



The Hopeful Narrative of God's Coming Kingdom

THE STORY OF THE FUTURE

Michael J. Svigel





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To my wife of over thirty years, Stephanie.

Though my mind is often in the heavens,
you always keep my feet planted on the earth.

Du bist die Beste in meinem Leben,
und ich liebe dich von ganzem Herzen.

Contents

Notes on Translations ix

Overture and Preview xi

Part One—Remembering the Story of the Future: How to Think About the End Times

1. The End Is at Hand!? The End Times in Church and Culture 2
2. A Certain Future: Three Rs on Which All Christians Agree 11
3. Dangerous or Just Different? Diverse Views on the End Times 20
4. Kingdom in Question: Differing Decisions on the Millennium 29
5. Doomsday in Dispute: Various Views on the Tribulation and Rapture 41

Part Two—Telling the Story of the Future: The End Times Reconsidered

6. A Wrong Turn in Albuquerque? Rewinding the Story of the Future 56
7. Following the Plot: Refocusing the Story of the Future 67
8. The Climax of the Story: Paradise and the Coming Kingdom 76
9. The Extreme Makeover of Heaven and Earth 86

Part Three—The Story of the Coming Kingdom: The Epic of Christ's Reign

10. The Old Testament's Origin Story 98
11. The New Testament's Stunning Sequel 108
12. Revelation's Climactic Conclusion 118
13. Binding the Dragon and Raising the Dead 128
14. The Early Church and the Coming Kingdom 139

Part Four—The Story of the Tribulation: The Chronicle of Christ's Return

15. The Day of the Lord and Christ's Coming as Judge 150
16. The Antichrist's Coming as Deceiver and Destroyer 160
17. The Drama of the Book of Revelation 171

Part Five—The Story of the Rapture: The Hope of the Church's Rescue

18. The Rapture Refocused: The Lenses of Scripture and History 186
19. Common Arguments for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture 196
20. What Child Is This? The Forgotten Rapture Passage 209

Part Six—Rehearsing the Story of the Future: Living Now in Light of Then

21. Hope and the Story of the Future 224
22. Our Personal Hope: What Happens When We Die? 234
23. That's a Wrap! Tying Up Loose Ends 244

Roll Credits! 255

Notes on Translations

Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Didache, Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, and Polycarp of Smyrna are from *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, translated by Rick Brannan (Lexham, 2012).

Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* books 4 and 5 are from St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies Books 4 & 5*, translated by Dominic Unger and Scott D. Moringiello, vol. 72, Ancient Christian Writers (Newman, 2024).

Unless otherwise noted, translations of Irenaeus's *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (cited as *Demonstration*) are from Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, edited and translated by John Behr, Popular Patristics Series 17 (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

Quotations from Justin Martyr's works are from *Justin Martyr: The First Apology, the Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or The Rule of God*, translated by Thomas B. Fallas, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 6 (Catholic University of America Press, 1948).

Translations of writings by other fathers of the church will be indicated by the following abbreviations, which will appear in parentheses after the quotation:

ANF: The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, 10 vols. (Christian Literature, 1885–1897; repr., Hendrickson, 1994). The volume containing the particular writing will be indicated after the citation; thus *ANF* 2 refers to volume 2 of the *ANF* series.

Citations simply identified as BDAG are from Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Overture and Preview

In classic cinema, before a film began the audience was treated to an overture—a brief performance previewing the major musical themes of the movie they were about to experience on the big screen. In similar fashion, I want to present a summary and preview of this book—an overture, as it were, of its basic theme and a preview of its features.

For centuries, people have proclaimed, "The end of the world is at hand!" But what in the world is *the end?*

Throughout church history, people have painted distorted pictures of the earth's demise. Many veer into baseless speculations and embrace inaccurate, incomplete, or sensationalistic versions of the future. Most projections of humanity's destiny deviate significantly from God's revealed story of the future. Some readers who just skim the Bible may come away thinking it's all fire, brimstone, doom, and gloom, and miss the fact that Scripture presents a hopeful story of future history. So do the writings of the early church.

