

JOHN BURKEI  
911 GEORGETOWN DR.  
N. AUGUSTA, SC 29841

JOB

# Our Blessed Hope

*Radio Sermons*



*by*

*Wayne Carver*

# Contents

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. The Parable of the Ten Virgins ..... 1 (Matthew 25:1-13)	
2. The Imminent Departure of the Church ..... 7 (John 14:1-3)	
3. The Significance of Paul's Message to the Thessalonians ..... 12 (I Thessalonians 4:13—5:11)	
4. Not Wrath, But Rapture! ..... 17 (Revelation 3:10)	
5. Incorruption and Immortality ..... 21 (I Corinthians 15:50-54)	
6. The Promise in the Upper Room ..... 25 (John 14:1-4)	
7. A Purifying Hope ..... 29 (I Thessalonians 4:16-18)	

# Introduction

*"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; **LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, AND (EVEN) THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND (EVEN) OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works**" (Titus 2:11-14).*

This booklet is a study of the doctrine of the imminent translation of the Church out of this world into the Father's House in the Third Heaven. The "Blessed Hope" of all Christians throughout this age of God's grace has always been the momentary appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in the atmospheric heaven, to catch His Church up to the Third Heaven to be with Him forever. Many have lost sight of this great truth, either through failure to understand the teachings of the Bible on this most important subject or through refusal to accept the truth, even when it is made clear to them. Nevertheless, teachers of God's Word are exhorted to "comfort one another with these words," both in I Thessalonians 4:18 and in I Thessalonians 5:11.

## The Imminent Rapture

Ever since the Lord Jesus was taken from His disciples to glory, on the day of His ascension, the blessed hope of His *imminent* return has been the constant expectation of each generation of Christians. Many who have not studied the Word of God in depth have failed to understand this great truth; nonetheless (whether they understood it or not), it *has* always been their "Blessed Hope"! In the early church, the Lord's imminent return to "catch away" His own was the dominant theme of the apostles' teaching. It was also the impelling motive in their witness.

Just consider the Apostle Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians. This letter (in our present Bibles) is divided into five chapters; in each of the five chapters the appearing of the Lord to catch away His Church is mentioned. First Thessalonians is the earliest (the first written) of all of Paul's inspired letters, followed by his second letter to the Thessalonians, which also speaks prominently of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and of "our gathering together unto him" in both the first and second chapters. It is obvious that the *imminent*

appearing of Jesus Christ was among the foremost of the great doctrines taught by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

From the time of the Apostle Paul's writing of his two epistles to the Thessalonians—as gradually great truths about the purpose of God in the Church were unfolded and this present age began to extend—the hope of our Lord's return continued undimmed. That this is most definitely true is prominently testified to at the very close of the canon of Scripture. Very near the end of the last book of the New Testament, the aged Apostle John still breathed a prayer that this "Blessed Hope" would soon be a reality. His prayer appears in Revelation 22:20: "*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"

### **Scoffers of the Last Days**

In spite of this great testimony, the passing centuries have brought scoffers who have said (in exact fulfillment of the prophecy of the Apostle Peter), "... *Where is the promise of his coming?...*" (II Peter 3:4). Because of the influence of these scoffers, it is the fashion of our day (in high theological circles) to discount the doctrine of the imminent translation of the Church at the time of the "appearing in personal presence" of our Lord. It is also present-day practice to isolate this portion of the scriptural teaching as "outside the realm of scholarly investigation." Some (who have become known as "great preachers") tell us, "Paul and the other apostles were mistaken and naive to hope for the coming of the Lord in their day. They completely misunderstood the doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ."

Others of our day (who concede that the Scriptures *do* teach this doctrine)—instead of accepting our Lord's imminent appearing to catch His Church away—have interposed various intervening prophesied events. By this device, they have therefore postponed the hope of His return by generations—or even millenniums. The resulting controversies brought about by this kind of teaching have obscured and confused the "Blessed Hope" of Christ's imminent return. (By the very use of the word, "imminent," we are declaring that no other prophesied event stands between the Christian and his "Blessed Hope"!)

### **An Unexpected Event**

**The Bible most definitely *does* teach that the Lord's "appearing" is to come at a time when He is unexpected. This, of course, can only**

take place if no other prophesied event precedes it. If the "rapture" of the Church is to take place in the middle—or at the end—of the seven-year tribulation period, then the Lord's appearing will *not* be at a time when He is least expected!

If a mid-tribulational or a post-tribulational rapture is the teaching of the Bible, then informed Christians should simply look for the beginning of the tribulation (the event that begins the tribulation is predicted clearly in Daniel 9:27), and then count forward the prescribed length of time. They could then know the exact day of the Lord's appearing; it would not be an unexpected event at all. Also, this concept says that the "Blessed Hope" of the Church all during this age has *not* been the Lord's momentary (sudden and brief) appearing. Rather, the "hope" of the Church is *the beginning of the tribulation!* This, then, is the event that informed Christians would look forward to! I, personally, would have a difficult time calling such anticipation a "Blessed Hope"!

There are some who try to insert a whole millennium before any part of the Lord's second coming is to take place. They are called "postmillennialists." Anyone of that persuasion is *not* looking for the imminent appearing of the Lord, but, rather, is looking for the coming of a millennium!

Only the doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture honors the biblical teaching that the "Blessed Hope" of the Church is the rapture, and that this hope is "imminent"—the next event on the prophetic calendar. Any belief concerning the rapture, other than the "premillennial" view, completely destroys the scriptural concept of an "imminent" appearing in the air of our Lord.

Let's consider the biblical case for an *imminent*—and *pre-tribulational*—rapture.

# 1.

## The Parable of the Ten Virgins

*"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:1-13).*

The Lord began His parable with the words, "Then the kingdom of the heavens will be made like to ten virgins, who having taken their lamps went forth to meet the bridegroom." He is saying that *some prominent event* within "the kingdom of the heavens" can be compared to that which could be expected to happen during a formal Jewish wedding procedure.

The expression, "the kingdom of the heavens," was defined in Matthew 13, where we have the seven sequential parables of "the kingdom of the heavens." ("The kingdom of the heavens" is the exact literal translation of Matthew's Greek.) This expression refers to that mixed condition of things that exists in this present parenthetical age—the age of the Church—the age of God's grace. "The kingdom of the heavens" is inhabited by all those who openly profess their allegiance to the two "kings" of the two most significant "heavens."

**In this age, the true "King" is in the Third Heaven, and from there He rules those who are His own. However, the usurper, the false "king," is in the first heaven (the atmospheric heaven), and he—the "prince of the power of the air"—Satan—rules his kingdom from that heaven. All who profess to be "religious"—that is, all who recognize**

some "god" as their ruler—are included in "the kingdom of the heavens."

Some of these are true believers in Christ. They make up the true "Church" of this age; they are *in* "the kingdom of the heavens," although they are *not* the total population of that "kingdom." There are others who *profess* to know the true Christ but have no true faith. Therefore, there is no reality in their lives, and their actual allegiance is to the "king" of the first heaven (Satan).

