

The Bible: A Love Story

Pt 6: The Rapture of the Bride (part 1)

The truth of the 'rapture' of believers, though widely-held among evangelical Christians in the past, appears to have fallen into disrepute among many of late.

One has only to go to the Internet (particularly YouTube) to get an idea of how much the concept of a 'secret' rapture is now not only denied even derided by many believers today. The word 'secret' is often used pejoratively (as if the doctrine were something sinister) and the concept is now portrayed in many quarters as having no basis in Scripture *whatsoever*. Instead, it is regarded as an almost cult-like belief springing from a perverse movement in the church during the early nineteenth century. At the very least, the 'rapture' is often touted as a doctrine 'invented' by John Nelson Darby in the 19th Century.

I believe that this perspective represents a superficial view of Scripture - and how it's used by the Spirit of God. It's true that the

doctrine of the 'rapture' of believers has only come into real prominence since the 19th Century but this is perfectly in line with the observable process of Divine revelation. Not that new doctrine has been revealed ([2 Peter 1:19](#); [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)) but that certain truths are more emphasised and brought into a fresh perspective as they become particularly relevant to the Church at specific points in history.

Accordingly, truths concerning the walk of the believer and response to persecution were paramount in the early church because these truths were particularly pertinent to conditions prevailing at that time. Again, in the reformation, the truth of justification by faith was urgently called for and Martin Luther, among others (Calvin, Zwingli; Melancthon etc), was instrumental in reviving and emphasising the great doctrines of grace (the five '*solae*').

And it has been the same with the doctrine of the 'rapture' of believers. In these last days, as world events rush to their inevitable conclusion, as Israel are gathered back in the

land, and as everything points to the return of the Lord to this earth in judgement, it has become time for the Spirit of God to bring to our conscious awareness the truth of a separate return of the Lord for his Church. In order to do so, as with He did with the great reformers of the 16th century, the Holy Spirit has similarly used men such as J.N. Darby (1800-1882) to highlight the truth of the Lord's soon return for the Church.

I now hope to show that the truth of the 'rapture' is not some fanciful imagining - nor a concocted conspiracy, but is actually perfectly consistent with New Testament teaching! You may not agree with my conclusions, but I pray that at the very least, you will concede that there does appear to be some grounds for arriving at these conclusions.

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As believers in Christ, we all agree that the Lord is going to return to the earth in glory. [Zechariah 14:1-9](#) contains a graphic description of this event! Our Lord, as the

Messiah/King, will reign over this earth for a thousand years ([Revelation 20:4](#)) in a kingdom known as as "*The Kingdom of Heaven*" (see message: "*Millennialism*").

So how does the Church, the 'Bride' and 'Body' of Christ, fit into all this?

Well, we know of four groups that will inhabit the millennial earth:

1. All the Israelites who survive the Great Tribulation (the "remnant" - 1/3 of the nation: [[Zechariah 13:8-9](#); [Romans 9:27, 11:26](#)]).

* These Israelites will presumably be born-again in the same way as we are as they will have been made spiritually alive by the in-breathing of the Holy Spirit ([Ezekiel 37:9-10,14](#)). This will be the fulfilment of the New Covenant in respect of the nation as a whole ([Jeremiah 31:33](#)).

2. Those among the nations who (i) survive Armageddon and (ii) do not worship the Beast or his image ([Matt.25:31](#)>> [et seq.](#)).

* These individuals will be in natural bodies and some will live and die on the earth although they will be much longer-lived than people today: a man will be regarded as a mere child at 100-years-old: ([Isaiah 65:20](#)).

3. The 12 apostles who will sit on thrones - judging the 12 tribes of Israel ([Matt. 19:28](#)).

* However, as members of the Church, they will presumably possess glorified bodies.

4. Saints who are martyred in the Great Tribulation ([Rev. 20:4](#)).

* These martyrs will be resurrected and reign with Christ a thousand years. Because they take part in the 'first resurrection' (like us) and rule for a thousand years, they must either receive glorified bodies (like us in the Church) - or at least bodies under very different conditions than before. We aren't told anything specific in this regard.

