

CHAPTER NINE

THE MYSTERY OF THE RAPTURE

The mystery of the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:50-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-18); where Christ will come into the air to snatch His saints, that is the Church home to heaven; in fulfilment of His promise (Jn. 14:1-3). This is possible since Pentecost, by which the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit as deposit or earnest of first-fruits in believers after the first advent of Christ guarantees the Rapture of all saints for total redemption (Acts 1:1-11; 2:1-4, 14-21; Rom. 8:21-23; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). The human being as a tripartite of spirit, soul and body includes a body that is flesh and blood (Gen. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Thess. 5:23). When God created man (male and female), He originally made him a steward on Earth to extend His kingdom through him (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:4-7, 15-25). However, when man disobeyed God, his eyes opened; yet he fell from this glory of the presence and life of God and had to die – spiritually, physically and eternally (Gen. 2:17; 3:9-25 v. 22; Rom. 3:23).

In our loss of the glory of God with shattered image and death in the midst of hostility on earth, God in His Sovereignty and mercy had an eternal Redemptive Plan through our Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 3:1-9, 15-19; Gal. 4:4-7; Ep. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:9-12, 18-23; Rev. 13:8). When the Lord Jesus promised to build His Church, He was looking at the final fulfilment of God's promise to redeem humanity from sin and give us eternal life as a new creation in Himself through stewardship of the mysteries of God including the Rapture (Matt. 16:13-21; 28:16-20; Jn. 14:1-26; 1 Cor. 4:1-20; 15:42-57; 2 Cor. 5:1-21; Eph. 3:4-10, 14-21; Rev. 1:1-7). Jesus promised to take us home to Himself in heaven in a Rapture at His return (Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Rev. 1:1-7). The Rapture of the saints in Christ to include both the dead and the living in the context of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is a mystery (1 Cor. 15:42-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11).

The body part of man is physical, not spiritual; and is made of physical material and substance, not spiritual material and substance. It is of the earth, not of heaven; and they who are of the earth are physical and earthly, not spiritual and heavenly. Man's body in its present state is made to live in the physical world and dimension, not in the spiritual world and dimension and to be emissary and steward of the earth for the kingdoms of this world (Gen. 1:26-28; 5:1-3; Matt. 4:8-10; Acts 17:24-29; Rev. 11:15).

The body is not able to inherit the kingdom of God because of sin – all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18-23; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). This is because the human body after the fall of man is become corruptible, not incorruptible (Gen. 3:19) and so man must die physically (Heb. 9:27). We are also aware that every man, until saved by

grace and faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-10) is born into this world dead (separated from the life of God) in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3). And ultimately, being a living soul, he is also doomed for eternal or the second death (Gen. 2:7; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:7-15). This is clearly seen in everyday experiences. The human body ends: it ages, dies, decays, deteriorates, and wastes away to nothing but dirt and dust. It has embedded within its very nature the seed of corruption in the soul bearing the image of the earthly, Adam as compared to the image of the heavenly, last Adam the Lord Jesus Christ who is now become the life-giving Spirit by His bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42-49 v. 45).

THE RAPTURE AS MYSTERY

The Rapture (at the return of Christ in the air but not the final return of Christ to the earth) is, hence, a mystery regarding the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:50-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:3; 2 Thess. 2:1-5). The Rapture, the catching up of all the saints in Christ is to bring about the purpose of God for the redeemed, the saints in Christ who are called, justified and glorified to be like Christ at His appearing (Rom. 8:29, 30; 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Jn. 3:2, 3). This is now only a hope of glory, that is the image of the risen Lord in the believer (Col. 1:26, 27; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45-49). Comparing the earthly with the heavenly from 1 Cor. 15:45-49 and the ultimate effects of the Rapture in 1 Cor. 15:50-55, we see the contrast in a seven-fold radical change for us to enjoy this eternal kingdom and glory in Christ (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14).

The seven-fold radical change at the Rapture

The seven radical changes awaiting believers at the Rapture to usher us into glory will be (1 Cor. 15:45-55):

- a) A glorified body to replace flesh and blood (vv. 45, 48, 50);
- b) Glory with honor and majesty to replace dishonor (v. 52);
- c) Power to replace weakness (v. 52);
- d) The imperishable or incorruptible to replace the perishable or corruptible (vv. 50, 53);
- e) Immortality to replace mortality (v. 53);
- f) The spiritual to replace the natural (vv. 46, 54);
- g) The heavenly to replace the earthly (vv. 49, 54).