There are others who profess to know "God," but who have not approached Him through the only "Way" that He has opened for mankind. The allegiance of these "religionists" is also directed to "the prince of the power of the air." This mixed condition of things as it exists in the world today *is* "the kingdom of the heavens," which the Lord says "will be made like the case of the ten virgins, who having taken their lamps went forth to meet the bridegroom."

Notice how the Lord continues: "*And five of them were wise (prudent), and five were foolish.*" Five of these "virgins" represent those in "the kingdom of the heavens" who have true faith in Christ. They had made their preparations for the Bridegroom's appearing, and they were ready to go at the least expected time. They were the ones who truly had given their allegiance to the King of the Third Heaven.

The other five virgins represent the ones who profess allegiance to the King of the Third Heaven, but who do not really possess eternal life. Their profession is not a reality, so their true allegiance is to Satan, the "king" of the first heaven. They have no "Oil" in their lamps—that is, they do not have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within them. They are not saved. Therefore, when the Bridegroom appears to take His "Bride" home to His Father's House, they will be left behind. He will say, "I know you not."

### The Picture of the Rapture

This parable of the ten virgins most definitely *does* picture the Lord's appearing in the air to catch His Church (His Bride) out of this earth to take her home to His Father's House. As in many of the Lord's parables, every single detail of the story is not chosen to enhance every single detail of the coming prophetic event. It is, rather, the *general nature of the story that matches the general nature of the prophetic event that it portrays.*

The parable is intended to emphasize the necessity of being ready to go with the Lord at the moment of His appearing. He will appear at a time that is not expected, and His appearance will allow no time to make spiritual preparation when this great event has actually come upon the world. We must have "oil in our lamps"—we must have the indwelling Holy Spirit—we must be saved—at the time that He appears in the air to catch us away. Those who are only "professors" at the time of His appearing, and who will truly be saved at a *later time*, cannot expect the Lord to transfer them to the heavenly wedding at a later point in time.

In the opening verse, the Lord likens the story of the ten virgins to an event that is of great significance to "the kingdom of the heavens." Once again, it should be emphasized that the expression, "the kingdom of the heavens," refers to that mixed condition of things that exists in this present age. "The kingdom of the heavens" is made up of those of this age who truly possess Christ—that is, those who are truly saved—added to all of the professing "religionists" who make a claim to knowing the true God of Heaven, but who really devote their allegiance to the god of this world—Satan. That definition most definitely does hold for this parable, because (in Verse 2) we are told "five of them (the virgins) were wise (prudent), and five were foolish." A portion of those who *claimed* to belong to the Bridegroom were truly His—that is, they were truly saved. However, the second portion were foolish. They had "*profession*," but they did not have "*possession*."

The very nature of this parable is such that we can know immediately that it was intended to teach *spiritual* rather than *secular* truth. The prospective "Bride" for the "Bridegroom" was made up of a multiplicity of "virgins." The Jewish people did not practice polygamy in the Lord's day, and the parable would have been faulty had it had its primary reference to the things of that world. The Lord used a plural number in referring to the "Bride" to emphasize that the spiritual "Bride" in view consists of a great number of individuals.

The number "ten" in the Bible is symbolic of testing. The Ten Commandments were the special test that God gave to Israel. God told the church at Smyrna that they would be tested for ten days with **severe persecution** (see Revelation 2:10). The parable of the ten pounds illustrates how the Lord will test our service when He returns. **Here, the parable of the ten virgins is given to illustrate how the Lord will test the reality of our profession of faith when He comes to gather His Church home (to His Father's House).**



Five of the ten "virgins" passed the test. "Five" is the number of God's graces applied to needy man. "Five" is the sum of four-plus-one—that is, it represents God's adding His help to man's weakness. (Man's weakness is represented by the number "four"—the number that has reference to the earthly creation.)

Therefore, the Lord was not promoting plural marriage in the earth when He spoke of the would-be "Bride" as "*ten virgins*." Rather, He was emphasizing spiritual truth of great significance.

### The Spiritual Meaning

*"They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps."* "Oil" is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The bodies of those ten who claimed to be a part of the "Bride" are represented by the "lamps"—the "vessels." The five virgins who had "Oil" had the Holy Spirit dwelling within them; they had been born again. They had been regenerated to eternal life. They were ready to go with the Bridegroom at the time of His appearing.

The foolish virgins had no "Oil" in their vessels. Although they *professed to know* the Bridegroom, they were actually *unknown of* Him. They had attached themselves to a religious company but had neglected to buy that "Oil" that can be purchased without money and without price. They were not saved and therefore could not depart with the bridal party at the time of the Bridegroom's appearing. There was no time to buy "Oil" when the appearing actually took place. Those who had "Oil" could not share what they had with the "idle professors." (It is not possible for a saved person to share his own personal salvation with another party.) No one can be saved "by proxy," through latching on to the coattails of one who has been regenerated to eternal life!

*"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."* While the Bridegroom allowed centuries and millennia to pass and still did not come for His Bride—"they all slumbered and slept." Not only did the idle professors grow weary of the long waiting and dropped into a slumber, but also the truly saved—those who truly possessed eternal life—did likewise! Though a sad commentary on the Church, it is nonetheless true that these long centuries that have passed since the Bridegroom went away—leaving His promise to "come again, and receive" us unto Himself that we may be where He is—have lulled a great many true Christians into such a slumber that they are no longer watchful. They are not expecting the Lord's

appearing in the air, so they also are a part of that group of "virgins" that "slumber and sleep." Many false concepts of the nature of the Lord's appearing have turned the attention of a multitude of those who truly know Christ as Saviour away from the Church's "Blessed Hope."

The great emphasis of this part of the parable is that the Bridegroom's coming is to be at an unexpected time! "While the bridegroom tarried they *all* slumbered and slept." None of the "virgins" were expecting Him. The time of His coming was an unprophesied secret. No one knew the day nor the hour. His coming was not preceded by any other prophesied event. The coming for the Bride was not preceded by the beginning of a tribulation, or of a millennium. If it had been, the "wise virgins" would have observed the first prophetic event and would have calculated the exact time of the Bridegroom's arrival. And, with such information available, they would not have been asleep at the time of His expectation. No, they were not expecting Him! His arrival was an unchartered event!

Therefore, all ten of the virgins were "asleep." Then the unexpected happened. "*And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*" The "appearing" took place in the middle of the world's interval of sleep. The Bridegroom came, and the cry went out. The unexpected had happened.

"*Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*" It is here that we encounter details in the parable that do not precisely match details of the actual event of the rapture. The Apostle Paul tells us that the "transformation to immortality" of living Christians at the time of the Lord's appearing will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Then we "shall be caught up together with" the resurrected dead in Christ "to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This leaves no time for any kind of physical activity such as that we may associate with "trimming of lamps." However, the Lord placed this variation in His parable just to emphasize the importance of preparedness.

