

# THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE AND THE COMING OF THE LORD

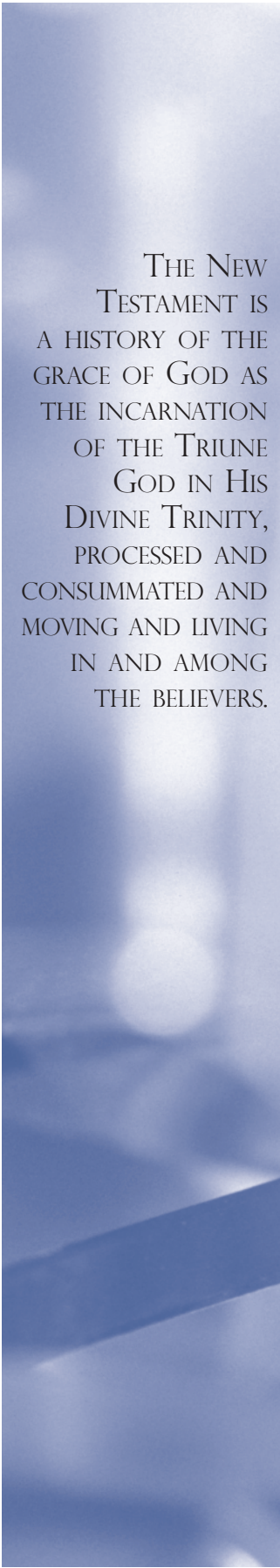
BY RON KANGAS

God is a God of purpose, having a will according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:9). In Ephesians 3:11 the apostle Paul speaks of “the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The eternal purpose—the purpose of the ages—is the eternal plan that God made in eternity past. The eternal purpose of God and His work in eternity past regarding holiness and sonship (1:4-5) are accomplished in time. Between the two ends of eternity—eternity past and eternity future—there is a lengthy interval, which is the bridge of time. God’s purpose in eternity past and for eternity future has been and now is being accomplished on earth in time. According to the Bible, as seen from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, there are four ages (dispensations) on the bridge of time. These ages are the dispensation of the patriarchs (from Adam to Moses), the dispensation of law (from Moses to the first coming of the Lord Jesus), the dispensation of grace (from the resurrection and ascension of Christ until Christ’s coming again), and the dispensation of righteousness (the manifestation of the kingdom of God) for a thousand years. In order to understand the expression *the consummation of the age*, we need to concentrate on the aspects of the third age—the present age, the age of the church.

## The Age of Grace, Mystery, and Faith

We need to study and know the Bible not only according to its spiritual principles but also according to the various dispensations. Many Reformed theologians reject any teaching concerning ages or dispensations and claim that the Old Testament and the New Testament are the same, insisting that there is no difference between the age of the law and the age of grace. However, according to the Scriptures, God deals with His people who are in different ages in different ways. In the age of the law, God dealt with His people according to the law, and in the present age, the age of grace, God deals with His redeemed and regenerated people according to grace by faith.

The common theological definition describes grace as “unmerited favor.” God’s grace, His favor, is received by those who did not merit it. This common definition is accurate when applied to certain verses in the New Testament, such as Romans 5:2 and Ephesians 2:8; however, such a definition is not applicable to many other verses, verses that speak of spiritual experience, not merely of unmerited favor. In those instances such a definition is shallow, infantile, and immature. Grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17), and “of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (v. 16). Did unmerited favor come through Christ? Are we receiving grace as nothing more than unmerited favor upon unmerited favor? Certainly not! In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul testifies, saying, “By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.” The grace of God, not simply unmerited favor, was with Paul, and by this grace Paul was what he was in Christ. After Paul entreated the Lord three times to remove the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:8), the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for



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you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (v. 9). Was it God's unmerited favor that was sufficient for Paul's suffering from "a thorn in the flesh" (v. 7)? Of course not! It was Christ Himself as grace (John 1:14). The entire Bible closes with grace. The last verse says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen" (Rev. 22:21). How could any regenerated child of God assert that God's final word is "The unmerited favor of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints"? The age of grace in which we are now living is much more than an age of unmerited favor.

**T**he grace of God is a matter of tremendous significance (John 1:14, 16-17; Eph. 2:7); it is the greatest truth and the highest revelation in God's economy, that is, in His plan and arrangement to accomplish His will and purpose. According to the New Testament, *grace* refers to what God is to us for our enjoyment (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). This means that grace is God not in doctrine but in our experience. Grace is God in Christ with all that He is for our supply and enjoyment: "The joy of Jehovah is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). This wonderful grace of God includes life, strength, comfort, rest, light, righteousness, holiness, power, and all the other divine attributes that can be imparted into us. Grace is not mainly the work that God does for us; instead, grace is the Triune God Himself dispensed into our being and experienced by us (2 Cor. 13:14). The New Testament is a history of the grace of God as the incarnation of the Triune God in His Divine Trinity, processed and consummated and moving and living in and among the believers.

The age of grace is also the age of mystery, as indicated by Revelation 10:7. According to Ephesians 3:4, the church has a particular title—*the mystery of Christ*. In God's economy, as revealed in the New Testament, there are mainly two mysteries. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God—God embodied, God defined, God explained, God expressed, and God made visible (2:2). The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ (v. 4). Although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ (1:22-23). The church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ (4:15-16). When we see the church, we see Christ; when we come into the church, we come into Christ; when we contact the church, we contact Christ. The church is a corporate unit produced out of Christ, who is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:30-32). The all-inclusive Christ is the mystery of the mysterious God, and such a Christ as the mystery of God produces a unit, which is the church. Mystery produces mystery; Christ, who is the mystery of God, brings forth the church, which is the mystery of Christ.

The present age—the age of grace, the age of the church—is the age of mystery (v. 32). Revelation 10:7 says, "The mystery of God is finished"; to finish the mystery of God is to close the age of mystery (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:3, 5; 5:32). In the dispensations from Adam to Moses and from Moses to Christ, everything was unveiled, and there was no mystery; it will be the same in the dispensation of the millennial kingdom and in the new heaven and new earth—everything will be unveiled, and there will be no more mystery. In the dispensation from the incarnation of Christ to the millennial kingdom—the church age, the age of grace—everything is a mystery (1 Tim. 3:9). The incarnation of Christ, as the beginning of the age of mystery, is a mystery; through the incarnation of Christ, the infinite God was brought into the finite man (v. 16). Christ is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2). God is a mystery, and Christ, as the embodiment of God to express Him, is the mystery of God. As the mystery of God, Christ is the embodiment of God; all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily (v. 9). The church is the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4-6). Christ is a mystery, and the church, as the Body of Christ to express Him, is the mystery of Christ. Christ and the church as one spirit are the great mystery (5:32; 1 Cor. 6:17). During the church age, the age of mystery, Christ is building up the church, the Body of Christ, to be His bride (Matt. 16:18; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 4:16; Col. 1:18; Rev. 19:7-9). The kingdom of the heavens, the gospel, the indwelling of Christ, and the coming resurrection and transfiguration of the saints are all mysteries that were hidden in the times of the ages (Matt. 13:11; Eph. 6:19; Col. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 15:51-53). All the mysteries will be completed, finished, and will be over at the trumpeting voice of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 10:7).



