THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH



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And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail.
Matthew 24:6-8

The invisible or Universal Church is composed of all true believers, whereas the visible or Local Church can be composed of both believers and unbelievers. The eschatology of the invisible Church rightly belongs to the study of pretribulation events. The eschatology of the invisible Church includes five major factors: the Church will be raptured; the Church will be judged and rewarded; the Church will be married to the Messiah; the Church will co-reign with the Messiah in the Kingdom; and the Church will abide with the whole triune God in the eternal New Jerusalem.

Only the first three factors fall within the scope of this Messianic Bible Study, hence, it is divided into three main sections: the definition of the invisible Church, the Rapture of the Church, and the two events subsequent to the Rapture of the Church.

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

A clear definition of what actually constitutes the invisible Church can be deduced from five passages of Scripture. An understanding of this will help to clarify exactly who is involved in the Rapture.

The first passage, Colossians 1:18, states that the Church is the Body of the Messiah: *And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

The second passage gives the composition of this Body, the Church, in Ephesians 2:11-16: *Wherefore remember, that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision, in the flesh, made by hands; that ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that once*

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were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.
The composition of the Church, the Body of the Messiah, is a combination of Jews and Gentiles united by faith in Yeshua (Jesus). This passage makes clear that there is no such thing as a Gentile church any more than there is a Jewish one. Until the Messiah died, there were only two entities: the Jews and the Gentiles. But now, there is a third entity: the *one new man*, which is defined as *one body*, the Church. The Church is not Jewish or Gentile, but Jew-Gentile, comprised of believers from the Jews and believers from the Gentiles, who are united into a new entity: the Church. Yet both retain their ethnic identities. This is true unity without uniformity. Thus, the Gentiles are *fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (Eph. 3:6); they are *fellow - partakers*, but not "takers-over."

A major purpose of the Church Age is a calling out from among the Gentiles by the gospel according to Acts 15:14: *Symeon has rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.*

This calling out of the Gentiles will continue until the full number of Gentiles that God has ordained for the Church has been reached according to Romans 11:25-27: *For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part has befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: And this is my covenant unto them, When I shall take away their sins.*
So while God is performing a work among the Gentiles, it has a purpose that is not merely Gentile related, but one that is also related to the Jews. In fact, one of the purposes for Gentile salvation is to provoke the Jews to jealousy so that many Jews may also come to faith in the Messiah during the Church Age (Rom. 11:11-15). Gentile believers are enjoying the spiritual blessings of the Jewish covenants and are grafted into a Jewish olive tree (Rom. 11:17-24), *for salvation is from the Jews* (Jn. 4:22). The Church, then, is simply a body composed of Jewish members, which are the natural branches, and Gentile members, which are the wild olive branches. These two entities are united by faith in the Messiah.

How one gets into the Body is explained by the third passage, I Corinthians 12:13: *For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit.*
With the Church being the Body of the Messiah and that Body being composed of Jewish and Gentile believers, entrance into the Body is by Spirit baptism. Every believer is a member of the Body by virtue of having been baptized by the Holy Spirit, a fact that takes place at the

moment one believes and is saved. Knowing just how one becomes a member of the Body of the Messiah helps to determine when the Church began. This, in turn, is important in determining who is involved in the Rapture.

In the fourth passage, it is made clear by use of the future tense that Spirit baptism was still future as of Acts 1:5: *For John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence.*
The first time the term church is used is in Matthew 16:18, and there also the future tense is used: *I will build my church*. The Church did not exist in the Old Testament, nor did it exist during the period of gospel history.

If Spirit baptism was future to Acts 1:5, the question is: "When did it begin?" It is generally agreed that Spirit baptism began at Pentecost in Acts 2, but it is impossible to prove this from Acts 2 because that chapter says nothing about Spirit baptism. Yet, that Spirit baptism did begin in Acts 2 is clear from the fifth passage, Acts 11:15-16: *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit.*
When Peter states: *as on us at the beginning* in verse 15, he is referring to the experience of the Jewish Apostles in Acts 2. Then in verse 16, Peter quotes Acts 1:5 and states that the prophecy of Spirit baptism in verse 5 was fulfilled *at the beginning* when the Holy Spirit came upon the Jewish Apostles at Pentecost.

A clear definition, then, is that the Body of the Messiah, the Church, is composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers and entrance into this Body is by Spirit baptism only. Since Spirit baptism did not begin until Pentecost in Acts 2, the Church could not have existed prior to that time. When Yeshua spoke of building His Church in Matthew 16:18, He used the future tense, showing that the Church had not yet begun. A major reason was that both His resurrection (Eph. 1:19-20) and His ascension, with the subsequent giving of spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:7-12), were necessary prerequisites for the building of the Church.

