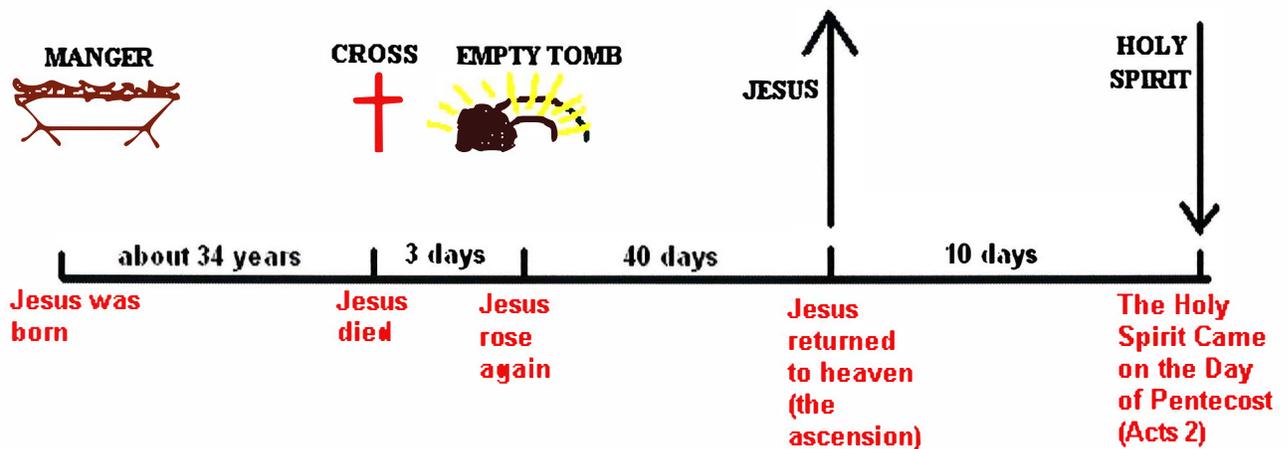


Lesson 22

GOD'S CALLED-OUT ASSEMBLY THE CHURCH

The Removal of the Church (The Rapture)



The Birthday of the Church

The Church has not always been in existence. The Church has not always been on earth. There was no Church in the days of Abraham. There was no Church in the days of Moses. There was no Church in the days of David and Daniel and Isaiah and John the Baptist. The Church did not begin until **after** the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Acts chapter 2 we learn about a very special day--"And when the _____ of _____ was fully come" (Acts 2:1). Something very special happened on this day (see Acts 2:2-3). It was on this day that the Holy Spirit came to live in believers. This day marks the birthday of the Church. It was on this day that the Church was born. It was on this day that Christ began **building His Church** (Matthew 16:18). It was on this day that people were first baptized (placed) into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13 and see [Lesson 17](#)).

For a more detailed study, see our paper entitled [When Did the Church Begin?](#)

When the Church first began there were about _____ (how many?) believers (Acts 1:15). These were the first people who became members of the body of Christ. Peter then preached a powerful message on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14,36-40). How many more people believed (ACTS 2:41)? _____ The Church was growing and increasing. Jesus Christ was building His Church. More and more "bricks" ("living stones"--1 Pet. 2:5) were being added to the building.

God continued to add new members to His Church and new bricks to His building. In Acts 2:47, we learn that "the Lord _____ to the Church _____ such as should be saved." The moment a person is saved, he (or she) becomes a member of the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). Did God continue to add believers to His body and bricks to His building (Acts 5:14 and 11:24)? _____