Bu what about the Church - the Bride of the King himself - the heaven "*ekklēsia*"? Christ

himself said that we don't belong to this world:

John 17:16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."

This does not mean that the saints in the Church won't be *with* Christ when he reigns over the earth - in fact we come down to earth with him (**Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:14** c.f. **Revelation 19:8**). It does suggest, however, that, as the Lamb's Bride, we won't be subjects in this earthly kingdom! (**John 14:1-4; Revelation 19:7-9**). Particularly as we are to participate in the judging of the world and of angels (**1 Corinthians 6:2-3**). However, as all judgement has been committed to the Son (**John 5:22**), we don't know exactly what our role will be.

But as we have seen in previous messages, one thing is clear: the 'Bride' must be compatible with the 'Bridegroom' - like him in every way: body, soul and spirit. Now we have seen that we are already like him in spirit (**2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:6**;

Colossians 1:27) and that, in practical sanctification, we are being progressively transformed into the image of Christ (**2 Corinthians 3:18**).

But what of our bodies? They are as yet unredeemed and the Scripture makes clear that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (**1 Corinthians 15:50**). So our bodies await a similar transformation into bodies like those of Christ. When (and only when) this has occurred, will the "Bride" be fully compatible with the "Bridegroom", and able to be spiritually joined with him; a suitable companion - as Eve was for Adam.

Read the next two verses in this connection:

Ephesians 5:31-32 "..... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery---but I am talking about Christ and the church."

Philippians 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the

power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

And of course it's inevitable that our citizenship is in heaven and that heaven will be our destiny once we are joined with Christ. Because when a bride marries her groom, he takes her to live with him - in this case, in his Father's house (see next message: *'Christ marries the Church'*).

This was the promise Christ gave to his disciples in [John 14:2-3](#),

"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Read this verse carefully and you may be able to see the clear implication that the bridegroom does not join his bride on the earth to begin with, but first takes her back

with him to the father's house (heaven). This is supported by such verses as such as [1 Thessalonians 3:13](#),

"May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

This particular coming of Christ with his holy ones culminates in the presence of the Father - not on the earth! If this is the case, then it would appear to link directly with [John 14:2-3](#) (cited above).

And if this is the case, then the transformation of our bodies, and our accompanying of Christ into the Father's house would seem to take place *before* his triumphal return to the earth as king!

Again this view is supported by the chronological sequence of events implied in Revelation where the wedding supper of the Lamb ([Revelation 19:6-9](#)) appears to precede the return of Christ to the earth. Added to the fact that the *whole body* of saints (no

doubt past and present [[Hebrews 11:39](#)]) accompany Christ in his descent to the earth.

Before going into more detail about why I believe the 'rapture' takes place *before* Christ returns to the earth as King, let's look at the Biblical description of the event itself.

John anticipates this glorious moment of our transformation when he says:

1 John 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

And Paul supplies the details:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the

clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

And why do we call this event the 'rapture' of believers? It's because the Greek word here translated 'caught up' is '**harpazein**' which means 'to seize', 'to snatch', or 'to carry off'. This was the sense in which the word 'rape' was used in earlier centuries (e.g. 'rape and pillage' etc) and indeed the English word 'rapture' is still used to signify being seized or carries off by a particular feeling (eg 'raptures of delight').

Paul also appears to be alluding to the same event when he describes the glorious transformation of our bodies (that we previously read about in [Philippians 3:21](#)) in the following terms:

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--- [52] in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Again, in [Romans 8:23](#), Paul refers to this event as the 'redemption of our bodies'. It will complete the transformation of the Bride so that, body, soul and spirit transformed, she can, together with her beloved groom, be presented to the Father!

[1 Thessalonians 5:23](#) "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now some of the Biblical references to this coming contain an expression which seems a little strange at first. Go back to [Philippians 3:20-21](#) where Paul says:

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Paul doesn't say that we are awaiting '*the* Saviour' or 'our Saviour' (as you might expect)

but that we are awaiting '*a Saviour*' from heaven. This suggests that Christ is coming to perform a work of salvation on our behalf. He will have come to save us from something - or at least to complete the work of salvation he has already begun!