True believers' hope, confidence and consolation in the Rapture

True believers have hope to support their faith and love, confidence of the Rapture as imminent and certain and consolation in the Rapture in glory will be (1 Cor. 15:45-55):

1. The sure hope of glory for all the saints in the imminent and certain Rapture is in the example of Christ in His bodily resurrection - 1 Cor. 15:12-28, 45-49, 51-58;
2. Our confidence of the Rapture is:

- i) in the Scriptures - 1 Cor. 15:1-11,
 - ii) in nature as life on earth which we observe around us - 1 Cor. 15:36-44 and
 - iii) in the guarantee of the Holy Spirit given to us 2 Cor. 5:1-8 v. 1, 5;
3. Our consolation of the Rapture is in the Scriptures as the Word of the Lord - 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

The dead and living saints in reference to the Rapture

The dead in Christ shall rise first and thereafter living saints will be changed because their spirits are already made perfect *teleioo* in an intermediary spiritual body in heaven in the presence of God (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Heb. 12:23). The Scriptures teach that the spirits of dead saints or believers in Christ are in heaven but in a more glorious state or compartment than the spirits of Old Testament saints and all other dead saints (Heb. 11:39, 40; 12:23, 24). This is because under the New Covenant, believers in Christ are permanently in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ in a new creation at salvation through the gospel and the active presence of the Holy Spirit awaiting the Rapture (Rom. 8:1-4, 9-11, 13-17, 21-27; 1 Pet. 1:2-5, 9-12).

We know that heaven at the moment, as a spiritual abode is a massive spiritual place created by God with different compartments (Gen. 1:1; Jn. 14:1-3; Heb. 12:22-29; Rev. 4:1-12; 5:1-14). It is called "my Father's house *chupa*" which has many mansions by Jesus in John's Gospel (Jn. 14:1-3). There is the place for the throne of God circled by power and glory to manage His eternal kingdom called the mount of congregation (Is. 6:1; 14:13; 66:1; Rev. 1:4; 4:1; 5:1; 6:16; 7:9; ... 21:5; 22:1). All authority and power to create from nothing or make new and glorious from what exists in the Universe are in God but made available to the Church through Christ in the gospel or Word and the Holy Spirit as He shows mercy – Gen. 1:1; Ps. 62:11-12; Lk. 4:36; 9:1; 24:46-49; Matt. 28:18-20; Jn. 1:1-3; Acts 1:1-8; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:17-23; Col. 1:15-18; Phil. 3:20, 21; Rev. 19:13; 21:5.

At the commencement of the Rapture, Christ Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first (1 Thess. 4:13-18 v. 16). Thus:

- a) Christ descends with them (the dead in Christ) from heaven by the Sovereign work of God to take for each a glorious body as the seed of life sown on earth before the living saints are transformed and translated; and then together with them we meet the Lord in the air – 1 Thess. 4:16-17. The Lord Jesus has already been judged for all sin at the cross and believers who merit the Rapture have no worry about sin - 1 Cor. 15:3-4, 50-55; 1 Jn. 3:1-3;
- b) the Lord returns into heaven with the caught-up saints all to the Bema (believers judgment seat) for rewarding within the seven literal years of 360 days a year – Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10);

- c) at the Bema, there is the judging of works done for the Lord in righteousness per the standards of the gospel while we were alive on earth (Rom. 2:6-16) and rewards given accordingly but with possible complete loss for some believers whose works are burnt as through judgment fire - 1 Cor. 3:14-17;
- d) after the Bema, the saints in Christ whose righteous works remain as additional righteousness to that given or imputed by Christ for redemption and symbolized by white clothes are called *kaleo* to the marriage of the Lamb as the eternal Bride in heaven - Rev. 19:7-9.

While the Raptured Church is in heaven for the seven years, there is the seven years of Tribulation on earth called the “the day of the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:2). This period runs concurrent with the seven years of Israel’s godly influence in place of the true Raptured Church in the midst of the Anti-Christ’s rule over the nations of the World (Acts 1:1-11; 2:16-21; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 7; 11-13; 16-18). After Christ has overthrown the false Church, judged sin with evil on earth and is eternally married to the glorious Church, the Lord as King of kings and Lord of lords now descends to the earth with His saints and angels to capture the Anti-Christ (Rev. 19:1-21).

More facts about the Rapture of the Church

Note some other facts stated about the Rapture, the radical change of the body, the nature of this momentous occurrence and present implications for all believers (1 Cor. 15:50-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:3).

- 1) The Rapture involves both the living and the dead saints in Christ. The point is that both the living and the dead (those asleep in Christ (1 Cor. 15:18) and whose spirits are resting from their earthly labours and suffering but now perfect with the Lord in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:20-23; Heb. 12:22-24) will receive recreated bodies, new incorruptible glorious bodies, bodies radically and completely changed to be like that of the Lord’s.
- 2) The Rapture will be a very quick, sudden event or change; it will be in a moment implying an indivisible time frame, such that you could not divide the time into two moments or split-seconds in timing, not even such that you could not blink an eye (1 Cor. 15:52).
- 3) The Rapture will be at the end time, at the end of the world but preceding the regeneration of the earth which must be after the return of the saints to the earth with the Lord (Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:21-23; cf. Zech. 14:1-4; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 19:11-16).
- 4) The Rapture will be a special summon of saints in Christ “*with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God* (1 Thess. 4:16). This is what is primarily meant by the *last trump, the trumpet of God* (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). It will be the last trumpet ever blown for saints in Christ, as the trumpet that will summon our bodies

lying in the graves and living in this corruptible world to begin an eternal re-union of glorified saints in Christ (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

