
7 Flights
to Forever:

Rapture & Resurrection Events in the Book of Revelation

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Introduction

Theologians disagree strongly about a peculiar type of Resurrection Event popularly known as “The Rapture.” Some believe it happens before the seven-year Tribulation Period. Others say it happens in the middle of the seven years, just before the 3.5-year Great Tribulation. Others say it happens after the Great Tribulation, at the time when Jesus returns to Planet Earth. Some say it *won't* happen at all.

By contrast, a plain reading of Scripture shows multiple past Rapture Events and multiple future Rapture and Resurrection Events. Just within the pages of the Book of Revelation we can find clear evidence of seven different Rapture and/or Resurrection Events. This booklet discusses each of the seven.

These seven Events will involve the Lord giving the participants a Resurrection Body with which they will be able to live Forever. These Events, then, are the upcoming Flights to Forever.

You might have noticed that this booklet capitalizes certain words and treats them as proper names. For example, Forever is used to describe the condition of living in our eternal destination, which will either be in the presence of the Lord in a Resurrection Body or in the place of eternal torment. Likewise we ascribe specific meanings to the words Rapture, Resurrection, Event and a few other terms that you will encounter in these pages.

May the Lord bless you as you study His Word and grow in your faith.

Your brother in Christ,
John Raymond Sears

Focus on Forever

Opening Prayer. Heavenly Father, You have hidden some great blessings in Your Scriptures. Help us to discover these blessings and apply them to our lives, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

God Has Plans For You

You might not realize it, but the Lord Himself has made travel plans for you. He wants to fly you to a faraway place, and He's already paid for your ticket. All you have to do is choose between two possible destinations and confirm which flight you want to take.

The Lord would greatly prefer to fly you to His house for a very long stay. Of course, you don't have to go there. In fact, unless you make a conscious decision to go there on His terms, He will shrug His shoulders and allow you to travel to a less desirable place.

Yes, I'm talking about Heaven and Hell. You will spend a very long time in one place or the other. There is no third option.

This booklet will explain the key elements -- and common misconceptions -- of this important subject. We all need to get this right, because it is the reason for our existence here on this Earth.

Where are you going?

This booklet focuses on the Seven Flights, but the real point is for you to grasp the Lord's love for you. When His love is real for you it will change your life. And you will make better choices.

The first thing we must understand is what Forever will be like. Let's open the Bible to the Book of Revelation, chapter 21 and read verses 3-8 in the New King James Version (NKJV):

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." ⁶ And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. ⁸ But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

You have just had a preview of Forever. Notice: there are two possible destinations, and you can choose one or the other.

Verse 3 describes Door Number One: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Door Number One is often called "Heaven." Is that where you want to spend Forever? I hope so. It must be a pretty nice place. God Himself chooses to be there, and He can afford to live anywhere He wants to. But my point is that God doesn't live there because the houses are nice and the schools are good. He chooses to live there *with you*.

So the big question that every human being on Earth must answer is: Will we choose to spend Forever with God? If we don't make a conscious decision to choose Heaven on God's terms, according to His plan, we will automatically get sent through Door Number Two. That default destination is described in verse 8:

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Is there any chance you would want to choose Door #2? Did I hear you say, “No way!”? Good! For the rest of this section we will focus on Forever with God, in Heaven, behind Door Number One.

The Big Picture

First, let’s step back and take in the Big Picture. There are some important issues we need to discuss:

- How do we *choose* Door Number One? That one is easy. Part of this section of the booklet describes the core elements of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you agree with the Gospel, and if you haven’t already done so, you can choose Heaven today by praying the prayer at the end of this section.
- How should we *prepare* for the trip? I’ve observed that very few people can live more than 100 years in their present bodies. So God must have a plan for changing us into something better if we will be there Forever. We’ll study our future Resurrection Bodies later in this section.
- How *soon* can we go there? That question isn’t quite as easy, and is discussed in the last two sections of this booklet.

The general structure of the Book of Revelation is as follows:

- Revelation 2-3: “The things that are...” Letters to the Seven Churches. (Advice to those of us living now).
- Revelation 4-5: “The things that will shortly come to pass...” A glimpse into the future, where you are invited guests. (Very soon)
- Revelation 6-19: The Tribulation Period. (7 years, starting very soon)
- Revelation 20: The Millennium Period. (1000 years)
- Revelation 21-22: New Heaven and New Earth. (Forever)

Pre-Flight Preparation: Your Resurrection

My goal, in this booklet, is to make sure everyone reading this – and everyone you know – will choose to take Flight Number One and be *there* in Revelation 4-5. But the first step is being sure we're all ready to go. So how do we get ready?

Let's start in the Resurrection chapter, Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 15. We will begin reading at verse 1:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶ After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Let me be really blunt: You won't get through Door Number One unless you understand these verses and completely trust them as the basis for your *personal* salvation. They are the core of the Gospel.

- **First of all, Christ died for our sins.** Sinning is coming short of God's standard, which is perfection. All of us are sinners; none of us can claim to be perfect. The wages of sin (imperfection) is death, and eternal death – Door Number Two – is what you and I deserve on our own merits. We can't work hard enough to earn heaven. We can't learn enough intellectually to earn our salvation. But God wants all of us to be with Him in Forever, so He allowed His Son Jesus to pay the death penalty that our sin deserved.
- **Second, His death was in accordance with the Scriptures.** That's an important point. Jesus didn't die in some traffic accident or gang-related shooting. He came at a precise time in history and allowed Himself to be murdered in a specific way.

- **Third, He was buried.** He really was dead physically, and His body stayed dead for three days and three nights as He predicted.
- **Fourth, He rose again according to the Scriptures.** That was proof that God accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. God the Father demonstrated that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to pay the price for you and me to get through Door Number One.
- **Fifth, He was seen by many witnesses.** Why? Obviously He wanted the disciples (and us) to know that He had risen from the dead. And He appeared to lots of different people in a variety of ways. All those people had their faith strengthened, to endure what they would experience in the coming months and years.
- **Sixth, Jesus appeared in His Resurrection Body.** This was not by accident. He did that to give us an appreciation of the Resurrection Bodies we will eventually receive.

That is the core of the Gospel message. God put together an elaborate plan, documented in advance in the Scriptures, for your benefit and mine. God had to do all of steps 1-4 in order to pay the price for us to choose Door Number One. Points Five and Six are proof that God loves you and me.

So all of this is the core of the Gospel. Now Paul wants to hammer home the importance of the Lord's Resurrection. Let's continue reading in 1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 12:

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Notice that scoffers can't handle the concept of the Lord's Resurrection. And the usual reason is that they don't think their sin is really so bad. Surely *their* sin wouldn't require Jesus to go through steps 1-6 on *their* behalf. Have you ever heard nonbelievers say stuff like "All roads lead to God?" Actually that statement is literally true, but not in the way they think. All sinners on the way to Door Number

Two *will* stand before God at the White Throne Judgment. Then they will have a long time to regret their choice.

Remember that all heresy is either “Jesus *plus...*” or “Jesus *minus...*” Paul didn’t cut any slack for the people who were teaching Jesus *minus* the Resurrection, as we see in verses 13-18:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁴ And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. ¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. ¹⁶ For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

And now a peculiar, chilling statement in verse 19:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

The Resurrection of Christ is the key to the Gospel message. There are tremendous benefits in this life to being born again. We enjoy character change, through the fruit of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace and more. But if we don’t get resurrected, then we can’t enter Door Number One. The truth is that we must be born again. Then, at the appropriate time, we must be resurrected.

All of this is great news, but it’s just the beginning of the Resurrection story. Let’s read more in verses 20-23:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Note what it says in verse 20: Christ rose – not just for Himself, but to be the firstfruits of all those who have a saving faith in Him. Today, we express that concept with the terms “prototype” and “proof of concept,” but the meaning is the same. Christ was our First-Goer, our Prototype, to prove the concept.

There is another important principle in verses 22-23: we shall all be made alive, each in our own order. The Greek word for “order” is *togma*. It’s a military term, describing soldiers in formation. They don’t just shuffle along in a shapeless group. They march in formation, in rows and columns, each in his own *togma*. In this case, Christ is leading the formation. The rest of us are in various groups or *togmas*. We’ll learn more about these *togmas* in the next section.

