

The Rapture—As We See the Day Approaching

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This paper is presented to refute the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture and to encourage believers that the Day of the Lord is drawing near.

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 1 Thessalonians 5:4

SINCE FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, then it is only possible to hope for those things which we do not as yet see. For example, the little boy hopes for a bicycle on his birthday. Why does he have this hope? Because Daddy said he would get him a bicycle. If the little boy has faith in the character and capabilities of his daddy, he will rejoice today in the bicycle that he will not actually see until next month. But once the birthday arrives bringing with it the bicycle, no longer does the boy hope, for now he has the reality. Likewise Paul writes, For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance (Romans 8:24-25).

What is the hope we are saved in? What is it that the believer eagerly awaits? Paul says that we are looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). The word appear (Greek *epiphaneia*) means to shine forth or become eminently visible. It is used five times in the New Testament to refer to the second coming of Christ. When Jesus comes back, we will see what is now only our hope. This is why Paul writes that we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ”

When John saw the Son of God, he was inspired to proclaim, And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father (John 1:14). Jesus, the Man, was (and is) the glory of God. But if the first coming of Jesus was glorious, how much more the second when He comes in power and great glory (Matthew

24:30)? The return of Jesus Christ will be the ultimate, quintessential demonstration of the GLORY! This is why Paul calls it the glorious appearing. ” He describes this event in striking detail in the following passage:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

The event described in this passage may sound bizarre to some, and it certainly sounds supernatural, but it is true nonetheless: Jesus Christ is coming back to this world to catch away His people. And this momentous and glorious event is what we call The Rapture –the blessed hope of every true believer.

How can we be so sure it will happen? Because our hope is not founded upon some pipedream or wishful thinking, but upon the personal promise of Jesus Christ. Consider His words, And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN and receive you to Myself (John 14:3). How could anyone ignore such a definitive statement? How could any reasonable person dismiss this clear biblical teaching without first making a thorough investigation? The Bible warns, however, that in the last days scoffers will come saying, Where is the promise of His coming? (2 Peter 3:3-4). These are the ones who don t really want to know the truth. But not knowing the truth never stopped the truth from being fulfilled; for the Word of God assures us, For yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry (Hebrews 10:37).

The Promise of His Coming

The Bible affirms many times the certainty of the second coming of Jesus Christ. At the time of His ascension into heaven, an angel appeared to His disciples and asked, Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner (Acts 1:11). Peter wrote, The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10a). And James wrote, Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 4:8). Jude joined the chorus by writing, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of

His saints, to execute judgment on all (Jude 1:14b-15a). And the apostle John wrote, Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him (Revelation 1:7). Clearly Christ's closest associates believed that He would one day come again.

If the Bible has any validity at all, then we must believe that Jesus Christ is indeed coming again. The question that many people are asking is, When? The disciples asked Jesus this very question, saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age? (Matthew 24:3). Jesus began His answer describing the times just prior to His return.

Some may wonder if there are any compelling reasons to believe that Jesus Christ will come again in our lifetime. The answer to this question is a resounding YES! There are a number of very compelling reasons to believe that it won't be long until Jesus Christ returns to this earth. Let's look at some of the most significant ones.

COMPELLING REASON #1: Labor Pains

When asked when He was coming back, Jesus answered, Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. He then went on to say, And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows (Matthew 24:4-8).

The literal meaning of the word translated sorrows is labor pains. In other words, just as labor pains let a woman know that the birth of her baby is near, so can we, as we see false Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes increasing in frequency and severity, know that the coming of Jesus is near. Let's look at some current statistics:

Jesus said that nation would rise against nation (that is, ethnic group against ethnic group). In recent years we have seen:

Serbs against Croats

Russians against Chechens

Hutus against Tutsis

Iraqi Arabs against Iraqi Kurds

Jesus also said that kingdom would rise against kingdom (that is, sovereign nation against sovereign nation). In recent years we have seen:

- # Iraq against Iran and Kuwait
- # China against Tibet
- # India against Pakistan
- # The Arab nations against Israel
- # The US and UK against Afghanistan and Iraq

The wars of the 20th Century resulted in more deaths than all wars of human history combined:

- # World War I over 8 million dead
- # World War II over 24 million dead
- # Korean War over 1 million dead
- # Vietnam War over 1 million dead
- # Cambodia late 1970s over 3 million dead
- # Iran-Iraq War 1980s over 1 million dead
- # Rwanda, Africa, 1994 over 500,000 dead
- # Yugoslavia, 1992 to 1996 over 250,000 dead

Jesus said there would be famines with multitudes of people starving to death. The figures that follow are from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization:

- # 750 million people are suffering from chronic hunger.
- # 35 million people are suffering from acute hunger.
- # 30,000 people die of starvation related causes every day.
- # India, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Bangladesh have become practically synonymous with starvation.

