



# The Rapture

*What are Some Common Misconceptions?  
Are the Church All Raptured at Once?  
Is it Before or After the Tribulation?*

WITHIN recent years there has been a considerable upsurge of interest, especially among Fundamentalist Christians, in Jesus' Second Coming and His Thousand-year Reign over the earth with His Church. This upsurge has been caused mainly by the signs of the times, which demonstrate that we are living in the very end of the Gospel, or Church, Age.

Among these signs of the times are the great increase of travel and knowledge (Dan. 12: 4; Nahum 2: 3, 4); Fleshly Israel's return to their homeland, their gaining control of all of Jerusalem, their recovering gradually from their blindness in part, and their conflicts with the Arabs (Jer. 16: 13-18; Amos 9: 11, 14, 15; Luke 21: 27-36; Rom. 11: 11, 15, 25-27); a great increase in crime, wickedness, moral laxity and the exposures of evils (2 Tim. 3: 1-9, 13; Matt. 24: 12; Luke 12: 2, 3; 1 Cor. 4: 5); the rapid deterioration of morals in the family, government, business, schools, literature, art, music, entertainment, *etc.* (2 Tim. 3: 1-9, 13); the prevalence of unbelief, false belief, false Christs and false prophets (Matt. 24: 24-26; Luke 18: 8; 1 Tim. 4: 1-3; 2 Tim. 4: 1-4); the fuel and food crisis, runaway inflation, disordered nature, overpopulation and famine (Isa. 47: 14, 15; Ezek. 7: 12, 19; 14: 19; Zeph. 1: 18; Luke 21: 11); gigantic war preparations, rapid development of horrible weapons, hot and cold wars, revolutions, conflicts between capital and labor and much terrorism and anarchy (Joel 3: 9-14; 1 Kings 19: 11, 12; James 5: 1-8); great unrest, and people fearing greatly as to the present and future (Luke 21: 25, 26); the great increase of Spiritism, occultism, Satanism, *etc.* (Matt. 12: 26; 24: 26); and, generally, the presence of a worldwide humanly unmanageable crisis (Psa. 107: 23-27; Zeph. 1: 17; Luke 21: 25-27).

## *PRE-MILLENNIALISM & POST-MILLENNIALISM*

There are two lines of thought as to Jesus' Second Coming that have been advocated by Christian people in general, namely, *Pre-Millennialism* and *Post-Millennialism*.

*Pre-Millennialism*, the teaching that Christ comes *before* the Millennium, to reign with His Church for a thousand years and to convert the world then, has in the minds of most professing Christians largely supplanted *Post-Millennialism*, the teaching that Christ comes *after* the Millennium to take over a converted world and to wind up all earthly things. It is becoming more and more evident to thinking people that the world is not being converted, but rather that the proportion of non-Christians to Christians is increasing rapidly (see our books *The Divine Plan of the Ages* and *The Millennium*).

With the upsurge of interest in Jesus' Second Coming there is increased hope in many Christian believers that they soon will be united with Jesus in the things eternal, the heavenly glory, in what is commonly known as *the rapture*, though the word *rapture* is not found in the Bible.

The noun *rapture* and the adjective *rapt* are derived from the Latin word *rapere* (*raptus*), which means "to snatch, to seize, to carry away." But both *rapt* and *rapture* have attached to them also the thought of lofty emotion, ecstasy, ecstatic joy, love, *etc.*

Accordingly, when *the rapture* is referred to by many professing Christians, especially Fundamentalists, they use the word to refer to our Lord Jesus, in the first, or secret, part of His Second Coming, *secretly and suddenly catching up to Himself all true Christians then living into the heavens, the spiritual realm, to be eternally united to Him, their heavenly Bridegroom, in eternal ecstatic joy, bliss, felicity and blessedness.*

One widely circulated rapture illustration portrays a scene outside a beautiful home. A woman who was hanging out laundry and a little girl who was riding a tricycle are pictured as being bodily whisked away skyward, whereas a boy mowing grass, obviously picturing a non-Christian or an untrue Christian, remains behind.

A widely circulated tract entitled "The Missing Ones" presents the time of the rapture as being one of great calamities, consternation, fear and distress, with trains suddenly losing their engineers, vehicles their drivers, families their best members, *etc.*, and the missing persons bureau as being swamped with calls. Some have bumper stickers on their cars, warning that in case of the rapture their cars will be driverless.

Many claim that after the rapture, there will arise from among those remaining on earth a powerful ruler—an individual—as the Antichrist, showing himself as God in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, causing all people in general to worship him and to receive his mark in their forehead and hand, and persecuting severely all who refuse to do so, in what is called "the tribulation," to be ended by the second phase of Jesus' Second Coming, in which He overcomes and destroys Antichrist and begins His Millennial Reign.

