## **ARTICLE 13**

We believe in the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.

#### **ARTICLE 14**

We believe in the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked.

The future life of believers in heaven rests on the New Testament hope of the Second Coming of Christ. During Christ's First Coming, God intervened into the life of the world. Jesus Christ's ministry on earth included signs and wonders that caused people to say, "God has visited His people" (Luke 7:16). While Jesus lived and worked on earth, He proclaimed that the kingly rule of God was beginning in a new way. After His death and Resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit on the church (Acts 2:33). The work that Christ began during His First Coming will be completed when He returns.

The promise of Christ's return gives Christians hope. When Christ first came to earth as a baby, He initiated the kingdom of God, that is, the rule of God among us. Jesus spoke of God's kingdom as a spiritual reality that has already come (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18, 19; 16:16). Although God has begun His reign, He has not yet brought the fullness of His kingdom and will not until Christ comes again. During His life on earth, Jesus initiated God's kingdom, as well as proclaimed God's plan for the future. The personal return of Christ will complete the establishment of God's kingly rule in the world. Divine redemption remains unfinished until all the enemies of Christ are under His feet including the last adversary, death. When this occurs, Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24). The end will be the complete establishment of God's rule. God will be supreme everywhere and in every way. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will rule and reign in perfect goodness (1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

## 1. Christ's Rapture of the Church

Today we look forward to the first phase of the Second Coming of Christ, the Rapture. When Jesus Christ returns, a number of incredible events will take place. Jesus will be openly proved to be God before the world. He will complete the work that He began during His First Coming. During His Second Coming, Christ will complete the redemption process by raising the dead "in Christ." He will transform the bodies of believers who have died and those who are still living on earth, changing their earthly bodies to heavenly bodies (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Also, along with the resurrection and transformation of the redeemed, all evil people, and hostile authorities that oppose Christ and His people will be eventually defeated and deprived of their power and influence (1 Corinthians 15:24-27).

# a. Jesus Christ's arrival will be a spectacular demonstration of His power and presence.

#### (1) Christ will come on the clouds.

In the Scripture, clouds frequently remind us of God's presence. In our present lives, Christ is hidden from the gaze of human eyes; but when He returns, the glorious Son of God will be seen coming in the clouds (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26). His return will not occur unnoticed

but will be obvious for all to see. Just as lightening lights up the whole sky, so will Christ's glorious presence when He comes (Matthew 24:27). As the Book of Revelation states, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7).

### (2) Christ will come "with power and glory."

During Christ's First Coming, He came in weakness and humility, but He will return in power and glory (Luke 21:27). He came to suffer and make atonement for sin, but He will come the second time to judge and to rule. There will be extraordinary manifestations of supernatural power.

### (3) The date of Christ's return will be in keeping with God's perfect timing.

• Jesus said that no human knows the day nor the hour when He will return.

The date and time of Christ's return—Only the Father knows when Jesus will return (Mark 13:32). Quite plainly, therefore, we cannot calculate in advance the date of Jesus' Second Coming.

Signs of Christ's return—Although we are not able and do not need to make exact predictions, it is wise for us to pay attention to the signs that point to the end of the world as we know it. According to Scripture, these signs include divisions, tensions, lawlessness, wars, rumors of wars, calamities, a false sense of security, and the spread of the Gospel (the Good News of Christ's love) throughout the world (Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 21; 2 Timothy 3:2-5). These signs are reminders and warnings to us that we need to be dedicated to Christ-like living, so that we are prepared for the day when Jesus Christ does return (Philippians 3:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:7).

#### Christ's return will precede His thousand-year reign with His people on the earth.

The belief that Christ's Second Coming will occur before His Millennial Reign is often referred to as the "premillennial" view. This premillennial view of the Second Coming interprets literally Revelation 20, in that Christ's return will occur before the Millennium, when He will come to earth to rule for a thousand years. There will be two phases involved in His coming: (1) The first will be the "Rapture" when He comes for the church, and (2) the second will be the "Revelation," at which time He will come with His people to reign for a thousand years. A tribulation period will follow the Rapture and will precede the Revelation.