And this isn't the only reference to Christ returning to save us! Look at [Hebrews 9:28](#),

"..so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

But how can this be so, if, as we firmly believe, we are already saved? If we have already passed from death to life?

To answer that, we need to examine the text a little more closely. The words '*not to bear sin*' is a misleading translation of the Greek phrase '*chōrīs hamartías*'. It's the same expression as used when in [Hebrews 4:15](#), it says that Christ was tempted (or tested) '*chōrīs hamartías*'. In that case too, the translation: '*without sinning*' or '*yet he did*

not sin' is similarly misleading. According to the best Greek scholars, the expression in either case rather conveys the meaning of '*apart from the question of sin*'!

If this is so, then the writer to the Hebrews seems to be telling us that whereas Christ's first advent was as a sin-bearer - primarily in connection with our redemption ([Galatians 4:4](#); [1 Timothy 1:15](#)) his next appearance is to provide salvation in another form!

It can certainly be said he is going to rescue us from these sinful, mortal bodies - and *that* is salvation in that sense (as it completes our redemption) - but the Scriptures indicate a quite different salvation. See what Paul has to say in [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#) ,

"..... and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead---Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

This appears to be the salvation alluded to in [Hebrews 9:28](#). And what then emerges from these two verses is that Christ is coming to save us from a form of 'wrath' that lies in the

future. It cannot be the wrath of God against sin, *per se*, because we've already been delivered from that ([John 3:36](#)). Indeed The fact that this 'wrath' is some sort of coming event is borne out by Paul's statement in [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#),

"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

We are appointed to '**receive salvation**' rather than '**suffer wrath**'. The fact that this is a future event (as opposed to the regeneration by faith) is made very clear when we examine the context of this statement . Let's couple it with the preceding verse:

[1 Thessalonians 5:8-9](#) "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and *the hope of salvation* as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."
(Italics mine)

This salvation from wrath is a 'hope' of salvation! Now in **Romans chapter 8**, the Bible defines hope as *expectation* of something that has not happened as yet and, in the same passage, Paul links this hope with the '**redemption of our bodies**', which must necessarily be the event described in **1 Thessalonians 4** and **1 Corinthians 15** (cited above).

Romans 8:23-24 "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? "

I have laboured this point somewhat because it is a vital clue in determining the place of the 'rapture' in prophecy. The upshot of what we have discussed is that we are awaiting eagerly in hope of a Saviour from heaven who comes to deliver us from a coming wrath - and in the same act, will transform our mortal bodies into glorious bodies like that of Christ.

So what is the nature of this coming 'wrath'?

It is generally accepted among believers that the future 'wrath' is what is known in Scripture as '*the great tribulation*' ('*tēs thlípeōs tēs megáles*' - [Matthew 24:21,29](#); [Revelation 7:14](#)). It's a time described as the wrath of God being poured out on the earth! And the objects of His wrath fall into two categories!

Firstly Israel. The tribulation period constitutes the final phase of God's discipline of that nation - made necessary because of her persistent disobedience and rebellion:

[Luke 21:23](#) "There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people."

(It must be kept in mind, however, that like God's discipline of the believer, Israel's sufferings will be for her ultimate benefit. As the holocaust brought the nation back to the land, so the tribulation will bring them back to the Lord - their true Messiah ([Jeremiah 31](#); [Zechariah 13:9](#)))

The tribulation is also the day of God's wrath being poured out on the inhabitants of the earth!

"The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead-and for destroying those who destroy the earth." ([Revelation 11:18](#))

And it intensifies:

[Revelation 16:1](#) "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

I want you to notice that this is not a case of persecution of Christians by the world: rather it's God's judgement being inflicted on the unsaved world by God Himself!

Read this frightening description in [Revelation.6:15-17](#),

"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone

else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it? "

This would appear to be the "wrath" from which we are to be delivered. And, according to [Romans 8:24](#), "In this hope we were saved.."

