

## **The Rapture**

What is the Rapture and its significance to the world? What happens to the church at the Rapture? Why is it critical that the church presently understand this biblical doctrine? Does our understanding of the Rapture affect our relationship with the Lord and each other?

## **Preface**

In researching the Rapture, there are many great resources available. At the end of this article I have listed a few additional resources for study on this great doctrine of the Bible. In the present article, I want to stay focused on answering the questions stated at the outset. In answering those questions, it becomes necessary to lay out certain biblical truths about the Rapture. The style of interpretation of Scripture employed herein is literal. I have endeavored to stay as close to the straightforward and accurate teaching of the Bible as possible and to arrive at conclusions that harmonize with *all* Scripture on the subject. This particular article is abbreviated to a certain degree, so a full treatment of each element is not always developed. I encourage every Christian to research this subject thoroughly. I have referenced many Scriptures along the way, so dig in and follow up with your own study through the Bible. The first two rules in interpretation are always your faith in Christ and prayer for understanding from the Holy Spirit. Without these two aspects, interpretation of God's Word is impossible. Having done this, then, let's take a closer look at the subject at hand.

## **I. What is the Rapture and its Significance to the World?**

### **The Day of the Lord**

It is important to know firstly that the Rapture initiates something known in the Bible as the "Day of the Lord." Spoken of more than any other one subject throughout the Tanakh (Old Testament), the Day of the Lord begins sometime after the completion of the church (when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, from Rom. 11:25) and the Rapture of the church has taken place (both happen simultaneously). This is the key to understanding *when* the Rapture takes place in relation to the seven-year Tribulation period, which we will discuss shortly. The Day of the Lord primarily refers to the seven-year Tribulation period which follows the Rapture, but is also used by the writers of the Old Testament to speak of Christ's Second Coming and the Judgment of the Nations, which terminates the seven-year period. In the Old Testament, the "Day of the Lord" or "that day" usually refers to the seven-year Tribulation period alone (particularly the last three and a half years, known as the "Great Tribulation"), but it *also* can refer to the 1,000 year reign of

Christ on earth that begins at His Second Coming, as well as the Great White Throne Judgment (the final judgment) of all those that have failed to receive God's forgiveness through Jesus. The Day of the Lord, as the entire period of time, culminates in the dissolution of the universe, including earth, called "the heavens and earth" in 2 Pet. 3:10-13 & Rev. 20:11 *and* in the subsequent creation of the New Heaven and New Earth, meaning the entire Universe, the entire creation of God (2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1, Isaiah 65:17). The New Heavens and New Earth will be created by God after the Millennial reign of Christ and the final, Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20 are concluded. Also known as the Eternal State or God's Eternal Kingdom, the New Heaven and New Earth start right away for us, so to speak, individually, at death or the Rapture, because we go immediately to be with Jesus in glory. But the New Heavens and New Earth will literally be created by God after the Millennium, the final judgment and the destruction of the old heaven and earth. His New Creation then heads into eternity glorified along with all the believers of all time (Rom. 8:21). This is usually known simply as "Heaven" or "Eternity".

So, the "Day of the Lord" refers *broadly* to the *whole period* (approximately 1,007 years), and more *specifically*, depending on its context in the Scripture, to the Rapture *or* the seven-year Tribulation *or* the Second Coming *or* the Millennium, *or* the destruction of the old heaven and earth *or* the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth.

As believers in Jesus Christ, born again, born of the Spirit of God by faith in Jesus (John 3), we are now looking to the return of Jesus Christ *at the Rapture*, our departure from this world just before the Day of the Lord and the Tribulation begins. We are not looking for more signs of the "last days" to be fulfilled or to the evangelization or Christianizing of the whole world. We are not looking for the revealing of the anti-Christ or the one world government, or the beginning of the Tribulation, or the last three and a half years of the Tribulation (known as the Great Tribulation). Nor are we looking for the bowl judgments or final trumpet of Revelation or *any other* signs or events *before* the Rapture. To be looking for anything *other than Jesus* coming for His church at the Rapture is to be distracted from the Lord's will for your life, according to the New Testament. This has always been true for the church at every point of the church age. At this moment, as with the first followers of Christ, and as should have been in all periods of church history, we are looking for Jesus to come and take us to be with Him. This *is* our "living and blessed hope." We will develop this thought further throughout the article. This biblical truth, in and of itself, reveals that the Rapture of the church must take place before the Tribulation period.