#### Scripture references:

Christ's coming in the clouds—Matthew 24:27-30, Mark 13:26; Revelation 1:7 Christ's coming with power and glory—Luke 21:27

Christ's coming according to God's timing—Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 21; 2 Timothy 3:2-5; Philippians 3:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:7

## b. Jesus Christ will gather God's people during the Rapture.

The first stage of the Coming of Christ will involve both dead and living Christians. First the righteous dead will be resurrected, and then the believers living on earth at the time will be caught up, or lifted up, with the resurrected dead in heaven. This gathering of the righteous dead and living believers will occur during the event referred to as the "Rapture" of the church. As was revealed to Paul, "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

## (1) The resurrection of "the dead in Christ" will be the first act of the Rapture.

The "dead in Christ" are believers who have died before the Rapture occurs. Their spirits are already in heaven (Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8), and during the Rapture their bodies will be raised, made new and whole, and reunited with their spirits. Salvation is for the whole person—body, spirit, and soul.

Scientifically speaking, the bringing back to life of a body that has been dead for years would seem to be impossible, but it will be one of God's many miracles that surpass human knowledge and logic and the usual natural order on earth. Examples of such miracles, that is, events outside the normal earthly order, that have already occurred in human history were Mary's miraculous conception, Jesus' arrival on earth as a human baby, and Jesus' Resurrection from the dead.

## (2) All believers (those just brought back to life and the righteous living) will be taken up into heaven.

During the Rapture both the righteous dead, who have just been brought back to life, and the righteous living will be caught up to be with the Lord in heaven. The terms "catching away," "caught up," and "rapture" signify being lifted to a region that is better than this earth. Often we speak of this place as heaven. Jesus spoke of it as the place where we are with Him in His Father's house in which there are many dwelling places (John 14:2). "Dwelling places" (Greek: *monai*) can also be translated "rooms" and refer to the rooms in the Father's home in heaven.

The gathering of God's people will occur quickly. Scripture states that the gathering of the believers will be swift, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Corinthians 15:52). Some people believe that when the dead and living believers are caught up to be with the Lord, the unbelieving world will not know that the Rapture has occurred. Scripture does not say that the Rapture will be secret, but it does indicate that this event will occur very rapidly.

### Scripture references:

Resurrection of the dead in Christ—1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

The Rapture—1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; John 14:2; 1 Corinthians 15:52

### 2. The Great Tribulation

The Great Tribulation will follow the Rapture. Revelation 7:14 speaks of "the great tribulation (*t*ēs *thlipse*ōs *t*ēs *mega*ēs). The Bible also uses other terms to refer to this same period. In Isaiah 26:20-21, this time of suffering is referred to as "the indignation," and in Daniel 12:1 "a time of trouble." Today this period of time is commonly referred to as simply "the Tribulation." Jesus predicted this period when He said, "There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, not ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). It is generally agreed that the Tribulation will be characterized by a time of unprecedented trouble for the inhabitants on the earth.

## a. The purpose of the Great Tribulation will be to test unbelievers.

Many Bible scholars believe that chapters 6-19 of Revelation offer a description of the Tribulation. The main features of these chapters are revelations depicted by the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Each of these items represents judgments and trouble that God will bring upon the world. According to Revelation 3:10, the purpose of the Tribulation will be "to test those who dwell on the earth." The clause "those who dwell on the earth" is used in the Book of Revelation

to refer only to unbelievers. The Tribulation is not designed to punish followers of Christ but to punish and call to repentance a world that has rejected Christ.

Scripture references: Revelation 3:10; chapters 6-19

## b. A number of Bible scholars believe the Tribulation will last seven years and will occur between the Rapture and the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

In the Book of Daniel, the prophet Daniel records the details of a vision that he had.

#### 1 week = 7 years

Each week in Daniel's vision of 70 weeks is thought to represent 7 years.

#### 70 weeks of years = 490 years

Beginning—The 70 weeks of years began with the decree of the Persian king Artaxerxes (estimated reign: B.C. 464-423) "to restore and build Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:25).

483<sup>rd</sup> year—The 69<sup>th</sup> week (483<sup>rd</sup> year) ended when the "Messiah, the Prince" made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:1-11; John 12:12-19). At that time the Messiah was "cut off," that is, put to death (Daniel 9:26; see also Matthew 27:33-56; Mark 15:22-41; Luke 23:33-49).

## 70<sup>th</sup> Week (Last 7 years)

End—The concluding period of Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks is the Tribulation (Daniel 9:24-27). The 70<sup>th</sup> week is unlike the first 69 weeks because it does not immediately follow. Nothing in the last 1,900 years satisfactorily fulfills the prophecy of Daniel 9:27. It has been concluded that the last 7-year period is future and that it is to be initiated by the Rapture of the church, which will introduce the 7 years of tribulation.

