

# The Lord's Return

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In present as in past days, the imminent return of the Lord for His Bride constitutes the blessed hope of the true Church, a hope fervently held despite increasing denial and derision from many. Then there are those even today who profess to believe it yet live lives indifferent to it because they have little understanding of its proper place and principle. Much of the misunderstanding is due to the failure to distinguish between the Lord's return to the air *for* His Church and His return to earth *with* it as a prelude to His Millennial reign. The first is the blessed hope of the redeemed Church; the latter is to do with the hope of a restored Israel. In this booklet we outline the biblical distinction behind these two hopes. They are wondrously brought out in Him who is both the Sun of Righteousness and the Bright and Morning Star - divine titles that circumscribe the illuminating hope in the closing scenes of the Old and New Testaments respectively.

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## The Lord's Return – What Does it Mean?

People sometimes speak of the **Lord's Return** and refer to two different events – His return for the Church or His return to the earth. The expression **Second Coming** has also been used to refer to either of these two events. Others take one of these expressions to include both events. Then we have the terms **Rapture** and the **Second Advent** which are also used when speaking about the Lord's return. All this can be a little confusing! What needs to be grasped is that the Bible teaches that there are two separate events associated with the Lord's return. We note them as Stages 1 and 2 and prefer to refer to them simply as the Rapture and the Second Advent, the latter standing in contrast to the Lord's First Advent which was also to the earth. Our attention this afternoon is upon the first Stage, the Rapture. It is wholly a **NT revelation** and particular to the **Day of Christ** and not given in the OT. However, now that we have the completed Canon of Scripture with the NT before us, we can see certain foreshadowing of the Lord's coming for His Church presented in the OT – for instance, the Ark of the Covenant [Christ] going ahead to search out a resting place for the people (Num 10:33); Isaac going out to meet His bride, Rebecca. The Rapture is distinct from Stage 2, the Lord's Second Advent, which is particular to the **Day of the Lord** and a grand theme of the OT – though not confined to it.<sup>1</sup>

### Stage 1 - The Rapture

The coming of the Lord for His Church was the fervent expectation of the early Christians. The expression **Maranatha** – “the Lord is coming” was a common greeting among them. Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonians – two of the earliest NT epistles, record how endemic this hope was among the saints of God in those early days. However, the hope lay dormant for centuries after the early church period. The Reformation spoke little of the rapture; Luther wrote nothing of it (speaking only of the Lord's second coming in judgment). The hymnology and prayer books of the institutional churches reveal no real conviction in regard to it. Rome's profession and posture has always denied it. Recent centuries however witnessed Spirit-led evangelical revivals which did two things in regard to the truth of the Lord's coming for His Church. First, it rightly divided Scripture and **revived** it; second, it **restored** this truth to the consciences and hearts of believers. It is one thing to revive a truth, but quite another to restore it into the fabric and life of the children of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Day of Christ (Phil 1:10; 2:16) = the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6) = the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14) = the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:8). All refer to the Lord coming for His people in the air = the Rapture.

We are reminded of the Lord's coming for His Church when we gather as a local assembly to keep the Lord's Supper, for it is celebrated only until He come (1 Cor 11:26). We meet around the Lord's Person as the Lord's house, while we partake of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day owning the blessed hope of the Lord's return. There are, too, practical implications for us as individual believers relating to the Lord's coming. We are to walk circumspectly in view of it. "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 John 2:28). "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear [to us – the redeemed only], we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). There will be that blessed presentation of us "faultless", "in the presence of His glory" (Jude 1:24).

### **NT revelation of the Bridegroom coming for His Bride, the Church**

We will consider with the Lord's help four key portions of Scripture that bear significantly on the subject of the Lord's return for His Church: John 14; 1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5.

#### **John 14:1-18**

There are a number of preliminary observations in regard to this passage. Our subject is introduced by the Lord Himself. As with other matters introduced by Him it reveals what was particularly dear to His heart, and thus it is to be particularly owned by the redeemed in Him. The Lord's Supper and believer's baptism were also instituted and introduced by the Lord, evincing His heart's desire that His people identify with Him and remember Him - and do so in the way in which *He* had appointed. In Matthew's Gospel the Lord heralds the coming of the Church, declaring that He will build it. We are given further light regarding the Church as His Body, Bride and as a Building in the Epistles. In Ephesians we read of the "One New Man" - the composition of the Church. Yet, was it not the Lord who first revealed this blessed truth when He spoke of the "one flock" as opposed to the "fold" (Jn 10). In each of these truths introduced by the Lord we are taken to Calvary and to His death: the Lord's Supper – to show forth His death; baptism – to identify with His death; the coming of His Church – grounded upon His death; the One new man - Jew and Gentile reconciled through His death - the cross (Eph 2:16). The Lord's return for His Church also takes us to His death. "I go to prepare a place for you." It was to Golgotha's hill and then into glory on behalf of a redeemed people.

