

The Rapture of the Church

The Believer's Fondest Hope



Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

The Rapture of the Church:

THE BELIEVER'S FONDEST HOPE



INTRODUCTION

Many people have good reason to fear the events of the future. Believers, however, can rejoice because they will escape the dreadful events predicted for the last days. They know that any moment the rapture may snatch all genuine believers from the earth into the presence of Christ. The rapture is a distinct New Testament truth, taught by Christ in John 14 and, twenty years later, by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4. These two passages are central to our understanding how the present age will end. In John 14 we have **the solemn promise** of the Lord's return, in 1 Thessalonians 4 **a splendid picture** of His return. No prophecies need to be fulfilled before this event can transpire.

1A. THE PROMISE OF THE LORD'S RETURN: John 14:1-3

1b. The Savior's Precious Advice: 14:1

The disciples were perplexed and distressed about the Lord's prediction concerning His death and departure (13:31ff, cf. Luke 9:44f). They neither understood nor believed the Savior's words of comfort which have prompted believers through the ages to eagerly anticipate the return of Christ for them.

1c. Avoid fear: "Let not your heart be troubled"

2c. Acknowledge the Savior:

Trust in God is commendable but trust in Christ is indispensable because He is the only way to the Father (14:6). Personal acceptance of Christ is necessary to secure a place in the Father's house. Martin Luther is correct in observing that, "if he were not true God with the Father, this faith would be false and idolatrous" (Rudolf Stier, *The Words of Jesus*, 1879, V, 185).

2b. The Savior's Present Activity: 14:2

Christ made several promises to His disciples.

1c. Communion in the Father's house:

"In my Father's house are many mansions." While Christ and the disciples would soon be separated, in heaven, the Father's house, they would enjoy unbroken fellowship. The picture is that of an oriental home with courtyard and living quarters for all the family members, suggesting fellowship and intimacy.



2c. Construction of our Future Home:
Christ is presently constructing this abode.

1d. The designation of "mansion"

The word mansion (*mone*), like its old English counterpart "meant a dwelling place rather than a sumptuous large house" (*Dictionary of N.T. Theology*, III, 229). Perhaps the modern term "condominium" best gives the sense of the Greek word. ("I've got a 'condo' just over the hillton?")

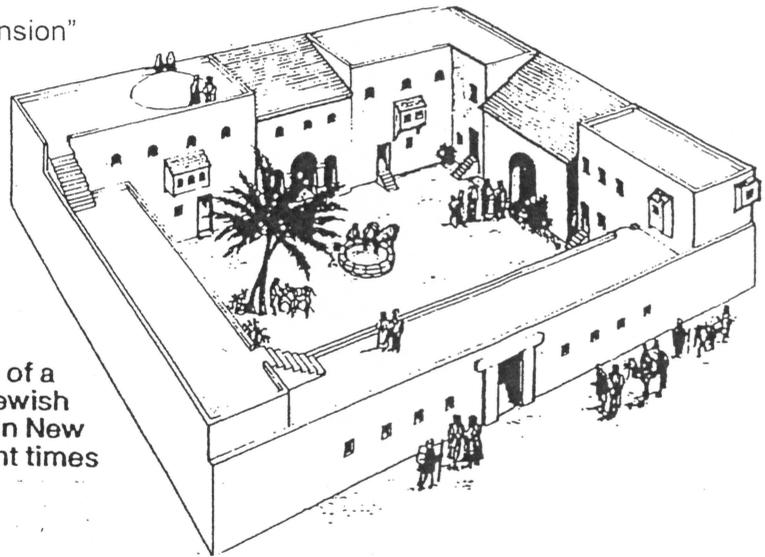
A Child of the King



An heir to a man-sion, a robe, and a crown.

