The Rapture

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

God's Word teaches that the Rapture (commonly referred to as the first phase or stage of the SECOND COMING OF CHRIST) is the catching away from the earth, of all living saints and all who died in the Lord. The Rapture will take place before the Great Tribulation, and it can happen any time from now. "In a twinkling of an eye" - without a moment's warning, "the trumpet shall sound . . . 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." (John 14:1-3; Luke 21:34-36; I Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:4-9; II Thessalonians 2:5-7; Philippians 3:11,20,21; I John 3:1-3). The Rapture is the greatest event of all ages that the Church is waiting for. It is the catching away of all true believers in Christ to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:16). Christ, at the end of His first advent, was in like manner taken up in the air to go and prepare a place for His own. The parting promise from God was that Jesus would return in like manner to receive His 'Bride' to be with Him forever (Acts 1:9-11; John 14:1-3).

DESCRIPTION OF THE RAPTURE

The Rapture is not the same as the Second Coming of Christ. It is rather the first phase of the Second Advent. At the Rapture, Christ will appear in the air, invisible to the inhabitants of the earth. He will come to resurrect all

dead saints, who along with the living believers will put on immortality and shall be caught up to be with the Lord. It will happen “in the twinkling of an eye,” before the great and terrible day of the Lord, when the wrath of God will be poured down from His cup of indignation without mixture at the Great Tribulation (I Corinthians 15:52). The Second Advent will not take place until after great tribulation. The time of the Rapture is unknown, even by the angels (Matthew 24:36; II Thessalonians 2:1-5). It will be heralded by the voice of the archangel and the blowing of trumpets signalling the end of the Church age (I Thessalonians 4:13-15). The Rapture was a mystery, unknown to the Old Testament Saints and prophets. God had

underlined this great event in two different ways in the Scripture to assure us of its certainty. First, it was illustrated in Enoch and Elijah, the two living saints who did not taste death, but were translated in a moment of time (Genesis 5:24; II Kings 2:11,12). Second, it was illustrated in Christ in the New Testament. He died, was buried and resurrected. While he talked with His disciples on Mount Olivet, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out their sight (Acts 1:9-11).

The Rapture marks the end of the Church Age, also referred to as the Time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). This truth was veiled to the Saints of old. However, “known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.” In His mercy, He interrupted His programme for Israel with the Church Age. Christ the Messiah came for His people but they rejected Him (John 1:11), and God turned to the Gentiles to take a people for Himself. The Rapture will mark the end of this special period of grace. God will resume His programme with Israel immediately after the Rapture, thus ushering in the beginning of the seventieth week in Daniel’s prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27).

EVENTS SURROUNDING THE RAPTURE

It is very certain that Christ is coming back again for "He that shall come will come and will not tarry." He assured the Church of the certainty of His coming (John 14:1-3). Angels proclaimed it; apostles and saints throughout the ages preached it. The signs of His coming are daily being fulfilled.

Christ answering a pertinent question asked by his disciples on "...what shall be the sign of thy coming ...?" (Matthew 24:5-12,30-39), gave in details what would be happening on earth shortly before His coming (Matthew 24:1-12,30-39). Many false prophets and false Christs shall arise, deceiving many unsuspecting believers. There will be wars and rumours of war. There will be international wars, famines (global economic recession), pestilences, earthquakes in divers places. There will be persecution of Christ's followers and some cases of martyrdom. Backsliding from the faith will increase. More people will be given to pleasure and merry making than those who seek the Lord. The scripture also predicts the conditions, characterized by a system of denials that will be prevalent within the visible Church, shortly before Christ's return. There will be a denial of God (II Timothy 3:1-5), of Christ (I John 2:18; 4:3), of His return (II Peter 3:3,4), of the faith, of true Christian living (Jude 18) and of authority. These sings are being fulfilled before our very eyes.

READINESS FOR THE RAPTURE

To qualify to partake in the Rapture; one must be born again, living a holy life, walking daily in the light, working the works of God, watching daily, praying always with all prayer and maintaining these experiences at the time of the Rapture or at the time of death as the case may be (John 3:3; Hebrews 12:14; John 4:35-38; 9:1-4; I Thessalonians 4:16,17). Practically all the signs preceding the Second Advent of Christ are fulfilled, telling us that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is very close and the time of the Rapture is much closer. Sinning Church members will not be able to go at the

Rapture, though saved before and baptized in water. Careless and compromising preachers will miss the Rapture too; it does not matter what Christian work they did in the past. All such people together with backsliders and sinners outside the Church will be left behind to face the Great Tribulation.

Knowing that these things shall be, that the Rapture will occur unannounced and very imminent, what manner of persons ought believers to be? Sinners are to make haste to repent and embrace Christ, as their Saviour. The saints of God are to watch and pray lest that day should come upon them unprepared (Matthew 24:42-44).

The Resurrection of the Dead

I Corinthians 15:50-55

God's Word teaches the resurrection of the dead as clearly as the immortality of the soul. Every individual who has ever lived will be resurrected, some to honour and glory, and others to shame and everlasting contempt (Job 19:25-27; Psalm 71:20; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28,29; I Corinthians 15:12-57; I Thessalonians 4:13-16; Hebrews 6:1,2; Philippians 3:8-11; Revelation 20:4,6,12,13).