This book takes a fresh look at ancient texts that reveal future events and timeless truths. Most importantly, the true story of the future emphasizes *hope*—not merely an otherworldly hope in an afterlife in some hazy "sweet by-and-by," but a revolutionary transformation of humanity and the world. This living hope answers the deepest longings of all people and all creation—peace, prosperity, health, and harmony—centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Looking Ahead

The issues related to the end times in this book are arranged not chronologically, but logically. (The term "end times" refers to the future events prophesied by the Bible that will lead up to and include the return of Christ as judge and

king.) Like constructing a building, I will lay the foundation first. If you encounter occasional words or concepts in this introduction that happen to be new to you, don't worry. I'll define these in due course. In chapter 1, I'll first contrast Christian views of the end times with notable perspectives in other philosophies and religions. I'll also show that even among Christians, various versions of the story of the future have taken many twists and turns.

I'll then step aside from that noisy chaos and establish the threefold foundation of authentic, biblical eschatology—the "three Rs" of the *return* of Christ, the *resurrection* of the righteous and the wicked, and the *restoration* of all creation (chapter 2). Next, I'll describe the differing perspectives on end-times issues held by Christians who all affirm the three Rs (chapters 3–5).

After setting up the foundation and context of eschatology (the doctrine concerning future things), I will make the case for understanding the story of the future through a retrieval of the ancient church (chapter 6). I also will provide the big picture of humanity's original mission to exercise dominion as God's image-bearers called to establish God's will on earth as it is in heaven (chapters 7–8). Then I'll look forward to the end of the story, when Christ—the second Adam—along with a glorified humanity will fulfill that mission and renew this fallen creation through the renewal of heaven and earth (chapter 9).

With the big picture as the backdrop, I then will focus attention on the best understanding of the coming kingdom of God by tracing the Bible's teaching through the Old Testament (chapter 10), the New Testament (chapter 11), the book of Revelation (chapters 12–13), and the early church (chapter 14). Through the lens of Scripture and the light of the early church, I'll argue that when we consider the sequence of the events of the story of the future, it makes the most sense that an earthly kingdom will come at the time of Christ's physical return. During this earthly kingdom, Christ will fulfill the original mission to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over all things.

Along with the doctrine of a future earthly kingdom, I'll make a case for the classic view of end-times events seen in the earliest church. I'll establish the biblical concept of the Day of the Lord as a technical term for the coming period of testing, purification, and purging of the world from wickedness. That is, as a "technical term," the very utterance of "Day of the Lord" would always conjure up specific imagery of judgment. Then I'll show how this technical concept continues in the New Testament (chapter 15). In keeping with the early church's view of the end times, I will champion the position that the final Day of the Lord—what many Christians also call the "Tribulation"—will be a period of seven years, divided into two three-and-a-half-year periods, during which a

literal Antichrist will rise to power and plunge the world into darkness (chapter 16). I'll demonstrate, too, how the imagery of the book of Revelation should be read in light of what's known as a "futurist, premillennial eschatology" (chapter 17). Again, these terms will all be defined as we slowly work through the hopeful narrative of God's coming kingdom together.

Having set the stage for discussion of the coming Tribulation and Millennium, I will introduce the question of the timing of the rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:15–17), relative to the timing of the future Tribulation period. I'll argue that while many leaders of the church of the first couple of centuries were fuzzy on the matter (chapter 18), a strong case can be made from Scripture that the rapture will take place before the seven-year Tribulation (chapter 19). This discussion includes a close examination of the symbolism of the "catching up" of the male son in Revelation 12:5 (chapter 20).

Finally, I'll tie up loose ends with a reminder that the story of the future is ultimately about hope, though several sources of "false hope" must be avoided (chapter 21). I'll conclude with a discussion of personal hope—that is, what happens to us when we die (chapter 22)—and an exploration of how we are to become a part of the story of the future in our present world (chapter 23).

Preview of Features

To help communicate and illustrate sometimes complex issues, each chapter of *The Story of the Future* will include some of the following features:

- *Simply Put* summarizes the big idea of each chapter in a single paragraph. If you ever get lost in some of the details, return to that chapter's *Simply Put* to remind you of where you are.
- *In Brief* defines biblical, theological, and historical words and phrases in simple terms.
- *A Closer Look* examines certain technical interpretational, theological, or historical matters in a little more detail.
- Charts, timelines, and tables provide helpful summaries or illustrations of matters discussed in the text.

