

EASTER SUNRISE

2011

"If He Were a Carpenter"

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."

There are seven raptures in the Bible. There are three in the Old Testament and four in the New Testament. Six of them have already occurred.

Starting in the Old Testament:

1. Enoch, a man who lived before the flood, was taken to Heaven without ever dying.
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. He was returned to the earth to continue his service to the Lord.

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. Like Isaiah, Paul was returned to the earth.
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 one that has not yet occurred. It is the rapture of the church. We read about it several places in the New Testament, e.g., in First Thessalonians chapter four and in First Corinthians chapter fifteen.

We **see** it happen in the Revelation of Jesus Christ!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ is a chronological book. It starts with Jesus ministering to the believers of this Church Age in which we live. The first three chapters describe the Church Age, with the church on the earth.

Beginning in chapter six and going all the way through chapter eighteen the future seven-year Great Tribulation is described in all its awful detail. Some of those chapters bounce around a little in terms of the timeline, giving extra detail, but if you follow the opening of the seven-sealed scroll through the blowing of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven bowls you are following a linear timeline that takes you from the beginning of the Great Tribulation through the seven years it lasts.

Chapter nineteen is the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth! He establishes the kingdom of God for one thousand years - and that is what chapter twenty is all about.

At the end of chapter twenty - at the end of the thousand years - there is one, final rebellion on the earth by Christ-rejecting human beings who were born during the kingdom age.

Next is the resurrection and final judgment of all the nonbelievers from all time, all at the end of chapter twenty.

Which leads us to chapters twenty-one and twenty-two which describe the wonders of eternity with Jesus in the new Heavens and on the new earth!

Going back in our minds to the chronology of the Revelation we see that, after the Church Age is described in chapters one, two and three, there is a scene in Heaven that occupies chapters four and five. It describes the church in Heaven, caught-up there prior to the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 4:1 After these things...

The verse opens with “after these things,” which is *meta tauta*; and it closes with “after this,” which is *meta tauta*. The timing is thus very precise.

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..."

John saw "a door standing open in heaven" and he heard a voice "saying, 'Come up here.'" 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*.

John 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.

Types are not doctrine, but they are important. For example. We said that Enoch was the first person raptured. 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.

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. Just as the church is never mentioned in Revelation six through eighteen, Daniel is not mentioned during the fiery furnace.

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The “first voice” was that of Jesus back in chapter one. He described it in both places as being 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 describing 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” 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 super-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.

1. First, we've already discussed the place of the church in the Book of the Revelation. 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. There is no mention of the church in all the detailed description of the seven years of the Great Tribulation. **The church is absent from the discussion of the events on the earth during the Great Tribulation.** We are in Heaven – raptured before the Great Tribulation begins.
2. Second, in several passages of the Bible the church is promised exemption from God's wrath. Revelation 3:10 is one such promise. 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? Those who subscribe to that position say that the first years portray mankind and Satan as the main actors, not God. It's only during the last part of the Great Tribulation, they say, that God's wrath is poured out. *That's just not the case!* 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. We believe in a pre-wrath rapture but we believe the entire seven years of the Tribulation is God's wrath being poured-out.
3. 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.
4. 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. 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.
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 – 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.

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 Great Tribulation. There's no talk from Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, about His putting the screws to us to purify us, to get us ready. No, instead we're told He purifies us by the washing of the water of the Word of God. In the world we will have tribulation, but we will not be in the world during the Great Tribulation.

The carpenter turned itinerant preacher was crucified, buried, then rose from the dead the first Easter morning. Forty days later He ascended into Heaven. The two men on the Mount - probably not angels but Moses and Elijah who had earlier been with Jesus at His transfiguration - told His disciples He was coming back.

He'll first return in the clouds to resurrect and rapture the believers of the Church Age.

In between Jesus has taken-up His carpentry again! He's busy building each of us our custom home.

“Even so, come Lord Jesus!” “Maranatha!”