## The Context

John 14 relates to the last week of the Lord's private upper-room ministry. It was a time of increasing fear and uncertainty for the disciples because of the persecution from the Jews and the Roman authority. During this time the Lord did a number of notable things. He prepared for and partook of the Passover; He washed the disciples' feet; He instituted the Supper; He gave the disciples a new commandment and informed them that He will go away but that He will return. Our present concern is His return while noting the vital importance of His going away. We may view the content of the passage – verses 1-18, according to eight headings - A Reassurance given; A Residence prepared; A Return promised; A rapture intimated; A relocation undertaken; A divine revelation affirmed; A divine request made; A divine Resource pledged.

## The Content

**A reassurance given:** “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” The Lord introduces three specific matters – *where* they will be, *whom* they will be with and *why* (the matter of “when” is conspicuously absent here and elsewhere in Scripture). There is a blessed reassurance in all this. The reassurance here is not so much about our eternal security but our *eternal destiny*. We have our eternal security in chapter 10 underwritten by the equality between the Father and the Son. “My Father and I are one.” In chapter 14 it is our eternal destiny and it is underwritten by the personal glory of the Son. This necessarily brings into view His two natures - God and Man – distinguishable but inseparable! We must not divide the Person of Christ. He is here the *Great Shepherd* of Psalm 23, the Man providing *consolation* – “Let not your heart be troubled.” He is here too as the *Chief Shepherd* of Psalm 24, the Son of God providing *confirmation* – “ye believe in God, believe also in me.” “Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty.” They were to believe in Him for the same reasons they believe in God. Not simply believe Him, but believe **in** Him because of who and what He is! The assurance of our eternal destiny rests on the personal glory of Christ Himself – the divine Man. The trilogy is complete in that we also have in this portion the *Good Shepherd* of Psalm 22 – the One who giveth His life for His sheep, intimated in His announcement - “I go!”

In the light of this reassurance we ask ourselves what do we know of the person of Christ – the divine Man? If we have a low appreciation of His person and glory, we will have a low assurance of His promises and grace, as illustrated by the disbelieving nation of Israel and in Lord's words to the woman of Samaria. “Jesus answered, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would

have given thee living water.” We ask amiss because we ask that which is not in accordance with His will. We also ask amiss because we ask that which is not in accordance with His Person. The leper’s plea to the Lord was true – ‘If thou wilt thou canst! A low appreciation of His person and glory will also cause us to have a low understanding of our position and profession in Him. We are the righteousness of God in Him! Accepted in the Beloved! What consolation and confirmation could there be in regard to our eternal destiny if it were based on an angel or some other created being? When gathered locally, a low appreciation of His person and glory will compromise our responsibility in regard to the truth that the local assembly is to manifest His glory, the assembly as “pillar and ground of the truth.”

**A Residence prepared:** “In my Father’s house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.” Where is the Father’s house but in heaven, where the Son now is and where He once lived as the eternal Son in eternity past. It is “my Father’s house.” It is not “my God’s house,” because emphasis is upon His sonship (cf the expression “my God” and His manhood). And, it is not “your Father’s house,” for this is too impersonal and does not comport with the tender affections demanded of the hour. Nor is it “our Father’s house” for this denies His unique sonship. It is “my Father’s house,” which preserves His unique sonship while serving to instill assurance to His beloved. He speaks here as the eternal son of God, the Son according to divine nature and right, who as the eternal Son will bring many sons into glory (Heb 2:10). There is another occasion where He refers to “my Father’s house” – the temple, of which many were making merchandise. There too we note the Son as the jealous custodian of the Father’s estate (Jn 2:13-17).