The resurrection of the dead is a cardinal and an important doctrine of the Bible. All who die in this world will undergo physical resurrection before the Great White Throne Judgment. This doctrine shows that there will be a resurrection of the body, joined with the soul, to meet the LORD either in peace and joy or meet Him as a Judge in condemnation, eternal punishment and torment of hell fire.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE DOCTRINE

Jesus, the Prophet come from God, declared in John 5:25, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." The fact of the resurrection of the just and unjust runs through the teaching of Jesus Christ (John 6:40; Matthew 16:21; 22:23-32). Job spoke of his eyes and flesh seeing God after worms have destroyed his body (Job 19:25-27). Isaiah spoke of the earth casting out the dead (Isaiah 26:14-19). Daniel spoke of the awakening of many that sleep in the dust, some to everlasting

life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2). In like manner spoke David (Psalm 16:10; 17:15). Old and New Testament saints (Hebrews 11:35; Mat 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-18; Luke 24:1-49; John 19-21; Acts 17:18,32; I Peter 1:3; 3:21). Even Herod the wicked king and the generality of the people of his day believed in the resurrection of the dead (Mark 6:14-16).

THE SOUL AND THE RESURRECTION

In the intervening period between death (when the body and soul are separated) and the resurrection, one may ask, "Where is the soul?" The soul of a saint of God goes immediately to meet God in heaven. The repentant thief on the cross received forgiveness and assurance from Jesus: "Today shall thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). Righteous Lazarus died and was "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom", where he was comforted (Luke 16:19-31). Stephen at death said, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God" ready to receive him (Acts 7:54-60). Paul was "willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (Philippians 1:21-23). Many other references of scripture confirm that the soul of the saint will rejoice in God's presence after death (II Corinthians 5:1-8; Ecclesiastes 12:1,7). But when a sinner dies, his soul proceeds to hell. In hell fire, he is conscious, he can see, he can feel and he can hear (Luke 16:19-31).

The form to be associated with the resurrected body of the just is exemplified by the glorified body that Jesus, the first fruit, had after his resurrection (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:11-20,24-31; I John 3:2). All resurrected bodies will be immortal (Daniel 12:2; Mark 9:42-48). The resurrected bodies of saints will possess different degrees of glory. "There is one glory of the

sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead" – (I Corinthians 15:39-54).

THE TIMING OF THE RESURRECTION

The timing for the resurrection to life of the just and resurrection to judgment of the unjust is well spelt out in the scriptures in accordance with the ordained programme of God. The resurrection of life (John 5:28-29), resurrection of the just (Luke 14:13-14), a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35), or the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6) has four phases:

1. The resurrection of Christ, the first fruit (I Corinthians 15:3,4,12,20,23).

2. The resurrection of the Church-age saints at the Rapture (I Thessalonians 4:13-16).

3. The resurrection of the tribulation period saints (Revelation 20:3-5).

4. The resurrection of Old Testament saints at the second advent of Christ to the earth (Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19).

All the saints of God that ever died shall rise in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6). The second resurrection is still part of God's programme, but it deals with the unsaved dead. It is the resurrection to damnation (John 5:29). Partakers of this resurrection shall be punished with eternal torment in the lake of fire (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15). There is a difference of one thousand years between the first and second resurrections (Revelation 20:5-15).

But just as in the Early Church when Hymenæus and Philetus erred about the resurrection (II Timothy 2:17), there are many false teachings today also, such as annihilation and purgatory. Nevertheless, the doubt or error

of man cannot alter God's timetable. Whether men repent and get saved or not, just as Jesus' resurrection did not depend of the faith of men, the dead shall surely rise (Acts 23:8; II Timothy 2:15-18; I Corinthians 15:12-23; Romans 3:3,4).

The challenge is for you as an individual to make sure you are ready for the first resurrection, so that the second death will have no power over you. To partake of the first resurrection, there must first be a spiritual resurrection here on earth. As a sinner dead in sins and trespasses, you must first be

made alive by the Spirit of life from above, and brought in the newness and holiness of life (I Thessalonians 4:14,16; II Corinthians 5:17-19; Hebrews 12:14).

The Great Tribulation

Matthew 24:15-22

God's Word teaches that the Great Tribulation will occur after the Rapture; it will be a time of terrible suffering on earth. It is also referred to as the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Matthew 24:21,22,29; Revelation 9:1-6; Mark 13:19; II Thessalonians 2:3-10; Revelation 13). During this time, the Antichrist will take possession of this world for a reign of terror. He will not be a system or organization but a person - a supernatural, diabolical being, in the form of a man who will blaspheme and proclaim himself to be God (Daniel 8:23-25; II Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 13:1-10). The Marriage Supper of the Lamb will take place above while the tribulation continues on earth (Revelation 19:1-10).

The great tribulation is described as the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7-9) "... great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21); "...the day of the Lord" (Joel 1:15); "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness" (Joel 2:1,2); "... wasteness and desolation" (Zephaniah 1:14-18); "... a time of trouble" (Daniel 12:1). The purpose of the great tribulation is to make Israel suffer so that they can be ready to cry to the Messiah (the Lord Jesus Christ Whom they at present reject) to come back to them. It is also to judge the unbelieving men and women of all ages (Zech. 12:10,11; 13:1-9; 14:12,13).

