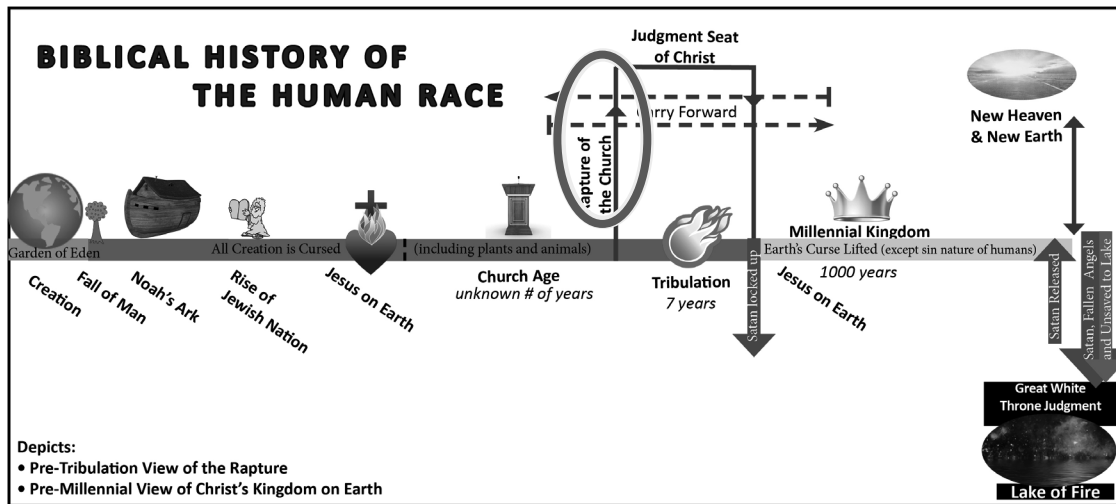


Preparing for the Rapture and Beyond



OUR SHORT TRIP TO HEAVEN

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Let's pretend we own a time machine and can easily travel forward and backward in time and be able to make decisions today based on what we see in the future.

See page 183 toolbox for full-page image.



YOUR PASSPORT PLEASE ...

To be a citizen of a country means that we **legally belong** to that country, **have the rights and protection of citizenship**, and the **responsibility to serve and protect it**.

The Apostle Paul reminds us, as believers:

²⁰ But our _____ is in heaven.
And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, *Philippians 3:20*

Since the day of our new birth (the day of our salvation) we were no longer citizens of earth, holding an earthly passport, but rather we became citizens of a heavenly kingdom and hold its passport. We are now simply visitors of earth – no longer citizens here.

With so much going on in the world today it is easy to get embroiled in it. While I find “interesting” what is happening on the global scene, news from countries other than my own holds less interest for me unless what is happening there has or will have an effect on me and my own country. It makes perfect sense to be most interested in what is happening in my country as it is more likely to have a direct effect on me (at least short term). Do you agree?

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, **admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.** ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-14, 16

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But what does the Bible say about this?

Read these verses, then circle the answer to the question contained in the verse:

Where do the enemies of the cross of Christ focus their minds?

¹⁸ *For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.* ^{19b} *Their mind is set on earthly things. Philippians 3:18, 19b*

As a soldier in active service to our King (Jesus) what should we avoid?

⁴ *No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. 2 Timothy 2:4*

What should we set our hearts on?

¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Colossians 3:1-2*



What does that phrase mean?

Look at Philippians 3:18-20 a bit more fully:

¹⁸ *For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.* ¹⁹ *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.* ²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:18-20*

In the first part of these verses Paul describes non-believers saying, ***“many live as enemies of the cross of Christ - who set their minds on earthly things.”*** In contrast he says, ***“our citizenship is in heaven.”***

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Does this mean that IF our minds (thoughts, time and effort) are **more** on “earthly things” than on “heavenly things” we are still “citizens of the earth,” not of the Kingdom?



What are your thoughts about this?

Is Paul saying that we, as believers, as citizens/passport holders of heaven, should simply ignore what is going on around us here on the earth? No. What does Jesus warn His disciples in Matthew 10:16?

¹⁶ “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as _____ as snakes and as innocent as doves”

The word shrewd means **“having or showing the insight, intelligence and understanding to make good judgments about practical matters.”** To be shrewd as serpents we must be aware of our environment. But that is not the same as being embroiled in it, especially to the near exclusion of focus on the Kingdom and the King - which is quite common in the church today.