20

What Child Is This? The Forgotten Rapture Passage

Years ago, a church I served as a deacon suddenly discovered they owned a building in south Dallas they had literally forgotten about. Yes, *forgotten*. A whole building. We were reminded of it when a family who lived near the church wrote us a letter inquiring about its status. After some research, we determined that, yes, we owned a property whose existence had simply been forgotten over the years with the turnover of church leadership.

Like that forgotten but rediscovered building, Revelation 12:5 stands quietly in the distant past as a forgotten rapture passage waiting to be retrieved. In the nineteenth century, that passage had settled the matter in the minds of many early proponents of the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine based on a close, detailed reading.

Simply Put

Revelation 12:5 describes a dramatic scene in which a "male son" is "caught up" to God to escape the threat of an ominous dragon. A careful examination of this passage reveals that the male son is a symbol for the body of Christ, the church, and that his snatching up into heaven represents the rapture. Further examination of the sequence of events and the chronology of Revelation 12 demonstrates that this rapture of the church occurs before the seven-year Tribulation. Though this all-but-forgotten argument fell out of use about a hundred years ago, it provides a compelling case for the pre-tribulation rapture.

However, so complex are the arguments that by the beginning of the twentieth century, many pre-tribulationists stopped using it in popular-level teaching. By the mid-1900s, most who taught the pre-tribulation rapture actually forgot about this century-old argument.

Retrieving the Rapture in Revelation 12:5

Revelation 12:5 says, "And she bore a son, a male, who is to rule all the nations by a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and to his throne" (my literal translation). Modern study Bibles and commentaries would lead us to believe that the only legitimate interpretation of the "male son" is "Jesus only." But if we survey commentators of the past, the landscape changes. Numerous interpreters from a variety of backgrounds once understood the male son not as Jesus only, but as the "body of Christ," the church.

Those commentators of the past noticed important facts and details of the text that modern interpreters miss or neglect. And some of today's commentators simply parrot modern interpreters who insist the passage refers to "Jesus only," without weighing all the evidence or responding to counterarguments.

A CLOSER LOOK

Four Presuppositions for the Revelation 12:5 Argument

1. A consistent futurist interpretation of the book of Revelation—that Revelation's prophecies point primarily to future realities (not to past or present realities or an ideal).
2. A robust doctrine of the spiritual union between Christ and the body of Christ, the church—that the church is "one body" with Christ (1 Cor 12:12).
3. An open mind regarding a distinction between Old Testament Israel, the New Testament church, and a future restored Israel.
4. A literal understanding of the chronological indicators and order of events in Revelation 11–13.

Seven arguments demonstrate that the male son in Revelation 12:5 is the body of Christ, the church, and that the catching up of the male son symbolizes the rapture of the church prior to the seven-year period of the Tribulation.

Argument 1: Consistency in Symbolism

Identifying the male son as the corporate body of Christ is consistent with the fact that the other characters in Revelation 12:1–6 represent corporate bodies, not individuals. In that vision, the woman crying out in birth pains (Rev 12:1–2) is best interpreted as a corporate body—the people of Israel through the ages leading up to the birth of the church. When we compare the Greek of Revelation 12:1 with the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the "Septuagint") of Genesis 37:9, we find the language is very similar. And, as commentator J. Massyngberde Ford noted, Scripture frequently uses the symbol of a woman for Israel: "In the OT the image of a woman is a classical symbol for Zion, Jerusalem, and Israel, e.g. Zion whose husband is Yahweh."[1]

Then comes the symbol of the dragon (Rev 12:3–4). Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon as "the devil and Satan," but the symbolism also points to more than an individual wicked spirit. As New Testament scholar G. K. Beale has explained, "The imagery of the dragon is used throughout the OT to represent evil kingdoms who persecute God's people. . . . It also stands for the devil himself as the representative head of evil kingdoms."[2] The symbolism of the dragon's seven heads and ten horns (Rev 12:3) draws from Daniel 7:1–8, where four beasts represent successive kingdoms against God's people: Babylon, Medo–Persia, Greece, and Rome. Together, these four beasts have a total of seven heads and ten horns. The image of the dragon in Revelation 12 sums up the totality of Satan's political opposition to God and his people throughout history.