THE TIMING OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The Bible shows that the great tribulation will take off after the rapture of the Church, and will last for seven years. It will end at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ when He alights on Mount Olives (Zech. 14:4; Matthew 25:31; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Jude 14,15; Acts 1:11). At this time He will settle on earth (Jerusalem) for a thousand-year reign called the Millennium (Revelation 20:4,6). This means that the great tribulation is between the Rapture and the Millennium. That is, it is during the 70th or last of Daniel's 70 weeks (Daniel 9:26,27; Matthew 24:15-31; II Thessalonians 2:3-8). It is after the Rapture because God will not like His children to suffer the great tribulation, its judgments and destructions. He saved Noah (a preacher of righteousness) and his family before destroying the world with flood (Genesis 6:8-10; 7:1-13,16-24; 8:15-22). He rescued Lot (who was vexed with the filthy conversation of Sodom) and his family before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah with fire (Genesis 19:10-29; II Peter 2:4-9). So God will take away His children from the earth before the great tribulation begins. The great tribulation reaches its peak of destructions, judgements, terrors, frightening wars and desolation from the middle of the 7 year duration and ends with Christ's Second Advent. This is when the Antichrist breaks his 7 year peace covenant with Israel and attacks Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-22; Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:6-9).

EVENTS AROUND THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The great tribulation is described as being full of woes, judgements, famines, bloody wars, explosions, plagues, terror, men calling for mountains to fall upon them, anguish, earthquakes, burning rocks falling from heaven upon the earth and scorching it, seas polluted, cattle and vegetation destroyed, millions dying from catastrophes, "as if a man flees from a lion and bear meet him ... he leans on the wall and the serpent bites him." Beasts and men will be in trouble; even mighty men will weep.

“Neither their gold and silver (riches) will be able to deliver them.” Whole cities and nations will be under great distress, perplexity, seas and waves roaring, hypertension, and confusion as the powers of the heavens are shaken by God (Amos 5:18,19;

Isaiah 2:19-21; 24:1-3,6,19; Mark 13:24; Joel 1:15; Luke 21:25,26; Matthew 24:11-26; Revelation 19:1-21). The great tribulation opens with the rapture of the church. Then comes the rise of the Antichrist (II Thessalonians 1:7,8). He will win nations, some by war while others concede authority to him (Daniel 7:8,24-25; Revelation 17:8-14). The “false prophet” popularizes him, making men to worship even his image. No one buys or sells without the mark or number (6-6-6) of the beast (Revelation 13:1-18; 14:9-11). While these go on, saints receive rewards in Heaven (Revelation 2:17,25-28; 3:12). There will be great apostasy, more of false religions and increase in the power of the devil who will be driven down to the earth (II Thessalonians 2:3-12; Revelation 12:10-12; 13:2,12-18). God’s planned judgements will fall on men in a divine sequence producing supernatural phenomena and demonic creatures unknown to man. These will come as Christ opens seven seals of a scroll on which they occur, then the blowing of 7 trumpets each a harbinger of more woes. 144,000 Jews will be sealed and raptured as well as countless tribulation saints from all over the world (Revelation 7:1-17). Saints in tribulation will be martyred (Revelation 6:9-11; 14:13; 20:4-6). A mighty angel appears with rainbow on his hand, a little book opened and swears that “there should be time no longer” (Revelation 10:1-11). After this the high point of catastrophes called “the great tribulation” begins for the remaining 3½ years (Revelation 11:1-19; Daniel 12:1-7; Jeremiah 30:6,7). Jerusalem falls to the Antichrist, and Israel is defeated (Matthew 24:15-22; Daniel 11:40-45). Israel runs for refuge in old Edom (Revelation 12:6,13-17; Isaiah 16:1-5). There will be more woes of the earth through the pouring out on it of the seven vials (Revelation 15:1-6; 16:21; 18:1-24). God’s two

witnesses will appear, be killed and later resurrect (Revelation 11:1-12). The marriage supper of the Lamb takes place (Revelation 19:1-10), and saints prepare to return to earth with Christ (Jude 14,15; Revelation 19:11).

The scope of the tribulation will cover Israel, the Middle East and the whole earth. The powers at work will be (a) The Antichrist called Beast, king of the north, the Syrian, the Assyrian, the king of Babylon, the Extortioner, the man of sin, the little horn, the prince that shall come, a king of fierce countenance and understanding dark sayings, the spoiler, the son of perdition, and that wicked one empowered specially by satan (II Thessalonians 2:1-10; Daniel 7:8,24; 8:9,23; 9:26,27; 11:36-45; Revelation 13:1-18;1 4:9-11; Isaiah 10:20-27; 30:18-33; Micah 5:3-15; Isaiah 14:4; 16:4; Daniel 7:11), (b) The False Prophet (Revelation 13:1-19; 14:9-11; 19:20), (c) God's powerful judgments (Joel 1:15; 2:12; Amos 5:18; Rev 4:1 - 19:21), and (d) The devil (Revelation 12:7-17; 20:1,2; II Thessalonians 2:9).