Consider how much time we spend reading the news, watching it on TV, our phones or our computers and talking about it with others versus time in prayer, study, discussion with others, and in thought about our “citizenship” in the Kingdom of Christ. Think and pray about this for a few minutes, then write what comes to your mind for these questions.

- Who exactly is our King? What does that mean?
- What does He expect of us (today and tomorrow)?
- What is happening right now in His kingdom?

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- What pleases our King and Commander in Chief?
How can we know?
- What would further the cause of His Kingdom here on earth?
- How might we help our fellow heavenly citizens (the Church)?
- How do we “invest” in our new homeland – the Kingdom - to our own benefit as well as to the benefit of the Kingdom as a whole?
- Does Jesus promise a reward or payment for investing and working for the Kingdom today (while we are in this life/body)? And why would He do that?
- Do you know what the promised rewards are?

SORRY, I JUST CAN'T WRAP MY MIND AROUND HEAVEN AND ETERNITY

I don't know about you, but I have a very hard time thinking too deeply about heaven, the Eternal Kingdom, eternity, infinity, etc. We shouldn't be surprised or unhappy with ourselves about it. We weren't designed (in our current body/mind) to understand it. But we are called **to believe and accept it**. The fact of the matter is it is too wonderful for us to understand or comprehend right now.

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⁹ However, as it is written:
"What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived" —
the things God has prepared for those
who _____ - 1 Corinthians 2:9

There is more to this particular passage and since I don't want to leave out some of the best parts let's look at it here in the Amplified translation before we continue:

⁹ but just as it is written [in Scripture],
"Things which the eye has not seen and the
ear has not heard,
And which have not entered the heart of man,
All that God has prepared for those who love
Him [who hold Him in affectionate reverence,
who obey Him, and who gratefully recognize
the benefits that He has bestowed]."

¹⁰ For God has unveiled them and revealed
them to us through the [Holy] Spirit; for the
Spirit searches all things [diligently], even
[sounding and measuring] the [profound]
depths of God [the divine counsels and things
far beyond human understanding].

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the
world, but the [Holy] Spirit who is from God,
**so that we may know and understand the
[wonderful] things freely given to us by God.**

¹³ We also speak of these things, not in words
taught or supplied by human wisdom, but
in those taught by the Spirit, combining and
interpreting spiritual thoughts with spiritual
words [for those being guided by the Holy
Spirit].

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¹⁴ *But the natural [unbelieving] man does not accept the things [the teachings and revelations] of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness [absurd and illogical] to him; and **he is incapable of understanding them**, because they are spiritually discerned and appreciated, [and he is unqualified to judge spiritual matters].*

1 Corinthians 2:9, 10, 12, 13, 14 AMP

The Holy Spirit is able to **progressively** reveal the **great mysteries (v10) of the Eternal Kingdom** to us as we continue to **(a) study the Word, (b) pray and (c) practice obedience** in our daily lives.

Even so, the Eternal Kingdom is much more “mysterious” to me than the next era (or age) to come, the **Millennial Kingdom**.

Let’s begin with some basic facts we can understand about the **Millennial Kingdom**:

1. **It occurs here on earth.** I have been to earth, I understand earth. I have never been to heaven and have no true concept of it. **Earth is easier for me to understand and plan for.**
2. The Millennial Kingdom will last **1000 years**. I understand 1000 years, I haven’t lived that long, but I understand human years. For now, my mind can’t wrap itself around eternity - something that never ends.
3. **Jesus will be here on earth to rule and reign.** He has been here before and He promised to return; I understand that.



Do you see what I mean? Do you agree?

Let’s go back to the pivotal points in human history. So far, the following have been or are being accomplished:

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1. **God created** the heavens, the earth and humanity.
2. **Sin entered** the human race.
3. The nation of **Israel was established**.
4. **Jesus (Yeshua) was born**, lived, died on the cross to pay the debt to the Father for the sins of the world, was resurrected and returned to heaven from where He had come.
5. The “**Age of Grace or the Church Age**” began the day of Pentecost that same year. We are living in the “Church Age” now.