Your Resurrection Body

OK. So you and I need to get Resurrection Bodies before we can enter Door Number One. And we’ll get our new bodies when God calls for our particular *togma*. So what will that new body be like? Paul answers that question in 1 Corinthians 15:35-44:

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”³⁶ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.³⁷ And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain.³⁸ But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.³⁹ All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.⁴⁰ There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.⁴¹ 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.⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

To summarize, your Resurrection Body will be pretty special. Your new body will be a spiritual body that is:

- **Designed by God Himself.** And if you have ever studied biology, you know how amazingly designed our old bodies are. You and I are walking miracles of engineering. Only God Himself could design a machine as complex as your present body. But He's got something much better waiting for you. It's a whole new you.
- **Eternal, incorruptible.** Your present body wears out. The fancy Bible word describing your old body is "corruptible." Your new body won't wear out or die or need joint replacement surgeries.
- **Glorious.** I don't really understand the concept of glory. God has it, and I don't. But for some reason, God will choose to make our new bodies glorious.
- **Powerful.** You will be able to do things and go places that your present body cannot.

We will return to 1 Corinthians, but first let's read from the epistle of 1 John, chapter 3, beginning at verse 1:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² 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. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

In our Resurrection Bodies, ***we will be like Jesus.*** Our bodies will be like His Resurrection Body. We will be able to do things that we can't do now. And we will rule and reign with Him, in these Resurrection Bodies, through the Thousand-Year Millennium Period. Then we will be with Him for eternity behind Door Number One.

Now let's turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 50-53, and learn more about our future:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

This passage of Scripture contains several key concepts that illuminate the concept of Rapture Events. Remember the overall sequence:

- We know that when believers die, their spirit bodies immediately go to Heaven to be with the Lord and their departed loved ones. This is explained in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 6-8 where Paul says that right now we are “...present in the body and absent from the Lord,” but soon we will be “...absent from the body and present with the Lord.”
- As of right now, the departed believers do not have their Resurrection Bodies. Those departed believers will get their Resurrection Bodies at The Next Rapture Event. They “...will be raised incorruptible.”
- Those of us who are alive in the Lord and watching for His coming will also get our Resurrection Bodies at that same future date, “...and we shall be changed.” We will be taken up in the Next Rapture Event. This is an important concept, because most believers alive today will probably be taken up in the Next Rapture Event instead of experiencing physical death.

For the remainder of this section, we'll look at the concept of the Next Rapture Event and set the table for the next section.

The Next Rapture Event: Foundational Truths

For purposes of this booklet, a *Rapture Event* is a "catching away" -- where God supernaturally transports a person or group from one place to another. Bible teach-

ers frequently talk about an event called "The Rapture" where believers in Jesus will be caught up to heaven immediately before the seven-year Tribulation Period.

For reasons that will become clear later, I'm not comfortable using the article "The" immediately in front of the word "Rapture." The Bible talks of multiple past Rapture Events. And as we will see in the next section, the Book of Revelation describes seven future Rapture Events. However it is safe to call the pre-tribulation catching away "The Next Rapture Event."

Question: Who invented the concept of a pre-tribulation Rapture?

Answer: God did.

Jesus Himself, on two separate occasions, promised a pre-tribulation Rapture. In addition, there are many historical Rapture Events recorded in Scripture, plus clear hints of The Next Rapture Event in the Old Testament and in Paul's epistles. Let's begin with our Lord's own words, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 21, verses 34-36.

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

From this passage we see that Jesus wants to help us escape all these things. All of what things? Verses 34-36 come at the end of the Lord's long discourse on the events of the Tribulation Period, so the context is exceptionally clear. Jesus wants us to escape all of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

The next issue is how we will escape. Do you suppose it will be by experiencing physical death before these events? By relocating to some South Pacific tropical island or the North Pole or somewhere else that won't be hit by nuclear bombs or terrorized by dictators? No, that doesn't sound like much of a promise. Instead, He implores us to watch and pray that we may be counted worthy to escape *before* "...all these things..." Other passages of Scripture help fill in the details.

Can you guess or remember Jesus' other promise? Turn to Revelation 3:10:

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

What hour of trial do you suppose Jesus meant? Some commentators think that this passage is historical and that each of the 7 letters is symbolic of a particular historical period. They might be partly correct. But the core messages of Revelation 2-3 are timeless for the church of Jesus Christ. And "the hour of trial" that immediately precedes His coming has not yet befallen "the whole world." Nevertheless, we are beginning to see strong hints that the terrible times are very near.

The Next Rapture Event: Why?

So what's the purpose of this future/next Rapture Event Jesus wants us to be alive and awake for? As usual, most folks can't see the forest for the trees. We look at Luke 21:36 and Revelation 3:10 and we think, "Wow! That's pretty special! The Next Rapture Event was designed to keep *me* from the Tribulation Period."

My response: Yeah, that is a special gift of God's grace and love toward you. But that isn't the main purpose of the Next Rapture Event. When you step back and look at the whole framework of Scripture, you get a different perspective:

- **First and foremost, God will put Israel back on the center stage of world events.** Israel has always been the focus of God's dealings with the human race. Some of us fortunate Gentiles have come to know and love the Messiah of Israel, and we are enjoying the "Church Age" (a subset of the "Times of the Gentiles") since Jesus' day. God must take us out of the way so He can once again deal directly with His people.
- **Second, God wants Israel to again be His messenger to the world.** God doesn't want us Gentiles polluting His message during this period. You and I feel pretty smug, thinking we have all the right answers, and maybe we do. But we're a noisy, mixed multitude. And we're not Jewish.

- **The third reason concerns the nature of God Himself.** All our lives, we have seen bad things happening to good people -- and bad people getting rich. We wonder: "Why does God allow this?" The answer is that God is both merciful and just. Because of these two characteristics, God will use the Next Rapture Event to:

- **Reward** all the faithful people who have trusted in Jesus for their salvation.

- **Warn** everybody else that they need to get their lives right with Him. Please note that in His mercy, He is giving even the pagans time to (a) come to know His Son, Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to (b) earn eternal rewards by acting in faith on His promises. When you and I are taken out of the way, it will warn everybody – pagans, fence-sitters and luke-warm folks – that they need to become quick learners. If they learn quickly enough, God will enable them to be saved before the fire and brimstone start falling. They might not be spared all of the carnage, but at least their eternal future will be secure.

The Next Rapture Event: Why Hasn't It Happened Already?

Can you remember the first time you heard about the concept of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture event? How many of you heard about it, for the first time, in the 1960s or earlier? I'm in that group. How many of you heard about it in the 1970s? In the 1980s? In the 1990s? Since the year 2000?

I can remember the first time. It was February 1966, my freshman year in college. A couple of friends insisted I go with them to a Campus Crusade for Christ seminar weekend up in Arrowhead Springs. The seminar was presented by a young preacher named Hal Lindsey, and the core of that seminar later became his best-selling book, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*.

Lots of people read that book, and suddenly Last-Days' Prophecy became the hottest fad in Christian teaching. Here is a general timeline of what has happened since that seminar in Arrowhead Springs:

- 1960s: Christians re-discovered Prophecy. My generation got excited.

- 1970s-1980s: Evangelical pastors began teaching Last-Days' Prophecy. Everybody got excited.
- 1990-2001: The excitement faded.
- 2001: Wake-up call (September 11) and people got interested again.
- 2002-Now: Back to sleep. The glow has faded. People are jaded.

The Lord carefully planned this timetable. He knew exactly how His message would be handled by us human messengers. He knew that preachers would use prophecy in a fire-and-brimstone way in order to manipulate people to an immediate, emotional response. God knew that human nature cannot sustain emotions very long. He knew that we would develop mental and emotional callouses on this subject.

However, God has given us nearly 50 years of advance warning (and thousands of books) to let everyone know that "the time of testing" is coming upon the whole world.

How bad is it now? Personal example: two different "30-something" young people tried to brush off my wife's warning that the Middle East is setting itself up for Last-Days' events. Both of these were good kids, with Christian parents, raised in churches and still attending worship services on Sundays. Both of them said something like: "Yeah, yeah, I've been hearing about that stuff since I was a little kid. Don't bother me with it now."

God knew that human nature would be like this. How do we know that He knew? Open your Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 3, and we'll start reading in verse 1:

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), ² that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, ³ knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Have you encountered these scoffers? If so, you're not alone.

Let's continue reading in Peter's epistle to see how he viewed that attitude, beginning verse 5:

For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷ But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God is not in a hurry to bring on the day of judgment. He is patient toward our faults and wants all of us to benefit from His love for us. And still our human nature gets bored with the subject.