THE SAINTS AND THE GREAT TRIBULATION

While terrors are unleashed on the earth, the saints will be (a) receiving rewards (I Corinthians 3:11-15; Luke 14:14; I Corinthians 9:24-27), (b) Rejoicing and feasting (Revelation 19:6-9), (c) Worshipping God with the angels (Revelation 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 4:5,7), and (d) preparing for the second Advent with Christ upon white horses (Jude 14,15; Revelation 19:11-14; Matthew 25:31). After the great tribulation, Jesus will come back to the earth to establish His millennial reign. Then Israel will repent and be saved (Zech. 14:1-8; Micah 1:3,4; Romans 11:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; Isaiah 66:7,8). When Jesus Christ comes, He will destroy the Antichrist and the false prophet, and cast them into the lake of fire, while destroying their armies at the battle of Armageddon (valley of Megiddo). Then an angel will bind the devil and cast him into the bottomless pit for a period of one thousand years (Ezekiel 38-39; Revelation 20:1-3; 19:11-21).

The most important question is this: Are you ready for the judgment day? “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” - Luke 21:36.

The Second Coming of Christ

Revelation 1:7

God's Word teaches that the Second Coming of Christ will be just as literal and visible as His going away, and He is coming to execute judgment upon the ungodly. He will also, then, set up His Kingdom and reign on this present earth for a thousand years (Zech. 14:3,4; Matthew 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 13:24-37; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:8; Jude 14,15).

CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S COMING

The Holy Spirit through the apostles confirmed that Christ shall appear "the second time" (Hebrews 9:28), and would then reward His faithful servants with crowns of glory, praise and honour and His adversaries with fiery indignation (I Peter 5:4; 1:7; Hebrews 10:27). James the apostle also encouraged believers: "Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth near." The angel of God confirmed that "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). The prophecy in Isaiah 9:6 that the government (of the whole world) would be on Christ's shoulder, is yet to be fulfilled. Also some prophecies in Isaiah 61 concerning Christ were only partially fulfilled at His first coming. Christ Himself confirmed in Luke 4:21 that "this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." The rest of the prophecies in that chapter would be fulfilled after His second advent.

The exactitude with which the old time prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ were fulfilled points to the infallibility of the Scriptures and to the certainty of those prophecies concerning His second advent. Prophecies on His virgin birth, details of His earthly life, His death and resurrection were all fulfilled to the letter, and so would those relating to His second coming. Apart from the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning Christ, other divine purposes which the second advent would fulfil include (i) the comfort of the church (John 14:1-3; 16:20-22); (ii) the restoration of Israel to her sovereignty as prophesied in the scripture (Isaiah 32:18; 33:20-24); (iii) the judgment of the earth (Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:22); (iv) the renovation of the earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 Revelation 21:1-5); (v) the restoration of all things according to the desire of God (Romans 8:20-23; Jeremiah 12:4,11).

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

The scriptures abound with evidence that speaks of the certainty of Christ's second coming. Our Lord Jesus spoke of His return several times, once leading the disciples to enquire about the signs that would herald that certain event. A study of the scriptures indicates that certain prophecies concerning Christ, and some future programme of God are not yet fulfilled and would only be, after the second advent of Christ. However, all the signs preceding the Second Advent are being fulfilled daily. Going through the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25, the following signs of His coming are clear. Jesus Himself said, there would be deception, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, anti-Semitism (Mark 13:9,13), offences, betrayals, hatred, false prophets, lawlessness and martyrdom (Matthew 24:4-13,24). He said the impact of the second coming would be as universal as when "the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth unto the west." It would

make “all the tribes of the earth to mourn.” They would be deep in spiritual lethargy and indifference as was the case in the time of Noah’s flood (Matthew 24:27,30,37).

VICTORY AT HIS COMING

The greatest event that will precede the second coming of Christ is the Rapture, which lies in the valley between the mountains of Christ’s first and second coming. It is a part of the mystery of the church which in the Old Testament age “was not made known unto the sons of men” as it was

revealed in the New Testament to “His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” The Rapture is however different from the second coming. The two events are distinct and separated by seven years. The second coming refers to Christ’s coming to the earth to live as He did in the first coming, to be seen by every eye. In the Rapture, Christ would not come to the earth but stop in the air where the saints will meet him. So only believers shall see Him then. When Christ meets the saints in the air, He will take them to heaven where they would remain for the period of the Great Tribulation. It is during this seven-year period that the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:18,19), and the judgment of saints for reward shall take place in heaven (I Corinthians 3:12-15; II Corinthians 5:10). In the second coming, however, He will come to the earth to live and fulfil a definite part of God’s timetable for the earth and man. Christ shall then come with the saints raptured seven years earlier. Whereas the Rapture can take place any moment without warning, the second coming cannot happen until after both the Rapture and the Great Tribulation.

In His Second Coming, Christ will reign on the earth for one thousand years with the saints. Christened the Millennial Reign, Christ’s rule shall be characterized by unprecedented peace, prosperity and blessing on the

earth (Isaiah 11:1-9). Satan, the author of heartache, strife and contention would for the duration of Christ's Millennial Reign (Revelation 20:23). Satan and his cohorts will mobilise forces to fight Christ and to frustrate His coming again to establish the Millennial Reign, just in the same way he used Herod to stop Christ's survival at His first coming. He was defeated and again he will be defeated. The battle against Christ and His host is called the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:1-4). There will be a great and terrible slaughter of the armies of the Antichrist gathered from the nations of the earth through the efforts of the evil spirits sent out over the earth by Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet (Revelation 17:13,14). This Satan's last attempt to wrongfully take the Kingdom from Christ will fail.