Some claim that the period between these two phases of Jesus' Second Coming will be 3½ years. Others say it will be 7 years, usually teaching that the 70th week of Dan. 9: 24-27 will then be fulfilled. However, this view is erroneous, for Daniel's 70th week was fulfilled along with the other 69 at the time of Jesus' First Advent, as we have shown clearly from many lines of evidence, in BS 463 (a copy free on request).

Ideas sometimes have become so imbedded in our minds, so much a part of ourselves, that we can scarcely part with them. Yet how many of us have found that our ideas concerning the Scriptures have required modification, the reason being our more or less imperfect understanding.

To many it becomes a trial to have long-cherished theories, such as the detached 70th-week teaching, interfered with; but to all who have the childlike spirit of Christ, namely, a readiness to accept unhesitatingly the Father's Word (not the teachings of men which conflict with it—Rom. 3: 4; 1 Cor. 2: 5), there is no trouble; for they say, "I of myself know nothing at all on the subject,

and if I have received an idea unsupported by God's Word I don't want it. I want only *the Truth*, not my own ideas independent of God's Word, for it alone can sanctify (John 17: 17); give me *the Truth*, no matter what idol it may overthrow."

To such only we have some things to say touching the long-cherished teaching that *true Christians living at the time of Jesus' Second Advent will never die a physical death*. The Scriptures quoted to support this concept, when carefully considered, do not uphold such a thought; and other Scriptures teach positively that all members of Christ's Body would, like their Head, Example and Forerunner, die physically. Let us together carefully examine the subject in the light of the following considerations on Scriptures usually regarded as the basis of the idea that some of the saints were to be exempted from physical death.

### 1 THES. 4: 15-17 CONSIDERED

1 Thes. 4: 15-17 is the classic passage quoted by those who believe in the exemption-from-death idea. The Greek word translated "coming" in v. 15, as in Matt. 24: 37-39, is *parousia*, meaning *presence*; it covers the first, or secret stage of our Lord's Second Advent, when the world is in ignorance respecting His Second Advent and going about the ordinary affairs of life, prior to the second stage, His *epiphaneia* (*bright shining*, manifestation), or *apokalupsis* (*uncovering*, revelation), and the third stage, His *basileia* (*Kingdom*). (For an in-depth study on the Stages of our Lord's Return, see BS 231—a copy free on request.)

In 1 Thes. 4: 15-17 we read: "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [*precede*, the old English meaning of *prevent*; compare ASV, Rotherham, *etc.*] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then [*afterwards*, Greek *epeita*, even as it is used to designate futurity elsewhere, *e.g.*, in 1 Cor. 15: 6, 7, 23, 46; Gal. 1: 18, 21; 2: 1; Heb. 7: 27; Jas. 3: 17; 4: 14] we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."

Of course, nothing in this text indicates that the saints remaining over to the time of the Lord's Second Coming would *die*; nor does anything in it teach that their human bodies would *not die*. This Scripture does not mention what *change* they would undergo before being joined to the Lord; in fact, a change is not mentioned here at all. But the same Apostle elsewhere informs us that a *change* would take place, because "flesh and blood"—human nature, human bodies—cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15: 50)—therefore the saints would all be *changed* to spirit bodies, which are invisible to men's human eyes, and can come and go as the wind (John 3: 8).

### 1 COR. 15: 51, 52 EXAMINED

Let us next look at 1 Cor. 15: 51, 52, for it mentions the *change* particularly, and let us notice carefully whether St. Paul says that any would be *changed without dying*, as many have supposed

he does. We read: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all *sleep*, but we shall all be *changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*."

From this statement regarding *sleep*, some have received the *impression* that the earthly body would not *die*; but who cannot see that the human body might be laid aside in death and the *New Creature* be delivered from it and so quickly clothed upon with the spirit body that not a moment for *sleep* would intervene? To *die* is one thing; to *sleep—remain unconscious, dead*—is quite another. If time would intervene between the dissolution of the earthly house (human body) and the receiving of the spirit body, then those New Creatures who would be alive and remain in Christ unto the time of His Parousia, or *presence*, would after death be obliged to "*sleep in Jesus*" (1 Thes. 4: 14; 1 Cor. 15: 18), as the Apostles and other Body members did during the Gospel Age. But that *sleep* has always been an undesirable thing.

With St. Paul, the saints during the Gospel Age could say that they were very desirous, not to be *unclothed (asleep)* without either human or spirit bodies), but to be clothed upon, or receive spirit bodies, which during Jesus' Second Presence they were to receive the moment they would part with the *old* human house (2 Cor. 5: 1-4). And this in substance St. Paul here states—all would not *sleep*, for to some the *change* would be in a moment, in an eye-twinkling. One thing is sure, all new creatures must leave the *flesh* sometime, and whenever or however it would be, it would be the *death* or dissolution and end of the human to all who would receive the spirit nature.