If symbols are used consistently in Revelation 12, then the male son doesn't represent "Jesus only." Rather, he represents the corporate body of Christ.[3] Of course, imagery associated with Christ is woven into the symbolism, but this imagery reinforces that the male son represents the body *of Christ* in union with its head.

1. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible, ed. W. F. Albright and David Noel Freedman (Doubleday, 1975), 195.

2. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, 245–46.

3. See Acts 9:4; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:13–14, 27; Eph 4:15–16.

The Cast of Characters in Revelation 12

THE WOMAN (Rev 12:1–2)	Corporate Israel of the Old Testament (Gen 37:9–10), which will be restored (Rev 7:1–8)
THE DRAGON (Rev 12:3–4)	Satan working through corporate nations against God and his people (Dan 7:1–7)
THE MALE SON (Rev 12:4–5)	The corporate body of Christ, in union with Christ (John 15:18–19; Eph 2:14–16)
THE REST OF HER OFF-SPRING (Rev 12:17)	Believers during the Tribulation, converted by Israel's ministry (Rev 7:9–17)

Argument 2: Allusion to Isaiah 66:7

Revelation 12:5 reads: "And she bore a son, a male, who is to rule all the nations by a rod of iron." In both the original Greek and in English translations, a reader will recognize the odd fact that the passage points out the obvious gender of a son ("male"). A Greek reader would also have noticed a grammatical issue with the statement. The neuter Greek word *arsen* ("male") modifies the masculine noun *huios* ("son"), which creates a grammatical contradiction. In languages like Greek, of which nouns and adjectives have genders (masculine, feminine, or neuter), adjectives are supposed to match the gender of the nouns they describe: masculine adjectives with masculine nouns, feminine with feminine, neuter with neuter. But "male son" in Revelation 12:5 matches a neuter adjective with a masculine noun—a grammatical inconsistency. Yet in the book of Revelation, John often used strange grammatical constructions like this one to point readers back to Old Testament passages that provide interpretive keys to the meaning of the symbol. In Revelation 12:5, the phrase "male son" is intended to cause us to pause, find the Old Testament passage to which the text is pointing, and figure out what's going on.

In this case, John was pointing us back to Isaiah 66:7. In an English translation of the Greek Septuagint, it reads: "Before the one in labor gave birth, before the distress of birth pangs arrived, she escaped and bore a male child [*kai eteken arsen*]." The next verse demonstrates that the woman and child are not individuals but symbols for corporate bodies: "Has the earth labored in a single day, or was a nation brought forth all at once? For Zion was in labor and brought forth her children." So, the passage in Isaiah to which John's strange grammar leads us interprets the "male [*arsen*]" as the plural "children"! John's allusion to

Isaiah 66:7–8 reinforces the identification of the woman as corporate Israel and confirms the interpretation of the male son as a corporate body.

Had the Holy Spirit intended to make it clear that the male son symbolizes the individual Messiah, Revelation 12:5 could have pointed to other Old Testament prophecies like Isaiah 9:6 ("For to us a child is born, to us a son is given") or even 7:14 ("The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"). Matching the language of either of those passages would have clinched the "Jesus only" interpretation. Instead, the Spirit points us to a passage that identifies the male son as a corporate body born to the corporate people of Israel. I can't think of a good reason why John would have pointed us to this particular passage if he didn't intend for us to understand the male son as corporate.

Argument 3: Background of Daniel 7:13

We've already seen that the imagery of a dragon with seven heads and ten horns (Rev 12:3) corresponds to the fusion of the four beasts of Daniel 7. In that passage, we find a clue about how the term "son" should be understood. Revelation 12 points us back to the coming of the "son of man" in Daniel 7:13–14 to rule and reign. In both Daniel 7 and Revelation 12, the "son" is destined to rule the nations; he's brought into the presence of God; and he's presented before God's throne.