- 5) The Rapture is an absolute surety – **imminent** but **certain and sudden**; as taking place in every believer's life time without visible signs (1 Cor. 15:51-52; Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). Paul says; *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*(1 Thess. 4:17).
- 6) The Rapture is the catching up (Gk. *harpazo*) and gathering together (GK. *episunagoge*) of saints in Christ as the first part or **imminent** but **sudden** part of the Second Coming is seen as mystery with only a few visible signs (2 Thess. 2:1-2; Rev. 1:7) and concluded by that part of the Second Coming which is the final Return of Christ with the saints after about seven years with marked visible Satanic lying wonders and natural signs or upheavals (Acts 2:16-21 v. 20; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Rev. 19:11-21). Paul says; *"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 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 is at hand."* (2 Thess. 2:1-2).
- 7) The Rapture and the change of the body are both an absolute surety – **imminent** but **certain and sudden**. Note the strong affirmative "shalls" about the events of the Rapture in these texts (1 Cor. 15:54; 1 Thess. 4:16).
- 8) **Death** has been defeated and shall be finally swallowed up in victory by the resurrection of Jesus Christ for all believers as stated that "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor. 15:54-58 v. 54). Note these facts from the Scriptures:
 - a) The victory was promised by God long, long ago (Is. 25:8).
 - b) The victory conquered the "sting" of death, which is sin (Gen. 3:19; 1 Cor. 15:56). There are reasons why the sting of death will be gone forever.
 - i. Sin gives death its power. Men die because of sin (Rom. 5:12). When God gives man a perfect body at the resurrection or rapture of the saints, then the sting is removed. Death will be no more.
 - ii. Sin surrounds death with all its fears; but when saints are perfected in the resurrection or glorious body, then sin is erased from the picture, and there is no death or surrounding fears for glorified saints in the Lord. Death becomes helpless because it has no more hold on us after the Rapture.
 - c) The victory will be over the strength of sin, which is the law. It is the law that gives power to sin, that gives sin control over men (1 Cor. 15:56), because the law lets you know sin and its resultant death (Rom. 7:7-11). When believers stand perfected and glorified before God, the law hovering over men's heads on earth will be done away with and death will be no more (1 Cor. 15:28, 54; 2

Tim. 1:8-10; Rev. 21:4). When a person believes in Jesus Christ, truly believes in Him, God counts that person's faith as righteousness.

Though the believer is not righteous by himself or herself, God takes the person's *honour of His Son Jesus Christ*, the person's faith, and counts it as righteousness, as the right to live in His presence, both now and in the hereafter (Phil. 1:21-23). It is only the saints those dead and living in Christ that shall be resurrected or raptured and given a body that is incorruptible and immortal at the Rapture of the saints. It is hence important for believers to understand and enjoy the two reasons why the strength of sin must be deemed gone forever by the resurrection of Christ.

- i. The law gives sin its power. The law and its standards show men their shortcomings. If men are perfected through Christ, then there is no need for the law because there is no sin (Rom. 4:15).
 - ii. If saints are perfected in the faith and love and there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Tim. 1:5-14; 1 Jn. 4:17-21), then there is no power of sin and death or condemnation (Rom. 5:12-21).
 - iii. At the Rapture, saints are perfected and glorified in Christ (1 Jn. 3:1-3), and there is no law, curse or sin and death or condemnation for bodily redeemed sons in heaven (Rom. 5:12-21; 8:17-23).
- d) The glorious victory over death has been wrought through the Lord Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law through His sinless life and rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:17). By the resurrection, Jesus was proven to be sinless in life (Acts 2:27-32). It is through Him and Him alone that man can be resurrected from the dead or raptured and given an incorruptible and immortal body; thus, making it possible for us to live forever in God's presence. Christ fulfilled the law; and the results are vivid:
1. By never sinning while on earth as the God-man and has become our advocate with the Father (1 Jn. 2:1, 2). He never broke the law of God, not even once. He, thus, secured perfect righteousness; and because His righteousness is perfect and ideal, it becomes the model and pattern for all men. It stands for and covers the unrighteousness of all men. His perfect righteousness overcomes sin and its penalty; it even condemns sin in His life and sealed that by death and resurrection. Scripture helps us to note that He condemned sin "through the flesh" and also fulfilled the law (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 8:3).
 2. Christ fulfilled the law for believers in that He bore the condemnation and punishment of the law for man. As the Perfect and Ideal Man, Jesus Christ

could bear all the violations and punishment of the law for man. Jesus Christ as the Ideal Man could die *for all men* (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

