

THE RAPTURE

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*"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall
make you free" (Jn. 8:32)*

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The Antichrist

Israel

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The teachings about the rapture, the end-time restoration of the nation of Israel and the millennium kingdom have, through various phases of church history, been spiritualised and pushed aside by theologians. Faith in these promises has, however, revived time and again to become a strong motivating power in the lives of believers.

We are living in a time which sees the fulfilment of many biblical prophecies. This is an indication of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When people accept the prophetic word and studies it, they achieve greater clarity regarding future events. They see the unfolding of a world scene which is, on the one hand, very dark indeed and leads to awful judgements, while on the other hand, a joyous hope blazes in the hearts of believers.

This hope comes from the knowledge that they will be able to escape the coming judgements if they are truly right with God. The promise of escape is the good news element in the prophecies. It is the 'blessed hope' to which every believer should cling in these dark days" (Tit. 2:13).

Two phases

In order to properly understand the second coming of Christ, we have to clearly discern its two phases, i.e. the return of Christ *for* his saints and His coming *with* His saints. During the first phase the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom will be unexpected, like a thief in the night. He will meet His bride in the air and quickly take her away to heavenly places (1 Thes. 4:16-17; 1 Thes. 5:2; Jn. 14:2-3).

During the second phase, His appearance will be public and every eye will see Him. He will be accompanied by His bride, as well as a heavenly army, and will set His feet on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4-5; Rev. 19:11-15).

The two phases of the second coming can also be discerned from the respective Greek terms which are used in the original language. The first phase, in which the Lord

Jesus Christ will suddenly appear in the midst of His bride, is referred to as *parousia*. This term indicates His *physical presence*. After His *parousia* He will never again be separated from His bride, the church. On that occasion He will appear to all those who eagerly awaited Him for salvation (Heb. 9: 28). Thereafter, they will abide with Him forever.

The second phase of Christ's coming is known as His *apokalipse* or *faneros* – that is His public *revelation* or *becoming visible*. This time, He doesn't come in secret to appear only to His bride. He will then be publicly revealed as King and Judge of the world. That is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thes. 3:13). Christ and His saints will be revealed to the world in glory at the same time:

“When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

It is quite obvious that Christians won't be able to accompany the Lord Jesus and be revealed in their glorified bodies if they hadn't been united with Him at an earlier stage already. The whole creation is awaiting this revelation, because harmony and ideal conditions will prevail on earth during the reign of Christ and His saints (Rom. 8:19).

The Bridegroom comes to fetch His bride

During the rapture, which will of necessity precede the visible coming, the heavenly Bridegroom comes only to fetch His bride. On this occasion He doesn't show Himself to the millions of other people on earth at all.

In biblical times the Jewish bridegroom used to depart for a lengthy period after his engagement, in order to prepare for his bride and himself a habitation in the house of his father. After this, he came to fetch her at night, secretly, without even the members of her own household being aware of this event at the time, and took her with him to the house of his father. Jesus used this custom as an analogy to explain His ascension to His disciples:

“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” (Jn. 14:2-3).

When Jesus Christ appears at His *parousia*, He will appear in the midst of His bride, the church. This will be the fulfilment of a promise which was made to the followers of Jesus at the time of His ascension:

“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

After His resurrection, Jesus was seen only by believers. At His ascension He was separated from them, and with the rapture He will be united with them. The rest of mankind will be left on earth because, by their own doing, they will not be members of the group that belongs to Jesus and with whom He has a special appointment:

“I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left” (Lk. 17: 34).

Glorification

The glorification of Christians will begin at the moment when the trumpet is sounded, the deceased saints raised from the dead, and the living saints transformed in an instant to receive their glorified bodies:

“Behold, I show 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” (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

When Christ suddenly appears in our midst, we will be clothed with heavenly bodies in an instant:

“For our [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

Caught up

Immediately after the deceased and living saints have been clothed with glorified bodies, they will be taken up to heaven to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus for ever:

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not [go before those who] 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 who 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” (1 Thes. 4: 14-17).

Note that the above-mentioned meeting will take place in the air and involves only born-again Christians. The Lord Jesus does not set His foot on the Mount of Olives and reveals Himself to the world at this stage, but returns immediately with His bride to the house of His father in heaven.

The word *caught up*, that is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (*harpazo* in Greek), clearly means to be *raptured* or *snatched away rapidly*. This word is also used to describe the action by which an eagle snatches and rapidly flies off with its prey.