### **The Imminence of the Harpazo**

According to the normal, literal interpretation of the Bible, at any time "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God", and all living believers will be "caught up" from the earth ("harpazo" in Greek, "rapiemur/rapturos" in Latin, "caught up" or "snatched away" in English). The

church is taken to be with the Lord just before God's judgment is to be poured out on this God-rejecting world. The doctrine of the Rapture is without refutation. It is taught so clearly in 1 Thess. 4 & 5 and 1 Cor. 15:51-53, among other places, that to deny it is simply to deny the plain and literal meaning of Scripture and the accuracy and inspiration of God's Word. Another doctrine of the New Testament that is irrefutable is that the return of Jesus is imminent, meaning that there is nothing stopping it or holding it back; it could happen at any moment. That the Rapture may take place at any time is taught by Jesus when He says, "*Watch therefore, for you **do not know** what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also **be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect***" (Matt. 24:42-44)."

### **When Will the Rapture Take Place?**

If we cannot know when the Lord is coming for His church, as He has said, then the Rapture is imminent. Jesus' plain and simple teaching *insists* that the church should be living in such a way that we are looking for Him to return for us at any time at the Rapture, and every New Testament writer agrees that that is how we are to be living our lives. By necessity, there can be no prerequisites to the Rapture. Additionally, there can be no terminus, or final date by which it must happen, otherwise there would be prerequisite events that would have to happen first. Conversely, the exact time of the *Second Coming of Christ, to the day*, is easily ascertained and well defined because it terminates the seven-year Tribulation period. Once the Tribulation begins, the inhabitants of earth during the Tribulation will be able to count forward seven years from the unveiling of the one-world leader. There is a second opportunity during the Tribulation to calculate the Second Coming. At the half way mark, something called the "abomination of desolation", which we will talk about shortly, takes place. By counting forward three and a half years from the day of that event, many believers will know the exact day of the Lord's glorious return (see Daniel 12:11-12, where he gives the Tribulation survivors the exact number of days). It is not possible, on the other hand, to know the timing of the Rapture, as the Lord Himself has said. This is a crucial fact when considering the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation period, as well as any attempts to ascertain an actual date for the Rapture, an hour or day or year, like so many false teachers and mislead Christians have mistakenly and unsuccessfully attempted to do throughout history.

No one can know the day or hour or season of the Rapture, that is clear from the Lord, so no dates can be set for it *and* there is nothing that has to take place *before* the Lord can come for His church. The Apostles believed that and expressed that belief with much enthusiasm. We will look at their thoughts on Jesus' imminent return for His church in the third section of this article, but it suffices to say here that the gospel does not have to go out to the whole world through the church first, nor does the anti-Christ have to be revealed, nor the beginning of the Tribulation begun. These prerequisites would make

Jesus' return for His church dependent on other events unfolding first. They would have the church looking elsewhere, to something other than Jesus' return, to the wrong event(s) to take place first, instead of Jesus and His coming Kingdom to be initiated at the Rapture of the church. That contradicts Jesus' clear teaching in the Gospels on His return for the church. It also contradicts the way the early church understood His teaching and viewed the timing of the Rapture. Therefore, the Rapture *must* take place during an open-ended period of time with an undefined end that, at a certain point in time, connects to the Tribulation period. The *only* indeterminate period of time that it can happen within, in relation to the Tribulation, is the so-called "Church Age", which is the period of time that we live in now, that extends from the start of the church until the completion of the church at the Rapture. This is the *only* time period between now and the Tribulation in which no one could possibly know in any way or within any period of surrounding time when the Rapture will occur. This circumstance must be true in order for Jesus' statement to be true about no one knowing the day or the hour or the season (Mark 13:32-37). The church age ends when the fullness of the Gentiles come in, which is before the Tribulation begins. *Any* proposed time for the Rapture after the Tribulation's onset is disqualified due to this teaching of the Lord. Expecting His return at any moment is called the doctrine of imminency. If Jesus' return is imminent, as Paul, Peter, John, James and every writer of the New Testament believed, and as Jesus stated Himself, than there is nothing holding it back, it can happen at any moment. In my understanding, this, among many other "proofs", assures the church of a pre-Tribulation Rapture. We'll look at one other indisputable argument for the "Pre-Trib" Rapture in a moment, though J. Dwight Pentecost lists no less than twenty-eight reasons for a pre-Tribulation Rapture in his book *Things to Come*. When interpreting the Bible literally, it is an indisputable fact that this view harmonizes with the whole of Scripture to a far greater extent than any other view of the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation.