3. Christ fulfilled the law by introducing grace and faith through the gospel and thus became the end of the law for believers (Rom. 4:16; 10:4-12; Gal. 3:11-25; Eph. 2:8-10).
- e) The thought of the Rapture or of the resurrection of the saints which is to effect the radical bodily change demands staunch labour in the work of God (1 Cor. 15:58). The promise of a resurrected and changed body is believers in Christ only; not to unbelievers. This is Paul calls believers “my beloved brethren” (1 Cor. 15:58). The charge of Paul is also to all believers in Christ! Note these points:
- i. The believer is to be steadfast (firm, fixed and determined) being faithful to the end and unmoveable (unyielding, unshaken and undisturbed) being rooted in the goodness and love of the Lord. This is because the believer has such a glorious hope: *the hope of being resurrected and given an incorruptible and immortal body* like that of Christ (Col. 1:3-8, 12-14, 23-29; 1 Thess. 1: 3-10; Tit. 2:11-14). The hope of this glorious fact should stir the believer to be steadfast and unmoveable in serving the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ii. The believer is to always abound that is, never slack, quit, stop, and even retire in labour (toiling, working, serving) in the work of the Lord and especially in the gospel (Rom. 1:9).
 - iii. The believer will be rewarded. And this must be enough challenge to all who genuinely love the Lord and continue in His work (Job 17:9; 19:25; Jn. 15:9; Rom. 14:15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:9; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 1:13; Rev. 3:11)
- f) The Rapture of all saints in Christ with the resurrection of dead believers is the time of the Lord's return to catch the saints and probably at the beginning of “the day of the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:1-3 see Acts 2:16-21 v. 20; 2 Thess. 2:1-12). Paul wants to make it perfectly clear that he does not know when the Lord is returning to meet the saints in the air and then to the earth, nor does anyone else (2 Thess. 2:1, 2). However, he wants us to clearly note these points outlined in 1 Thess. 5:1-3:
- 1) No one knows when the Lord is returning. The Scriptures teach that no one knows when the Lord is returning to earth; only God knows (Mk. 13:34). We are even told not to observe “times” (*chronos*) means chronological time, the events that follow one another and roll in and

away from one another) and “seasons” (*kairon*) means the particular time and the nature of the events that are to take place (Acts 1:4-8). Therefore, there is absolutely no need to discuss the times and the seasons. God’s way of time reckoning is mystery (Deut. 29:29; 2 Pet. 3:8, 9) and expects us to seize or redeem opportune time or opportunity (Gal. 6:6-10; Eph. 5:14-17; Col. 4:5). We must understand that regarding the kingdom of God on earth, God has given the Church the mandate of an unspecified time to advance it on earth (Matt. 6:9, 10; 11:1-15; 16:16-19; Acts 1:1-11; 1 Thess. 2:8-13; 4:13-5:10).

- 2) Nonetheless, believers will know or sense intuitively that the return of the Lord is near when the Tribulation or "the day of the Lord" which ushers in the mid-Tribulation or the period just before "the great and notable day of the Lord" is ready to come upon the earth at the end of the last days (Acts 2:19, 20; see Matt. 24:1-31; Mk. 13:1-37; Lk. 21:5-38; 1 Thess. 5:1-3). And when, how and what is "the day of the Lord"? Again, no man knows when, for the day which is seven literal calendar years of 360 days a year starting with the Rapture and ending with the return of Christ is coming as a thief in the night - suddenly and unexpectedly (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11 v. 2). The how and what is marked by deliverance for saints in their sudden catching up but with terrible wrath from God for the unbelievers on earth through natural catastrophe and satanic or devilish or destructive agents (1 Thess. 1:9, 10; 2 Thess. 2:1, 2; Rev. 9:13-10:11 vv. 5-7).

True believers in Christ as a way of life or people of the way as saints, with the “spirit of rapture” are to be looking for the Lord’s return in every generation, but unbelievers will be caught completely off guard (1 Thess. 5:3-10). In the end, they will be shocked and stand in stark terror at the appearance of Christ and at the judgments that will begin to fall upon earth prior to the return and as the final appearing (2 Thess. 2:1; Rev. 19:11-16).

That day, the day when God will bring every soul then living on earth into judgment as part of His wrath against evil and sinful humanity referred to as the mystery of God (Rev. 10:5-7). That day, is also what the Bible calls "the day of the Lord". The up-coming “day of the Lord” will be literal seven years of 360 days a year to begin with the great *deliverance*, known as the Rapture of the saints in Christ, the Church. It will conclude There will physical deliverance of repentant Jews into safety and others at this

time and continues with the *wrath* of God as judgment of sin upon the earth and then conclude with the *appearing* of Christ to rule on earth.