Some claim that Matt. 24: 40, 41 proves the "missing ones" teaching, but it says nothing about anyone being taken to heaven. Rather, it shows Body members being gathered to the Truth as spiritual food (comp. v. 28).

### ST. JOHN PICTURES LAST PART OF CHURCH

Now notice the words of Jesus concerning the Apostle John, who is a type, or representative, of the last part of the Church—those who would be alive and remain unto the *presence* of the Lord and then be changed. Jesus said of him to the Apostle Peter, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should *not die*: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall *not die*; but, If I will that he tarry till I come," *etc.* (John 21: 22, 23).

Just so it has been with the company typified by St. John; the saying has gone abroad and has been generally received that this part of the Church would *not die*. But when we examine the evidences, we find that neither Jesus nor the Apostles said that some would *not die*, but that if the Master so willed, some would tarry till His Second *Presence* and then be changed in a moment and *not sleep*.

Now notice the positive teaching that all of "the body" were to die, and then mark the necessity of death. It was no less an authority than St. Paul who said: "If we be dead with him,

we shall also live with him"; and "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"—and to this end Christ's Body members were "made conformable unto his death" (2 Tim. 2: 11; Rom. 6: 5; 2 Cor. 4: 10; Phil. 3: 10). Now we see that in Jesus' case the human was surrendered to death forever (He was "put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit [as a spirit being]"—1 Pet. 3: 18, ASV), and that had He taken back the human nature it would have been taking back our *ransom price*; we see also that the privilege was granted to His Body members to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1: 24), to be "dead with Christ," "baptized into his death" (Rom. 6: 8, 3), who loved us and bought us with His own precious blood and tasted death for every man (1 Pet. 1: 18, 19; Heb. 2: 9).

In a word, if Jesus needed to be obedient *even unto death*, and if He says to His saints, "Be thou faithful *unto death*, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2: 10), who shall say that the dissolution or death of the human being is not necessary?

### PSA. 82: 6, 7 EXAMINED

Psa. 82: 6, 7 very clearly proves that all of the "gods," the "children of the Most High," the saints, would "*die like men*, and fall like one of the princes [not like Prince Adam, for his own sin, but like Prince Jesus, sacrificially]."

To understand this Scripture, it is necessary first to understand the context and also our Lord's application of it. Psalm 82 apparently refers to our Lord Jesus as the Divinely appointed Deliverer and Judge of Christendom at the time of His Parousia, His *presence*, in the closing of the Gospel Age.

The Hebrew word translated "God" and "gods" in v. 1 and "gods" in v. 6, is *elohim*, which word is applicable not only to Jehovah, but also to others: it is used (1) of judges and rulers (Ex. 21: 6; 22: 8, 9, 28; 1 Sam. 2: 25); (2) of mighty men who were not judges or rulers (Gen. 23: 6; Ex. 7: 1); (3) of good and bad angels (Psa. 8: 5, comp. Heb. 2: 7; Psa. 97: 7, comp. Heb. 1: 6) and (4) of Jesus (Psa. 45: 6, comp. v. 7, where Jehovah is mentioned).

Likewise, we see that in Psa. 82: 1 our Lord Jesus is set forth as the god, the mighty one, who "standeth in the congregation [assembly] of the mighty [among the political, financial, ecclesiastical, industrial, social and labor potentates]; he judgeth among the gods [*elohim*—earth's mighty ones]." He rebukes these earthly princes for judging unjustly and exercising favoritism toward the wicked; and He exhorts them to defend the poor and fatherless and to see that justice is given to the afflicted and the needy, to deliver them out of the hand of their abusers.

But, according to v. 5, earth's mighty ones (earth's *elohim*) "know [heed] not [God's call for equity—the sounding of the antitypical Jubilee Trumpet, 'the last trump,' the seventh trumpet, 'the trump of God' (Zech. 9: 14; 1 Cor. 15: 52; Rev. 11: 15; 1 Thes. 4: 16)—for an explanation of the trump of God, see *The Time is at Hand*, pp. 147-149], neither will they understand; they walk

on in darkness [respecting the outcome of their policy, until, as a consequence]: all the foundations [the established principles of law and order] of the earth [human society] are out of course [unbalanced, in confusion, distorted, out of proper relationship to one another, hence must be removed, 'dissolved,' to make way for the new heaven and earth—the new social order (2 Pet. 3: 10-13)]."

Then, in vs. 6, 7, Jesus addresses His saints, His "little flock" (Luke 12: 32), as mighty ones: "I have said, Ye [He called them gods unto whom (or *for* whom) the word of God came'—John 10: 35] are gods [*elohim*—mighty ones—because they received the Word of God and the Spirit of that Word, as Jesus imparted it to them]; and all of you are children of the Most High [Beloved, now are we the sons of God'—1 John 3: 2; 2 Pet. 1: 4].

