

Revealed in the Upper Room: The Rapture

By PAUL J. SCHARF

We are fast approaching that time of year in which we remember the death of the Lord Jesus, and celebrate His victory over death through His resurrection.

Over these next three weeks, I would like to focus on Jesus' ministry following the Passover meal He shared with His disciples, in the Upper Room.

There Jesus revealed many new truths for the forthcoming church age to these who would become its "foundation" (Eph. 2:20)—though they were certainly unworthy and lacking understanding at this time (see John 13:24 and 14:5 for examples). All of this commenced once Jesus had identified and dismissed Judas, the betrayer (John 13:21-30).

The disciples were certainly not cognizant of almost anything that was about to play out at this most poignant moment in history. They were absolutely unprepared for Christ's death, which would take place in less than 24 hours—to say nothing of His resurrection or ascension. They had no grasp at all of a complete dispensational change, which would see God's focus move away from the nation of Israel to a brand "new man" (Eph. 2:15) called the *church*.

Jesus was preparing His disciples for this amazing set of events that would transform the world—only little more than 50 days away! But He did not ease into His conversation. Rather, He begins at the end—the end of the church age, that is—with the *rapture* of the church.

Personally, I had to be convinced that John 14:1-4 was really a specific prophecy of the pretribulational rapture, rather than a general statement about Christ's second coming. What finally persuaded me was the very clear connection between this passage and the classic rapture passage in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.ⁱ As LaHaye and Mayhue state: "Note the close parallels between the promises of John 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18."ⁱⁱ

I agree here with *The MacArthur Study Bible* in its comment on John 14:2-3: "This is one of the passages that refers to the rapture of the saints at the end of the age when Christ returns."ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice the similarities between the two passages that support this thesis:

- Jesus does not want His disciples to "be troubled" (John 14:1). Paul does not desire his readers "to be ignorant" (1 Thess. 4:13), but rather to spread "comfort" (1 Thess. 4:18). Both passages yield the same result in the life of a believer.
- Participation in the event being described in each case is based upon one's belief in Jesus (John 14:1; 1 Thess. 4:14).
- Both passages offer descriptions of "heaven" (1 Thess. 4:16) as the starting point for this event—and the ultimate destination for believers (see John 14:2-4).

- John 14:3 says Jesus “will come again and receive” believers—taking them to their heavenly home. 1 Thess. 4:17 says we will “meet the Lord in the air”—strongly implying that we will return to heaven with Him.
- Also, according to John 14:3, we will therefore live with Jesus forever. As Paul phrases it, “We shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

To sum up, it seems clear to me that Jesus was opening New Testament teaching on this previously unknown subject—which we now call the pretribulational rapture.

The rapture and the details surrounding it are termed “a mystery” in 1 Cor. 15:51. Some would argue that only the Apostle Paul had the ministry of revealing *mysteries* regarding the church age.^{iv} But Paul himself testified that this was, in fact, not the case. He said these were “revealed ... to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:5). A New Testament *mystery* is not defined as something that was revealed only through Paul. Rather, it is truth that was never prophesied in the Old Testament, that relates to the church age—which was itself “hidden in God” (Eph. 3:9) in the time before the first coming of Christ. I believe that Paul defines a *mystery* as such in Rom. 16:25-26.

Jesus had, in fact, given the first hints about this new church dispensation in Matt. 16:18 and 18:15-17. And we will continue to think along that theme in the next installment.

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.

Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱ One of the greatest Bible teachers in the history of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Dr. Renald Showers, wrote: “... since John 14:2-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 refer to the same coming of Christ, and since Christ’s coming in 1 Thessalonians 4 is the coming to rapture the church from the earth, His coming in John 14:2-3 is also the coming to rapture the church from the earth” (*Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* [Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995], p. 163).

ⁱⁱ Tim LaHaye and Richard Mayhue, “Rapture,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, gen. eds. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), p. 312.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, gen. ed., 2nd ed. English Standard Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2021), p. 1,468.

^{iv} No less an authority within dispensationalism than Dr. Alva J. McClain wrote: “... if in His discourse to the Eleven He was preparing all His disciples for an *interim* between His departure and His return to establish the Kingdom, then His silence as to the latter becomes understandable. And this undoubtedly was the main purpose of the discourse” (*The Greatness of the Kingdom* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974], p. 374). Dr. Andy Woods states likewise: “... Christ’s ... farewell address to the church (John 16:12-13) is found in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)” (*The Coming Kingdom* [Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016], p. 152).