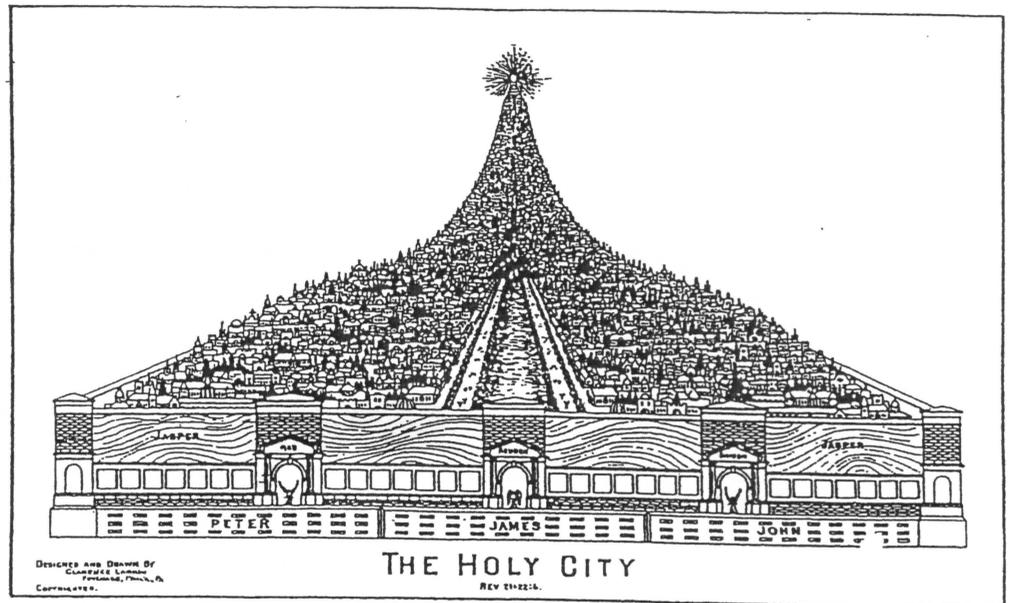


Model of a wealthy Jewish house in New Testament times



Eerdmans' Family Encyclopedia of the Bible, 214.

2d. The description of our eternal home:



Larkin, *Dispensational T.*
Page 148.

In Rev. 21:1-22:5 the actual description is given of our eternal home. It is a city, the New Jerusalem, with 12 foundations and 12 gates. Its dimensions, undoubtedly to be taken literally, stagger the imagination. "The city is laid out as a square. . . 1500 miles, its

length and width and height are equal" (21:16 NASB) For 2000 years Christ has been constructing the city in heaven while completing the Church on earth. When the last building block is added to the city in heaven and the last believer is added to the Church on earth, Christ will return. It only took God six days to create the universe. What a magnificent place our eternal home must be! In glorious fellowship we will share the city with the triune God, the holy angels and all the redeemed (Heb. 12:22-23).

Our Bridegroom has gone to the Father's house to prepare the Bride's eternal home. At any moment He could return for us. No intervening events or special signs need to be anticipated. The promise of the Lord's imminent return constitutes the next event in God's prophetic program.

3b. The Savior's Promised Appearance: 14:3

1c. The Reception of Believers

Christ promised an abundance of abiding places in the Father's house. He must depart for a very good reason, namely to prepare our eternal home. Then the Savior would come and take the Bride into His presence forever.

2c. The Return to the Father's House

It should be noted that the believer eventually would be where Christ is, in the Father's house, that is, the third heaven or paradise (2 Cor. 12:1-4). If the posttribulationists are correct, Christ returns, we meet Him in the air, descend with Him to earth and rule with Him forever. If this scenario is true, then Christ spoke an untruth in John 14. In the posttribulational view the believer never spends a single moment in heaven.

2A. THE PICTURE OF THE RETURN OF THE LORD: 1 Thess. 4:1-18

1b. The Problems:

In 1 Thessalonians 4 the Apostle Paul discusses three major problems:

1c. The problem of immorality vs. 1-9

The Thessalonians had been saved out of a very pagan society and needed to be reminded that Christians should avoid every form of sexual immorality (v. 3).

2c. The problem of indolence vs. 10-12

Some believers at Thessalonica apparently had given up their means of livelihood in eager anticipation of the Lord's return. Having forgotten the Lord's admonition to "occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13), they had become dependent upon other believers.

Martin Luther once said, "If I knew the Lord were coming back tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree today." The believer needs to live as if the Lord were coming back today. *He needs to work as if He were not retuning for 100 years.*

3c. The problem of ignorance v. 13

The Thessalonians were inattentive when Paul taught them about the rapture. They were ignorant but should not have been. They all had hoped to live until the rapture. But the Lord tarried and some of their loved ones had passed away. Would they miss out on future blessings? Would they not be resurrected until after the Millennium?

2b. The Preview: v. 14

The Thessalonians should not be concerned about their departed love ones: "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep." (NIV) Since every believer has identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, he is safe with Jesus and will accompany Him at the rapture.

1c. The designation of "sleep":

Contrary to the teaching of the cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the metaphor "sleep" describes the state not of the spirits and souls of individuals but of their bodies. When believers die, their bodies are placed in the ground. The term sleep is very fitting because they rest from their earthly labors and await the awakening of the resurrection. Interestingly, the English word cemetery is derived from the Greek *koimeterion*, that is, a place of sleep.

cemetery - -

κοιμητήρια

2c. The destiny of the saints and sinners:

The moment a believer dies he is present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). When the saint departs from this life, he is immediately present with Christ in heaven (Phil. 1:23) conducted there safely by the angels (Lk. 16:22).