Scripture references: Daniel 9:24-27; see Matthew 21:1-11; John 12:12-19; see also Matthew 27:33-56; Mark 15:22-41; Luke 23:33-49

# c. During the Tribulation, an evil person opposed to Christ will appear and will claim to be a great spiritual leader.

(1) This man of sin will be a completely evil person, also identified as the "son of perdition," "the lawless one," and "the Antichrist."

He will be the Antichrist because he will be against Christ and will set himself up as God in the temple in Jerusalem (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8; compare 1 John 4:2-3). He will perform signs and wonders and lead many astray (v. 9). He will deceive people by using power from Satan to perform signs and miracles (v. 9-10).

(2) Through his lies, the Antichrist will lead many in the wrong direction.

He will convince people to follow and worship him and to reject faith in Christ. He will be successful in persuading people to honor him because of his ability to perform miracles and tell clever lies. His mighty works will be counterfeit miracles. As miracles, they will be supernatural signs, but false signs because they will support the claims that the Antichrist is a deity. This evil miracle worker will lead many down the path of destruction.

Scripture references: 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10; 1 John 4:2-3

## 3. The Battle of Armageddon

The Tribulation will reach its conclusion when Jesus Christ, accompanied by His redeemed people, comes to earth to reign for a thousand years. At this final appearing, Christ will come from heaven in glory and power, and He will defeat all rebellious powers living on earth. He will come to judge the wicked living on the earth at the time. These people will be people who belong to the kingdom of darkness and will persist in their unbelief and rebellion against God. Many of them will join the "beast" (the Antichrist) and his "false prophet" to make war against Christ, but Christ and His heavenly army will defeat these two leaders and their armies (Revelation 19:19-21).

# a. All the armies of the world will war against Jesus Christ in the Battle of Armageddon.

A great confederation of armies will gather together in a final, gigantic war, the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:14-16). In Revelation 19, as the bringer of judgment, Christ is pictured as riding on a white horse accompanied by the armies of heaven to exercise His authority as King of kings and Lord of lords. In the Battle of Armageddon, all the leaders of the earth and their armies will war against the Lamb (Christ) and His redeemed people, but they will suffer overwhelming defeat (19:19-21).

Scripture references: Revelation 16:14-16; 19:11-21

# b. Immediately after the Battle of Armageddon, will come the doom of both the world ruler (the "beast") and the "false prophet."

These two agents of Satan, the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet, will be "cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Revelation 19:20). One of God's angels will bind Satan in chains for a thousand years. This angel will lock up Satan in the bottomless pit so that he is prevented from deceiving the nations (Revelation 20:2-3). This time period that follows is often referred to as the "Millennial Reign of Christ."

Scripture references: Revelation 19:20; 20:2-3

## 4. Millennial Reign of Christ

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of a time when Christ will reign on the earth. All of Christ's redeemed people will share in His kingdom and reign with Him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). When Satan is bound and made ineffective, Christ will reign with absolute authority over the world. Prior to the Millennial Reign, during the period of Tribulation, the Antichrist will have exercised extensive authority, and demonic activity will have increased. During the Millennium, however, all rule, power, and authority will be subjected to Christ, and righteousness and peace will prevail throughout the earth for a thousand years.

## a. During the thousand-year reign, Christ will rule from Jerusalem.

From the holy city of Jerusalem, Christ along with His people will rule over the earth (Revelation 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:4). His people's administration will be under the authority of Christ. Therefore, before the Millennium Reign can occur, Christ must come. The Millennium Reign will then follow the Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 6-19).

Scripture references: Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 20:4

## b. During the thousand-year reign, ideal conditions will exist on the earth.

Satan will be bound in prison so that he will not be able to deceive the nations (Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 20:2-3). During this time he will have no influence on humankind. This period of time will also be a time of peace because all nations will be under the authority of Christ, and war will be abolished (Isaiah 2:2-4). There will be economic prosperity and abundance (Isaiah 30:23-26). Physical infirmities and sickness will be removed, and people will enjoy longer lives (Isaiah 35:3-6; 65:20; Ezekiel 47:12). Justice will be administered by Christ (Isaiah 66:13), and there will be a perfect social order (65:21-23). Jerusalem itself will be holy (Zechariah 14:20-21), and all the nations will come to worship the Lord (14:16-19). Jesus Christ and His people will reign in righteousness and in peace.