WHAT'S LEFT



6. The Rapture of “the Church”
7. Then (a) **wonderful events and a great celebration in Heaven will occur*** and simultaneously (b) **7 years of tribulation on earth will begin** (see the booklet *After the Rapture: Hell on Earth* for more on this topic).
*Very specific and important things will occur in Heaven during this time. The majority of this study will be about what will happen there and why it is important to know these things now.
8. Afterwards **Jesus will return** to the earth with His Saints (me, you, us? I hope) **to rule and reign here for 1000 years** (called the **Millennial Kingdom**).
9. After the Millennial Kingdom time period of 1000 years the earth as we know it will cease to exist. **God will create a new heaven and a new earth**, and the **Eternal Kingdom** will officially begin.

WHAT'S NEXT – THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

I find it quite interesting to learn how many “church-going Christians” know little or nothing

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Does it seem like there are quite a few Scriptures about the same thing? Repetition in the Scriptures indicates importance and surety. It often reveals that events are certain and coming soon.

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about the **Rapture of the Church** as detailed in the Scriptures. Without this knowledge, they are **missing the anticipation and excitement of one of the most thrilling events that could ever happen to them!**

I've had few people tell me that they knew a little about what was explained in our ***After the Rapture: Hell on Earth*** booklet (what will occur on the earth during the 7-year tribulation/wrath of God period) but they had **never heard of the Rapture**. I feel sad when I hear a believer say, "I sure hope I won't live during that Tribulation time..." because they don't know anything about the Rapture, the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Marriage Ceremony and Supper of the Lamb (celebration), the Millennial Kingdom or the Eternal Kingdom. **That's a lot to know nothing about!**

The opening paragraph of the ***After the Rapture: Hell on Earth*** booklet says:

What just happened? The Rapture of the Church. As if the world isn't spinning out of control enough already, something seemingly unbelievable just happened! Literally millions have just "disappeared" causing people to ask, "Where did they go? Are they dead or alive somewhere? Why did some disappear and not others? What is different about them?"

These are not made-up or rhetorical questions; they are simply futuristic – meaning that it hasn't happened yet. But people WILL be asking these questions one day in the perhaps near future.

WHAT IS "THE RAPTURE"?

The word "Rapture" does not appear in English Bibles. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. The word used there is *harpazo*. When the Bible was translated from Greek to Latin, **the word *harpazo* was translated as *rapturo*, a word that means "to seize, carry off by force, to claim for oneself eagerly, to snatch out or away."** This is where

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we get the idea of the word **Rapture** because that is what the description of the physical events will be like.

Let's look at some verses to explain what is being described with this word.

While **John 14:2-3** does not specifically identify the Rapture event, it clearly indicates **a plan and a promise made by Jesus** to return to the earth's atmosphere to gather His followers and take them to heaven to be with Him:

²My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:2-3

*⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may _____ with _____.
1 Thessalonians 5:9-10*

¹⁶For the _____ will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will _____. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

NOTE that it is **important not to confuse this event** (the Rapture at the BEGINNING of the Tribulation Period) with the Second Coming of Christ at the END of the Tribulation Period. They are two distinct events.

At the Rapture Jesus does not touch the earth, He comes to the earth's atmosphere and shouts His

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I highly recommend the documentary entitled, **"Before the Wrath"** - it explains so much about what is going to happen in the near future as it mirrors a Galilean wedding in many ways.

This documentary features Kevin Sorbo, Jack Hibbs, Amir Tsarfati and Jan Markell and is available on Amazon.

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command for US to come to Him in the air. All believers around the globe will hear His voice, unbelievers will not.

At the Second Coming Jesus will come to the earth and will bring His Holy Angels and the raptured believers (Church Saints) with Him. That time He will come riding a (symbolic) “white horse” and land back on the Mount of Olives where He departed from when He left the first time as promised (Acts 1:11).

So, that’s the promise, that’s the plan. **At a time when we least expect it, the Lord, Jesus, is going to come near the earth to call and gather to Himself those who believe in, trust in, rely on, and love Him.** [This is the Biblical definition of a “believer” - much more than intellectual assent.] While we don’t know the “day or hour” we have a reasonable expectation, because of current events among other things that it may be sooner than we think.



What do you think the Scriptures mean by “keeping watch”? It surely doesn’t mean sitting up 24 hours a day and staring into the sky. So, what does it mean, how would that admonition play out in our lives right now? What would/should/could we do differently?

WHY IS THE RAPTURE NECESSARY?

Take a look back at 1 Thessalonians 5:9: *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The wrath referred to is **“the wrath of God against sin/rebellion.”** To satisfy God’s righteous justice, the issue of sin must be judicially resolved. This debt must be “paid” by someone (Romans 6:23).