Our Lord Himself warned about the human tendency to lose interest. Open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew. I want you to catch the flavor of how Jesus explained the end times. In Matthew 24, He began by telling of the Tribulation Period, outlining the same calamities that we read about in Revelation chapter 6. But then, from chapter 24, verse 32 through the end of chapter 25, Jesus spent almost twice as much time explaining how we must be watchful and vigilant to discern the signs of the times. Look at what Jesus gave us:

- Matthew 24:33-35 – parable of the fig tree, meaning we need to watch Israel to discern when the times are right.
- Matthew 24:36-44 – comparing the end times to the days of Noah, when God gave mankind 120 years to take Noah's preaching seriously and repent. They didn't listen and died clueless. We have had nearly 2,000 years of Gospel teaching and more than 50 years of good end-times teaching, but most folks these days are virtually clueless.

- Matthew 24:45-51 – parable of the faithful servant, compared to the faithless servant and how they act when their Master is away.
- Matthew 25:1-13 – parable of the Ten Virgins, where five are wise and prepare for their master’s coming but five are foolish and are not ready. This parable concludes with verse 13: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”
- Matthew 25:14-30 – parable of servants using talents while the master is away. The wise servants expected his return and used their time wisely.
- Matthew 25:31-46 –prophecy of Jesus sitting in judgment when He returns. He will not be a casual spectator, expressing political correctness. He will not be a candidate campaigning for votes. He will come as The Lord, God Himself in a Resurrection Body, to rule the world with a rod of iron.

So can you get a sense of what Our Lord thinks is important? ***He spent nearly twice as much time telling us to watch and wait*** as He did telling us about the events to come.

Summary

We’ve covered a lot of ground, so let’s summarize Section 1, Focus on Forever:

- **You have a pre-paid ticket** to Forever.
- **You must choose Door Number One.** Otherwise you will get Door Number Two. If you haven’t already done so, you can be 100% sure of your salvation today, by praying the simple prayer of salvation on the next page.
- **You need your Resurrection Body** before you get there. You will get it instantly as you begin your flight.
- **There will be seven future flights** to Forever.
- **Each flight is a Rapture/Resurrection** Event.
- **Watch and pray** to go in the First Flight. If you are reading this *after* that Event, stand fast in your faith. If you have not already done so, you can pray

the prayer of faith below, become born-again, and prepare to go in the next Flight to Forever.

Remember our Lord's words in Luke 21, verses 34-36:

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Choosing to be born again is not complicated. All it requires is a simple prayer of repentance from religious works and profession of your faith in the power of the Lord's sacrifice to pay the price for your redemption. Head knowledge and intellectual assent to the Gospel message are not enough. You must allow the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and begin His life-changing work in your life. Following is an example of such a prayer.

Prayer of Faith: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to pay the price for my salvation. I confess that I have been a sinner, attempting to earn Heaven by head knowledge and my own self-righteous works. I confess that my religious works come short of Your standard, which is perfection. I believe the Gospel message: that Jesus died, was buried, was resurrected and was seen by many trustworthy witnesses before He ascended to Your right hand. Please forgive my sins and make me born again, through the power of Your Holy Spirit dwelling in my heart. And grant that I may be counted worthy, by Your grace, to escape all the Tribulation events and to stand before You in my new Resurrection Body. Thank You. Amen.

Focus on the Flights

The previous section was “Focus on Forever,” describing the key principles of the various types of Rapture and Resurrection Events. In this section, we will focus on the seven individual flights that are still future as this booklet is being written. For each Event, we will describe the following, to the extent that available Scripture permits:

- When each Event will occur,
- The participants before the Event,
- The Event, and
- The participants after the Event.

Why are we studying all these details? Because each of these seven Events demonstrates the *character* of the God we serve. You need to appreciate the God who chooses to spend Forever with you and me. He cares about you, personally and passionately. If we grasp the enormity of His love for us, it should inspire us to draw closer to Him in our daily prayer time. We need to get beyond a bare minimum sense of duty. We should get to know *Him*.

So let's begin at the beginning, showing the Lord's love as demonstrated throughout the Book of Revelation. As you recall, we gave a general outline of the book in the previous section.

- Revelation 1: “The things you have seen...” (Introduction)
- Revelation 2-3: “The things that are...” Letters to the Churches. (Now).
- Revelation 4-5: You and me in Heaven (Very soon)
- Revelation 6-19: The Tribulation Period. (7 years, starting very soon)
- Revelation 20: The Millennium Period. (1000 years)

- Revelation 21-22: Forever

You and I are living in the second bullet, here and now. You and I will soon be living in Revelation 4 and 5, in our Resurrection Bodies, and we will get there before the Tribulation Period begins.

So *how do we get there?* And *how do we know* the Next Rapture Event will precede the Tribulation Period?

Past and Future Rapture Events

There are lots of good people who don't believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture Event. They state objections like: "The word 'Rapture' doesn't appear in the Bible!" And you know, they're right if you only have the English translations of the Bible. But if you have access to Latin and Greek manuscripts, you'll discover some facts about the word "Rapture:"

- It is derived from Latin word *rapturos*.
- *Rapturos* is the Latin translation of Greek word *harpazo*. The word *harpazo* is a term for catching away or snatching away.
- *Harpazo* appears multiple times in the original Greek texts.
- *Harpazo* is related to our word "harpoon."

Let's look at a few examples of how *harpazo* is used in the Bible, beginning with 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 16-17:

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 (*harpazo*) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

This passage gives us a succinct description of the future "Next Rapture Event." Now, for variety, we have the story in Acts 8:39-40:

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away (*harpazo*) Phillip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Phillip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

In Phillip's case, the Spirit of the Lord *harpazo'd* Phillip and put him back down somewhere else. Paul describes a different type of event in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, verses 2-4:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up (*harpazo*) to the third heaven. ³ And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ how he was caught up (*harpazo*) into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

By the way, the latter two passages describe New Testament examples of past Rapture Events. And in these cases, God caught them up and later brought them back to Earth.

Now can anybody remember two examples of Old Testament Rapture Events? Right – Enoch walked with God and he was not, because God took him (Genesis 5:18-24). And Elijah was caught up in a chariot of fire (2 Kings chapter 2). So the Bible documents several examples of past Rapture Events. Now let's examine the seven future Rapture Events described in the Book of Revelation.

The Next Rapture Event

The First Flight to Forever is the Next Rapture Event. That is for us – you and me. And how do we know the Next Event happens before the Tribulation? Our Lord Himself says so, in two different places.

The first example is a passage we discussed earlier: Luke Chapter 21. The context here is important. The Lord had been describing the Tribulation Period, in a

way that parallels the account in Matthew 24. But this account in Luke includes a few verses that should get your undivided attention. Let's read verses 34-36:

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The Lord's plan is for His people to be paying attention and to escape all those things He had just described.

The second place He made this promise is in the Book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 10:

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

We – those of us reading and writing this book – intend to participate in this first Event. So where are we mentioned in Revelation *before* our Rapture event? We are featured in chapters two and three of Revelation, in the letters to the churches. And we certainly are a mixed bag of folks today:

- The letters to the churches describe all kinds of wonderful attributes, and we smile to hear the praises.
- The letters also describe our shortcomings, and we squirm when we hear them.
- Every single letter also includes the cautionary phrase: “He who overcomes...” So for a time, our job is to overcome our own human weaknesses by walking in faith, trusting in the Lord to change our hearts as we go.

That describes our present condition. But then the Lord intervenes, as we see in Revelation 4 verse 1, and gives us a look at the future:

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

This verse, by itself, doesn't *prove* the concept of the Pre-Trib Rapture. But it certainly is consistent with everything we've seen so far. Let's continue reading in verses 2-4:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³ And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

The first thing we notice is the presence of God Himself, seated on a throne.

The next thing we notice is that God has surrounded Himself with 24 Elders. That's you and me, dressed up and looking good. We know those are Christians because they are described in ways that mirror the promises in Revelation 2-3 that Jesus made to those who overcome. Just in verse 4 we see that the 24 Elders:

- Wear white robes (as promised in Revelation 3:5),
- Wear crowns (as promised in Revelation 2:10, 1 Peter 5:4, James 1:12, 2 Tim 4:8), and
- Sit on thrones (as promised in Revelation 3:1).