When an angel interprets the vision of the "son of man" for Daniel, he explains it *corporately* (Dan 7:18, 21–22, 27). As Old Testament scholar W. Sibley Towner explained, "These three texts make clear that he [the son of man] has now been radically interpreted as an identifiable and specific collective entity."[4] And commentator Choon-Leong Seow put it simply: "The one is the many; the many are the one."[5]

Therefore, John's allusion to the vision of the "son of man" in Daniel 7 further strengthens the identity of the male son in Revelation 12:5 as the *corporate* body of Christ, the church. With Christ, the church is destined to rule over the nations after being presented before the throne of God to receive the reward of the kingdom (2 Tim 2:12).

4. W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays, Patrick D. Miller, and Paul J. Achtemeier (Westminster John Knox, 1984), 105.

5. Choon-Leong Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion, ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Westminster John Knox, 2003), 16.

Argument 4: Application of Psalm 2:9

In Psalm 2:9, God promised the future Messiah, "You shall break them [the nations] with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This psalm is applied to the male son in Revelation 12:5. Doesn't this imply that the male son can only be Jesus? No, because references to Psalm 2:9 appear twice more in Revelation, and the other passages point to a *corporate* application of the promise to the church.

The first time Psalm 2:9 is quoted is in Revelation 2:26–27, where Christ himself broadened the promise to believers: "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father." Revelation 19:14–15 applies Psalm 2:9 to Christ returning to rule along with his victorious saints—the fulfillment of the promise Christ made to believers in Revelation 2:26–27.

So, concluding that the male son symbolizes the corporate body of Christ is more consistent with Christ's extension of the promise of Psalm 2:9 that applies both to Christ (Rev 19:14–15) and to the church (2:26–27). This also mirrors the individual-corporate identification of the son of man in Daniel 7 and the corporate male child born to Israel in Isaiah 66:7–8.

Argument 5: Parallels to Isaiah 26:16–27:1

When we look at the Greek Septuagint translation of Isaiah 26:16–27:1 through the lens of Revelation 12, we see many striking parallels that make it hard to deny that there are intentional connections between the two passages. The following comparison places side by side an English translation of the Greek Septuagint and parallel passages in Revelation 12.

Septuagint of Isaiah 26:16–27:1	**Revelation 12**
26:16 "Lord, in distress I remembered you; with a little distress ***was*** your discipline toward us.	
17 And as the woman in labor approaches childbirth, ***and*** cries out at her pangs, this is how we have become ***to*** your beloved.	2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. . . .
18 Because of fear of you, O Lord, we conceived in the womb and had pangs and gave birth; we made a wind of your deliverance on the land, but all those who dwell on the land will fall.	4 . . . the woman who was about to give birth . . .

[19] The dead will rise, and those in the tombs will be raised, and those in the earth will rejoice; for the dew from you is a remedy for them, but the land of the impious will fall."	[12] Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!
[20] Go, my people, enter into your chambers; shut your door; hide a little while until the wrath of the Lord passes.	
[21] For look, the Lord is bringing from the holy *place* the wrath against those dwelling upon the land; and the land will uncover its blood, and it will not cover up the slain.	
[27:1] On that day God will bring the holy and great and mighty sword against the dragon, a fleeing serpent, against the dragon, a twisted serpent; he will slay the dragon.	[3] And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon. . . . [7] Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, [8] but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. [9] And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The imagery of Isaiah 26 begins with God's people crying out in "a little distress" (Isa 26:16). They liken their afflictions to the pains of labor (26:17). Revelation 12:2 parallels this language, as the woman Israel cries out in labor pains. We've already seen this same language used in Isaiah 66:7—quoted in Revelation 12:5—where the woman Zion gives birth to a corporate body.

In Isaiah 26, Israel brings forth not a literal child but "a wind [or "spirit"] of your deliverance [or "salvation"]" (26:18). We can imagine how early Christian readers of this passage might have taken this as a reference to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost when the Spirit like a wind fell upon a small remnant of Jewish followers of Jesus, thus giving birth to the church (Acts 2:1–2)—what Ephesians 2:15 calls "one new man." In any case, Isaiah 26:18 contrasts this birth of a "spirit of salvation" with the doomed fate of the wicked.