Jesus said that pestilences, that is, killer diseases such as AIDS, cancer, heart disease, TB, and venereal diseases, would ravage the earth:

- # Over 20 million Americans have genital herpes (*Readers Digest*, January 1983).
- # 270 million people worldwide have malaria (*Newsweek*, January 11, 1993).

Recent research has shown that contrary to what many have believed, communicable diseases are dramatically on the rise all over the world.
In several African nations, over one-fourth of the population is HIV positive.

Jesus also mentioned a great worldwide increase in the frequency and intensity of earthquakes. The following figures are from the U.S. Geological Survey's listing of killer quakes (6.0 or higher):

1900-1909 3
1910-1919 2
1920-1929 2
1930-1939 5
1940-1949 4
1950-1959 9
1960-1969 13
1970-1979 51
1980-1989 86
1990-2000 over 200

A 1981 headline in *Science News* read, "Significant U.S. Quakes Double in 1980." The article reported that twice as many significant earthquakes rocked the United States in 1980 as in 1979, in keeping with a worldwide trend in increased tremblers (July 11, 1981). Is it any wonder Jesus concluded by saying, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42)?

Continuing His description of the period just prior to His return, Jesus warned, "Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). In a parallel passage He added that men's hearts would be failing them from fear and the expectation of those things coming on the earth (Luke 21:26). The apostle Paul made this prediction: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come" (2 Timothy 3:1). Jesus Himself predicted, "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:37). According to the Old Testament, the days of Noah were characterized by widespread corruption and violence, so much so that God brought destruction upon all who would not heed Noah's warnings about the coming deluge (ref. Genesis 6:11).

Jesus said, "For as in the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of

Man be (Matthew 24:38-39). For the average citizen of that day, life was continuing on as usual until suddenly the judgment of God fell.

During the past several decades, the world has been experiencing a remarkable increase in the frequency and intensity of the very things that Jesus said would let us know we are in the last days. In spite of man's best efforts to eliminate war, the killing continues unabated. Deadly famines plague vast areas of the globe, while virulent diseases sweep across every segment of society. And in addition to the dramatic increase in the number of deadly earthquakes, society in general has become increasingly corrupt and brutal as children are abused, young girls are raped, innocent school children are gunned down, and cities are burned and looted. And while all this goes on, the leaders of the world stand and watch, powerless to curb the rising tide of senseless violence. If things continue as they are, it is only reasonable to conclude that extremely perilous times lie ahead for every one of us.

COMPELLING REASON #2: The Third Temple

In the midst of His description of the last days, Jesus abruptly issued the following warning: Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15-16). One of the most interesting things about this warning is Jesus' reference to the holy place. At the time He spoke these words, this term could have referred to only one place: the holy temple of the Lord on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem.

During the days of Jesus, the temple was the focal point of the Jewish religion. Jesus visited the temple on many occasions, even referring to it as My Father's house (John 2:16). In 70 A.D., approximately forty years after the first coming of Christ and the beginning of the New Testament period, the temple was completely destroyed by the Romans under the leadership of Titus. From that day until now, there has not been a temple in Jerusalem.

What are we to make of this? The words of Jesus seem to suggest that there will be a temple during the days just prior to His coming. Moreover, Paul described the Antichrist to the people of Thessalonica as the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God (1 Thessalonians 2:4). If the Antichrist is to stand in the holy place and sit in the temple of God, then there has to be a temple in Jerusalem. As of today there is no temple.

This is not to say that there will never be a temple. The fact is, there is a vigorous

movement in Israel today to build what would be the third temple on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. A number of organizations are involved in this endeavor. One is a group called the Temple Mount Faithful headed by a man named Gershon Salomon. Back in October of 1990, the publicized plans of this group precipitated a riot resulting in the death of nineteen Arabs. What plans provoked this outburst of violence? Their expressed intention to lay the cornerstone for the new temple.

In Salomon's own words, "Only God can give timing. But we do feel the time is short. In the near future the third temple is going to be built and the Messiah is going to come" (*Endtime* magazine, November/December 1996).