There is, therefore, no truth to the allegation by some critics that the word *rapture* doesn't appear in the Bible. The word *harpazo* can be translated as:

- »»»» catch up;
- »»»» rapture; or
- »»»» snatch away swiftly.

In his internationally acclaimed *Studies in the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, K.S. Wuest says:

“HARPAZO. This is a Greek word that has various meanings. It is not translated by one uniform English word. The meanings are as follows: to seize; to carry off by force; to claim for one’s self eagerly; to snatch out or away. It was used proverbially in the sense of *to rescue from the danger of destruction*. It was used also of *divine power transferring a person marvellously and swiftly from one place to another*.

“The word is used in Mt. 11:12, 13:19; Jn. 6:15, 10:12, 28, 29; Acts 8:39, 23:10; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; 1 Thes. 4:17, Jude v. 23; Rev. 12:15. The procedure in Greek exegesis when a word has a number of meanings, is to use only those meanings which are in accord with the context. For instance, in the case of *harpazo* in its use in connection with the wolf (Jn. 10:12), it would not do to interpret it in the sense of rescuing from the danger of destruction. It would mean here *to seize and carry off by force, to claim for one’s self eagerly*. Study these places where the word occurs, using as many meanings as agree with the context. Pay special attention to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and see how much new truth you obtain regarding the Rapture of the Church.”

The following are a few examples of Scripture verses in which the term *harpazo* is used. Please note the basic meaning of being removed swiftly and purposefully from one place to another:

- “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord *caught away* Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more” (Acts 8:39).
- “And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to *take him by force from among them*, and to bring him into the castle” (Acts 23:10).

- "I knew a man in Christ [more than] fourteen years ago... such a one was *caught up* to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2).
- "We who are alive... shall be *caught up*... to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thes. 4:17).
- "And she brought forth a male child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was *caught up* unto God, and to his throne" (Rev. 12:5).

The first resurrection

A concept which is closely related to the rapture, is that of the first resurrection. On this occasion the Lord Jesus will only come to fetch the righteous; this is why Paul says that "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thes. 4:16).

Nothing whatsoever is said here about the resurrection of the ungodly. Seeing that a first resurrection also implies a second, and because we know that the righteous as well as the unrighteous will be raised, it becomes clear that the ungodly will be raised at a later resurrection.

Revelation 20 says that at least a thousand years will separate the two resurrections. John refers to the Christian martyrs who will be raised in the first resurrection to reign as kings with Christ during the millennium:

"...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:4-6).

Those who share in the first resurrection are declared blessed; therefore, to be declared part of this resurrection signifies a very privileged position.

Various other parts of Scripture offer irrefutable evidence that the saints will be resurrected first. Paul refers to an order of resurrections:

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who slept. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam

all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then *cometh* the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Cor. 15:20-24).

Between the resurrection of Christ as *firstfruits* and the resurrection of those who belong to Him at His coming, a period of about 2000 years will elapse. It is clear from Revelation 20 that a further 1000 years will elapse between the *first resurrection* and *the end* when the rest of mankind will be raised from the dead to receive their judgement at the great white throne.

Note also the following conditions attached to sharing in the first resurrection:

"I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ... That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:8, 10-11).

What does Paul mean by his hope on the resurrection? Surely everybody will be raised from the dead. What, then, is this resurrection which Paul strives to attain? It can't be the general resurrection in which he will in any case share. It must refer to a very special resurrection in which only those will share who knew Christ and the power of His resurrection and who conformed to His death. One cannot interpret this passage without admitting that a resurrection of the righteous will occur before the resurrection of the unrighteous.

In Luke 20 we find a statement which is clear evidence of a special resurrection. The Sadducees stated a problem with regard to the relationship between men and women in the life to come, to which Jesus replied:

“But those who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Lk. 20:35-36).

It is clear that a special standard is required for this resurrection. Sons of the resurrection are specifically qualified as children of God. A promise to these people is also found in Luke 14:

“But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Lk. 14:13-14).

If there were only one resurrection, it would have been unnecessary to say “in the resurrection of the just.”

The following are expressions which only refer to the first resurrection:

- † The first resurrection (Rev. 20:6).
- † The resurrection of the children of God (Lk. 20:36).
- † The resurrection of those who died in Christ (1 Thes. 4:16).
- † The resurrection of the just (Lk. 14:13).
- † A better resurrection (Heb. 11:35).
- † The resurrection to life (Jn. 5:29).
- † The resurrection from the dead in Jesus (Acts 4:2).

