

CHAPTER NINE

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The central object of our study has been two events both of which have to do with the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The first of these events is what we refer to as the *Rapture* of the church. The second event is known as the *Second Coming* of Christ or the *Revelation of Christ*. These two events are not one and the same, however some would like to confuse the issue and make us think that these are the same or that they take place at the same time. The distinction between these two events is best shown by a number of contrasts. (1) The translation entails the removal of all believers, while the second advent entails the appearing or manifestation of the Son. (2) The translation sees the saints caught up into the air, and in the second advent He returns to the earth. (3) In the translation Christ comes to claim a bride, but in the second advent He returns with the bride. (4) The translation results in the removal of the church and the inception of the tribulation, and the second advent results in the establishment of the millennial kingdom. (5) The translation is imminent, while the second advent is preceded by a multitude of signs. (6) The translation brings a message of comfort, while the second advent is accompanied by a message of judgment. (7) The translation is related to the program for the church, while the second advent is related to the program for Israel and the world. (8) The translation is a mystery, while the second advent is predicted in both Testaments. (9) At the translation believers are judged, but at the second advent the nations are judged. (10) The translation leaves creation unchanged, while the second advent entails a change in creation. (11) At the translation Israel's covenants are unfulfilled, but at the second advent all her covenants are fulfilled. (12) The translation has no particular relation to the program of God in relation to evil, while at the second advent evil is judged. (13) The translation takes place before the day of wrath, but the second advent follows it. (14) The translation is for believers only, but the second advent has effect on all men. (15) The expectation of the church in regard to the translation is "the Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5), while the expectation of Israel in regard to the second advent is "the kingdom is at hand." (Matt 24:14) (16) The expectation of the church at the translation is to be taken into the Lord's presence, while the expectation of Israel at the second advent is to be taken into the kingdom. These, and other contrasts support the contention that these are two different programs and can not be united into one event.

WHAT IS THE RAPTURE

It would be well for us to define some terms. The word *Rapture* does not appear in the scriptures. This is a word that has been chosen to describe an event taught in Scripture. When translating one language into another you chose a word that best gives the meaning of the original. It will be a different word from that of the original language but will convey as nearly as possible the meaning of the original. Quite frequently the meaning cannot be conveyed in just one word and therefore it requires a phrase to give us the meaning contained in the original. The Rapture is a word that has been used for many years and its original, although now obsolete, meaning is "a carrying or transporting." I have chosen to use different words, at times I use translation and at other times I use rapture. I have chosen to use interchangeably the word of historical usage and interchanging with it the word that better describes the event.

There are two words in Scripture that describe that which takes place at the time of the "Rapture" or the "Translation" of the Church. The words are used in :

(1 Th 4:17 NNAS)

Then we who are alive and remain
will be caught up together with them

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,
and so we shall always be with the Lord.

The first word we want to look at is *harpazo* (αρπαζω). This word means to take, to seize, to snatch. This word is derived from *haireomai* (αιρεομαι) which means to take for ones self. The second word is *apantesis* (απαντησις) which means to go out to meet. The picture of the translation is that after the resurrection of the dead then we which are alive and remain will be taken up, snatched away taken by the Lord Himself for His own. Those of us caught up will go to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

THE IMMINENT RETURN OF CHRIST

We say that the coming of Christ for His Church is *imminent*. Many signs were given to the nation Israel, which would precede the second advent, so that the nation might be living in expectancy when the time of His coming should draw nigh. Although Israel could not know the day nor the hour when the Lord will come, yet they can know that their redemption draweth nigh through the fulfillment of these signs. To the church no such signs were ever given. The church was told to live in the light of the imminent coming of the Lord to translate them into His presence.

New American Standard Bible

John 14:2-3 (NASB)

²“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³“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.

Acts 1:11 (NASB)

¹¹They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NASB)

⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Philippians 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Colossians 3:4 (NASB)

⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Timothy 6:14 (NASB)

¹⁴that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

James 5:8 (NASB)

⁸You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

1 Peter 3:3 (NASB)

³Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

1 Peter 3:4 (NASB)

⁴but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Such passages as

1 Thessalonians 5:6 (NASB)

⁶so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

Titus 2:13 (NASB)

¹³looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

Revelation 3:3 (NASB)

³**So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.**

all warn the believer to be watching for the Lord Himself, not for signs that would precede His coming. It is true that the events of the seventieth week will cast a shadow or a pawl before the rapture, but the object of the believer's attention is always directed to Christ, never to these portents.

