

**CONSISTENT BIBLICAL FUTURISM**  
Part VII  
by Thomas Ice

As I continue to look at the Olivet Discourse and futurism, we are seeing that if part or all the events prophesied in Matthew 24:4–12 refer to the inter-advent age—which is the current church age—then imminency is impossible. Yet, all pretribulational rapturists believe that the New Testament Epistles teach us to look for Christ Himself, which indicates that no event or series of events must occur before Christ can come in the clouds and take His church with Him to the Father’s house. Let’s take a look at imminency passages.

**IMMINENCY PASSAGES**

Wayne Brindle has given four helpful criteria as guidelines for identifying a passage that teaches the imminence of the rapture. Brindle contends that if any one of the four criteria is found in a New Testament passage then it indicates imminence. The four criteria are as follows, which also provides a definition of imminence:

- (1) The passage speaks of Christ’s return as at any moment.
- (2) The passage speaks of Christ’s return as “near,” without stating any signs that must precede His coming.
- (3) The passage speaks of Christ’s return as something that gives believers hope and encouragement, without indicating that these believers will suffer tribulation.
- (4) The passage speaks of Christ’s return as giving hope without relating it to God’s judgment of unbelievers.<sup>i</sup>

Brindle notes that many second coming passages do not teach imminence, based upon his criteria. “Matthew 24—25, for example, describes Christ’s return as delivering the elect from the midst of tribulation and death, and thus those chapters do not prove imminence,” declares Brindle. “Likewise 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 19 fail to speak of imminence, since both depict eschatological events that include signs for Christ’s return (although 2 Thess. 2:1, a reference to the rapture, could arguably be separated from the rest of the chapter).” He concludes that, “seven New Testament passages do clearly teach the imminent return of Christ.”<sup>ii</sup>

**SEVEN PASSAGES**

Brindle’s seven passages are as follows: John 14:1–3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 5:4–9; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:2–3; Revelation 22:7, 12, 20.<sup>iii</sup> The first passage is John 14:1–3: “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.” This is the only passage in the Gospels that speaks of the rapture. It was in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13—16, 17), the night before Christ was crucified, in which He introduces Church Age truth, including the rapture in verse 3. Brindle classifies this passage as teaching imminence since Christ returns with believers to the Father’s House in heaven, instead of remaining on earth for the millennium, as will take place at the second advent. Further, there are no intervening events that must take place before Christ’s return.<sup>iv</sup>

Second, 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10: “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.” The wrath spoken of by Paul must surely refer to “the day of the Lord” (2 Thess. 2:2) or the wrath of the tribulation (1 Thess. 5:3, 9). Thus, believers will be delivered by Jesus, (through the rapture), from future wrath (the tribulation). Brindle notes that, “the statement points to a deliverance before wrath begins.”<sup>v</sup> This passage speaks of an imminent return.

Third, 1 Thessalonians 5:4–9: “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,”

Fourth, 1 Corinthians 1:7: “so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Corinthian church is instructed by Paul to focus not on spiritual gifts, but on the return of Christ. They are “awaiting eagerly” His revelation, which supports the notion of imminence. If one is “awaiting eagerly” something, it is the entire focus of their expectation, which could not be the case of events were to precede Christ’s revelation.

Fifth, Titus 2:13: “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” “Paul’s terminology here strongly implies that ‘the blessed hope,’ as the Christian’s ultimate hope, is the rapture presented as a totally positive and joyful expectation.”<sup>vi</sup> Surely this would not be the case if one were destined to go through the events of the tribulation. There would be a dread, because in order to experience the happiness of Christ return, they would first have to endure the pain of tribulation. This is not the case at all in this passage. Believers are to be looking for an imminent appearing of their Savior, Christ Jesus, not signs or events that must precede His appearing.

Sixth, 1 John 3:2–3: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Once again the focus of this passage is on the fact that Christ will appear. There are no other signs preceding his appearing, which forms the basis for always being ready by purifying oneself as He is pure. Imminence is clearly taught in this passage. “If a person expects important guests to arrive momentarily, he or she may be busily engaged in cleaning the house and making every possible preparation for the arrival—perhaps focusing with great eagerness on ‘purifying’ the house and making it ready,” notes Brindle. “The hope is realistic and motivational in proportion to its imminence.”<sup>vii</sup>

Seventh, Revelation 22:7, 12, 20: “And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:7). “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (22:12). “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (22:20). The focus of these verses in Revelation 22 are upon the fact that Jesus is coming “quickly.” “Quickly” is an adjective that pertains “to a very brief period of time, with focus on speed of an activity or event.” Specifically, in these contexts, it is a qualitative adjective and means “without delay, quickly, at

once.”<sup>viii</sup> In other words, when the event or events that these three verses reference, begin to occur, when ever that will be, they will come to pass “quickly,” “suddenly,” “unexpectedly,” “without delay” from the perspective of the recipient of these actions. There will be no warning or signal that this event is about to take place. This is why these passages are said to teach imminency concerning Christ’s return, which has to refer to the rapture that precedes the numerous events of the tribulation described in Revelation. Brindle concludes: “The promises thus assume imminence, and the probability of a reference to the rapture is strengthened by the reference to Christ’s rewards in 22:12 (based on works, as at the judgment seat of Christ; 2 Cor. 5:10–11).”<sup>ix</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Imminency is an important item within a futurist interpretative approach. Brindle concludes: “These passages that promise the rapture of the church all teach, imply, or allow for imminence as an event that can occur ‘at any moment.’ The purpose of most of these passages is to encourage believers concerning the hope that awaits them or to motivate them to pursue holiness in anticipation of seeing Christ soon.”<sup>x</sup> On the other hand, the Olivet Discourse tells believers to watch for signs and to “endure to the end, he shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13). Church age believers are told to wait, not watch, since there are no signs preceding the “any moment” or imminent rapture event. These are two separate events. Thus, if there are signs of Christ’s coming throughout the Church Age, especially toward the end, then it leads to the clear conclusion that their cannot be a pre-trib rapture before the tribulation or the concept of imminence must be totally redefined, as many posttribulationists have done. Instead, it is better to apply consistent futurism to the Olivet Discourse and see all of the events of verses 4–31 as occurring within the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, not in any part of the current Church Age. Maranatha!

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Wayne A. Brindle, “Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April–June 2002; vol. 158, no. 630), p. 139.

<sup>ii</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” p. 139.

<sup>iii</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” pp. 139–51.

<sup>iv</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” pp. 141–42.

<sup>v</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” p. 143.

<sup>vi</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” p. 148.

<sup>vii</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” p. 149.

<sup>viii</sup> W. F. Arndt, F. W. Danker, F. W. Gingrich, & Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 993.

<sup>ix</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” p. 151.

<sup>x</sup> Brindle, “Imminence of the Rapture,” p. 151.