But now we come to an interesting matter. Where did He go to prepare a place for us? Let us first observe that He is not preparing *us* for a place. We are already fitted – sealed by the Spirit of God unto the day of redemption, having the Holy Spirit who is the pledge (seal) of the earnestness of our inheritance. In Colossians we read - “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.” There is no partial rapture here (nor anywhere else in the word of God). The Bride/Body cannot be dismembered! Romans 14:10 tells us that we shall **all** stand before the judgment seat of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:51 Paul states, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall **all** be changed.” But what of Hebrews 9:28, ‘them that look for Him’? This is a *descriptive* term, given to distinguish the outlook and prospect of the world from

that of an *expectant* people. Further, let us note in passing that the Church being already fitted for heaven in Christ is not to be prepared for its future glory through wrath, as Israel will be in a day to come. Israel must pass through the Tribulation in order that the wheat is separated from the chaff - a process of refinement (cf the tares from the wheat – a process of discernment).

Returning now to our question. He had to go to prepare a place for us. Where did He go to accomplish this? To the Cross! The preparation had its ground in the Cross – as is in regard to all our divine blessings – past, present and prospective. Our justification, redemption, sanctification and glorification are all grounded upon the Cross. How then could our place of eternal destination be provided apart from the Cross? “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:19-20). The Lord’s resurrection and ascension was the divine confirmation of all that which was accomplished on the Cross.

**A Return Promised:** “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.” Here the expectant heart is brought to consider a number of vital truths. First note the absolute divine assurance and prerogative of the Lord – “I will!” His divine Person again underwrites the eternal destiny of the believer. Second, no date or time is given. The Lord merely furnishes a statement of divine assurance in order to engage our faith in Him. To set dates is faithless folly. It takes us outside the intent of God’s Word, compromising the effect of imminence upon our practical sanctification. Now an important remark is needed. Some agree that it is folly to predict times and dates and cite Matthew 24:36 in support. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” However, the day of His coming in this verse is not His coming for His Church, but to the earth in judgment – Stage 2, His Second Advent. Further, when considering the time of His coming, many have asked why He has not yet come? Peter gives us the answer. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). We sometimes hear talk of a “delay” in the Lord’s coming. Let us speak instead of His longsuffering for there can be no such thing as the Lord being delayed in any sense of the word. It implies some external factor has impeded His divine timetable. Third, there are no signs to look for – the Jews seek a sign and it is folly to seek signs in regard to the Lord’s coming for His Church. We do see however increasing wickedness for the spirit of iniquity does already work (2 Thess 2). Fourth, it is the Bridegroom in Person who comes, not the Spirit, the

Father or an angel. The eternal Son, the Bridegroom comes Himself. It is because it was the Son who came to die. The Bride is *His* purchased possession. May we lay hold on this truth. The Bride is a PURCHASED possession (not to *be* purchased!). “Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14). In Acts 20:28 we have this truth connected to His absolute deity. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood.”

**A rapture intimated and relocation:** “And receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Note first that the Church goes unto Him – where He is. This intimates the catching away of the Church referred to as the **Rapture** of the Church. This catching is unto Himself – the Bridegroom, not to the Father, nor to the Spirit. The eternal destiny of the Bride is to be with the Bridegroom, that where He is there we will be. At present He has promised to be where *we* are (Matt 18:20).

**A Request made:** “If ye love me keep my commandments.” Our love for Him is to be the motivation for obedience unto Him. The law said “do and live.” The Lord, the One who came under the law and fulfilled it is requesting that we “do because we live.” May we say little more here – love itself must have its motive. Why is it that we love Him? Is it not because He first loved us? May we all examine our hearts before Him – speaker included!

**A Resource pledged:** “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” The Spirit of God is to be *with* and *in* us; even His sealing unto the day of redemption, the Spirit being the divine pledge of our inheritance. The all-sufficiency of God!

## **I Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5**

In this evening session we continue outlining the subject of our Lord’s return for His Church, focusing on Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians chapter 4. This portion amplifies the Lord’s revelation given in John 14. We will include two other vital portions that deal with the Lord’s coming for His Church and in so doing combine the NT teaching concerning it - 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5. A diagram illustrating this approach has been circulated. By

combining these three portions we arrive at eight truths relating to our subject, which can be headed as follows: a responsibility in the light of divine revelation; a reassurance; a resurrection; a rapture; a refurnishing; a reunion; a rejoicing; a reckoning.