Let's see what else we can learn about the 24 Elders. Turn to Revelation 5:8-10, and I'm going to share some insights that I learned from [Dr. David Hocking's presentation](#) at a recent Pre-Trib conference:

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of

incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰ and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

Several things jump out from this song:

- The 24 Elders sing this, not the 4 living creatures or the angels.
- They sing that You have redeemed **us** (not them) by Your blood. Angels and the four living creatures don't get redeemed. The Elders are redeemed and Raptured human beings.
- Verse 10: You have made **us** kings and priests to our God.
- Verse 10 echoes Revelation 1:6 which says, “...and has made **us** kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”
- Verse 10 echoes Revelation 2:26-27 and 3:21 where the Lord promises that **we** will rule and reign with Him and that **we** will sit on thrones.
- Manuscript evidence supports “redeemed **us**.” There are only 24 Greek manuscripts in the whole world that contain Revelation 5:9-10. You need to understand that 23 of the 24 Greek manuscripts read “...have redeemed **us**.” The 24th manuscript has an indefinite pronoun there. All of the extant Greek manuscripts read “**us**” in Revelation 1:6. All 10,000 Latin translations of the Greek read “us” in both places.

Some “modern” translations read “them” – expressing a denominational bias that the 24 Elders are *not* Christians who have been Raptured before the Tribulation Period begins. But there is no manuscript evidence for “them.” The 24 Elders are **us**, you and me, Raptured and rejoicing in our Resurrection Bodies.

So that is the Next Rapture Event, the first one described in the Book of Revelation. But it is not the only such Event. The other six Rapture/Resurrection Events happen between Revelation 6 and Revelation 20.

Most people avoid those chapters because they deal with successive waves of God's judgment upon an unbelieving world. That will not be a pleasant time to be an Earth dweller, assaulted by all those beasts and dragons and plagues and fire and brimstone.

However, that dreadful time is actually very precious to the Lord, because He will take many different and wonderful harvests of souls during that time. Once the present-day church is taken out of the way, He will once again put Israel into the center of the world stage and speak to the world through His Chosen People. Many millions of people will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, during that 7-year period. Many of the new converts will suffer greatly for their faith, but our Lord will bless them greatly, as we shall see.

One more reality check: I encourage you to take ownership of the information I'm about to share. You can page through Revelation and note all seven of these Events yourself in less than an hour. I encourage you to do so, because it will enable you to explain the Events to others who do not have access to this booklet.

The Second Event: The Numberless Multitude

Turn to Revelation 6, and we'll start reading in verse 9:

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. ¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

The context of this passage is Revelation chapter 6, which is an overview of the entire 7-year Tribulation Period. For your homework, take two Bibles, open

one to Matthew 24 and the other to Revelation 6. Nobody questions that Matt 24 is an overview of the entire 7 years, because it concludes with His return. Revelation 6 tracks Matthew 24 point for point. So these terrible afflictions will be in the background of all the other plagues that will befall the Earth dwellers.

As we see in verses 9-10, killing Christians will become a popular sport among Earth dwellers. And notice that we only see the souls of the martyrs. They don't have Resurrection Bodies yet. They haven't been Raptured yet, but they will be. And God gives them all white robes, to confirm their eventual place in Heaven, with us.

Now turn a page or two to Revelation 7, starting in verse 9:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

These are not you and me. And notice in verses 13-14 that the Apostle John didn't recognize them at first. He recognized the 24 Elders, but not these folks.

They weren't Christians then, and they aren't Christians now. Today, these people are not born again. They may attend Church services and call themselves Christians. But like the five foolish virgins in the parable we described in the previous section, they weren't ready to answer the call for the Next Rapture Event.

Notice these aren't just Americans or Europeans. They come from everywhere. Some of them were the souls under the altar in Revelation 6, 9-10. Some of them might be people down the street from you that have resisted your invitation to your home Bible study. But God has His eye on every single one of those precious people, and He will reward the faith they develop between now and then.

The Third Event: A Private Rapture for the 144,000

Now let's look at the Third Event. You should already have your Bible open to Revelation 7. Back up a few verses to the beginning of the chapter and let's read verses 1-4:

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.

To review, in the first section we said that the primary reason for the Next Rapture Event is to take the Church out of the way so Israel can again be God's messenger to the world. How do I know that's His plan? This passage makes it clear: God will supernaturally call and anoint this group and make them the most amazing evangelical force since the original Apostles. When does God do this? Almost immediately after you and I are airlifted to safety, and just at the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

We aren't told anything about their ministry. But we do get to see them after their private Rapture Event. Turn a few pages to Revelation 14, verses 1-5:

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. ³ They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. ⁴ These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

A few years ago, I read an interesting article by Bill Perkins of Compass.org, which raised the possibility that the 144,000 will be chosen from among the Haredi, who are the Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. There are 1.3 million Haredi, today and somewhere between 150,000 and 175,000 of them are unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 35. These guys spend all their time reading Scriptures. They are not Christians today. But the Lord has a way of getting our attention, doesn't He? Regardless of their origin, God knows them each by name and has a great plan for their lives.

The Fourth Event: A Private Rapture for the Two Witnesses

So the 144,000 will be the first private Rapture Event. Now let's read about the second private Event. Flip back a few pages to Revelation 11, verses 1-6. We start by reading about the ministry of these characters:

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. ² 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. ³ And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. ⁶ These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

The context here is somewhere in the second half of the 7-year Tribulation Period, i.e. the Great Tribulation. We know from other Scriptures that the Beast violates the 7-year treaty at the 3.5-year point and invades Israel. So the 144,000 have been Raptured away, and the faithful remnant of Israel has fled into the wilderness. In the narrative of the Book of Revelation, this episode is recorded between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments.

For perspective, consider that these two guys are doing a very dramatic ministry in enemy territory. They are at Ground Zero, calling the trumpet judgments (as described in Revelation chapters 8 and 9) upon the Earth dwellers before they happen. Notice that they will perform their ministry for 1,260 days – about 3.5 years. Then what happens? Let’s read Revelation 11, verses 7-10:

When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸ And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. ⁹ Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three- and- a- half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. ¹⁰ And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The Earth dwellers we see here are not nice people. They aren't like the pleasant folk that were Raptured with us. By this point, most of the Earth dwellers are pretty hard-core sinners, rejoicing that God's messengers have been slain. Still, the Lord was faithful and loving to send the two witnesses to warn them of impending judgments. And the Lord will be faithful and loving to the two witnesses, as we see in verses 11-13:

Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. ¹³ In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

This remarkable story has a remarkable ending. Despite the plagues these Two Witnesses were calling down, and despite their bloody murder, God will use these events to turn more people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. And it will be very timely, enabling more souls to come to saving faith before the Fifth Future Rapture Event.

The Fifth Future Rapture Event: The Lord Takes a Harvest

For our next event, turn to Revelation 14. We will start with verses 13-16:

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." ¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." ¹⁶ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The Lord's harvest happens just before the events known as "The Day of The Lord." And notice that the entire Trinity is in view here. The Father speaks from heaven promising a blessing to the remaining Earth dwellers who have come to a saving knowledge of His Son Jesus; the Spirit affirms the blessings, and the Lord Jesus Himself comes out to take a harvest.

The question we need to answer is "What type of harvest is Jesus taking here? We learn what Jesus is *not* harvesting in verses 17-19:

Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." ¹⁹ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

This angel is called "another" angel. The Greek word for "another" here is *heteros*, meaning another of a different type. He is a different type of angel and he takes a different harvest. This angel's harvest is symbolic of the Day of the Lord, "...the great winepress of the wrath of God."

So what harvest did Jesus take? We learn that in the very next chapter, Revelation 15, starting in verse 1:

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. ² And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. ³ They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! ⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For

You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.

Have you ever felt like having a pity party? Well, these folks would certainly qualify for one. Not only have they lived through the same fallen world that you and I live in now, but they have also endured nearly seven years of Hell on Earth. They didn't get saved soon enough to go up with us or with the Numberless Multitude. So they have been through the wringer. God gave them the faith to have "the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name." And they show up singing praises to God for His justice and mercy.

The Sixth Event: The Very Last Martyrs

Surely by now the Lord has used up all of His grace and lovingkindness, right? Wrong. There are two more events to be aware of, and they are both in Revelation 20. Turn to Revelation 20 and let's read verses 4-6:

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years

Behold: more latecomers. They missed all the earlier Rapture Events. But the Lord had his eye on every single one of them. Remember the story (in Matthew chapter 20) of the landowner who hired workers at different times during the day? These are the folks who were hired just an hour before quitting time. And God will allow them to rule and reign with Jesus – alongside of us – for the Millennium Period.