When an unbeliever dies, his body is placed in the ground while his soul and spirit go immediately to the place of torment (Heb. 9:27). The Bible knows nothing of an intermediate state called purgatory or of a second chance for salvation after death.



3b. The Promise: v. 15

The doctrine of the rapture, Paul asserts, comes directly from the Lord, possibly revealed during Paul's three-year stay in Arabia (Gal. 1:17-18).

4b. The Picture: vs. 16-18

1c. The Return of the Lord, v. 16

Christ's coming will be heralded by three sounds:

1d. A shout: a cry of command.

2d. The voice of the archangel: Michael (Jude 9), perhaps in triumph.

3d. The trump of God: the last trump, a sound of deliverance, as God concludes His program for the Church. (1 Cor. 15:52; not to be confused with the seventh trump of Revelation 11:15).

2c. The Resurrection of the Dead, v. 16

At the return of the Lord the first event will be the resurrection of "the dead in Christ," that is, the Church age saints (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13).

3c. The Rapture of the Living, v. 17

The living believers will be "caught up together with them," or reunited with those who fell asleep in Christ. The changing of our bodies will be instantaneous, "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52).

The term "rapture" is not found in the Bible but comes from the Latin *rapio*—to seize or snatch—accurately conveying the idea of sudden removal from this earth.

4c. The Reunion in the Air, v. 17

At the rapture we will meet our Lord and loved ones in the air. We have missed our believing relatives and friends who preceded us. They revel in God's eternal presence, unperturbed by the succession of time. Withheld from them presently is anything that would detract from the bliss of heaven. On the other hand, their joy in heaven may be increased by knowing of the salvation of loved ones on earth (Luke 15:10).

5c. The Remaining with the Lord, v. 17

Being with the Lord forever includes returning with Him to heaven, rewards at the judgment seat, rejoicing at the marriage of the Lamb and ruling with Him during the Millennium and residing in the New Jerusalem for all eternity (Rev. 21:3; 22:1-5).

6c. The Reassurance from the Lord, v. 18

Their comforting hope was the descent of the Lord and their deliverance from the wrath of the tribulation period (1 Thess. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rom 5:9). Were the believer to face the tribulation, then Paul's concluding words would not be those of comfort but of caution.

CONCLUSION:

The believer's fondest hope is the any-moment return of the Lord. The rapture is:

- (1) ***A comforting hope:*** 1 Thess. 4:18 "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."
- (2) ***A purifying hope:*** 1 John 3:3 "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."
- (3) ***A blessed hope:*** Titus 2:13 "Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing . . ."
- (4) ***A sure hope:*** 2 Peter 1:19 "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed. . ."

THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

I THESSALONIANS 4

13 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.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 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 them which are asleep.

16 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:

17 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.

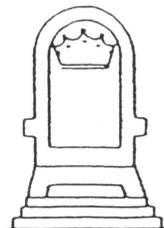
18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

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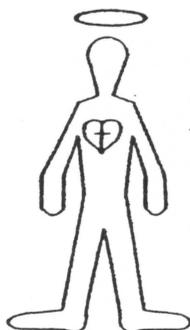
Death for Saints and Sinners

Death of the Believer

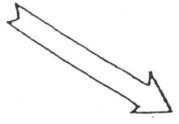
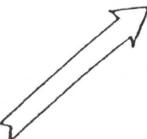


GLORY

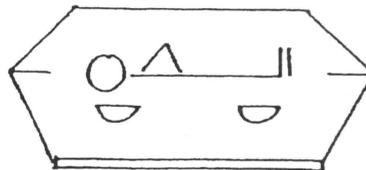
2 Cor. 5:8
"Absent from the body... Present with the Lord."



Immaterial
Material



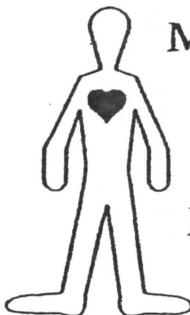
GRAVE



Death of the Unbeliever

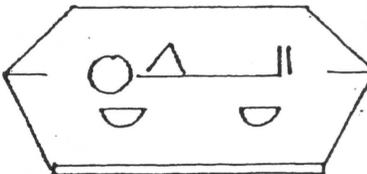
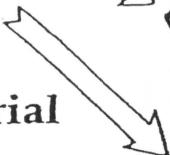
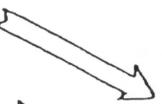
GRAVE

Heb. 9:27
"As it is appointed unto men once to die, But after this the Judgment"