### **The Context**

The Thessalonians knew well of the Lord coming for the Church (1 Thess 1:10; 2:19), but there were questions raised by trials, the death of some and false teaching by others. It is critical to note that chapter 4 deals with Stage 1 of the Lord's return – the Rapture, whereas chapter 5 is concerned with the Day of the Lord. This must be kept in mind when studying this Epistle and the subject of the Lord's return. Let us now look to each truth enumerated above.

### **The Content**

**A responsibility in the light of divine revelation:** “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.” Brethren and sisters, we are not to be ignorant people – but intelligent in regard to divine revelation. We are to study to show ourselves approved, workman rightly dividing the word of God. The enemy gains a foothold where there is an ignorance of God's word – as was the case in Thessalonica. “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were nobler than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:11-12). Practical Christianity is impotent unless founded upon divine truth – zeal without knowledge is unprofitable. James does not simply say be ye doers, but be ye doers of the *word*, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. May we strive to know the doctrine!

**A reassurance:** “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thess 4:14). First note the threefold basis of this assurance - Paul's *apostolic authority*, the *word of the Lord* (v 15) and Christ's *resurrection glory*. The application of the first two is relatively straightforward and needs little comment. But why do we have the resurrection glory of the Lord brought in here? It is in response to two questions raised by the Thessalonians. First, what is the position of the *dead* in Christ *in relation* to the *coming of Christ*? Second, how does it relate to those who are

*alive* at His coming? It is not, what is the position of the dead in Christ? – But of their relationship to the Rapture and to those who are alive at the Rapture. Answers to both questions involve a resurrection – the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the assurance of their resurrection rests on the truth of Christ’s victorious resurrection.

### **A resurrection:**

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise [a resurrection] first (1 Thess 4:14-16).”

We are told that the dead in Christ shall rise first (those that sleep in Jesus – sleep being a metaphor for death). The resurrection of the **body** is referred to here. Resurrection only refers to the body as our spirit is eternal. At death our spirit departs to be with Christ – absent in the body but present with the Lord (Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8).<sup>2</sup> It is the *body* that is resurrected because it signifies Christ’s victory over death. His bodily resurrection is the assurance that death and sin have been defeated. We note further that Christ did not simply rise *from* the dead. Scripture declares He arose from **among** the dead. So it is with all the righteous – their bodies arise from *among* the dead as part of the *first* resurrection. Christ is the Firstborn from among the dead of the first resurrection (Col 1:18). He is not the Firstborn in regard to the unrighteous dead, whose bodies will be raised unto the second death – at the *second* resurrection (Rev 20).

We observe too that it is not the Son receiving the saints unto Himself as in John 14, but God bringing them with Jesus. May it be suggested that this too is given for assurance, resting on the truth delivered to the Thessalonians that it was the true God who raised *Jesus* from among the dead – the Man in the day of His humiliation and suffering (Jn 1:10).

**A rapture:** “Then [after which] we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds.” First, we note there will be a “catching up,” *harpazo* – to carry off; Latin *rapiō* or rapture. The same word is used in Acts 8.

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<sup>2</sup> The Church which is Christ’s Body comprises all those saved since Pentecost to the Rapture – those gone before in death and who are with Him, and those who are alive on earth at the Rapture. The bodies of the former are resurrected.

Phillip was caught away – miraculously carried elsewhere by the Spirit of God. So too in 2 Corinthians 12:2 when Paul was miraculously carried off into the third heaven. Second, this carrying away is upward designated by the expression “to meet the Lord in the air.” There is nothing else to be ascertained from the expression “in the air.”

**A refurnishing:** This we get from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, 15:51-53.

“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 [those who are alive and remain] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

So too in Philippians 3:20-21. “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” The resurrection and refurnishing is confirmed by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. “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” (1 Cor 15:52). Again in Romans. “And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit [in regard to], the redemption of our body” (8:23).

**A reunion:** “Then [after which] we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17).” Those gone before and those living are reunited in the air given by the terms *together* and *with* – both at the same time.