The Seventh Event: After the Millennium

Now let's take a look at the seventh and last group. We read about them in Revelation 20, verses 11-15:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

For the entire 1000-year period, you and I – plus the folks involved in the five Rapture/Resurrection Events after ours – will be ruling and reigning with Christ here on Earth. The question we must answer is: “Over whom will we be ruling?” We know that at least half of the world's population will die during the 7-year Tribulation Period:

- One fourth of the world's population will die because of the judgments unleashed in Revelation chapter 6. If the world's population is about 7.2 billion at the start of the Tribulation Period, then about 1.8 billion people will perish.
- In Revelation 9, verses 13-18, we see that another one-third of the world's people will die as a result of the demonic horsemen which will punish the earth with fire and smoke and brimstone. If the earth's population has already been reduced by 1.8 billion to about 5.4 billion, then one third of that remnant would be another 1.8 billion people.

But that still leaves a few billion unsaved folks in fleshly bodies entering the Millennium. Every single one of them will need to hear the gospel and get born

again, just like we did. All of their children and all of their grandchildren and great grandchildren will need to be born again. If they do, their names will be written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and they will enter into Forever alongside you and me. You and I will participate in evangelizing them during the Millennium.

Maybe you are beginning to think, "Wow. I haven't really done much evangelism lately." Well, don't worry about it. Go ahead and get started sharing the Gospel now. You will have 1000 years to sharpen your skills. And the people you lead to the Lord will be eternally grateful.

Conclusion: God's Love is Amazing

By now you're probably wondering: "What's the point? Why did we just march through such a long Bible study?" The answer is simple: This study demonstrates the love of God and His willingness to use flawed vessels like us to do His work.

Believe it or not, the Book of Revelation spends as many chapters talking about you and me and future believers and our parties in heaven as it does on the episodes of fire and brimstone.

You and I and future believers that God loves are mentioned in 14 of the 22 chapters:

- Rev. 1-5: Us on Earth and in Heaven
- Rev 7: The 144,000 and the Numberless Multitude
- Rev. 10: Message to remaining Earth dwellers
- Rev. 11: Two witnesses and people in vicinity
- Rev. 12: Woman, child and remnant of Israel
- Rev 14: The 144,000 and the Lord's last harvest before His coming
- Rev 15: The Lord's last harvest in Heaven
- Rev 20-22: Believers in the Millennium and Forever

You and I are central characters in this book. You are part of God's plan for the Millennium and Forever. And He also has compassion and grace and a plan for people who don't yet know Him, who don't have a clue or who don't even care

today. Maybe the Lord can use you, *before* He takes us up in the first flight, to plant seeds that will enable a friend or family member or some total stranger to get aboard a future flight.

The Book of Revelation tells me that God wants to touch your life. He wants to give you joy now, and a glorious future very soon.

But there's more to the story than what we've seen in this section. The most-important lesson of the four is the next section. The Lord offers you a unique privilege, available only to believers at this particular time in human history, to help shape the course of future history.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your unfailing love is amazing. All of us come short of Your standards, and yet You care for us and have provided multiple flights for us to join You in Forever. Thank You for Your gracious provision. Help us to stay focused on You and Your plan for our lives. Amen.

Focus on the Lord's Will

The Next Steps

All of us wonder at times: “What is God’s will for my life?” Sooner or later we all encounter the difficult times and we have to make some hard choices. So we hit our knees and we pray to learn God’s will for our lives. And this is a very important first step as we see in the epistle of first John, chapter 5, and verses 14-15:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

These two sentences will change your life, if you make them the focus of your prayer life. Note that there are two parts to this: praying to hear God’s will, and praying for God’s will to be done.

Pardon me for stating the obvious, but we can’t stand strong in prayer until we know God’s will. On the BibleWriter web site, you can find a pair of lessons on the subject of “[God’s Will for Your Life](#).” Those lessons show how Psalm 119 is your road map of God’s will for your life. Most people are puzzled at that concept, because Psalm 119 is very general and can apply to anybody. Our human nature would much prefer that God would give us very specific instructions – sort of like a divine GPS informing us: “In 2.5 miles, turn right on Fondren Avenue and your destination is on the right.” Is that the type of guidance that you normally get from from the Lord? For most of us, most of the time, the guidance is more subtle.

But the truth is that Psalm 119 describes how the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Scriptures, can shape the process of the Christian life. And the process of the Christian life is what Paul talks about in Galatians 5:22-23, the Fruit of the Holy Spirit.

If we're doing this right, we are allowing the Holy Spirit to change our lives and reshape us into the likeness of our Lord, Jesus. God's general will for our lives is to be changed into the likeness of our Lord now, in this life, as proof of the truth of the Gospel message.

So it is 100% correct for us to study the Scriptures and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through the daily process of character change. And as we pray to hear God's will for our personal lives, and as we walk in faith according to His will, we will be changed.

But there's more that we can be doing. And at this point, we will ask the question, "What is God's Ultimate Plan for Your Life?" To answer that, let's look at the Book of Revelation chapter 21. We'll start in verse 1.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." ⁶ And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. ⁷ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

While Psalm 119 describes God's general will for your daily walk, this passage describes His ultimate will for you. In fact, this passage describes ***what God wants most*** in the entire Universe. This passage describes a perfect world, so nice that God wants to live there. And this passage includes you and me. God wants us to be His neighbors.

And notice what the Lord says in verse 7: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.” Ladies, don’t be side-tracked by the use of the masculine pronouns here. God is not making a sexist promise here. Quite the opposite. Anybody who overcomes “shall inherit all things.” And God will treat all of us with the favor accorded to firstborn sons. Remember that in Bible times, the sons would get a portion of their father’s estate. A daughter would presumably marry and her husband would get a portion of *his* father’s estate. That was part of God’s plan for keeping a family’s land in that family. When we get to Forever, all of that will become unnecessary. All of us, men and women, will inherit all things and be treated as sons of God.

So that is God’s perfect and ultimate will for your life. And as we mentioned in our first section, that is Door Number One, to use the game show analogy. Our God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to a saving knowledge of His Son, Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. But there is an alternative to Door Number One, as we read in verse 8 of Revelation 21:

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Door Number Two is the Second Death. That is also part of God’s ultimate will, to execute perfect justice forever. The folks in verse 8 will receive God’s justice. You and I will receive God’s mercy and grace.

So let’s continue reading and learn more about what you and I will receive, in verse 9:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ¹² Also she had a great and

high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ¹³ three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

This passage used to really get me confused. The angel said come see the Lamb's wife. So what did John see? He saw "the great city, the holy Jerusalem." Does that mean our Lord is going to marry a building? At least it's a really nice building. And look at the gates: the Lord has chosen to write the names of the 12 tribes of Israel on the gates. But this won't be just a Jewish building. Look what else we can learn, starting in verse 14:

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. ¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty- four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. ¹⁸ The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

So this will be quite a remarkable city:

- **Gates:** Inscribed with Tribes' names
- **Gates:** Made of pearls
- **Foundations:** Inscribed with Apostles' names

- **Foundations:** Covered with gems
- **Streets:** Pure gold.
- **Cubical:** 12,000 furlongs (1,380 miles) each side. If the South edge was in Houston, the North edge would be somewhere up near the Canadian border.

Does this sound like the home you live in now? It's overwhelming when you first bump into the concept, but it's important to realize that *you are in this picture*.

When you enter the gates, you are reminded of the faith of the original 12 patriarchs, the sons of Jacob. Like you, each of the patriarchs had a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. God was able to work through them to accomplish His Plan.

Likewise the Apostles were folks like you and me. They allowed the Lord, through the working of the Holy Spirit, to change their character. As a result, God was able to work through them to establish the Church. Every time we read through Hebrews chapter 11 we are reminded how the Lord can use ordinary people who are willing to step out in faith to accomplish His Plan. By implication or extension, your names are written on the foundations, just as the 24 Elders represent you in Revelation 4-5.

But what about all those gemstones that will decorate the foundations? And what does it mean by saying we are the bride of the Lord?

As usual, we can look to other portions of Scripture for insights. Let's begin by looking at Isaiah 54, and we'll begin reading at verse 4:

"Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame. For you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is His name, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He is called the God of the whole earth. ⁶ For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused," says your God. ⁷ "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with

great mercies I will gather you. ⁸ With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer.

Have these promises become reality yet? Not so you'd notice. These promises are still future, and note verse 5:

"For your Maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is His name, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel."

Our Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, *and* He is our Maker *and* He is our Husband. And how great is His kindness toward us? It is everlasting. This passage includes you and me, in our everlasting Forever home with God. And look at how Isaiah describes our future home, starting in verse 11:

"O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. ¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. ¹³ All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children."