"But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes [not like the world in general, which dies like Prince Adam, as his children, sharers of his sentence, but *sacrificially*, with and like Prince Jesus—Isa. 9: 6; Acts 3: 15; 5: 31; as already seen, v. 7 proves that all the members of Christ's Body would die physically]."

This having been completed, Christ is called upon (v. 8): "Arise, O God [*elohim*—Mighty One], judge the earth [complete the overthrow of Satan's empire and the ushering in of the 'times of restitution' long promised by all the holy prophets—Acts 3: 19-23; Psa. 96: 1-13; 98: 1-9]: for thou shalt inherit all nations [Psa. 2: 7-12]." Then "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14: 21); and "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations" (Psa. 22: 27, 28).

Well, says one, then do you deny the saints' "rapture," or *translation*? No, we reply, we do not deny it, but we do believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that those saints who would be living in the favored time of the Lord's *presence* would be translated, or changed to their own spirit condition, at the moment of the death of the "earthen vessel" (2 Cor. 4: 7) *whenever it would come*; therefore they would not be obliged to *sleep* as did the New Creature Paul and others, but would be "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

### "BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE"

The following statement in Rev. 14: 13 is helpful also in this connection: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Nowhere in the Scriptures is death represented as in any sense a blessing, except in this one instance: on the contrary, it is usually set forth as a terrible enemy (1 Cor. 15: 25, 26). Note, however, that in this instance it is indicated as blessed only to a special class, "*the dead* who die." These are members of the Body of Christ—they are dead to the world, crucified with Christ, "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3: 3).

Note also the specific time application—"from henceforth"; and the context shows that it applies after the message goes forth that Babylon (the confused, mixed condition of worldly-mindedness and lukewarm Christianity) is fallen (comp. Rev. 3: 15-17; 18: 1-4), in the Gospel-Age Harvest. This coincides with the time of Jesus' Second Advent, and the beginning of the setting up of His Kingdom, at which time the sleeping saints are raised. "Henceforth," after that time, death, whenever it would come, would be a blessing to "the dead which die." As they one by one would die as men and like men, they would *in the same instant* be made like their Lord, glorious spirit beings, partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1: 4). It is then "that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." It is only the *labor* (toil) incident to the human body—the frail earthen vessel, which would cease. Their service of the Kingdom, in which they engaged while on earth, would continue.

The change of those Body members who would then be alive and remain, thus would give them the same fellowship, glory and power already entered into by the members who slept; they are all "caught away" from earthly conditions and united "together" "with the Lord in the *air*," which pictures the spiritual rulership of the world.

Satan has long occupied the position of "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2: 2), and has used for his co-workers and joint-rulers in it many of the great ones of Babylon, who, under his blinding errors, verily think they are doing God service. But in due time the present prince of the "air" shall be fully bound, and shall deceive no more; and the present heavens, the great Antichrist system, will "pass away with a great noise," while the new prince of the "air," the true spiritual ruler, Christ Jesus, will take the dominion and establish the "new heavens," the Church being united with Him in this power or "air," as His Bride.

Thus the "new heavens" will supersede the present "air" powers. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first [former] heaven and the first [former] earth were passed away. ... And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21: 1-4).

### "CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM"

But some may ask, Does not 1 Thes. 4: 17 say of the saints that "all shall be caught up *together*," and does not this mean that the saints who "are alive and remain" at the time of Jesus' Second Advent will be "changed" at the same *instant* of time?

The Greek word *hama*, translated "together" in this verse, means *at the same time* (see Thayer, Baxter, Liddell and Scott, Strong, Diaglott, etc.), either in the sense of (1) the same *period* of time, or (2) the same *moment* of time. Many have misunderstood its use in this text, as though it meant

that all the dead and all the living saints would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at the same *moment* of time. But in every one of its other nine occurrences in the New Testament *hama* means the same *period* of time, and not the same *moment* of time, and therefore it manifestly means the same *period* of time in our text also. The other nine occurrences are as follows:

*Matt. 13: 29*—The Lord here warned against trying to root out the symbolic tares from the symbolic wheat during the Gospel Age prior to the Harvest, "lest ... ye root up also the wheat *with* them." *Hama*, here translated *with*, in the sense of *at the same time*, indicates, not an instantaneous matter, but a rooting up as occurring over a *period* of time.

*E.g.*, the years' long course of the rigorists in the early Church, especially the Donatists, whose error on the nature of the so-called only true Church led them to act toward the tares in a way that fulfilled the parabolic request to root up the tares. And the controversy against their course, led by Cyprian, Augustine, *etc.*, giving the Truth on the subject, was the Lord's prohibition against the rooting out of the symbolic tares at that time.