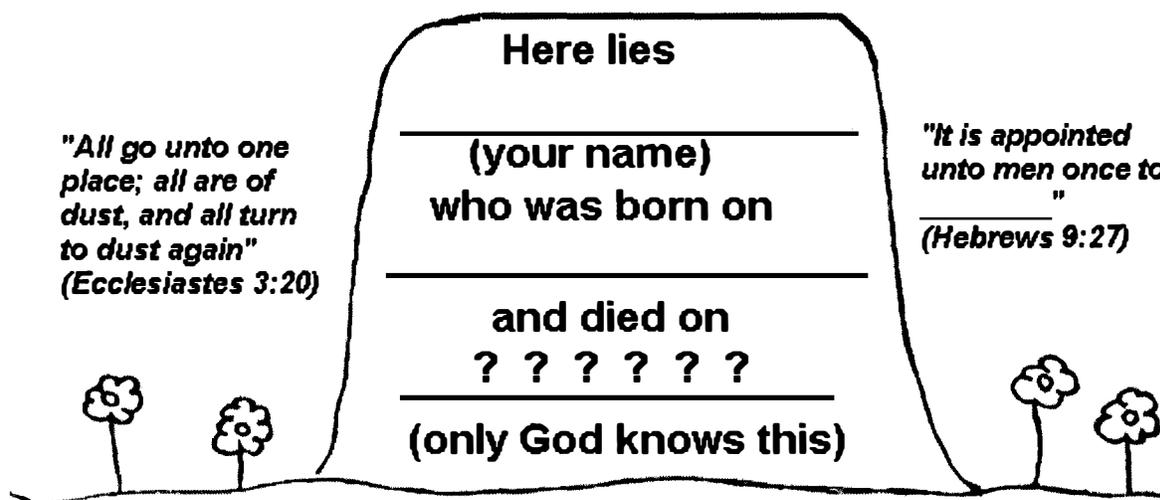
Today Jesus Christ is still building His Church. The building is not finished yet. God is still adding new members to the body of Christ. There is still room for more. Someday the Church will be completed and the building will be finished. Someday (and we do not know when), the last "brick" will be in place and the building will be finished. Someday the last member of the Church will be saved (although we do not know who this person will be, or when or where this will happen).

Perhaps God is now working on the "finishing stage" of the Building. When the finishing pieces are finally in place then the Church will be completed. What will happen then? What will happen on the day when the last member of the Church is saved?

A Tombstone and a Victory Stone

People are born and people die. Every person has a date of birth (**birth date**) and every person has (or will have) a date of death (**death date**). Go to any cemetery and you will see birth dates and death dates on the gravestones.

Please fill out your own TOMBSTONE below:



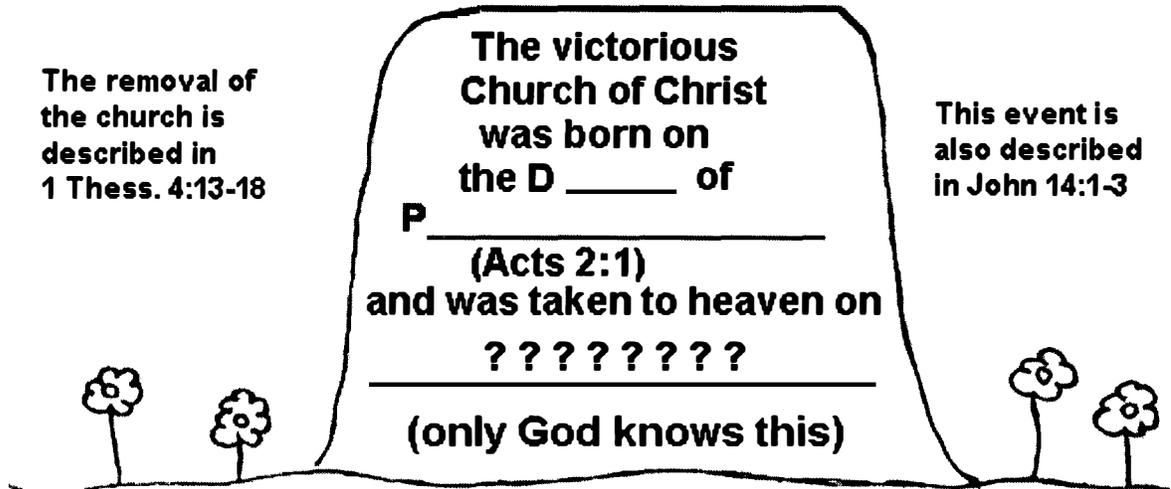
This person (YOU!) will someday die. At that time your days on earth will have been fulfilled and completed. At death you will be removed from the earth. Believers will go to heaven and unbelievers will go to Hades. Hades is a temporary place for the souls of the unsaved while they await their resurrection, their final judgment, and their consignment to the lake of fire--see Revelation chapter 20 and Revelation 21:8. Your body will go in the ground.

