



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

"Gone, Believer, Gone"

4:1

Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

- being changed to bring change -

A storm is gathering in heaven. You see it's indicators in the beginning words of verse five of chapter four where it says, **And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices...**

Where and when will this storm break forth? Chapters eight, eleven, and sixteen mention these **lightnings** and **thunderings** hitting the earth during a future time when God pours out His wrath upon the earth. The storm is the Great Tribulation - seven years of trouble coming upon the whole earth such as there never has been before nor ever will be again. Some of its effects on the earth will be the following:

- Cold war, followed by actual war
- Widespread death by war from famine
- The most violent earthquake ever known

- Great disturbances in the stellar heavens
- 1/3 of the earth's vegetation destroyed
- 1/3 of the earth's ocean life destroyed
- 1/3 of the earth's fresh water fish destroyed
- 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars darkened
- A hellish invasion of the earth by demons who torment the inhabitants of the earth
- Hailstorms that destroy 1/3 of the earth's trees and green grass
- Greater hailstorms, with hailstones that weigh 125 pounds each
- A plague of terrible sores upon human beings
- The total poisoning of all the earth's fresh water
- The total poisoning of all the earth's salt water

This gathering storm is lamented by an angel in chapter eight when he says, *...Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth...*¹

When you begin to realize the awful scope of this gathering storm, you're thankful for Jesus' promise to the church in Revelation 3:10,

Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

As we previously studied, Jesus will keep you from out of the Great Tribulation. How?

By coming to take you to Heaven beforehand in the rapture of the church.

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The verse opens with *after these things*, which is *meta tauta*; and it closes with *after this*, which is *meta tauta*.

After these things looks back on chapters two and three. It looks back on the letters to the seven churches. We said last week that

¹ Revelation 8:13

those letters represent the entire church, the complete church, through history.

Beginning in chapter six and continuing through chapter nineteen the gathering storm of the Great Tribulation is described in horrific detail.

In between are chapters four and five describing what is going on in Heaven after the church age and before the Great Tribulation begins.

John saw a door standing open in heaven, and he heard a voice... saying, 'Come up here.' He was caught up to Heaven through the door before the Great Tribulation. He was kept out of it, as it were. John is a type of the church being caught up to Heaven before the Great Tribulation.

We commonly call this being caught-up to Heaven the rapture. "Rapture" comes from the words *caught up* in First Thessalonians 4:17. In the Greek the word is *harpazo* - "to seize upon by force," "to snatch up."

In the fourth century AD the scholar Jerome translated the New Testament from the original Greek into Latin. His translation is known as the Vulgate. He rendered the Greek word *harpazo* into the Latin word *raepitius*. This was eventually brought into English as *rapture*.

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Do you know that there are seven raptures in the Bible?

1. Enoch, a man who lived before the flood, was taken to Heaven without ever dying. Interestingly, he was raptured prior to the global flood. He becomes a type of the church raptured before the Great Tribulation. Noah and his family are preserved through the flood. They become a type of the nation of Israel being preserved through the Great Tribulation. (By the way: There is another very notable type of the rapture in the Book of Daniel. When Daniel's three friends are preserved through the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is nowhere to be found. They are a type of Israel preserved through the Great Tribulation. He is a type of the church kept out of it altogether).
2. Elijah was raptured without dying when the chariot of fire came for him and a whirlwind took him to Heaven.

3. Isaiah was raptured to Heaven and saw God's throne.

Moving to the New Testament:

1. Philip the evangelist was raptured right after he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. In his case he was not raptured to Heaven but to a city called Azotus.
2. The apostle Paul was caught-up to Heaven. He describes it in Second Corinthians 12:2-4.
3. Jesus, in His ascension, was raptured to Heaven – caught away bodily and taken there. Jesus' ascension is referred to as a rapture in Revelation 12:5 where it says He was **caught up to God and to His throne**.

The seventh rapture is the catching away of the church prior to the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 4:1 ...And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me...

The **first voice** was that of Jesus back in chapter one. He described it in both places as **like a trumpet**.

Trumpets in Scripture are often used to signal an assembling together. We know from First Thessalonians four and from First Corinthians fifteen that a trumpet will sound as the church is caught-up to Heaven.

It's not a stretch at all to see that John was typifying the same event – the rapture of the church.

Revelation 4:1 ...saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

Up here, as we'll see, is in Heaven. John would see the events of the Great Tribulation from the safe vantage point of Heaven.

Not everyone believes the church will be raptured prior to the Great Tribulation. There are four other positions:

1. The mid-tribulation rapture position says that Jesus comes for the church mid-way through the seven years.
2. The post-tribulation rapture position says the church will go through the seven years and be removed at the Second Coming of Jesus to earth only to immediately return with the Lord.
3. The partial rapture position says that only spiritual believers will be raptured before the Tribulation. Backslidden Christians will be left behind.
4. The pre-wrath rapture position puts the rapture about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the seven years. Those who hold to this say that the catastrophes in the first $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Tribulation are the result of the wrath of man and the wrath of Satan, not the wrath of God. God's wrath, they say, is towards the end and that is when the church is removed.