In that same breath, we read of the resurrection of the dead as well as a second warning to the impious who are alive on the earth at the time of that resurrection (Isa 26:19). The righteous are then urged to enter their innermost chambers (26:20) to hide from an impending disaster (compare Gen 43:30; Judg 16:9). Thus in this passage closely associated with the resurrection of the dead,

God's people are hidden from the Lord's wrath, which is brought against "those dwelling upon the land" (Isa 26:21)—the wicked who will "fall" (26:18–19).

Isaiah 27:1 then tells us that God will bring his sword of judgment against the dragon (*drakōn*), also called a serpent (*ophis*). These two terms—dragon and serpent—appear together in the Old Testament only in Isaiah 27:1, and in the New Testament only in Revelation 12:9.

The similarities between these two passages are too many and too specific to be coincidental. But to what end is Revelation 12 pointing to Isaiah 26:16–27:1? This question is answered when we consider that the Spirit intends us to understand the catching up of the male son in Revelation 12:5 in light of the dramatic imagery of Isaiah 26. The spiritual birth of the church that began at Pentecost and extends to the resurrection from the dead (1 Thess 4:16–17) leaves the impious behind to suffer judgment while the righteous are protected from wrath (5:1–11).

If the catching up of the male son refers to the rescue of the church from coming wrath, then the rejoicing of the resurrected in Isaiah 26:19 parallels the song of rejoicing in Revelation 12:12. Those who dwell in the heavens would be the corporate body of Christ—the church resurrected, transformed, and rescued from the dragon, which is cast down to the earth for a "short time."

Argument 6: The Language of "Snatching" (*Harpazō*)

In his vision, John saw the male son "caught up [*harpazō*] to God and to his throne" (Rev 12:5). Most readers who interpret the male son as "Jesus only" identify this as the ascension (see Acts 1:9). However, the verb *harpazō* ("to snatch") is completely wrong for describing the ascension of Christ. *Harpazō* always conveys the notion of sudden snatching. Greek scholar Ernest Moore noted that *harpazō* "is most often used in a bad sense—of seizing or snatching the persons or property of others."[6] When it's used in a positive sense, it's often in contexts of rescue from peril.[7]

In contrast, when Scripture describes the ascension of Christ, it uses neutral terms indicating gradual upward movement: *epairō* "be lifted up" (Acts 1:9), *analambanō* "to take up" (Mark 16:19; Luke 1:11), and *anabainō* "to ascend" (John 20:17; Eph 4:8–10). In Revelation 11:12, John used the term *anabainō* to describe the ascension of the two witnesses. Even though that term was fresh in his mind,

6. Ernest Moore, "ΒΙΑΖΩ, ΑΡΠΑΖΩ and Cognates in Josephus," *New Testament Studies* 21, no. 4 (1975): 525.

7. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2.291; 4.71; 5.522; *Antiquities of the Jews* 12.113.

John instead chose *harpazō* for Revelation 12:5! If the snatching of the male son to God's throne was meant to represent the ascension of Christ, wouldn't John have used established ascension terminology? Instead, he used a term that never describes Christ's ascension.

Furthermore, Revelation 12:1–4 sets up a perilous situation in which the dragon stands ready to devour the male son. Thus, the catching up of the male son in 12:5 is a rescue. This is utterly incompatible with the New Testament portrayal of the ascension of Christ. Jesus wasn't snatched away to God's throne to escape any threat, satanic or otherwise.

Some have unsuccessfully tried to solve this dilemma by suggesting that the snatching is not the ascension but some other event—perhaps Christ's snatching away to crucifixion,[8] or his snatching from the grave.[9] However, those interpretations simply don't match the text. The destination of the snatching is "to God and to his throne," not to the cross. And Christ didn't ascend instantly after his resurrection, but some forty days later (John 20:17; Acts 1:1–11).

To put it plainly, if John used *harpazō* to describe Christ's death, resurrection, or ascension, he chose the wrong word. But if John intended the male son to represent the corporate body of Christ, and his catching up to the throne to represent the rapture, then the use of *harpazō* was perfectly appropriate. It's the term for the rapture of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, a passage that had been known for decades before Revelation was written.

Argument 7: Omission of Death and Resurrection

If we identify the male son as "only Jesus," how do we explain the omission of any mention of his death and resurrection? If Revelation 12:5 had said, "And her child suffered, died, rose again, and ascended to God and to his throne," there would be no question that the male child is Jesus.

