

The Lord God commanded the first man, Adam, “saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die’” (Gen 2:16-17).¹

John 14 and the Rapture

BY DR. RON J. BIGALKE JR.

Adam’s disobedience² regarding God’s prohibition resulted in the origin of death. God declared, “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (3:19). Humanity would not only experience physical death but also spiritual death (cf. 3:8-10, 21, 22-24). Even the “ground” was cursed because of Adam’s sin, and therefore, death originated in the natural world at the time of his disobedience (3:17-18). As a consequence of the origin of death, the redeemed will experience “a resurrection of life,” whereas those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) will experience “a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29). The nature of the resurrection body for the redeemed is entirely different than that of those not redeemed by God (1 Cor 15:35-49; Rev 20:5-15).

The blessedness of the resurrection of life is well attested in Scripture. For instance, David exclaimed, “With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory” (Ps 73:24). Even the

Book of Job, the oldest biblical writing, references the doctrine of resurrection. Job inquired, “If a man dies, will he live *again*? All the days of my struggle I will wait until my change comes” (14:14). Job anticipated a change of the condition of his body.³ He rejoiced that upon death God would call and he would answer, because the Creator will long for His creation (14:15). Job knew that because his “Redeemer lives,” his “flesh” would “see God.” The reality of resurrection caused Job to express the fainting of his heart (19:25-27). The blessedness of the resurrection of life instilled comfort and peace within Job: “For I know that You will bring me to death and to the house of meeting for all living” (30:23). Having been redeemed, Job anticipated receiving a resurrection body.

Resurrection is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture. The timing of the resurrection of life in relation to the return of Christ, and specifically in relationship to His church, will be the focus of this

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series.⁴ Passage such as John 14:1-3, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Corinthians 15:23-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:1-11, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (and an extended exegesis of the Olivet Discourse and Revelation 3:10) will be examined in relation to Christ’s coming. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ resulting in the translation of living church saints and resurrection of dead church saints is called the rapture.⁵ The issue is whether certain biblical passages only teach the doctrine of blessed resurrection, and not the translation of *living*

church saints and resurrection of *deceased* church saints prior to the beginning of the Day of the Lord.⁶ The timing of the rapture in relation to the tribulation is, of course, relative only to premillennialism.

THE BACKGROUND OF JOHN 14

The Gospel of John contains much narrative that is not contained in the Synoptic Gospels,⁷ and serves as an invaluable supplement since John provided details and discourses of the ministry of Jesus (especially in Jerusalem and Judea) that would have otherwise been unavailable (thereby forming a fourfold Gospel as opposed to four isolated works). The Upper Room discourse (John 13—17; cf. Matt 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26; Luke 22:14-30, 39) was given on Thursday of the Passion Week.⁸ Whereas the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24—25; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36) given on Wednesday afternoon was focused upon the national future of Israel, this last of Christ’s major discourses was focused upon addressing not only the state of the disciples but also other believers during the period of Jesus’ absence⁹ (John 13:33; 16:5-7).¹⁰

COMFORT AND PROMISE IN JOHN 14:1-3

On the night in which the specific events leading to His crucifixion would begin, Jesus was “trou-



bled” in soul (John 12:27) and spirit (13:21). As the supreme Servant, however, Jesus provided comfort and promise to His disciples who were “troubled” in heart (14:1). The disciples were not troubled because of *their* impending death, but because they were confused regarding Jesus’ references to *His* impending death and departure. In response, Jesus promised that for those who believe in Him, He will “go and prepare a place” for them in His “Father’s house,” that where He is, there they “may be also” (14:1-

3). The disciples were not to let their hearts be troubled but to trust in God, which is related directly to trusting in His Son (14:1). Jesus was telling His disciples to trust in Him the same as they trusted in the Father, since His words and actions are those of God.

The reason why the disciples were to trust Jesus was due to His promise for them. In the context of the crucifixion, Jesus would indeed depart from them, but he was going to prepare a place for them (14:2). Whereas there is general agreement concerning the interpretation of John 14:1-2, commentators disagree concerning Jesus’ promise to “come again” and “receive” His disciples to be with Him (14:3). One interpretation is that Jesus was referring to coming again to His disciples to receive them after His resurrection. Although two resurrection appearances of Jesus could be called a coming again (John 20:19, 26), the comfort and promise of John 14:3 is related to an eternal dwelling place. When Jesus does “come again” and “receive” His disciples, it is permanent. Another interpretation is that Jesus was referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit following His ascension and glorification. There is the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 14:18-20, which is evident by the structuring of verses 18-20 by two passages (14:16-17 and 14:25-26), but it is conjecture to think that



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the coming of the Holy Spirit is synonymous with the coming of Jesus in 14:3 (cf. 14:19-20; 16:16-30), because the coming of the Holy Spirit is conditioned upon Jesus' death and resurrection. The least possible interpretation is that the coming in 14:3 is a reference to the death of a Christian and Jesus receiving him or her into heaven. The death of Jesus is the only death in the context of the Upper Room discourse (not the Christian). Scripture does clearly refer to the Christian *going* to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5:1-8; cf. Luke 16:22; Acts 7:56).