When referring to the resurrection from the dead of Christians, as well as when referring to Christ's resurrection from the dead, the term *ek nekroon* is used in Greek. This means *from the dead* and is only used with regard to a resurrection where there are other dead who are left behind. This expression, which is used 49 times in the New Testament, of which 34 times are used in regard to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, is not used once for the second resurrection. The second resurrection is referred to as *toon nekroon*, or *resurrection of the dead*.

When the rapture takes place, the just will be raised *from among the rest of the dead* with glorified bodies and will meet Christ in the air together with those who are still alive.

Escape

In the light of the circumstances which will prevail on earth, the rapture will offer Christians an escape from the threatening judgements. It will be a dark time of massive spiritual deception. The fundamental, evangelical Christians will be declared unbiblical and loveless, and will be despised. They will be regarded as prophets of doom because they will proclaim the imminent judgements of God which will fall upon the world during the great tribulation. They will also be regarded as rebels because they will be unwilling to join the ecumenical movement and to accept the unitary reforms of the New Age Movement.

As the time for the revelation of the Antichrist approaches, true Christians will be subjected to immense pressure, intimidation and threats. If they remain faithful and true to the end, the Lord will take them away so that they can escape the tribulation period:

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to **escape** all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk. 21:36).

The proponents of the false peace of the humanistically inspired and antichristian new world order will, however, not escape the great tribulation:

“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**” (1 Thes. 5:3).

In the first of these two scriptures reference is made to a group that *will* escape the coming judgements, and in the second case a group that will be caught unawares and that will certainly *not* escape. The first group watch and pray, and the second group trust in their own peace programmes.

The word *escape* (*ekfeugo* in the Greek) definitely means to be *outside* the tribulation and, in the case of Luke 21:36, to be in the presence of the Son of man. The prefix *ek* in Greek always means *outside*. New versions of the Bible that were translated from the Vatican manuscript, like the *Good News Bible*, are totally mistaken when they render this word as *go through* the tribulation. It is a complete contradiction of the promise that we can *escape* the tribulation if we are spiritually worthy. We won't be here!

I would like to quote an authoritative Greek dictionary in this regard, i.e. *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, by W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich. The root meaning of *ekfeugo* is translated as:

- ▶▶▶ *escape to safety;*
- ▶▶▶ *escape; and*
- ▶▶▶ *avoid or evade.*

The meaning of *ekfeugo* in Luke 21:36 is in this dictionary specifically indicated as *escape tribulations*.

A dramatic rescue operation

Apart from the heavenly glory for which the bride is taken away, the rapture also constitutes a dramatic rescue operation in which the true believers will be removed from the scene of divine judgement. Although the rapture is a unique occurrence, there are examples in the Bible of times when God poured out His wrath, but provided an escape route for the true believers as they were not the objects of His wrath.

In the days of Noah, God announced His judgements over a wicked and depraved generation:

“And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark...” (Gen. 6:13-14).

Shortly before the outpouring of God's judgements the eight believers escaped the disaster area by entering the ark. God Himself closed the door behind them before He

judged the sinners (Gen. 6:16-23).

In the time of Lot another rescue operation occurred. The night before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot and his family received an urgent command to depart from the disaster area. The two angels also said that they could do nothing while Lot and his family were still around. Shortly after their departure, fire and brimstone rained down on the ungodly (Gen. 19:13-25).

The Bible says that there is a clear correlation between these historic events and God's end-time dealing with believers *and* unbelievers:

“And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man: They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Lk. 17:26-30; also read Gen. 6 and 19).

The following correlation between the ancient and modern situation can be made:

- In the time of Noah and Lot anarchy prevailed as people in these lawless and promiscuous societies did just what they wanted. Violence was the most common means to resolve conflicts. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot widespread moral depravity occurred. People became so corrupt that they were “wicked in every intent of their thoughts.” So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot people were excessively materialistic and adopted permissive life-styles that led to all sorts of licentiousness, including sodomy (derived from the name *Sodom*). So will it be again...

- In the time of Noah and Lot people scoffed at the men of God and took no heed of the prophetic warnings of forthcoming judgements. They regarded it as far-fetched speculation and continued with their reckless lives. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot God gave the degenerate sinners reasonable time to repent from their evil ways. They refused to repent and thereby sealed their own fate. They had only themselves to blame for their downfall and affliction. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot God offered a way of escape to the believers at the critical moment before He turned in wrath to the sinners. The order of events was: First the prophetic warnings about the impending judgements, then the safeguarding of the believers who took heed of the appeal to repent, and ultimately the outpouring of wrath over the sinners. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot there was no security for nominal believers whose hearts were still devoted to the things of this world. Lot's wife was a type of those believers who only have an outward form of godliness, but are still spiritually dead. This false pretence cost her her life at the last moment. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot an awful disaster struck this world soon after the evacuation of the believers. Death and destruction occurred as never before in history. So will it be again...
- In the time of Noah and Lot the sinners didn't realise how many privileges and blessings they enjoyed because of the presence of a few believers in their midst. God was prepared to pardon a whole city if there were only ten believers. When these people, who shone like lights in a wicked and perverted generation, were taken out of the way, complete spiritual darkness befell the godless, and provoked the anger of God. So will it be again...

