

JESUS AND THE RAPTURE

by Andy Woods

Introduction

Did Jesus ever refer to the rapture? When this question is asked, two passages usually come to mind: Matt 24:40-41 and John 14:1-4. The purpose of this paper is to show that although Christ did not refer to the rapture in Matt 24:40-41, He did refer to the rapture in John 14:1-4. The first part of this paper is an examination of Matthew 24:40-41 as a potential rapture passage. This section seeks to dissuade readers from connecting Christ's statement in Matt 24:40-41 to the rapture through an examination of the role of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew's overall argument, through an examination of the textual details within and surrounding Matthew 24:40-41, and by noting the inadequacy of the arguments for a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40-41. The second part of the paper is an examination of John 14:1-4 as a potential rapture passage. This section will attempt to argue that Christ was referring to the rapture in John 14:1-4 by making several preliminary observations that should create an openness to the rapture interpretation, by observing the textual details of John 14:1-4 that point in the direction of a rapture interpretation, and by showing the inadequacy of the alternative non-rapture interpretations of John 14:1-4.

Matthew 24:40-41

Matthew 24:40-41 says, "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left." It is common for popular prophecy writers to assign a rapture

significance to these verses.¹ A popular 1970's Christian song by Larry Norman similarly interpreted these verses as pertaining to the rapture: "A man and wife asleep in bed. She hears a noise and turns her head, he's gone. I wish we'd all been ready. Two men walking up a hill. One disappears and one's left standing still. I wish we'd all been ready." However, a close examination of the passage demonstrates that it is unlikely that it is referring to the rapture.

Matthew's Argument and the Olivet Discourse

Matthew's Jewish-Christian Audience

Understanding the role of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew's overall argument weakens the notion of attaching a rapture significance to Matt 24:40-41. Although no specific target audience is mentioned, various clues make it apparent that Matthew had a believing Jewish audience in mind.² The Jewish nature of the book is apparent by noting several factors. First, the book contains a disproportionate number of Old Testament citations and allusions. Of the book's 129 Old Testament references, 53 are direct citations and 76 are allusions. On thirteen occasions, Christ's actions are said to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Second, the book follows a fivefold division. The five major sermons of the book are delineated through the repetition of the concluding formula "when He had finished saying these things" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This fivefold structure would have immediately been recognizable to the Jewish mind since Jews had a tendency to categorize items, such as the Book of Psalms and the Pentateuch, according to a fivefold division. Third, although originally written in Greek, the book evidences a Hebraistic style, parallelism, and elaboration.

¹ Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 210-11.

² Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980; reprint, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005), 15-18.

Fourth, *tote* (“then” or “at that time”) reflects a Jewish style. While this term is employed ninety times in Matthew, it is only used six times in Mark, fourteen times in Luke, and ten times in John. Fifth, the vocabulary of the book is distinctly Jewish. The following Jewish terms are found in the book: David, Jerusalem as the Holy City (4:5; 27:53), city of the great king (5:35), lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6; 15:24), kingdom of God, and kingdom of heaven.³ Sixth, the subject matter of the topics covered is distinctly Jewish. Among the topics covered are the Law, ceremonial defilements, Sabbath, kingdom, Jerusalem, temple, Messiah, prophecy, prophets, David, Abram, Moses, scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

Seventh, Matthew’s genealogy reveals a Jewish audience. Matthew traces Christ back to David and Abraham rather than back to Adam (Luke 3). Eighth, Matthew places a special focus upon the Apostle Peter. Because Peter was the apostle to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-8), Matthew’s focus on Peter harmonizes with the Jewish emphasis of his book. Ninth, unlike the other Gospels that explain Jewish customs to Gentile audiences, Matthew leaves these same Jewish customs unexplained. This is true not only with regard to Jewish rulers (Matt 2:1, 22; 14:1; Luke 2:1-2; 3:1-2) but it is also true with regard to ceremonial cleansing (Matt 15:2; Mark 7:3-4). The customs that Matthew does explain are of Roman rather than Jewish origin (Matt 27:15). Although some of Matthew’s writings seem to anticipate at least some kind of Gentile audience by giving the interpretation of some Jewish words (1:23; 27:33, 46), it does seem to be a general rule that Matthew provides fewer interpretations of Jewish customs than any other Gospel writer.

³ Interestingly, “kingdom of heaven” appears thirty one times (3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1) and “kingdom of God” (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43) appears only five times. These terms are synonymous (Matt 19:23-24). However, the multiple references to the former and the scant references to the latter also reflect a common Jewish reluctance of mentioning God’s name directly.

Tenth, various church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius believed that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience. Not only was Matthew written to a Jewish audience but to a believing audience as well. In other words, Matthew's audience primarily consisted of Jewish Christians. Both Eusebius⁴ and Origen⁵ indicated that Matthew was written to those within Judaism who came to believe.

Matthew's Purpose and Argument

Matthew wrote in order to accomplish three *purposes*.⁶ First, he wrote to convince his Jewish audience that the Christ in whom they had believed was indeed the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Thus, Matthew shows that Christ was the rightful heir to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. Matthew appeals to a variety of devices to accomplish this purpose such as genealogies, fulfilled prophecy, messianic titles, kingdom teachings, and miracles. Because the Jewish understanding was that the kingdom would be immediately established upon the arrival of the king (Isa 9:6-7; Matt 20:20-21), the next logical question that a Jew would ask is, "if Christ is indeed the Jewish king then where is His kingdom?"

Thus, Matthew wrote for the second purpose of explaining why the kingdom had been postponed despite the fact that the king had already arrived. In order to accomplish this purpose, Matthew carefully traces the kingdom program. Here Matthew explains the kingdom's offer to the nation (3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7; 15:24), its rejection by the nation (11-12; 21-23; 26-27), the present interim program for those who will inherit the kingdom (sons of the kingdom) due to Israel's rejection of the kingdom (13; 16:18), and the nation's eventual acceptance of the kingdom (23:38-39; 24:14, 31; 25:31). The notion

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24.6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.25.4.

⁶ Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, 18-20.

of a past rejection and future acceptance of the kingdom by national Israel would lead to the question, “what is God doing in the present?”

Thus, Matthew wrote for the third purpose of explaining God’s interim program. Here, Matthew introduces the interim program that the sons of the kingdom will experience (Matt 13), as well as the advent of the church (Matt 16:18; 18:17; 28:18-20). The Church Age represents God’s present earthly program between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of the King and His kingdom. Since Christ’s disciples would play foundational roles in the church (Eph 2:20), Matthew explains how Christ prepared them not only for His death but also for their new role in the church age.

At the time of writing, the Gentiles were becoming more prominent in the church. The Jewish believers needed an explanation for this Gentile inclusion. Thus, Matthew explains how God’s interim program would thrust the Gentiles into prominence (2:1-12; 8:11-12; 13:38; 15:22-28). In sum, Matthew selectively (John 20:30-31; 21:25) includes material from Christ’s life in order to accomplish these purposes. Therefore, the *message* of Matthew is the confirmation to Jewish Christians that Jesus is their predicted king who ushered in an interim program by building the sons of the kingdom into the church in between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of her King.

In addition to this overarching purpose, Matthew wrote to accomplish three sub-purposes. *First*, Matthew wanted to confirm the Jewish Christians in their faith. He wanted them to understand that the Jesus in whom they had believed was indeed the Jewish king. This was true in spite of the fact that the kingdom had not immediately materialized according to their expectations and instead God’s program had taken a new direction. *Second*, Matthew wrote to offer the believing Jews an explanation regarding Gentile inclusion in God’s present program. This was an explanation that the believing Jews desperately needed since the church was on the verge of becoming predominately Gentile through the coming three missionary journeys launched from Syrian Antioch. Thus, Matthew wrote his Gospel from this very locale for the purpose of assisting the

church through this delicate transition. *Third*, Matthew wanted to encourage the Jewish Christians. Thus, he explained that although Israel had rejected her king, God was going to use this negative act for the positive purpose of including the Gentiles. He was also going to restore the kingdom to Israel in the future.

Matthew's Structure

A major structural clue in Matthew's Gospel is the repetition of the concluding phrase “when He had finished saying these things” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This formula alerts the reader to the book’s five major discourses. Each discourse concludes with this phrase. Thus, the five major discourses include the Sermon on the Mount (5–7), the missionary discourse (10), the kingdom parables (13), the discourse on humility (18), and the Olivet Discourse (24–25).⁷

In order to explain to his Jewish-Christian audience how Christ can be the Jewish king and yet at the same time the Jewish kingdom is absent and the Gentiles are prominent in the mystery age, Matthew develops a well-organized argument. First, he establishes Christ’s messianic identity and traces Christ’s offer of the kingdom to Israel (1–10). Second, he shows the nation’s rejection of this offer (11–12; 20:29–23:39). Third, he explains God’s inclusion of the Gentiles in the mystery age during the kingdom’s absence and postponement (13:1–20:28). Matthew then develops the final part of his argument. Although the kingdom has been postponed in the present, it will be re-offered to and accepted by the nation in the future. Although he has alluded to this restoration earlier (17:1-13; 19:28; 20:20-28), Matthew most clearly develops the idea of the kingdom’s restoration to Israel in his fifth and final discourse section known as the Olivet Discourse (24–25).⁸ Matthew’s Jewish audience would have been familiar with Old

⁷ Ibid., 24-25.

⁸ Ibid., 265-66.