In our daily life as Christians, the age of mystery eventually becomes the age of faith. God's mysteries are known by faith; for this reason the age of mystery is also the age of faith (Heb. 11:1, 6; Rev. 10:7; 1 Tim. 3:9). Faith is a substantiating ability by which we substantiate, give substance to, the things not seen or hoped for. This faith assures us of the things not seen, convincing us of what we do not see; therefore, it is the evidence, the proof, of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). We do not regard, or look at, the things which are seen but the things which are not seen (2 Cor. 4:18). The Christian life is a life of things unseen, and the Lord's recovery is to recover His church from things seen to things unseen (Rom. 8:24-25; Heb. 11:27; 1 Pet. 1:8; Gal. 6:10). Faith is the unique way for God to carry out His New Testament economy with man (Heb. 11:6). God's economy is in faith—a matter initiated and developed in the sphere and element of faith; without faith we cannot realize God's economy (1 Tim. 1:4). Faith is the unique requirement for people to contact God in His New Testament economy (Heb. 11:1, 6; 1 Tim. 1:4). God's requirement for us related to everything in the New Testament economy is faith (Rom. 1:16-17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Mark 11:22; Luke 18:8). Genuine faith is Christ Himself infused into us to become our ability to believe in Him; after the Lord Jesus has been infused into us, He spontaneously becomes our faith (Rom. 3:26). Through faith in Christ Jesus, we are brought into an organic union with Christ; in this organic union we experience Christ and live Christ (Gal. 2:16, 20; John 14:17; Eph. 4:1). In the Body "God has apportioned to each a measure of faith"; therefore, we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think but "think so as to be sober-minded" (Rom. 12:3). Faith is the divine requirement for the overcomers to meet Christ in His triumphant return and to receive the reward of the kingdom (Luke 18:8; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 10:35, 39).

### The Consummation of the Age as Revealed in the Gospel of Matthew

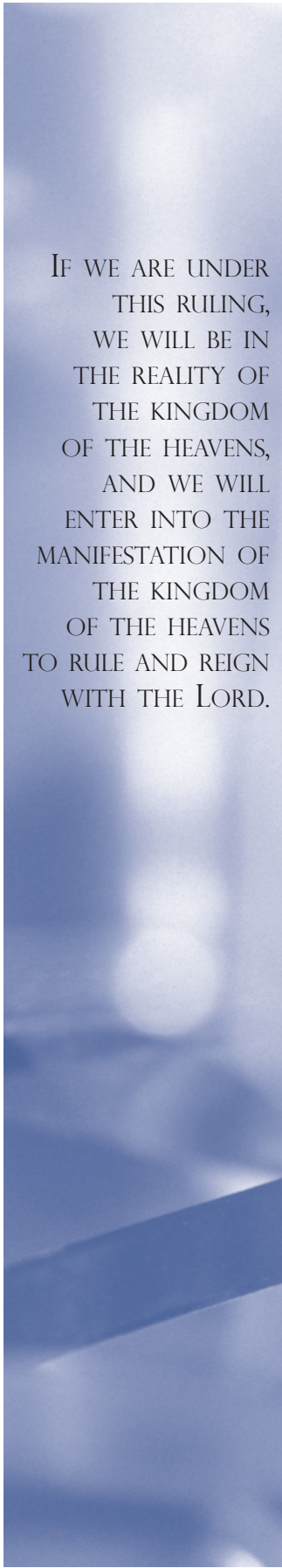
The expression *the consummation of the ages* is used in Hebrews 9:26, and *the consummation of the age* is used five times in the Gospel of Matthew (13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20), clearly indicating that it is a crucial matter in this New Testament book. The word *consummation* means that there is a process that will be brought to completion and fulfillment. The consummation of the age and the end of the age refer to the same thing. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, the resurrected Lord Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth was given, said, "Behold, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age" (28:20). Here *the consummation of the age* indicates the end of this present age, the church age. The consummation of the age is not the end of the world but the completion of the church age, the age of grace; this age is very close to completion. The end spoken of in Matthew 24:6 also refers to the consummation of the age (Dan. 12:4, 9, 6-7)—the three and a half years of the great tribulation. The process of consummation as recorded and revealed in the Gospel of Matthew is focused on the kingdom, Christ, and the church.

### The Kingdom

Matthew is a book on the kingdom, with Christ as the King, the Messiah; everything written in this book is related to the kingdom (2:2; 21:5; 27:11). The kingdom of God is God's reign in a general way over the entire universe by power and authority and also God's reign in a particular way in the sense of life (Psa. 103:19; 145:11-13; 1 Chron. 29:11; Dan. 4:3, 34; John 3:3, 5). As a specific section within the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly rule—the kingdom of God in the third heaven, where God exercises His authority over everything created by Him (Matt. 3:2). God's intention is to have the earth controlled by the heavens; thus, His heavenly reign must descend to the earth to be the authority over the earth (6:10). The Lord Jesus came to bring the heavenly rule to earth so that the earth might be recovered for God's right, and the will of God might be done on earth as in heaven (4:17; 5:3).

If we would know the truth of the kingdom in a thorough way, we need a full understanding of the three aspects of the kingdom of the heavens—the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation (v. 3; 13:31-32, 43). The reality of the kingdom of the heavens

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is the inward content of the kingdom of the heavens in its heavenly and spiritual nature (chs. 5—7). The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is an exercise to the seeking believers (5:3, 20; 7:13-14, 21). Only the overcomers are in the reality of the kingdom (Rev. 2:7). Those who live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today will be manifested with Christ to be kings in the millennium (20:4, 6). The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is the outward condition of the kingdom of the heavens in name (Matt. 13). The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is today's Christendom, which includes all the false Christians (vv. 27, 38-39). That which constitutes the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens will be thrown into the lake of fire (vv. 30, 40-42). The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens is the practical coming of the kingdom of the heavens in power (chs. 24—25). The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will be the manifestation of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens (5:3; 13:43). In the next age the reality of the kingdom will become the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens (7:21). At His coming back, the Lord will deal first with the appearance of the kingdom, and then He will transfer the reality of the kingdom into the next age to become the manifestation of the kingdom (13:41-43). The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, composed of the overcoming saints, will actually be the New Jerusalem during the millennium (Rev. 2:7; 3:12). At the time of the full manifestation of the kingdom, we will fully enter into glory (Rom. 8:18, 21; Heb. 2:10; Phil. 3:21). In the millennium the overcoming believers will be with Christ in the bright glory of the kingdom, whereas the defeated Christians will suffer discipline in the outer darkness (Matt. 13:43; 8:12).

God regenerated us with the intention to bring us under His heavenly rule (John 3:3, 5). We have been born into a royal, heavenly family, and we must be exercised in a heavenly way and be governed by a heavenly rule (Matt. 5:48). If we are under this ruling, we will be victorious and overcoming, we will be in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, and we will enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to rule and reign with the Lord (25:21, 23; Rev. 20:4, 6).