## **The World After the Rapture**

When the time for the church comes to be taken from the earth to Heaven, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be raptured, snatched away, caught up together with them (those who have already died in Christ) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11)." Once the church is removed out of the way at the Rapture for our "marriage to the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7), our glorification in Heaven with Jesus, *then* the false world leader known as the anti-Christ will be revealed on earth (2 Thess. 2). He will ultimately lead the nations of the earth into Israel, Mount Megiddo in the north of Israel being the central gathering point for the final world war (known as Armageddon). This war features nations from around the globe, but primarily becomes the powers of the west facing off against the powers of the east. Finally, he leads what remains of the world's armies into war against Jesus and His bride at Christ's return, the "Second Coming" (Rev. 19:19). Initially, the last world empire's leader is apparently peaceful, powerful and an intriguing politician (for more on the anti-Christ, see Daniel 7:8-28; 8:9-14, 23-26; 9:24-27; 11:21-45; Rev. chapters 13, 17, 18, 19; 2 Thess. 2 & Matt. 24). He quickly becomes a seemingly benevolent and effective

European/Western leader sometime after the Rapture (either immediately or possibly within weeks, months or even years) but is in reality the “man of sin” and the “son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3) and the “worthless Shepard” (Zech. 11:16-17). He is to become the one world government’s dictator, the anti-Christ. Beginning halfway through that seven-year period he breaks his covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27). He also goes into the Holy of Holies (in the Jewish Temple) and stops the sacrifice to Israel’s God (which is re-instituted sometime after the Rapture) and demands that the world worship him as god (probably an atheistic, New Age idea of a human achieved “godhood”). This is the “abomination of desolation” that Jesus and Daniel referred to, and it is the event that starts the last three and a half years of the seven-year period known as the “Great Tribulation”.

### **The 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel and the Timing of the Rapture**

We call this last three and a half years of the seven-year period the “Great Tribulation” because of Jesus’ description of it in Matt. 24:21, and Daniel’s in Daniel 12:1. We know that the whole period is seven years because of repeated references to it being that length of time in the book of Revelation and Daniel, and because it is also known as the 70<sup>th</sup> week (of seven years) of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27). The last three and a half years of the Tribulation will be a time of *great* tribulation, unlike any other time on earth. I believe it is an understanding of the *whole* Tribulation period *as the* 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel that eliminates all doubts that the timing of the Rapture is *before* the seven-year period begins. This is because the church *cannot* be on earth for *any* duration of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. The church age must end *before* the last seven years of God’s plan with Israel can resume. Paul makes this clear in Romans chapter 11, so getting acquainted with Romans chapters 9-11 is essential. But before we look at that, let’s look at Daniel 9:24-27 for more on the “70<sup>th</sup> week” of Daniel. The angel Gabriel is sent by God and says to Daniel that seventy weeks (of years) are determined ( $70 \times 7 = 490$  years)... “to bring in everlasting righteousness” and to “anoint the Most Holy” (v. 24). These events, without argument, will only happen at Jesus’ *Second* Coming. After 69 weeks of years ( $69 \times 7 = 483$  years), according to Gabriel the “Messiah shall be cut off” (literally suffer the death penalty). Since this already happened at Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, that leaves a seven-year week left unfulfilled, the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel ( $490 - 483 = 7$  remaining years). The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem during the week before His crucifixion was exactly 483 years from the start of the prophecy given in Daniel. The 70<sup>th</sup> week, the remaining 7 years, must be future to the time of the church because the 70 weeks has to do with God and Israel, not the church, and it was not fulfilled after the time of Christ being on earth. Astonishingly, the 483 years concluded sometime between Jesus’ presentation of Himself as Messiah at the triumphal entry and His crucifixion (His being cut off), exactly 483 years from the start of the prophecy, just as Gabriel said it would. So, the 70 weeks of Daniel were interrupted right between the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel at Christ’s rejection and subsequent crucifixion and resurrection. In Romans 11, Paul makes it clear that God cast Israel away at this point

(v. 15), but only temporarily. There is still then a need for that final 7 years of Daniel to take place for God “to bring in everlasting righteousness” and to “anoint the Most Holy”.