The Church is different than a person. The Church had a **birth date** (the Day of Pentecost--about 30 A. D.) but it will never have a **death date**! The Church has been living in the world for about 2000 years. Many enemies (evil men and evil angels) have tried to destroy the Church, but the Church lives on. Members of the Church have been persecuted and tortured and burned and

stoned and executed, but the **Church lives on**. Remember, men can only kill the body but they are not able to kill the _____ (Matthew 10: 28). The Church lives on! Jesus said, "I will build My _____; and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Where does the Church get its life from (Colossians 3:4)? _____
Therefore, to kill the Church you must kill the **Head** of the Church! Is it possible to kill Him (see Revelation 1:18 and Romans 6:9)? _____

The Church will never die, but someday the Lord Jesus Christ will come to remove His Church from the earth and to take His Church to heaven. Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you (in heaven), I will _____, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Therefore the **Victory Stone** of the Church reads like this:



The day will come when the Church will fulfill its days on this earth. When God is finished with the church and when God has fulfilled His purpose with the church, then He will REMOVE IT. The Church will no longer be on earth.

A Man Who Was Removed From the Earth

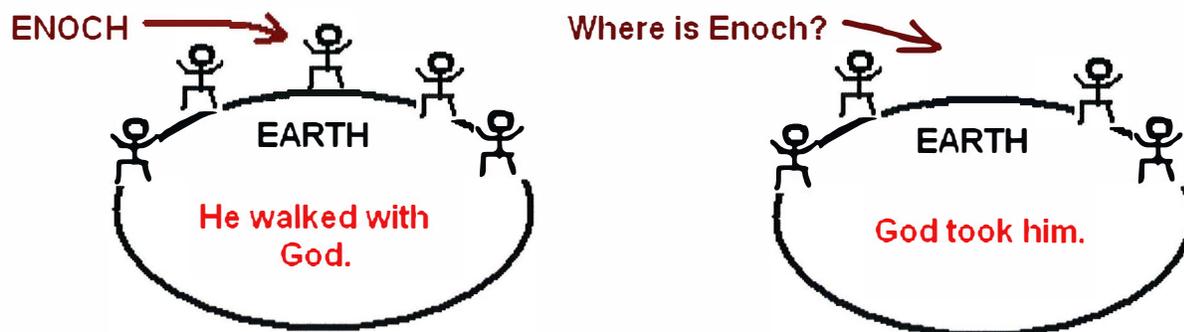
The Church will someday be removed from this earth. A day is coming (and it may be soon) when every living believer on the face of the earth will suddenly disappear. Did you know that thousands of years ago a man suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth? Let's learn about him:

Read Genesis 5:5,8,11,14,17. What are the last three words in each of these verses? _____
 _____ All of these men died! Methuselah was the oldest man who ever lived
 (Gen. 5:27). Did he die also (Genesis 5:27)? _____ All of these men died, but there is one man
 mentioned in Genesis 5 who did not die. Something very special and very unusual happened to
 him.

This man's name was Enoch and he is described in Genesis 5:21-24. Did Enoch rebel against God
 and disobey God, or did he love God and walk with God (Genesis 5:22)?