And most assuredly the rooting out of symbolic tares and wheat of necessity would be first one of this class and later one of the other, *etc.*, the members of the two classes not experiencing it always at the same *moment* of time, but at various times during the same *general period* of time—the Gospel Age prior to its Harvest (v. 30).

*Matt. 20: 1*—"Who went out early [*hama*] in the morning" or "who came forth *at the same time* [*as*] morning." The morning does not come in a *moment* of time, but in a *period* of several hours. The words *came forth* also imply an act that stretched over a *period*, as distinct from a *moment* of time; for these words imply leaving one place, advancing toward another place and finally arriving there.

*Acts 24: 26*—"At the same time [*hama*; see Diaglott] also hoping that money would be given him by Paul." After the hearing that Paul had before Felix the governor, he was kept bound in prison for two years (v. 27), during which Felix sent for him often, and communed with him (v. 26), *at the same* (*period*, not *moment* of) *time* hoping for a bribe from Paul, to obtain his release. But in all the moments while Felix was conversing so frequently with Paul, his faculty of hope was not always operating. At times doubtless other faculties operated, *e.g.*, intellectual faculties. Moreover, during the extended time in those two years that Felix was hoping, it was often while he was not conversing with Paul; nevertheless it was *hama*, at the same time, *i.e.*, *during the same general period*.

*Acts 27: 40*—"And having cut off the anchors, they left them in the sea; having, *at the same time*, loosed the bands of the rudders, and hoisted the foresail to the wind, they pressed towards the shore" (Diaglott). Obviously all this could not be done in a *moment*, instantaneously; but it was all done in the same *period* of time.

*Rom. 3: 12*—"They are all gone out of the way, they are *together* [*hama*] become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Thus is described the course of sinners from the fall

in Eden until at least St. Paul's day; hence the word *hama* in this verse covers a *period* of over 4,000 years.

*Col. 4: 3*—"Withal [*hama, at the same time* during which they 'continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving'—v. 2] praying also for us." Obviously a *period* of time is here meant.

*1 Thes. 5: 10*—"Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live *together* [*hama*] with him." The "living *at the same time* with Christ" here meant will be done in the eternity *following* the resurrection. It could not refer here to this life, because this blessing of eternally living with Christ was not only for the faithful who were watching, therefore alive, but also for the faithful who were asleep, *i.e.*, dead.

*1 Tim. 5: 13*—"And *withal* [*hama, at the same time*] they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking 'things which they ought not.'" Surely a *period* of time is here indicated by *hama*, for all the matters here spoken of could not occur in a *moment*.

*Philemon 22*—"But *withal* [*hama, at the same time*] prepare me also a lodging." In the preceding verses St. Paul had been encouraging Philemon to treat his returned slave Onesimus as a brother; and having confidence that he would do even more than requested (v. 21), the Apostle asked that *at the same time* during which Philemon would be showing kindness and brotherly love to Onesimus he would also prepare a lodging for Paul, for he hoped that the Lord might grant him a visit to Philemon in answer to the latter's prayers.

Thus in every one of the other nine occurrences of the word *hama* in the Scriptures, the things mentioned are represented as being done, *not simultaneously*, in the same *moment* of time, but rather in the same *period* of time. Accordingly, we are right in concluding that in *1 Thes. 4: 17* the "being caught away *together*" (*hama, at the same time*) means that the "dead in Christ" (the sleeping saints—*1 Cor. 15: 18*) and the living saints would be raptured, not in the same *moment* of time (as some erroneously conclude and teach), but in the same *period* of time.

### PRE- OR POST-TRIBULATION RAPTURE?

For many years there has been much discussion and controversy as to whether the Church's rapture would be *before* or *after* the "great tribulation." The Scriptures show clearly that the saints were to expect more or less of tribulation (*John 16: 33*; *Acts 14: 22*; *Rom. 5: 3-5*; *8: 35*; *12: 12*; *2 Cor. 1: 4*; *7: 4*; *2 Thes. 1: 4*; *Rev. 2: 10*). But what about the special tribulation, the Great Tribulation, here in the end of the Age? Were they to expect to escape it entirely, go through part of it, or go through all of it?

There are clear indications in the Scriptures that some of Christ's Body members would witness the gathering of the storm of the Tribulation and share in some of its troubles. Nevertheless, the Scriptures show also that all the Body members would be fully raptured,

delivered, exalted to the glorious spirit condition, before the severest features of the Tribulation (Matt. 24: 21) would come.

One passage which shows this prophetically is Psa. 46: 1-11. The saints are set forth as being in a time of great trouble upon the world—the Tribulation—and as saying: "God is our refuge and strength [He would give them the power to stand amid bearable troubles, and shield them and provide a way of escape from those that would be too hard for them to bear—1 Cor. 10: 13], a very present help in *the* [so the Hebrew] trouble.

