offer historical downtrends as harbingers for *national* discipline, such as 2 Timothy 3:1-7, or passages that reveal events prophetic of the Second Advent, such as **Matthew 24**, are often misapplied to the Rapture.
8. This mistake causes certain theologians to assert that apostasy in the land means that the Rapture is immediately upon us. Others maintain that the establishment of the nation Israel in 1948 is a clear sign the Rapture is immediate.
9. However, there is absolutely no passage in the New Testament that reveals any prophecy regarding the Church Age, except for its beginning and its end. Therefore there is no prophecy to be fulfilled before the Rapture *may* occur.
10. This means the Rapture could occur at any moment, but this was as true in the first century as it is today and one cannot logically conclude that an event that has been impending for over 19-hundred years is *immediate*.
11. The best word to describe the place of the rapture on God's timetable is *imminency*. Imminency means impending, or threatening to occur but it does not necessarily mean immediately.
12. The day the Rapture does occur it will be both imminent and immediate, but until then it must be considered imminent but not necessarily immediate.
13. While the Rapture is imminent, the Second Advent is not. Those who subscribe to the pretribulation Rapture also conclude the Second Advent to be posttribulation which is more commonly referred to as premillennialism.
14. Simply put, pretribulationists believe the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation begins. Premillennialists believe that the Second Advent will occur before the millennial reign of Christ begins.
15. Poor hermeneutics have led many to confuse the timing of the fulfillment of prophecies related to each of these events. Interesting commentary on this subject is provided by:

Couch, Mal (ed.). *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 344-45:

History of the Rapture. A history of the Rapture is of necessity a history of pretribulationism, since most other views do not distinguish between the two phases of Christ's return—the Rapture and the Second Advent.

It is conceded that the earliest documents of the ancient church reflect a clear premillennialism, but great controversy surrounds the early understanding of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation. Pretribulationists point to the early church's clear belief in imminency and a few passages from a couple of documents as evidence that pretribulationism was held by at least a few from the earliest times. (p. 344)

As was typical of every area of the early church's theology, views of prophecy were undeveloped and sometimes contradictory, a seedbed out of which developed various and diverse theological viewpoints. It is hard to find clear pretribulationism spelled out in the fathers; there are found clear pretribulation elements that, if systematized with their other prophetic views, contradict posttribulationism and support pretribulationism. (pp. 344-45)

Expressions of imminency abound in the apostolic fathers. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas all speak of imminency.



Evidence of pretribulationism surfaces during the early medieval period in a sermon some attribute to Ephraem the Syrian entitled, "Sermon on the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World."

The sermon was written sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries. The rapture statement reads as follows:

Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms the world? For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the Tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."

This statement evidences a clear belief that all Christians will escape the Tribulation through a gathering to the Lord. How else is this to be understood other than as pretribulational? The later Second Coming of Christ to the earth with the saints is mentioned at the end of the sermon. (p. 345)

16. Those who do not believe that the Bible presents a dispensational view of history are quick to criticize those that do. Their failure to grasp the presence of dispensations in Scripture is due to the system of hermeneutics they use to interpret the text.