At the birth of the church, God ceased to have direct relations with Israel as a nation because they had rejected the New Covenant, they rejected their Messiah. That indeterminate period of time, of Israel being set aside by God, precisely and unequivocally coincides with the church age, the age of grace that we are still living in today. Through Israel’s fall (their failure to receive Jesus as the Messiah) salvation has come to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11) and “is riches for the Gentiles (v. 12).” And here is the key: Paul says in verse 25 “that blindness in part has happened to Israel *until* the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25). The *birth* of the church was just after Israel’s rejection of Christ *stopped* the 70 weeks of Daniel at the conclusion of the 69<sup>th</sup> week. It is the *glorification* of the church that will *start* God’s clock on Israel again, “for God has committed them all (Israel as a nation corporately) to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32)” and “all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26).” “For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world (the start of the church age), what will their acceptance be but life from the dead (Rom. 11:15)?” Considering that we know the resurrection of *the church* happens at the Rapture and that the resurrection of *Israel* happens at or after the Second Coming, these verses in Romans 11 are exhilarating and conclusive. Paul tells us clearly that when Israel, as a nation, accepts Jesus as their Messiah, the resurrection of God’s people will take place!

An acceptance of Jesus by a remnant of Jewish believers will directly follow the Rapture of the church, will continue throughout the Tribulation *and* will usher in the Second Coming seven years later. Remember also, the Tribulation is called “the Time of *Jacob’s* Trouble” in Jeremiah 30:7 and Daniel clearly states, in 9:24, that the “seventy weeks are determined *for your people* (Israel) *and for your holy city* (Jerusalem)”. He says that this period determined *for Israel*, that ultimately brings judgment on the earth during the last seven years, will be “to bring in everlasting righteousness” (v. 24). The last week is like all the other weeks spoken of by Gabriel, it is exactly seven years (v. 24 & 27), but it culminates in the “bringing in of everlasting righteousness”, with Jesus’ return and the beginning of the Millennial reign of Christ immediately following. Daniel even tells us, like Jesus and John, that the anti-Christ commits the abomination that causes desolation exactly three and a half years into the seven-year period, which initiates the worst part of this whole period, the Great Tribulation (v. 27).

The fullness of the Gentiles *is* the *end* of the church on earth and the church age and is consummated by the Rapture. Otherwise, Jewish believers during the Tribulation (“the remnant” mentioned so often throughout the Prophets and in Romans 11) would *also* be soon-to-be-Raptured Christians in the midst of the Tribulation. They would be part of the church! Impossible! They must be one or the other. They *cannot* be both. Clearly, according to Scripture, Jewish believers during the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel are the remnant of believing Israel. Without dispute, this is the plain, straightforward reading of the text. Only after the church is removed can God begin to deal with Israel again for this last seven-year period of Daniel left unfulfilled. This is exactly what Paul says in verses 25 and 26 of Romans 11, “*blindness* to Israel *until* the fullness of the Gentiles *has come in*

(to the church and to Heaven at the Rapture). “*And so all Israel will be saved*”, separate and distinct from the church. This happens during the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, the time of Jacob’s Trouble, but ultimately is fulfilled at its culmination when the remnant of Israel constitutes *all* of Israel and they enter into the Millennium after the judgment of the nations.

When the Rapture takes place, at the end of the church age, God begins to work with Israel again. At the end of that seven-year Tribulation period, the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, “the Lord comes with billions of His saints (Jude 1:14), the church, which is His bride, and captures the anti-Christ and his false prophet and they are “cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev. 19:11-21). This event is known as the Second Coming and brings the Tribulation period to a close. It also initiates the Millennial (1,000 year) reign of Christ on the regenerated, Eden like earth (Isaiah 51:3). For more on the anti-Christ and his false prophet see Rev. 13. For more on the Millennium see Rev. 20, along with such Old Testament passages as Isaiah chapters 11 & 35. The “judgment of the nations” is described by the Lord in Matthew 25:31-32.

### **The General Outline of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ**

As an important side note, in the book of Revelation, 1:19, Jesus tells John to break the book into 3 main divisions. Chapter 1 is what John saw: the Revelation of Jesus in glory, with all authority in Heaven and earth given to Him. Chapters 2 & 3 represent the things that are: the present and entire church age from the resurrection of Christ to the Rapture of the church. Chapters 4-22 are the things which will take place after this (after the church age): all of chapters 4-22 are *future* to the Rapture of the church. Furthermore, chapters 4 & 5 describe the church in Heaven immediately after the Rapture, concurrent to the seven-year Tribulation happening on earth. Chapters 6-18 describe variously the events of the Tribulation on earth. Chapter 19 is a description of the Second Coming of Christ with His saints, the church (the church is finally mentioned again for the first time since chapter 5 because we return with Jesus from Heaven after our departure *before* the seven-year Tribulation period began). Chapter 20 of Revelation describes the Millennial reign of Christ, and 21 and 22 the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21:1-4), as well as our relation to the earth in the New Jerusalem (Heaven) during the Millennium and Christ’s reign on earth at that time (after Rev. 21:4). It’s critical to have that outline and to understand the meaning of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is a revelation of His eternal glory and all that He is doing for the eternal futures of those that put their trust in Him. It gives us insight and perspective on all He has been doing for His creation throughout history.