Another organization involved in the rebuilding of the temple is the Temple Institute. The work of this group is to reconstruct the furnishings and implements used in temple worship, many of which are on display at their headquarters in Jerusalem. Concerning the building of a third temple, Institute director Zev Golan says, "No one can say how, and no one wants to do it by force. But sooner or later, in a week or a century, it will be done. And we will be ready for it." (*Time* magazine, October 16, 1989).

The construction of a temple in Jerusalem would obviously necessitate a priesthood. In anticipation of this need, two Talmudic schools in Jerusalem are training students in the elaborate details of temple service. There has been the difficulty, however, of determining who is qualified to serve as a priest, since the Bible says that all priests must be directly descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses. Various groups have been trying for years to compile a list of candidates, but in January of 1997 their efforts received an almost unbelievable boost. A multinational team of geneticists announced that they had discovered a feature in the Y chromosomes of those claiming to be *cohanim* (priests) which is not present in non-Aaronides. A follow-up study released in July of 1998 has confirmed their initial discovery. An Associated Press story reports, "Scientists have found fresh genetic evidence that Jews who consider themselves part of the priestly class known as Cohanim really are part of an unbroken line extending back thousands of years."

Some may ask, "But isn't the Islamic shrine called the Dome of the Rock sitting right where the temple has to be built?" This was thought to be the case until 1982, when Israeli archaeologist Asher Kaufman identified the location of the holy place as being under a smaller, less significant shrine called the Dome of the Spirits. An article in *U.S. News and World Report* stated:

The key to Kaufman's assertion is the identification of underground cisterns and clusters of natural rock that had to be tooled by ancient workmen to fit into the Temple's missing walls. Starting with these findings and detailed descriptions of

the Temple layout in the ancient religious writings of the Talmud, Kaufman made thousands of measurements indicating where the building must have stood (December 19, 1983).

The prospect of an end-time temple standing beside the Dome of the Rock appears to have biblical support. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John relates a prophetic vision he experienced while imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos. He writes, "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months' (Revelation 11:1-2). Since the temple of Jesus' day had definitely been destroyed several decades before John penned the book of Revelation, he is apparently picturing a temple which is yet to be constructed. The court outside the temple, which is for the Gentiles, could very well be a reference to the area surrounding the Dome of the Rock.

One theory is that the Jews will be allowed to build their temple on the Temple Mount, separated from the Dome by a wall, as part of the final status agreement on Jerusalem. Regardless of how it actually happens, the Bible tells us that we will see the reconstruction of a temple in Jerusalem and that this will be a clear sign that the coming of the Lord is near. Current events tell us that the building of such a temple is getting closer every day. As Temple Institute director Golan laments, "Every day's delay is a strain on the nation."

COMPELLING REASON #3: The Cashless Society

One of the most notable signs that the Bible says will appear just prior to the return of Christ is described in the book of Revelation. This is the sign of the CASHLESS SOCIETY. Revelation 13 speaks of a beast rising out of the earth who has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon. It goes on to say that he deceives those who dwell on the earth (13:11,14). It further says of him, "He causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (13:16-17).

The man behind this coming economic system is the one we call the Antichrist. But what is this mysterious number associated with this false Messiah? What is the number that everyone must have in order to buy or sell? The Bible explains, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666" (13:8).

Many believe that this 'mark of the beast' will have something to do with the bar codes which are already found on virtually every retail item sold in this country. These codes are framed in three 6's, one marking the beginning, one the center check point, and one the end.

An article appearing in *Senior Scholastics* magazine on September 20, 1973 provides an interesting description of what was then considered to be a futuristic economic system. This article states:

All buying and selling in the program will be done by computer. No currency, no change, no checks. In the program, people would receive a number that had been assigned them tattooed in the wrist or forehead. The number is put on by a laser beam and cannot be felt. The number in the body is not seen with the naked eye and is as permanent as your fingerprints. All items of consumer goods will be marked with a computer mark. The computer outlet in the store which picks up the number on the items at the checkstand will also pick up the number in the person's body and automatically total the price and deduct it from the person's 'Special Drawing Rights' account.

This system is practically in place right now. It is already possible in many locations to make purchases without any cash using only a debit card. A July 1992 newspaper article reported: 'Anyone with an ATM card and direct deposit of paychecks to his bank conceivably almost never would need cash' (*The Capital*, Annapolis, Md.). The problem with the debit cards is that they can be lost or stolen. The next step will be replacing the plastic cards with a microscopic computer chip implanted under the skin on the hand or forehead. The technology to do this is already in existence.