The world and the church are called to prepare for this great event. The world is admonished to repent and come to Christ before the day of the Lord (John 3:1-8). The Church as a bride is called to be ready, holy, spotless, watchful, prayerful and busy preaching His word until He comes (Hebrews 12:14; I John 3:1-3; II Timothy 4:1,2; Ephesians 5:25-27).

"Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him" - (Revelation 1:7).

Christ's Millennial Reign

Isaiah 9:6,7

God's Word teaches that Christ's Millennial Reign is the 1000 years literal reign of Jesus on earth, which will be ushered in by the coming of Jesus back to earth with ten thousands of His saints. At this time He will judge the nations that dwell upon the face of the earth (Jude 14,15; II Thessalonians 1:7-10). During this time the devil will be bound (Revelation 20:2,3). It will be a reign of peace and blessing (Isaiah 11:6-9; Hosea 2:18; Zech. 14:9-20; Isaiah 2:2-4). The word millennium is a compound derivative from Latin which simply translates into a thousand years. Thus, Christ's millennial reign is a thousand years of the full manifestation of the glory of God. It is sequel to the Great Tribulation which is a period of intense suffering for all on earth. According to God's revealed timetable, the Church will suddenly be taken away by Christ (I Thessalonians 4:13-18) in a mysterious event known as the Rapture. Then will follow seven years of great suffering of sinners left behind (Matthew 24:21-22). At the end of this period, Jesus will come again with the Church to establish His government (Jude 14). The government of this world, at that time, will resist His coming. But the Lord will overcome at the battle of Armageddon

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(Revelation 19:15-21). Satan will be bound and imprisoned for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-3). The kingdom of this world will then become the kingdom of our God and His Christ (Revelation 11:15; Daniel 2:44).

ESSENCE OF THE MILLENNIAL REIGN

Christ's millennial reign will be a time when the purposes of God will be fully realised on earth, as a theocracy (government of the state under the firm control and direction of God) will be established. Christ, as the divine Representative of the Godhead will at this time, speak and act for God. He will be given a universal and glorious dominion, with absolute power to govern (Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 45:4; Isaiah 11:4; Psalm 72:4). It will be the responsibility of Christ at this age to announce God's will and law (Isaiah 2:3,4; 33:21,22; 42:4; Acts 3:22). The millennial reign will be a manifestation of the promise God gave David, that his throne would have no end. Christ, as David's Son after the flesh, will thus establish a glorious house and throne, over an equally glorious kingdom (II Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 72; Isaiah 11:10). Divine mercy, divine goodness and divine truth will be displayed through Christ even as the glory associated with His deity, omniscience, omnipotence and righteousness will be fully made manifest.

The Gentile world system (humanity without Christ) as it is at present organised under the direct influence of satan, will thus become an outmoded setup. In its stead comes Christ's millennial reign void of sin and all forms of unrighteousness. Satan, having been defeated and bound, will lack the power to induce people to sin (Revelation 20:1-6; Matthew 19:28; Ephesians 5:25-27).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MILLENNIUM

What are the components of the millennium? One, the millennium shall witness an unprecedented era of national and individual peace. There will be a complete cessation of the scourge of wars, as the kingdoms of the world will be fused together under the reign of Christ. The ensuing peace will herald an era of economic boom and prosperity. The beauty of this age is that hitherto antagonistic and irreconcilable foes will henceforth co-habit as "sheep and lambs." Two, there will be joy unspeakable (Isaiah

9:3,4; Jeremiah 30:18,19). Three, there will be holiness (Ezekiel 43:7-12; Isaiah 1:26,27). Four, there will be glory (Isaiah 24:23; 60:1-9). Five, there will be comfort (Isaiah 12:1-2; Jeremiah 3:23-25). Six, justice will abound (Isaiah 9:7; 11:5; 42:1-4). Seven, there will be full knowledge (Isaiah 11:1-2,9; 41:19-20; 54:13; Habakkuk. 2:14). Additionally, the following benefits will also accrue to the inhabitants of the age. One, the original curse placed upon mankind at creation will be removed, resulting in abundant productivity to the earth (Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:9; 65:25). Two, sickness becomes a thing of the past (Isaiah 33:24; Jeremiah 30:17; Ezekiel 34:16). And three, healing will naturally be available to the deformed (Isaiah 29:17-19). Against the background of the above, there shall be preservation of life (Isaiah 41:8-14; 62:8,9; Jeremiah 32:27; Ezekiel 34:27; Joel 3:16-17; Amos 9:15; Zech. 14:10,11), and complete freedom from all forms of oppression that at present ravage mankind (Isaiah 14:3-6; 42:6,7; 49:8,9; Zech. 9:11,12).

PARTAKERS OF THE MILLENNIAL REIGN

Who are those expected to partake in Christ's millennial reign? One, the glorious Church (Ephesians 5:25-27). This will exclude the apostate church that is married to the world (Revelation 17:1-7). Two, the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3). These are those who recognise and admit their state of spiritual poverty (life on earth without assurance of salvation) and are willing to turn away from sin and surrender to Christ. And three, the watchful, prayerful saints (Hebrews 9:28; Matthew 25:34).