Testament Scripture predicting Israel's conversion as a result of the Great Tribulation (Jer 30:7; Dan 9:24-27). The Olivet Discourse is simply an amplification of these prophecies (24:15). Matthew includes this final phase of his argument in order to give his Jewish readers hope that present Gentile prominence in the mystery age does not mean that God has forsaken His covenant promises to His chosen nation.

Emphasis of the Olivet Discourse

Matthew's emphasis upon Israel's restoration in the Olivet Discourse grows out of the final verses of the previous chapter (23:37-39). There, Christ expressed His desire to gather (*episynagō*) Israel. However, the nation had rejected the kingdom offer. Christ promises that the time would come when the nation would acknowledge Him as the Messiah by chanting a messianic Psalm (Ps 118:26; Matt 21:9) thereby allowing Christ to return and re-gather (*episynagō*) His nation (23:39). Thus, the Olivet Discourse furnishes the circumstances through which Israel's restoration and final regathering will be achieved (24:31).

If the Olivet Discourse is a natural extension of Christ's promise to restore the nation in the future, interpreters should not be surprised to discover the Jewish nature of this discourse. After all, Christ's promise of restoration at the end of Matthew 23 was given exclusively to Israel. Christ makes this clear through the twofold repetition of the word "Jerusalem" in Matt 23:37a. Moreover, various Jewish references, such as the destruction of the second temple (24:1-2), the offer of the kingdom (24:14), Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks (24:15), the holy place (24:15), the desecration of the temple (24:15), the flight into the Judean wilderness (24:16), the Sabbath (24:20), the elect (24:22), the Messiah (24:23-24), and the Davidic Throne (25:31), found throughout

the discourse make it clear that the Olivet Discourse primarily concerns Israel.⁹ In sum, the Olivet Discourse plays a critical role in Matthew's overall presentation to his Jewish-Christian audience. As explained, his inclusion of the Olivet Discourse is designed to give his readers hope of a future Jewish kingdom. Such a theme should have a bearing upon how Matt 24:40-41 is interpreted. Rather than understanding these verses as relating to Church Age truth, such as the rapture, it is better to understand them against the backdrop of the Tribulation judgment leading to Israel's restoration.

Textual Details Within and Surrounding Matthew 24:40-41

Not only does Matthew's overall argument mitigate understanding Matt 24:40-41 as the rapture, but the details of the text within and surrounding Matt 24:40-41 also weaken a rapture interpretation of these verses. Such details include the passage's connection with Noah's day, the order of the other Matthean judgments, and the Lukan parallel passage.

The Connection to Noah's Day

The context of Matthew 24:40-41 relates directly to what transpired in Noah's day, which is described in the immediately preceding verses (Matt 24:37-39). These earlier verses say, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the Flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:37-39). These verses are then followed by verses 40-41, which say, "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left." The connective *tote*, which

⁹ Ibid., 277; Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Isrel, 1995), 184.

begins verse 40 links verses 40-41 with verses 37-39. Because of this connective, if we can understand who was taken in Noah's day, it will help us understand who will be taken in verses 40-41.

When verse 39 says, "the flood came and took them all away," it is a reference to the unbelievers who did not enter the ark and consequently were taken away by the Flood. While the unbelievers of Noah's day were taken away in judgment, Noah was preserved from being swept away in judgment thereby allowing him to enter the next dispensation of Human Government. Thus, by way of analogy, the man taken from the field and the woman taken from grinding at the mill (40-41) are unbelievers being taken away into judgment at the Lord's return. While the unbelievers will be taken away in judgment, the believers will be left behind thereby allowing them to enter the next dispensation of the millennial kingdom. Such an order is the exact opposite of the rapture, which will take believers away into eternal bliss and leave the unbelievers behind upon the earth to experience divine judgment (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-58). Thus, the more verses 40-41 are connected with the events of Noah's day as depicted in the same context, the less probable it is to ascribe to verses 40-41 a rapture interpretation.

This view that Matt 24:40-41 refers to judgment at the Second Advent rather than the rapture is held by numerous credible Bible interpreters. According to Walvoord:

According to Matthew 24:40-41, "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left." Because at the rapture, believers will be taken out of the world, some have confused this with the rapture of the church. Here, however, the situation is the reverse. The one who is left, is left to enter the kingdom; the one who is taken, is taken in judgment. This is in keeping with the illustration of the time of Noah when the ones taken away are the unbelievers.¹⁰

Feinberg also explains:

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 193.

It will be a taking away judicially and in judgment. The ones left will enjoy the blessings of Christ's reign on earth, just as Noah and his family were left to continue on earth. This is the opposite of the rapture, where those who are left go into the judgment of the Great Tribulation.¹¹

Showers echoes:

Jesus was not referring to the Rapture of the church in Matthew 24. When that event takes place, all the saved will be removed from the earth to meet Christ in the air, and all the unsaved will be left on the earth. Thus, the rapture will occur in reverse of the order of things in the days of Noah and, therefore, the reverse of the order at Jesus' coming immediately after the Great Tribulation.¹²

Toussaint similarly notes, "Since it is parallel in thought with those who were taken in the judgment of the flood, it is best to refer the verb to those who are taken for judgment preceding the establishment of the kingdom."¹³

Order of the Other Matthean Judgments

Matthew's description of the flood of Noah's day, which depicts the unbelievers being taken in judgment while the believers are left behind to enter the new dispensation, is by no means an isolated case. All of the Matthean judgments follow the same pattern. For example, in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30), it is the tares or the unbelievers that are first gathered to be burned (Matt 13:30a, 41-42). Then the wheat or the saved are left behind to enter the kingdom (Matt 13:30b, 43). Moreover, in the parable of the dragnet (Matt 13:47-50), it is the bad fish or the unbelievers that are first gathered to be thrown away (Matt 13:48b, 49-50). Then the good fish, or the saved, are left behind to enter the kingdom (Matt 13:48a). In addition, in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31-46), it is the goats, or the unbelievers, that are first cast off the earth into judgment (Matt 25:41-46). Then the sheep, or the saved, are left behind to enter

¹¹ Charles L. Feinberg, *Israel in the Last Days: The Olivet Discourse* (Altadena, CA: Emeth, 1953), 27.

¹² Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 180.

¹³ Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, 281.

the kingdom (Matt 25:34-40). Matthew's consistent pattern of judgment found throughout his book is that the unsaved are taken into judgment while the saved are left behind to enter into the kingdom. Thus, the same order of events is likely in view in Matt 24:40-41. Such an order would contradict the order of the rapture where the exact opposite chronology will transpire.

The Lukan Parallel Passage

Luke 17:26-37 offers the parallel passage to Matthew 24:40-41:

"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it. I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left." And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered."

In addition to Matthew's description of one man taken from the field and the woman taken away from grinding, Luke adds the one taken from the bed and the other left. Luke also records the disciples' question "Where, Lord?" (Luke 17:37a). This inquiry relates to the locale to where those taken will go since Christ made it clear that those not taken will be left upon the earth. Christ answers, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered" (Luke 17:37b). "Vultures" refers to those birds of prey that

gorge on the flesh of corpses.¹⁴ Such imagery connotes judgment where the birds of prey will feast upon carcasses of the deceased (Matt 24:28; Rev 19:17-18, 21). By using such imagery, Christ explains that those taken in Luke 17:34-36 are those taken into destruction and judgment. Of course, the rapture involves the opposite. At the rapture, those taken are taken into glory rather than judgment. Thus, the Lukan parallel passage with its emphasis upon being taken into judgment substantially weakens the rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40-41.¹⁵ In sum, the connection with Noah's day, the consistent order of the other Matthean judgments, and the Lukan parallel passage all negate a rapture interpretation of Matt 24:40-41.

Inadequacy of Arguments Favoring a Rapture in Matt 24:40-41

Thus far we have seen that Matthew 24:40-41 should not be given a rapture interpretation based upon the place of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew's overall argument and based upon an examination of the textual details within and surrounding Matthew 24:40-41. This section furthers this same thesis by noting the inadequacy of the arguments for a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40-41. Such arguments include the use of *paralambanō* in verses 40-41, the rapture is in view in Matt 24:31, the day or hour of the Second Advent can be discerned once the Tribulation period begins, and that normal life activities as depicted in Matt 24:40-41 could not take place at the end of the Tribulation period.

The Use of *Paralambanō* in Matthew 24:40-41

One of the reasons various interpreters believe that the rapture is in view in Matt 24:40-41 is because of Matthew's switch from *airō* when describing those "taken" in

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 22, 382.

¹⁵ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 184-86.

the Flood in verse 39 to *paralambanō* when describing those "taken" in verses 40-41. Those who believe that the rapture is in view in verses 40-41 are quick to point out that *paralambanō* in these verses is the same word that John used to depict those taken in the rapture in John 14:3. According to this argument, Christ must also be describing taking believers to Himself in Matt 24:40-41. However, several reasons make it apparent that Matthew's use of *paralambanō* in these verses need not signal to the reader that the apostle has suddenly switched to a discussion of the rapture.¹⁶

First, *paralambanō* is a non-technical term. It is not a word that has the same definition everywhere it is used. While *paralambanō* can refer to the Lord taking believers to Himself (John 14:3), it also can refer to a taking away in a negative sense. For example, it is used to describe Satan taking Jesus to a venue for purposes of temptation (Matt 4:5, 8), a demon taking other demons for the purposes of indwelling a man (Matt 12:45), and Christ being taken away to be abused (Matt 27:27) and eventually crucified (John 19:16). Thus, whenever *paralambanō* is used, its meaning must be determined from its context. As explained previously, the context of Matt 24:40-41 involves judgment rather than deliverance.¹⁷

Second, it is possible for two different words for "taking" to describe the same event rather than different events. For example 2 Kgs 2 uses two different Hebrew words to describe Elijah being taken to heaven. Second Kgs 2:1 uses *alah* to describe this taking. Second Kgs 2:3, 5 uses *laqach* to describe the same event. Interestingly, John 19:15-16 uses both *airō* (vs. 15) and *paralambanō* (vs. 16) to denote the singular event of Christ being taken away for crucifixion. Why cannot Matthew 24:39-41 also use the same two words to allude to the singular event of Christ's return in judgment?