But it's saddening sometimes to see how natural sentiment can obscure spiritual truth! No doubt you've heard the argument (as have I) that goes like this:

"I think the notion of the 'secret rapture' is nothing more than a crutch for weak-minded Christians who simply don't want to go through suffering and persecution for the Lord! Why should we expect to avoid trials and tribulation on this earth?"

This is a very ill-conceived objection to the notion of a 'rapture' of believers. It's a weak argument for three clear reasons:

1. The first is this:

Simple logic should tell us that it's actually not a question of 'why *shouldn't* we pass through the tribulation' but that a better question would be: 'why *should* we?'

Like the other millions in the Church for the last 2000 yrs - we suffer right now from varying degrees of persecution. Some of this has indeed been terrible. "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" details the terrible suffering of the saints in the early Church and many of us are familiar with horrors of the Spanish Inquisition as well as the torture and death of thousands in the world today! On the other hand, however, innumerable saints have lived quiet, peaceful lives - called upon by the Lord to witness steadfastly to those around them.

So if we ask: 'Why shouldn't we go through the tribulation', we might as well ask - 'Why

shouldn't any of the previous generations of believers in the Church have gone through it?' It's true that, in common with all believers from the time of Pentecost onwards, we should certainly expect persecution in the Christian life today. Believers right now have gone, are going, and will go through persecution if they honour the name of the Lord. The Scripture guarantees no less:

2 Timothy 3:12 " ... everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

But logic dictates that the church age (per se) has got to come to an end *at some point in time*. The '**things which are**' of **Revelation 1:19** (the church age) have eventually to give way to '**the things that shall be after these things**' (**Revelation 4:1**). At the time of the completion of the church's testimony on earth, there will necessarily be multitudes of believers on the earth who must then be gathered to the Lord (in one form or other).

The early Church was eagerly awaiting this event - the appearance of a Saviour from heaven. What makes that any different from today - except that the coming deliverance may well now be "just around the corner?" And we are told, after all, to watch and wait eagerly for the return of our Lord!

And take the exhortation given to the future saints passing through the great tribulation itself:

Luke 21:28 "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Those saints will be eagerly awaiting and expecting deliverance! Are we to accuse them also of fear and cowardice?

2. The second reason is this: the nature of the Tribulation period itself dictates that we be not part of it! The tribulation simply cannot play a part in the church era because the Scripture clearly defines it as a time of God's wrath against the nations and His

discipline of Israel? It simply has no relevance to the Church. **Revelation 3:10** says this:

" Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to *test the inhabitants of the earth.*"

The tribulation comes to test the 'inhabitants of the earth'. This expression is a dynamic equivalent translation of the Greek participle "*tēs oikoumenēs*" (signifying 'the inhabited world/earth' / 'earth-dwellers').

We are not 'earth-dwellers' as such. Christ himself said in **John 17:6** that **"They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."** and, as we have quoted above, Paul assures us that **'our citizenship is in heaven'** (**Philippians 3:20**). **I repeat: the tribulation period is simply of no relevance to the Church!**

3. The third reason is this:

The tribulation period is a specific time during which the Beast (whom we often know simply as the 'Antichrist'), reigns more or less

supreme over the earth. Now Satan may have tried to establish this evil incarnation on the earth many times before (the Roman emperors, Napoleonic, Hitler etc.) but he has failed each time!

Why has he failed? We find out when we turn to **1 John chapter 4**. There John makes specific reference to the final Antichrist coming into the world in person - and in this passage the apostle makes three important points:

i) Satan has been trying to establish his 'seed' (the 'Antichrist') on earth - particularly since the advent of the 'seed of the woman' (**Genesis 3:15**):

1 John 4:3, ".....This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

ii) His efforts to do so have been unsuccessful thus far because every 'spirit' of antichrist has been overcome by believers in the Church:

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them..... "

iii) And now we are given the reason why we have successfully resisted and defeated the antichrist 'spirit'; it's not us, 'per se, but because of the Spirit of God who dwells in us. It's He who overtones the 'spirit' of Antichrist because, as John goes on to say:

" ... the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

Since the Holy Spirit came down to permanently indwell believers ([John 14:16](#); [Romans 8:9](#)) and unite us into the one body of Christ ([Ephesians 4:3-4](#)), the Antichrist (whoever he may prove to be), cannot rule over the earth! Logically then, the Spirit of God must first remove Himself from this scene and because we are His permanent temple both individually ([1 Corinthians 6:19](#)) and corporately ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#)), it follows that the removal of the Church from the earth) would have to occur before the tribulation period can even begin!