The Church is composed of all true believers from Pentecost in Acts 2 until the Rapture of the Church. The Rapture excludes Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints. Therefore, only saints who will be raptured are Church saints. The Rapture passages clearly state that only those *in Christ* will partake of the Rapture. Throughout his writings, Paul uses terms such as *in Christ, in Jesus, in Jesus Christ, in Christ Jesus, in him, in whom, in the Lord*, in a very technical way, referring to those who were baptized by the Spirit into the Body of the Messiah, the Church.

II. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

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There are two separate issues concerning the Rapture of the Church: first, the events of the Rapture itself; and secondly, the timing of the Rapture.

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A. The Events of the Rapture

Three key passages need to be studied for an understanding of the Rapture of the Church.

1. John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

This passage does not detail the Rapture event, but it does contain the promise of it in that Yeshua promised to return for the believers. Nothing is revealed as to the time or the circumstances, only the fact that there will be a coming of the Messiah for His saints. This coming especially for the saints is the subject of revelation in the two other passages. This passage does make one key point: the coming for the believers was for the purpose of taking them to the place where He was then going. Since Yeshua was going to Heaven, this will be a coming to take the saints to Heaven and not to the earth. This is important because in Posttribulationism the saints meet the Lord in the air and return with Him to the earth. But that is not the promise here; rather, He is coming to take the saints to Heaven. The passage itself says nothing about the timing of the Rapture, only that it results in the entrance of the Church saints into Heaven. This fits well with Pretribulationism.

2. I Thessalonians 4:13-18

This passage describes the program of the Rapture. Paul answered a question that had been raised in Thessalonica, "Do believers who have died miss out on the benefits of the Rapture?" in verses 13-15: *But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep.*

These living believers understood that there was a Rapture to come, but they did not understand how saints who were already deceased would be involved in it. Hence, some were thinking that only the living believers would enjoy the benefits of the Rapture and that the dead believers would not. This question arose because some believers had recently died. Their loved ones who were still alive were distressed, not knowing what the future had in store for them. Apparently, while Paul was still with them, he had taught some truths concerning the Rapture as it related to the living, but not to dead believers.

In reference to the death of believers, Paul used the term "sleep." This

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term, when used as a synonym for death, is used of believers only, never of unbelievers. Thus, the Bible views the death of believers as a temporary suspension of physical activity until the believer awakens at the Rapture. Just as physical sleep is a temporary suspension of physical activity until one awakens, yet there is no suspension of mental activity, so death is a temporary suspension of physical activity until one awakens at the resurrection. These verses do not teach "soul sleeping," for there is no cessation of spirit soul activity, only physical activity.

Having stated that deceased believers benefit from the Rapture before living ones do, Paul spelled out the chronological sequence of the Rapture event in seven stages to show why this is true in verses 16-17: *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*
First, *the Lord himself shall descend from heaven.* At some point in the future, the Messiah will come out of the Heaven of heavens and descend into the atmospheric heavens.

Secondly, *with a shout*. The Greek word used here is that of a command of a military leader who comes out of his chief commander's tent and issues a command. One day the Chief Commander will come out of His heavenly tent and give a shout, a command, for the resurrection and the translation of believers to occur.

Thirdly, *with the voice of the archangel*. Angels are often used to set God's plan into motion. Michael the Archangel will be used in this way regarding the Rapture. The content of what the voice says is not stated. But if known military procedure can be applied to this situation, then, this is simply the repetition by the sub-commander of the order or shout of the chief commander. Yeshua gives *the shout* or command for the program of the Rapture to begin, and it is Michael's task to set it into motion by repeating the command.

Fourthly, *with the trump of God*. The sound of the trumpet was used as a summons either to battle or to worship. With Michael's repetition of the command, the trumpet sounds, and this triggers the Rapture itself. Thus, this trumpet serves as a summons for the plan to move into motion.

Fifth, *the dead in Christ shall rise first*. This is the resurrection of dead saints. The reason they will not miss out on the benefits of the Rapture is because they will actually begin to enjoy them first. The expression *in Christ* limits the resurrection at the time of the Rapture to those who were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of the Messiah, the Church. Thus, this resurrection of dead saints is to be

limited to Church saints only. Old Testament saints will be resurrected at a later point in God's prophetic program.