Material

Immaterial



GEHENNA



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The Rapture



1

RETURN

5

REWARDS

II Cor. 5:10

6

Rev. 19:6-9

REJOICING

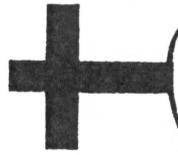
ACCOMPANIED BY
--SAINTS
--ANGELS

ANNOUNCED BY
--A SHOUT OR COMMAND
--VOICE OF THE
ARCHANGEL
--TRUMP OF GOD

WITH THE LORD
LOVED ONES

4

REUNION



2

RESURRECTION

OF CHURCH-AGE SAINTS

3

RAPTURE

7

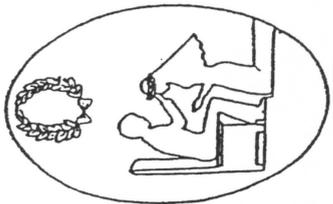
REASSURANCE

I THESSALONIANS 4.

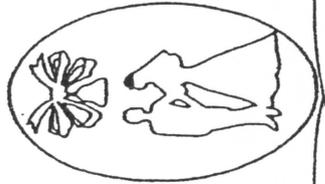
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Eschatology Timeline



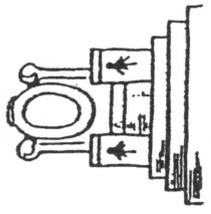
JUDGMENT
SEAT
OF CHRIST



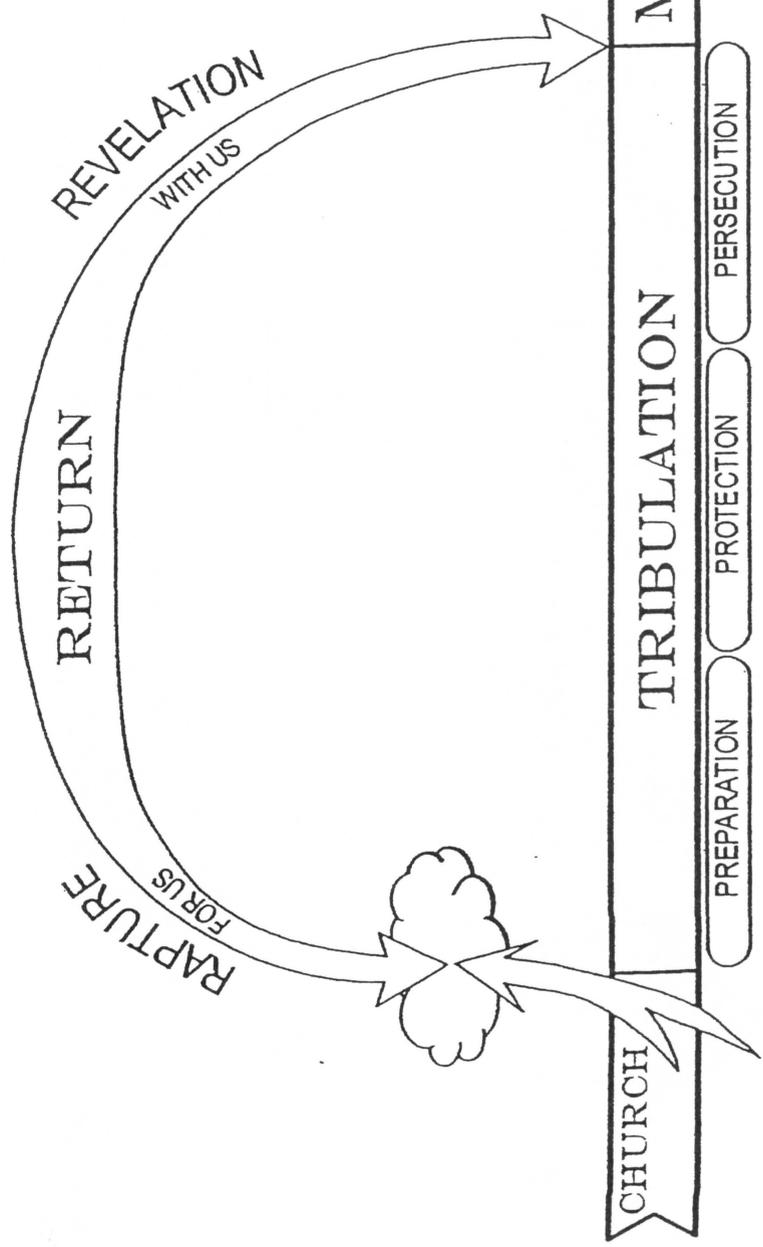
MARRIAGE OF
THE LAMB



CELEBRATION



GREAT WHITE
THRONE
JUDGMENT



CHURCH

MILLENNIUM

ETERNITY

PREPARATION PROTECTION PERSECUTION



666



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