But is this supported elsewhere in Scripture? Absolutely! Paul makes this very point in [2 Thessalonians . Chpt 2:1-9](#),

The Thessalonian believers were in a state of panic. We're not given the details but someone had apparently convinced them that the 'Day of the Lord' had arrived - a day of judgement and terror! ([Isaiah 24:21-22](#); [Joel 2:30-31](#)). Now we would all agree that the 'Day of the Lord' begins when Christ returns to the earth as King. And prophecy makes it quite clear that the King's first act is to deliver Jerusalem from the Beast's devastating onslaught in the final battle of the Armageddon war:

[Zechariah 14:3-4](#)

"Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. [4] On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south."

Now given all the ominous portents of the Lord's return and the terror of that day, the believers had clearly forgotten what Paul had already told them about their particular destiny. As a result, they were starting to panic. So Paul writes to reassure them that they will not be present on the earth when that day arrives! And he does so by setting out for them a series of logical, interdependent future events (a prophetic 'chain' if you will).

He begins by saying:

**".....that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction."
(2 Thessalonians 2:3)**

So, before the Lord returns to the earth, the Antichrist (man of lawlessness) must first make his appearance.

But then something is preventing him from appearing:

"And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time" (2 Thessalonians 2:6-9).

Something is holding back the man of sin and, as we discussed earlier, we believe that this can only refer to the Holy Spirit whose temple /dwelling place is in believers individually and in the Church corporately.

The Holy Spirit is the reason we're the salt and the light on the earth. He restrains the Antichrist's evil because He is greater than the spirit of the Antichrist (1 John 4:3-4). And this state of affairs will continue right up until the time that the Holy Spirit is no longer dwelling on the earth (in the way that He is today).

As Paul goes on to say:

"The one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way." (éōs è mésou génēsai: "until from out of the midst he might be [gone]")

So the Holy Spirit restrains the Antichrist until he is no longer present on the earth.

And one thing we can be sure of: if the Holy Spirit is no longer here, then we, the Church, will also no longer be here on earth ([John 14:16](#); [Romans 8:9](#)) His absence from the world must necessitate the removal of the Church!

Our removal from this earth prior to the tribulation period does follow a sound principle in Scripture. As we said above, we are the 'salt of the earth' ([Matthew 5:13](#)) and the 'light of the world' ([Matthew 5:14](#)). Now hear what Christ says about what happens when both light and salt are removed:

[Matthew 5:13](#) "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot "

And: [Matthew 6:23](#)

"If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Christ was of course describing a general principle in life and testimony. Nevertheless,

whether or not this was a veiled allusion to the tribulation period in particular, it was certainly an accurate portrayal of the conditions that will prevail at this future time - a time when the 'light' and 'salt' (seen in the Church) will have been removed.

So - after our removal from the earth (ie, the 'rapture'), and with the Restrainer consequently out of the way, Paul goes on to say:

"....then the lawless one will be revealed" (2 Thessalonians 2:8a)

The Antichrist can then begin his dreadful reign over the earth (or at least the prophetic earth).

But now, very importantly, listen to what Paul says next:

2 Thessalonians 2:8 " ...whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. "

This is clearly descriptive of what occurs when Christ returns to the earth as King! And just as Clearly, this event takes place "*after*" the Antichrist has ruled because the Lord returns to the earth in power and glory to destroy Him and the false prophet.

So we are (and must necessarily be) removed from the earth before the 'man of sin' can begin to rule and then the Lord returns at his second coming to put an end to the Antichrist!

The conclusion seems to be inevitable: the 'rapture' is a separate event from the Lord's second coming to the earth - the two being divided by a period of at least seven years!