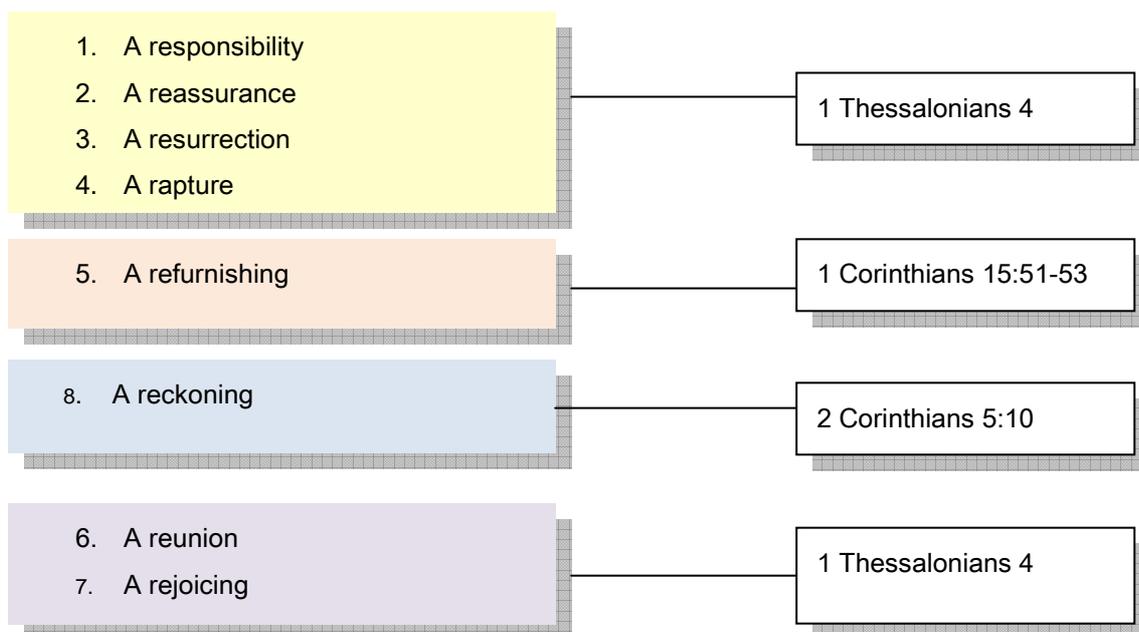
**A rejoicing:** “And so shall we ever be with the Lord.” “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:17-18). There will be no parting of company with the Lord – ever, which comports with His own divinely declared purpose – that where I am there ye may be also!

**A reckoning:** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). The judgment seat of Christ is where the quality of our works is assessed. John exhorts, “And now, little

children, abide in him [live in close continual fellowship with Him]; that, when [not *if*] he shall appear [to the Church], we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 Jn 2:28).

**Titus 2:13:** “Looking for *that* blessed hope, and *the* glorious appearing [appearance of the glory i.e., the personal presence] of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” The definite article “the” is not in the text, which means the latter expression (appearance of the glory) refers to the former expression (blessed hope) and is a further expression of it. (So too the titles “the great God” and “Savior Jesus Christ” refer to the same Person). The whole expression thus refers to one event. Opinion is divided whether this is the Rapture or the Second Advent. The revised and preferred view taken here – not dogmatically however, is that it refers essentially to the latter event – the Lord’s return to the earth. The blessed hope - and it is an imminent one based on the imminence of the Rapture, appears to be the return of the Church *with* Christ - *having been* raptured. It is a blessed hope that we, the Church, His Bride, shall reign with Him and that the glory of this once rejected Man will be manifested on earth (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:6). At that time the glory of God in Christ shall appear to “all men,” as His grace so appears to all men today through Christ (v 11). Considered in this way, this verse endorses the truth of the future literal presence of the Lord on earth.

### The doctrine of the Lord’s return for His Church given in 1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5.



## The Second Advent – Stage 2

This refers to the Lord coming to the earth for the second time. He comes:

*Physically*: “Which also said, 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); *Visibly*: “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” (Rev 1:7 cf Acts 1:11; Matt 24:30); *Universally*: “Every eye shall see Him” (Rev 1:7); *Locally*: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof... (Zech 14:4). The place of His tears will be the place of His triumph; *Conjointly*: He comes with His saints. “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:13; Jude 14-15). “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col 3:4). This verse declares the fact of Christ’s return to the earth and the truth of the Rapture preceding it. If the Church is to appear (be manifested) with Christ in glory (His public manifestation to the world), then it must have previously been with Him – raptured before hand!

## The Day of the Lord

The first and most important point to make is that the Day of the Lord is not an event but a period of time during which a number of events occur. It begins with the Lord taking up Israel after the Church has been raptured. It is the period in which He personally intervenes in world affairs. Its conclusion coincides with the end of the millennial reign of the Lord on earth, just before the eternal state begins.