A recent newspaper report about dogs and grocery stores shed some valuable light on how this system could work. The dateline is Seattle and the headline reads: 'Select Safeway Stores Host Micro-chipping Clinics.' The story then says:

When a pet becomes lost, it can be devastating...but it doesn't have to be anymore. Safeway and local Washington veterinarians want to help owners keep track of their pets before they are lost. Select Safeway stores will be hosting Microchipping clinics on the weekends of May 30, June 6 and June 13 from 1 to 5 p.m. Members of the Veterinary Strategic Alliance, a coalition of local veterinarians and veterinary technicians, will be at the clinics performing the microchip procedure.

The microchips, a \$40 retail value, will be offered for the special price of \$15. Safeway shoppers can also get money saving coupons on the

microchip by purchasing special products and collecting checkout coupons at Safeway.

Developed by a veterinarian, the microchip is a small device, not much bigger than a grain of rice, with an identification number. When a pet is microchipped with a quick injection around the shoulder area, all the pertinent information about the animal and owner, including a contact number and address, is entered into a national database. When scanned, the microchip displays a unique number on the scanner's screen. Then, the shelter (or whoever is scanning the animal) can call a 24-hour hotline to find out who the animal belongs to.

Microchips are not for dogs and cats only. They can be implanted into any animal, including ferrets, reptiles and birds. And it isn't just for reuniting lost pets either –microchipping is beneficial when a pet is stolen or there is a discrepancy over ownership of a pet.

Could an implanted microchip be the explanation and fulfillment of the remarkable prophecy of Revelation 13? Consider this: The word translated "mark" is the Greek word *charagma*, which Strong's dictionary defines as "a scratch or etching, i.e. stamp (as a badge of servitude). The root of this word is the *charasso*, which means "to sharpen to a point. It is important to know that whenever a Greek word ends with the suffix *ma*, it generally means the results of something. Therefore, the literal meaning of the word translated "mark" can be said to be, the results of being stuck by a sharpened object. Clearly a tiny microchip implanted by a hypodermic needle fits this definition.

Furthermore, microchips are powered by tiny lithium batteries. Should one of these batteries spring a leak, a terrible sore would erupt on the skin. Revelation 16:2 says, "A foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast...."

So what does this all mean? It means that we are quickly approaching a day when all financial transactions will be handled by computer –there will be no more coins, no more cash, and no more checks. In addition, all credit cards and debit cards will be replaced by an implanted microchip that contains personal information (such as a bank account number) and can be read by a scanner. It will then come to pass that no one will be able to buy or sell except he who has the mark!

Some may think this could never happen. But a *Time* magazine article entitled "The Future of Money" makes the following statement concerning the way electronic money can be stored: "Your daughter can store the money any way she wants –on her laptop, on a debit card, even (in the not too distant future) on a

chip implanted under her skin (April 27, 1998, p.51).

The prime mover in the coming cashless system is a company called Mondex, which, with the financial backing of MasterCard, is spreading electronic money systems all over the world. Formed in England in 1993, the name Mondex is a compound of the words monetary and dexter. According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, the word monetary means relating to money or to the mechanisms by which it is supplied to and circulates in the economy. The word dexter means situated on the right and comes from the very word used in the book of Revelation to describe the location of the mark of the beast —the right hand.

The American franchise for Mondex has been purchased by AT&T/Lucent Technologies, which uses the symbol of the Solar Serpent on their logo. The name Lucent is also a compound of the words Lucifer and enterprises. All transactions made through this cashless system will be secured by what is called the SET protocols. SET stands for Secure Electronic Transaction, but Set is also the name of the Egyptian god of evil, the one we call Satan.

Even though everything about this emerging cashless system seems to be wrapped up in satanic language and symbols, it continues to sweep across the world like an unstoppable fire. And why not? For didn't Jesus call Satan the ruler of this world (John 14:30). And didn't John write, 'The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one' (1 John 5:19)? For the present time this world is the devil's, and the coming economic system is without question the devil's system.

Though it may be introduced as a voluntary alternative to the cards, eventually this mark will become mandatory. No one will be able to buy or sell without it. Will it happen this year? Next year? The year after? Five years from now? Who can say? But the point is, we are almost there. We are almost at the complete and perfect fulfillment of a remarkable prophecy made over 1900 years ago by an imprisoned apostle of Jesus Christ.

Many people believe that a cashless economic system will be a wonderful advancement for society. But the Bible gives this clear and uncompromised warning: 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives the mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall drink of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation' (Revelation 14:9-10).