This then leads on to another significant observation: when the Old Testament Scriptures prophesy the return of the Messiah, they are *not* referring to his coming (*parousía*) for the Church but to his return to the earth in glory.

This is in accordance with Scripture: the Church is nowhere a subject of Old

Testament revelation. That's why each of its major truths is called a 'mystery' in the New Testament - including the nature of the Church ([Ephesians 3:4-6](#)), the movement of the Antichrist ([2 Thessalonians 2:7](#)) and the 'rapture' itself ([1 Corinthians 15:51](#)).

Now a 'mystery' in the New Testament is defined as a truth which was hidden from past generations (i.e. before Pentecost) but has been now revealed by the Spirit of God! In this regard, just consider the following two references, both of which are directly applicable to the Church:

[1 Peter 1:10-11](#) "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow."

And then, in [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](#), "However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind

has conceived"---the things God has prepared for those who love him--- [10] these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit" (Notice in this connection: [1 Corinthians 4:1, 14:2b](#))

So back to our passage:

Here's the time-line of events as Paul sets them out:

Rapture -----> Antichrist -----> 2nd Coming
(Church removed). (Day of the Lord)

Even the structure of the book of Revelation appears to support this timeline:

In [Revelation 1:19](#) John told to "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

- * What you have seen
- * What is now
- * What will take place later (lit. "After these things").

What had John seen? To find out, we need to read [Revelation 1:12-19](#).

John begins by saying: "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands.." ([Revelation 1:12](#))

He then sees a vision of the Son of man walking among the lampstands. The vision ends with these words: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.." ([Revelation 1:17](#)).

So when the voice says "Write, therefore, what you have seen", that's quite self-explanatory - it was the vision of Christ walking among the lampstands.

But what about the next two statements?

"..what is now and what will take place later" (*meta tauta - after these things*).

"What is now" will be best understood by first considering what is meant by "after this"

because there is a clear reference to this in [Revelation 4:1](#),

"After this (*meta tauta* - "*after these things*") I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place later (*'metà taūta'*: "*after these things*').

So **"later"** (lit. '*after these things*'), John is caught up to heaven, views the scene around the throne ([Revelation 4-5](#)) and then witnesses the scene on earth depicting the coming tribulation period ([Revelation 6-19](#)).

Therefore, looking at our verse again (**"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."**) we can deduce that the expression '**what is now**' must be referring to whatever John saw *between* the vision of the Son of Man (**'what you have seen'**) and the spiritual translation of John to heaven immediately preceding the tribulation events on earth (**'after this'**)

This leaves only one thing! The church, which occupies the whole of **Revelation chapters 2-3!** And if this description of the church does indeed go on up to the time of the future tribulation, then the seven churches described in these two chapters (7 being the number of completeness) are most likely to be forming a prophet illustration of the entire church age!

So here is the time-line that we're presented with:

Things: seen (Rev.1) (Vision of Christ).	present. (Rev.2-3) (Church age)	Things later (Rev. 6-19) (heaven)
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Of course this has only real significance for our discussion if John being caught up into heaven (in spirit of course) is indeed a picture of the 'rapture' of the church just before the tribulation commences! Is there evidence to at least suggest that this may be the case?

I believe so. Firstly there's of course the previously-described chronological sequence

of the events as they are presented to us. Of course this is not conclusive in itself but one significant observation does give support to this argument: having exclusively occupied to whole of **Revelation** chapters. **2-3**, the church is nowhere mentioned once in **Revelation 6-19** (the tribulation period). In contrast to the church age (**Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:13-16**). Israel and Jerusalem once again come into prominence and are presented in stark contrast to the nations! (**Revelation 7:4-8; 11:1-2,13; 12:1-2,6,13; 14:1; 15:3; 16:16, 19:19-21**) c.f. **Revelation 6:4,8,15; 8: 7-13; 9:4,15; 10:11; 11:18; 12:12; 13:3,8;14,16; 14:18**).

Notice also that the age of Grace appears to be over in this future period of time! Jesus predicted in **Matthew 24:13** that endurance will be necessary in order to be saved. We see these Old Covenant conditions once more in force (**Revelation 15:5**) and further brought out in **Revelation 14:11-12; 15:5; 16:2,11 etc.**

Added to this, there are a couple of things John sees in heaven that lend weight to this

assumption that the 'rapture' has just curried.