So, when is Christ returning? When the earth has reached such a depraved condition that it is hopelessly lost forever and ripe for the judgments by God's own standards of "the day of the Lord." (Is. 13:9-11; Zeph. 1:14-16; Mal. 4:1; Jd. 1:14-16).

- 3) The day of the Lord will come when the world of unbelievers will be feeling they have a profound sense of security; when they will be saying, "peace and safety" for brisk normal life activities as was in the days of Noah and Lot. Probably, some leaders throughout the world or some world organization will cooperate and be able to achieve some sort of peace and security throughout the world. People will be revelling in the security and living it up even as they did in the days of Noah (Lk. 17:26-30; cf. Gen. 6:1-13). Of-course chosen vessels (and the Church before the Rapture) may now be preaching the eternal gospel as only means of righteousness (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:15; cf. 2 Pet. 2:15).
- 4) The day of the Lord (after the Rapture, the catching up and gathering together of the saints) will be a day of catastrophic destruction from wars, the rise of Anti-Christ and then also the wrath of God (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Suddenly, out of nowhere, the great and terrible day of the Lord will fall upon the world and the unbelievers of the world with "sudden destruction" that it will be totally unexpected (1 Thess. 5:3). It will be just like the travail that suddenly strikes a woman who is with child. The progression of pain, suffering, and destruction will be relentless (Is. 13:6-8; Joel 1:15; 2:30-31; Zeph. 1:14-18).
- 5) The day of the Lord will be a day of no escape. Judgment and destruction in that upon the world with the view of vengeance on believers are an absolute surety; they shall not, in no wise, escape. All human beings who have not truly trusted Jesus Christ will face this great and terrible day of the Lord (Jer. 11:11; Amos 5:18-19; 9:2; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 2:3; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:3; Heb. 2:3; 12:25).

- g) **Christ's victory over sin and evil on earth:** The victory of Christ over the world, sin and the flesh, Satan and death is in phases (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 8:14-25; Gal. 4:4-7; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Jn. 3:1-10; Rev. 11:15). Presently there is the spiritual victory but eventually there will be the ultimate deliverance of the earth itself from curse (Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:18-25). The ultimate redemption of the earth comes after the Rapture, followed by the wrath of God that is to be poured on earth against sin and evil, and all before the Lord Jesus Christ

returns with His saints and heavenly hosts (Jn. 12:31; 16:33; Rom. 5:1; 8:1-4, 14-25; Heb. 2:14, 15; 1 Thess. 1:9, 10; Tit. 2:11-15; 1 Jn. 5:4, 5; Rev. 6:17; 9:13-10:11; 11:15-19).

- h) **The gospel, the foundational truths about the Kingdom and Christ in the light of the Rapture:** The gospel encompasses all the foundations of our faith to present Christ as the Saviour, the Healer, Giver of witnessing power and Returning King or Ruler of the Millennial Kingdom (Acts 1:1-11; 1 Tim. 6:11-15; Rev. 11:15-19; 11-16; 20:4-6). The gospel is always also to be preached by the Church in the context of the kingdom and about Christ (Acts 1:1-3; 28:30-31) in the light of her Rapture just before the Great Tribulation (Acts 1:4-11; 2:16-21). This is how the gospel as the message of first importance presents and supports the teaching of an imminent Rapture of the saints in Christ in a mystery (1 Cor. 2:1-7; 15:1-28 vv. 3-4, 19-23); thus, the Rapture becomes a **pre-Tribulation Rapture** and a **pre-Millennial Return** (Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 1:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1-5; Tit. 2:11-14; 1 Jn. 3:1-3; Rev. 1:4-7; 19:11-16; 20:4-6).

Regardless of trends in Christendom through undue theological assumptions along individual, cultural and ecclesiastical positions; the Scriptures affirm that to believe the gospel preached with the active presence of the Holy Spirit is to be granted repentance and forgiven of sins by Christ; and this is equally to be given eternal life in Christ (Acts 2:38-39; 5:20, 29-32; 11:13-18; 1 Pet. 1:2-5, 9-12; 1 Jn. 2:23-25; 5:9-13). And then from the time of conversion (Acts 2:38-39; Eph. 1:13-14) to obey the demands of the gospel with the presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 3:23-24) will be sufficient to take believers to merit salvation sharing the eternal glory and kingdom of God (2 Thess. 1:3-12 v. 8; 1 Pet. 4:1-19 v. 17).

JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS AFTER THE RAPTURE

There will start God's eternal judgment for works after the Rapture of the saints (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 4:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:8-10). The New Testament insists on the prospect of divine eternal judgment as something besides death, to be the single unavoidable fact of a man's future: *'It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment'* (Heb. 9:27). With dead saints, resurrection at the Rapture demands judgment of works not sin which is already judged on Christ, our Advocate (1 Cor. 3:9-17; Heb. 6:1-2; 1 Jn. 2:1-2). Equally, the Lord Jesus will judge both the living and the dead, "And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to witness solemnly that it is He who has been marked out by God *to be Judge of the living and the dead.*" (Acts 10:42 LITV).