"*Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*" In the case of an earthly wedding (such as the one to which this parable referred), it would be necessary for the "virgins" to "trim their lamps"—that is, they would light their lamps and adjust them for maximum light as they prepared to make a midnight trek to the house of the father of the bridegroom. It would have been at this point that the foolish virgins would have realized their great need for oil and

would frantically have tried to obtain some. *"And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out."*

A lamp with a wick will light and burn briefly, even without any oil in the bowl. The "foolish virgins" applied fire to the wicks of their lamps. The lamps flared briefly and then went out. This greatly emphasized their lack of fuel, and it proved to all looking on that they had not properly prepared for this great event. They were not a part of the "Bride" who was about to be taken to the consummation of her marriage!

### **We Must Be Prepared**

It was impossible for the "wise virgins" to share the indwelling Holy Spirit with their companions. That is not the way salvation works! We must each obtain our "fuel" directly from the Fuel Source! There is no possibility of changing this principle. The Lord Jesus Christ is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He is the only Source of "Oil." *"But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you. But go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves."*

They were not prepared, and the rapture took place. *"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut."* The catching up of the Bride is a one-time-only event. Those who are saved at the time of the Lord's appearing will be caught up. Those who are saved afterward will not experience a "second rapture," or anything resembling it. The door to "transformation to immortality" will be closed after the true Church has been caught up.

*"Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."* The five foolish virgins apparently obtained "Oil" after the door was closed. This could indicate that some of them were later saved during the tribulation period. However, even if they were, they were still not a part of the "Bride." Their salvation is not of this present age. They will never be considered as part of the "Bride of Christ." His answer to their call was, *"Verily (truly) I say unto you, I know you not"*—"you are not a part of this wedding party."

The Lord ended His story with the words: *"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."* Our Lord Jesus himself said that His parable was told for the purpose of **emphasizing the need for preparedness and watchfulness. His appearing in the air is to occur suddenly and at an unpredicted time.**

He stated specifically, "Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." This statement would not be true if His "parousia" (His "appearing in personal presence") were to come anywhere in God's prophetic program other than at the end of this age of grace, prior to the beginning of the tribulation. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ definitely taught a "pre-tribulational" rapture. Our "Blessed Hope" is *imminent!*

## 2.

# The Imminent Departure Of the Church

*"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).*

There is a significant amount of New Testament support for the doctrine of the *imminent* translation of the Church. This issue has become greatly confused in our day, but the scriptural case is clear. The next event on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture of the Church! That is the event that ends this "acceptable year of the Lord" and begins "the day of wrath of our God." Christians of today are to "look up" in momentary expectation of the Lord's appearing.

The Lord's first clearly-spoken promise of the rapture of the Church is found in these verses from John 14:1-3. The Lord and His disciples were in the upper room where He was delivering His last preresurrection teachings to those who believed in Him. He had just told them, "...Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you" (John 13:31-33). And then came the **great promise!**

The Lord made this promise just before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, His death by crucifixion, His burial, and His resurrection from the dead. It was a definite promise—a declaration of something that had never been promised to the chosen nation Israel! It was the promise of the “appearing in personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our gathering together unto him” (see II Thessalonians 2:1). Nevertheless, the passing centuries have brought scoffers who have said, “... *Where is the promise of his coming?*...” (II Peter 3:4).

It is the fashion in high theological circles of our day to discount the doctrine of the Second Coming of the Lord. It is also common practice to isolate this portion of scriptural teaching as “outside the realm of scholarly investigation.” We are told, as stated earlier, “Paul and the other apostles were mistaken and naive to hope for a literal return of the Lord in their day, or in the days to come.” Others (who admit that the Scriptures *do* teach this doctrine) have interposed various prophesied events. Thereby, they have postponed the hope of our Lord’s return by generations—or even millenniums. The resulting controversies have obscured and confused the “Blessed Hope” of the *imminent* return of Jesus Christ.

In recent years, it has become the trend among certain Christian groups to teach that the rapture of the Church *is* a definite doctrine of the Bible. However, the spokesmen of these groups say that the time of the rapture is to be postponed until the *middle* of the seven-year tribulation period. They have attempted to make a biblical case for this doctrine, and many believers have been confused on the issue. By moving the rapture to the *middle* of the tribulation, they have completely destroyed the doctrine of the *imminence* of our Lord’s appearing.

### Three Questions

Before we can gain an intelligent understanding of the issues involved in today’s controversy, three main questions must be considered. First, can we believe the Bible and accept its revelation literally? Second, are there predicted events which must occur before the Lord’s return? Third, do the Scriptures present the fulfillment of the “Blessed Hope” of His return as an imminent event—that is, as possible at any moment?

In answer to the first question, we can definitely know that all Scripture is inspired—it is “God-breathed”—it is all valid, and it is

infallible in its revelation. Much of the present chaotic condition in prophetic study has come largely through the failure of some teachers to accept the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God. The answer to the first question is "Yes! We *can* definitely believe the Bible and accept its revelation *literally*."

Our second question is "Are there predicted events which must occur before the Lord's return?" The answer is one of the most complicated in the whole field of prophetic study. Throughout the centuries, many schemes of prophetic interpretation have been offered. Beginning about the fourth century A.D., we find within professing Christendom that scheme of prophetic interpretation known as the "postmillennial view." This view imposes a whole millennium between the Christian and his hope for the Lord's return. Postmillennialism postpones any hope for a rapture—or a return of the King in power and glory—for at least one thousand years. Yet, this is the view of a certain part of professing Christendom today.

Then we have also the view of the "post-tribulationists." Those of this persuasion believe that the Church of this age must continue on earth through the opening part of "The Day of the LORD" (the tribulation). Our Lord Jesus Christ predicted in Matthew 24:21: "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be,*" and the Apostle John described it in great detail in Revelation 6-19. "Post-tribulationists" place the rapture of the Church at the end of the seven-year tribulation period and just moments before the Lord's second coming in power and glory to set up His kingdom upon this earth.

Then, there are the "mid-tribulationists"—those who place the rapture of the Church in the *middle* of the tribulation. Those of this view believe that the day of God's wrath does not really begin until after the first three-and-one-half years of the tribulation have expired. They (who are sometimes called "prewrath rapturists") think that the Church is to be taken out of this world just before the most intense part of the tribulation begins.

**If any one of these three views about the rapture is correct, then we must dismiss the doctrine of the imminent coming of the Lord! We must look, not for His coming in the air, but rather for either a millennium on the earth, or for the beginning of the Great Tribulation! The rapture of the Church, according to these views, is not the next event on God's prophetic calendar! All who follow these concepts are looking for some other prophetic event to be fulfilled so when that**

**happens, they can calculate the exact time of the Lord's appearing. In this respect, there is no room whatsoever for the idea that the Lord's appearing will come at an *unexpected* time!**

Are any of these views correct? Or does the Bible teach that the Lord's appearing for His Church is *imminent*—that is, that no other prophetic event stands between the present time and the rapture? Let's establish beyond doubt that the Scriptures *do* teach that the rapture is *imminent*. The only prophetic concept that embraces *imminency* is that known as the "premillennial, pre-tribulation" view of God's future program. The Bible teaches both the doctrine of a millennial kingdom of righteousness on the earth *and* the awful time of tribulation which will precede this kingdom.

