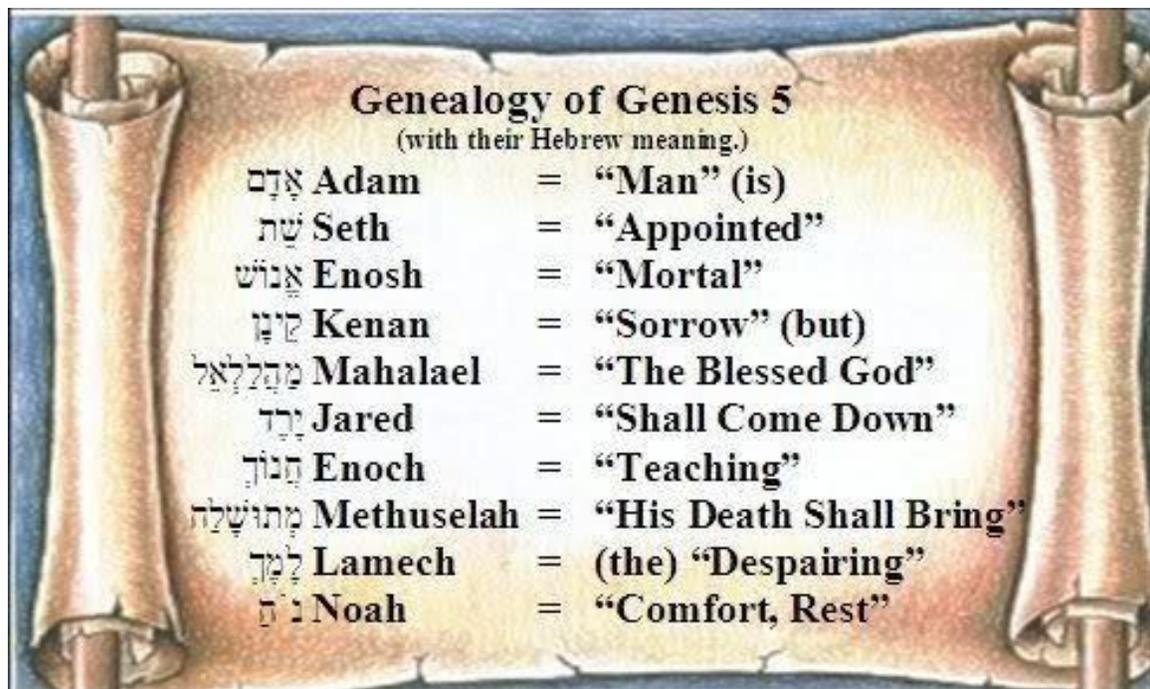


## How Important is the Key Question?

Is the Question that Important? Does it really make any difference when the Lord will come? Is it not His coming that is important, not when?

If His coming should be Pre-tribulational, then we will praise Him for the fact that we missed that terrible time. If it is Post-tribulational, then we will gladly suffer for His sake. Either way, we still have the blessed hope of His coming.

Are all the doctrines of the Bible of equal importance? In one sense, yes; in another, no. The fact that God has chosen to reveal something makes it important — even a genealogical table. For example: The genealogical chart of Genesis 5 below contains a deeper message.



**Genealogy of Genesis 5**  
(with their Hebrew meaning.)

אָדָם Adam	=	“Man” (is)
שֵׁת Seth	=	“Appointed”
אֵנוֹשׁ Enosh	=	“Mortal”
קֵיֵן Kenan	=	“Sorrow” (but)
מַהֲלָאֵל Mahalael	=	“The Blessed God”
יָרֵד Jared	=	“Shall Come Down”
חֵנוֹךְ Enoch	=	“Teaching”
מֵתוּשֶׁלַח Methuselah	=	“His Death Shall Bring”
לָמֵךְ Lamech	=	(the) “Despairing”
נֹחַ Noah	=	“Comfort, Rest”

Therefore, from the perspective of revelation, everything in the Bible is of equal importance as a part of God's revelation. This is particularly true in the Hebrew use of “Figures of Speech” or “Idioms”.

On the other hand, one can certainly be saved without knowing about a lot of things that are part of God's revelation in the Bible. Truths about salvation and about the accuracy and authority of the Bible itself would obviously stand at the top of any list of important doctrines. Yet this is not to say that the biblical teachings about the future or about demons or about the church are unimportant. But it is to say that from the perspective of the question of how to be saved they are not as important as the gospel is.