_____ WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS MAN? WHY DID ENOCH
 NEVER DIE?

Genesis 5:24 tells the amazing story of Enoch: "And Enoch _____ with God: and he
 was _____; for God _____ him." Enoch was walking with God and suddenly **HE WAS
 NOT!** All of a sudden he disappeared! Who removed Enoch and took him from the earth?

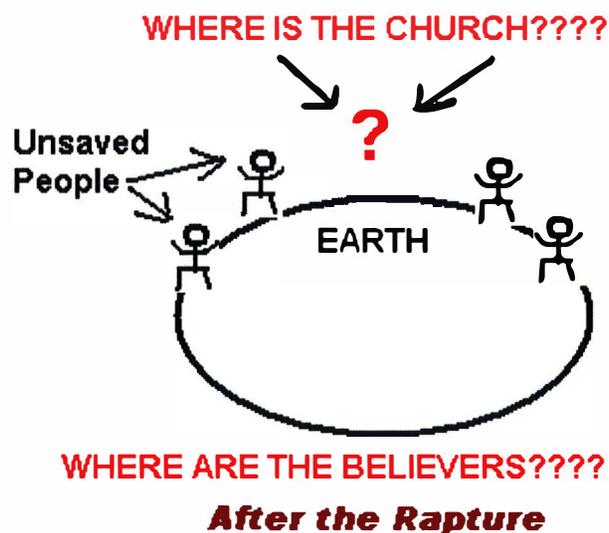
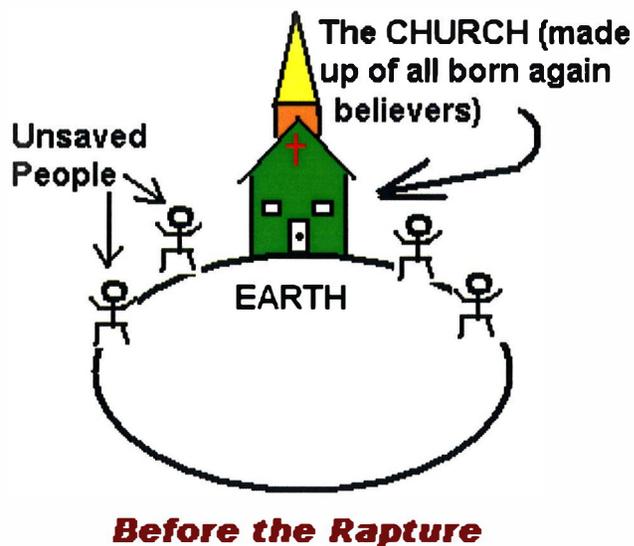


FIRST HE WAS THERE THEN HE WAS NOT.

Enoch is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:5. According to this verse, did Enoch ever see death?
 _____ We are told that Enoch was T_____ (Hebrews 11:5). This
 means that he was moved from one place to another. He was quickly moved from earth to another
 place (God's place of safety). Enoch was **not found** (Hebrews 11:5); this means that Enoch could
 not be found on the earth! People could not find him. He had disappeared! God took him! This
 speaks of sudden removal.

What Happened to Enoch Will Happen Again!