Since Jesus, through His sacrificial death on the cross, already paid our debt (He had no sin debt of His own) for sin, there is **no additional wrath** to be waged **against us** (believers – those who accept His substitutionary gift of mercy and grace). Others (non-believers) have chosen

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to ignore or refuse Jesus' offer and will stand trial to pay their own debt later (at the Great White Throne Judgment).

Therefore, He (Jesus) will come back and take all believers who are alive off the earth to heaven where we are safe from "the wrath" – aka The Tribulation Period.

¹⁰ *Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the _____ of _____ that is going to come on the _____ to _____ the inhabitants of the earth.*
Revelation 3:10

From these verses **it appears** that in order to fulfill His promise, the believers who are alive when the Tribulation period begins **must be removed from the earth** or they would suffer the "wrath of God against sin." **Unbelievers who are alive at that time are destined to suffer the wrath, not believers.** Obviously, all the believers could simply die at that moment and then be resurrected just like the dead in Christ will be, but apparently that is not His plan.

These seven years provide the time period for the bema (Judgment Seat of Christ) and the Marriage Ceremony of the Lamb to occur in Heaven. More on this topic later.

WHEN IS THE RAPTURE GOING TO HAPPEN?

WHY HASN'T IT HAPPENED ALREADY?

"The New Testament teaches that the Rapture is **imminent** – that is, **nothing must be prophetically fulfilled before the Rapture occurs, it could happen at any time without anything in particular preceding it.** The Rapture is a sign-less event that can occur at any moment. This is in contrast to the second coming of Christ, which is preceded by many events in the seven-year tribulation period."¹

The Apostle Paul and the early church thought it would happen during their lifetime. Obviously, it did

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not. Why hasn't it happened already? I believe the answer to that question may be found in:

⁹*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*
2 Peter 3:9

³*This is good, and pleases God our Savior,*
⁴*who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*
1 Timothy 2:3-4

This means **God continues to give humanity time to turn from sin/rebellion and toward Him.** He is patient not because He is indifferent, but because He desires* all to be saved. I am personally very grateful that it had not already happened in Paul's time because it gave me (and other people I know and love) the opportunity to be saved. I still have unsaved family members and friends. So, I appreciate His delay. Besides, eternity is a long time... we have time to wait.

*He desires/wants all humanity to be saved but allows mankind to have free will to choose. He honors that since He gave us free will in the first place.

That being said, the time WILL come and we are called to "be ready." Being ready will have eternal consequences as we will see.

WHO IS GOING TO HEAVEN AT THE TIME OF THE RAPTURE?

The simple answer to this is **"Church-Age Followers of Jesus."** The answer may be a bit more complex. In his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says it this way, "The **invisible** or Universal Church is composed of **all *true believers, whereas the visible or local church can be composed of both believers and unbelievers.**"² This is important to note.

^{9b}*They tell how you turned to God from idols*

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to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10

²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our _____ to sonship, the redemption of our _____. Romans 8:23*

*Only **true believers** have “the (Holy) Spirit” indwelling them. **Those are the only ones who will be rescued (raptured).** Unfortunately, the world is full of “**make-believers aka unsaved believers**” – some are pretenders, some go to church primarily for social reasons, others have been duped into believing in a false God/Jesus (one other than the one presented in the Bible). Some consent to Jesus being someone of great importance but will not agree to His Lordship nor agree with God that He (Jesus) paid for sins, or even that they are sinners in need of salvation. Sadly, our churches are full of these folks and some of them are even in the pulpits.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THAT MOMENT?

⁵² *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:52*

As I understand it, in a flash so fast that it will be shocking to everyone, all “believers/followers of Christ” will totally “disappear” from the face of the earth. Poof! Gone! Clothing, glasses, false teeth, and other paraphernalia left behind! Let’s take a quick time out to think about this –

Humans are comprised of two basic parts:

1. Tangible:

Body (soma) – flesh, bone, blood, brain, heart, etc., what we can touch and see, the “tent” in which the intangible parts of us live.

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2. Intangible:

- a. **Soul (psyche)** - Our thoughts, emotions and will.
- b. **Spirit (pneuma)** - The spirit part of us is the true us. We **have** a spirit, **but we are not spirits**. The spirit is **the intangible part of humanity that enables us to relate to God by either embracing Him in worship and obedience or by rejecting Him in pride and ignorance**. Because of the “fall” we were born “spiritually dead” (separated from God). When we first become believers, we are given **new Spirits that are permanently connected with God through Jesus**. (See *The Fall of Man* in the toolbox.)