## Importance of Eschatology

How important is eschatology? Even the message of salvation includes something about *eternal* life, something about *future* judgment, and about a Judge who *is going to* intervene in the affairs of mankind -(Acts 17:31). Yet the question of this book, the time of the rapture, does not have to be settled or even understood in order for one to be saved.

Then why focus on this question? Is it really that important?

## Prophecy

Prophecy itself is certainly important to Biblical revelation. It is said that one-fourth of the Bible was prophecy when it was written (of course many of those prophecies have already been fulfilled) and that one out of every five verses in Paul's writings concerns prophecy. Passages concerning the rapture are, of course, only part of this large amount of material concerning eschatology, but they are an important part. Some instruction concerning the rapture comes from Paul's teachings -(1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:51-58; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13-5:11); some from the teachings of Christ -(John 14:1-3; Revelation 3:10).

Furthermore, the Lord gave a promise to the disciples and to us concerning the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation. He promised that the Spirit would **"announce to you the things that are to come"** -(John 16:13, Williams). **"Things that are to come"** seems to be a specific area of truth within the broader promise that the Spirit **"will guide you into all the truth."** In other words, special attention to prophecy is promised. Some understand those coming things not to refer to end-time events but to the revelation concerning the Christian church period (which was future when Christ spoke). Even if that interpretation is correct, **"things that are to come"** cannot exclude the events at the end of the church period, so the phrase still involves prophetic truths including the rapture.

The Lord, then, expects us to understand prophecy, including the prophecy of the Rapture of the church. Clearly that doctrine cannot be ignored if we enter fully into the fulfillment of Christ's promise. -(See 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:6; Titus 2:13.)

## Imminency

The question of the time of the rapture is also important to the concept of imminency (imminency means impending, ready to take place). If the rapture is before the Tribulation, then certainly the concept of imminency is considerably stronger and clearer. If Pre-tribulationism is correct, then the Rapture could take place at any time and is clearly imminent. If, however, the church will live through the Tribulation and be raptured at the end, then only in the last part of the Tribulation could anyone truly say that the Lord's coming is imminent. His coming would not be ready to take place until almost all of the clearly predicted events of the Tribulation had occurred; therefore, it would not be imminent until very near the end. That alone makes the question of the time of the rapture an important question.

When I first began pastoral ministry in 1965, I did not encounter many with clear Post-tribulation convictions. That was partly due to the fact that I moved mostly in Pre-tribulation

circles of older pastors. But it was also due to the fact that Post-tribulationism was not in vogue. In the several decades that have passed, some have changed from a Pre-tribulational to a Post-tribulational position. More literature has been published. Doctrine is not considered to be as important as experience today. Cooperation among evangelicals with a view to appealing to the largest possible audience often precludes proclaiming eschatological distinctions. The spirit of our times looks down on too much dogmatism, even if it is truth. The Methodist Church largely went from a Pre-Tribulation view to one of Post-Tribulation from the late 1950's up through the 1980's.

One gladly respects different positions, especially when they are held intelligently. One of the greatest assets of Christianity in the United States has been the freedom to hold different positions and to establish churches and schools that will promote those positions. If you do not agree with that, then live for a time in a country in which there is a state church or where it is almost impossible to establish a school that teaches what you believe. Our differences over this question of the rapture are not necessarily detrimental to the cause of Christ. We should want to study the question because it is part of God's revelation, because it comes under the umbrella of Christ's promise in John 16:13, and because it shapes our concept of imminency.

### **The Whole Plan of God**

But there is one additional reason. The question is important in order to be able to proclaim the whole plan of God accurately. I detect today a spirit of eschatological agnosticism, which is not healthy for the church. Some are saying that we cannot know (agnosticism) the answers to these minor eschatological questions, so we should simply ignore them. The church will not lose much, we are assured.

But if we lose any of God's revelation, we lose something important. We need to make up our minds about eschatological truths so that we can proclaim all of God's truth. The rapture is a vital part of eschatology, a question worth studying, and a truth worth proclaiming.

### **Suffering**

Finally, notice that none of the reasons that make this an important question includes a desire to avoid suffering if that be God's will for the believer.

Pre-tribulationists do not hold their view as an escape mechanism. Our Lord warned that believers in every generation would suffer tribulation in this world -(John 16:33). Paul said that it is normal for Christians to live under a sentence of death -(Romans 8:36). The rapture question does not concern the Christian and tribulation in general, but the Christian's relation to the yet future period of unique tribulation. If Post-tribulationism is correct and it is God's will for believers in the last generation of the church to suffer the intense persecutions of that period, they will gladly do it for His sake. But if Pre-tribulationism is correct and they will escape that time, they will be grateful to the Lord for that.

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