¹⁶ Ibid., 180-81.

¹⁷ Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, 281; Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, 193-94; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 476-77.

Third, there is a logical reason for the use of two different Greek words in Matt 24:39-41. When God took the unbelievers away into judgment in Noah's day, he used an impersonal agency to do so: the floodwaters. However, when He takes the unbelievers away into judgment following His return, He will use a personal agency to do so: angelic beings. Although angelic beings are not specifically mentioned in Matt 24:40-41, they are mentioned in the Matthean parallel passages describing the future judgment awaiting unbelievers at Christ's Second Advent (Matt 13:39, 49). Thus, the switch in Greek words in Matt 24:39-41 may simply signal the different agencies that the Lord uses in judgment rather than a switch in a judgment-coming (Matt 24:39) to a rapture-coming (Matt 24:40-41). Thus, Toussaint summarizes, "The differences in verbs can be accounted for on the basis of accuracy of description."¹⁸

Rapture in Matt 24:31?

Many are confident that the rapture is in view Matt 24:40-41 because the rapture is also conspicuous in the same context (Matt 24:31). Matt 24:31 says, "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." Those who hold to a rapture interpretation of this passage point to the numerous similarities between the coming of Christ in Matt 24:31 and other rapture passages such as 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-58. Examples of such similarities include Christ's coming in a cloud (Matt 24:30), the sounding of a trumpet, and the world-wide gathering of believers (Matt 24:31).¹⁹ On account of these similarities with other well-known rapture passages, many are confident that the rapture is in view in Matthew 24:31 and thus also in Matt 24:40-41.

¹⁸ Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, 281.

¹⁹ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 135.

However, it is a logical fallacy to assume that mere similarity is the same as equality. For example, although one can point to similarities between my two automobiles, this is not to say that one automobile is the same as the other. While there may be some points of similarity between Matt 24:31 and other rapture passages, this does not necessarily mean that the two passages are speaking of the same event especially if it can be shown that there are substantial differences between the passages. Many observe that any similarities between Matt 24:31 and other rapture passages are outweighed by substantial differences. Ice observes, "In 1 Thessalonians 4 believers are gathered in the air and taken to heaven, while in Matthew 24 they are gathered after Christ's arrival to earth.." ²⁰ Sproule queries:

Where does Paul mention the darkening of the sun (Matt. 24:29), the moon not giving its light (Matt. 24:29), the stars falling from the sky (Matt. 24:29), the powers of the heavens being shaken (Matt. 24:29), all the tribes of the earth mourning (Matt. 24:30), all the world seeing the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:30), or God sending forth angels (Matt.24:31)?²¹

Feinberg similarly notes:

Notice what happens when you examine both passages carefully. In Matthew the Son of Man comes on the clouds, while in 1 Thessalonians 4 the ascending believers are in them. In Matthew the angels gather the elect; in 1 Thessalonians the Lord Himself (note the emphasis) gathers the believers. Thessalonians only speaks of the voice of the archangel. In the Olivet Discourse nothing is said about a resurrection, while in the latter text it is the central point. In the two passages the differences in what will take place prior to the appearance of Christ is striking. Moreover, the order of ascent is absent from Matthew in spite of the fact that it is the central part of the epistle.²²

²⁰ Thomas Ice, "Matthew 24:31: Rapture or Second Coming?," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 31 August 2011, 2.

²¹ John A. Sproule, "An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism" (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 53.

²² Paul D. Feinberg, "Response: Paul D. Feinberg," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulation*, ed. Richard R. Reiter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 225.

In order to equate Matt 24:31 with the rapture passages, a reconciliation of all of these differences is needed rather than merely highlighting a handful of similarities.

Also, Showers explains how the imagery of Matt 24:31 has more in common with what the Old Testament predicts concerning Israel's eschatological regathering rather than the church's rapture.

First, because of Israel's persistent rebellion against God, He declared that He would scatter the Jews "into all the winds" (Ezek. 5:10, 12) or "toward all winds" (Ezek. 17:21). In Zechariah 2:6 God stated that He did scatter them abroad "as four winds of the heavens." . . . God did scatter the Jews all over the world. Next, God also declared that in the future Israel would be gathered from the east, west, north, and south, "from the ends of the earth" (Isa. 43:5-7). We should note that in the context of this promise, God called Israel His "chosen" (vv. 10, 20). . . Just as Jesus indicated that the gathering of His elect from the four directions of the world will take place in conjunction with "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Greek text of Mt. 24:21), so Isaiah 27:13 teaches that the scattered children of Israel will be gathered to their homeland in conjunction with the blowing of "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Hebrew). . . Gerhard Friedrich wrote that in that future eschatological day "a great horn shall be blown (Is. 27:13)" and the exiled will be brought back by that signal. Again he asserted that in conjunction with the blowing of the great trumpet of Isaiah 27:13, "There follows the gathering of Israel and the return of the dispersed to Zion." It is significant to note that Isaiah 27:13, which foretells this future regathering of Israel, is the only specific reference in the Old Testament to a "great" trumpet. Although Isaiah 11:11-12 does not refer to a great trumpet, it is parallel to Isaiah 27:13 because it refers to the same regathering of Israel. In its context, this passage indicates that when the Messiah (a root of Jesse, vv. 1, 10) comes to rule and transform the world as an "ensign" (a banner), He will gather together the scattered remnant of His people Israel "from the four corners of the earth."²³

In fact, contextually, the regathering spoken of in Matt 24:31 harks back to Matt 23:37. There Christ expressed a desire to gather an unwilling first-century Israel. He clearly identifies His audience as Israel in verse 37 with the twofold repetition of the word "Jerusalem." However, although first-century Israel was unwilling to be gathered by her Messiah, a future generation of repentant Jews will be regathered by Christ upon

²³ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 182-83.

His return at the conclusion of the Tribulation. Matthew uses the same verb "gather" (*episynagō*) in both Matt 23:37 and Matt 24:31 in order to draw this connection.

Day or Hour Can Be Known in the Tribulation

Those who argue that Matt 24:40-41 is speaking of the rapture rather than the Second Advent note that the context favors the rapture. It is contended that this point is especially true considering Matt 24:36, which says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." It is argued that the phrase "no one knows the day or the hour" (24:36) cannot be speaking of the Second Advent at the end of the Tribulation since people would know the time of that event. This event will take place exactly seven years after the Antichrist enters into the peace treaty with Israel (Dan 9:27). Because, Matt 24:36 cannot be speaking of the Second Advent, it must be speaking of the rapture.

However, the phrase in verse 36 could be given from the perspective of an unbeliever.²⁴ Unbelievers will always be unprepared for Christ's return regardless of what era of history they are living in. Matthew 24:42 exhorts believers to be alert. The same Greek verb for "alert" (*grēgoreō*) as used in Matt 24:42 is also used in 1 Thess 5:6 and Rev 16:15. Both 1 Thess 5:4-6 and Rev 16:15 speak of the nonalert state of the unbeliever regarding Christ's return. First Thess 5:3 says, "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child; and they will not escape." By contrast, the child of God will not be caught off guard for Christ's return since he is a child of the day rather than the night (1 Thess 5:4).

²⁴ Thomas Ice, "An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25, Part XXXV," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 1 September 2011, 1-2.

Also, Revelation 16:15 provides the following parenthetical statement after the sixth bowl judgment: "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame." Late in the Tribulation, this verse analogizes Christ's return to a thief coming upon an unprepared victim. Thus, even after eighteen of Revelation's nineteen judgments have transpired, unbelievers in the Tribulation will still be caught off guard by Christ's return.

Interpreting verse 36 from the perspective of the unbeliever fits the parallel with Noah's day (Matt 24:37-39) that immediately follows verse 36 and concludes before verses 40-41. In Noah's day, it was the unbelievers who were caught off guard when the Flood-judgment finally came (Matt 24:39) despite Noah's faithful warning of coming judgment (2 Pet 2:5) for 120 years (Gen 6:3). Because Matt 24:36 is similarly narrated from the perspective of the unbeliever, it can be understood as a reference to the Second Coming rather than the rapture. Although the time of the rapture is unknown to all, the time of the Second Advent at the end of the Tribulation period will be unknown to unbelievers.

Normal Life Activities at the End of the Tribulation?