○ In the time of Noah people scoffed at the builders of the ark “and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Mt. 24:39).

The minds of the enemies of God are darkened and they continue in pride until they suddenly stumble and fall. Then they are without a saviour.

Won't you rather come over to God's side today and be reconciled to Him through His Son's death on the cross? He alone can make you worthy to escape the approaching tribulation, which is God's judgement on a sinful world. You can be with Jesus in the safety and joy of His Father's house when the hour of darkness comes over the world.

Withholders

Noah and Lot had to admonish the ungodly people of their time with serious and persistent warnings. The Christians of the New Testament have an even greater responsibility to fulfil their role as the salt of a corrupt earth and the light of a dark world. They have been given the explicit command to act as withholders against the advance of the Antichrist:

“And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now [restrains] *will do so*, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thes. 2:6-9).

The coming day of the Lord will not commence before the rapture of the believers and the subsequent revelation of the Antichrist. The terrible day of judgement will be preceded by a great *falling away* (2 Thes. 2:3). This term in Greek (*apostasia*) literally means *to depart*. When the truth departs, the lie prevails. When the Christians depart with the rapture, spiritual darkness will prevail on earth.

While the Christians are here, they are supposed to take a bold stand for the truth and restrain the building up of antichristian forces on earth. After they have left, the Antichrist will have the opportunity of taking over the world without resistance. The spirit of delusion will then get the upper hand, and the man of sin (2 Thes. 2:3) will personally give the example of an utter immoral and unholy way of living.

The Antichrist cannot be revealed until the one who restrains him has been taken out of the way. This role is fulfilled by the church as the body of Christ. Don't attach any significance to the theory that the rapture will occur in the middle of the tribulation period of seven years. After 3½ years the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel, desecrate the temple and declare himself to be God (Dan. 9:27, 11:36-37; Mt. 24:15-21; 2 Thes. 2:4). Then Israel will have to flee to the wilderness for survival (Mt. 24:16; Rev. 12:14). This flight to the wilderness in the middle of the tribulation is not to be confused with the rapture. It is something quite different.

The unscriptural teaching of a mid-tribulation or a post-tribulation rapture leads to a warped perspective and wrong priorities. Instead of awaiting the coming of Christ, people are awaiting the Antichrist. In this way they compromise their commitment to Christ. Instead of striving for sanctification in expectation of the imminent coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, they start planning an earthly survival strategy for the tribulation period. Works of this nature are irrelevant due to a distorted prophetic vision of coming events.

Our command is not to prepare for the coming of the Antichrist, but for the coming of Jesus Christ. We should remain concerned with His works until He comes. If we are constantly occupied with the work assigned to us by Christ, we won't be around when the Antichrist is revealed.

People who think that they can calculate the time of the rapture by waiting for the Antichrist to come and then add another 3½ years until the Lord comes, are missing a very important aspect of the prophecies.

The judgement seat of Christ

The rapture should never be viewed in isolation, but as a means to an end. It describes the way in which all the true believers will be swiftly removed from earth to heaven where they must appear before the judgement seat of Christ (this is the subject of a separate booklet). To be ready for the rapture, therefore, implies readiness to give account of your life and stewardship before Christ's judgement seat:

“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10; see also Rom. 14:10).

After having received crowns as reward for faithful service, the glorified church will gather around the throne of the Lamb where they will praise the Lord for His righteousness (Rev. 4:10-11) and join with Him in judging the world during the tribulation period (1 Cor. 6:2). They will also look forward to the time when they will return to the earth with Jesus Christ to reign with Him as kings during the millennium:

“And they sung new songs, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10; see also Rev. 19:11-15, Zech. 14:4-5).