Have you been washed in the Blood of the Lamb? Have you be made "king and priest unto God" through faith in His name (Revelation 1:5,6)? "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" - I John 3:3.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15

God's Word teaches that the Great White Throne Judgment is when God finally judges all (the living and the dead, small and great) who have ever lived on the face of the earth, according to their works. This is after the Millennium. At this time the final judgment will be held. All those from all ages, who have not yet been judged (believers' judgment, as sinners, was accomplished by Christ on the cross - John 5:24; 3;17-19) will stand before God at this time. The devil and his angels are judged at this time also and sent to the lake of fire forever (Daniel 12:2,3; Matthew 10:15; 11:21-24; 12:41,42; John 5:28,29; Romans 2:5-9,12,16; 14:12; II Peter 2:9; Jude 6; I Corinthians 6:1-4; Acts 10:42; Revelation 20:11-15).

In this teaching on the events of the last days or eschatology, the Lord is graciously unveiling the curtain of eternity to reveal to humanity His programme for this present evil world. The doctrine of The Great White Throne Judgment opens our eyes to see a time to come when all wicked/ungodly people (the living and the dead, small and great who have neglected God's salvation) will face the final judgment of the Living God (Romans 14:12). We caution that the teaching must not be approached with doubtful disputations or viewed as fable or fiction but a fact. These are true sayings of God written for our learning and admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11; Revelation 19:9).

CLARIFICATION ON THE JUDGMENT

Revelation 20:11

The Bible clearly presents the order of events preceding the Great White Throne Judgment and constantly enjoins, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 2:7). At the close of the millennium, the devil will be released from “the bottomless pit” (Revelation 20:3), and he will deceive thousands of people and gather them to fight against the King (Christ) and His saints. This is the battle of Gog and Magog. But at the end of the battle, when the rebellious have been killed and destroyed by the fire of His indignation which comes down from heaven, the devil will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-10). After this, Great White Throne Judgment will be set. God will sit on a throne so white, magnificent and terrible that the whole earth and (atmospheric) heaven will tremble and flee from Him. All those who died unrepentant from the time of Adam till the time of this judgment will be resurrected (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15) This is called the second resurrection. And they will all stand before God to account for their deeds. This final judgment of sinners (the living and the dead, small and great) is known as the Great White Throne Judgment (Psalm 9:17; Daniel 7:9-10; Matthew 11:20-24; 10:15; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15). The Bible is replete with pointers to this great and notable day of the Lord (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 11:21-24; 12:41,42; Romans 2:15,16; II Peter 2:9; Jude 14,15; I John 4:17).

CANDIDATES FOR THE JUDGMENT

Revelation 20:12,13

The world is corrupt and polluted. Man is rebellious and disobedient against God. Right from the beginning, God sighed for the acts of man, “for every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart has been evil continually” (Genesis 6:5,6). But this will not continue forever. No! for “He hath appointed A DAY in which He will judge the world righteousness” (Acts

17:30,31). But everyone whose name is written in the Book of Life will escape the Great White Throne Judgment, since his judgment as a sinner was borne by Christ on the Cross (John 3:17-19,30; Romans 8:1; John 5:24). Besides, "God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:9). "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire

and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). That great congregation will consist of (i) all categories of sinners (dead of alive) from Adam to date. They will be judged for neglecting the salvation of God (Hebrews 2:3); (ii) all backsliders in all dispensations (Exodus 32:33); (iii) all who deny the deity of Jesus Christ (John 3:18,36). These are the sceptics, the atheists, idol worshippers and all people who neither depend on Christ's atonement as the final sacrifice for sin nor accept His Lordship; (iv) all religious hypocrites who "...are like unto white sepulchres which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27).

COMPLETENESS OF THE JUDGMENT

Revelation 20:14,15

Death has been an invidious age-long enemy of God's creation. It is Satan's principal messenger of destruction and instrument of cruelty. At the Great White Throne Judgment, death will be stripped of its power, and cast into the lake fire. Consequently, there shall be no more death (Revelation 20:14; I Corinthians 15:26). Hell, the temporal abode of the souls of the wicked, will likewise be emptied and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). This old earth which has been polluted with sin, defiled by Satan, demons and sinners shall be burnt up (II Peter 3:10). The heavens (atmospheric heavens or skies) which have similarly been polluted by Satan and wicked

spirits shall be dissolved and “the elements thereof shall melt with fervent heat” (II Peter 3:7,10-12). God will judge (a) all unrighteous deeds of men (I John 5:17; Romans 11:28-32) - every unrighteous act, feeling or imagination that was not cleansed by the blood of the Lambs will be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment; (b) the secret deeds of men (Matthew 10:26; Romans 2:16; Hebrews 4:13; II Chronicles 16:9) - every secret bribery, immorality, pornography, drunkenness, abortion, etc, will be revealed. “And the books (of record) were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works.” There is a record in heaven for everything done under the sun, “whether it be good or bad” (I Corinthians 5:10b); (c) the words of men (Matthew 12:36,37; 5;22; Ephesians 4:29,31; 5:4). “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” Every gossip, backbiting and slander against our neighbours, fellow believers or church leaders, will be judged. All foolish, unedifying, corrupt, graceless and abusive words against others will be accounted for at the Great White Throne Judgment. “For by they words thou shalt be justified and by they words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37). God will judge every unrepentant sinner or backslider (Proverbs 11:21). God’s judgment will be fair, without partiality or respect of persons (Romans 2:2-12; Job 34:18-22). He will judge the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the highly respected and the most despised. “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible which regardeth not persons nor taketh rewards (bribe)” (Deuteronomy 10:17). The righteous Judge of the universe will receive no bribe to pervert judgment on that great day. But “in righteousness He doth judge and make war” (Revelation 19:11). God is without partiality. “WHOSOEVER was NOT found WRITTEN in the BOOK OF LIFE was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

The lake of fire is a place of indescribable suffering and punishment for all those who shall be condemned at the Great White Throne Judgment. The punishment of the wicked will be grievous, comfortless and endless in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever and they have no rest day nor night” (Revelation 14:11). Escape through Christ’s grace!