The signs are all around us. They virtually proclaim the soon coming of Jesus Christ. Who will have sufficient faith to resist the intense societal pressure to receive this mark which is sure to come? Jesus asked His disciples this penetrating question: 'When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?' (Luke

18:8). Only those with genuine faith will have the inner strength to refuse this diabolical mark. They will not fear the persecution of the Antichrist, but will instead be looking for the second coming of Jesus Christ. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear the second time, apart from sin, for salvation ” (Hebrews 9:28).

What Will the Coming of Christ Be Like?

Jesus described His coming like this: Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken (Matthew 24:29). Then, as the world lies in abject darkness, light will suddenly burst forth from heaven: for as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:27).

Paul painted this vivid picture of the Second Coming: The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

What will happen when Jesus descends from heaven and re-enters the earthly realm in bodily form? He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds...two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:31,40). At some point thereafter, we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...so then each of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:10-12).

The Bible teaches that Jesus is coming again to judge the world in righteousness ” (Acts 17:31). Every human being will have to stand before Him to be judged not only for what they have done, but also for the secrets of their hearts (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 2:16). In other words, it will not be enough just to have acted right; it will be equally important that our motives and intentions were also right. To God, the only acceptable human actions are those which are motivated by genuine faith in Jesus Christ, for whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23).

At the second coming of Jesus Christ, every thought and every deed will be revealed by the One whose eyes are like flames of fire (Revelation 1:14); for there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13).

The Day is Approaching

The Rapture will not come unexpectedly upon the people of God. Actually, the Bible teaches quite the opposite. Just as Noah was not surprised when the flood came and Lot was not surprised by the sudden outpouring of wrath upon Sodom, so will it be for all watchful believers. In fact, the Rapture should not only be expected, but if we watch carefully, the Bible says we will be able to see this momentous day approaching.

Some may ask, But didn't Jesus say that He would return at an hour when we do not expect Him? (ref. Matthew 24:44). This seems to be what Jesus said if we take His statement out of context. But if we read it in the light of everything else He said, we find that Jesus meant this as a warning, not as a settled fact. What Jesus actually taught was that, for those who are alert and ready, His coming will be fully expected, but for those who are not ready and not paying attention, He will come unexpectedly and take them by surprise.

Paul reiterated this idea in Hebrews 10 when he wrote: And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25). This verse has been used by many to encourage church attendance, but actually it has nothing directly to do with people coming to church. It has everything to do, however, with people being ready for the Rapture.

In order to understand this, it is first necessary to know that the phrase "assembling of ourselves together" is a translation of one Greek word, *episunagoge*, which means "complete collection." The usual word used in the New Testament for an assembly, either of Christians or Jews, is *sunagoge*, which is where we get the word "synagogue." But the word used in Hebrews 10:25 has the prefix *epi* added, which strengthens and intensifies the root meaning of the word. In other words, the assembly Paul referred to in Hebrews 10:25 is not the normal assembly of Christians for worship, but the ultimate, complete assembly when Jesus calls His people together to meet Him in the air (ref. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Thayer's Lexicon says that *epi* can also add the idea of upward motion to a word. So perhaps *episunagoge* should be translated "the upward assembly." This idea is supported by the way this word is used in the only other place it is found in the Bible: Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). In this verse *episunagoge* is translated

gathering together. The context clearly shows that Paul is talking about the Rapture.

Jesus used the verb form of *episunagoge* in the Olivet Discourse when He said, "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together [*episunago*] His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Again, this is plainly describing the Rapture of the believers to be with Jesus.

Let Us Persevere

Paul understood that the Rapture was intended to be an expected event and therefore warned the Thessalonians not to be troubled by those who were claiming that the Day had already come. This is also why he admonished the Hebrew believers not to forsake this great promise –for after all, the Rapture is the hope of the Church.

Apparently there were some who were weak in faith and, in the midst of severe persecution, had forsaken the hope of the Rapture. But Paul wrote to them encouraging them not to forsake the *episunagoge*. In other words, he was telling them, "Hold on, don't give up. Jesus really is coming. He really will gather us up together to Himself. "

The context of this admonition suggests that the reason Paul was reminding them that they would be able to see the Day approaching was because of the severe hardships the people were enduring. In Hebrews 10:33 he wrote, "Partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated. The word translated tribulations is the very same word Jesus used three times in the Olivet Discourse to describe the days just prior to His coming (ref. Matthew 24:9; 21; 29).