That which is brought mostly into question by the misled Bible teachers of our day is this: Will Christ come first—before *both* of these prophetic periods—to meet His Church in the air and take her home to His Father's House, or will He come at some point in between? In spite of views to the contrary, it is the teaching of the Scriptures that Christ *will* come prior to both the seven-year tribulation period, and Christ's thousand-year (millennial) reign! *This is the only view which fully resolves all of the problems of biblical interpretation involved!*

### **Imminency Taught to the Thessalonians**

In I Thessalonians 4:13 through 5:11, the great truth of the imminent appearing of the Lord to catch His Church up to meet Him in the air is expounded. (This passage should be handled as one continuous dissertation, without regard for the chapter division that has been placed within it.) The opening verses of this passage read as follows: "*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (vv. 13-17).

**One can gather from this portion of Paul's inspired letter that he had taught the Thessalonian Christians much of the doctrine of our**

Lord's imminent appearing during his brief stay with them that is described in Acts 17:1-10. Paul had crowded a great measure of teaching into those few weeks that he spent with his Thessalonian converts. However, he had not been able to cover everything—or else the Thessalonians had not been able to absorb all of his teaching. So, some questions remained. One question concerned those of their number who had already passed into the presence of the Lord. When, in God's plan of future things, would *they* be raised from the dead? That they *would* be raised, no one doubted. But would their resurrection come at the time the Lord came for His living saints, or would it be later?

This question is answered emphatically in this passage from I Thessalonians 4. In Verse 15 we are told that the dead *in Christ* will be raised first—but their resurrection is to come just a moment *before* the living saints are caught up to meet Christ in the air. Thus, the resurrection of dead Christians, the transformation of living Christians, and the “catching up” of the entire “Body of Christ” are essentially one event.

On the basis of this disclosure, the Thessalonian believers were exhorted to “comfort one another with these words.” The word translated “comfort” includes the idea of “exhort” and “encourage.” The fact that both dead and living brethren *in Christ* were to be caught up simultaneously (before God's judgment on the earth) was intended to be of great encouragement and comfort to these Thessalonians who were, at that very moment, enduring great persecution for the name of Christ.

Then, having established the order of the resurrection of the dead *in Christ* and the transformation of the living *in Christ*, Paul was ready to face the next question. This question concerned the *time schedule* of this great event. In what order (with respect to other prophesied events) was the rapture of the Church to occur? In I Thessalonians, Chapter 5, this question is answered in no uncertain terms. Paul declared that the resurrection, transformation, and catching up of all those involved, were to come *before* the opening of “The Day of the LORD”!

“The Day of the LORD” is a prophetic time period that includes *both* the tribulation and the millennium. This time period was defined by the Old Testament prophets long before Paul's day, and the apostle simply used the term as it was understood by those to whom he was writing. Neither the tribulation nor the millennium would come



before our Lord's appearing. Otherwise, Paul's message would not have made sense. The Apostle to the Gentiles was stressing the *imminency* of the Lord's appearing to catch His Church out of this world.

It should be emphasized that the only way that our Lord's appearing in the air (to catch us up to meet Him there) can be *imminent* is if the rapture precedes *both* the tribulation and the millennium! Thus, the return of the Lord *must* be premillennial, and the rapture of the Church *must* be pre-tribulational. A mid-tribulational, or a post-tribulational rapture places other prophetic events between us and the Lord's appearing. Therefore, His appearing would not then be *imminent*.

### 3.

## The Significance Of Paul's Message To the Thessalonians

*"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in*

*darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (I Thess. 4:13—5:11).*

When the Thessalonian Christians had opportunity to communicate with Paul after his forced exit from Thessalonica (see Acts 17:5-10), they had certain vital questions to ask him. One such question concerned those of their number who had already passed into the presence of the Lord. When would these departed ones be raised from the dead? Would they be raised at the time the Lord came for His living saints or later?

This is answered emphatically in I Thessalonians 4:13-17. Paul writes: "*But I would not have you to be ignorant (lacking in knowledge), brethren, concerning them which are asleep (have died knowing Christ as their Saviour), that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no (future) hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again (which we do, because that belief is required for salvation), even so them also which sleep in Jesus (have died knowing Jesus as their Saviour) will God (the Son, this same Jesus) bring with him. For this we say unto you by (direct) word from the Lord (Paul had received a specific revelation on this subject), that we which are (still) alive and remain unto the coming (are still on this earth at the time of the appearing) of the Lord shall not prevent (go ahead of) them which are asleep (dead in Christ). For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout (as a military command), with the voice of (Michael) the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then (immediately after this) we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (the resurrected dead) in the clouds (of the atmospheric heaven), to meet the Lord in the air (in the atmospheric heaven); and so shall we ever (throughout all future time) be with the Lord."*

The Thessalonian Christians had their answer. The dead in Christ would be raised first, just a moment before the living saints are transformed to immortality and caught up to meet Christ in the air.

**Both the living and the dead of the Church of this age will be caught up together for a common meeting with the glorified Saviour.**

Having established the *order* of the resurrection and the translation, Paul was now ready to deal with the second question which concerned the time sequence of this event with respect to "The Day of the LORD." What was to be the time relationship of the rapture with respect to other prophesied end-time events? In the verses that continue on into Chapter 5, this question also is answered.

The Thessalonians had asked about the *time* of the rapture, so Paul reminds them, "*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*" (1 Thess. 5:1, 2).

The apostle was saying, "There is no need that I use this letter to write of times and seasons, because you really have no need for this kind of information. You already have complete knowledge that 'The Day of the LORD' is coming upon the world at the time when it is completely unexpected—it will come with stealth, just like a thief in the night."

Paul thus dismisses the subject of the exact time that the rapture will occur; but under the term "The Day of the LORD," the period immediately following our translation is described. That period will come "as a thief in the night"—completely unexpected by those in the earth left behind to enter that period. According to Verse 3, "The Day of the LORD" will involve "sudden destruction" and "they (the unsaved people of the world) shall not escape."

### **The Day of the LORD**

When Paul used the term, "The Day of the LORD," he was speaking of a time period that was well-known to the Old Testament prophets. With only two exceptions, all of the writing prophets of Israel mentioned this prophetic time interval. They gave it its definition. "The Day of the LORD" is the future-time period when the LORD himself will once again directly control the affairs of the earth. This "Day" is an extended interval of time that has the characteristics of a Hebrew day. It will consist, first, of a period of darkness, and then a period of light. It begins with the seven-year tribulation, and it extends through the thousand-year (millennial) kingdom. "The Day of the LORD" is that age which will immediately follow this present **age of grace**. It will come upon the earth after the Church age is completed.

In contrast with the way "The Day of the LORD" will come upon the unsaved people of the world ("*For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape*"), this time of trouble will not come upon the saints! Paul says, "*But ye* (those to whom he is writing—that is, true Christians), *brethren, are not in darkness* (you cannot enter that period of darkness that marks the opening part of 'The Day of the LORD'), *that that day should overtake you as a thief.*" Paul says that "The Day of the LORD" cannot overtake those who are the "saved ones" of God who have received Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour during this age of grace!