Scripture references: Isaiah 2:2-4; 30:23-26; 35:3-6; 65:20, 21-23; Ezekiel 47:12; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 9:10; 14:16-21

### 5. Release of Satan and His Ultimate Defeat

# a. At the close of the thousand-year reign of Christ, Satan will be released from prison and will lead a rebellion against Christ, the Lord and King.

At the bidding of God, "Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth" (Revelation 20:7-8). Throughout the Millennium, Christ will have ruled the nations with a "rod of iron," and peace will have prevailed on the earth (Revelation 19:15). However, when Satan is released, he will immediately deceive the nations and prompt many to rebel. In the Bible, these nations are identified as Gog and Magog (see also Ezekiel chapters 38-39).

Scripture references: Ezekiel chapters 38-39; Revelation 2:27; 12:5;19:15; 20:7-8

## b. Jesus Christ and His army of angels and followers will defeat Satan.

The defeat of the nations Gog and Magog will be proof of the justice of God in the world. The power of Satan will not last forever. He will be cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet will already be imprisoned (Revelation 20:10).

Scripture references: Revelation 20:10

# c. The close of the Millennium will be a graphic reminder of the wickedness of the human heart.

Prior to this post-Millennium rebellion led by Satan, the millennial kingdom will have provided ideal conditions next only to the eternal state and life of heaven. However, even under such ideal conditions, the human heart that has not experienced the saving grace of Christ will persist in rebellion against God.

Scripture references: Revelation 20:7-8

## 6. The Great White Throne Judgment

## a. The Final Judgment of all unbelievers will occur after the Millennium, following the resurrection of unbelievers.

This Final Judgment will be what Peter and John called "the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9; 1 John 4:17) and Jude "the judgment of the great day" (v.6). Paul spoke of it as "the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16; see also 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Timothy 4:1). Paul declared that God "has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Christ] whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:31). A vivid description of the Final Judgment is given in Revelation 20:10-15. After the unsaved dead are resurrected, they will be brought before the Great White Throne and will be judged according to their works.

## (1) The unbelieving individuals who will be judged at this time are those who will have refused Jesus Christ and failed to ask for forgiveness for their sins.

These unbelievers will not be fit to enter into the heavenly presence of God and Christ. Their fate is described in the phrases: "everlasting destruction" (2 Thessalonians 1:9) and "the lake of fire and brimstone" where "they will be tormented day and night forever" (Revelation 20:10, 15). This final punishment is also referred to as "the second death" (Revelation 20:14; 21:8).

## (2) Those persons who receive eternal punishment will be excluded from the presence of God and fellowship with Him.

Some passages of Scripture emphasize that those who have rejected Christ will be judged on the basis of their actions (Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:6-10). Such people, who during their lives on earth, did not accept Jesus Christ and relied on their own achievements rather than on God' grace, will be judged. This judgment will lead inevitably to their condemnation, because no matter how noble their works and achievements have been, they cannot be saved simply by having done good things. In order to receive God's rewards, people must accept His grace and forgiveness, invite Jesus Christ to be a part of their lives, and devote themselves to serving Him.

#### Scripture references:

Final Judgment following Millennium—2 Peter 2:9; 1 John 4:17; Romans 2:16; see also 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Timothy 4:1; Acts 17:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:10-15; 21:8

Persons who will be punished—Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:6-10

## b. During the Final Judgment, followers of Christ will enter into a life of joy with God forever.

The Final Judgment is the climax of the process of judgment that Christ initiated during His entry into this world. "For judgment," said Jesus, "I have come into the world" (John 9:39). The present aspect of judgment is emphasized when Jesus said that the one who does not believe the Son "is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). The coming of Jesus Christ brought people to a point of decision. If they refuse Jesus as their Savior, they stand under judgment. Jesus has authority to judge now as well as in the Final Judgment.

(1) Followers of Christ, as well as unbelievers, will be included in the Final Judgment.

All people must stand before the judgment throne of God. Paul states "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10). The word "all" in its context means that the judgment of believers and unbelievers will be based on how they have lived during their life on earth. However, the judgment of believers will be very different than that of unbelievers. Believers do not have to fear God's anger toward them or to fear that they will not go to heaven. They can face the future judgment with great confidence, knowing that they will be loved by God and will be invited to live with Him forever.