The details of John 14:1-3 indicate that it is the rapture of the church when Jesus will "come again" and "receive" His own to be with Him forever. Of course, some commentators believe the coming in 14:3 is the coming of Christ in glory (at the end of the tribulation). For instance, posttribulationists interpret the coming in 14:3 as occurring at the end of the tribulation, which would mean believers are prevented from entering the Father's house, since they return to Earth with Christ as He descends from heaven in glory. Such a view does not harmonize with the teaching that Christ will receive Christians when He comes again to take the believers to His Father's house. Furthermore, if premillennialism is true, which this writer does believe Scripture to teach *unambiguously*, the Father's house would not be present upon the earth in the millennial kingdom. Jesus is *currently* preparing the eternal dwelling place, which is likely the New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven to the New Earth, and will be the future and eternal dwelling place of the redeemed (Rev 21:10-27). The departure to prepare the dwelling places is reason for coming again and receiving believers into His Father's house. The receiving of the believer is to heaven at the time of the coming in John 14:3, and not the time in which Christ descends to heaven with believers at the second coming.

CONCLUSION

John 14 introduces a new and distinctive revelation, as the promise is not something that any prophet promised or would have the ability to promise. There is no reference in John 14:1-3 to Messiah coming

again and receiving His own into an earthly Jerusalem. The comfort and promise of the Lord Jesus Christ is to come again to receive His own into the Father's House, where He abides presently. The Lord Jesus Christ promised, "I will come again and receive you to Myself," with no reference to the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, nor to His coming to establish His earthly kingdom reign upon the earth. There is no reference in John 14:1-3 to Messiah judging the nations either, but only His coming for His own. The comfort and promise of John 14:1-3 is being with Jesus Christ in heaven, as the result of His coming again and receiving His own. That will result in the instantaneous glorification and resurrection of the body.

ENDNOTES

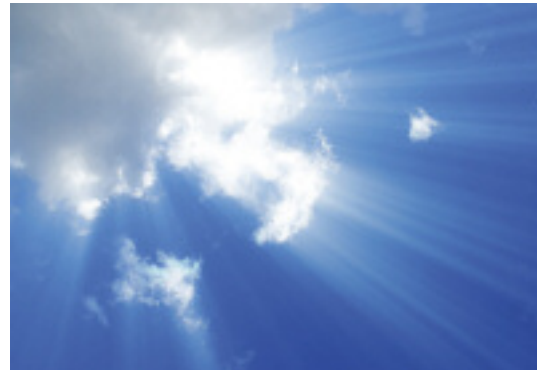
- 1 The Hebrew verb form in Genesis 2:17 is the infinitive absolute, and to express emphasis it is used with the Qal imperfect, which would translate literally as "dying you shall die." (New Testament parallels of this idiom may be identified in Mark 4:41 and Luke 22:15.) Adam and Eve began to die physically the very moment that they disobeyed God (cf. Rom 6:23). If they had not disobeyed, they would be living today upon the earth and would have continued to live eternally. The grammar of Genesis 2:17 indicates that death was inevitable and does not refer to two aspects of death (i.e. spiritual death will culminate in physical death).
- 2 The conjunction and the Qal active participle in Genesis 3:5 indicate that there was never an instance in which Adam did not know the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit.
- 3 C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866-91; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 4:370.
- 4 The foundation and origin of the church indicates a holy calling distinct from Old Testament saints. For instance, see Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "God's Purpose for the Church – Part I," *Midnight Call* (February 2008): 16-23.
- 5 The Greek word for "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is ἁρπάζω [*harpazō*], which was translated as *rapiemur* in the Latin Vulgate. Depending upon the translation, the word "rapture" is specified in the Bible.
- 6 The "Day of the Lord" is primarily an Old Testament term referring to the seven years of tribulation (Daniel's seventieth week); the term is

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never used in reference to the millennial kingdom. "That day" is an Old Testament term that may reference either the tribulation or millennium.

- 7 "Synoptic" in reference to the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, and the Gospel of Luke means "to represent the same point of view" or "to view together."
- 8 Later than evening, Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples where He suffered in agony (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1) and was betrayed and arrested (Matt 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12). He was also tried that day, first by Annas and later by Caiaphas (Matt 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-65; John 18:13-27).
- 9 It could be said the Olivet Discourse gave attention to the Old Testament, whereas the discourse in the Upper Room was given with attention to New Testament history and teaching that was then unwritten.



- 10 Some commentators believe Jesus delivered the discourse and intercessory prayer of John 15:1—18:1 after departing the Upper Room. Jesus' statement to "Get up, let us go from here" (John 14:31) may have simply expressed His intent to depart soon from the Upper Room and not the actual departure in Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Luke 22:39, and John 18:1.

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