Chronology of Revelation

The departing of the church before the coming tribulation period is also clearly evident from the chronology of the events of Revelation. In these events, the true church mysteriously vanishes from the earth before the start of the tribulation period, only to appear again when Christ comes back after the seven years. The believers of the tribulation do not constitute the church. The different main events in the book of Revelation occur in the following order:

- ◆ The glorified Christ after His ascension (ch. 1).
- ◆ The dispensation of the church on earth (ch. 2-3).
- ◆ The heavenly vision, including the glorified church after the rapture (ch. 4-5).
- ◆ The seven years of the tribulation period (ch. 6-18).
- ◆ The second coming of Christ, in which He is joined by the glorified church (ch. 19).
- ◆ The millennial reign of Christ and His church (ch. 20:1-6).
- ◆ The final judgement before the great white throne (ch. 20:7-15).
- ◆ The new heaven and the new earth (ch. 21-22).

After describing the church on earth in Revelation 2-3, it is subsequently shown in its glorified state in heaven in Revelation 4-5. Chapter 4 opens with the words, *After this* (Greek *meta tauta*) which clearly indicate the chronological order of events. This expression often occurs in the book of Revelation, thereby confirming its general chronological ordering of events.

During the dispensation of the church (ch. 2-3) the following words are repeated seven times: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22). The believers of the tribulation period, who are saved after the rapture, do not represent the church. To them is merely said: "If any man have an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13:9). In Revelation 19:7-14 we again read about the church as the wife of the Lamb, who will return with Him to earth after the seven years of the tribulation.

Getting ready

The next important event on the prophetic calendar is the rapture. Before the Antichrist can be revealed and the tribulation begin, the meeting between the Christian church and the heavenly Bridegroom has to take place. As members of the church of Christ we have to be ready, hence the many admonishments in the Bible to expect the second coming and to be watchful and vigilant at all times.

Are you a sanctified member of the bridal church? Are you ready for the coming of the Bridegroom? It is impossible to be ready unless we are *in* Christ:

“*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

With regard to the rapture, the emphasis is on accepting the Lord Jesus for salvation as well as for sanctification. After the initial cleansing from sins, an experience of sanctification, or filling with the Holy Spirit, must occur in order for Christians to live a life of holiness and service:

“Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

John says that everyone who has the hope of the return of Christ “purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3). The Christian endeavours, therefore, to be like Jesus and to remain in Him:

“And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:28)

Paul says that the grace of God teaches us that:

“...denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:12-13).

The Thessalonian church had a strong expectation of the second coming. Paul encourages this attitude:

“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing... Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings... Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be pre-

served blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful *is* He that calleth you, who also will do *it*” (1 Thes. 5:16-24).

Peter adds to the perspective of a holy life the warning that Christians should not be blinded by the temporary things of this world:

“*Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in holy [conduct] and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God... Therefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found by Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:11-14).

You should be on the alert lest you be influenced by the world and your spiritual standard be lowered and you be distracted from the work of the Lord. One of the signs of the times is a spirit of backsliding and lukewarm commitment among believers. Many people, instead of being inspired to renewed holiness by the growing unrighteousness, lose their motivation and give up:

“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall [grow] cold” (Mt. 24:12).

Amid the general falling away, our attitude and initiative should be diametrically in the opposite direction:

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward *is* with Me, to give every one according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:11-12).

The requirement for the rapture is clearly stated in Luke:

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk. 21:36).

Are you worthy to escape this great judgement? If not, you should start watching and praying. Start with the sinner’s

prayer in which you confess your sins and receive the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. Thereafter, prayer should remain the most important activity in your spiritual life. If you lead a secret life of prayer in your inner room, God will reward you in public by upholding you in a godless world and by using you in His service (Mt. 6:6).

Furthermore, you have to be constantly alert against the attacks of the enemy, also when he appears as an angel of light with nice sounding but unscriptural suggestions. You must also guard against spiritual passivity resulting from a lack of involvement with the things of the Lord. The devil often induces people to hide behind full programmes and exhaustion as excuses to keep them from prayer. In the garden of Gethsemane the disciples were unable, in a time of spiritual crisis, to watch and pray for even one hour with the Lord Jesus. His command was:

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh *is* weak” (Mt. 26:41).

We received a similar command regarding the rapture:

“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. *For the Son of man is* as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mk. 13:33-37).

Remain in Christ, stay alert and keep looking for the bright morning star that will soon appear above a dark horizon. In the twinkling of an eye the battle on earth will be over and we will stand amazed at what the Lord has prepared for us (1 Cor. 2:9). Our biggest joy will be at the sight of the heavenly Bridegroom “when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all those who believe in that day” (2 Thes. 1:10).

