

Future Tense: A Study of the End Times and 1–2 Thessalonians

Introduction and Overview

I. Introduction to Biblical Prophecy

A. Some Basic Terms

1. Prophecy – A divinely revealed oral or written message usually concerning the future.
2. Prophecy – To speak a divinely revealed message usually through a prophet concerning the future.
3. Prophet – “One who speaks forth on behalf of God.”¹
4. End Times/Last Days – “. . . the final period of history when the Messiah will come to establish God’s kingdom.”²
5. Eschatology – The study of the last things, that is, of the end times.

B. The Importance of Studying Biblical Prophecy

1. God commands the study of biblical prophecy –
2. God wants us to understand biblical prophecy –
3. Much of the Bible is prophetic –
4. Biblical prophecy is a source of comfort and hope –
5. Biblical prophecy is a source of spiritual blessing –
6. Biblical prophecy encourages holy living –
7. Biblical prophecy ultimately points to Jesus Christ –

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 135.

² J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 254.

II. The Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy

A. The Primary Options

1. The Allegorical Method –
2. The Normal (Literal) Method –

W.A. Criswell in his book *Why I Preach The Bible Is Literally True*, states, “If we preach the Bible Literally, it is like telling the truth. You do not have to remember what you said. But if you spiritualize . . . what you said about the passage yesterday may be diametrically opposed to what you make it mean today . . . a man will find himself contradicting himself over and over again as he preaches through the years.”

B. The Principle of Interpretation

If the plain _____ makes _____, seek no other _____.

C. The Process of Interpretation

1. General Guidelines (Grammatical/Historical/Literary)
 - a. Be sure to use established grammatical principles.
 - b. Be sure to consider historical, biographical, and geographical information.
 - c. Be sensitive to the genre of the passage.
 - d. Be conscious of the context.
 - e. Be willing to compare Scripture with Scripture.
 - f. Be aware of the principle of progressive revelation.
2. Special Guidelines
 - a. Recognize that Christ is often the main focus of a prophecy.

- b. Recognize the principle of foreshortening. Foreshortening occurs when specific prophetic events appear to be chronologically close, yet may be many years apart.
- c. Recognize the principle of double-reference. This occurs when one prophecy may have several references, but only one true fulfillment.
- d. Recognize the principle of time-reference. This occurs when one event follows another scripturally but not chronologically.

D. The Plan of God

- 1. Redeem man –
- 2. Restore the kingdom –

These two emphases can be seen in the portrayal of Christ as a lamb (redemptive, see John 1:29) and as a lion (Royal, see Rev. 5:5).



III. Excursus: The Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy

A. Specific Questions to Ask

- 1. Is this conditional or unconditional?
- 2. Is this figurative or symbolic?
- 3. Is this fulfilled or unfulfilled?
- 4. Is this passage self-interpreted?
- 5. Is this passage interpreted by other Scripture passages?

B. Questions for Identifying Figurative Language

1. Would it be absurd to take the passage literally?
Example: John 10:9 “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me. . .”
2. Is it identified as figurative by the context itself?
Example John 2:21 “But He was speaking of the temple of his body”
3. Are there any grammatical clues such as the words “like” or “as” which would indicate the presence of figurative language?
Example: Isaiah 43:31 “They will mount up with wings *like* eagles”
4. Do other Scriptures identify it as figurative?
Example: 1 Corinthians 9:9–10
5. Does the book or passage appear to be highly symbolic in nature?
Example: Ezekiel, Revelation, etc.

Overview of the End Times

I. The Major Approaches

A. Major Rapture Positions

The term “rapture” is not found in Bible. The English term is derived from the Latin “rapere” (“to seize”) which is used in the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The Greek word in 4:17 is *harpazō* (ἁρπάζω) which means “snatch, seize, i.e. take suddenly and vehemently” (BDAG).

Theologically, I would define the rapture as the “catching away of the church” (both resurrected dead and transformed living believers) to meet the Lord in the air.

1. Pre-Tribulational Rapture –
2. Mid-Tribulational Rapture –
3. Post-Tribulational Rapture –
4. Partial Rapture –
5. Pre-Wrath Rapture –

B. Major Second Coming Positions

The designation Second Coming (or Second Advent) is second in relation to the First Coming. In its broadest sense, the Second Coming refers to Christ’s return to earth in the last days.

1. Premillennial –
2. Postmillennial –
3. Amillennial –

II. The Major Events in Order

- A. The Rapture
- B. The Tribulation (or Daniel's Seventieth Week)
- C. The Second Coming
- D. The Millennium
- E. The New Heaven and Earth/Eternal State