### *The Christ*

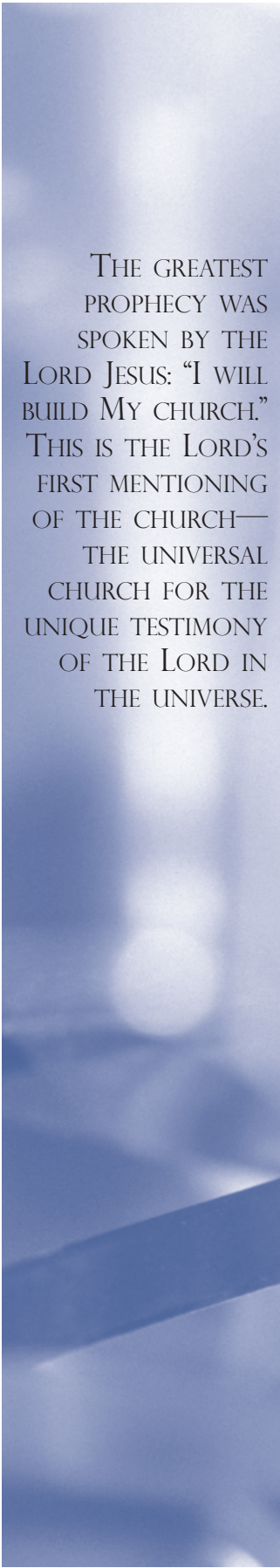
Although the Gospel of Matthew is a book on the kingdom, it is also a revelation of the all-inclusive Christ; it is a great blessing to see this revelation (16:16-17). Christ's person is mainly in two aspects, indicated by two titles—*the Christ* and *the Son of the living God*. Regarding the Lord's person, He is the Son of God in the Godhead, the second of the Triune God. *The Son of the living God* speaks of His person, which embodies the Father and consummates in the Spirit for a full expression of the Triune God (John 14:10-11a; 1 Cor. 15:45b). Regarding the Lord's work, He is the Christ, the anointed One who came with the commission to accomplish God's eternal purpose through His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coming again (Matt. 16:21, 27). The revelation in Matthew concerning the all-inclusive Christ includes the following:

- Matthew proves that Jesus is the King, the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament (1:1, 17; 2:1-2; 27:11, 37). He is Christ, the anointed One, and the heavenly King (2:2, 4; 21:5). The heavenly King did not come with haughty splendor but with gentle, humble meekness (v. 5).
- Christ is the Son of Man (8:20; 11:19; 13:37; 16:13). Christ is the man who brings God's dominion to earth and makes God's name excellent on earth (9:6; 12:8; 13:41; 16:27-28). In order for the kingdom of the heavens to be established, the Lord Jesus stood as a victorious man—a man who could defeat Satan and withstand any hardship, opposition, or attack (4:4; 12:40; 26:64).
- Christ is the Baptizer (3:11). The Lord's baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is based on His redemption, initiated the kingdom of the heavens, bringing His believers into the kingdom of the heavens (v. 12). The Lord's baptism in fire, which is based on His judgment, will conclude the kingdom of the heavens, putting the unbelievers into the lake of fire (v. 12).



- Christ is the light of life shining in the darkness of death (4:12-16). Christ's ministry for the kingdom of the heavens began not with earthly power but with heavenly light. The Lord Jesus did not start a movement or a revolution; rather, He attracted the disciples to Himself as the great light for the establishment of the kingdom of the heavens.
- In calling people to follow Him for the kingdom, Christ ministered as a Physician and revealed Himself as the Bridegroom (9:9-15). He came as a Physician to heal and enliven us so that we might be reconstituted to be citizens of the kingdom of the heavens (vv. 9-13). We need to appreciate Him as the Bridegroom so that we might have the enjoyment of living in His presence (vv. 14-15).
- Christ, from His incarnation to His crucifixion, is the unfulled cloth for making a new garment (v. 16; Luke 5:36). Through His death and resurrection Christ was made a new garment to cover us as our righteousness before God so that we might be justified by God and be acceptable to Him (Matt. 15:22; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:30).
- The individual Christ is the new wine, and the corporate Christ is the fresh wineskin (Matt. 9:17). The new wine signifies Christ as the new life, full of vigor and cheering strength, stirring us to excitement and satisfying us. The fresh wineskin signifies the corporate Christ, the outward container that holds the new wine (1 Cor. 12:12).
- Christ is the Shepherd and the Lord of the harvest (Matt. 9:35-38). In His ministry for the establishing of His heavenly kingdom, the Lord Jesus ministered as a Shepherd (vv. 35-36). If we see the vision of Christ as the Lord of the harvest, we will beseech Him to thrust out workers into His harvest (vv. 37-38).
- Christ is the Friend of sinners and the wisdom of God (11:19). As the Friend of sinners, Christ sympathizes with their problems and senses their grief (v. 19). Whatever Christ did was done by the wisdom by God, which is Himself; this wisdom was vindicated by His wise works (v. 19; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30).
- Christ is the One who gives rest (Matt. 11:28-30). To take the Lord's yoke is to take the will of the Father and to be constrained by the will of the Father (v. 29; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). Because the Lord was always satisfied with the Father's will, He always had rest in His heart; now He asks us to learn from Him (Matt. 11:28-30).
- Christ is the greater Jonah (12:39-41; 16:4). Jonah is a type of Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. For the evil and adulterous Jewish and religious generation, the Lord Jesus would do nothing but die and be resurrected as the greatest sign to them that they might be saved if they would believe (v. 4).
- Christ is the bread and crumbs under the table (15:21-38). God's economy is not a matter of outward things but of Christ coming into us as food (vv. 26, 34, 36). We need to take in the edible Christ by eating Him as bread, even as the crumbs under the table (v. 27).
- Christ in His humanity is the resurrected One with all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18-19). In His humanity, as the Son of Man and the heavenly King, all authority was given to Christ after His resurrection (v. 18). Because the Gospel of Matthew is concerned for the kingdom, and the kingdom requires authority, Matthew emphasizes Christ's resurrection as a matter of authority for discipling the nations (v. 19).

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This comprehensive unveiling of Christ in Matthew's Gospel should motivate His loving truth-seekers to worship Him, experience Him, and enjoy Him as the wonderful, all-inclusive One (2:11; 28:9, 17; 17:5).

### *The Church*

There are many prophecies in the Bible, but the greatest prophecy was spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My church." This is the Lord's first mentioning of the church—the universal church for the unique testimony of the Lord in the universe (cf. Eph. 1:22-23). The words *My church* indicate that the church is of Christ, not of any person or thing, hence, radically different from so-called churches, those denominated after a person's name or according to a doctrine or religious practice. The church—"My church"—in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the one church in the entire universe. This unique church is built upon the revelation of Christ as the rock. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord said that He will build His church upon "this rock," which refers not only to Christ Himself but also to the revelation of Christ (v. 16). The sectarian denominations are not built upon this rock but on persons and doctrines. The church that is built upon the revelation of Christ is the genuine church; it is not sectarian.