Signs of the times

The rapture definitely has a strong element of surprise to it as nobody knows when it will occur. Nevertheless, there are certain signs that clearly point to the time of the end. As will be shown in the last section of this booklet, many of the signs that were popularly regarded as referring to the end of the church age, really only apply to the tribulation period. Among these are the enormous natural disasters, wars, starvation and pestilence predicted in the Bible. An example of signs given to indicate the nearness of the second coming of Christ (not the rapture) is the following:

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear and [the expectation of] those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh’ (Lk. 21:25-28).

The signs that point to the end of the church age prior to the tribulation period, relate to the consummation of the present dispensation, the restoration of Israel, and the preparations for the Antichrist’s appearance and rule on earth. Although these signs are very evident, they can’t be fitted into a rigid time frame. They can unfold faster or slower, and there is always the possibility of more developments before the time will finally be ripe to draw the curtain on this dispensation.

Two sets of signs are given which indicate the end of the church age. The one set is related to the end of the existing order, and the second set indicates the restoration of Israel and the rise of a new world order in anticipation of the coming of the Antichrist. He can only appear after the stage has been properly set.

We are now witnessing the decay and collapse of the

existing world order. The signs of decay cover a broad spectrum and include all walks of life:

- ◆ Economic decay is evident in collapsing economies, poverty, unemployment, and rampant inflation.
- ◆ Political decay is seen in the acceptance of humanistic constitutions, anarchy, chaos, and violence.
- ◆ Social decay leads to disintegrating social structures and the breakdown of marriages.
- ◆ Religious decay is responsible for the increased darkening of peoples' minds, immorality and spiritual confusion.

From the ashes of the old order, the global structures of a new world order will arise. They will constitute the framework for the world society, world economy, world religion, and world government of the Antichrist:

- ◆ A centralised world economy will be established in which numbers for electronic funds transfer will be issued.
- ◆ Political unity in the form of a world government and a world peace-keeping force will emerge.
- ◆ Social unity among the denationalised planetary citizens will give further expression to the ideology of globalism.
- ◆ Religious unity will be based on the deceptive idea that all religions worship the same God.

Another form of build-up that must occur at the end of the church dispensation is the re-establishing of the people of Israel in their own land, and their increase to a point where they are the biggest single Jewish community among all countries of the world. At present there are still more Jews in America than in Israel. Only when the Israelis become the leading group (although still a minority with regard to the total world population of Jews) will they be able to take decisions and sign covenants on behalf of all Jews. After the rapture they should be in a demographic position which will enable them to take a decision on the leadership position of the Messiah. The Bible says that their decision will be tragically wrong (Jn. 5:43).

The seven year long absence of the bride of Christ after the rapture. Spiritual darkness will then prevail on the earth.

RAPTURE

SECOND COMING

THE TRIBULATION OF SEVEN YEARS

u **FIRST 3½ YEARS** u **LAST 3½ YEARS** u

Directly after the rapture the Antichrist will be revealed and the first 3½ years of his reign on earth will commence.	The Antichrist changes his image in the last 3½ years to become a military dictator who will enslave humanity.
The institution of a new world order according to the Plan of the New Age Movement. World unity is established.	Strict economic control is exercised through a cashless economy managed by a system of numbers.
The temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem and an alliance of world religions recognise the Antichrist as their messiah.	The temple is desecrated by the Antichrist when he declares himself as God in the Holy of holies.
An international campaign is waged against the Messianic Jews and Christians who refuse to accept the Antichrist.	The summary execution of all people who refuse to worship the Antichrist and to accept his number.
A deceptive world peace is based upon an agreement between the Antichrist and a false world religion.	The multi-national forces of the Antichrist are mobilised for the final world war of Armageddon in Israel.

AUTHORITATIVE BOOK ON THE RAPTURE

In 1995, an authoritative book on the pre-tribulation rapture (*When the trumpet sounds*, edited by Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy) was published by Harvest House Publishers in Eugene, Oregon. Contributions were made by 23 leading experts in this field. They include names such as Prof. Paul Feinberg, Dr. Elliot Johnson, Dr. Tim LaHaye, Prof. Dwight Pentecost, Dr. Randall Price, Prof. Robert Thomas, Prof. Charles Ryrie, and Prof. John Walvoord.

In the Introduction, the editors say:

“The New Testament clearly teaches that each believer has a hope, a *blessed* hope, which is a grand and glorious destiny. This hope is both personal and a Person. First, it is given to each individual believer and, second, our hope is in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible portrays this hope as pictured in ancient Jewish marriage customs. In biblical times a betrothed maiden would eagerly await the any-moment coming of her groom to take her to his father’s house in marriage celebration.