"Therefore will not we fear, though the earth [symbolizing the present organization of human society] be removed [shaken, disorganized and swept away—Heb. 12: 26, 27], and though the mountains [the kingdoms, governments, of this present evil world] be carried into the midst of the sea [the lawless, ungovernable masses of people]; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled [with the disputings of contending factions], though the mountains [kingdoms] shake with the swelling [the rising of the masses against the privileged classes] thereof.

"There is a river [God's Word, the fountain of Truth and grace], the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God [the Kingdom of God, the Body members in their earthly condition, before being exalted to Divine power and glory], the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High [the sanctuary, the true Church, wherein the Most High is pleased to dwell—2 Cor. 6: 16].

"God is in the midst of her [by His Spirit, Word and providences]; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early [*at the dawning of (her) morning*—Leeser's translation]."

The remainder of Psa. 46 describes further in very graphic terms the Great Tribulation, especially its severer features. But vs. 1-5 are sufficient to show clearly that the remaining Body members would still be here on earth during the earlier, less severe features of the Tribulation.

Their escape from these earlier features would be by their being supported, strengthened and kept safe amid them by the Divine Word, their shield and buckler (Psa. 91: 4). And their being raptured amid the troubles of the Tribulation, but before the severest features, would cause them to escape these features. Thus they would escape in one sense or the other from all the features of the Tribulation ("all these things"—Luke 21: 36).

The Prophet Elijah had a vision of a violent wind, an earthquake and a fire, and after the fire there was a still small voice (the voice of God; 1 Kings 19: 11, 12; comp. Psa. 46: 10). This wind seems clearly to correspond to the World War (Phases I and II) portion of the Great Tribulation (which began in 1914), the earthquake to the World Revolution portion and the fire to the World Anarchy portion, with "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30: 7), Phase II, upon regathered Fleshly Israel as its final part.

Elijah (as well as John the Baptist) is used to represent the true Church in the flesh as God's reformer mouthpiece, the forerunner of the Christ, Head and Body, in the glory of the Divine nature (Mal. 4: 5, 6; Matt. 11: 14; 17: 12; see *The Time is at Hand*, chap. 8). Elijah's ascent in a

whirlwind is used to represent the rapture of the last Body members at the beginning of the severest features (the whirlwind) of the Great Tribulation—the World Revolution and the World Anarchy (including Jacob's Trouble, Phase II).

We pray that our examination of the Scriptures concerning the rapture of the Church and related matters has been a blessing, with perhaps an amending of understanding on the subject, and a discarding of some preconceived opinions which are recognized as not in harmony or not fully in harmony with the Scriptures.

Let us continue to rejoice increasingly in the blessed hopes connected with our Lord's Second Advent—His Parousia, His Epiphaneia, or Apokalupsis, and His Basileia. Let us look earnestly at the "things eternal," seeking diligently to grow in grace and knowledge, and to make our calling and election sure, to an abundant entrance into a share with our Lord Jesus in His everlasting Kingdom (2 Pet. 1: 5-11; 3: 18). Let us remember that there are two phases to the Kingdom—earthly and heavenly (see our *Kingdom of God* booklet—a copy free on request).

## IMPORTANT RELATED QUESTIONS

Some who have been taught differently may have difficulty with accepting the Bible teaching, mentioned in the foregoing pages, that the saints of the Gospel, or Church, Age all would sleep in death, awaiting the time of Jesus' Second Advent.

The Bible clearly teaches that *souls* (including the saints' souls) *are not immortal* (death-proof), but *mortal*—that is, *souls can die* (Psa. 22: 29; 30: 3; 33: 18, 19; 35: 17; 56: 13; 78: 50; 116: 8; Isa. 10: 18; Ezek. 13: 19; 18: 4, 20, 27; 22: 27; Matt. 10: 28; Acts 3: 23; James 4: 12; 5: 20—see our *What is the Soul?* booklet—a copy free on request; see also our *Life-Death-Hereafter* book).

The Bible clearly teaches also that *souls sleep in the unconscious sleep of death between the time of death and the resurrection* (Eccles. 9: 5, 10; Psa. 6: 5; 115: 17; 146: 4; Isa. 38: 18, 19; Dan. 12: 2; John 11: 11-13; Acts 7: 60; 13: 36; 1 Cor. 15: 6, 18, 51; 1 Thes. 4: 13, 14; 2 Pet. 3: 4).

But some may think that some New Testament passages, such as Phil. 1: 23 and 2 Cor. 5: 8, are not in agreement with the teaching that the saints slept in death during the Gospel Age. Therefore we will examine these two passages and their contexts here.

### ST. PAUL'S EARNEST DESIRE

*Question:* In Phil. 1: 23 we read of the Apostle Paul's "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ." Does not this prove that Paul expected to be with Christ immediately after his death, that

the dead are conscious and that Paul did not expect to wait until Christ's Second Advent to be raptured and united with Christ in glory and to receive his reward?