### I Thessalonians 5:1-9

We trust earlier sessions have made clear that in chapter 4 of this epistle Paul is referring to the Lord’s coming for His Church – the Rapture. In chapter 5 however, his purpose is to present teaching on the Day of the Lord, mentioned explicitly in verse 2. In verse 1 we have the context where this distinction is made plain. The subject following verse 1 – the Day of the Lord, is to do with “times and seasons” i.e., OT prophecy. Here the Church and its blessed hope is not found. In verses 2-3 Paul presents the coming and character of the Day of the Lord. It comes “as a thief in the night” when the world believes it possesses “peace and safety.” It is the Day and not the Lord that comes as a thief in the

night. This period of time begins without warning and at a time unexpected – when man is beguiled by his own conceit, believing he is immune from divine judgment – as it was in the days of Noah, as given in Matthew 24. We mark this as one of the common dispensational characteristics in these two passages. The character of the Day of the Lord is unmistakable – a day of wrath (so, too, the period of Matthew 24). We see in this alone the clear distinction between the Day of Christ and the Day of the Lord. In verses 4-9 we have its confinement – it will not overtake (come upon) them as a thief who comes in the night, for they are children of light. They are not in darkness and therefore not under divine judgment. Paul reiterates this in verse 9 and it refers to the Church – not just to the Thessalonians - “we are not appointed to wrath.” Again he declares that the Day of the Lord will not overtake them, clear teaching that the Church will not pass through the Day of the Lord – which includes the Tribulation (Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Week). Even so, they and we too have a present conviction in the light of the sure judgments of that Day – verses 6-8.

## 2 Thessalonians 2

“1. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2. That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ [the Lord] is at hand. 3. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”

In verse 2 it is not the *Day of Christ* as given in the AV, but the *Day of the Lord*, which is plain from the context and clarified by the original text. As noted grievous persecution and false teaching regarding the Day of the Lord had caused the Thessalonians to believe the Rapture had passed, and that Day – the Day of divine wrath upon the earth was “at hand.” The expression “at hand” is better rendered “now present.” Paul set about stating why that Day had not yet come. Before this Day arrives two things must happen. There must be “a falling away” and then the “man of sin,” “the son of perdition” will be revealed (v 3). First, the falling away [apostasia] doubtless refers to the forsaking of divine ways, which will characterize the mass apostasy within the Tribulation period. Second, the context gives us the identity of the man of sin and the time in which he will be revealed. Observe that he is not presented in connection with the Church as its head, but sitting in the “inner temple” which in Scripture always refers to the holiest chamber of the temple (v 4). As far as this portion is concerned the

Church has gone - raptured. The whole scene is future, Jewish and of the earth. The man of sin sits in the inner temple and proclaims himself as God. He is the *Antichrist*; the *little horn* of Daniel 7; the *king of fierce countenance* of Daniel 8; the *willful king* of Daniel 11:36; the *First Beast* that comes out of the sea in Revelation 13. He is the ruler of the Revived Roman Empire. He is the *abomination of desolation* spoken of by the Lord in Matthew 24 (cf Dan 12:11) who stands “in the holy place” – the inner temple (v 15). Note again the coincidence between this passage in Thessalonians and Matthew 24. This is the time of the Tribulation – specifically the last half of it, marked by the Beast breaking the covenant he confirmed with Israel three and one half years earlier. It is the time of “Great Tribulation” mentioned by the Lord in Matthew 24 and by Jeremiah - Jacob’s Trouble (Jer 30:7). Verses 4-7 inform us that even in present days the same spirit of iniquity operates – but, the Restrainer, the Spirit of God has not permitted the man of sin to arrive (v 7). Once the Restrainer leaves, as he now abides in the Church and in the world, then the man of sin will be revealed. We despair at the unparalleled and abounding iniquity about us today, but it is little compared to the lawlessness which will reap havoc in that day. The Lord will then come to the earth and consume the man of sin – clear reference to the second stage of His return, the “Great and Terrible day of the Lord,” the brightness of His coming i.e., His manifestation (v 8), which is not His coming to the air (Stage 1). In verse 9 we have the “False Prophet,” the second Beast of Revelation 13 who will be the spokesman for the man of sin. He will cause multitudes to worship the man of sin through his signs and lying wonders – the workings of Satan.