In Matthew 18:15-20, the second time that the church was spoken of by Christ, we have a revelation not of the universal church but of the local church. Verse 17 says, "If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church." The church revealed in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, the unique Body of Christ; the church revealed in Matthew 18:17 is the local church, the expression of the unique Body of Christ in a certain locality. From this we can see the distinction between the one universal church and the practice of the church in various localities. "The church" in 18:17 must be a local church, not the universal church; otherwise, no one would be able to "tell it to the church." The universal church in 16:18 is locally and practically manifested in "the church" in 18:17. According to Christ Himself, there is (or should be for us today) only one church in a locality. In Revelation 1:11 the apostle John was told that what he saw, he should "write in a scroll and send...to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamus and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." In chapters 2 and 3 Jesus spoke to the messenger of each of the seven churches; for instance, He began by saying, "To the messenger of the church in Ephesus" (2:1); He then continued to speak to each of the other churches listed in 1:11 (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

**T**he Bible first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church; this indicates that the presence of the kingdom produces the church (Matt. 4:23; 16:18-19). The life of God is the kingdom of God (cf. John 1:13; 3:3, 5); the divine life is the kingdom, and this life produces the church (cf. Matt. 7:14, 21; 19:17, 29; 25:46). The kingdom is the realm of life for life to move, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose; this realm of life is the kingdom. The gospel brings in the divine life, and this life has its realm, which is the kingdom; the divine life with its realm produces the church (2 Tim. 1:10). The gospel of the kingdom brings forth the church because the kingdom is the life itself, and the church is the issue of life (Matt. 4:23; Acts 8:12). The kingdom is the reality of the church; therefore, apart from the kingdom life, we cannot live the church life (Matt. 5:3; 16:18-19; Rev. 1:4-6, 9). The reality of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7) is the content of the church life; without the reality of the kingdom, the church is empty. Since the kingdom life issues in the church life, as we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life (Rom. 14:17). A believer who does not live in the reality of the kingdom cannot be built into the structure of the church (Eph. 2:22). Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up (Matt. 16:18-19). The church is brought into being through the authority of the kingdom. The keys of the kingdom are given to make the building of the church possible (v. 19; 18:18; cf. John 20:23). When the kingdom of the heavens is able to assert its authority over a company of believers, those believers can be built up into the church (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16).

The genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age; today the believers live the

kingdom life in the church (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; 13:44-46; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:19; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4-6). Each time the Lord Jesus spoke of the church, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom; this indicates how intimately the kingdom and the church are related (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18). Romans 14:17 proves that the church in this age is the kingdom of God. *The kingdom of God* in 1 Corinthians 4:20 refers to the church life (v. 17), implying that in the sense of authority, the church in this age is the kingdom of God. The term *fellow citizens* in Ephesians 2:19 indicates the kingdom of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His authority. The gospel work of Paul and his fellow workers for the establishing of the churches was for the kingdom of God (Col. 4:11). The word *kingdom* in Revelation 1:6 reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is; thus, the church represents the kingdom. In the church as the kingdom, we are under the kingdom's rule, government, discipline, and exercise (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the reality of the kingdom only when we live, walk, and have our being in the spirit, not in our natural man (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25). As those who are under the dispensing of the Divine Trinity, we need to live a kingdom life in the church, growing and developing in the divine life until we reach maturity (2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

**T**he work of the church is to bring in the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10; 12:22-29; Rev. 11:15; 12:10). The church was brought into being for the purpose of bringing in the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; Rev. 1:6, 9; 11:15). The church's responsibility is to perpetuate Christ's victory and to bring in God's kingdom (12:10-11; 11:15). All the work of the church is governed by the principle of the kingdom of God. The church is responsible for bringing heaven's will down to earth and for carrying it out on earth (Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50). The church, which comes into being under the rule of heaven, deals with God's enemy (16:18-19; Eph. 6:10-18) by reason of her submission to the heavenly rule. For the kingdom of the heavens to be established, there is the need of spiritual fighting (Matt. 12:22-29). The responsibility of the church is to continue the warfare that Christ fought on earth; the church must continue the victorious work that Christ has carried out against Satan (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Col. 2:15; Psa. 149:5-9). The church should pray to bring in the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10). The coming of the kingdom is not automatic; if there is no prayer, the kingdom cannot come. The prayer of the church is the most effective means of curbing Satan (16:19; 18:18). The church must be the outlet of heaven, allowing heaven's authority to be expressed on earth (16:18-19; 18:17-18). Genuine prayer is a joint labor with God to bring His kingdom to the earth and to carry out His will on earth (6:10; 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12).

### The Truth concerning the Coming of the Lord

The truth concerning the Lord's second coming, His coming again, has various and crucial aspects, which merit a succinct consideration.

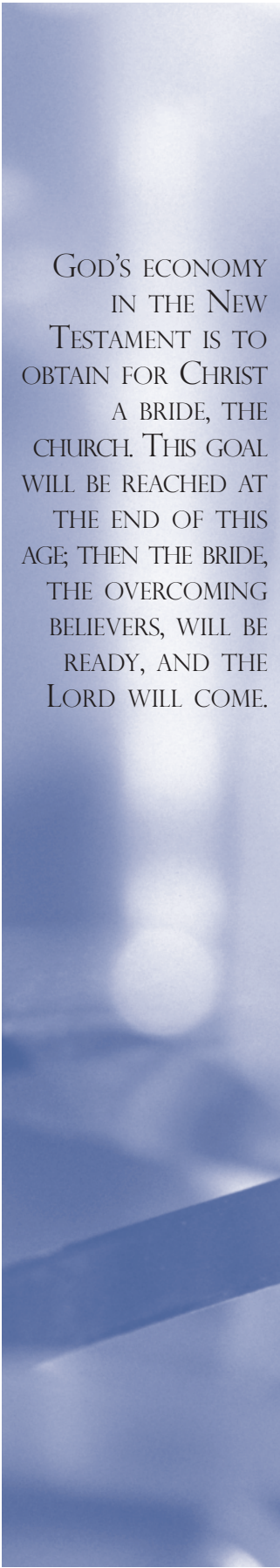
### The Speaking of the Lord Jesus concerning His Coming

Christ spoke repeatedly of His coming again.

- "Just as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:27). The second coming of Christ has two aspects: the secret aspect, related to His watchful believers, and the open aspect, related to the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. The lightning signifies the open aspect, which will take place after the great tribulation, and the thief's coming signifies the secret aspect, which will occur before the great tribulation (vv. 29-30, 43). The Lord's coming like a flash of lightning striking the earth will be a sign of the end of the Lord's parousia and implies that the Lord is like electricity (v. 3; Luke 17:24).
- "Wherever the corpse is, there will the vultures be gathered together" (Matt. 24:28). The vultures typify Christ and His overcomers, who will come as a swift, flying

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THE PRAYER OF  
THE CHURCH  
IS THE MOST  
EFFECTIVE MEANS  
OF CURBING SATAN.