A final argument used to contend that Matt 24:40-41 is speaking of the rapture rather than Christ's judgment-coming in His Second Advent at the end of the Tribulation relates to how normal life seems to be described in these verses. They speak of people working in the field, grinding at the mill, sleeping in the bed (Luke 17:34), etc...Given the global judgments of the Tribulation, how could normal life patterns be taking place prior to Christ's Second Advent? Therefore, according to some, it makes far more sense to associate these events with the rapture before the Tribulation unfolds. Dave Hunt notes:

When Christ says, "As it was in the days of Noah and Lot," it is absolutely certain that He is not describing conditions that will prevail at the time of the Second Coming. Therefore, these must be the conditions which will prevail just prior to

the Rapture at a different time—and, obviously, before the devastation of the tribulation period.²⁵

By way of response, the primary purpose of these verses is not to describe normal life patterns. Christ's major point was to emphasize the unprepared state of the unbeliever. It is possible that verses 40-41 are a figure of speech depicting unbelievers being caught up in the system of the Antichrist during the Tribulation. Therefore these verses are not speaking of ordinary life. Unbelievers in the Antichrist's system will be so caught up in everyday life that they will not be looking for Christ's return. Consequently, they will be caught off guard when the Second Advent takes place. This point is the major one that Christ seeks to get across rather than describing life behavior at the Tribulation's conclusion. In sum, the arguments used by those seeking to find the rapture rather than the Second Advent in Matt 24:40-41 are answerable. Such arguments include the use of *paralambanō* in verses 40-41, the rapture is in view in Matt 24:31, the day or hour of the Second Advent can be discerned once the Tribulation period begins, and that normal life activities as depicted in Matt 24:40-41 could not take place at the end of the Tribulation.

Conclusion

Matthew 24:40-41 is not a rapture text. This point has been established through an examination of the role of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew's overall argument, through an examination of the textual details within and surrounding Matthew 24:40-41, and by noting the inadequacy of the arguments for a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40-41. Since the rapture is not found in Matt 24:40-41, is there a better place to locate the rapture in Christ's teaching? The second part of this paper provides the answer to this important question.

²⁵ Hunt, *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ*, 210-11.

John 14:1-4

This section of the paper will attempt to argue that Christ spoke of the rapture of the church in John 14:1-4. These verses say:

Do not let 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. 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. And you know the way where I am going.

This section will attempt to make this argument by noting several preliminary reasons why interpreters should be open to a rapture teaching in this passage, by contending that the details of the text favor a rapture interpretation, and by noting the inadequacy of the views advocating a non-rapture interpretation of John 14:1-4.

Preliminary Reasons

There are five preliminary reasons why interpreters should be open to a rapture interpretation in John 14:1-4 even before an exegesis of this passage is attempted. These reasons include the significance of the Upper Room Discourse, the eschatological flavor of the discourse, the eschatological interpretation of John 14:1-4 found in the early church fathers, the passage's congruity with the Jewish marriage analogy, and the parallels between John 14:1-4 and 1 Thess 4:13-18.

Significance of the Upper Room Discourse

As previously explained, the position of the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25) in Matthew's overall argument plays a significant role in ascertaining whether Christ is speaking of the rapture in Matt 24:40-41. Similarly, the position of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17) in John's overall argument plays a significant role in discerning whether Christ is speaking of the rapture in John 14:1-4. John explains his purpose in writing his Gospel in 20:30-31. These verses say, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these

have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." First, John writes for the *Christological* purpose of convincing his readers of Christ's divine identity through a selective record of His signs. Second, John writes for the *soteriological* purpose of invoking his readers toward faith in Christ. John desires for unbelievers to "believe" in Jesus and for believers to keep on "believing" in Him for purposes of their practical sanctification.

To this end, John unfolds the heavenly genealogy of Christ in his prologue (1:1-18) and the divine identity of Jesus through a record of His seven signs and discourses (1:19–11:57). This section is sometimes referred to as the Book of Signs. As predicted in the Old Testament (Dan 9:25), Christ showed up on an exact timetable (Luke 19:38-39, 42, 44) to present His messianic credentials to the nation during His Triumphant Entry (John 12). At this point, the nation of Israel formally rejected Christ as their king. John 12:37 accentuates Israel's unbelief when it says, "But though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him."

John's record of this national rejection at the Triumphant Entry (John 12) then leads to his recording of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17). There Christ reveals a new or mystery age known as the Church Age. Although the development of Church Age doctrine is fully accomplished in the Pauline epistolary literature, Christ reveals many Church Age truths in seed form in the Upper Room Discourse. Paul's teaching would bring these seeds to full maturity. Thus, in this discourse, Christ noted, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:12-13). Chafer explains:

The discourse embodies, in germ form, every essential of that system of doctrine which is distinctively Christian. Being addressed to Christians, it does not present truth which is peculiar to Israel, and being addressed to those who are saved, it does not present any feature of salvation by grace which is made possible through

the death and resurrection of Christ, which truth is implied. This portion is like a seed plot in which all is found that is later developed in the epistles of the New Testament. It serves as Christ's farewell address to believers—those whom the Father has given Him out of the *cosmos* world.²⁶

Thus, the Upper Room Discourse contains many seed truths that are given greater clarification and explanation in the epistles.²⁷ Such examples include the believers' oneness in Christ (John 17:20-23; Eph 2:11-22), the Spirit's permanent residence in the believer (John 14:16; Eph 4:30), the believer's union with Christ (John 14:20; Gal 2:20; Rom 6:1-14), the believer's opposition to the world (John 15:18-19; Jas 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17), the necessity for the believer to stay in fellowship with Christ (John 13:10; 15:1-17; 1 John 1:5-7, 9), abiding in Christ as a prerequisite for fruit bearing (John 15:1-7; Phil 4:13), the believer's election (John 15:16; Eph 1:4); Christ as the ultimate model of sacrificial living and service (John 13:1-20; Phil 2:5-11), the necessity of divine discipline in the believer's life (John 15:2; Heb 12:5-11), Satan as the god of this age (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2), the defeat of Satan at the cross (John 12:31; 16:11; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14), the Spirit as the inspirer of all Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21), the Spirit as the illuminator of all Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:14; 1 John 2:20, 27), Christ's provision of peace in the midst of adversity (John 14:27; Phil 4:7), the necessity of the Spirit's convicting ministry as a prerequisite for salvation (John 16:7-11; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:4), the normalcy of tribulations in the present age (John 16:33; Jas 1:2-4), the believer as the ultimate overcomer (John 16:33; 1 John 4:4; 5:4-5), Christ's present session at the Father's right hand (John 14:12-14; 17:5; Heb 8:1; 10:12-13), the power of prayer (John 14:12-14; Eph 6:18-20; Jas 5:16), the inerrancy of Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16), and the disclosure of Eschatology (John 16:13; 2 Thess 2:1-12).

²⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948; reprint, [8 vols. in 4], Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 3:25. See also 5:140-42, 145-46, 166.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5:143-66.

Since the Upper Room Discourse reveals Church Age truth in germ form, it should come as no great surprise that Christ would also disclose in this discourse how the earthly program of the church will conclude. Christ provides this very teaching through an initial and brief reference to the rapture in John 14:1-4. Conversely, because the focus of the Olivet Discourse is upon Israel's future restoration, it is less likely to find a rapture passage in Matt 24–25. The different literary emphases between the Olivet Discourse and the Upper Room Discourse are captured on the following chart:

	Olivet Discourse	Upper Room Discourse
Scriptural location	Matt 24–25	John 13–17
Parallel passages	Mark 13; Luke 21	Matt 26; Mark 14; Luke 22
Location of address	Mount of Olives	Upper Room
Time of address²⁸	Third day of the Passion Week	Sixth day of the Passion Week
General focus	Farewell address to Israel	Farewell Address to the Church
Specific focus	Israel's future	Divine provision for the disciples after Christ's imminent departure
Discourse prompted by:	Christ's prediction of temple's destruction (Matt 24:1-3)	Christ's announcement of His soon departure (John 13:1)
Explanation of which section of Scripture?	Previously written Old Testament	Unwritten New Testament

²⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 1494-95.

Eschatological Flavor of the Upper Room Discourse

Those who deny that John 14:1-4 is a rapture passage often point out that John's Gospel in general and the Upper Room Discourse in particular are not focused upon Eschatology. While it is true that John and the Upper Room Discourse do not focus upon Eschatology to the same magnitude as does Matthew's Gospel and the Olivet Discourse, it is an overstatement to say that John's Gospel and the Upper Room Discourse make no eschatological contribution. At least three reasons can be given as to why an eschatological insertion should not be surprising in John 13–17.²⁹ First, eschatological statements can be found sprinkled throughout John's Gospel as well as in the Upper Room Discourse. Examples include references to the two final resurrections (John 5:29; Dan 12:2; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:4-5), Israel's future acceptance of the future Antichrist in lieu of the true Christ (John 5:43; Dan 9:27a), Christ's promise to preserve and resurrect the believer in the last day (John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:25-26), and the coming of the Spirit who will disclose "things to come" (John 16:7, 13).

Second, John likely bypassed many eschatological statements that Christ made in the Upper Room Discourse since they were not germane to the apostle's purpose in writing. John, who wrote his gospel roughly 60 years after the discourse was given, did not write for the primary purpose of disclosing eschatological truth. Rather he wrote for the main purpose of encouraging faith in Christ (John 20:30-31). Given John's candid admission of selectivity employed throughout his Gospel (John 20:31; 21:25), he could have very well omitted many eschatological-oriented statements made by Christ in the Upper Room Discourse that had no direct bearing upon his Christological and soteriological purpose in composing his Gospel.

²⁹ George Gunn, "John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 2 September 2011, 11-13.

Third, according to Edersheim's reconstruction of the events in the upper room, Christ's promise in John 14:1-4 followed closely on the heels of two eschatological promises.³⁰ The first of these is Christ's promise in Matt 26:29: "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." The second of these is the reading of Psalm 118:26 in the progression of the Seder celebration. This Psalm says, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD." This verse has tremendous messianic and eschatological implications (Matt 21:9; 23:39). Thus, these two promises furnish the eschatological context for Christ's revelation of the rapture in John 14:1-4. In sum, the preceding reasons indicate that the Upper Room Discourse exhibited the appropriate eschatological background for Christ to unveil the rapture in John 14:1-4.