## **Matthew 24**

The Jewish and prophetic context of chapter 24 is clearly indicated within the opening verses and in those that conclude the previous chapter. In the latter the Lord grieves over His rejection by the Jews and He declares *their* house is left desolate – they are set-aside until a future day, figured in the parable of the fig tree in verses 32-33 of chapter 24. The fig tree is symbolic of Israel as set aside by God, but whose godly remnant will enter divine blessing under the New Covenant (cf Lk 13). We observe that the Lord in His lament refers not to His people Israel, but to the city of David – that city of promise which is the centre of biblical prophecy concerning Israel. As it was in the past, even in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, Jerusalem - the place of the covenant and the temple will be the centre point of God’s future dealing with His earthly people. It is in regard to *Israel* and *Jerusalem* that the “times and seasons” are measured in God’s prophetic program. Matthew 24 is to do with times and seasons, which again

connects it with 1 Thessalonians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 2 – the Day of the Lord. It is also to do with signs and wonders, which are essentially given to God’s earthly people Israel, not to the Church.

The opening verses of chapter 24 also declare the Jewish and prophetic context, confirming that this passage has nothing to do with the Church and the Day of Christ – which relates to events in heaven. The Lord withdraws with His disciples to Mount Olivet. Here the disciples are representative of remnant Israel during the Tribulation in the Day of the Lord. The Mount of Olives in prophecy is that place upon which the feet of the Lord will stand when He returns to the earth in judgment – the “Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.” How fitting and figurative that He should repair with His disciples to the very place to which He will return, a place of future triumph which overlooks Jerusalem the place of His tears, the prophetic city of promise. “And his feet shall stand in that day [day of His return to the earth] upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (Zech 14:4).

Our purpose is not to present a detailed exposition of chapter 24, but to focus on a number of aspects of it that have been of interest and in some cases, a matter of difficulty. Consider first the portion from verse 15. We have here the conditions on earth during the Great Tribulation (v 21) – the last half of the Tribulation period or Jacob’s Trouble. This will be a time of unprecedented persecution of the Lord’s people, both Jew and Gentile, but essentially of the Jews. The distance Jews are allowed to travel is severely restricted on the Sabbath. So the Lord exhorts they pray that their flight from persecution will not be on the Sabbath. This persecution will be at the hand of the Antichrist – the “Abomination of Desolation”(v 15). Second, we have the coming of the Son of Man to the earth preceded by celestial signs and wonders – the Lord returns in judgment to save the faithful remnant (v 29-31). All this has nothing to do with the coming of the Lord to the air for His Church. Third, in verse 34 the Lord declares, “this generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled.” He speaks morally and descriptively – the expression “this generation” characterizes all those among the Jews who reject Him. Those who reject Him in the future are very much part of the generation of rejecters that witnessed against Him during His days on earth. Fourth, the Lord’s statement in verse 36 “of that day and hour knoweth no man,” is sometimes used in reference to the Rapture as we noted. A study of this chapter informs us that the event He refers to is not the Rapture. It refers to the Lord coming to the earth in divine judgment as the Son of Man. This

divine title we add, is OT in origin and connects the Lord with the day of judgment foretold by the OT prophets. To interpret this verse to be the Rapture can I suggest violates the context and misrepresents the message in the discourse. It will also mar the harmony between this chapter and those in Thessalonians 1 and 2 noted above. For these reasons great care and qualification must be employed if using these portions to preach the way of salvation to the unsaved today. There are many other passages in Scripture that are better suited to this purpose. Verses 40-41 refer again to the Tribulation and not to the Rapture. Those who are “taken” are the faithful remnant who are alive at the end of the Tribulation. They are taken into the new dispensation – the Millennium, not into the air. There is a clear parallel drawn here to the days of Noah morally and dispensationally. The faithful in the ark were taken into the new age after God had judged the rebellious world by flood. Those who were “left” were judged. Fifth, the exhortation to “watch” is given in verse 42, which is reinforced by the illustration of the faithful and wise servant (vv 45-51). This is the needed attitude for the Jews during the Tribulation, who as we noted earlier, are represented by the Lord’s disciples with Him on Mount Olivet. All attempts to have this portion refer to believers today runs contrary to the context of the chapter. Are the saved in Christ who fail the test of watchfulness appointed unto wrath and cut off - the weeping and gnashing of teeth (v 51)? To say so contradicts at the very least 1 Thessalonians 5:9, which states that God hath not appointed us to wrath.