It seems strange that the essential elements of the work of Christ (see 1 Cor 15:3) would be missing without a hint. This peculiarity is resolved if the male son is not intended to refer to the individual Jesus per se, but to the corporate body of Christ. At the time Jesus returns, not all believers will have experienced physical death, though all will experience transformation and a catching up from earth to heaven (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:15–17).

8. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick, repr. ed. (Black, 1966; repr., Hendrickson, 1993), 149–59.

9. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Baker, 2002), 463.

Summing Up the Arguments: The Male Son and the Rapture of the Church

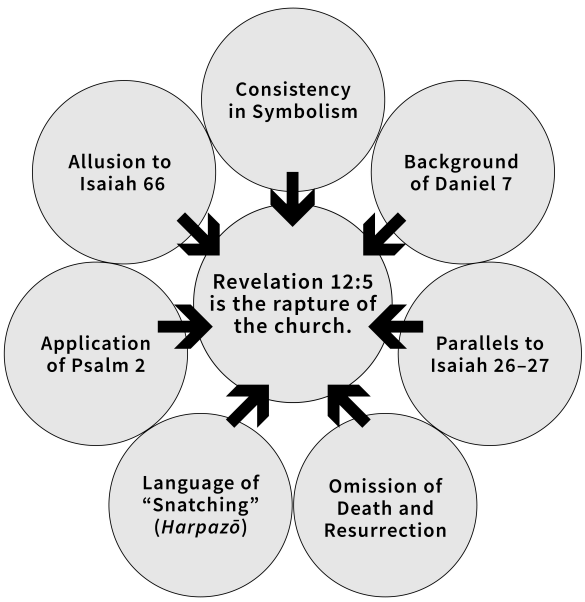
Considering all the evidence, I offer the following conclusions.

First, *there is no good reason to reject the view that in Revelation 12:5 the male son represents the body of Christ.* Jesus himself applied Psalm 2:9 to the church (Rev 2:26–27). The distinct vision of Revelation 12 using a "male" image rather than female is due to the allusion to Isaiah 66:7–8. The image of the male son also fits the biblical background of the "son of man" and "body of Christ," both of which are masculine images.

Second, *identifying the male son as "Jesus only" doesn't incorporate all the evidence*. It ignores the corporate imagery of Isaiah 66:7–8 and Daniel 7:13–14. It also neglects the parallels to Isaiah 26:16–27:1, which point to resurrection and protection from wrath. And it disregards the unambiguous meaning of *harpazō*, "to snatch."

Third, *concluding that the catching up of the male son symbolizes the rapture of the corporate body of Christ incorporates all the evidence.* The evidence and arguments may seem complicated, but opting for a simpler explanation that doesn't account for all the evidence is simply a bad argument.

Seven Arguments Pointing to Revelation 12:5 as the Rapture



Therefore, *the best interpretation of Revelation 12:5 is that the male son is a symbol for the corporate body of Christ, the church—and the catching up of the male son is a symbol for the rapture of the church*. Because 1 Thessalonians was one of the first New Testament books written, the use of *harpazō* to mean the rapture of the church would have begun long before the vision of Revelation 12. By using *harpazō* in Revelation 12:5, the inspired text points the diligent reader back to the passage in which the church is resurrected, transformed, and caught up to God.

The Timing of the Rapture in Revelation 12:5

If you've never done an "escape room," you're missing out. What's an escape room? It's a puzzle-based, hands-on experience in which team members must solve a series of clues and logical challenges to escape a room before running out of time. It goes something like this: One key unlocks a box, which contains a clue to a combination, which opens a door, which leads to a room with another puzzle, which solves a riddle for a clue, which helps you arrange a series of numbers, which releases another key, which unlocks another door to escape the room. While each escape room is unique, they all have this in common: To escape the room, you have to observe the details carefully, think through implications logically, and follow steps sequentially.

The same is true when it comes to putting together the events described in Revelation 12–13 in relation to the catching up of the male son in Revelation 12:5. Embedded in this passage are some important clues regarding the chronological relationships over the various pieces, but to put them all together, you have to observe details carefully, think through implications logically, and follow steps sequentially. So, open your Bible and let me walk through the passage step by step, showing how a close examination of the chronological indicators in Revelation 12 confirms that the catching up of the male son represents a pre-seven-year event.