GOD'S ECONOMY  
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army to war against Antichrist and his armies and destroy them at Armageddon (Exo. 19:4; Deut. 32:11; 28:49; Isa. 40:31; Hosea 8:1). At His appearing, Christ and His overcomers will appear swiftly from the air like vultures.

- “At that time the kingdom of the heavens will be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom” (Matt. 25:1). We are the virgins going, and Christ is the Bridegroom coming (cf. 9:15). In the Bible we have a universal couple—the Bridegroom and the bride. In His coming back Christ will be the Bridegroom coming for His bride. The reign of God, the kingdom, is related to the marriage of Christ, and the marriage of Christ is the issue of the completion of God’s eternal economy (Rev. 19:7). God’s economy in the New Testament is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His redemption and divine life (John 3:29). By the continual working of the Holy Spirit throughout the centuries, this goal will be reached at the end of this age; then the bride, the overcoming believers, will be ready, and the Lord will come.
- “From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). The Lord was the Son of Man on the earth before His crucifixion (cf. 8:20; 11:19; 18:11). Since His resurrection He has been the Son of Man in the heavens (Acts 7:56), and He will be the Son of Man at His coming back on the clouds (Rev. 14:14). To accomplish God’s purpose and to establish the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord had to be a man. Without man, God’s purpose could not be carried out on earth, nor could the kingdom of the heavens be constituted on earth (Matt. 4:1-11).
- “To him I will give the morning star” (Rev. 2:28). In His coming back Christ will be the morning star secretly as a reward to His overcomers, those who watch for His coming; to all others He will appear openly as the sun (22:16; Mal. 4:2). In the kingdom the Lord will appear publicly to His people as the sun. Before the great tribulation He will appear privately to His overcomers as the morning star.
- “If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you” (Rev. 3:3). A thief comes to steal precious things at an unknown time. The Lord Jesus will come secretly, as a thief, to those who love Him and will take them away as His treasures (Matt. 24:43). Because Christ will come to “steal” valuable things, we should seek to be precious, worthy of being “stolen” by Him in His secret coming. A normal Christian is one who is qualified to be “stolen” by the Lord. For the Lord’s coming as a thief, we need watchfulness and readiness (vv. 42, 44).
- “I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown” (Rev. 3:11). The Lord brings the recovered church, the church in His recovery, into the sensation of His coming, because she loves Him. All the churches in the Lord’s recovery should love the Lord under the inspiration of His coming back. The Lord’s coming back should be precious to us while we are testifying of Him in His recovery.
- “Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one as his work is” (22:12). “I come quickly” is the Lord’s repeated warning that we may consider His reward at His coming back (vv. 7, 20). This reward (lit., “wages”) will be rendered to each one of the believers at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 14:10; Matt. 16:27).
- “Yes, I come quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20). Once again, the Lord warns us, the believers, the saints, that He is coming quickly (vv. 7, 12). Hence, the entire Bible concludes with the desire for the Lord’s coming expressed as a prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus!”



### *The Last Week of the Seventy Weeks in Daniel 9*

Daniel 9:24-27 is a prophecy concerning the “seventy weeks,” which are divided into three parts, each week representing a period of seven years. The first seven weeks will be forty-nine years, and the sixty-two weeks will be four hundred thirty-four years. There is a gap in time between the first sixty-nine weeks and the last week of the seventy weeks. This gap is the present age—the age of the church, grace, and faith. During this gap the Lord will fulfill His great prophecy—“I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18)—and during this time the bride will make herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7).

Concerning the consummation of the present age and the coming of the Lord, Daniel 9:27 is crucial: “He [Antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many [Israel] for one week; and in the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease and will replace the sacrifice and the oblation with abominations of the desolator, even until the complete destruction that has been determined is poured out upon the desolator.” At the beginning of the seventieth week, the last seven years of the present age, Antichrist will make a firm covenant of peace with Israel regarding the rebuilding of the temple of God. In the middle of that last week, he will break the covenant, and this will be the beginning of the great tribulation, which will last for three and a half years (Matt. 24:21; Dan. 7:25; 12:7). In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul says that “the man of lawlessness..., the son of perdition,” referring to Antichrist, will exalt himself “above all that is called God or an object of worship, so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth, saying that he is God” (vv. 3-4). The lawless one will be revealed, and at the end of the seventieth week the Lord Jesus will slay him by the breath of His mouth and bring him to nothing by the manifestation of His coming (v. 8).

At the end of the first three and a half years of the seventieth week, the Lord will come secretly, and at the end of the second three and a half years, the period of the great tribulation, He will come openly with His bridal army. All the living believers in Christ, those who are mature in the divine life and those who are immature, will be on the earth during the first three and a half years of the last week. At the beginning of the great tribulation, the mature believers will be raptured at His secret coming. Three and a half years later, at the end of the last period of seven years, the seventieth week, all the remaining believers will be raptured at His open coming with His bridal army. This opens the way for us to know the Lord’s parousia.

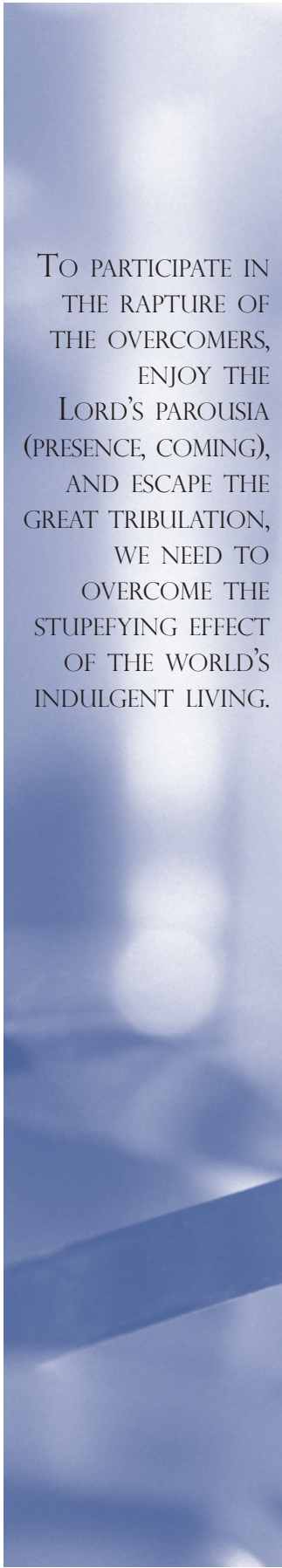
### *The World’s Situation at the Time of the Lord’s Coming—like the Days of Noah and the Days of Lot*

“Just as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:37). The days of Noah typify the days of the Lord’s coming. The worldly characteristic and the moral condition existing at the time before the Lord’s coming will be like those in the days of Noah. Noah lived in a crooked and perverted age (Gen. 6:1-22).