“During this time of waiting and watching expectantly, the bride’s loyalty to the groom was tested. In a similar way, the rapture provides for the church this same sense of expectation and anticipation. The rapture expectation provides believers with a similar daily motivation for a pure and godly life until He comes. Just as the betrothed maiden eagerly waited because of her love for the groom, so also do we await our Lord’s any-moment coming. *Though you have not seen Him, you love Him* (1 Pet. 1:8). Such motives are not *escapism* but, rather, flow from the love and devotion of a sincere believer to our Lord.

“Christ’s rapture of His bride holds a central place in the New Testament, and it assumes the same in the thought and life of the Christian. The study and implications of God’s Word are always important. It is because of this importance that we present the following essays. The rapture is the central future

prophetic event for the Christian, and its study is therefore vital in the lives of Christians...”

“The desire to promote greater understanding of this certain and glorious hope led, in 1994, to the establishment of the Pre-Trib Research Center in Washington, D.C. The center grew out of Tim LaHaye’s burden for communicating the rapture to the present generation. In 1992, LaHaye and Thomas Ice drew together a group of biblical scholars, communicators, and pastors for a conference known as the Pre-Trib Study Group. This group has expanded and met each year since 1992, and many of the essays found in this work originated in those conferences. There are many materials available from the Center, and anyone desiring to know more about the Center, its resources, and ministries can write to: Pre-Trib Research Center, 370 L’Enfant Promenade. S.W., Suite 801, Washington, D.C. 20024.

The first chapter in the book is most significant. It was written by Thomas Ice, and its title is: *Back to the future: keeping the future in the future*. The following key statements are made in this chapter:

“When will Bible prophecy be fulfilled? Why is timing crucial for a proper understanding of biblical prophecy? Major prophetic events such as the tribulation, millennium, and the second coming will occur in the future, after the current church age is past. Therefore, to try to relate events that will unfold during a future time in the present church age is inconsistent with the original interpretative conclusion that they will happen in the future. This writer argues that we need to be aware of what is future and keep the future in the future...”

“During the last few years we have seen a rash of futurists who have tried to date the rapture. I believe that that is impossible if a futurist is consistent with the principles of futurism. Why? Because, according to pretribulation futurism the date of the rapture is not linked in any way to an earthly

event that can serve as a basis for date-setting. The rapture is a sign-less event. Since there are signs related to the second coming, some say that we can calculate the date of the second coming based upon a sign and then subtract seven years to arrive at the date for the rapture. The problem with this is that none of the signs for the second coming are activated until the start of the tribulation, after the rapture. Then, and only then, does the seven year countdown commence. The tribulation cannot begin until after the church age has ended in the rapture; then the seven-year period will begin. Until it does begin, none of the signs will aid in date-setting.

“Those who are pretribulation futurists have to abandon the futurist method to even speculate on a date for the rapture. The system of futurism precludes date-setting. This is why futurist date-setters actually lapse back into some kind of historicism that equates the church age with the tribulation...

Stage-setting for the tribulation

“Another point to remember is that just as there was a transition in the early church away from God dealing with Israel as a nation, so it appears that there will be a transition at the end of the church age as God sets the stage to resume His unfinished plan with Israel after the rapture. The church age clearly began on Pentecost, but about 40 years later in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, a specific prophecy relating to God’s plan for Israel was historically fulfilled. This was the final fulfilment relating to the transition from Israel to the church. During the last 100 years we have seen events occur which are setting the stage for the players to be in place when the rapture brings the church age to an end and God resumes His plan for Israel during the tribulation.

“In addition, there are general predictions about the course of the church age, such as a trend toward apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1-16; 2 Tim. 3:1-17). These do not relate to the timing of the rapture, but are instead general trends about the church age.

It is important to realise that when speaking of a general characteristic like apostasy, no matter how bad something may be it can always get a little worse or progress a little further. Thus, it is tenuous to cite general characteristics, apart from clear historical indicators, as signs of the last days. Regardless of how much our own time may look like it fits that trend, we can never be certain that there are not more developments to come.” (End of quotation).

An end-time strategy

Christians should have specific strategies, or plans of action, through which they give practical expression to their general objectives to live holy lives, to do the work of the Lord, and to be ready for His coming. The promise of the rapture is a very important motivating force in determining our objectives and the strategies emanating from it. The main guiding principles of this promise are the following:

o Good news

The rapture is the good news element in a dark scenario of end-time prophecies. If this promise is concealed Christians would be left only with the bad news about the coming of the Antichrist and the tribulation period that they will have to face before Jesus comes. Their chances would indeed be slim to survive all the apocalyptic disasters of the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon. A situation like that can be equated to the Flood without the ark, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah without any provision for the escape of the believers from the scene of God’s wrath.

