

They Shall See God

The night that Jesus was betrayed, He told His disciples that He was going to leave them. However, He promised that one day He would return:

John 14:1-3: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

This promise was repeated after Jesus ascended into Heaven:

Acts 1:10-11: “And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

The apostle Paul expanded upon this doctrine in his letter to the Thessalonian church:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds,

to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

One day the Lord Jesus Christ is going to return to this world. When He returns He will descend from Heaven, just as He ascended into Heaven 40 days after His crucifixion (Acts 1:3-9). Paul tells us that He will return "with a shout", "with the voice of the archangel", and "with the trump of God". This means when Jesus returns, the voice of the archangel Michael will be heard *before* the trumpet sounds.

Jesus will then raise all of the dead who believed in Him (those who are "dead in Christ"). After He's done that, all Christians (both the living and the newly resurrected) will be caught up to meet Him in the air.

Paul had more to say about this coming event in his letter to the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 15:51-54: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

This passage tells us that when Jesus raises Christians from the dead at His return, they will be both immortal and incorruptible. Likewise, all Christians who are alive when He returns will be transformed and made incorruptible and immortal as well. From that point on sin, disease, and death will no longer be a problem for us.

But what happens next? Where do we go after we meet the Lord Jesus in the air? The answer to that is found in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 12:1-5: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

Who's the child in this passage? Well, despite what many people think, this passage isn't talking about Jesus. Although Herod did try to kill Jesus after He was born, Jesus didn't escape Herod by ascending into Heaven. Instead He moved to Egypt, where He remained until Herod died (Matthew 2:13-20). After Jesus died and was resurrected, He wasn't suddenly “caught up” to God; instead He ascended into Heaven in front of many witnesses (Acts 1:9). When Jesus *did* ascend into Heaven He wasn't in any danger. What this passage describes doesn't match the life of Jesus at all.

Second, Revelation 4:1 tells us that the events which can be found after that chapter are *future* events. This includes Revelation 12! If chapter 12 is a future event then it can't be talking about Herod's attempt to kill Jesus after His birth, since that happened long before Revelation was written.

So who's the child that will be caught up to God? It's the church. The phrase "caught up" in Revelation 12:5 is the same Greek word that's translated as "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which is talking about the moment when Christians will be "caught up" to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. (It's Strongs #726 – the Greek word "harpazo".) Second, Revelation 12:5 says that the child will rule all nations with a rod of iron. That's the same promise Jesus gave to the church:

Revelation 2:26-27: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father."

Revelation 12 is talking about the return of Jesus for His church. The passage reveals some important details about His return: it tells us what happens *before* we're caught up to God, and what happens *after*. It also tells us why this must happen.

Why will we be suddenly caught up to God? It's because right before Jesus returns, the devil will invade this world for the express purpose of attacking the church the moment after it's resurrected:

Revelation 12:3-4: "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born."

Why will we suddenly be caught up to Heaven? It's to

rescue us from this attack by the devil and his entire army of demons. Before Jesus returns, the devil will invade this world in a highly visible way. (The reason his invasion is called a “wonder in heaven” is because the whole world will be able to look up at the sky and see this sight.) To the world it will seem like an alien invasion, but it's actually the devil preparing to attack the church.

How do we know this dragon is the devil? It's because Revelation 12:9 tells us that the dragon is called “the devil, and Satan”. The fact that he's bringing with him “the third part of the stars of heaven” is interesting. In the Bible, when stars are used symbolically they represent angels. This means that of all the angels that God created, one third fell and became devils while two thirds remained faithful and served God. The fact that the devil cast them to the earth means that when he invades in a highly visible way, his entire army of devils will invade as well. (How many demons are there? Hebrews 12:22 says that there are an “innumerable” number of angels. That leads me to believe there's an *enormous* number of demons.)

Why would the devil attack the church after we're resurrected? Well, suppose that he *didn't* and allowed the resurrected church to remain here. That would be the end of evil in this world. How could evil ever triumph again if many millions of perfect and immortal Christians were around to oppose it? The only way the devil can have his way in this world is if he gets rid of us first, so that's what he does.

The devil's attack upon us must be a dangerous threat because Jesus quickly removes us from this world to protect us from it. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says this happens “in the twinkling of an eye”. Our rescue *must* happen extremely rapidly because if there was any time at all between the resurrection and being caught up to Jesus, the devil would take advantage of it to inflict great harm upon us. Even though we'll be resurrected immortals at that point, the devil will still have the ability to harm us (just as he resists the angels of God, who are also immortal).