For the world, the Rapture of the church is the beginning of the end of world history, as we now know it. For the church, it is the beginning of our eternal, glorified lives with Jesus.

## II. What Happens to the Church at the Rapture?

We've looked at what the Rapture is as an event and its timing in relation to the Tribulation period. We've also seen what it means for the inhabitants of the earth left behind. In the third section we will discover that an accurate understanding of the Rapture is vital for Christians to possess. As we will see, the Scripture exhorts us to be living in anticipation and the immediate expectation of Jesus' return for His church, which happens at the moment of that magnificent event. So, in this second section, let's go into more detail about what the Rapture means for the church. What happens to us? Where do we go? What will we be doing? How do we relate to the earth during its Tribulation for seven years and the Millennial reign of Christ to follow?

### What Happens to Us?

Let's look now at the church immediately after the Rapture. First of all, what happens to us?

*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be **changed**— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed**. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and **this mortal must put on immortality** (1 Cor. 15:50-53).*

We are changed! Changed into what? We are glorified into the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! We are given immortal bodies that are fit for eternity in Heaven (also called the New Jerusalem in Revelation). At our glorification, our sin nature is destroyed. Death is destroyed. God Himself will be with us and be our God. This is, without a doubt, the most glorious event in the entire eternal life of every believer! Paul gives us an important passage that helps in our understanding of this change of body. Just before he speaks of the Rapture in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53, he says this:

*But someone will say, "**How** are the dead raised up? And **with what body** do they come?" Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But **God gives it a body** as He pleases, and **to each seed its own body** (1 Cor. 15:35-38).*

*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is **raised in incorruption**. It is sown in dishonor, it is **raised in glory**. It is sown in weakness, it is **raised in power**. It is sown a natural body, it is **raised a spiritual body**. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being. " The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the*

*earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man* (1 Cor. 15:42-49).

The following verses add more light to what it means to be glorified in Christ, at death or Rapture. This is only meant to be a sampling of Scripture on the subject. Remember, these things are only comprehensible in any way because, as Christians, we have “the mind of Christ,” so consider all of these things prayerfully.

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is (we cannot fully see Him as He is unless we are like Him)* (1 John 3:2).

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, **but then face to face**. Now I know in part, **but then I shall know just as I also am known*** (1 Cor. 13:12).

*Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then **an heir of God through Christ*** (Gal. 4:7).

*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are **children of God**, and if children, then **heirs**—heirs of God **and joint heirs with Christ**, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be **glorified together*** (Rom. 8:16-17).

*Now when all things are made subject to Him (Jesus), then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him (The Father) who put all things under Him, **that God may be all in all**. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*** (1 Cor. 15:28, 49).

*“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us... that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one...** “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me **may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory** which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:20-24).”*

*For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body**, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Phil. 3:20-21).*

In fact, Paul was so focused on the imminency of this change that he could say to the Corinthians, *Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer* (2 Cor. 5:16). In verses 1-6 he said we are groaning for our new bodies and that we would rather be with the Lord in glory. So, he doesn't really see Christians as in their

old nature anymore, but rather in Christ, ready to be changed at any moment! Our spirit is already seated with Christ now in Heaven through faith in Him (Eph. 1). What an amazing worldview this is! We'll talk more about this Heavenward and Christ-centered worldview in the third section of this article. But for now, we move on to the church's location after the Rapture.

### **Where Do We Go?**

So, we've talked about the glorification of the church that takes place at the Rapture. Back on earth, one of the first questions after the Rapture will be, "where'd they all go?" That is a good question for the church to ask, as well. Is there any indication in the Bible of our location during and after our glorification? As a matter of fact, there is quite a bit about our location. Jesus said in John 14, "***In My Father's house are many mansions and I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also...***"

Paul said, in 1 Thess. 4, "*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (those who have already died in Christ) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be **with the Lord.***"

Soon, and very soon, we are going to see the King! We are going to be with the Lord in Heaven! Revelation chapters 4 and 5 give us a description of some of what will happen when the church gets to Heaven after the Rapture. To see what we will be doing in Heaven with the Lord, be sure to read about the Heavenly scene described to us by the apostle John in Revelation 4 & 5. Keep in mind that in 1 Thess. 4 we are told that *all* Christians that have ever lived come with the Lord from Heaven at the time of the Rapture to meet the *still living* Christians at that time in the air with the Lord. The believers that had already died and been with the Lord will receive their resurrected bodies at that time and the living saints will be changed at that moment into their eternal, glorified bodies. So, the entire church, from its formation to the Rapture, will be bodily resurrected and glorified at this point and immediately translated into Heaven to be with the Lord forever.