*Answer:* At first glance it may seem so to many; but a close analysis of the preceding and following context, and of parallel passages, does not favor such a thought.

In Phil. 1: 20-25 the Apostle tells us that he does not know whether to prefer life with its sufferings and its blessings of service for the brethren, or death with its release from labor and sufferings. He confesses himself hard pressed as to which he should choose of these two things—(1) life or (2) death (vs. 21-23). As between these two things, therefore, it was a matter of indifference to him which he should choose, since both had such accompaniments that he could not decide which of the two would be the more desirable.

But in v. 23 he mentions two other things—a third and a fourth thing—that are far better than life or death. In the King James Version these are mentioned as (3) departing and (4) being with Christ.

The Greek word *anulusai*, which in v. 23 is translated "depart," is in the only other New Testament passage in which it occurs rendered "return" (Luke 12: 36). The word *anulusai* in classical Greek means both *to depart* and *to return*. Which of these renderings fits Phil. 1: 23?

In Luke 12: 36 *anulusai* is used in a parable illustrative of our Lord's Second Advent. Jesus clearly taught us that our rewards would be given to us at His return from heaven, and not before (Matt. 16: 27; Rev. 11: 18); in the resurrection, and not before (Luke 14: 14). Paul and the other Apostles taught similarly, that the "spirit," the New Creature, is saved in the Day of the Lord, and not before (1 Cor. 5: 5); and that it is only after Christ's return that the Church would see Him and be with Him (1 John 3: 2; 1 Thes. 4: 16, 17; 2 Tim. 4: 8; compare John 14: 2, 3). *Therefore Paul and the other Apostles believed that they would for the first time in glory see and be with the Lord Jesus after His Second Advent.*

These considerations prove that the word *anulusai* in Phil. 1: 23 should be translated *return* and not *depart*. So the translation should read, "having a desire for the *returning* of, and the being with Christ." These, of course, are the two things, (3) and (4), that are by far better than the other two things—(1) life or (2) death; and we immediately recognize them to be things different from life and death. This is that blessed hope that God has given His Gospel-Age people to cherish (Phil. 3: 20; 1 Thes. 1: 10; Titus 2: 13; Rev. 22: 20). And this was the hope that the Apostle expressed in Phil. 1: 23, which is to be realized at Christ's return, through the resurrection.

These considerations prove also that the clause, "having a desire," *etc.*, should be enclosed within a parenthesis. They prove additionally that the passage does not treat of the consciousness of the dead, and therefore should not be quoted to try to prove that false doctrine. Furthermore, they clearly confirm the Apostle's teaching that his and other Body members' rapture and reward would not come until the Lord's Second Advent, at the time of His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

## "ABSENT FROM THE BODY" AND "PRESENT WITH THE LORD"

*Question:* In your book *Life—Death—Hereafter* and elsewhere you cite many Scriptures to show that the dead are asleep in the unconscious condition of death and will not be awakened from the dead until in the resurrection day, the day of Christ's appearing. But does not the Apostle Paul's expression "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5: 8) prove that when a person dies he continues in a conscious existence?

*Answer:* If we were to draw such a conclusion from this passage, it would contradict many other Scriptures—and we know that God does not contradict Himself. Furthermore, this Scripture does not warrant any such conclusion.

In order to understand what St. Paul really meant in 2 Cor. 5: 8, we should note carefully the context. We will then see that the Apostle was not speaking of people in general, but only of the Church, New Creatures, who "have this treasure [the Spirit-begotten new nature] in earthen vessels [human bodies]" (2 Cor. 4: 7).

Note that in v. 16 he speaks of this treasure as the inward man that is renewed day by day, and of the earthen vessel as the outward man that perishes. Only those who are Spirit-begotten, who are New Creatures (though still under development in human bodies, preparatory to their Spirit birth in the resurrection), have both *an outward man* and an *inward man*.

St. Paul discusses the inward man from *three standpoints*: (1) as "clothed with an earthly tabernacle," the natural body, *i.e.*, in the present life (2 Cor. 5: 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9); (2) as "unclothed," "naked," "absent from the body" and "absent from the Lord," *i.e.*, in the death condition, awaiting the resurrection (2 Cor. 5: 3, 4, 6, 8, 9); (3) as having and being in "a building of God," "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven," "clothed" and "present with the Lord," *i.e.*, in the resurrection condition (2 Cor. 5: 1-4, 8). If we keep in mind these three standpoints as well as the meanings of the expressions "inward man" and "outward man," we will recognize that the Apostle here says nothing at all about the consciousness of the dead.