Firstly, he sees 24 elders around the throne. Two groups of 12 - a number which is certainly representative of testimony and witness for God! In the Old Testament, the number 12 is used of Israel (12 tribes; 12 loaves on the table of shewbread [[Leviticus 24:5-6](#)], 12 pillars of stone etc). In the New Testament we have the twelve apostles representing the New Testament saints. And when we come to the new Jerusalem, we find the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on the gates and the names of the twelve apostles on the foundation! ([Revelation 21:12,14](#)).

So when John, after the "**things which are**" (i.e. after the church age) sees 24 elders around the throne, this would suggest that at that point, the whole body of saints are now gathered around the Lord!

And they're wearing their crowns! ([Revelation 4:4](#)) A significant detail considering that the only clue we're given in

Scripture concerning the actual time of the distribution of crowns, is found in [2 Timothy.4:8](#) where Paul says:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

A natural reading of all these verses would leave me to believe that the calling up of John to heaven ([Revelation 4:1](#)), at the end of the church age, but before the tribulation commences, is a prophetic glimpse of the promised 'appearing' (*parousía*) of the Lord for his church.

On final thing in John's vision of heaven further supports this view: in front of the throne the apostle sees seven blazing lamps which represent the seven spirits of God ([Revelation 4:5](#)). This is undeniably the Spirit of God represented in His seven aspects as they are described in [Isaiah 11:2](#). And if the Holy Spirit is back in heaven in His entirety (seven aspects) then we can assume that the

restrainer is indeed no longer on the earth to hold back the tide of evil initiated by the Antichrist.

An interesting sidelight here: the reversion to justification by works in the tribulation may well be due to the absence of the Holy Spirit from the earth because it is He who convicts people of righteousness and judgement as well as the necessity of salvation by faith in Christ alone ([John 16:9](#)). In place of the gospel of grace (faith in Christ alone), the 'gospel of the Kingdom' ([Matthew 24:14](#)) is preached - still salvation based on Christ alone but stressing the necessity of remaining loyal to him as the coming King.

In closing, I would suggest that two intriguing promises in Scripture further suggest that there are two distinct appearances of the Lord:

In the very last chapter of last book of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), we find this promise made to Israel:

Malachi 4:2-3 "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. [3] Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty."

That's the promise to Israel: Christ. Will come to earth blazing like the sun and everyone will see him!

This is the coming Christ refers to in the Olivet discourse:

'Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.' (**Matthew 24:30** - see also **Rev.1:7**)

This coming is connected with judgment. Paul tells us that Christ will be:

'revealed from heaven in blazing fire with all his holy angels. He will punish men who do

not love God and who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus'. (2 Thess.1:7-8)

The second promise is not made to Israel but to the Church. Fittingly it's found in the very last chapter of the last book of the New Testament:

Rev.22:16-17 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come."

The difference is both striking and instructive. When the King/Messiah comes down to deliver Israel, he comes as the sun, ushering in the morning of the '*Day of the Lord*'. But for the Church - the heavenly body, he appears *before the dawn!* Before the sun rises, he comes as the "Bright and morning star". This, of course, is the planet, Venus that appears in the sky before sunrise.

So the imagery is clear: the rest of the world sleeps on in darkness (for at least seven years) and they don't see the morning star.

By contrast, we who are spiritually awake. wait and watch for its (his) appearance:

1 Thessalonians 5: 5-6 'For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.'

But there is something else wonderful about the 'rapture'. It isn't just a meeting in the air, glorification of our bodies and entrance into sonship (**Romans 8:23**), but it's the penultimate step in the impending spiritual wedding between our heavenly 'groom' and us, his awaiting 'bride'. In fact the whole of the Christian experience here on earth, culminating in the 'rapture' of believers, closely follows the pattern of the ancient Hebrew wedding.

And that's what we'll be discussing in the final message of this series: 'Christ marries the Church.'

May God bless His Word to each one of us!
Amen