The doctrine of Imminence, or "at any moment coming," is the clear teaching of Scripture. Such a belief in imminency marked the premillennialism of the early church fathers as well as the writers of the New Testament. In this connection Thiessen writes:

. . . They held not only the premillennial view of Christ's coming, but also regarded that coming as imminent. The Lord had taught them to expect His return at any moment, and so they looked for Him to come in their day. Not only so, but they also taught His personal return as being immediately. Only the Alexandrians opposed this truth; but these Fathers also rejected other fundamental doctrines. We may say, therefore, that the early Church lived in the constant expectation of their Lord, and hence was not interested in the possibility of a Tribulation period in the future.

Although the Eschatology of the early church may not be altogether clear on all points, for that subject was not the subject of serious consideration, yet the evidence is clear that they believed in the imminent return of Christ. This same view of imminence is clearly seen in the writings of the Reformers, even though they have had different views on eschatological questions. Chafer quotes some of the reformers to show that they believed in the imminency of the return of Christ.

. . . Luther wrote, "I believe that all the signs which are to precede the last days have already appeared. Let us not think that the Coming of Christ is far off; let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer's coming with longing and cheerful mind" . . . Calvin also declares . . . "Scripture uniformly enjoins us to

look with expectation for the advent of Christ." To this may be added the testimony of John Knox: "The Lord Jesus shall return, and that with expedition. What were this else but to reform the face of the whole earth, which never was nor yet shall be, till that righteous King and Judge appear for the restoration of all things." Similarly, the words of Latimer: "All those excellent and learned men whom, without doubt, God has sent into the world in these latter days to give the world warning, do gather out of the Scriptures that the last days can not be far off. Peradventure it may come in my day, old as I am, or in my children's days." . . .

Those sermons of my father, William George White, that I remember most were those he preached concerning the soon return of Jesus Christ. Often I heard him say, "I would like to be preaching on the return of Jesus for His Church when Jesus comes again." We never witnessed a beautiful sunrise or sunset or the sun breaking through the storm clouds, but that my parents would remind us that, at some moment like that Jesus would come to take us home. What a wonderful privilege it was to be raised in a home where we were taught to keep our eyes heavenward looking for the appearing of Jesus. My father did not experience the rapture he so longed for but through death entered the presence of God. I do not know if Jesus shall come while I live or if I shall pass through the valley of the shadow of death but this one thing I do know Jesus is coming soon and this is the blessed hope of all those who know Jesus Christ and love his appearing.

John, the beloved apostle, instructs us concerning the return of Jesus Christ:

(1 John 3:2-3 NNAS)

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. {3} And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The doctrine of imminence forbids the participation of the church in any part of the Great Tribulation period. The multitude of signs given to Israel to stir them to expectancy would then also be for the church, and the church could not be looking for Christ until these signs had been fulfilled. The fact that no signs are given to the church, but she, rather, is commanded to watch for Christ, precludes her participation in the seventieth week

His coming is not death

There is one more negative that I must deal with, before we consider the positive aspects of the translation of the church. The return of Christ for the believer is not death. I will not spend much time on this false teaching. This comes from those who would allegorize Scripture. They attempt to impose any interpretation on Scripture that will support their position. Let's look at just a few passages that nullify this teaching.

We are taught that death is our enemy; (1 Cor 15:26 NNAS) The last enemy that will be abolished is death. Apply any teachings concerning the coming of Jesus for the believers to the teaching that His coming is death and you will see they just do not apply. If His coming were death then the two would be synonymous. This is simply not true. Try inserting the word "death" in those passages which speak of Christ's coming and see the result.

(Mat 16:27 NNAS)

"For [death] [the Son of Man] is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and [death] [He] WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING

TO HIS DEEDS.

(1 Th 4:16 NNAS)

For [death] [the Lord Himself]
will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice
of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the
dead in Christ will rise first.

We need not spend more time here except to say that we who pass from this life before the rapture of the Church do so through death. As strange as it may seem God uses death to release the believer from the consequences of this sin cursed world. God placed an angel with a flaming sword at the entrance to the garden to prevent Adam from returning to eat of the Tree of Life and living forever. What a tragedy it would be if there were not death to release us from the suffering of disease and tragedy. How unthinkable it would be that we should live forever in such pain and suffering. That is what Hell will be, not heaven. Hell is that place where, "the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." In hell even this provision of a loving God will not be available to those who have rejected God's Son.