### **Matthew 25 – the Parable of the Ten Virgins**

This chapter begins with two parables relating to the kingdom of heaven. The first, the parable of the ten virgins speaks of *readiness*; the second, the parable of the talents speaks of *faithfulness*. Both are given to reinforce the exhortation to watch in chapter 24, and to convey the moral character of the kingdom of heaven as it relates to the time of the Tribulation.

Our focus this morning is upon the first of these parables. Some take it to refer to the present day – the Church age and the Rapture. However, I respectfully suggest that such a view seems contrary to the context of this chapter and is unsustainable from the elements of the parable itself. Let me briefly explain why and rehearse some of the discussion last afternoon in our conversational Bible-reading. First, verse 1 begins with the word “then,” which connects the events of chapter 24 i.e., the Tribulation and Day of the Lord with the subject matter in chapter 25. This is significant as to the identity of the unfaithful and imprudent servant who is cut off (24:45-51). This cannot refer to a believer in Christ who is sealed by the Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. Second, the five virgins were taken into the “marriage feast” – not to the

“wedding” as given in the AV. The marriage feast takes place after the wedding ceremony. We have here the bridegroom returning with His bride to the place of festivity and the virgins going out to meet him. Third, suppose as suggested by some that we take oil as representative of the Holy Spirit and the virgins who had oil in their lamps as representative of “true” believers in Christ. The other virgins are taken to be false professors – the tares among the wheat. What then are we to make of the statement by these other virgins - “our lamps are going out” (not “gone out” as in the AV)?<sup>3</sup> How does this hold up against the permanent work of the Spirit of God today, for the statement indicates that their lamps shed some light having some oil within? What do we make of the fact that those who had returned after they had bought oil (they now had the Holy Spirit) were excluded? Those who were not ready were shut out. Our future presence with Christ does not depend on our degree of readiness to meet Him. Further, if this is the Rapture of the Church, then the activity in verses 11-12 must be in heaven, which appears impossible. Finally, only the redeemed will know of the Lord’s coming for His Bride – which is quite different to His coming to the earth where every eye shall see Him. How is it then that the unsaved – said to be represented by the virgins without oil, hear of the bridegroom coming and go to meet him?

We would say therefore the five virgins with oil represent the faithful Jewish remnant during the Tribulation who, being prepared, is taken into the marriage feast of the Bridegroom when He comes to earth with His Bride, the Church (Stage 2 of Christ’s return). This is the marriage feast or supper, which will take place on earth after the coming of the Lord with His Bride to the earth. “Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). The marriage itself takes place in heaven (Rev 19:7). In verse 13 we get the moral imperative of the parable to Israel in that day. “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” Our calling is to “wait for his [God’s] Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).

J W de Silva (Melbourne, Australia)

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<sup>3</sup> “Our lamps are going out.” “The AV misses the graphic force of the continuous present, denoting something in progress.” Vincent (Word Studies in the New Testament). So, too, A T Robertson, (Word Pictures in the NT); Newberry.

## The Lord's Return – Viewed in Two Stages

Stage 1 - Rapture	Stage 2 – Second Advent
His <i>coming</i> to the <i>air</i> for His people (appear to His people)	His <i>appearing</i> on the <i>earth</i> (with His people)
The subject of NT <i>revelation</i> (not given in the OT)	The subject of biblical <i>prophecy</i>
He comes in Person as the <i>Day Star</i> , (2 Pet 1:19)	He appears in Person as the <i>Sun of Righteousness</i> (Mal 4:2).
Comes in joy as the <i>Bridegroom</i>	He appears in judgment as the <i>Son of man</i>
Coming referred to as the <i>rapture of the Church</i>	Appearing referred to as the <i>Second Advent</i> (or Second Coming)
Hope of the Church	Hope of Israel
Pertains to the <i>Day of Christ</i>	Pertains to the <i>Day of the Lord</i>
Only the chosen few will see Him (His birth, Pentecost, resurrection, coming)	Every eye shall see Him (Calvary; Judgment)
John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-54; Phil 3:20-21; Heb 9:28	1 Thess 5:1-9; 2 Thess 2:1-12 Matt 24 (Mk 13; Luke 21); Matt 25; Rev 19; 20.

## The *Timing* of the Two Stages of the Lord's Return