When we get to heaven, we won't be living in mud shacks or rusted-out Quonset huts. There will not be a bad part of town. There won't be any slums. There won't even be any ugly houses for the sharks to buy. Our Forever home will be nicely decorated. Our Maker, our Redeemer, will personally create the décor.

So we see that Revelation 21 echoes the symbolism of Isaiah 54, but that isn't the only parallel passage. Let's look at the book of Exodus, chapter 28. In earlier chapters of Exodus, the Lord gave Moses instructions for building the Tabernacle and the holy furnishings. In chapter 28, the Lord gives instructions on how the priest is to be dressed to perform his priestly duties.

The very first item the Lord describes is the ephod. The best way to think of an ephod is like a fancy apron with shoulder straps. And the ephod had to be decorated a specific way. Let's start reading in verse 9 of Exodus 28:

"Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: ¹⁰ six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. ¹¹ With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. ¹² And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders as a memorial."

Do you get the picture here? The very first item of the high priest's garments was the ephod. And the primary decoration for the ephod was this pair of engraved stones. What was to be engraved on the stones? The names of the children of Israel. Why? So that when God looked down on the high priest, he wouldn't just see the high priest. He would see the names of the children of Israel.

Remember that Jesus is our High Priest. By extension, our Lord offered His sacrifice with your name and mine written on those shoulder plates. When our Heavenly Father looked down to see that offering, He also saw your name and mine on His Son's shoulders.

But the symbolism doesn't end with the shoulder plates of the ephod. Let's continue reading in verse 15 about the breastplate that attached to the ephod:

"You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. ¹⁶ It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width. ¹⁷ And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; ¹⁸ the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; ¹⁹ the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; ²⁰ and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be

set in gold settings. ²¹ And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.”

Notice that this is called “the Breastplate of Judgment.” It was decorated with precious stones in a way that should remind you of Revelation 21. And the names of the sons of Israel were engraved on them or on the gold settings around them. No favorites here: God didn’t just specify the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Levi and the tribe of Joseph. All 12 tribes, warts and wrinkles and all, were inscribed. And by extension, your name and my name were inscribed on our Lord’s breastplate when He made atonement for our sins.

Let’s continue reading with verse 29:

“So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the Lord continually.”

This is an important detail. The earthly high priest was to keep the names of the sons of Israel *near to his heart* whenever he performed any priestly duties. By extension, our Lord Jesus wore our names close to His heart when He was on the cross. And He continues to carry our names close to His heart right now.

Remember, this was the Breastplate of Judgment. Our Lord is our righteous Judge, and He has already pronounced the verdict for everyone who claims righteousness by His grace, through faith in His completed sacrifice. Your name and my name are engraved on precious stones near His heart.

So let’s stop here and summarize what we’ve learned about God’s will so far. We’ve learned that God’s will includes:

- You in Heaven, Forever;
- God with you, Forever;
- The Lord is your High Priest and Redeemer; and

- Your name is near His heart.

Can you agree with me that this is God's perfect and eternal plan for your life? Are you willing to accept God's perfect and eternal plan for your life?

Has it ever crossed your mind that we can reach out and pray for God's eternal plan to come true? Have you ever thought that our Lord Himself commanded you to pray for God's eternal plan for your life?

Let's read from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, starting with verse 9:

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Notice how we are told to start every prayer: "Our Father." We start our prayer by grabbing hold of our relationship to God, our Father. If you are born again, then God the Father can look at you and see a family resemblance. If the Holy Spirit has given you that new nature, and is bearing the Fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life, then your character is in the process of being changed into the likeness of His Son, Jesus.

So to Whom do we address our prayer? To God. And Who is He? He is our Father. And where is our Father? In Heaven. Where is Heaven today? We don't know exactly. But God is there, and He wants us to live with Him Forever.

Now you are about to learn a profoundly obvious secret of prayer, because the very next line of the model prayer is: Hallowed be Your name. So what does the word "hallowed" mean? It literally means "holy" but if you grab the meaning of this phrase it will change your prayer life.

When Jesus told the disciples to pray "Hallowed be Your name," he was telling us to ***praise God, our Father, every time we come before Him in prayer.***

This should not have been a novel concept for the disciples, nor should it be for us. More than a thousand years earlier, King David had written about this principle in Psalm 100. Let's read the first 3 verses:

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! ² Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. ³ Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

True confession time: I used to have trouble with this Psalm. Because I'm not, in my human nature, a cheerful person. My temperament is more calm and stoic. Worse, when I have a serious burden to take to the Lord, my first response is *not* to make a joyful shout. So how can I truthfully make a joyful shout if I'm not feeling joyful? That was a problem for me until I heard a pastor teaching on the next two verses:

⁴ Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. ⁵ For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.

Did you know that prayer has a gate? If you want to enter into the courts of the Lord in prayer, you need to find the gate and enter that gate with praise.

When I first heard this, I still didn't get it at first. What if I don't feel like praising God? What if my heart is so heavy that all I can do is cry out in pain?

When your heart is heavy, you must learn to start praising the Lord. Surely you can't start by reciting the problem. Instead, start with what you know about God as a Person. Start with general Scripture examples and speak the praises out loud. Here is how you might start your prayer:

- "Father God, You are my heavenly Father."
- "I praise You for Your love and grace."
- "I praise You for being faithful to Your promises." In other words, thank the Lord for how He has answered your prayers in the past and how He has helped you get through hard times. Go ahead and be specific.

- “I praise You for allowing these things to happen, because I know You love me and I know you will provide a way of escape that I may get through this crisis.” (See 1 Corinthians 10:13 for corroboration.) You can trust Him because He has amply demonstrated His faithfulness and love toward you.
- “Your Name will be glorified in my life.” The Lord’s answer to your prayers will have multiple purposes. You will receive a blessing, first of all. And you will be sharing that blessing with others, helping to strengthen their faith when they encounter tough times.

So before you even start to recite your problems, get yourself inside the gates of prayer. And let me give you a hint: praising God out loud will change *you*, even before you get an answer from the Lord, and even before you tell Him what your problems are.

Praising God aloud will change your entire perspective. When you praise the Lord out loud, good things happen:

- You remind yourself of God’s love.
- You remind yourself of God’s past deliverances.
- You help yourself to stay focused.
- God gets the glory. And...
- The enemy is driven away. He can’t stand to hear God get the glory after he has shot a fiery arrow at you.

That is why Jesus told us to pray “Hallowed be Your name.” So the Holy Spirit has given us an attitude adjustment by this point. We feel connected to our heavenly Father, and we are reminded of His love and faithfulness. So what do we pray next? We pray verse 10 of Matthew 6:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Right here, in the Gospel of Matthew, our Lord Himself is telling us to pray for God’s eternal Kingdom to come now, onto this Earth. So before we even get to

our own prayer list, we must be in touch with our Father's prayer list. More than anything else, God the Father wants us to be with Him in eternity. And God wants us to reach out and touch His will for His Kingdom to come on this Earth.

That is the entire point of this lesson series. God wants us to reach out and pray for His Kingdom to come here, on the Earth.

Eternity and Forever are not TV shows. We can't just sit in our rocking chairs and flip channels with the remote control. Eternal life is *not* a spectator sport.

Yes, the Bible is a great guide to past human history, but the Bible also speaks about our future history. The Bible has much to say about Forever – how we get there, what it will be like, and what we should be doing *until* we get there.

Yes, until we get to Forever, we will have problems. And we can bring our problems to the Lord, as we see in the next three verses of the Lord's prayer:

Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

As long as we're in these fleshly bodies, we will have to deal with money issues, forgiveness issues and temptation issues. But we can face these problems boldly as long as we keep focused on the last line of the prayer:

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Do you really believe that verse? Do you really believe that God's plan for your life is to be with Him in the Kingdom, in New Jerusalem, Forever? Do you really believe that is His will for your life? Are you willing to reach out and pray for God's will to come to pass *quickly*?

A logical person might ask: "How do we *know* that God wants to come soon? What if it's His will to bring the Next Rapture Event and the Tribulation Period a long time from now?" That is a great question. For an answer, I would like to show you a portion of Psalm 119, beginning in verse 123:

My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word. ¹²⁴ Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes. ¹²⁵ I am Your servant; Give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies. ¹²⁶ It is time for You to act, O Lord, for they have regarded Your law as void.

I would recommend that you memorize verse 126:

It is time for You to act, O Lord, for they have regarded Your law as void.