Now, what is the reason for this? Paul tells us in Verse 5: "*Ye are all* (notice, it's *all* the saints that are included—Paul knew nothing of a 'partial rapture!') *the children of light, and the children of the day* (that is, the children of the light portion of the day); *we are not of the night* (that is, of the *dark* portion of the day), *nor of darkness.*" The saved of this age are "children of light" and "children of the *day* (as contrasted with *night*)."

Since the saved of this age "are not of the night, nor of darkness," then we should "...*not sleep, as do others* (that is, the unsaved); *but let us watch and be sober* (let us be awake and alert to the imminency of our Lord's appearing to take us out of this world before "The Day of the LORD" comes)." Verse 7 tells us, "*For they that sleep* (at the end of this present age—that is, the unsaved) *sleep* (on into) *in the night* (the beginning part of "The Day of the LORD"); *and they that be drunken* (in the end of this age) *are drunken* (on into) *in the (coming) night.*"

### Christians Are to Escape

In Verse 8, Paul again turns his address to Christians, and what he says is of tremendous importance! "*But let us* (saved ones), *who are of the day* (daylight), *be sober* (completely alert), *putting on* (constantly having) *the breastplate* (the armor that protects our vital organs) *of faith and love; and for an helmet* (the headpiece that protects our seat of intelligence, emotion, and reasoning capacity), *the hope* (the definite expectancy) *of salvation* (not eternal salvation, but 'rescue' from the wrath to come)."

Then, in Verses 9 and 10, Paul establishes beyond doubt that the rapture of the Church (which he just described in Verses 13 through 18 of Chapter 4) will come before the beginning of "The Day of the LORD"—that is, before the beginning of the tribulation! This is what

he has been leading up to through the preceding eight verses. Notice very carefully what he says: "*For God hath not appointed us (the saved ones of this age) to wrath (we are not appointed to enter the period of God's wrath upon the earth; that is, we are not appointed to enter the seven-year tribulation), but (rather) to obtain salvation (a 'saving from' that wrath—a 'rescue from' that wrath) by our Lord Jesus Christ (that is, by His appearing to catch us out of this world before the period of wrath begins—before 'The Day of the LORD' begins).*" He is the One "*Who died for us (the basis of our eternal salvation), that (included in our salvation), whether we wake or sleep (that is, whether we are among the living or among the dead at the time of His appearing), we should live (from that moment, experience eternal life in immortal bodies) together with him.*"

In a word, I Thessalonians 5:1-10 establishes a sharp *contrast* between those translated in the rapture and those left on earth. All Christians, living and dead, are to be caught up to be with the Lord. All the unsaved (the second group) are left on earth to enter a time period of unexpected destruction. That day of wrath, destruction, and judgment *will follow the translation!* The Church will *not* be included in the wrath poured out on the earth!

The teaching of Paul in this passage clearly establishes not only the order of the resurrection and translation of the saints, but also the relationship of this event to the time period of the tribulation—all of it—that follows. The appearing of the Lord to catch His Church out of this earth *is imminent*, and *no part* of the tribulation precedes that "Blessed Hope"!

### **The Emphasis of Paul's Message**

Therefore, in the first eleven verses of I Thessalonians 5, contrast is made sharply between those scheduled to be translated at the Lord's appearing (that is, believers of this age), and those left behind on the earth. The first group (Christians) are to be caught up to be with the Lord. The second group (non-Christians) are to be left on the earth to unexpected destruction. The "day" is a definite time period having the characteristics of a twenty-four-hour day—opening with a period of darkness and extending into a period of light—but is actually over a thousand years in duration. This "day" of wrath, destruction, and judgment will follow the translation of the Church. **The Church will not be included in the wrath poured out upon the earth, because Paul declares (in I Thessalonians 5:9), "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation (rescue from that wrath) by our Lord Jesus Christ."**

**The teaching of Paul in I Thessalonians 4:13 through 5:11 establishes, beyond doubt, not only the order of the resurrection of dead saints and the translations of living saints, but establishes also the relationship of this event (the rapture) to the time of tribulation that follows. As pointed out earlier, Paul definitely declares a "pre-tribulational" rapture!**

The very exhortation of comfort of the Lord's appearing (given in I Thessalonians 5:11) loses its meaning *if* the Church must pass through any part of the Great Tribulation! What comfort is there to a prospect of a distant deliverance—*if*, in the path between, lie probable martyrdom, destruction, and persecution? To me, it would be far better to die a normal death and be raised in the resurrection than to endure such a period in order to avoid death in translation! Make no mistake: The entire point of the Thessalonians' passage hangs on the imminency and pre-tribulational character of the appearing of the Lord to catch His Church away!

## 4. **Not Wrath, But Rapture!**

*"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from (out of) the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10).*

The same promise of the pre-tribulational rapture given by Paul in I Thessalonians 4:13 through 5:11 was made by the mouth of the Lord himself in Revelation 3:10. The Lord was dictating His seven letters (addressed to the seven churches in Asia) to the aged Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos on that memorable "Lord's Day." These letters were dictated to functioning local assemblies existing in John's day and contained messages that dealt with special circumstances in each church. However, there is deeper meaning in the letters, because (taken in the sequence in which they are recorded) they provide an outline of future Church history that was prophetic at the time the letters were written. Each letter covers a specific period in Church history; and although there are significant overlaps in the times

covered, one who looks back today can easily see the definite pattern. Thus, promises made to these seven Asian churches are actually made to the entire "Body of Christ," as the situation fits.

### The Promise to Philadelphia

The next to the last letter is written to the "church in Philadelphia." This "church" represents fundamental, Bible-believing Christians who will be present in the earth just before, and at the time of, the Lord's appearing in the air at the end of the age. We can identify the prophetic group addressed in this letter by the words of Revelation 3:8: "*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength* (this church represents a minority group within total professing 'Christendom'), *and hast kept my word* (this group believes in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures—they believe in the inerrancy and infallibility and complete authority of the Holy Writings), *and hast not denied my name* (they believe in the full name of deity and humanity that applies to the Son of God himself—they believe in 'Jesus,' 'Yeshua,' 'Jehovah our Saviour')."

It is in Revelation 3:10 that the Lord makes a definite promise of the *pre-tribulation* rapture to those of this fundamental group. "*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from* (out of) *the hour* (the relatively-short time period) *of temptation* (judgment and testing), *which shall come upon all the world* (this is a universal judgment, and only the prophesied tribulation—the 'seventieth week of Daniel'—meets this qualification—and, by the way, the word 'world' refers to the unsaved population of the kingdom of Satan), *to try* (test) *them that dwell upon the earth* (this again refers to the unsaved, and excludes those who know the Lord during this age of grace)."

Let's once again read our Lord's promise: "*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from* (out of) *the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth*" (Rev. 3:10). This is clearly and literally a promise that the Church will have no part in the tribulation.

### The Promise to Thyatira

By the way, this is not the only place in the seven letters to the churches in Asia where the Lord promised that the rapture of the Church would occur *before* the wrath of God is poured out upon the

earth during Daniel's seventieth week. As a part of the Lord's letter to "the church in Thyatira," He said (in Revelation 2:28), "*And I will give him the morning star.*" The "morning star" is a symbol of the brightness of the Lord's appearing in the atmospheric heaven to catch His Church away before the dark period of judgment upon the earth. So, to the Thyatirans also, the Lord promised a *pre-tribulational* rapture!