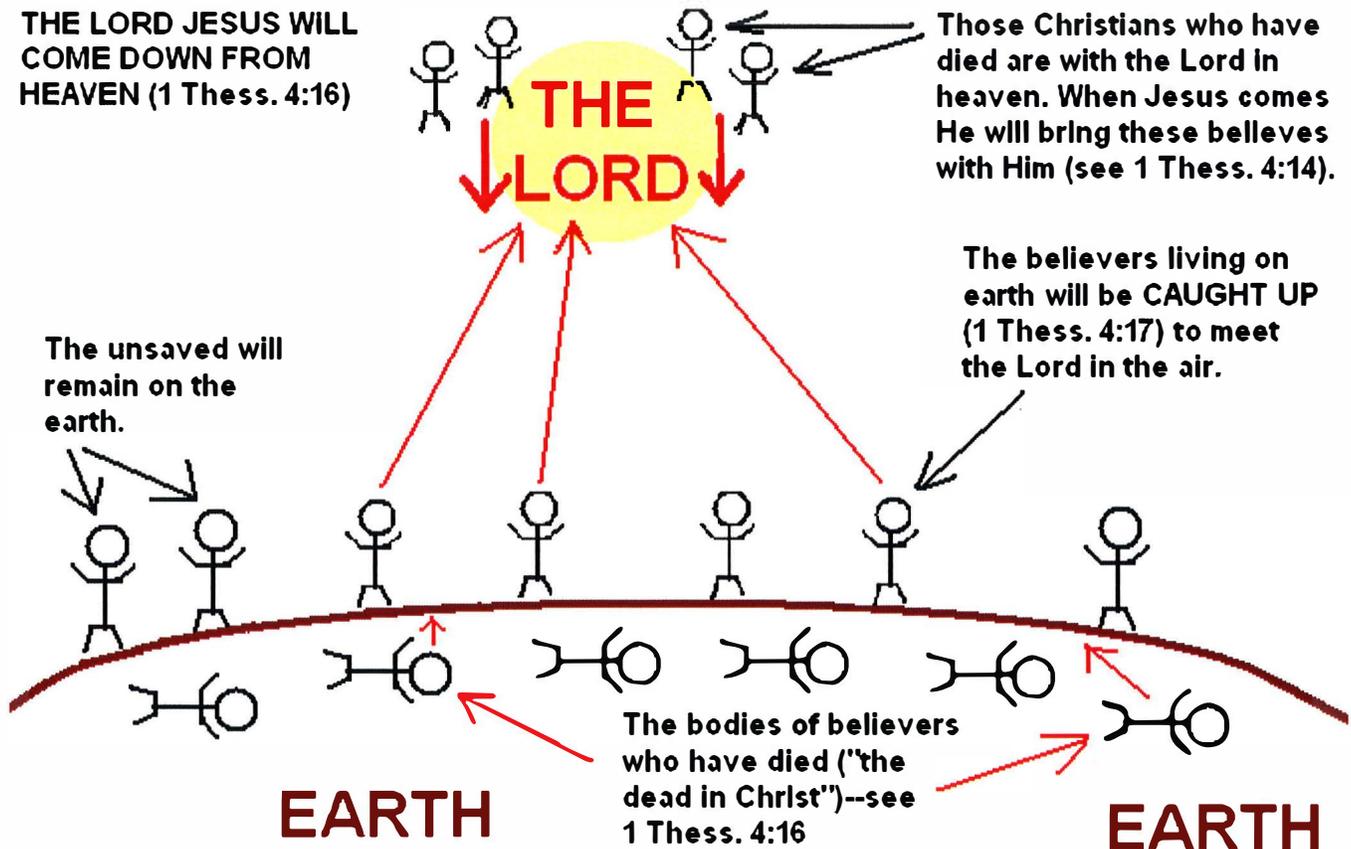
Something very unusual happened to Enoch. He was a man who never died. Did you know that
 what happened to Enoch is going to happen again, perhaps very soon? This time it will not just
 happen to one man, but it will happen to **many people**. There will be a whole group of people
 living on earth who will never see death. **God will take them!** A whole group of people will be
 quickly removed from the earth to heaven, and they will not be found by those who remain on the
 earth. Someday Christ Jesus will come and remove a whole group of people from the earth and
 take them to heaven (John 14:3). This group of people is called **the church**:



The Bible teaches that there will be a group of people living on the earth who will never **sleep** (see 1 Corinthians 15:51). This means that they will never **die** (just like Enoch). They will never sleep the sleep of death. The reason they will never die is that they will be taken up to heaven by Christ.

This great event (the removal of the Church) is called **the rapture**. This word "**rapture**" comes from a verb which means "to be caught up, to be snatched up, to be taken or carried away suddenly." Long ago Enoch was raptured and someday the Church will be raptured also.