When you look at the Big Picture, it seems scary to pray for The End Times to come quickly. Yes, we know that *our* personal situations will be good because we plan to be caught up (*harpazo*'d) in the Next Rapture Event. And yet we have some concerns because that event is the launching point for the seven-year Tribulation Period. As you know, bad things will happen to Earth dwellers during that period. But the whole purpose of the previous section was to assure you of God's loving care and provision for every person on Earth. Yes, the times will be rough, but whom the Lord loves, He chastens. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to eternal life, Forever in Heaven with Him.

Let's close this section by looking at the very last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, and we'll start with verse 16. Our Lord is speaking:

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! ²¹ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Verse 20 should resonate in your heart. Jesus tells us "Surely I am coming quickly." And the Apostle John responds: "Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus." That is the last prayer in the Bible. Verse 21 is a blessing that the Apostle pro-

claims to those of us who are reading and paying attention to the extravagant promises of this book.

The Lord has blessings for you and your family, today and Forever. It is the Lord's perfect will for you to live with Him Forever in the New Jerusalem. And the very end of the very last chapter of the Bible is a prayer for the Lord to come quickly.

Should you and I be praying that also? Let's return to 1 John chapter 5, and let's re-read verses 14-15:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Do you *understand* God's perfect will for your life and the lives of your loved ones? Are you *willing* for the Lord's will to be done? Will you *take hold* of God's Plan for the future and help to pull it into the present through fervent prayer?

Closing Prayer: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as in Heaven. Amen.

When Do We Start?

Are you ready?

By now, you're convinced that you'll like Forever a lot better than this mixed-up world of the present. So you must be wondering if we are close to the date of the Next Rapture Event. The short answer is that we're close. The long answer requires some research in Scripture.

The Lord's disciples asked a similar question, but not concerning the Next Rapture Event. Instead, they wanted to know when the Lord would set up His Kingdom. We read the account in Acts chapter 1, verses 6-7:

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

The Lord did not choose to give us exact dates for either the Next Rapture Event or for His return to Planet Earth seven years later. But we can look at the signs of the times and be sure of *some* things. Certain things must happen before we can be issued our boarding passes for the flight to Forever.

First things first...

The very first priority is that we must be watchful of two things, as commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke's Gospel, chapter 21, verses 34-36:

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

First, we must be watchful of ourselves, that we don't get "weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the cares of this life." Human nature tends to have a short attention span, and our natural inclination is toward the "cares of this life." We can't avoid the cares of this life, but we can be aware of our priorities and keep our focus on the Lord and our walk with Him.

Second, we must be watchful of the signs of the times. For centuries before the birth of Jesus, the Hebrew prophets had made hundreds of clear predictions about Him. In fact, there was a general expectation that the arrival of Messiah was imminent even before His birth. As He went about His earthly ministry, He fulfilled many of those prophecies. Furthermore, He fully expected the Israelites of His day to understand what they saw. Let's read Matthew 16, verses 1-3:

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; ³ and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times."

Today we are expected to watch for a different set of signs telling us that the end times are very near. Here is a partial list:

- **Israel must be back in its own land** as an independent nation. How can we know this? Because Israel is mentioned in the Book of Revelation and other prophecies concerning the Last Days. Israel has existed since 1948.
- **Israel must be hated by all of its traditional enemies**, which now include all of its Muslim neighbors. The traditional enemies are in place and possess nuclear weapons in preparation for [Ezekiel's War](#).
- **The balance of world power must be shifting** away from Europe and America and towards the Middle East. That will enable the Last Days' Dictator to be the most-powerful man on earth for a short season. If you were

not previously aware that the Last-Days' Dictator would come from a Muslim country, you should read this [free lesson on the BibleWriter web site](#).

- **The aforementioned Muslim countries must be anxiously awaiting the Last-Days' Dictator**, to become their caliph or *Mahdi*. You should be aware that Muslim scriptures describe their messiah in the same terms that the Bible describes the Last-Days' Dictator, and that all the radical Islamist groups are anxiously awaiting him. The above-mentioned free lesson will explain more about this concept.
- **The world must be in an advanced stage of moral decay**, comparable to that of the Days of Noah (see Matthew 24:37-38). Since most of the world has always been morally bankrupt, the depravity just before the Last Days must be exceptional. We will discuss this issue shortly.
- **The world banking system must be prepared to implement a totally cash-less society**, where the only legal transactions are electronic or otherwise controllable via the mark of the beast. That situation is rapidly coming upon us, as all the large banks and world governments (including the USA) are treating large cash transactions as unlawful acts.

All of these signs are flashing brightly these days, to a greater degree than I have seen in my lifetime. Furthermore, there is a unique linkage between Israel and the United States of America that very few commentators have noticed. For most of recorded history, God has used Israel as His messenger to the world. For the last 2,000 years, however, God has taken a slightly different approach, as we see in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 1 and verse 1:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah of Israel. But since Pentecost Sunday, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been carried throughout the world, far beyond the geographic borders of Israel. Since the days of the Apostle Paul, the Gospel

message has primarily been spread to and through Gentile believers. From that time until the Next Rapture Event, we are living in the Church Age, which is a subset of the Times of the Gentiles. After the Next Rapture Event (which ends the Church Age), there will be a seven-year period when the nation Israel will again be at the center of God's dealings with Planet Earth, but those will still be part of the Times of the Gentiles.

Some commentators have indulged in the heresy of Replacement Theology, claiming that the Gentile Church has replaced Israel in Bible prophecy. Those folks should sit down and read chapters 9 and 10 of Paul's epistle to the Romans, which clearly state that the nation Israel is only suffering from temporary blindness. At the appointed time, the veil will be lifted and the remnant will claim the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and King.

In the meantime, as we await the Next Rapture Event, we should also note the parallels between Israel and the United States of America in terms of God's promises and warnings in Scripture. Let's begin with the framework of blessings and warnings that God gave Moses. We read them in Deuteronomy 28, beginning at verse 1:

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: ³ "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. ⁴ "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. ⁵ "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ⁶ "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. ⁷ "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. ⁸ "The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. ⁹ "The Lord will establish you as a holy people to

Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. ¹⁰ "Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you."

We all know that those words were spoken to the people of Israel. But here is a key question: Are these principles relevant only to the nation Israel? Are there any other people on earth that God refers to as "My people?"

Yes, all Christians *should* be His people. Furthermore, when you read how this nation was founded, and the Christian faith of key men and women, you realize that the United States of America occupies a unique place in human history. There has been a really diverse assortment of people here, with the usual mixture of good and bad. But this country was established on a bedrock of freedoms and self-governance that existed nowhere else on earth for the first 100 years of its existence.

The remarkable thing is that born-again, Spirit-filled Christians have never been a majority in the USA. Our Lord did not command Christians to conquer nations by the sword or the ballot box. Our Lord has a different plan, as He explained in Matthew chapter 5, starting in verse 13:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

What is salt used for? For flavoring, and for preserving. What is the proportion of salt in a recipe compared to the other ingredients? It's a pretty small amount. If you cook a pot roast or casserole, there will be a lot more meat and potatoes than salt. So salt has an effect far beyond its quantity.

Likewise Christians only need to be a small percentage of the population to affect the moral climate. If we are salty, we can have an influence far beyond our actual numbers. That is God's plan. That is His purpose. But note what else Jesus tells us in verse 13: "...if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."

So let's pause for a moment and look at the world around us. Are they seeing our good works and glorifying our Father in heaven? Sometimes, but not so much lately. Is it possible that we, as a nation, have lost our saltiness? Perhaps.

The Lord knows that we have a tendency to backslide, and He provided specific warnings about backsliding in that same chapter of Deuteronomy. Let's turn back to Deuteronomy 28, and see what might be happening to the USA. We'll start in verse 15:

"But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. ¹⁷ "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ "Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. ¹⁹ "Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. ²⁰ "The Lord will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me."

Now we're going to stop reading here at verse 20, but there are more warnings in later verses that you can read for homework if you're interested. In other words, God told His people – the nation Israel and Christians in the USA – that He will bless our socks off if we choose to be salt and light, so that all men will see the light and give glory to God. Unfortunately, the opposite is also possible, as we just read.

What does this mean in real life? First of all, did God bless Israel when they obeyed Him? Most assuredly. The kingdoms of David and Solomon were the richest and most-powerful in the world at the time. And yes, the United States has been the richest and most-powerful nation in the world for most of its history.

And did God keep His Word concerning the consequences of disobedience? Definitely. First of all, He allowed Israel to be split into two kingdoms immediately after Solomon's death – because Solomon had been unfaithful and had allowed the worship of foreign gods. Then things proceeded to get worse. Eventually they were taken into exile, with a mere remnant returning later.