First, immediately after the male son is caught up (Rev 12:5), Michael the archangel and his army fight the dragon, who is cast down to the earth (12:7–9). We should recall that 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that the archangel is also associated with the rapture of the church. Given the identification of the male son, the rapture will have occurred prior to the outbreak of the heavenly war. According to Daniel 10:12–13, angelic warfare takes time. Thus, an unspecified period elapses in the narrative following the catching up of the church to God

and the casting down of the devil and his angels to the earth. In the context of Revelation 12, this unspecified period *follows* the rapture, but it takes place before the woman Israel's 1,260-day protection from the dragon. So, the war in heaven must take place during the first half of the future seven-year period.

When the dragon is finally cast down after the conflict, a song of victory breaks out in heaven (Rev 12:10–12). This song makes perfect sense in the context of the church being recently resurrected, transformed, and raptured—those who dwell in heaven (12:12) are the glorified saints. As the kingdom of Christ begins to manifest itself in the heavenly realm, the judgments described in Revelation begin to affect both the spiritual and physical domains. In that song of victory those who had once been accused by the devil "day and night" are now said to have overcome him (12:10–11). The basis for Satan's accusation against the saints is gone, for they are all glorified in the rapture (1 Thess 4:17; 1 Cor 15:52; Phil 3:20–21). Those who remain on the earth, however, will face the devil's "great wrath" (Rev 12:12), for his time is short. The church, though, will have been saved from wrath (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9).

After the dragon is cast down, he attacks the woman, Israel (Rev 12:13). Clearly, then, corporate Israel will be reconstituted through faith in their Messiah, Jesus, at the beginning of the Tribulation period (7:1–8). Before the woman flees to the wilderness, however, the dragon—working through the world powers—launches an attack on Israel with an army (12:13–16).

In Old Testament prophecy, a flood represents a military invasion, which is another aspect of the Day of the Lord.[10] But the dragon's attempt to destroy Israel through an invasion during the first half of the Tribulation will be miraculously thwarted (Rev 12:16). The earthly warfare leading to the woman's flight adds to the gap of time between the rapture of the church and Israel's 1,260-day protection, which must therefore take place later in the seven-year period (Rev 12:13–16).

Utterly frustrated by his failure to destroy Israel, the dragon turns his attention to "the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). This likely refers to the group called the "great multitude" in Revelation 7—those saved during the Tribulation, from "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (7:9). They will come to faith through the testimony of the remnant of believing Israel symbolized in the earlier vision of Revelation 7 as "the 144,000" (7:1–8). With Israel protected during the second half of the seven-year period, Satan turns to a dif-

10. Isaiah 8:7–8; Jer 46:7–8; 47:2; Dan. 9:27; 11:10, 40.

ferent means of combating the people of God: the Beast from the sea, commonly known as the Antichrist (Rev 13). At the midpoint of the seven-year period, the Beast's forty-two-month reign of terror begins (Rev 13:5).

To sum up, the rapture of the male son is immediately followed by time-consuming events before the midpoint of the Tribulation. In heaven, spiritual warfare results in the casting down of Satan (Rev 12:7–12). On earth, physical warfare results in Israel's flight (12:13–16). These things must take place during the first half of the Tribulation, during which the remnant of Israel is saved and sealed (7:1–8), the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt (11:1–2), the two witnesses carry out their 1,260-day ministry, and finally, the Beast appears and the witnesses are martyred (11:3–7). The forty-two-month reign of the Beast and False Prophet then takes place during the second half of the Tribulation (Rev 13), during which Israel is protected for 1,260 days (12:6, 14).

Though it was lost for a time in the dusty attic of the history of doctrine, the interpretation that the male son is a corporate body raptured to heaven has never been refuted. It was simply neglected, ignored, rejected, or ridiculed. But given the four basic presuppositions with which this chapter began, the passage stands its ground as a sturdy argument that the rapture will take place before the Tribulation.

The Rapture and Order of Future Events in Revelation 12–13