Genesis indicates that man fell through Satan’s corruption in four stages (3:1—11:32). As a result of man’s first fall, the evil nature of Satan had been injected into man (3:1-6; John 8:44). In the second fall the evil nature of Satan in man devised and developed a godless human culture (Gen. 4:16-24; 1 John 5:19). At the time of the third fall, this godless culture produced an evil, crooked, corrupted, and perverted generation, and the evil power of darkness corrupted the earth and filled it with violence (Gen. 6:1-13). In the fourth fall man completely renounced God to make a name for himself, causing God to scatter man and confound mankind with many languages (11:1-9).

In Matthew 24:37-39 the Lord Jesus likened our age—the age during which He will return—to the days of Noah. Luke 17:26-28 likens the days of the Son of Man to the days both of Noah and of Lot. The days of Lot include more than the days of Noah. During the days of Lot there was not only eating and drinking but also buying, selling,

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planting, and building. Buying and selling are related to economics; planting, to production; and building, to construction. The conditions of evil living that stupefied the generation of Noah before the deluge and the generation of Lot before the destruction of Sodom portray the perilous condition of our living in the present age before the great tribulation and the Lord's parousia (Matt. 24:3, 21, 27, 37, 39). If we would participate in the overcomers' rapture to enjoy the Lord's parousia and escape the great tribulation, we must overcome the stupefying effect of man's living today (Luke 21:34-36).

### *The Lord's Coming, His Parousia*

The Lord's disciples asked Him about the sign of His coming (Matt. 24:3). The word *coming* in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*, which should be translated "presence." *Parousia* is used several times in the New Testament with respect not to the coming of certain important persons but to the appearing of the Lord (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4; 1 John 2:28). It may be helpful to quote some examples. "Just as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:27). This verse speaks of the visible aspect of the Lord's coming, which will occur at the end of the great tribulation, that is, the end of the seventieth week. Witness Lee explains, "Lightning may be considered as being concealed in a cloud, waiting for an opportunity to flash forth. In a similar way, Christ will be clothed with a cloud (Rev. 10:1) in the air for a time and then will suddenly appear, like a flash of lightning striking the earth" (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 24:27, note 1). In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 the apostle Paul mentions two matters—the Lord's parousia (presence) and our gathering together (rapture): "Now we ask you, brothers, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." Verse 8 speaks of "the manifestation of His coming." The Greek word translated "manifestation" may also be rendered "shining forth." Lee notes, "This indicates that the Lord's coming (parousia) will be hidden before it is manifested openly... This indicates also that the Lord's coming will last a period of time... First, it will be in secret, and then it will be manifested to the public" (Note 3). The Lord's parousia will begin with the rapture of the deceased and living overcomers (Rev. 12:5; 14:1) and will end with Christ's appearing on the earth "on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30), when "He comes with the clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7).

**I**n the secret aspect of His coming, His parousia, the Lord will rapture the overcomers to the third heaven; in the open aspect of His parousia, the Lord will rapture the majority of the believers into the clouds in the air. The Lord's parousia will travel from the throne of God in the third heaven to the air. "The Lord Himself, with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are living, who are left remaining, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will be always with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:16-17).

### *Losing the Soul-life and Participating in the Rapture of the Living Overcomers*

If the believers in Christ who are living during the seventieth week, the last seven years of the present age, desire to be raptured as overcomers before the great tribulation, they must be willing to lose their soul-life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel (Mark 8:35). If we want to come after the Lord, longing to be one with Him in our daily living, we need to deny our self, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24).

The essence of the self is the soul-life, and the soul-life is lived out through the soul. In Matthew 16:25 the Lord Jesus said, "Whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." To save the soul-life is to allow, even direct, the soul to have its enjoyment in the present age and not allow the soul to suffer for the Lord's sake. If we want to save our soul-life, we will lose it, but if we lose our soul-life for the Lord's sake, we will save it (10:39; Luke 14:26-35). In Luke 9:23-25



the Lord Jesus taught the disciples to take up their cross and follow Him by denying their soul-life. To save the soul-life is to allow the soul to have its enjoyment and to escape suffering; to lose the soul-life is to cause the soul to lose its enjoyment and thereby to suffer (Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35). To deny the self is to reject the soul's desire, preference, and choice (Luke 9:23). We must deny our soul, our soulish life, with all its pleasures, in this age so that we may gain it in the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming age (1 Pet. 1:10). If we allow our soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in this age for the Lord's sake, we will cause our soul to have its enjoyment in the kingdom age; we will share the Lord's joy in ruling over the earth (Matt. 25:21, 23).

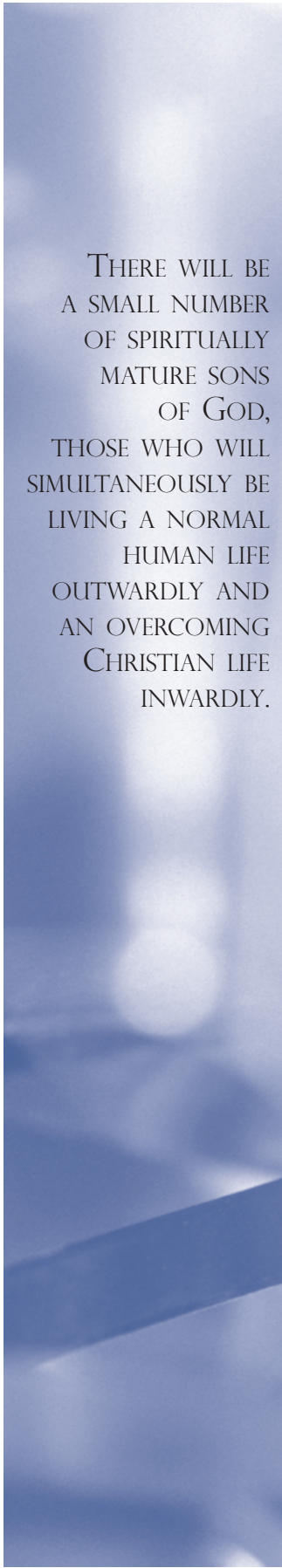
In Luke 14:26-35 the Lord taught us to be absolute in following Him and to hate our father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, and even our own soul-life. The soul-life distracts, hinders, and frustrates us from following Him faithfully. The believers are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13); as such, their taste depends on their renouncing the earthly things (Luke 14:33-34). The believers may lose their taste—their function in the kingdom of God—by not being willing to renounce all the things of the present life (v. 34). If the believers lose their taste, their function, they will be fit neither for the land, signifying the church as God's farm (1 Cor. 3:9), which issues in the coming kingdom (Rev. 11:15), nor for the manure pile, signifying hell, the filthy place in the universe (21:8); they will be saved from eternal perdition but unfit for the coming kingdom. Consequently, they will be thrown out from the glory of the kingdom during the millennium and be put aside for discipline (Luke 14:35).

**I**f we lose our soul-life, we may participate in the rapture of the overcomers (17:26-36; 21:34-36). In order to participate in the rapture of the overcomers so that we may enjoy the Lord's parousia (presence, coming) and escape the great tribulation, we must overcome the stupefying effect of man's living today (17:26-30). As followers of the Lord Jesus, we need to overcome the stupefying effect of the world's indulgent living by losing our soul-life in this age (vv. 31-33).