(2) In the Final Judgment those who believe in Christ will not experience condemnation.

Believers acquitted—Faith in Christ's death has already acquitted believers of their sins, so Christians will receive no punishment.

Because of Jesus Christ, there will be no condemnation (Romans 8:1). On the Day of Judgment, God in His grace will reveal which actions and thoughts from our lives were quality materials and which were not. When the lives of individuals are examined, the building materials (work) of some believers will prove to be superficial—"wood, hay, straw." These people, who have lived shallow lives without being deeply dedicated to God's ways, will not receive the rewards that they would have received had they built with "gold, silver, precious stones" (1 Corinthians 3:12-17).

**Destruction of inferior building blocks**—However, as an act of love and true justice, God will destroy through fire all of those building blocks of our work and service that are inferior and have been damaging to the Christian community and others.

During this process, it is our inferior actions—not us—that will be consumed by fire. All Christians will still be saved and will be invited to live with God, but some Christians "as through fire." Therefore, the judgment of Christians will reveal the quality of each person's contributions to God's work on earth. This judgment will also reveal any damage that Christians may have caused. God will richly reward each of us for all of the spiritually positive and loving acts that we have done during our lifetime on earth. "Each of us shall give an account to God" (Romans 14:12).

Scripture references: John 9:39; Romans 8:1; 14:10, 12; 1 Corinthians 3:12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:10

## 7. Our Hope Today

a. We have reason to expect that the day is fast approaching when Christ will return and take His faithful people from the earth to His Father's house in heaven.

No one knows except the Father when Christ will come again, but the "signs" affirm that His coming is near. Among these "signs" are the prevailing spirit of lawlessness and violence, the persistence of war and distress among nations, people increasingly abandoning and not believing in God, and the spread of the Good News about Jesus Christ to all nations (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The conflict between good and evil will not go on forever. In the end, sin and sorrow will pass away, and God and righteousness will triumph.

Scripture references: John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21

b. The truth of Christ's Second Coming gives believers great comfort as well as a great encouragement and incentive for Christian service and Christ-like living.

Believers do well to remember that it is God's grace that has saved us and His grace that has brought us this far. We will need more of His precious grace to endure patiently until Jesus comes again. The prospect for Christ's soon return is exciting. The difficulties of this life will end, and we will enter into a place of true rest (Revelation 14:13). Deficiencies, trials, uncertainties, temptations, sorrows, and death will be no more (Revelation 7:14-17; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Just as Peter recognized Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30), so we will recognize and know our loved ones in heaven. But the greatest blessing of all will be that we will have fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and we will be with the triune God forever. Longing for the Lord to return, we pray, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

Scripture references: Revelation 7:14-17; 14:13; 22:20; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Luke 9:30

#### **Discussion**

#### Christ's Rapture of the Church

- 1) Who knows when Christ will return?
- 2) Discuss the first stage of the coming of Christ. What actions will occur?

#### The Great Tribulation

- 3) What will be the purpose of the Great Tribulation?
- 4) In the order of events, when will this occur?

### The Battle of Armageddon

- 5) During the Battle of Armageddon, who will war against Christ?
- 6) What will happen immediately after the Battle?

#### Millennial Reign of Christ

- 7) What is the Millennial Reign? Who will reign? Where will their kingdom be located?
- 8) Describe the conditions on the earth during the Millennium.

#### Release of Satan & His Ultimate Defeat

9) What event will be proof of the justice of God in the world?

#### The Great White Throne Judgment

- 10) Why is sin such a problem for God? (see Leviticus 19:2; 1 John 3:4; Isaiah 1:2; 63:10; Romans 3:23)
- 11) What will happen to persons who receive eternal punishment?

#### **Our Hope Today**

12) What hope has this study given you?

## **Prayer**

Jesus Christ, Our Savior, we praise You for the assurance that one day when You return, You will bring the old era of sin and death to an end. We wait expectantly for that day. We pray that when You return You will find us devoted to Your work and to holy living.

Holy Spirit, prepare us for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to set our priorities on spiritual things and to remain watchful for His glorious appearing.

Heavenly Father, may our carefully made plans and long-range projects be interrupted by the trumpet of God's heralding Your Son's Second Advent.

We look forward to the day when our Lord Jesus Christ will appear and we will be like Him and will see Him as He really is.

Amen.

## **Resources for Additional Study**

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