Such a situation would not only be highly demoralising, but it would contradict a clear biblical principle that true believers are never the objects of God’s wrath. “*There is... no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 8:1). The rapture is part of the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus. He came to this sin-drenched world to pay the price for the salvation of sinners. He returned to heaven to go and prepare a place for us. He will come back to take us

away to our heavenly abode. If we remain in Him we will be worthy to escape the horrors of the coming tribulation on earth by way of the rapture. We don't have to despair at the knowledge of what is coming over the world. There is a wonderful element of good news in the prophetic word.

○ **A correct future expectation**

To believe in the pre-tribulation rapture gives one the assurance that you have a correct, biblical future expectation. It does not in any way contradict other biblical truths. This end-time perspective honours the Lord Jesus and recognises Him as the critical factor in the eschatology, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). The Christians should remain focused on Him and wait for His sudden appearance – not for the Antichrist. Those who deny Him will all remain behind after the rapture. The only reason why they will be delivered to the dictatorship of the Antichrist is because they rejected the redemption offered to them by the true Christ. What they will experience on earth will be a direct result of the seals broken by the Lamb in heaven. Never deny Jesus Christ His central position in biblical prophecies. To expect His imminent return, and to order your life accordingly, is a command which is meant to be a strong, positive motivation to all Christians of all ages.

○ **Correctly determining and prioritising works**

To expect the coming of the Lord Jesus before the tribulation period, guides your actions in the right direction. You prepare for His coming and not for the coming of the Antichrist. The concept of the rapture explicitly confronts you with your responsibility to give account of yourself before the judgement seat of Christ immediately after being caught up to heavenly places (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12).

If you lose sight of the possibility of Christ's imminent return you may lapse into complacency, spiritual inactivity, and even into sin (Mt. 24:48-51).

○ **Safeguard against materialism**

The fact that our works will be judged after the rapture, and

that only those with eternal value will be rewarded, is of great significance in helping us to devote ourselves to objectives that are higher than the material things of this perishable world. Paul says that after the foundation of salvation has been laid in our lives we must bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit and not revert to useless, materialistic works:

“...let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon... Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire” (1 Cor. 3:10-13).

People who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture do not concern themselves on how they will survive on earth after the revelation of the Antichrist and the occurring of the destructive signs of that time. They occupy themselves with the works of Christ: “I must do the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; the night comes when no one can work.”

○ Motivation for holiness

One of the strongest motivations that the promise of the rapture instills in a Christian is that of holiness. As members of the bridal church we should commit ourselves to the challenge of being presented to the heavenly Bridegroom as chaste virgins. That implies the responsibility to be vigilant by not allowing the Wicked One to pervert or corrupt our minds and lives (2 Cor. 11:2-3). We do not attain the standard of holiness by any human efforts, because Jesus Christ is our sanctification. “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). We should accept it in faith, trust the Lord for the power of the Holy Spirit, and live according to the principles of the new man.

○ Hope during trials and afflictions

In the shadows of trials, testing and affliction, when the prospects of life on earth are bleak, the belief in the rapture

is always the light at the end of the tunnel. Through countless sorrows and suffering, millions of people have clung desperately to the promise of the resurrection and our union with the Lord. It gave them strength to persevere, counting the things of this world, and even their own lives, as nothing that they may win eternity with Christ. So, be encouraged, lift up your afflicted spirit, expect the Lord, and know that your future is safe and sure in His hands.

o **A sense of destiny**

Like Abraham, we should regard ourselves as strangers and sojourners in this dark world that lies in the sway of the Evil One. Our future is not here, and for that reason we must always have the vision of the city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). In our pilgrimage through the world, we should always be people with a strong sense of destiny. When the Lord comes, He will take us to our eternal home in that heavenly city.

We should not identify ourselves with this world and become one with it in its materialism and spiritual depravity. That doesn't mean that we are poorly motivated and people without a mission while we are here. To the contrary! We realise that we must proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of the darkness into His marvellous light. Many people still walk in darkness; that is why we are in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we must shine as lights in the world.

While we are fulfilling our duty as the witnesses of Christ, we should always keep sight of the morning star that shines above the dark horizon of a troubled world. The message of the morning star is that the night is far spent, and that the day is at hand. Before Jesus will come as the Sun of Righteousness when every eye shall see Him, we will meet Him in the air as the bright and morning star.