The New Heaven and the New Earth

Revelation 21:1-27

God's Word teaches that the New Heaven and the New Earth "wherein dwelleth righteousness," will be made by God and the redeemed shall dwell with God forever. This present earth which has been polluted by sin will pass away after the "Great White Throne Judgement" (Psalm 102:25-26; Isaiah 51:6; 65:17; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; II Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1). No unclean thing will be there. We shall know one another, our knowledge having been perfected. There will be no more curse upon anything. There will be no more night; the glory of the Lord will be the light thereof (Isaiah 66:22; II Peter 3:12,13; I Corinthians 13:12; I John 3:2,3; Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5).

The present age in which we live is referred to in scriptures as the last days (Hebrews 1:1,2). This age is very significant in the plan of God as it ushers us into another important series of events often called eschatology. Also called the church age, our present age is marked by evil, the dominion of Satan, darkness, ungodliness, lust, murder, lying and all manner of sin (Ephesians 6:12; Galatians 1:4). The church is not left out. There is denial of God, Christ, faith, sound doctrine and Christian living (I Timothy 4:1-4; II Timothy 4:3,4; 3:1-8). The land is under a curse (Genesis 3:17); the devil and all his angles walk to and fro the whole earth. The atmospheric heavens are polluted by the activities of Satan. The believers today groan under the harsh and hard conditions of the earth. They look forward to a change - a

new heaven and new earth wherein dwell righteousness and holiness. God has the ultimate plan to judge sinners. “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into lake of fire.”

A PICTURE OF THE HOLY CITY

Revelation 21:1-5,9-23

With the final judgment of sinners, God’s plan is to replace this polluted evil earth and atmospheric heavens with a new earth and a new heaven that will match His glory, holiness and righteousness (Revelation 21:1-8). “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: the former shall not be remembered, nor come in to mind” (Isaiah 65:17). This gives a good picture of what shall become of the present earth and heavens. All what we may call beautiful edifices and empires today will melt away in fervent heat because “the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store; reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (II Peter 3:7,10-14). The glories of men and all the so called “wonders” of the world shall not stand this fervent heat. Herein is wisdom: Believers should lay up their treasures in heaven, not on earth “where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal” (Matthew 6:20). This new creation is entirely free from any taint of sin, and therefore the consequences and effect of sin are absent. Here there is neither death, sorrow, pain, tears, nor separation from God (II Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:4). As God created the present heavens and earth, so will He create the new heavens and a new Jerusalem as its capital. This is the capital of the eternal state called the “Bride” because of its virgin beauty, unstained with sin. Here Christ and all the saints from all ages will reside forevermore. Indeed all things will be new. “Behold, I make all things new.” This is the eternal destiny of the saints from all ages. This is the place Jesus spoke about. “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 14:3). We shall appear with Him in glory and be like Him (Revelation 21:3; Colossians 3:4).

The Holy City, New Jerusalem, is a material city not a mystical one. Its beauty is beyond human description. About 15.000 miles in length and a breath and height of about 15.000 miles, the streets are made of pure gold as clear as glass. With walls of jasper and its twelve foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones, it has twelve gates of twelve pearls. The entire city wall is pure gold, as clear as glass. This is a city without any temple. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. "The city has not need of sun, neither of moon to shine in it: the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." The redeemed of all the earth shall bring their glory

and honour into the city. This is a city whose gates are never shut (Revelation 21:16-26). The pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb. The tree of life by the sides of this river bear twelve manner of fruits monthly. The fruits and leaves are for the healing of the nations. "And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:1-5). Words are insufficient to describe this new creation.

SCREENING IN THE HOLY CITY

Revelation 2:6-8,27

The life of the redeemed in this eternal city will be glorious. It will be a life of fellowship (I Corinthians 13:12), rest (Revelation 14:13), full knowledge (I Corinthians 13:12), holiness (Revelation 21:27), joy (Revelation 21:4),

service (Revelation 22:3), abundance (Revelation 21:6), glory (II Corinthians 4:17), and worship (Revelation 19:1; 7;9-12]).

