

# Declarations of Imminence do Not Prove the Rapture

By Christopher J. Patton

Sometimes we can overlook some basic assumptions in studying Bible prophecy. For this reason I believe that one should always remember to differentiate between prophetic opinions and saving faith.

Prophetic teaching is based on an analysis or knowledge of current events or bible history. Faith is founded on the promises of God written large and repeatedly through the entirety of Scripture. The bottom line is that the disciple of Jesus/Yeshua is to be faithful in "so doing" until He comes – whenever that may be.

## **Historical Context of the New Testament**

I appreciate the writings of many fine, well-educated and competent Bible scholars who believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the saints. To support their belief in a private return of Jesus for the Saints, these persons usually cite the "doctrine of imminence." This doctrine teaches that there is no prophetic event required to precede His second coming. It means that Jesus might come at any moment.

Scholars and others who believe in the imminence of Jesus' Second Coming at the Rapture also quote a fair number of New Testament verses to support their position. However, I suggest in this brief article that they overlook a few obvious considerations in the process of their interpretation of Scripture to support the idea of a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Saints. In short, they fail to consider the historical context of the New Testament and the logical perspectives of its writers.

If one abides by a traditionalist or conservative assignment of when and by whom the various documents of the New Testament were written, then these messianic "books" may be divided into two groups:

1. those written prior to the destruction of the Herodian Temple in AD 70 and
2. those written after AD 70 and before the failed Bar Kochba messianic expectations, revolt and probable partial rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem ending in AD 135.

In the first case the writers of the New Testament books lived and wrote during times when a Temple stood at Jerusalem and sacrifices were made. In the years leading up to Rabbi Akiva's declaration of Simon Bar Kosiba (Bar Kochba) as the Messiah of Israel, the Jewish New Testament writers lived in an atmosphere of imminent expectation shared by most of the Jewish community. Those expectations materialized in the Bar Kochba revolt against Rome

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when the Jewish Zealots made Jerusalem their capital and minted coins with representations of the Temple on them.

## **Then Not Unlike Today**

When the New Testament was written both the writers and their audiences could look around and perceive the necessary “pre-conditions” prophesied to typify the “Last Days.” A significant number of Jewish people lived in their homeland. There was a Temple in Jerusalem, and there were zealous Jewish elements planning and preparing to rebuild it with a sanctified altar and sacrifices. Furthermore, a world political and economic power of Roman-Babylonian heritage dominated the secular landscape, which was a bipolar, religious confused popular culture pervaded by the extremes of spiritual mysticism and humanistic materialism.

Just as today’s global situation is fraught with tensions, natural disasters and the potential for sudden economic collapse, the socio-political tensions were palpable during the days when the New Testament was written. The economic stability of a militarily imposed “Pax Romana” had become increasingly tenuous, and just about any Roman Emperor was a good candidate for Antichrist: Nero and Hadrian particularly come to mind. I have heard more that one prophecy scholar comment that Satan has always had a qualified candidate available for the role of Antichrist. That universally worshipped god of this world constantly puts false “messiahs” (charismatic religious leaders or teachers) forward to varying degrees of popular acclaim.

## **Biblical Accuracy**

Biblical accuracy does not demand that the writers of its pages were always correct. The Bible accurately records and preserves to this day what an author believed and taught at the moment of his particular document’s composition.

I believe that the New Testament authors were very rational in their imminent expectations within the historical context of their lives. When they wrote, they could look around and see world conditions and potential prophetic fulfillments all around them, but they were wrong.

Jesus did not return to rule Israel and the nations during the first or second centuries AD. This fact does not take anything away from the spiritual teachings of those books – even though they were written in expectation of a soon return of Christ. It does not take anything away from the revealed expectations of what signs must precede the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming. The faithful still look for those

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signs today. Some have concluded that there are indications that these momentous events may begin to unfold in the next few years.

The most convincing Scriptural arguments for a pre-Tribulation Rapture rely heavily on the "doctrine of imminence" and various rational allegories to interpret various biblical references. When I consider the New Testament "proof texts" given for imminence within their context, I conclude that they do not provide strong, indisputable proof for this hopeful way of escape from the trials Jesus said would come upon us all – believer and unbeliever. (Luke 21:35)

Emotionally, I would prefer being raptured away to be ever with my Lord over enduring years of trial and potential martyrdom, but as a disciple of Jesus, I am not my own. I have been purchased by the blood of the Lord, and I will serve when, how and under what conditions as He determines.

All scholars anticipating the millennial reign of Jesus/Yeshua over a reborn Israel and the nations agree that Messiah's "Glorious Appearance" as King of Kings will follow the seven years of the Great Tribulation. The Bible is very plain on this teaching.

Here I wish to recommend to all that caution is the better part of wisdom in regards to the teaching of a pre-Tribulation Rapture. We must always be ready, for life is tenuous. And we must be dedicated regardless of our own intellectual persuasion, for we are saved by faith and that not of ourselves. (Ephesians 2:8) Let us continue in well-doing, serving the Lord fully during each day that He gives us. (Matthew 24:46)