Church Fathers

There exists support for a "heavenly and eschatological" interpretation of John 14:1-4 among the earliest church fathers. Gunn cites and quotes five Ante-Nicene fathers who interpreted John 14:1-4 in this manner. They include Papias (ca. 110), Irenaeus (ca. 130-202), Tertullian (ca. 196-212), Origen (ca. 182-251), and Cyprian (d. 258).³¹ Thus Gunn concludes:

So we see that, from the earliest years following the death of the apostle John, through the mid third century, the promise of John 14:1-3 was seen in terms of a future coming to receive believers to heaven. The ante-nicene fathers did not think that this promise had been fulfilled either in Christ's own resurrection or in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And since the promise was seen as something to be fulfilled in conjunction with the believer's bodily resurrection, they clearly were not thinking in terms of multiple comings being fulfilled at

³⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 8th and rev. ed., 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 2:513.

³¹ Gunn, "John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," 7-11.

individual Christians' deaths, much less of a spiritual coming at the salvation of each individual Christian, but of a future day when all believers will be raised to receive their rewards.³²

Gunn further observes:

Interestingly, references to John 14:1-3 virtually disappear when perusing the writings of the Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers. This is a bit surprising, given the abundance of material in these later writers when compared with the Ante-Nicenes. I would assume that with the rise of Augustinian amillennialism and its optimistic interpretation regarding the present arrival of the Kingdom of God, the kind of hope held out in John 14:1-3 ceased to hold relevance.³³

Jewish Marriage Analogy

Christ's relationship to His church is analogous to that of a groom to his bride (Eph 5:22-33; 2 Cor 11:2). Thus, the New Testament uses the Jewish marriage custom as an analogy to depict the relationship between Christ and the church. There are seven aspects to this relationship.³⁴ First, the groom travels to the home of the bride's father and pays the *betrothal contract* price for the hand of the bride. This step is the equivalent of Christ's death that paid the price necessary for the church to enter into a relationship to Him (1 Cor 6:19-20). Second, during the *betrothal period* , the groom is temporarily separated from the bride in order to prepare temporary dwelling places in his father's house. These dwellings would eventually be indwelt by the groom and his new bride. This step represents Christ's Ascension and the beginning of the Church Age. Here, Christ is temporarily separated bodily from His church as He is preparing temporary dwelling places for His bride in His Father's house (John 14:2). Just as the fidelity of the groom and bride are tested during this time of separation, the church's loyalty to Christ is

³² Ibid., 11.

³³ Ibid., 30, n. 24.

³⁴ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 164-69.

currently being tested as the church is tempted to succumb to false teaching and worldly conduct (Jas 4:4; 2 Cor 11:2).

Third, at an unknown time, the groom returns to the bride's home. Upon his return the groom is accompanied with escorts, is preceded by a shout, and comes to collect his bride and take her to his father's house. This step is the equivalent of the rapture of the church, when Christ accompanied by angels and preceded by the shout of an archangel (1 Thess 4:16-17), will come at an unknown time to take the church to His father's house in heaven to the temporary dwellings He has prepared for her (John 14:3). Fourth, the bridal party returns to the groom's father's home in order to meet wedding guests who have already assembled. This step is the equivalent of the raptured church being taken to heaven in order to greet Old Testament saints who are already in the presence of the Lord. Fifth, during the *consummation of the marriage* stage the wedding party waits outside the marital chamber while the new couple enters into this chamber in order to physically consummate their new union. This step is the equivalent of the church's marriage to Christ. Thus, at this point, the church is no longer merely the bride of Christ but now has formally been married to Him.

Sixth, the groom emerges from the marital chamber announcing to the wedding party the reality of this new physical union. The groom then returns to the marital chamber to be with his bride for seven days while the wedding guests continue to celebrate outside the marital chamber. This step is the equivalent of the church after the rapture being hidden with Christ in heaven for seven years (Dan 9:27), while the events of the Tribulation transpire on the earth below. Seventh, the groom and the bride emerge from the marital chamber unveiled and in full view of the wedding party. The bride had been veiled to the wedding party thus far. This step is the equivalent of Christ and the church returning to the earth at the conclusion of the seven year Tribulation period unveiled (Col 3:4) and visible to the entire world (Rev 1:7; 19:7-9).

With this background in mind, interpreters should be open to a rapture interpretation of John 14:2-3. John 14:2 describes step two when Christ departs and goes to heaven to prepare heavenly dwellings for the marriage. John 14:3 describes step three when Christ returns to receive His bride, the church, in the rapture and takes her to His Father's house in order to inhabit the new dwellings. In other words, John 14:2-3 seems to be an exact fit regarding steps two and three of the Jewish marriage custom analogy. Thus, John 14:2-3 seems to be depicting Christ's Ascension, building of temporary heavenly dwellings, and return for the church in the rapture.

Parallels Between John 14:1-4 and 1 Thess 4:13-18

A final preliminary reason as to why interpreters should be open to a rapture interpretation of John 14:1-4 is the parallel that this passage has with 1 Thess 4:13-18, which is a well-known rapture text. The late Mennonite commentator J. B. Smith demonstrates an extensive relationship between John 14:1-4 and 1 Thess 4:13-18. Both passages use eight identical vocabulary terms and concepts and in the same order.³⁵

John 14:1-4	Verse	1 Thess 4:13-18	Verse
trouble	1	sorrow	13
believe	1	believe	14
God, me	1	Jesus, God	14
told you	2	say to you	15
come again	3	coming of the Lord	15
receive, you	3	caught up	17
to myself	3	to meet the Lord	17
be where I am	3	ever be with the Lord	17

³⁵ J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, trans. J. Otis Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1961), 311-13.

Interestingly, when Smith compared the vocabulary of these two passages to Rev 19:11-21, a Second Advent text, he found no similar parallels. He noted, "Hence it is impossible that one sentence or even one phrase can be alike in the two lists. And finally not one word in the two lists is used in the same relation or connection."³⁶ Smith explains the significance of the parallels between John 14:1-4 and 1 Thess 4:13-18:

The words or phrases are almost an exact parallel. They follow one another in both passages in exactly the same order. Only the righteous are dealt with in each case. There is not a single irregularity in the progression of words from first to last. Either column takes the believer from the troubles of earth to the glories of heaven. It is but consistent to interpret each passage as dealing with the same event—the rapture of the church.³⁷

Other commentators who have drawn similar parallels between these two passages include J. H. Bernard, James Montgomery Boice, Arno C. Gaebelin, Arthur Pink, Rudolf Schnackenburg, F. F. Bruce, R. V. G. Tasker, and W. E. Vine.³⁸

Preliminary Conclusion

Even before an exegesis of John 14:1-4 is attempted, five preliminary observations should cause an unbiased interpreter to be open to a rapture understanding of John 14:1-4. These preliminary observations include the role that the Upper Room Discourse plays in revealing Church Age truth in seed form, the eschatological flavor of the discourse, the fact that the eschatological and heavenly interpretation of John 14:1-4 is found in the early church fathers, a rapture interpretation of John 14:2-3 fits the Jewish marriage analogy, and extensive parallels can be found in between John 14:1-4 and 1 Thess 4:13-18.

³⁶ Ibid., 312.

³⁷ Ibid., 312-13.

³⁸ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 162-63.

Textual Details of John 14:1-4

Now that these preliminary observations have been noted, an exegesis of John 14:1-4 will show that this passage represents Christ revealing the rapture for the very first time in biblical history. This sub-section analyzes John 14:2-4 and attempts to show that these verses are best understood in accordance with a rapture interpretation.

John 14:2

There are several phrases in this verse that must be properly defined. They include the expressions "my Father's house," "many mansions," and "I go to prepare a place for you."

My Father's House

Although much ink has been spilled seeking to discover the meaning behind Christ's expression "My Father's house," perhaps the most simple and straight forward explanation is that offered by Showers. He writes, "The Scripture indicates that God's unique dwelling is in heaven (Dt. 26:15; Ps. 33:13-14; Isa. 63:15; Mt. 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9). In light of this, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg concluded that in John 14:2 'The Father's house is His heavenly abode.'"³⁹ It is to this location that Christ returned following His Ascension in order to enjoy His pre-incarnate position of glory (John 17:5) at the Father's right hand (Ps 110:1) and seated on His Father's throne (Rev 3:21). This abode is the most likely interpretation of the Father's house in John 14:2.

Many Mansions

As many commentaries have noted, "mansions" does not represent the best translation of the Greek noun *monē*. This mistranslation ultimately emanates from the Vulgate's use of the Latin term *mansiones* in its attempt to translate the Greek term *monē*.

³⁹ Ibid., 155.

Tyndale followed the Vulgate by using the English word "mansions." This word "mansions" was later picked up and used by the KJV and other early English translations. However, *monē* has more to do with a temporary dwelling such as a watchhouse or an inn.⁴⁰

I Go to Prepare a Place for You

The place where Christ is going is the same place where He came from. John's Gospel and the Upper Room Discourse clearly state that He came from heaven (John 16:28a; 17:5) and that He is going back to heaven (John 13:1; 14:12; 16:28b). Thus, the reference to "I go" could only refer to His Ascension. Interestingly, the same Greek verb *poreuomai* that is translated "I go" in John 14:2 is used elsewhere in the New Testament to depict Christ's Ascension (Acts 1:10-11; 1 Pet 3:22).⁴¹ In sum, John 14:2 teaches Christ's return to the very heaven from which He came in order to prepare temporary dwellings for His disciples.