Yes, God punished the Israelites, but He never turned His back on them completely. Despite their backslidings, God sent His prophets to them, to encourage them to repent and do right. We see a good example in the Book of Isaiah, chapter 1, and starting at verse 1:

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. ² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. ³ "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know. My people do not consider." ⁴ Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward.

Notice how this chapter starts out. Isaiah is stating his credentials, that he was a prophet to God's people for many decades – through the reign of four different kings of Judah. Were they all good kings? Did they all walk with a pure heart toward the Lord? Of course not. Some of them, like Hezekiah, were real reformers. Others were really evil.

We can say the same thing about the political and religious leaders of this country. We have had some great men as president. We have had some real stinkers.

But there is a key distinction here: ***we have chosen every single one of them.*** The good men have been God's gift to us, and God's blessings have followed. The real stinkers have been exactly what we deserve, because ***they have been an exact reflection of the spiritual health of the people who elected them.***

Now let's bring the message of Isaiah 1 into the 20th century, specifically into the USA in the 1960s. In many respects, our nation was zooming downhill in the late 1960s. The Supreme Court had banned prayer and the Bible in public schools. Pop culture had turned into drug culture, and traditional morality was being abandoned for what you could delicately call "alternative lifestyles."

Did God sit idly by and wring His hands? No. He sent good men – like Billy Graham, Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, Jess Moody of First Baptist Van Nuys, and Jack Heyford of Church on the Way – to call this country to repentance. And a good portion of the country did repent (remember the Jesus Movement?) for a time. Revival broke out all over the country, for a time. And we had some good years, for a time.

For many years, our churches became alive to the promise of Isaiah chapter 2, so let's begin reading at verse 1:

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

During the heady days of the Jesus Movement, we loved to read about the Lord returning to Earth during the Millennium Period and ruling this planet from

Jerusalem. We loved to share this vision of a future Earth, and we led many people to the Lord with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To be honest, many of us thought that the world of the 1970s was as corrupt and evil as it could ever get. And then we saw the utter corruption of the world in the 1990s and thought, “It can’t get any worse than this. The Next Rapture Event must be right around the corner.” Then September 11, 2001 happened, and the Middle East was finally acknowledged as a hotbed of crazy religious violence. We were absolutely sure that the Tribulation Period was just days away and the Next Rapture Event was just minutes away.

Then, to everyone’s great amazement, Christians really began to pray after September 11. Christians once again were salt and light in a very dark world. And the nation was healthier for a time. But that was yesterday.

Just like the nation Judah, the United States has experienced times of revival and times of backsliding. But how bad can things get before the Next Rapture and the Tribulation Period?

Let’s see how bad things got in Judah. Turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah 25, beginning at verse 1:

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), ² which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: ³ “From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty- third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. ⁴ And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. ⁵ They said, ‘Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. ⁶ Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you. ’ ⁷ Yet you have not listened to Me,” says

the Lord, “that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. ⁸ “Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, ⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ says the Lord, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. ¹⁰ Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.’”

I can already hear what today’s network news people would say to the prophet if he gave that sermon today. “That’s a pretty harsh message, Mister Jeremiah. It’s not politically correct. It doesn’t sound like much of a happy-face future. You need to preach something more positive!”

Actually the religious and political leaders of his day said exactly the same thing to Jeremiah. But Jeremiah was faithful to deliver the message the Lord had given him.

There are two peculiar things that modern readers should note:

- In verse 9, God calls Nebuchadnezzar “My servant.” Think about it. That pagan king was not a nice person, and he ruled a country of people who were equally not nice. But God chose him to carry out His will – the judgment upon God’s people for their backsliding.
- Then in verse 11, God declares that the punishment and desolation are for a finite length of time: 70 years, one year for each Sabbatical Year that Israel failed to observe. In other words, for 490 years they had failed to allow the land to rest every seventh year as the Lord had commanded.

To bring this home to the 21st century, God has called our present enemies and political leaders to be His servants to carry out His judgment upon the United

States. And some of that judgment is starting to happen now, before the Next Rapture Event. On a more-positive note, God does not intend to make a complete end of the USA. He has a specific duration of judgment in mind – in this case the seven years of the Tribulation Period.

So how bad will things be for the USA during the Tribulation Period and after the Next Rapture Event? Earlier in this section we mentioned that Ezekiel’s War would happen at the very beginning of the seven-year Tribulation Period. God provides a miraculous deliverance for Israel, and a remarkable destruction for her enemies. Let’s look at how the Lord beats back Gog and the other miscreants in Ezekiel 39, starting at verse 3:

“Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. ⁴ You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. ⁵ You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken,” says the Lord God. ⁶ “And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.”

The enemies surrounding Israel will be destroyed, as we would expect. But take another look at verse 6. God will send fire upon Magog “...and on those who live in security in the coastlands.” Who are the coastlands? Back in those days, the coastlands were countries a long sea journey west of Israel. And archeologists have proven that the Phoenicians and Danites traded with the American Indians for many centuries – until the Romans destroyed the Phoenician fleets.

We don’t know for certain if verse 6 includes the USA. But we know that the current government of the USA has a strong preference for the Muslim countries and a strong dislike of Israel.

As this booklet is being written (Summer of 2015), the United States Senate is struggling over an astonishingly bad treaty concerning Iran. Most Americans are unaware that this agreement would require the USA to attack Israel in defense of Iran. We are praying that this treaty is voided soon, but the news reports aren’t en-

couraging. If the USA sides with Iran and Gog in Ezekiel's War, this country will certainly provoke God's wrath.

Even if the treaty is voided and God spares the USA from His fire and brimstone, there are plenty of terrorist organizations, not to mention Russia, who are willing and able to attack us.

So is there any silver lining in all this future gloom and destruction? Yes, there is. The Lord made sure that Ezekiel 39 verse 6 was deliberately vague. The USA won't necessarily be nuked. There is hope for this country.

We have hope for many reasons, but I'm only going to share two right now. The first is expressed by the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied the fall of Judah and then lived through the desolation afterwards. As he wrote the Book of Lamentations, amid the rubble of the nation, he wrote the following – Lamentations 3, verses 21-25:

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. ²² Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" ²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Our first reason for hope is the same as Jeremiah's: because the Lord loves us, and because He is faithful to His promises toward us. He loves each of us, personally and passionately. He promises a blessing to those who wait for Him and who seek Him in their Scripture study and prayer life.

The second reason we have hope is the possibility of revival in the USA.

Rapture or Revival?

So what comes next? Will Christians rally in their faith and bring another revival to this country? Or are we seeing evidence that God's ultimate will (as discussed in the previous section) is bringing us close to the Next Rapture Event?

There is increasing evidence that the moral depravity of this country and its leaders has doomed this formerly great nation. As this booklet is being completed, our government has demonstrated a complete disregard for the God of the Bible and for the core principles of the Constitution of the United States. Examples:

- Our Congress passed a so-called trade bill (the text of which has been kept a closely guarded secret) that gives the President dictatorial powers in matters of the environment, banking, regulation of businesses and restrictions on religious liberties.
- Our Supreme Court announced a remarkable series of decisions that (a) ignored the plain language of the legislation under consideration, (b) struck down restrictions on gay marriage -- not on legal or moral grounds but on the vague basis of self-esteem, and (c) declared that honest citizenship is meaningless because states cannot force residents to prove that they actually are citizens in order to vote.
- By expanding the national debt beyond human comprehension, the government has encouraged the banking system to become corrupted beyond repair. Instead of “too big to fail,” our banks and government have become “too big to succeed.”

Without a major revival among the Christian remnant in this country, we are headed for the curses described in Deuteronomy a few pages back.

Nevertheless, there is hope. We have hope because the Lord Himself gave us a foolproof way to cope with terrorists and corrupt government leaders. We find that in the book of 2 Chronicles, chapter 7 and starting in verse 12:

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: “I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

So we have hope because the cure for terrorists and bad government is readily available. If God's people, who are called by His name, will humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways, this country will experience revival now and be spared the worst of the Tribulation Period.

Let me encourage you to begin your personal revival by heeding the call that our Lord gave us in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 21, verses 34-36:

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The Lord is hoping that His people will answer His call. Perhaps He will hear from heaven, will forgive our sins and will heal our land. But if this is the time determined by the Lord to begin those terrible Last Days, then your watchfulness and your prayers will be rewarded by your personal Flight to Forever, to meet the Lord in the clouds. I look forward to meeting you when we get there.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, this world has become so corrupted and confusing that we don't know how to act or even how to pray sometimes. And yet we trust You to work all things for good. So we bow our hearts before You and we pray, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”