This fact expresses the holiness of the living and true God, whose moral will must prevail, and before whom all responsible creatures must therefore in the end be judged obedient to be rewarded or rebellious to be condemned (Jn. 5:22-29). When God's will finally prevails at the coming of Christ, there must be a separation between the finally obedient and the finally rebellious, so that the kingdom of God will include the one and exclude the other for ever. No such final judgment has occurred within history; though there are provisional judgments in history, while God in his forbearance gives all men time to repent (Acts 17:30, 31; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). But at the end the truth of every man's position before God must come to light.

Pending Eternal Judgements

About four categories of such judgments are noted in the Scriptures; namely: a) *the Bema or Rewards judgment of saints after the Rapture and later the Tribulation and Old Testament Saints* (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; see 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 9:25-27; Phil. 2:19; 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 20:1-6), b) *the wrath of God upon living sinful humanity and evil after the Rapture of the saints and finally at the Battle of Armageddon* (1 Thess. 1:9, 10; Rev. 9:13-10:7; 19:11-21), c) *the swift Judgment of evil during Christ's Millennial Rule* (Rev. 20:1-6), and d) *the Great White Throne judgment of God for casting Satan and his followers, unbelievers and death and hades into Hell Fire* (Rev. 20:7-15).

The Judge is God (Rom. 2:6; Heb. 12:23; Js. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:11) or Jesus Christ who has the mandate as the Son to judge (Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Jn. 5:22; Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; 1 Pet. 4:5; Rev. 22:12). So, it is God who judges through His Son, who is the eschatological divine representative, the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:22, 27, 30; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:1). Jesus Christ the creator-redeemer will judge as the eternal Word, *Logos* (Jn. 1:1-5; Acts 10:33-43; Col. 1:12-20; Rev. 19:13). Jesus Christ just before the Rapture of the saints is seen as both the Lamb to offer salvation (Jn. 1:29) and the Lion (Gen. 49:8-10) to judge those who reject Him (Rev. 4; 5). He is now both the Son of Man and the Son of God or Christ and Lord or the Saviour and the Sovereign Lord (Matt. 16:13-19 vv. 13, 17; Acts 2:36; 4:23-30 v. 24 see Rev. 4; 5). He is returning to the earth as the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

The standard of judgment is God's impartial righteousness according to men's works but in the light of Christ's righteousness through the gospel (Matt. 5:17-20; 16:27; Rom. 1:16-18; 2:6, 11-16, 25-29; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). Believers' judgment will not be condemnatory but for rewarding in the areas of our: 1) *worship* (Gk. *proskuneo*) *of God* and 2) *service* (Gk. *latreuo*) *to God* (Matt 4:10). Service in addition to *direct worship of God* comprises also: i) *doing good to others for God's sake* [Matt 5:34-40; 25:34-46], ii) *presenting your body to God as a holy, transformed living sacrifice not*

conforming to the standards of this world [Rom. 12:1, 2] and ii) *turning people to righteousness* [Dan 12: 3].

Service *latreuo* including direct worship *proskuneo* of God involves all the three aspects; namely: “*your work of faith and labor of love, and the patience of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thess. 1:3). It is to prove “... *how you had turned to God from the idols, to serve douleuo the true and living God, and to await His Son from Heaven ...*” (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). The implication is that the believer serves *latreuo* God not as a *latris* or *mistotos*, a hired servant but as a *doulous*, a bond slave or servant (Rev. 1:1). Therefore, every believer to always serve or worship as a *doulous* bond servant but not out of compulsion as a *latris* or *mistotos* hired servant. This is why we should improve our worship of God in spirit and truth, living the crucified Spirit-filled life, giving ability and our evangelistic zeal.

During the rewarding judgment, the Master our Lord Jesus will look at:

- a) Heart attitude (Matt. 5:8, 22, 28; 6:6-18; Eph. 4:23, 24),
- b) Motive – which hold faith and good conscience through the gospel and the active presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 4:1-5; 1 Tim. 1:15-19), and
- c) Love as the nature of God (1 Cor. 12:31 - 14:1).

Christian work must be out of love *agape*; “*The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (1 Tim. 1:5).

Eternal Judgment in perspective

The Bible plainly teaches that there will be resurrection and then judgment after death (1 Cor. 15:35-44; Heb. 6:1, 2; 9:27). In the order of resurrection of the dead, believers will receive glorified bodies like that of Christ and live with Him eternally; unbelievers will resurrect with immortal, spiritual bodies but will be cast into damnation in hell fire to spend eternity there (Matt. 25:46; Jn. 5:22-29). In each of the two categories there will be a series of eternal judgments accordingly. Believers will be rewarded for the works at the **Bema in heaven** (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10) and will be put to use at the beginning of the Millennium Rule of Christ on earth (Rev. 20:1-6). All other dead saints will be resurrected and rewarded before the millennium begins (Rev. 20:4-6).