John 14:3

There are several phrases in John 14:3 that also must be properly defined. They include the expressions "I will come again," "and receive you to myself," and "that where I am you may be also."

I will Come Again

Because the Greek verb *erchomai* translated "come" is in the present tense, some have suggested that this coming had to do with something that transpired in the

⁴⁰ Friedrich Hauck, "Ménō," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4. 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 582; Pausanias *Description of Greece* 10.31.7 (ca. 143-161 AD).

⁴¹ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 155.

immediate future of Christ's original audience rather than something destined to take place in the distant future, such as the rapture of the church. However, there are two better options for understanding the present tense of *erchomai* that still contend that Christ is here is speaking of the rapture. First, the present tense could be an example of the use of the futuristic present. This linguistic reality transpires when a future event is so certain that the biblical writer presents this future event as if it were a present reality.

Wallace explains:

The present tense may be used to describe a future reality...The present tense may describe an event that is *wholly* subsequent to the time of speaking, although as if it were present...Only an examination of the context will help one see whether this use of the present tense stresses *immediacy* or *certainty*.⁴²

Second, it is possible that the present tense is used here to communicate imminency. Swete notes, "The present tense 'I come' is used rather than the future, for the Return is regarded not as a distant event, but as one ever imminent and at hand."⁴³ In fact, it is common in Johannine literature to use the present tense of *erchomai* to describe the future coming of an eschatological event due to that event's certainty and imminency (1 John 2:18; Rev 2:5, 16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20).⁴⁴

The word "again" (*palin*) is also significant. It indicates that Christ will come back in the same way He left. According to Lenski, "The coming again is the counterpart of the going away; visibly Jesus ascends, visibly He returns, Acts 1:9-11."⁴⁵ Thus, Constable concludes, "Since Jesus spoke of returning from heaven to take believers

⁴² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 535-36.

⁴³ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Last Discourse and Prayer of Our Lord: A Study of St. John XIV-XVII* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 8.

⁴⁴ Gunn, "John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," 22.

⁴⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *An Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), 974.

there, the simplest explanation seems to be that He was referring to an eschatological bodily return (cf. Acts 1:11)."⁴⁶

It is also possible that John through his use of *palin* was indicating that Christ's Second Advent would be just as tangible, physical, and literal as His First Advent. According to BDAG, *palin* refers "to repetition in the same (or similar) manner, *again, once more, anew* of someth. a pers. has already done."⁴⁷ Thus, "Just as His first coming involved one specific coming, not repeated comings, so His future coming would involve one specific coming."⁴⁸ Therefore, the expression "I will come again" in John 14:2 indicates that Christ in the future will come singularly and bodily just as He came the first time and just as He ascended.

And Receive You to Myself

The verb *paralambanō* translated "receive" refers to Christ coming again to take the disciples to be with Him. According to BDAG *paralambanō* means, "to take into close association, *take (to oneself), take with/along...I will take you to myself* J 14:3...*with me to my home*."⁴⁹ Showers observes, "It is interesting to note that the verb translated 'receive' in Jesus' promise is used in the New Testament for the action of a bridegroom taking his betrothed wife unto himself (Mt. 1:20, 24)."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on John," online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 4 September 2011, 210.

⁴⁷ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 752.

⁴⁸ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 157.

⁴⁹ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 767.

⁵⁰ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 157.

According to TDNT, the preposition *pros* translated "to" is defined as follows: "πρός with the Accusative...This is very common and denotes movement 'towards.'...Spatially, 'to or towards someone or something,' primarily with an intransitive or transitive verb expressing movement."⁵¹ Thus, the clause, "And receive you to Myself," refers to Christ's return to spatially remove believers and to take them to be with Him.

That Where I am You May Be Also

The Greek word *hopou* translated "where" refers to a specific place or location. According to BDAG, the word refers to "a specific location in the present" and is "used in connection w. a designation of place."⁵² Thus, Jesus will return to take the believer to a place where He is. This place can hardly be the earth since there would be no need for Him to build the heavenly dwellings spoken of in the preceding verses. Morris explains the overall significance of this purpose clause: "The construction emphasizes purpose...He is speaking about a firm divine purpose. It is God's plan that Jesus will come back in due course in order that He and His followers may be in heaven."⁵³

John 14:4

Here Christ says, "And you know the way where I am going." The Greek verb *hypagō* that is translated "going" is a verb used repeatedly in John's Gospel in reference to Christ's return to the Father. According to BDAG, the verb is "used esp. of Christ and his *going* to the Father, characteristically of J...J 7:33; 16:5a;...10, 17...13:3...8:14a;...21b,

⁵¹ Basel Bo Riecke, "Πρός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6. 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 721.

⁵² Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 717.

⁵³ Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 492.

22; 13:33;...36b...8:21a...14:28...13:36a; 14:4, 5; 16:5b; 1J 2:11."⁵⁴ Thus, the employment of the same verb here is most likely in reference to His Ascension.

Summary

What all of these textual details reveal is that Christ would return through His Ascension to His Father's heavenly abode. While there, He would prepare temporary dwellings for His disciples. However, He would also return for His disciples at a future time. His return would be just as personal as was His First Coming and Ascension. Upon His return He would physically take believers to be with Him by spatially drawing them to Himself. The ultimate purpose of this event is so that believers could dwell in their prepared, temporal, heavenly places as well as be with Christ in the specific heavenly place where He is. All of this information would serve as a tremendous comfort to the disciples who were greatly troubled over the announcement over His soon departure (John 13:1). In fact, John 14:1 makes it clear that Christ unfolded the reality of this glorious event for the specific purpose of comforting His distressed disciples.

Of course, such revelation of this phase of Christ's return represents mystery truth never before disclosed. Its description is out of harmony with any past revelation concerning the Messiah's Second Advent. Gaebelein explains:

But here in John 14 the Lord gives a new and unique revelation; He speaks of something which no prophet had promised, or even could promise. Where is it written that this Messiah would come and instead of gathering His saints into an earthly Jerusalem, would take them to the Father's house, to the very place where He is? It is something new. And let it be noticed in promising to come again, He addresses the eleven disciples and tells them, "I will receive you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also." He speaks then of a coming which is not for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, not of a coming to establish His kingdom over

⁵⁴ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1028.

the earth, not a coming to judge the nations, but coming which concerns only His own.⁵⁵

It should come as no surprise to find such mystery revelation in the Upper Room Discourse. As previously mentioned, this discourse represents Church Age truth in seed form awaiting the epistolary literature in order to receive fuller amplification. Chafer has written, "The Upper Room Discourse, in which the above passage is found, is the seed-plot of that form of doctrine which is later developed in the Epistles. It is not strange, therefore, that the Apostle Paul takes up this great theme for further elucidation."⁵⁶ Not only is this true with respect to other truth germane to the Church Age but it is equally true regarding the event that will terminate the Church's earthly program, the rapture of the church. This is the very event that Christ disclosed in John 14:1-4.

Inadequate Alternative Interpretations of John 14:1-4

Thus far, a rapture interpretation of John 14:1-4 has been defended by noting several preliminary observations and by showing that the details of John 14:1-4 speak of the rapture. However, the case for the rapture in John 14:1-4 will now be strengthened by exploring the inadequacies of the other major non-rapture interpretations of this passage. Many faulty attempts have been made to de-eschatologize the passage. Such inadequate interpretations include the views that John 14:1-4 is speaking of the death of the believer, the believer's individual salvation, Christ's resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). After the problems with these positions are explored some problems associated with the non-pretribulational eschatological positions will be briefly discussed.

⁵⁵ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John: A Complete Analytical Exposition of the Gospel of John* (NY: Our Hope, 1925; reprint, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1965), 268.

⁵⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:111.

Believer's Death

Some believe that John 14:1-4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church. Rather, it refers to Christ returning to receive the believer's soul into heaven every time a believer dies.⁵⁷ However, this position is fraught with problems. First, in John 14:3, "the adverb 'again' (...*palin*) implies that this coming will be a one-time event like the first coming was, not many comings repeated over and over every time a believer dies."⁵⁸ Second, at the believer's death, it is angels rather than Christ that transport the believer to heaven (Luke 16:22) while Christ remains in heaven awaiting the arrival of the deceased believer (Acts 7:56). Ice explains: "The Bible never speaks of death as an event in which the Lord comes for a believer, instead, Scripture speaks of Lazarus 'carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom' (Luke 16:22). In the instance of Stephen the Martyr, he saw 'the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56)."⁵⁹

Third, at death, the Lord does not come for the believer. Rather, the believer goes to the Lord (2 Cor 5:8; Philip 1:23). Gaebelein summarizes:

This error is clearly refuted by the fact that elsewhere in the New Testament the Spirit of God tells us that the believer's death is not the Lord coming to the dying believer, but the death of a Christian means that he goes to be with the Lord; . . . For the believer to be absent from the body means "present with the Lord, . . . (2 Cor. v:1-8).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 29.

⁵⁸ Gunn, "John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," 21.

⁵⁹ Thomas Ice, "The Rapture and John 14," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 07 September 2011, 1-2.

⁶⁰ Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John: A Complete Analytical Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 266-67.