The passage which most clearly describes the **rapture** or **removal** of the Church is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We need to remember that many of the members of the Church have already died and have gone to heaven to be with the Lord. This group would include such people as Peter, Paul, Stephen, Robert McCheyne, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody and perhaps some believers that you have known who have died. There are also those members of the Church who are still living today. This would include you if you are a believer. The following diagram may be of help:



THEY (the members of the Church who have already died) and **WE** (the members of the church who are still living on earth) will **meet together** in the air to be with the Lord forever (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

This great event will take place very quickly in three stages:

1. First, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend (come down) from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
2. Second, "the dead in Christ will _____" (1Thess. 4:16). This means that the bodies of church-age believers who have died will be raised up and given brand new resurrection bodies.
3. Third, those who are living when Christ returns will be C _____ U_____ (raptured) with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). These believers will also receive a new body: "We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be _____...for this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

When Will This Event Take Place?

When will Jesus come to remove His Church from the earth and to take His believers to heaven? When will the rapture take place? Today? Tomorrow? Next month? Next year?

God has not told us when Christ will return for His Church. This event may happen at any time.

We do know, however, that when God is finished using His Church on this earth, then the last member of the Church will be saved. The last "brick" (living stone) in the building will be in place, and at this time Jesus will return for His Church. Today God invites all people to become members of His Church. The day is coming, however, when it will be impossible for a person to become a member of the Church.

Think about the days of Noah. For 120 years Noah built the ark as God commanded him to do (Genesis 6:3). The people living on the earth had many opportunities to believe God. If they had believed God they could have gone through the door of the ark and been saved from the great flood, just like Noah and his family. For years God gave them opportunities. Finally the door of the ark was shut (Genesis 7:16) and the day of opportunity had passed. It was now impossible to get into the ark of safety.

For about the last two thousand years God has been giving men the opportunity to become members of His Church. Soon the day of opportunity will be past and the Church will be removed from the earth. After the **rapture** it will be impossible to become a member of the Church. It will be too late. The Church (the body of Christ) will be completed and it will be taken to heaven. Acts 2:47 will no longer be true. God will no longer keep on adding saved people to the Church, because the Church will no longer be on earth.

People can still be saved after the rapture, but they will not be members of the Church. They will live on earth during a very difficult time known as the time of tribulation or trouble (Matthew 24:21). During this time men's hearts will not grow softer; they will grow harder and harder (like Pharaoh)--see Rev. 9:20-21.

When will the rapture take place? We do not know. Maybe there is only one more person who needs to be saved before God's purpose for the Church is fulfilled. Only God knows this. Only God knows when He is finished building the Church and when the Church will be completed. Maybe there are 10 more people or 100 more people or 1000 more people that God will save before Christ returns for His completed Church. For about 2000 years God has been saving people and making them members of His body, which is the Church.

Are You Ready?

1. The first thing that you should do to prepare for the Lord's coming is to make sure that you are saved. Those who are saved will go to heaven to be with Christ. Those who are not saved will remain on earth. If you are not sure that you are saved, be sure to talk with your Pastor or Sunday School Teacher or to someone else that can help you.
2. If you are saved, make sure that you "walk with God" as Enoch did. Stay in a close relationship with the Lord: "And now little children, _____ in Him (stay in a right relationship with the Lord and confess your sins as 1 John 1:9 tells us to do); that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be _____ before Him at His coming (at the **rapture**)--see 1 John 2:28.

3. Tell others about the Saviour and invite them to be members of Christ's Church. Don't keep the good news to yourself!

Remember, there is still an opportunity for people to be saved and to become members of God's Called-Out Assembly. Your friends need to know that God wants to save them, and that He died to save them. There is a wonderful Saviour who is able to save all those who come to Him (Hebrews 7:25 and John 6:37).