## The Truth to the Corinthians

The Apostle Paul also sent a word of revelation to the Corinthian Christians, concerning the transformation to immortality of the saints at the time of the rapture. And, in this disclosure, he provided information that can only fit into the idea of an *imminent, pre-tribulational* rapture. Let's consider some of the things that Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15.

The fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians is rightly known as the "Resurrection Chapter" of the Bible. It begins with Paul's definition of the Gospel, which serves as an introduction to that which follows. The Apostle to the Gentiles shows that the Gospel message includes the concept of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. From this, Paul argues that the resurrection of Christ is an essential of all Christian faith and hope. Then, the apostle links this with the resurrection of men in general. After having established these great truths—by sharp contrast—the grand exception to the doctrine of resurrection is revealed in I Corinthians 15:51, 52:

*"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."*

This passage is obviously a parallel to I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Paul is speaking of the time of the resurrection of the "dead *in Christ*" and the transformation and translation of living believers in Christ. The subject is introduced as a "mystery." As the word "mystery" is used in the New Testament, it refers to truth "hidden" from Old Testament revelation, but now revealed in the New.

Now, the fact that there should be a resurrection of the just is **certainly no "mystery"**! Nor is it a "mystery" that there should still be **living saints on the earth** at the time of this great event! Both of these **general factors are clearly** revealed in the writings of the Old



**Testament prophets.** The Prophet Daniel wrote (in Daniel 12:2), "*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*" Zechariah (in Chapter 12 and Verse 10) said, "*And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*"

The "mystery" is *not* the resurrection; it is that the living believers in Christ shall be transformed and translated! They shall be "changed" from a mortal body to an immortal body "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." This is *nowhere* taught in the Old Testament!

There is one very important thing that we should note: This transformation is for "all"! Paul says, "We shall *not all* sleep, but we shall *all* be changed." *All* living believers are to be changed and caught up at the time of the Lord's appearing. This requires a period of time *between* the rapture and the Lord's second coming in power and glory, *because when He returns there are (will be) believers upon the earth! Some* have to come to know Christ *between* these two events, so the rapture *cannot* come at the *end* of the tribulation, just a few moments before the Lord's return to earth to establish His kingdom! Therefore, the rapture must be *pre-tribulational!*

## 5.

# Incorruption and Immortality

*"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:50-54).*

The Apostle Paul is here referring to the time of the resurrection of the dead saints and the transformation and translation of the living saints. He refers to the time when all Christians of this age, in immortal bodies, will be caught up to be with the Lord Jesus Christ forever.

First, Paul tells his reader "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." These present physical bodies of flesh, sustained as they are by the life principle of blood, are not adapted for eternal existence in "the heavenlies." They *must* undergo a change. Our present earthly bodies cannot be transferred into "the Father's House" in their present state.

Paul also says, "...neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." The bodies of those who died knowing Christ during this age of grace (that have corrupted away in the grave) are also not suitable to be reinhabited and caught up to Heaven in their present form. That which has corrupted away must be reconstructed into something incapable of ever corrupting away again at any time in the future. It requires the power of the Creator himself to restore the "corruption" and to transform this "corruption" into "incorruption"! However, that power *will* be applied at that future time of "Our Blessed Hope"!

## The Mystery

In Verse 51, the subject that Paul is about to cover is introduced as a "mystery." As discussed in the last chapter, this word, as used in

the New Testament, never refers to something mysterious or difficult to understand. Rather, it refers to a truth "hidden" from Old Testament revelation, but that is now revealed in the New.

That there should be a resurrection of the saved is certainly no "mystery," for this truth was plainly revealed in the Old Testament. Job said (in Job 19:26): "*And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*" Daniel declared, "*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*" (Dan. 12:2). Resurrection of the dead was a well-known Old Testament doctrine.

Remember, the "mystery" is *not* that the dead saints are to be resurrected; the "mystery" is that the saved ones, still living at the time of the Lord's appearing, are to be transformed from mortality to immortality. This transformation is to take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." *This* revelation is nowhere made in any of the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures! Paul is here revealing something that is entirely new, and that was never even hinted at prior to the time of his writing this first letter to the Corinthian Church!

### No Partial Rapture

Note very carefully, Paul says that this transformation is for *all*! He says, "We shall not *all* sleep, but we shall *all* be changed." When he says, "We shall not *all* sleep," he is proclaiming that *all* believers in Christ will not have died at the time of the Lord's appearing. And when he says, "But we shall *all* be changed," he is declaring that *all* believers in Christ who are still alive *will be* transformed to the immortal state just before they are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and then to go with Him to His Father's House. None are to be left "untransformed," or left behind. Therefore, when the Lord appears at the time of the rapture (and this transformation and translation takes place) *there will be no believers left in the earth!* For at least a brief period of time, there will not be a single saved person left upon the earth!

This is important, because the fact that *all* believers are to be taken up in the rapture *requires* a time interval between the rapture and the Lord's second coming in power and glory (to establish His kingdom on the earth). One might ask, "Why?" It is because the **Scriptures clearly reveal that there *will* be believers still on the earth**

at the time of our Lord's second coming! *If* all believers are taken up in the rapture, then there *must* be a time interval between the rapture and the Second Coming in which additional people come to know the Lord!

It is *not* possible for the rapture to occur at the end of the tribulation, just a few moments before the Lord's feet touch the Mount of Olives, as some have taught. (Some "post-tribulationists" say that the Lord will descend to the atmospheric heaven at the time of His second coming, that the Church will be caught up to meet Him there, and that the Church will then descend with Christ to touch down on the Mount of Olives with Him.) Since *all* believers are to be caught up, this concept leaves no time interval for new believers to receive the Gospel *before* Christ's arrival to set up the kingdom! However, the fact that there *are* believers waiting for Him on the earth is well established by many passages of both the Old and New Testaments.

### Transformation Before Tribulation

The event that Paul is speaking of in I Corinthians 15:51, 52 *must* occur before the tribulation—while the kingdom is established by our Lord's second coming to the earth after the tribulation! The necessity of this conclusion is plainly implied in Paul's revealed "mystery." While the tribulation is in progress, many will come to know the Lord through the preaching of the 144,000 Jewish young men who will be miraculously converted at the very beginning of this seven-year period. Many of these new believers will die as martyrs at the hand of the "beast" and his henchmen. However, some will survive to the end of this seven-year period, and these believers will witness the Lord's return to establish His earthly kingdom.