Fourth, the expression "I will come again and receive you to Myself" is never used anywhere else in reference to the believer's death.⁶¹ Fifth, the context of the Upper Room Discourse is the death of Christ rather than the death of the believer.⁶²

Believer's Salvation

Others contend that John 14:1-4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church. Rather, it refers to Christ coming to receive the new believer every time someone believes the gospel. However, this view suffers from the same problem dealt with in the prior discussion. The adverb "again" (*palin*) implies that Christ's coming will be a one-time event like the First Coming and not many repeated comings every time someone gets saved. Moreover, this view fails to handle properly the localized language of John 14:1-4.

The vocabulary of John 14:1-4 is heavily localized. Note the terms "Father's house" (...*he oikia tou patros*), "dwelling places" (...*monai*), "a place" (...*topos*) "where I am" (...*hopou eimi ego*), and "where I go" (...*hopou ego hupago*). Jesus could scarcely have used more specifically localized language. Surely, He was referring, not to the spiritual sphere of individualized salvation, but to a location in heaven where He intended to take His disciples in the great eschatological event we refer to as the rapture.⁶³

Walvoord similarly comments on the allegorical nature of this view:

One is at a loss to know how to comment on such fanciful exegesis. If the passage says anything, it says that Christ is going to leave them to go to heaven, not simply leave them by dying. The Father's house is not on earth, and Christ is not going to remain in the earthly sphere in His bodily presence. The expression "I will come" must be spiritualized and deprived of its real meaning in order to allow the explanation...To spiritualize the Father's house and make it "*spiritual abodes within His own person*" is spiritualization to an extreme. Obviously the believer is in Christ, but this is not the same as being in the Father's

⁶¹ Ice, "The Rapture and John 14," 1.

⁶² Ron Bigalke, "John 14 and the Rapture," online: midnightcall.com, accessed 07 September 2011, 2.

⁶³ Gunn, "John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," 21.

house...spiritualization in order to avoid the pretribulation rapture...extreme form of exegesis...to escape the implication that the rapture is different from the second coming of Christ to set up His kingdom.⁶⁴

Christ's Resurrection

Others contend that John 14:1-4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church but rather refers to the fact that Christ would return to the believer through His bodily resurrection.⁶⁵ Advocates of this view argue that it best fits the context of the Upper Room Discourse. There, Christ predicts His soon resurrection (John 14:18-20). Also, John records Christ's many post-resurrection appearances (John 20:19, 26; 21:1).

However, this view also contains its share of weaknesses.⁶⁶ First, the basic chronology of John 14:3 places the coming of Christ after His Ascension back to the Father when it says, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself..." Earlier, it was established that "I go" refers to Christ's Ascension. The notion that Christ's coming represents His resurrection violates this chronology since Christ's coming to His disciples in His resurrected body transpired before His Ascension.

Second, it was previously noted that the adverb "again" (*palin*) in John 14:3 indicates that Christ's Second Coming would be just like His First Coming. However, the resurrection view violates this principle since Christ's coming after His resurrection was out of the tomb and after death. By contrast, His First Coming was from heaven. Third, it was earlier observed that the preposition "to" (*pros*) in the expression "And receive you to Myself" (John 14:3) communicates the spatial movement of believers from earth to Christ to be with Him. However, no spatial movement was involved when Christ

⁶⁴ John F. Walvoord, "Posttribulationism Today, Part VII: Do the Gospels Reveal a Posttribulation Rapture?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (July-September 1976): 211-12.

⁶⁵ Thomas E. Crane, *The Message of Saint John* (New York: Alba, 1980), 96.

⁶⁶ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 160.

resurrected and came to His disciples. Fourth, Christ's resurrection did not take the disciples to the prepared dwellings spoken of in John 14:2-3. Bigalke notes, "Although two resurrection appearances of Jesus could be called a coming again (John 20:19, 26), the comfort and promise of John 14:3 is related to an eternal dwelling place. When Jesus does 'come again' and 'receive' His disciples, it is permanent."⁶⁷

Coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

Others contend that John 14:1-4 has nothing to do with the rapture of the church. Rather, the passage refers to a spiritual coming of the Holy Spirit to the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Keener explains:

As the chapter proceeds, one learns that the coming again in verse 3 refers to Jesus' coming after the resurrection to give the Spirit (v. 18)...The "Father's house" would be the temple (2:16), where God would forever dwell with his people (Ezek 43:7, 9; 48:35; cf. Jn 8:35). The "dwelling places" (NASB, NRSV) could allude to the booths constructed for the Feast of Tabernacles but probably refer to "rooms" (cf. NIV, TEV) in the new temple, where only undefiled ministers would have a place (Ezek 44:9-16; cf. 48:11). John presumably means this language figuratively for being in Christ, where God's presence dwells (2:21); the only other place in the New Testament where this term for "dwelling places" or "rooms" occurs is in 14:23, where it refers to the believer as God's dwelling place (cf. also the verb "dwell"—15:4-7)...In this context, John probably means not the Second Coming but Christ's return after the resurrection to bestow the Spirit (14:16-18). In Jewish teaching, both the resurrection of the dead (which Jesus inaugurated) and bestowal of the Spirit indicate the arrival of the new age of the kingdom.⁶⁸

The NET Bible offers a similar explanation:

Most interpreters have understood the reference to *my Father's house* as a reference to heaven, and the *dwelling places* (μονή, *monē*) as the permanent residences of believers there. This seems consistent with the vocabulary and the context, where in v. 3 Jesus speaks of coming again to take the disciples to himself. However, the phrase *in my Father's house* was used previously in the Fourth Gospel in [2:16](#) to refer to the temple in Jerusalem. The author in [2:19-22](#)

⁶⁷ Bigalke, "John 14 and the Rapture," 2.

⁶⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 298-99.

then reinterpreted the temple as Jesus' body, which was to be destroyed in death and then rebuilt in resurrection after three days. Even more suggestive is the statement by Jesus in [8:35](#), "Now the slave does not remain (*μένω*, *menō*) in the household forever, but the son remains (*μένω*) forever." If in the imagery of the Fourth Gospel the phrase *in my Father's house* is ultimately a reference to Jesus' body, the relationship of *μονή* to *μένω* suggests the permanent relationship of the believer to Jesus and the Father as an adopted son who remains in the household forever. In this case the "dwelling place" is "in" Jesus himself, where he is, whether in heaven or on earth. The statement in v. [3](#), "I will come again and receive you to myself," then refers not just to the parousia, but also to Jesus' postresurrection return to the disciples in his glorified state, when by virtue of his death on their behalf they may enter into union with him and with the Father as adopted sons. Needless to say, this bears numerous similarities to Pauline theology, especially the concepts of adoption as sons and being "in Christ" which are prominent in passages like [Eph 1](#). It is also important to note, however, the emphasis in the Fourth Gospel itself on the present reality of eternal life ([John 5:24](#), [7:38-39](#), etc.) and the possibility of worshiping the Father "in the Spirit and in truth" ([John 4:21-24](#)) in the present age. There is a sense in which it is possible to say that the future reality is present now.⁶⁹

This view seems to be built around at least four presuppositions. First, the phrase "My Father's house" (*οἰκία τοῦ πατρὸς μου*) in John 14:2 refers to the temple. The logic behind this idea is that the phrase is used only one other time in John's Gospel. In John 2:16, Christ uses the expression "My Father's house" (*πατρὸς μου οἶκον*) in relation to the temple. Second, the expression can have a metaphorical meaning since Christ used the phrase in this same context to describe His body (John 2:19-22). Paul also used temple imagery to depict the believer's body (1 Cor 6:19) and the church (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:20-22). Third, dwelling places (*μονῆ*) in John 14:2 refers to the indwelling of the Father and Son in the believer. The rationale for this point is that *μονῆ* is used only one other time in the entire New Testament (John 14:23). This usage is just a few verses later in the very same chapter in reference to the indwelling of the Father and Son in the believer. Fourth, the verbal form of the noun *μονῆ* is *μένω*. This latter word is used of abiding or indwelling elsewhere in John's Gospel (John 8:35) and in the Upper Room Discourse (John 15:4-7).

⁶⁹ *Net Bible: New English Translation*, (Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 1985-86.

Before responding to these presuppositions, let us first note some general problems with the view.⁷⁰ First, as indicated earlier, the proposition "to" (*pros*) in the expression "and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3) communicates the spatial movement of believers from earth to Christ to be with Him. However, no spatial movement was involved when the Spirit came upon believers in Acts 2. Second, it was previously noted that the adverb "again" (*palin*) in John 14:3 indicates that Christ's Second Coming would be just like His First Coming. According to Lenski, "The coming again is the counterpart of the going away; visibly Jesus ascends, visibly he returns, Acts 1:9-11."⁷¹ When the Spirit was poured out upon the church in Acts 2, Christ never physically returned just as He physically left. Rather, He remained in heaven at the Father's right hand (Acts 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 3:21-22). Third, this view renders nonsensical the expression "receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). The Holy Spirit did not receive believers in Acts 2. By contrast, the Scripture routinely indicates that it was the other way around. Believers received the Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2:38; 8:15-17).

Now that these general problems with the position have been introduced, let us respond to the presuppositions that the view is built upon. First, while it is true that the expression "My Father's house" (John 14:2) is used only in John 2:16, the John 2:16 reference to "house" is masculine (*oikos*) and the John 14:3 reference to "house" is feminine (*oikia*). Although *oikos* is typically used with the genitive "of God" to refer to the Temple in both the LXX and John 2:16, *oikia* is never used in this manner.⁷²

According to TDNT:

In the NT, too, we find both οἶκος and οἰκία; the gen. τοῦ θεοῦ is usually linked with οἶκος, not οἰκία (though cf. Jn. 14:2: ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου). As in the

⁷⁰ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 160.