God has already judgment sin and Satan on the cross (Jn. 12:31, 32). Sin and evil on earth will be judged during the Tribulation before Christ’s Millennial Reign begins including the unbelieving who follow and serve Satan through the Anti-Christ (Rev. 9:1-21; 10:5-7; 11:15-19; 19:18-21). The living normal human beings who live through the millennium will be judged directly by Christ. He will do this spiritually and with redemptive power through the bride, other saints and angels and physically by kings and lords of the various nations on the regenerated earth (Rom. 8:17-23; Rev. 20:1-6). Satan will then receive his final judgment and eternal doom after the millennium (Rev. 20:7-10).

In the case of unbelievers, however, judgment will be at the **Great White throne** as condemnation for rejecting Christ (Jn. 5:29; Rev. 20:12-15). Unbelievers may be also further placed in the intensity of torment in Hell Fire depending on the evil deeds at the end of Christ's Millennial Reign (Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:5, 11-15).

The Bema Judgment for rewarding believers

This will be the judgment for only the saints in Christ after the Rapture at the **Bema** or the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1, 2). It will be a judgment of good works of all believers to be duly rewarded by Christ, the Righteous Judge (1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:8). Believers work is from two sets of materials, those imperishable from Christ (*gold, silver, precious stones*) and the perishable from the flesh, the world and Satan (*wood, grass, straw*). Paul states this plainly in verse twelve of the judgment context in First Corinthians; "*And if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw,*" (1 Cor. 3:9-15 v. 12).

Judgment may hence cause loss of all rewards as by the fire of believers' judgment at the Bema. It could be a loss so great that it is like one is stripped as much as a burnt-out building. It is the loss of all except the bare eternal life or salvation of oneself on account of our faith in Christ's redemption (Matt. 3:11, 12; 1 Cor. 3:9-15). This may be why some schools of thought call this salvation reward for all believers as freely given personal crowns to be made kings under Christ by the blood, **the symbolic crown of gold** (Rev. 1:4-7; 4:4).

Salvation as eternal life received is an inheritance reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet. 1:1-5). Such eternal salvation is obtained on the basis of our faith in what Jesus did on the cross to provide the gospel (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 15:3-5). It is granted freely by God through the preaching of the gospel with the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:3-6; Acts 5:20, 29-32; 1 Pet. 1:9-12). Probably, therefore, the saving grace of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may offer each one of us a redemptive **crown of gold for believers as priests unto God** (Rev. 5:6-10). This free redemptive crown is what noted as symbolized in Revelation 4:4.

We must understand that in eternity all saints who merit the first resurrection has received the mark of the eternal blood of Jesus to eternally serve God starting in the Millennium (Rev. 13:8; 20:4-6). For believers in Christ, the blood will also provide us with eternal righteous garment like unto that of Jesus at His resurrection (1 Pet. 1:18, 19; 1 John 3:3; Rev. 1:5). This is the power of the blood that speaks in heaven and even that will continue to work in eternity (Heb. 12:22-29). Even Tribulation saints like all saints on earth will enjoy the power of the blood (Rev. 7:14; 12:9-12).

The saintly crown of gold from Christ by redemption will be refined in earthly chastening and trials of faith (Job 23:10; 1 Pet. 1:7). All other crowns as rewards and positions are given based on each believer's merit or our righteous works done through Christ and as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 3:16-23; 4:1-5). We never forget that while only the righteousness of Christ as white, pure and spotless clothes takes us to heaven (Eph. 5:25-27; 1 Tim. 6:11-19), both the righteousness of Christ and the righteous works of believers as garments are needed for the called to be the eternal Bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7-10).

Crowns As Rewards For Believers Works

Surely Scripture teaches plainly that Jesus will reward the faithful for various acts of Christian life and service. Even though final judgment is in the end (1 Cor 4:5), the apostles also intimated that it is possible for one to know whether he would merit a crown (2 Tim 4:8; Rev 14:13).

Five representative crowns are mentioned in the Scriptures:

The Victors' Crown: This is given to those who overcome the flesh by the relinquishing of some life-long enjoyment so that they could move readily and efficiently to serve Christ. It is also called the Incorruptible or Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:25-27).

The Soul-Winners' Crown: This is the crown of rejoicing given to those who win the lost at any cost (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1).

The Crown of Gory: It is the crown given to those who faithfully shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

The Crown of Righteousness: Given to those who live their lives in expectation of the rapture (Dan. 12:2-3; Matt. 5:16; 2 Tim. 4:8).