Preserving the soul-life is related to lingering in the earthly and material things (vv. 31, 33). We linger in the earthly things because we care for our soul's enjoyment in the present age (cf. 2 Tim. 4:10). Lot's wife became a pillar of salt because she took a lingering look backward at Sodom, indicating that she loved and treasured the evil world that God was going to judge and utterly destroy (Luke 17:32). She was rescued from Sodom, but she did not reach the safe place that Lot reached (Gen. 19:15-30). Although she did not perish, she was not fully saved, but, like the salt that becomes tasteless (Luke 14:34-35), she was left in a place of shame; this is a solemn warning to the world-loving believers (1 John 2:15-17, 28). Lingering in the earthly things for the sake of our soul's enjoyment will cause us to lose our soul. For us to lose our soul means that we will suffer the loss of its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age (Luke 17:33).

Luke 17:31-36 speaks of our reaction to the rapture call. These verses depict the soul-life in its engagement not with sinful things but with the things of earth; the Lord's charge here is related to the believers' overcoming in their practical life (vv. 34-36). Whether or not the living believers participate in the rapture of the overcomers depends on their reaction to the call to go; the rapture will occur secretly and unexpectedly (v. 31). This call will not produce a miraculous last-minute change in us, one that has no relation to our previous life with the Lord. In that moment we will discover our heart's real treasure; if this treasure is the Lord Himself, there will be no backward look (v. 32). We need the cross to work in us a thorough detachment in spirit from everything and everyone other than the Lord Himself (v. 31). Certain ones are taken because they have overcome the stupefying effect of self-indulgent living in this age and can thus be raptured into the enjoyment of the Lord's parousia (vv. 26-30, 34-36). In 21:34-36 the Lord Jesus warned us to take heed to ourselves and to be watchful at every time, beseeching that we would "prevail to escape all these things which are about to happen and stand before the Son of Man." *Prevail* here means to have strength and ability; the strength and ability to escape

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the great tribulation come from watching and beseeching (v. 36). *Escape* refers to being raptured before the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21). “All these things which are about to happen” are all the things of the great tribulation. *Stand before the Son of Man* corresponds with *standing* in Revelation 14:1, indicating that the raptured overcomers will stand before the Savior on Mount Zion in the heavens before the great tribulation.

### “One Is Taken and One Is Left”

When the seventieth week—the last seven years of the present age—takes place, there will be millions of believers throughout the earth, the majority of whom will not believe in the rapture of the overcomers and will thus not make themselves ready for the Lord’s secret coming at the end of the first half of the seventieth week. When the Lord’s parousia is about to begin, the situation on the earth will be the same as that of the days of Noah, with billions of human beings ignoring God and devoting their time and energy to eating and drinking, buying and selling, loving money, and indulging in fleshly pleasures. A large number of believers will be living in a similar manner because they are anxious about their needs, love the world and the things of the world, and are saving their soul-life for enjoyment. However, there will be a small number of spiritually mature sons of God, those who will simultaneously be living a normal human life outwardly and an overcoming Christian life inwardly. When the Lord comes secretly, these believers will be raptured, but all the other believers will be left behind. Some will be taken, and others will be left.

Addressing all the believers who will be living in days “just as the days of Noah were,” the Lord spoke clearly and directly about one being taken and another being left behind. “At that time two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes” (Matt. 24:40-42). Certain well-known theologians boldly express their views and opinions concerning these verses. Some argue that there is no such thing as a rapture; they insist that no living believers will be lifted up from the earth and brought before the Son of Man. Others teach that the one who is taken is a believer and the one left behind is an unbeliever. This interpretation is based upon the thought that the Lord was speaking to, or at least about, everyone on the earth; it is negated by verse 42: “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes.” “Both *watch therefore* and *your Lord* prove that the two men and two women in verses 40 and 41 are saved believers. The Lord would not charge unsaved people to watch, nor is He the Lord of the unsaved” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 42, note 1). The “two men” and the “two women” are believers of Christ Jesus who are living and working daily in an ordinary, practical way. This brings us to an important question: Why will some be taken, raptured, and others be left behind and remain on the earth until the end of the great tribulation, at which time they will be raptured to Christ, who will be in the cloud with His bridal army composed of overcomers? Those who are taken in rapture earlier have two vital spiritual characteristics that those left behind do not possess.

The Greek word translated “mature” means “at the end point.” To be transformed is to be metabolically changed in our natural life, whereas to be matured is to be thoroughly filled with the divine life that changed us. Maturity is the last stage of transformation; it is the fullness of life (Heb. 6:1). As used in the New Testament, the word *mature* refers to the believers’ being full-grown, completed, and perfected in the life of God that they received at the time of regeneration. We should never be content with ourselves but, rather, pursue growth and maturity in the life of Christ; we need to go on, to be brought on, to maturity by forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, pursuing toward the fullest enjoyment and gaining of Christ for the uttermost enjoyment of Christ in the millennial kingdom (Phil. 3:12-15). The prerequisite for maturity in the spiritual life is to grow continually in the divine life (Eph. 4:15). The ultimate issue of the believers’ growth and maturity in the life of Christ is the full-grown man—the church as the Body of Christ grown into a mature man (v. 13).

In his Epistle, James uses the illustration of a farmer awaiting with long-suffering the



precious fruit of the earth (5:7). While we are awaiting with long-suffering the Lord's coming, the Lord Jesus, as the real and unique Farmer, is patiently awaiting our maturity in life as the firstfruits and harvest of the field (Matt. 13:3; Rev. 14:4, 14-15). If we pray, "Lord, come back quickly," the Lord may say, "While you are awaiting My coming back, I am awaiting your maturity. Only your maturity can hasten My coming back." It is a great help for us to realize that if we are serious about awaiting the Lord's coming back, we need to grow in life unto maturity. The mature bride is the goal of God's will and purpose. The marriage of the Lamb is the issue of the completion of God's New Testament economy, which is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His judicial redemption and by His organic salvation in His divine life (Gen. 2:22; Rom. 5:10; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2).