During our Lord's millennial reign, there will be tilling of this earth's ground, raising of crops, marriage, an increase in population, and death. The Prophet Amos is speaking of the millennial reign of Messiah in Chapter 9, Verses 13 through 15, of his prophecy: "*Behold, the days come saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.*"

That this passage refers to the millennium is made clear, because the promise is related to the final gathering from which there *will be* no more plucking up out of the land, according to Amos 9:15. If this is true, then there *must* be a body of saints—still in the flesh, not resurrected—to perform these functions. Further, as stressed earlier, this body of saints *must* be on the earth at the time of our Lord's second coming to establish His kingdom on the earth. However, according to Paul's words of I Corinthians 15:51, 52, *all* the living saints at the time of our Lord's appearing in the air for His Church *are* to be translated. This would leave *no* redeemed ones to fulfill a natural function on the earth. The only way in which all the prophecies can be fulfilled literally is for a time interval—the seven years anticipated in Daniel 9:27—to elapse *between* the translation of the saints of this age and the return of Christ to establish His kingdom. In this time interval, a new generation of believers can be formed. Paul's "mystery" of I Corinthians 15:51, 52 is left without adequate interpretation unless Christ comes for His Church *before* the tribulation!

Those who try to place the tribulation (or part of it) *before* the rapture have no explanation for this problem. They usually choose to ignore it. The truth is that the great Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments that deal with the return of the Lord to establish His kingdom at the end of the tribulation *never* speak of a translation at that time. The saints who are on earth when the Lord returns *remain on earth*. They remain in the flesh, and they enter the millennial kingdom as either redeemed Gentiles, or redeemed Israel. By contrast, the redeemed of this age (the Church) are transformed and translated. That is, they are caught up to glory in our Lord's Father's House!

In view of his tremendous revelation, the Apostle Paul concludes this section of his letter with the words: "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (I Cor. 15:58). "Our Blessed Hope" is *translation* not *resurrection*—the coming of the Lord for the *rapture*, not the *tribulation*!

Christians of today *are not* looking for the beginning of a tribulation, nor a millennium. They are looking for "the appearing in personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our gathering together unto him" (see II Thessalonians 2:1)—that is, Christians are looking for the rapture of the Church at any moment, and no other prophetic event stands before this "Blessed Hope."

## 6.

# The Promise in the Upper Room

*"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know"* (John 14:1-4).

These verses contain the first recorded revelation that clearly distinguishes the transformation and translation of Church-age believers (saved ones) from the establishment of the Lord's earthly kingdom on this earth (at the time of His return in power and glory after the seven-year tribulation period is ended). The Lord spoke these words to His disciples in that "upper room" that played such an important part in the closing days of the Lord's earthly ministry. That which was spoken here has become known to Bible scholars as "The Upper Room Discourse."

Just before these words were spoken, Peter had been informed that he would deny his Lord thrice. We find this simple exchange in John 13:36-38: "*Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.*"

From this exchange, those disciples present definitely understood that the Lord was going away. All of them were troubled at the Lord's words, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." These followers of the One whom they knew to be the Messiah of Israel were confused over this statement, even though the Lord had told them many times previously that He had come into this world to die. But now, in light of His definite declaration that He was going away, they were deeply disturbed. What was to happen to them, and what was to be their continuing mission in life?

### Words of Comfort

But then came the Lord's comforting exhortation, "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*" (v. 1). These

disciples *did* have great faith in God. They had believed in an invisible God that they had never seen. Even though the Person of the Father had never been manifest in a tangible way, their faith in Him had never wavered. The Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son and the Son of Man, *had* been walking in manifest presence with them for a full three-and-one-half years. But now He was about to leave their personal presence. He also was to be visibly absent from the earthly sphere. Therefore, His exhortation is, "You have believed in God the Father, whom you have never seen. When I go away, you will not be able to see and touch me, also. Continue your belief and faith in me, just as you now exercise your faith in the Father. Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

And, in the light of this exhortation to continue in faith, the Lord unfolds the tremendous revelation found in Verses 2 and 3. "*In my Father's house are many mansions (dwelling places): 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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*"

The Lord first revealed His purpose in going away. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you." There were many dwelling places in the Father's House. But these dwelling places were not yet prepared to receive the Lord's Bride. The Lord Jesus Christ himself *was* (is) the Bridegroom. And, as it was the custom in those days, it was up to the Bridegroom to prepare a place for His betrothed Bride in the residential rooms of His Father's House. In this revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ was using the allegory of Jewish wedding custom to illustrate His *purpose* in removing the local presence of His humanity from the sphere of this earth.

### The Jewish Wedding

When the Jewish youth had won the heart of the maiden whom he had chosen to be his bride, and when his family had made the proper business negotiations to close the legal aspects of the betrothal, he would leave the betrothed bride in her own father's house and return to the house of *his* father to prepare a bridal chamber in which the marriage was to be consummated. The bridegroom never told the bride how long he would be gone. The length of his absence was indefinite, and the choice of the date for the final marriage ceremony was actually the prerogative of the bridegroom's father. However, the bride was to make herself ready, and to be in a constant state of readiness for the momentary appearing of her betrothed bridegroom.

when he would come to "catch her away" from her own father's home and carry her back with him to his father's house to make her his wife. From the bride's viewpoint, the bridegroom's appearing was always "imminent." No other event in the wedding calendar stood between the ever-changing present moment of her life and the coming of the bridegroom to take her away.

The Lord said to His disciples in that upper room, "...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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (vv. 2, 3). In effect, the Lord told His disciples, "It is just as though you were my betrothed Bride—I am the Bridegroom. The time has come for me to return to my Father's House to prepare the bridal chamber. Since I am going to do this, then you can know beyond doubt that I will return to take you with me back to the place that I have prepared for you. The time of my appearing is in my Father's hands. But you should be prepared for my momentary appearing."

In these verses, we have the explanation of the reason they could not follow Him now *and* why He was going to leave them. When the bridal chamber was prepared, He was coming back to take them to the prepared place in the Father's House. The Church of this age (collectively) is the "Bride of Christ." We are betrothed to Him and are waiting for the day when He will arise from His seat at the right hand of God the Father and descend into the atmospheric heaven to call His Bride up to meet Him there. At His appearing in the first heaven, the cry will go out (exactly as it did in the parable of the ten virgins): "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!" We can expect our heavenly Bridegroom's appearing at any moment! No other prophetic event stands between us and that "Blessed Hope." By all accounts, His appearing in the air to catch us away *is* "imminent"!

### Not the Jewish Expectation

What a contrast this promise is to the Jewish expectation, which was clearly understood by the disciples! The Jews were looking for the earthly kingdom promised by the prophets. Christ (Messiah) was expected to rule on the throne of David on this earth. But this upper room promise was entirely different! Christ had just said that He would take His own back to Heaven—to the Father's House! This was to be *their* expectation as believers in this present age! It was to be *their* "Blessed Hope"! With this promise of His return, they were to comfort their hearts. And, it was for this that they were to be constantly watchful as the age continued onward into the future.



In light of the later revelation of I Thessalonians 4:13 through 5:11, II Thessalonians 2:1-3, and I Corinthians 15:50-58, it should be evident that we have in John 14:1-4 a parallel passage. The Lord Jesus Christ was speaking of the time of the translation of His "Bride" of this age—the Church-age saints. Obviously, those disciples that heard these words from the Lord's mouth could not go to the Father's House apart from such a transformation of the body as was revealed by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:51, 52. And, they could not go without the translation revealed (again, by the Apostle Paul) in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Both of these phenomena required the Lord's personal appearing in the air—which was to come in His Father's own time.