Why do we hold the pre-tribulation position? Is it just wishful thinking?

We hold it for several reasons.

First, we've already discussed the place of the church in the Book of the Revelation. It is completed before the seven years begin.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*. It occurs twenty times in Revelation. Nineteen of those occurrences are in chapters one, two, and three. It occurs again in chapter nineteen when the church is depicted as a bride returning to earth with Jesus in His Second Coming. The church is absent from the discussion of the events on the earth during the Great Tribulation. We are in Heaven – raptured.

Second, in several passages of the Bible the church is promised exemption from God's wrath. We already saw the promise to Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10. Other such promises are in First Thessalonians 1:9-10 and 5:9.

What about the idea that the first parts of the Tribulation are not God's wrath? *That's just not true!* Though God may use man or Satan the entire period of the Great Tribulation is His wrath. When

the first seal is opened it is the Savior, Jesus Christ, who opens it. An angel calls each of the four horsemen to ride across the earth.

Third, the purpose of the Great Tribulation is for God to turn the nation of Israel back to Himself. It is called **the day of Jacob's** [Israel's] **trouble** (Jeremiah 30:7). It is the last 'week' of seven years that was prophesied by Daniel and determined upon Israel. The Great Tribulation does not deal with the church at all. It is for the purification of Israel.

Fourth, the doctrine of imminence makes a pre-tribulation rapture necessary. Imminence means three things:

1. The rapture could occur at any time. Other events may take place before it, but no event must precede it.
2. The rapture is a sign-less event. We're looking for Jesus to appear at any moment.
3. The rapture is certain to happen and when it does it will be sudden. It may or may not be soon; but it will be sudden.

There are a whole host of Scriptures in the New Testament that teach imminence.² One of them is First Corinthians 16:22 which uses the word **Maranatha**! It was a specially coined word, like a secret password, that believers used to identify one another. I'm told it was an Aramaic word that the pagans who spoke Greek couldn't understand. It consists of three Aramaic words: *Mar* (Lord), *ana* (our), and *tha* (come). It's a one-word prayer, "Our Lord, come."

It only makes sense if the Lord could come imminently! If you know He can't come for at least three and one-half to five years it makes no sense.

A fifth reason we hold to the pre-tribulation rapture is that it is presented as a blessed and comforting hope:

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

² 1Corinthians 1:7; 1Corinthians 16:22; Philippians 3:20; Philippians 4:5; 1Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1Peter 1:3; Jude 1:21; Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, & 20; Revelation 22:17, 20.

John 14:2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

1 Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

If the rapture were mid-trib or post-trib or partial – would that be a blessed hope? Would that really be comforting? We'd have to change Jesus' words to read, "Let your hearts be troubled!" Instead of the Thessalonians being sad their loved ones had died, they'd be happy for them – thinking they had avoided the Great Tribulation!

A sixth biblical reason we hold the pre-trib position is the typology of the Bible. We've already seen Enoch and the Flood and Daniel and his three friends. There is also the whole analogy of the Jewish bridal customs where the Bridegroom would go prepare the home then suddenly return to catch away his bride.

We might call this the romantic reason. I think it's a strong one – **maybe the strongest!** Not just because of the Jewish wedding system. I think it's a strong reason because Jesus is a romantic and He loves His church jealously.

- being changed to bring change -

This distinct nature of the church as the beloved bride of Jesus is often overlooked. Jesus has gone to prepare our home in Heaven and is coming back for us to take us there **before** the Tribulation.

In recent years, many opponents of the pre-tribulation rapture view have made dogmatic assertions that this view was never taught before 1820AD.

Grant Jeffrey has found an ancient citation from a sermon ascribed to Ephraem of Nisibis (306-373AD) which clearly teaches that believers will be raptured and taken to Heaven before the Tribulation.

Ephraem of Nisibis was the most important and prolific of the Syrian church fathers and a witness to early Christianity on the fringes of the

Roman Empire in the late fourth century. He was well-known for his poetry, exegetical and theological writings, and many of the hymns of the early Byzantine church. So popular were his works that in the fifth and sixth centuries he was adopted by several Christian communities as a spiritual leader and role model.

This sermon is deemed to be one of the most interesting apocalyptic texts of the early Middle Ages. The translation of the sermon includes the following segment:

For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.

This text was originally a sermon called *On the Last Times, the Anti-christ, and the End of the World*.

In the world you will have tribulation. **But you will not be in the world during the Great Tribulation.**



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