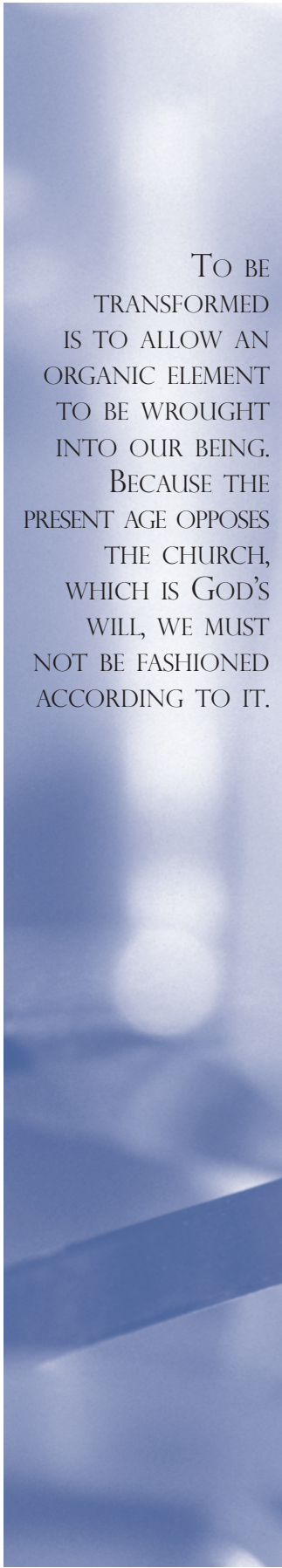
On one hand, the Lord, as a Farmer, awaits patiently the growth of His people, the harvest, and, as the Bridegroom, He lovingly anticipates the corporate maturity of His bride. On the other hand, the believers in Christ cooperate on their side to mature and make themselves ready. The spiritual characteristic of those who are taken is their making themselves ready for the Lord's secret coming by abiding in the Lord not only day by day but moment by moment (John 15:4-7). To abide is to stay, remain, and dwell. The apostle John emphasizes abiding in the Lord in his first Epistle. The inward anointing, which we received from the Triune God when we were regenerated, now abides in us and teaches us to abide in Christ (1 John 2:20, 27). As one abiding in the Lord, the aged apostle wrote, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk even as He walked" (v. 6). This proves that we are abiding in Christ by our living as He lived. Lee notes, "To be in Christ is the beginning of the Christian life. Our being put in Christ was God's doing once for all (1 Cor. 1:30). To abide in Christ is the continuation of the Christian life. This is our responsibility in our daily walk, a walk that is a copy of Christ's walk on earth" (*Recovery Version*, 1 John 2:6, note 1). A believer who is spiritually mature in the divine life and is prepared to be raptured must nevertheless fulfill the requirement of continually abiding in the Lord. The apostle John helps us and warns us when he says, "Abide in Him, so that if He is manifested, we may have boldness and not be put to shame from Him at His coming" (v. 28). Here *His coming* refers to the secret aspect of His parousia. If a mature Christian is not abiding in the Lord when He comes to rapture the living overcomers, this believer will be "put to shame" and will be left behind. The pervading teaching that all Christians will be raptured before the great tribulation is false. The Christians who are raptured, taken, will be mature in Christ and will be abiding in Christ.

### *Loving the Lord, Awaiting His Coming, and Loving His Appearing*

As the apostle Paul was reaching the end of the course that God had set before him, he wrote about two kinds of loving—loving the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8) and loving the present age (v. 10). Second Timothy 4:7-8 says, "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing." Paul and other faithful servants of God not only loved the Lord but also loved His appearing—His coming, His parousia. However, when the hour of trial and test came, one of his fellow workers loved the world and the things in the world (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24; 1 John 2:15). This co-worker did not love the Lord's coming and separated himself from those who loved the Lord's appearing: "Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age" (2 Tim. 4:10). Every believer of Christ who will be living at the time of the secret coming will either be like Paul, loving the Lord's appearing, or like Demas, loving the present age. If the Lord's second coming is precious to us, we will love His appearing (v. 8).

Loving the Lord's appearing and loving the Lord Himself are inseparable (1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:8). If we are waiting for the Lord to come, we should be those who love His appearing (1 Thes. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8). The Lord's appearing, His coming back, is a warning, an encouragement, and an incentive to us (vv. 1, 18). We should love the Lord's appearing and look forward to it with earnest expectation and joy (Rev. 22:20). We should have a living that loves the Lord's appearing; this causes us to not be discouraged but to remain faithful to the end (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 17:14).

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We need to consider 1 John 2:15: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him." The world is an evil system arranged systematically by Satan (vv. 15-17; James 4:4). God created man to live on the earth for the fulfillment of His purpose, but His enemy, Satan, in order to usurp the God-created man, formed an anti-God world system on this earth by systematizing people with culture, education, industry, commerce, entertainment, and religion (Eph. 3:11; Gen. 1:26-28; 2:8-9; 4:16-24). All the things on the earth, especially those related to mankind, and all the things in the air have been systematized by Satan into his kingdom of darkness to occupy people and frustrate them from accomplishing the purpose of God and to distract them from the enjoyment of God (1 John 2:15-17). The world is against God the Father, the things in the world are against the will of God, and those who love the world are enemies of God (vv. 15-17; James 4:4).

"The whole world," the satanic system, "lies in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). "The whole world" comprises the satanic world system and the people of the world, the fallen human race. *Lies* means remaining passively in the sphere of the evil one's usurpation and manipulation; the whole world and the people of the world are lying passively under the usurping and manipulating hand of Satan, the evil one. The Greek word rendered "evil" in 1 John 5:19 refers to one who is pernicious, harmfully evil, one who affects others, influencing them to be evil and vicious; such an evil one is Satan, the devil, in whom the whole world lies. Satan is utilizing the material world and the things that are in the world to eventually head everything up in the kingdom of Antichrist; at that hour the world system will have reached its zenith, and every unit of it will be revealed to be anti-Christian (2 Thes. 2:3-12).

Loving the Lord's appearing is in contrast to loving the present age (2 Tim. 4:8, 10). An age is a part, a section, or an aspect of the world system of Satan, which is used by him to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose (1 John 5:19; 2:15). In 2 Timothy 4:10 *the present age* refers to the world that surrounds, attracts, and tempts us; we cannot contact the world unless we contact the present age of the world. As already noted, Demas is a negative example of one who loved the present age; due to the attraction of the present age, he forsook the apostle Paul (v. 10). In Romans 12:2 Paul exhorts us to not be fashioned according to this age but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind; here *this age* denotes the present, practical part of the world, which stands in opposition to the Body life and replaces the Body life (vv. 4-5). To be fashioned according to this age means to adopt the modern fashions of the present age; to be transformed is to allow an organic element to be wrought into our being, thus producing an inward metabolic change (v. 2; 2 Cor. 3:18). Because the present age opposes the church, which is God's will, we must not be fashioned according to it (Rom. 12:2). If we are to live in the Body of Christ, we should not follow the present age or be fashioned according to this age or conformed to it (vv. 4-5). If we love the present age, we will take sides with the world; if we love the Lord's appearing, we will take sides with Him and fight with Him for His interests (2 Tim. 4:1-2, 4-8, 10).

Those who love the Lord, wait for His coming, and love His appearing will overcome (1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:20; 17:14). Loving the Lord's appearing is a proof that we love the Lord and live for Him today; hence, it also becomes a condition for us to receive His reward (2 Tim. 4:8, 18). To love the Lord's appearing does not mean that we should not live a normal life; rather, the more we love His appearing, the more we need to live a normal life today (Matt. 24:40-42; 2 Thes. 1:10; 3:6-12; 1 Tim. 5:8). As we love the Lord Jesus, take Him as our life, live Him, and magnify Him, we should await His coming and love His appearing; this should be our heart's desire and our living as those who hope to enter into His joy, be saved into His heavenly kingdom, and receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8, 18). 

#### Work Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. *Recovery Version of the Bible*, Living Stream Ministry, 2003.