In 2 Cor. 5: 1 the Apostle addresses the Church, the New Creatures, who in the resurrection will have "celestial bodies" (1 Cor. 15: 40). He here assures them that even though their earthly house (the body of flesh, their temporary abode) be dissolved (Greek, *taken down, i.e.*, goes into death), they nevertheless have awaiting them a building of God, a new house, a glorious heavenly body, which becomes theirs in the resurrection, during Jesus' Second Advent (Matt. 16: 27; Luke 14: 14; John 14: 3; 1 Cor. 15: 51, 52; Col. 3: 4; 1 Thes. 4: 16, 17; 2 Tim. 4: 8; 1 Pet. 5: 4; 1 John 3: 2; Rev. 22: 12).

It is for their glorious heavenly bodies that the Church in the flesh during the Gospel Age has longed (Rom. 8: 23; 2 Cor. 5: 2). It was not the death state for which they longed; for during the time of unconscious sleep in death, the New Creature—the new heart, mind and will—is naked, *i.e.*, has no body. But when clothed with the new spirit body, the New Creature is no longer naked.

The Diaglott translation gives the thought of v. 3 very well: "And surely, having been invested, we shall not be found destitute." The RSV translates it: "So that by putting it on we may not be found naked." Vincent's "Word Studies in the New Testament" gives as the equivalent: "We shall not be found naked because we shall be clothed."

While tabernacling in the flesh during the Gospel Age, the New Creature, "the inward man," is burdened, not longing for the unclothed, naked condition—the unconscious, disembodied death condition—but for the clothed condition, when mortality is "swallowed up of life," in the new house, "eternal in the heavens" (vs. 1, 4; 1 Cor. 15: 54).

It is God Himself who has been working in His New Creation the character transformation needed to fit them for their heavenly inheritance; and He gave them His holy Spirit, His holy disposition, as an earnest—a down-payment or pledge—that, if faithful, they would receive in the resurrection their new spirit bodies (v. 5).

The two Greek words that in v. 6 are correctly translated "at home" and "absent" are respectively *endemeo* (from *en—in* and *demos—people*, meaning *to be among one's people*) and *ekdemeo* (*ek—from*, the word meaning *to be away from one's people*). There is here (and in v. 8) a play upon the words which might be expressed by *at home* and *from home*.

Referring to what was just said, especially in v. 5, the Apostle infers that this gives New Creatures even here the confidence (*courage*, ASV, RSV, Rotherham, *etc.*) that enables them to walk by faith and not by sight (v. 7) while *at home* in the body (the *inward man* dwelling in the flesh, the *earthen vessel*, the *earthly house of this tabernacle*) and absent from (*away from home with*) the Lord (literally, *from home from the Lord*). The object of faith emphasized here, as indicated in the entire context, was to behold the Lord's glory and to be at home (to dwell) with Him (John 17: 24; Rom. 8: 17; 2 Tim. 2: 10-12). This was especially longed for and was expected when the Lord would come again and take His saints home to Himself in the resurrection (see the list of references above). This "end of faith" for the saints is described also in 1 Pet. 1: 4-9, 13.

Therefore, keeping this object of their faith in mind, and realizing that God was working in them and preparing them for their eternal home in the heavens (vs. 1, 2, 5), the New Creatures in Christ Jesus have been confident (courageous) and willing (literally, *well-pleased*) that in harmony with God's arrangement they in due time would enter into death (be absent from the body—from it as their home or dwelling place; *ekdemeo—from home*) and later, in the resurrection (when Jesus in His Second Advent would come again and receive them to Himself—John 14: 3), be present with the Lord (v. 8; "at home with the Lord"—ASV, RSV; *endemeo—at home*).

This glorious hope enabled them to labor in the interests of God's cause for the perfecting of their New Creatures (the "inward man") in Christlikeness until death, so that they might be pleasing to Him, whether present (*endemeo—at home*) with Him in their resurrection bodies at the time of His Second Coming, or in death absent (*ekdemeo—from home*) from Him and from their fleshly bodies (v. 9). They were ever conscious that they must all appear (Greek, *be made manifest*, as in v. 11) after their resurrection at the Judgment Seat of Christ for their rewards, which would be increased by their good deeds and decreased by their evil deeds (v. 10; Matt. 16: 27; Rev. 11: 18).

How clearly 2 Cor. 4: 16 — 5: 10 interprets itself as applying only to New Creatures—only to those begotten by God's holy Spirit to a spirit life, "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3: 1)! This passage has no reference at all to mankind in general. It says not one word about anyone being conscious in death. It does not teach that in being absent from the body one is then present with the Lord, though some pervert 2 Cor. 5: 8 in trying to prove that this is the case. On the contrary, this verse, like all other Scriptures treating of the subject, shows that to be absent from the body—to be in the death state, without a body, "naked," "unclothed" — is quite another thing than being present with the Lord. Two distinct conditions are here indicated: "[1] to be absent from the body, *and* [2] to be present with the Lord." The former begins at a New Creature's death; the latter at his resurrection awakening, in the Judgment Day, during Jesus' Second Advent.