

## WAITING FOR THE BLESSED HOPE

*Tom's Perspectives*

by Thomas Ice

*"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*

—Titus 2:13

Probably the best conclusion to this type of study would be a listing of those passages of infallible revelation which set forth the doctrine of the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Leon Wood (*Is the Rapture Next?* pp. 29ff.) recognized two groups of Scriptural passages, those having to do with watching and those with hoping. The "watching" passages include Matthew 24:42–44; Matthew 25:1–13; Luke 12:35–40; Romans 13:11–12; I Thessalonians 5:6–8; and I Peter 4:7. The "hoping" passages include Titus 2:13; James 5:7–8; and several others. Pentecost (*Things to Come*, page 168) says "The doctrine of imminency is taught in Scripture in such passages as John 14:2–3; I Corinthians 1:17; Philippians 3:20–21; I Thessalonians 1:9–10; 4:16–17; 5:5–9; Titus 2:13; James 5:8–9; Revelation 3:10; 22:17–21." Stanton (*Kept from the Hour*, "pp. 124-5) cites as testimony from Scripture John 14:2, 3; Acts 1:11; I Corinthians 15:51, 52; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4; I Thessalonians 1:9, 10; I Timothy 6:14; Hebrews 10:37; II Peter 3:4, 5; and Revelation 22:20. Examination of these various passages should convince all of the true imminence of the Lord's return.<sup>1</sup> "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

Why did Paul describe Christ's return as "the blessed hope" (τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα)? Since the word μακάριος means "happy,"<sup>32</sup> and since the article τὴν is most likely fulfilling either a par excellence ("in a class by itself") function or a monadic ("one of a kind") function,<sup>33</sup> Paul's terminology here strongly implies that "the blessed hope," as the Christian's ultimate hope, is the rapture presented as a totally positive and joyful expectation.

Some pretribulationists interpret this passage as referring to the second coming of Christ rather than the rapture, because of Paul's use of the word ἐπιφάνεια ("appearing"). However, all four uses of the term in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13) present the appearing of Christ as a joyous expectation apart from signs or tribulation. Thus it most likely refers to the rapture.

Others have related this event to Christ's posttribulation second coming because the verse states that His appearing will be a "glorious appearing," which, some suggest, can refer only to the manifestation of an exalted and glorious Christ to the entire world (Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 24:30; 25:31). However, though the world will not see Christ's glory until His second coming, the church will experience His glory when it meets Him in the air (Rom. 5:2; 1 Cor. 15:43; Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:1; 1 John 3:2). This "glory" may be either an attributive genitive ("glorious appearing") or a subjective genitive (the glory that "appears"). Either way there is nothing in the passage that restricts this appearing to Christ's second coming.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (1959). *Central C. B. Quarterly*, 2(2), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 486.

<sup>33</sup> See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 222–24, for descriptions and other examples.

<sup>34</sup> Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 173.

The fact that in Titus 2:13 Paul exhorted believers to look for Jesus' coming as the "happy," blessed hope (confident expectation) for the church, without any mention of preceding signs or Tribulation, strongly implies the imminence of this event—that it can occur at any time. It is a weak argument to say that the context of this passage makes any reference to signs inappropriate,<sup>35</sup> since Paul could easily have introduced the idea of tribulation and persecution and watching for signs as he spoke of the "present age," just as Jesus did in Matthew 24. The exhortation to "watch" or "look" for what is the hope of the church loses its significance if it may not arrive "at any moment."<sup>362</sup>

3. According to the accounts of the tribulation in the Scripture, the events are related to Israel and the Gentiles and not to the church. In fact, the church is promised deliverance from the period according to 1 Thessalonians 5:9 (cp. Rev. 6:17; 1 Thess 1:9–10; Rev. 3:10). Whenever the truth of the rapture of the church is presented in the Bible, it is always in the form of predicting it as an imminent event. It is therefore offered as a hope to believers and a basis for comfort and exhortation with no events indicated as necessarily occurring first (1 Thess 4:18; 5:6; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:1–3).<sup>3</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>35</sup> Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 36–37.

<sup>36</sup> Earl Radmacher writes, "If ... there are specific prophesied signs, in reality we would not be looking for the Savior at any moment but instead should be watching for the revelation of the Man of Sin, the Great Tribulation, etc." ("The Imminent Return of the Lord," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 4 [July 1998]: 20).

<sup>2</sup> Brindle, W. A. (2001). Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 158, 148–149.

<sup>3</sup> Walvoord, J. F. (1966). The Coming of Christ for His Church. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 123, 11.