### **What Will We Be Doing?**

What will we be doing in Heaven once we are glorified? The "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7) speaks of the spiritual uniting of Jesus and the church, the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; 25:1, John 3:29) and His bride. The glorification of the church happens at once and unifies the whole church with each other and Christ in one glorious moment at the Rapture. As a man and a woman are made one here on earth in marriage before the Lord, in a spiritual sense the Lord has used that analogy to describe our glorification in Him. So, the entire church has been glorified bodily and translated to Heaven in the twinkling

of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52) at the moment of the Rapture. Some of the other things to happen are described in Revelation 4 & 5, like our worship of the Lord when we arrive at His throne.

*Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created (Rev. 4:9-11)."*

We will also observe his taking of the Title Deed to the earth and the opening of the seals that begin the seven-year Tribulation on earth. That dark period on earth coincides with our time in Heaven after the Rapture.

*And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:6-7, 9-10)."*

### **The "Bema" Seat of Christ**

An event commonly known as the "Bema Seat of Christ" will also take place during this time of "marriage" and "honeymoon" in Heaven with the Lord. This is the event described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10, and variously as rewards and crowns received in Heaven for our works done in this life. Interestingly, we cast our crowns before God's throne once we get to Heaven (Rev. 4:10), so I personally do not view rewards as something to strive after in an earthly way or as something that some will have more of in Heaven than others. Without Christ I can do nothing, and only by Christ living in me can I do all things! Rewards speak of the fruit of the Spirit in a believer's life and of the immense and unspeakable blessings for us from our gracious and precious Lord!

Interestingly, Paul calls *the Philippian believers* his joy and crown in Phil 4:1. And, to the Thessalonian believers he said, "*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming (1 Thess. 2:19)?*" Furthermore, Isaiah said, "*Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him (Isa. 40:10).*"

Ultimately, the Lord Himself is our reward (Ps. 58:11, Isa. 49:4; 62:11, Col. 3:24, Rev. 22:12) and our full portion (Ps. 73:26; 119:57, Lam. 3:24). Psalm 16 says,

*O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup... I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol (the grave), nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:5, 8-11).*

### **Preparation for our Role in The Millennium**

One other activity to mention is our possible preparation for the Lord's Millennial reign on earth. We are said to "rule and reign with Him in His Kingdom (Rev. 5:10, Isa. 32:1)." So, it seems likely that some of our time with the Lord in Heaven, while the Tribulation is unfolding on earth, will be spent in preparation for our return with Him and our various duties and responsibilities on earth after His return. The survivors of the Great Tribulation will have been through hell on earth, so our arrival as Christ's glorified church, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, will be a cause of great rejoicing. There will be a great celebration at that time. We will help judge the nations at Christ's return and assist in whatever ways He calls us to in His establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. Whatever they are, each of our ministries will be something that God blesses and gifts us to do and something that we love perfectly.

Presumably, in the midst of worshipping our Creator and preparing for His redeeming of the earth and all that is rightfully His, we will have some opportunity to visit with previously passed loved ones and new friends, of which number in the countless redeemed! Oh how wonderful it is to ponder the pleasures and joys of our blessed eternity to come.

### **III. Why is it Critical that the Church Understand the Doctrine of the Rapture?**

Now that we've seen what happens to us, where we'll be and some of what we'll be doing in Heaven after the Rapture, we need to reflect carefully on what all of this means for us as children of God *now* in this life *before* the Rapture. Why is it so *crucial* for the church to understand fully this great doctrine? The answer may seem a bit simple and yet for many, surprising.

#### **Our Mind is to be Set on Things Above**

A Christian who is maturing daily in a close and personal relationship with Jesus should begin to find themselves naturally living their entire life, every moment, in the immediate

expectancy of His imminent return, which is initiated by this ecstatic event that has come to be known as the Rapture. Not only do we need to know this event thoroughly, we should be living for its outcome and in joyful anticipation of its transcendent climax. The Rapture transports us to the moment of our glorification in Jesus Christ, into His presence forever. Moreover, the Rapture declares the soon coming of God's Kingdom on the earth, and its King, Jesus, reigning in justice and righteousness. If you are not living to be glorified in Christ and for the establishment of God's Kingdom, than what *are* you living for? Prayerfully consider that the New Testament believers were living for Jesus' return, as abundantly reflected in the writings of the apostles and the words of the Lord.