The important facts revealed in the Lord's promise are these: The Lord *was* coming for His Bride—for *them!* The time of separation—no matter however long or indefinite it was—was only temporary. His return was always "imminent"—they were not exhorted to look for the fulfillment of any other prophecy first. He could return at any moment. There was to be *no part* of a tribulation—or a millennium—before His appearing!

In I Thessalonians 4, it is revealed that the translated and resurrected saints would meet the Lord in the air (in the atmospheric heaven). In John 14:2, 3, we are told where these translated and resurrected saints will go from that meeting place. They will go upward to the Third Heaven—they will go to the Father's House! The bridal chamber has been prepared by the loving Bridegroom for His Bride.

How fitting all this is! We, who are the Church of this age and the betrothed Bride of Christ, are to leave this world and all its cares and sins behind! We are to be transformed to immortal bodies, to be lifted upward by the power of God to meet our Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds of the atmospheric heaven. And, after that meeting, we are to be taken on upward into the Third Heaven—into the glorious presence of the Father's House! This *is* "Our Blessed Hope"!

## 7.

# A Purifying Hope

*"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:16-18).*

The imminent rapture of the Church is a great truth of Scripture; it cannot be denied. However, those today who believe the Church will go through the tribulation (all, or part, of it) think otherwise. For those who believe that the rapture is scheduled to take place in the middle of the tribulation, that "Blessed Hope" is to be preceded by three-and-one-half years of judgment on the earth. *They* are not looking for the Lord's *imminent* appearing in the air to catch them away. Rather, they are looking for the beginning of the "Seventieth Week of Daniel"—the beginning of the tribulation. When they see the tribulation begin, then they can calculate the exact day of our Lord's appearing. In reality, these have no "Blessed Hope"! They are looking for *wrath*—not *rapture*!

There are those who also believe that the Church will go through the entire tribulation—through the entire "Seventieth Week of Daniel." For these "post-tribulationists," the meeting in the air is just a momentary event. They deny the truth of the Lord's promise of John 14:2, 3. The "meeting in the air" is not (according to them) to be followed by a journey to "the Father's House" in the Third Heaven. Rather, that meeting is to be followed by an immediate return to the earth with the Lord to destroy His enemies and to establish the earthly kingdom! In this concept, the Church corporately (that is, both the transformed *living saints* and the resurrected *dead saints*) does not get to Heaven at all!

If these "post-tribulationists" are right, the place prepared for the Bride in the Father's House will never be used by the resurrected and translated Church! Instead, the Church is plunged immediately into the millennial earth. After the thousand-year reign of Christ is completed, the Church will be taken to the newly-created "new heavens and new earth"! If this be so, the Lord's work of preparing the

bridal chamber in His Father's House is all in vain, because that bridal chamber is never to be occupied by "the Bride of Christ."

## Pre-Tribulational Rapture Satisfies Scripture

Remember: The rapture of the Church *is* imminent, and it *is* to take place *before* the beginning of the seven-year tribulation! The "pre-tribulational rapture" interpretation of the prophetic Scripture gives full luster to the hope of the *imminent* return of Jesus Christ as an event *before* the time of the tribulation. In this concept, the Church has refuge in Heaven while the storms of divine wrath purge the earth and renovate it for the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. The "Blessed Hope" of the pre-tribulational rapture brings comfort to the hearts of those wounded by separation from loved ones who have gone on before, and who are longing for the face of their beloved Saviour.

Belief in the pre-tribulational rapture always makes the Lord's appearing imminent. That is, there are no wearisome and catastrophic events of ominous proportions standing between us and that glad moment! Therefore, Christians can "comfort one another with these words," just as Paul exhorted us in I Thessalonians 4:18. The rapture is always before the eye of the believer, and he knows that he should be ever watchful—because his Lord could appear at any moment! In the twinkling of an eye, the transcending event is to be accomplished, and the Church will forever be with the Lord! Only a short time after the "shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God" are heard, the Bride will be with the Bridegroom in the heavenly bridal chamber that He has been preparing during this age of God's grace!

The truth of our Lord's appearing in the atmospheric heaven to catch His Church up out of this earth was intended to be a comfort, an exhortation, and a hope that quietens the troubled hearts of believers. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote (in I Thessalonians 4:18), "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" Then, in I Thessalonians 5:11, he further wrote, "*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*" The only way that the hope of the rapture can be a comfort to hearts of believers is if it is to come *before* the beginning (before *any part*) of the tribulation.

## John's Testimony

John 14:1-3 records the Lord's words of promise for His return to the earthly sphere to take His Bride home to His Father's House. That

was a promise of the "pre-tribulational rapture." And, in the First Epistle of John, we have a further truth as a counterpart to that revealed in the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel. Note I John 3:2, 3: "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this HOPE in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*"

John tells all Christians of this age that, even now, we *are* the sons (children) of God—that is, even now before the Lord comes for our resurrection and/or translation. Then, John goes on to say, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." We do not now see the manifestation of those immortal bodies that are to be ours. But we do know that when our Lord Jesus Christ shall make His appearance in personal presence in the atmospheric heaven, we shall be transformed to His bodily image! And then, in this new state, we will be able to see our Lord as He really is! John continues: "*And every man (person) that hath this hope in him purifieth himself (that is, makes himself clean by righteous living and by confession of transgressions), even as he (the Lord Jesus Christ) is pure.*"

What a prospect! We shall be like Him when we see Him! This is *not* a reward for long toil and walking a weary road. This is the love token of the Bridegroom for the Bride! The transformation to immortality of I Corinthians 15 is to transfigure the Bride until she—like the Bridegroom—is all together lovely, without a trace of sin or disfigurement! This *is* a purifying hope!

### **Be Prepared!**

The imminence of our Lord's coming is that which underlines and emphasizes the meaning of John's exhortation. It is because that it is a moment-by-moment expectation that the believer is exhorted to holiness. It is just as if a distinguished guest were expected at any moment. Everything must be in order and spotless. There will be no time for preparation when he comes. Not only is there the customary cleaning—but as moments of waiting continue, there is constant reinspection to reassure that all is in order. If it were known that the guest would not arrive for days, months, or years—then there would be no need for vigilance! It is the *imminency* of his coming that determines the urgency of preparation!

**So it is with the appearing of the Lord for the rapture of His Church. For many in Christendom today, because of their system of**

prophetic interpretation, this "Blessed Hope" is dim and distant. By reason of theology—or unbelief—they are assured that there is yet plenty of time for preparation. They believe that much time and many other prophetic events must intervene before the Guest comes. For these, His appearing is *not* a purifying hope!

Those who really believe in our Lord's imminent appearing are not so indifferent! They realize the urgency of preparation! They expect, at any moment, to hear those three sounds of His presence—to look up—and see Him above their heads, as they are transformed to immortality and begin to rise upward for that long-awaited "meeting in the air."

So may it be with all of us who have read these words today! May the appearing of the Lord be a "blessed hope," a purifying hope, a comforting hope, a steadfast hope, a ray of light in a dark world!

**The End**