⁷¹ Lenski, *An Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, 974.

⁷² Gunn, "John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?," 14.

LXX, οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ is used in honour of the earthly sanctuary of Israel. No other sacred or ecclesiastical structure is called by this term in the NT sphere. But the Christian community itself is the → ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, the οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ (Hb. 3:6; 1 Pt. 4:17; 1 Tm. 3:15) and the οἶκος πνευματικός (1 Pt. 2:5). It may be supposed that this usage was common to primitive Christianity and became a permanent part of the preaching tradition... Jn. 14:2f ... This saying, which would seem to have lost its original form, is fairly isolated in the context, and is perhaps older than the sayings around it. ... the Father's dwelling has places of rest for the afflicted disciples of Jesus.⁷³

In sum, the coming of the Holy Spirit view is built upon connecting the common expression "my Father's House" in John 14:2 with the temple imagery of the identical expression found in John 2:16. However, the view disintegrates when it is understood that these two expressions are not identical given the difference in gender regarding the noun "house" as employed in these verses.

Second, it is true that *monē* (John 14:2) is used only one other time in the entire New Testament (John 14:23), and that this usage is just a few verses later in the very same chapter in reference to the indwelling of the Father and Son in the believer. However, the context of John 14:2 is radically different from the context of John 14:23. Gunn observes:

Though in John 14 verses 2 and 23 occur in the same chapter, the contexts are quite different. The issue in verse 2 is the disciples' sorrow over Jesus' departure to be with the Father in heaven (see discussion on the expression "I go" below), but the focus changes in verse 15. Verses 15-24 form a distinct unit in the Upper Room Discourse characterized by the believer's love for Jesus as evidenced by the believer's keeping of Jesus' commandments... One way of seeing this topic shift is by noting that the verb "to love" (...*agapaō*) occurs eight times in verse 15-24, but does not occur once in verses 1-14, and the verb "to keep" (...*tēreō*) occurs four times in verses 15-24, but does not occur once in verses 1-14. At the beginning of this section on loving Jesus and keeping his commandments is the promise that the Holy Spirit would be given to the believer (verse 16). It is by means of the Spirit's indwelling that the believer is: (1) not left as an orphan (verse 18), and (2) empowered to love Jesus and keep His commandments. It is Jesus' sending of the Spirit to indwell believers that makes us understand...*monē*...as located in the believer. On the other hand, in verse 2, the

⁷³ Otto Michel Halle, "Οἶκος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 121, 31.

location of the...*monē*...is fixed by where we understand the “Father’s house” to be.⁷⁴

The differences between these two paragraphs are captured on the following chart:

Section	John 14:1-14	John 14:15-24
Occurrence of <i>monē</i>	John 14:2	John 14:23
Issue	Sorrow over Christ's soon departure	Believer's love for Christ
Uses of <i>agapaō</i>	0	8
Uses of <i>tēreō</i>	0	4
Meaning of <i>monē</i>	Dwellings in the Father's heavenly abode	Spirit indwelling believers

By defining *monē* of John 14:2 based upon how *monē* of 14:23 is used in a foreign context, proponents of the Acts 2 interpretation are guilty of committing a hermeneutical error known as "illegitimate totality transfer." "The error, arises when the 'meaning' of a word" as derived from its use elsewhere is then automatically read into the same word in a foreign context.⁷⁵ Words only have meanings based upon the contexts that these words are found within. *Monē* of John 14:2 means something entirely different than *monē* of John 14:23, since these uses of the same word transpire in two completely different contexts. In sum, the coming of the Holy Spirit view is built upon connecting the common word "*monē*" in John 14:2 and John 14:23. However, the view suffers when it is understood that these two words are not identical given the different contexts in which they are found.

Third, it is true that the verbal form of the noun *monē* (John 14:2) is *menō*, which is used of "abiding" or "indwelling" elsewhere in John's Gospel (John 8:35) and in the Upper Room Discourse (John 15:4-7). However, equating these two words represents

⁷⁴ Gunn, “John 14:1-3: The Father's House: Are We There Yet?,” 17.

⁷⁵ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218.

an exegetical fallacy known as the "root fallacy." This fallacy "presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components."⁷⁶ For example:

nice, which comes from the Latin *nescius*, meaning "ignorant." Our "good-by" is a contraction from the Anglo-Saxon "God be with you." Now it may be possible to trace out diachronically just how *nescius* generated "nice"; it is certainly easy to imagine how "God be with you" came to be contracted to "good-by." But I know of no one today who in saying such and such a person is "nice" believes that he or she has in some measure labeled that person ignorant because the "root meaning" or "hidden meaning" or "literal meaning" of "nice" is "ignorant."⁷⁷

"Words should not be defined by their etymology but instead by their context and use."⁷⁸

Thus, it is inappropriate to arrive at a definition of *monē* based upon how the verbal form of this word is used elsewhere. As previously explained, John 14:2 is found within its own unique context.

In sum, the coming of the Holy Spirit view is substantially weakened when it is understood that the various terms of John 14:2 cannot be defined by their usage elsewhere given the unique context of John 14:1-4. This principle is true with respect to seeking to equate the "my Father's house" with its use in John 2:16, interpreting *monē* of John 14:2 with its use in John 14:23, and defining *monē* with the verbal form's use in John 8:35 and John 15:4-7. In conclusion, a rapture interpretation of John 14:1-4 is strengthened when the untenable nature of the non-eschatological interpretations are considered. These options include the death of the believer, the believer's individual salvation, Christ's resurrection, and the coming to the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

⁷⁶ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27

⁷⁸ "Root Fallacy," online: www.tentmaker.org, accessed 8 September 2011, 1.

Non-Pretribulational Rapture Interpretations

Mid-Tribulation and Pre-wrath

In addition to the non-eschatological interpretations of John 14:1-4 described above, others assign an eschatological yet non-pretribulational understanding to the passage. Examples include the mid-tribulation and pre-wrath positions. Yet, these perspectives have at least two major flaws. First, they do not handle well the promise of comfort in John 14:1: "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." How could Christ's promise be a comfort if the church must first endure any part of the wrath of God before experiencing the blessing of the rapture. Both the mid-tribulational and pre-wrath views promote a scenario in which the church will be present for half (mid-tribulationalism) or three fourths (pre-wrath) of the Tribulation before participating in the rapture. Second, these views fail to take into consideration the imminency or any moment perspective of the passage. In John 14:1-4, Christ fails to articulate any signs that would precede His return for the disciples. The mid-tribulational and pre-wrath perspectives do not handle well such an imminency emphasis. They both place signs related to the Tribulation that must take place before Christ can return in the rapture.

Post-Tribulationalism

Giving John 14:1-4 a post-tribulational rapture interpretation⁷⁹ contains the same two above discussed problems associated with the mid-tribulational and rapture views. First, the post-Tribulational rapture interpretation damages Christ's promise of comfort (John 14:1) since it advocates the church enduring all of the Tribulation period before experiencing the blessing of the rapture. Second, the post-Tribulational view

⁷⁹ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 134, 153.

contends that Tribulational signs that must precede Christ's promise to return thereby damaging imminency. Third, the post-Tribulational view makes Christ's preparation of the heavenly dwellings (John 14:2-3) unnecessary. Lindsey explains:

Now if Jesus is building a dwelling place for us in the Father's house, and if we are to go there **when** He comes for the Church, how could He be speaking of an event that occurs simultaneously with the Second Advent? For at that time Jesus is specifically and personally coming to the earth (see Zechariah 14:4-9). If the post-tribulationists are right, then Jesus engaged in a futile building program. For when He comes to the earth in the second coming, He will rule out of the earthly Jerusalem for a thousand years. Since He says He is going to come in order that we may be with Him **where he is**, we would have to be with Him here on earth. Do you see the problem? The dwelling places in the Father's house would be unused. And worse by far, Jesus would be guilty of telling us a lie. For as we have seen, He is coming for the purpose of taking us to the Father's house at that time. Post-Tribulationist Robert Gundry doesn't keep this passage in context when he says, "Jesus does not promise that upon His return He will take believers to mansions in the Father's house. Instead, He promises, '*Where I am*, there you may be also.'" This makes Jesus' whole promise ridiculous. Why would He speak of preparing a place for us in the Father's house if He didn't mean that His return would take us there?⁸⁰

In sum, a rapture interpretation of John 14:1-4 is strengthened when this view is compared to the other non-eschatological interpretations of this passage. Such non-eschatological interpretations include the death of the believer, the believer's individual salvation, Christ's resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Moreover, a pre-Tribulational rapture understanding of these verses is fortified when examining the weakness associated with other non-pretribulational views.

Conclusion

This section has attempted to argue that John 14:1-4 represents a promise of the rapture by noting several preliminary reasons why interpreters should be open to a rapture teaching in this passage, by contending that the details of the text favor a rapture

⁸⁰ Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (New York: Bantam, 1983), 43.

interpretation in these verses, and by noting the inadequacy of the views advocating a non rapture interpretation of John 14:1-4.

Summary and Overall Conclusion

Did Jesus ever refer to the rapture? There are two passages that are most commonly viewed as rapture statements from Christ. They are Matt 24:40-41 and John 14:1-4. For the reasons stated throughout, the Matthean text is *not* a rapture teaching. However, interpreters *are* on solid exegetical footing in seeing in John 14:1-4 an initial and only reference to the rapture of the church in seed or germ form.

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