The following verses are just a sample of what is underlying the thrust of the whole New Testament. We see this anticipation and expectancy in the Gospels and in Acts, in Paul's letters and the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude, as well as the book of Hebrews.

*So think clearly and exercise self-control and **rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ** (for the Church, that is the Rapture); as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:13-16)."*

*...**looking for and hastening** (the Greek word is *speudo*, "to desire earnestly" –Thayer's Lexicon) **the coming of the day of God** (2 Pet. 3:12a)...*

*Therefore **be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord**. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. **Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand** (James 5:7-8).*

*And now, little children, abide in Him, **that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming** (1 John 2:28).*

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that **when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is**. And everyone **who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure** (1 John 3:2-3).*

And through Paul, the Holy Spirit says again,

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, **looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ** (we are **living lives** looking for Jesus, and **looking** for His glorious appearing), (Jesus) **who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.***

*Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you (Titus 2:11-15).*

*And you became **followers of us and of the Lord**, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that **you became examples** to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you **the word of the Lord** has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols **to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who **delivers us from the wrath to come** (the wrath to come is God's judgment of the world in the Great Tribulation and the final "Great White Throne" judgment of the unbelieving dead, both yet future to the church age) (1 Thess. 1:6-10).*

*...eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7b)...*

*For **our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself** (Phil. 3:20-21).*

So, how are we Christians to live in this present age? We are to live our lives looking to Jesus moment by moment as He "purifies for Himself His own special people" and we should be looking for Jesus at the Rapture of the church, waiting, eagerly waiting for Him to come from Heaven because He brings our blessed hope, our glorification in Him! We are to be resting our hope fully upon Jesus and the grace that is to be brought to us at His revelation, earnestly desiring this day! The grace to be brought to us at His revelation is our glorification, our eternal life in Him and the measureless blessing of our God's lovingkindness. Forgiveness is the removal of sin once counted against us, but grace is both God's undeserved kindness toward us in His blessing and power for His church today and His unending and unknowable blessings that He will pour out on us for all eternity!

*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ **who is our life** appears, then you also will appear with Him **in glory** (Col. 3:2-4).*

Why do we live our lives with our minds set on Jesus and looking for His return at any time? Because "when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." The closer we are getting to Jesus, the more we groan to be clothed in our new bodies and to be one with Him in glory.

### **Our Blessed and Living Hope**

Let's look now at Jesus' own comments on our blessed hope. Most Christians know that Jesus promised His church that He would come again for her one day, but sadly, some

still do not know that He was referring to what we now know is the Rapture, the day of the church's great calling away from this temporary, fading life and out of this fallen, dying world.

*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. **And 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** (the Rapture takes us to Heaven, where we "appear with Him in glory", Col. 3:4). *And where I go you know, and the way you know* (John 14:2-6).*

With this very statement in mind, among others, Peter said, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to **a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*** (1 Peter 1:3-5)."

Our eternal life, in and through and with Jesus, is our living hope (Paul called it our blessed hope). We have been born again to it by our God and Father who has, according to His abundant mercy, begotten us again to a hope that is *alive*. Our hope of glory is Christ, who is alive through His resurrection from the dead. Because He is alive, we too are alive to God by faith in Him. And our Father has a place for each of us in His house that Jesus is preparing for each of us that are His, an imperishable and undefiled inheritance that will never fade away. Jesus is coming again to receive us to Himself, that where He is, we may be also, a place reserved in Heaven for each of us. We know where He has gone and we know the way, and we are kept by the power of God through faith for this salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Someone may ask, "How can I know the way?"

Jesus says to one and all the same, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me* (John 14)."

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of **your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls*** (1 Peter 1:6-9).

In light of our daily, personal relationship with the Lord, how critical is it for the church to understand and live in anticipation of this, the greatest of all moments?

#### **IV. Does our Understanding of the Rapture Affect our Relationship with the Lord and Each Other?**

According to the Scripture, our understanding of the Rapture *will* affect our worldview and our relationship with Jesus. Certainly there is no doubt that for the New Testament church, this looking for and earnestly desiring of the Rapture with eager anticipation was the normal, daily outlook. Why should it be any different for us today?