Knowing what Jesus had taught in the Olivet Discourse and observing that the Hebrew believers were undergoing a time of severe trouble and persecution, Paul may have reasoned that the Rapture was getting closer. He therefore called upon the people to exhort one another "so much the more as you see the Day approaching. The Greek word translated see is *bliepo*, which means to look at or discern, and the word translated approaching is *eggizo*, which means to make near or come near. The clear implication of Hebrews 10:25 is that those believers who know what to watch for and are watching for those things will be able to discern that the day of the Rapture and the coming of Christ is drawing near. He will not come in a day they do not expect. They will be watching the Day as it arrives.

This only makes sense, for why would God not allow His people to know what lies ahead? The Bible was written to the people of God, not the people of the world. Examples from the past indicate that God's people always knew what to expect, and these examples were written for our learning, that we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Again, in examining the context of Paul's admonition to the Hebrews, he goes on to say: "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry (Hebrews 10:35-37). Plainly the entire theme of this passage is Paul's encouragement not to forsake the promise that Jesus will come and deliver His people from their fiery trials and persecutions. All they had to do was endure to the end. This is why Paul wrote that we eagerly await our hope with perseverance."

The Bible tells us that the world will be covered with darkness at the time of the Lord's glorious return to earth (Isaiah 60:1-2). While it may be true that those living in darkness will not be expecting His return, this is not true of His faithful believers. He will come as a thief in the night to those who aren't watching, but Paul told the Thessalonians, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

Watch and Be Ready!

Everything the Bible says about the last days indicates that the people of God will be anticipating the coming of their Savior. They will see this great day approaching. They will even be looking for and hastening the day of God. As Daniel wrote concerning the events that lie ahead, "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand" (Daniel 12:10).

If we really have understanding concerning these fearful but exciting prophetic events, then what impact ought this anticipation and hope have on our lives? As Peter asked, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" (2 Peter 3:11-12).

Today we see through glass darkly. But soon we will see Jesus face to face. At that moment we will be changed, in a twinkling of an eye, and our lowly bodies will be transformed into the likeness of His glorious body (ref. 1 Corinthians

15:51-53; Philippians 3:20-21).

John describes this wondrous occasion when he writes, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Notice that John did not say "some" who have this hope. Neither did he say "most" who have this hope. What he said was, "everyone" who has this hope in Him "purifies himself."

Purity is not an option for those who desire to see the Lord. The book of Hebrews admonishes, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). 53. The word "purifies" is the Greek word *hagnos*, which has the same root as the word translated "holiness." Unless we pursue holiness by purifying ourselves from all that defiles, we shall not see Jesus—for Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

The primary meaning of *hagnos* is "clean," but it also contains the idea of innocence, modesty, and chastity. Paul wrote that he wanted to present the believers in Corinth as a "chaste [*hagnos*] virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2b). He also wrote that Jesus was coming for a "glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy [*hagios*] and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27b). This is certainly why Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by saying, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness [*hagiosune*] before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). Holiness is not optional.

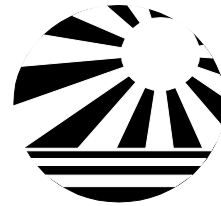
Peter tells us that our new birth experience has provided us with a "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). This means that the hope we have in the coming of Jesus and the catching away of His people is something worth living for. It is a hope that is so vital and so marvelous that it ought to impact every area of our lives. He goes on to say that we are looking forward to "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:4-5).

What a promise! What a salvation! What a future! Now is not the time to be compromising with the world and soft-peddling sin. Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and

let us put on the armor of light (Romans 13:11-12). Now is the time to stand firm for the whole counsel of God. Today is the day to let the glory of God shine brightly.

True holiness is more than an inward attitude. Anything that resides exclusively in the heart cannot be seen by man. But holiness is intended to be visible. This is why it is closely connected with glory. As the angels of heaven proclaim, Holy, holy, holy...the earth is full of Your glory. Jesus is coming for a Church that is both glorious and holy. The two cannot be separated. Without holiness there is no glory. This being so, let us understand that the evidence of the (as yet) unseen glorious appearing of Jesus Christ is the personal holiness of the believer. Everyone who has this hope must purify himself. We must all be pursuers of holiness.

Let us watch and understand!



Note to the reader:

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Published by

Rosh Pinnah Publications

PO Box 337, Carlisle, PA 17013 717-249-2059

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Rosh Pinnah means Chief Cornerstone in Hebrew.