THE RAPTURE

THE TRANSLATION

THE CATCHING UP

THE GOING TO MEET

THE MEETING IN THE AIR

All the above phrases describe that great event when we who know Christ as our Lord and Savior will enter the presence of our Lord never to be taken from that presence again. This great truth has been the object of our careful study through these many weeks.

(John 14:1-6 NNAS)

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in
God, believe also in Me. {2} "In My Father's
house are many dwelling places; if it were not so,
I would have told you; for I go to prepare a
place for you. {3} "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.
{4} "And you know the way where I am going."
{5} Thomas said^ to Him, "Lord, we do not
know where You are going, how do we know
the way?" {6} Jesus said^ to him, "I am the way,
and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the
Father but through Me.

What a beautiful and simple explanation given in the loving and tender words of Jesus Himself. He spoke to give comfort to His disciples. These disciples did not know at this time exactly what was going to take place but Jesus wanted them to hear from His own lips the promise of His return. He spoke to their troubled hearts.

Jesus did not intend for this truth to cause divisions within the body His Church. These blessed words were to bring comfort and they do. To all those who believe in Jesus there is that confidence of an eternal home in the Father's House. Jesus loved the Father and the Father loved the Son and it is into that relationship that we enter and are given an abiding place in God's dwelling place. Then Jesus speaks those words of love the words of a groom to his beloved, "I am going to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also." Those are the words of promise to the Church His Bride. It is His highest goal to present His Bride to the Father (Eph 5:27).

(Eph 5:27 NNAS)

that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Jesus said, "and if I go . . . I will come again." Jesus came to provide redemption for man and to call out a people for His name. This plan required that He return to the Father so that the Holy Spirit could come. This is an accomplished fact. The Lord Jesus was Crucified, He died, was buried, and rose again, this is the Gospel. He ascended into Heaven as recorded in Acts 1:9. In Acts 1:10 the angels said, "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as you have seen go into heaven." This reference is to His second advent and not to the rapture, but the promise of Jesus in John 14 is that, "If I go . . . I will come again. Jesus did go into heaven to the Father. He is now preparing a place for us. He will come again just as He promised. His promise is this, "I will come again and receive you unto my self that where I am there you may be also." That's all I need. Thank You dear Jesus!

Building upon this foundation and using it as the guide for our understanding and interpretation we are prepared to consider other passages that further explain the process of His coming.

(1 Th 4:13-18 NNAS)

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. {14} For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. {15} For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. {16} For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. {17} Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. {18} Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The early churches like the church at Thessalonica did not have the written Scriptures that we have today. They were dependant on the verbal teachings of Paul and others. Paul wrote the letters of I and II Thessalonians to further instruct them in the things of the Lord. One of their primary concerns had to do with a misunderstanding as well as false teachings concerning those believers who had died. They were concerned that those who had died would not be a part of the translation. They understood that those who were alive would experience this catching up, the Rapture. Paul writes that it is not God's intent that we should be ignorant but that He wants us to understand what He is about. Paul's instruction is that those who have fallen asleep are now with the Lord and that God will bring them with Him. This is based on the fact and guarantee that Jesus assures our resurrection by His resurrection. Paul states that, "we shall not go before them, those who have fallen asleep." The fact is that, "they shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

What a glorious day that will be, when God the Father gives the command and all of heaven bolts into action. This is the promised day the day when Jesus comes back as He promised to take His redeemed ones into the Fathers house. The Archangel of God calls the angelic hosts to witness the ultimate demonstration of God's marvelous Grace. Jesus begins His journey back and the God of heaven sounds the trump that summons from the graves of all the world, from the depths of the sea, from every far-flung battlefield, from unmarked graves of martyrs for the cause of Christ, all respond to the trump of God , and that great army of blood washed souls break the shrouds of death and loose the bands of this earth and rush heavenward into the arms of Him who said. "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." After that marvelous demonstration of the power and immutability of God those who are alive and remain on the earth, will be set free. The call of God and the shed blood of Jesus Christ cuts them free from the captive chains of this world, and in a moment in the twinkling of an eye they are transformed into the likeness of Him who died for them. **"What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see. When I look upon His face, the one who saved me by His grace. When He takes me by the hand and leads me to the promised land what a day, What a day, what a day that will be."**