This outlook on life helps to unify the whole body of Christ, as well. The Rapture *is* the glorification and the unification of the church as a whole, all at once. It will bring the unity and oneness-of-mind of the body of Christ that the Lord so earnestly desires for His people today.

*...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13)...*

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind (Phil 2:1-2).*

Paul then says we are to have the same mind of Christ, who, after being obedient to death as a servant (dying for us), was exalted and that God has “given Him the name which is above every name (Phil 2:5-11).” What if the whole church kept the coming of the Lord and what that means as the preeminent thought of our daily life? I submit to you, that this is exactly what we individually and corporately are to be doing. By looking to the Lord for our glory at that moment of His coming for the church, we would all be of one mind and have the same love. We would have the same motivation and focus. We would be of the same mind of Christ, who obeyed *unto exaltation*. We humble ourselves in service to the Father, like Jesus, motivated by love, until *our exaltation with Him*. It will not happen as a whole body on earth, but it should be happening individually in each of our hearts.

This unity of mind in the church will be fulfilled completely at the Rapture, our glorification as one body and our marriage to Christ. But, how much more unified we could have been by imitating Jesus’ full reliance on the Father and “*looking (only) unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).*” For the joy set before *us* (glory with Jesus forever and all who are there with us), we pick up our cross daily and follow Him, until *we* have sat down *with Him* before *His* throne of grace!

If some Christians differ on *when* the Rapture will take place in conjunction with the Tribulation, ie. pre-Trib, mid-Trib, pre-Wrath or post Trib Rapture views, *should* that disagreement divide the church? In the big picture, I do not think so. It *does* divide the church, but it shouldn’t. I think there *would be* more unity if we were focused on Jesus’ return and we all agreed that there was nothing to look forward to first. But it *is* possible for the church to remain unified in staying focused on Jesus and our future with Him no matter when we think the Rapture will occur. Going so far as to set dates for the Rapture, on the other hand, causes damage to the body of Christ and non-believers alike. Additionally, believing there is *no* Rapture is a precarious and damaging position, as it

deletes such a central and conspicuous teaching of Jesus and the early church. But as far as just differences regarding *when* the Rapture takes place in relation to the Tribulation period, count mine as another voice urging unity over division in the church on this issue. Love, kindness and patient discourse on the matter is the path set before us by many great teachers and leaders in church history, and this, I believe, is the way of the Lord.

As we have seen, the result of the Rapture is our glorification and the beginning of an eternity in the presence of Jesus. For Christians, this is what knowing the Lord is all about. Being a Christian is about Jesus alone: who He is, what He has done for us, what He wants for us and what He will be doing for us in eternity. Heaven is about the presence of Jesus. The presence of Jesus is everything that we will ever want or need. Eternity, the place He has prepared for us, our rewards, our work; these are all about Jesus and fulfilled by being with Him. There is true satisfaction and peace and joy only in His presence. Being with Jesus and being like Him is what God wants for us, forever.

## **V. Closing Thoughts**

In this life, as followers of Christ, we have but a foretaste of His eternal glory and presence, a glimpse of His Holiness, as through dark glass. We have this relationship only through faith in Jesus Christ. We have access to the throne of Grace by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God, who comes to indwell us when we receive Jesus, surrendering our hearts to His. In closing, consider the following verses, and may the Lord richly bless you in all things.

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:26).*

*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22).*

*Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).*

*...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)...*

*"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8)."*

*...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).*

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).*

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor. 13:14).*

The presence of Jesus, that's what Heaven is all about. Do *you know* Him? Do you know His presence? Do you have the witness of the Holy Spirit in you? Do you know that you know that you know that you will be with the Lord Jesus forever? What if He were to come for His church today? Would you be glorified with Him or left behind?

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8)... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9). "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)."*

*And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Rev. 22:17, 20-21).*

*Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matt. 24:42-44).*

*Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you (2 Peter 3:14-15).*

*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive (John 7:37-39)...*

#### Additional Resources:

*Rapture of the Church* (article online), at WWBS, by David Bartholomew.  
<http://worldwidebiblestudies.org/Study696952-Rapture-Of-The-Church.htm>

*The Rapture* (pamphlet), by Pastor Chuck Smith, The Word for Today.

*Things to Come* (book), by J. Dwight Pentecost, Zondervan.

*Three Views on the Rapture* (book), Gundry/Archer, featuring Gleason L. Archer Jr., Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo and Richard R. Reiter, Zondervan.

*The Rapture* (a video), by Chuck Missler, Koinonia House. Also a 12 part video series available on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p20zDOjLRdc>

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