The Crown of Life: Given to those believers who successfully overcome temptation, tests, trials and persecutions for the gospel's sake. It is referred to as the martyr or sufferer's crown (Js. 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

The promises to over-comers as inheritances or other benefits in the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation or elsewhere are thus all to be seen as aspects of the above group of crowns or a confirmed statement of the benefits of righteous living in eternal heaven (Dan 12: 2, 3; Rev 2; 3). The crowns as rewards denote positioning and authority levels, which will be granted Christians for the millennial period when we reign with Christ for a thousand years and also for eternity. It would seem that Christians are earning their eternal positions of service now, while still alive and enrolled in kingdom living and business (2 Tim. 2:11-12; Heb. 9:27).

It could mean that the closer one attains to the Lord in positioning, the brighter the reflected glory from Him. Daniel reasons thus, "*Those who are wise shall shine like the*

brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” (Dan 12:3). While Paul affirms this saying, “There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.” (1 Cor 15:41)

CONCLUSION ON THE MYSTERY OF THE RAPTURE

The time remaining for the present Earth to be destroyed with fire after the flood of Noah is not stated anywhere in the Scriptures (Gen. 8:22; 9:1-19; Acts 17:24-31; 2 Pet. 3:1-13). Time as *chronos* or chronological time of days and nights and seasons and times which has a beginning also has an end but that ending of time is only known to God and linked to Christ's rule on earth (Acts 1:1-11 vv. 4-8; Rev. 11:15 see Eccl. 4:11). Note that time as *kairos* or opportune time is available equally to all humanity; but must be redeemed because of the fleeing *chronos* time (Jn. 7:6; Acts 24:25; Rom. 13:11; 2 Cor. 6:2; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5; Heb. 11:15).

It is the Jews and the Temple that have a set covenant timeline since their captivity in Babylon to the coming of the Messiah as stated clearly in Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27 see also Dan. 10:10-11:1, 21-35). Time is here measured by 360 days a year in literal day and nighttime records on earth that is governed by moons and stars just before man was created (Gen. 1:14-19). There is, however, an intercalated unknown period cut off from the Jewish timeline and set aside by God for Jesus the Son of Man and the Son of God to build the Church (Acts 1:6-8; Eph. 3:4-6). Thus, since the Church enjoys both earthly and heavenly domains, it is not governed by earthly timing only; but by divine reckoning not specified and known to created beings of the Universe including humanity by chronological time (Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 1:4-11; 2:16-21).

It is only guessed by its relationship with the time after the Rapture of the saints in Christ and by the mid-point and concluding days during the seven-year Tribulation termed “the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20). The time of restoration of the kingdom to Israel is a mystery and known only to God (Acts 1:6, 7). It is the Tribulation which re-starts the kingdom activity of the Jews to run off the times of the Gentiles, that is the times set by God for Gentile nations to rule the Jews for their unbelief (Lk. 21:24). During the Church Age salvation now eternal in nature and called great salvation is in Christ (Heb. 2:1-4) and not the Jews or the law (Rom. 11:7-24). But coinciding with or just after the Rapture (Rev. 1:7) and during this period of Tribulation the mystery of Israel's blindness will be removed to convey salvation through the Jews (Rom. 11:25-26) and to run off the times of the Gentiles on earth (Lk. 21:20-28 v. 24).

The Rapture of the Church or saints in Christ is thus not linked to any signs being certain and imminent but speedily when it is due not necessarily immediate in respect of *chronos* time (Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 1:1-11; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). Except that because the Rapture is separated from the visible return of Christ to the earth by only the seven years calendar or period of Jewish Worship of Christ as Messiah in Jerusalem, some signs just before or of the Great Tribulation may be notable pointers before the Rapture (Matt. 24:21; Acts 2:20; Rev. 7:14; 9:1-21). These signs shall include the final return of Jews to the Promised Land and the restoration of Temple Worship in Jerusalem (Zech. 12:6-10; Acts 3:19-26; Rom. 11:25, 26).

Interestingly, Jewish resettlement in the Promised Land in the 1900s long after their second major but final dispersion in 70 A.D. and all other related issues may be the result their destiny in God's kingdom agenda (see Ezek. 36-39). Many prophets had predicted the discipline of the Lord on rebellious Israel. They also indicated their return to the Promised Land (Is. 11:11, 12; 39:6; 43:5, 6; 44:28; 45:4; Jer. 23:3; 25:11; Ezek. 36:8, 24). We must notice that Moses additionally had predicted only two great dispersions for the Jewish nation (Deut. 28:46-58; 64-68).

It is generally believed that the first was to Babylon, while the latter was the dispersion in 70 A.D. to all parts of the world. Therefore, having now resettled in Jerusalem and regaining step by step all the Promised Land, there would possibly not be any more dispersion. To-date, the only unfilled Jewish prophecies could be the return of remaining all remnants and the rebuilding and restoration of the Jerusalem Temple worship. But all these could happen unexpectedly in haste but in times of affliction just before and after the Rapture of the saints in Christ, the Church when Israel resumes the seven years left off of her kingdom destiny on earth (Dan. 9:24-27).