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). There is punishment for the unrepentant and coward who would rather chose to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. They will suffer torment eternally in the lake of fire. We have only one life to life (Hebrews 9:27). Therefore the believer must remain faithful and steadfast in the Lord, the sinner must repent and be saved and the backslider must come back home and be restored. Negligence of this so great salvation will be unfortunate. We should not miss the glories of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

ENTRANCE INTO THE HOLY CITY

Revelation 21:24-27

In order to partake in this new inheritance, sinners must repent and believers must overcome. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Revelation 21:7). We must overcome the world (I John 5:4; 2:15-17) and Satan (Revelation 12:11). False prophets, sin and evil must not have dominion over us. We must flee from all appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:17-21). Whether they be persecutions or temptations, we must overcome to be part of this great inheritance (Revelation 2:10,26-28). The overcomer is one that is victorious and triumphant over all the works of the devil (Acts 19:16). The sinner must be thirsty for righteousness and salvation. “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of water of life freely.” It will be too costly to miss this glorious experience. Sinners must repent today. Backsliders must return of the Saviour today! “Let him that hath ear, hear what the

Spirit saith unto the churches. Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from God: and I will write upon him my new name" (Revelation 3:11,12).

The Destiny of Sinners

Luke 16:19-31

God's Word teaches that hell fire is a place of everlasting punishment where sinners (all who do not have their names in the book of life) will suffer torments for ever and ever. It was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41) but God has decreed that the wicked and those who forget Him and reject Christ will also be cast there because of their sin and neglect of His salvation (Psalm 9:17; Matthew 25:46; Luke 12:4,5; Matthew 5;22,30; Mark 9:43-47, Revelation 14:10,11; 20:10,12-15).

The fact and reality of hell is an important and recurring theme in the scriptures. It is vividly captured as a place of agonizing torment and everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire for the unconverted (Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:23,28). Owing to its frightful credentials, there are those who merely explain away hell as a biblical truth. Many have even drawn up the broken cisterns of erroneous assertion to rationalise their gross inadequacies. The Bible, however, unambiguously provides ample illuminations of hell, as the indisputable abode of sinners (Psalm 9:17; Proverbs 7:24-27; 9:13-18; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:22-28; Revelation 20:13-15; 21:8).

THE REALITY OF HELL

Luke 16:19-24

Hell is a fearsome "rest-place" for transgressors. And the Lord Jesus Christ spent considerable time lending weight to this reality. He told the city of Capernaum for instance, that it would be turned into hell because of its

iniquities (Matthew 11:23). He warned repeatedly on the danger of hell and the need for His listeners to steer clear of it (Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:8,9; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:5). He offered vivid explanations of hell as a place of everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:41,46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:22-28; Revelation 14:10,11). He revealed that sinners who died unsaved would have their lot in hell (Matthew 7:15-19; 13:40-42,50; 23:33; 25:41-46; Luke 16:23; Revelation 19:20; 20:14-15; 21:8).

The apostles also followed the same thematic explanations of hell as offered by the Lord (Romans 2:5-9; II Thessalonians 1:7-9; Hebrews 10:26,27; James 3:5,6; II Peter 2:4,9; 3:7; Jude 7,23; Matthew 3:7-10). The Church today cannot afford to assume a less specific position on the teaching of hell, without subverting the sacredness and completeness of scripture. The word “hell” is found about fifty-four times in the King James version of the Bible. Its translation in Hebrew, Sheol, occurs thirty-one times, while the Greek interpretations Gehena, Hades, and Tartarus occur twelve, ten times and once respectively. Its regular usage in scriptures, apart from the allusions drawn to it by the Lord and other bible characters, lend sufficient validity to its reality.

THE FINALITY OF HELL

Luke 16:23-26

When a sinners dies, his soul immediately proceeds to hell where, with full consciousness, he tastes the excruciating pain that hell offers. The story of poor Lazarus and the rich man, best exemplifies the eternal punishment awaiting the sinner (Luke 16:23,24). Hell is also a place where the memory of the damned comes alive. The rich man in Luke 16:23,24 remembered his riotous living while on earth as well as his five brothers yet unsaved. Apart

from the acute discomfort of hell, the regret of an error of judgment while on earth on the part of the unsaved, presents an everlasting torment on its own.

The teaching of the doctrine of hell must scrupulously avoid erroneous and unscriptural views of false teachers. The concept of purgatory, representing a so-called intermediate state between death and appearance before God, has no biblical foundation. Neither is the notion of annihilation of the wicked correct. The future punishment of the wicked is eternal. The sinner receives an express translation, at his death, into hell, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44-48; Deuteronomy 32:22; Job 26:6; Isaiah 5:14; Amos 9:2; II Peter 2:4; II Thessalonians 1:7-9). The needless controversy over the reality of hell is not strange; the scriptures clearly allude to this: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14). Since God is holy, sin must be punished in the person of the sinner or in the person of the sinner's Substitute the Lord Jesus Christ.

No man believes in hell because he simply wants to. He believes in hell because he is compelled to. It is true that eternal punishment is not a pleasant subject for discussion, yet it is a fearful reality, an awful and tragic fate.

THE URGENCY OF ACTION

Luke 16:27-31

Action is necessary on the part of the sinner: he is challenged to humble himself, repent of sin, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only way to avoid the agony of hell (Mark 1:14,15; Luke 13:1-5). On the part of the believer, he is expected to be involved in the salvation of souls. One, he

should pray for the conversion of sinners (Romans 10:1). Two, he should enlist himself in the army of soul-winners (Acts 9:19,20). Three, he should pray for more labourers (Matthew 9:36-38). Four, he should give generously to the propagation of the gospel (I Corinthians 16:15). And five, he should be involved in training others for the work of evangelism (II Timothy 2:2). This is a great challenge, and God demands that we give it all the seriousness that it demands (Acts 1:8; 8:4; Jude 23).