That is an incredible gift – do you agree? Jot some thoughts you have about this here:

¹⁷ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17*

⁵ *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the _____ of _____ and _____ by the _____, Titus 3:5*

⁵ *Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. John 3:5-6*

At the time of the Rapture two things will happen instantaneously:

⁵⁰ *I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—*

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⁵² *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:50-52*

1. Believers/followers of Jesus who have physically died **between the birth of the Church (Pentecost – May 25, A. D. 33) and the Rapture date/time will be called out of their graves.** Note that at the time of their death, their spirit and soul went home to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). But their bodies were left here (because the body is corruptible and needs to be renewed in order to function in heaven). No matter where all their body parts are (even if they are burned up, or dismembered, or whatever ...) God knows where every part is and will put it all together perfectly, the way **He originally intended it to be.** These perfected new bodies will rise and be reunited with their spirit and their soul and proceed to join the Lord in the air.

2. **Then, those of us who are still alive, living on the earth, will be raptured** (snatched away, taken up) to meet the Lord in the air. **On that trip up our earthly bodies and souls will be changed** (transformed) **into new imperishable bodies and perfected souls – we already have new spirits** (we got them at the moment of our salvation).

Let's think a bit more about this transformation, shall we?

³⁹*Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.* ⁴⁰*There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 1 Corinthians 15:39-40*

Starting with an understanding of things on earth, it is obvious that God created each creature to be able to function well within its assigned environment. Birds

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cannot survive in the water, nor can fish survive in the air. Not only is air or oxygen a problem for them **in the other's environment**, but their whole body is uniquely structured for their particular assigned environment (their scales and feathers, their eyes - even how they blink, the way they eat and process food, how their structure reacts to gravity, all of it.) Isn't our Lord incredible? **Pause and acknowledge Him for a moment.**

Likewise, we humans have been made to function well in our assigned environment. We haven't been made to function under water or in the air, at least not without the aid of some man-made device. And even then, it isn't really good for the human body. We don't function well outside gravity either. BUT when the Rapture comes, we are told that we will receive a **new body in an instant.**

⁵¹ *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52*

This new body will be unique in all the universe and even in heaven. (I personally think it will shock the angels who have been watching all of this play out in real time, but that's just my opinion for now.) This new body will be perfectly suited to live both on earth (with its unique characteristics) AND in heaven (with its unique characteristics). Just like Jesus can travel effortlessly between the two and function well in either environment, so will we also. And throughout eternity as the Lord continues to create new worlds, we will still be able to function well wherever He goes or sends us. Won't that be amazing!

¹⁷ *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*

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*And so we will be with the Lord forever.
1 Thessalonians 4:17*

Note that right now the spirit/soul of the deceased Church-age saved individuals are already living in heaven and have a temporary body there. They are “wearing” a body that is perfectly suited the heaven’s environment (see 1 Corinthians 15:40), but they can’t come back to earth or travel around the universe – the body they have right now is not suited for that. They, too, will need a new body that can do all these things, and they will get it at the time of the Rapture (the “dead in Christ”). See *The Order of Resurrections & New Bodies* on page 187 of the Toolbox.

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UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

1. Did the section about our citizenship make you think differently in any way?

Take a minute to consider an Old Testament passage. Jeremiah is writing to the Jews then living in Babylon as exiles (by the hand of the Lord). They probably assume they will be there “forever” - and indeed some of them will die there (old age, etc.) but some will be born there as well. In some ways, we are “exiles” here on earth. We have been assigned to stay here until He returns for us.

*⁴This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵**“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.”** ⁶Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷Also, **seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”** Jeremiah 29:4-7*

If we believe we are citizens of heaven AND occupants of our assigned land on earth, how ought this cause to behave? Can our behavior be beneficial to both places at once? If so, how?

2. Had you thought before about what Jesus is doing and what He wants us to be doing as well? Will thinking about it cause you to do anything different in the future? If so, what?

3. Summarize the events of the Rapture you learned in this chapter in 3-5 very simple sentences (an “elevator speech” so to speak). Compare what you write with fellow group members. Do you think you could explain this to a fellow believer? Try it this week as many need to learn about it from a fellow believer.