When will the devil invade this world? His invasion will occur at a time when Israel is in terrible pain:

Revelation 12:1-2: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.”

The pains of this woman (the nation of Israel) are specifically called *birth pains*. That's because they're a sign that a child is about to be born. In this case, the child is the church, which is about to be resurrected and “born again” as incorruptible immortals. When the devil sees Israel's pain, he will understand what it means and will invade this world so he can attack us the moment after the resurrection. (How do we know that this woman is Israel? It's because the description of the woman matches Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9, which was a dream about Jacob's family – the Israelites.)

When will the Lord Jesus Christ return? He will return *after* Israel experiences these birth pains, and *after* the devil invades this world in a highly visible way. That's when the archangel Michael will shout, the trumpet will sound, and the Lord Jesus will descend from Heaven to save us.

What happens after we're caught up to meet the Lord in the air? Revelation 12:5 says that we will be caught up to God and to His throne. That means Jesus will take us from this world directly to the throne room of God, where *we will see God*. That will fulfill this famous verse:

Matthew 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

This is an amazing and an astounding promise! The day is coming when we will see God. This is something that Jesus desires:

John 17:24: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

What's the very first thing Jesus does after resurrecting us? He brings us directly into the presence of God the Father in Heaven. This is an astounding gift! There's no better place we could ever be taken, and no greater thing we could ever see. God is the source of both beauty and joy. He has infinite wisdom, power, and might. In His presence is *endless* joy:

Psalm 16:11: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

We will never see anyone more beautiful, more awesome, or more holy than God. He's the greatest being we will ever meet. In fact, seeing Him is so great that it's impossible for any mortal to see Him in the fullness of His glory and live:

Exodus 33:20: “And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”

That's why we must be transformed into immortal and incorruptible beings before it's possible for us to be caught up to God. At that point we'll be able to do something that was previously impossible: we can behold almighty God in all of His glory.

There are many wonderful things in this world, but none of them can compare to seeing God. There are many joyous moments in this life, but none of them can compare to the joy we'll find once we're before the throne of God. There's nothing this world has to offer that is remotely close! Being with God in Heaven, and seeing Him, *must* be the earnest desire of our heart

(because it's also what Jesus desires for us).

What will we do when we finally see God? The book of Revelation reveals that as well:

Revelation 4:10-11: “The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Who are these 24 elders? They're the resurrected church, which is in Heaven after being caught up to the throne of God. What is the church doing? It's falling down before the throne of God and worshiping Him.

Does this mean that after Jesus returns we'll spend all of eternity before the throne of God in Heaven? Nope. God has a different plan for us. After the final judgment God will dwell with mankind *on earth*:

Revelation 21:1-5: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the

former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

In the beginning God created a perfect world and put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to keep it. However, they sinned and corrupted this world. Every evil and painful thing that's ever happened has been a result of that original sin. This world isn't what God originally created it to be – but that doesn't mean all is lost.

It's true that after the day of judgment God will destroy this world (Revelation 20:11-15). However, He will then create a new one – a world that will never see pain or suffering or death. *That* is where those who believe in Jesus are going to spend eternity: not in Heaven, but in the new world that God will one day create!

This time, though, God isn't going to live in Heaven while we live on earth. Instead both God and mankind will live together in that new earth. That means once Jesus returns we truly will be with Him forever – and there can be no better reward than that.

Why is eternal life worth having? Why will we never become bored or tired of living forever? It's because our everlasting life will be spent in the presence of our infinite God, who loves us and died to save us. It's because we'll forever be in the presence of almighty God, who's the source of all beauty and joy and life and wisdom, and who has infinite glory that will never be exhausted. Throughout all the endless ages to come we'll never exhaust Him because He will *always* be infinitely greater than us.

On top of all that, God has promised to love us forever – and He *always* keeps His promises:

Romans 9:23-24: “And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

Ephesians 2:7: "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

In all of the endless ages to come we'll be experiencing the exceeding riches of His grace and kindness! That's what we have to look forward to in eternity: not boredom and pain, but grace and glory.

God is the reason why eternal life is such a privilege: it means spending eternity with Him. Without God, eternal life would be a curse. With God, eternal life is the greatest possible blessing – because we will see Him.