Sixth, *then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds*. The resurrection of dead saints is followed by the translation of living saints. Without exception, every believer will be removed from the earth and will be united *with the Lord* in the heavens. The Greek word used here, *harpazo*, means "to be caught up." The source of the English term rapture comes from a Latin source equivalent to the Greek term. Living believers will be caught up or raptured with deceased ones.

The seventh stage is to *meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*. The final step in the Rapture event is that both the resurrected dead believers and the translated living believers will meet the Lord in the air. Next comes the guarantee that once believers have been united with Him in the air, they will permanently remain with Him and return with Him into Heaven, thus fulfilling the promises in John 14:1-3. This passage also says nothing about the timing of the Rapture, only the chronological sequence in which the Rapture event occurs.

So Paul comforts the bereaved members with the truth that dead believers would not miss out on the benefits of the Rapture; in fact, they will begin to receive the benefits first in verse 18: *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

3. I Corinthians 15:50-58

The third passage deals with the change in the nature of the bodies. Verse 50 declares the necessity of the change of the raptured living and the resurrected dead saints: *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.*

The background to this statement is found in Genesis 2:17: *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.*

This is further developed in Genesis 3:17-19: *And unto Adam he said, Because you have hearkened unto the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return unto the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.*
Because of sin, man has become subject to corruption and mortality.

All men are seen to be guilty of participating in Adam's sin by imputation according to Romans 5:12-14: *Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned: for until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed*

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when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come.

Mankind is living under the sentence of death, where his physical body is subject to corruption and mortality. The sin-nature is in it, and the results of sin are evident in the death of the body. This kind of body, subject to sin, mortality, death, and corruption, cannot enter into the Eternal State. So a change will be necessary, either by resurrection or translation, before the bodies can enter eternity.

This necessary change is described in verses 51-53: *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

The emphasis is on the quickness and rapidity of the change. It will be done *in a moment*. The Greek term behind this word is the origin of the modern English word "atom." The emphasis is that this will be "in an atom of time," it will be that quick. Furthermore, it will be in *the twinkling of an eye.* This is not a reference to blinking, but rather to "a sudden flash of recognition." It is like seeing a person and then suddenly recognizing who he is. It is this sudden flash of recognition that is meant by *the twinkling of an eye*. This, too, emphasizes the quickness of the change.

This event is said to happen at the time of *the last trump* (I Thes. 4:16). Both Midtribulationists and Posttribulationists try to identify this with the seventh trumpet of the Book of Revelation. But this cannot be what Paul meant by *the last trump*; because, at the time his first letter to the Corinthians was written, John had not yet written the Book of Revelation. The Corinthians would not have had any knowledge of seven trumpets. Yet it is evident from the fact that Paul used the definite article the last trump, he expected the Corinthians to know what he was talking about. The only knowledge they would have of trumpets are those spoken of in the Old Testament, especially those of the Feasts of Trumpets. The *last trump* refers to this feast and to the Jewish practice of blowing trumpets at this feast each year. During the ceremony, there is a series of short trumpet sounds concluding with one long trumpet blast called the *tekiah gedolah*, which means "the great trumpet blast." This is what Paul meant by *the last trump*. As such, it says nothing concerning the timing of the Rapture; only that the Rapture, whenever it comes, will fulfill the Feast of Trumpets. This trumpet is the same as *the trump of God* found in I Thessalonians 4:16. In that passage, at the sound of the trumpet the dead saints are raised as incorruptible and the living saints will be changed. Thus, in verse 53, the problem of corruption, which keeps the dead body out of Heaven, will be solved through resurrection when it will become incorruptible. The mortal, those who are alive, will put on immortality through translation.

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The nature of this new, glorified body is not a subject of much revelation, but several things are said concerning it. What is revealed clearly about the resurrected body is found in I Corinthians 15:35-49. Six points are made concerning the resurrected body in verses 42-49 and 53.

Verses 42-49 state: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthly: the second man is of heaven. As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*

Verse 53 states: *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

First, in verse 42 it is a body that is incorruptible. Secondly, in verse 43a it is a glorified body. The same point is made by Philippians 3:21. Thirdly, in verse 43b it is a body of resurrection power. Fourthly, in verses 44-46 it is a spiritual body. Fifth, in verses 47-49 it is a heavenly body. And sixth, in verse 53 it is also an immortal body.

It is possible that information as to the nature of the new body may be gleaned from a study of the nature of the resurrected body of the Messiah. But here, some caution must be used. This source of information has one major drawback: it is not always easy to determine if what was true of the body of the Messiah was due to His resurrection or due to His deity. Thus, some of the following observations concerning His body could possibly be true of all resurrected bodies. But they may not all be true, for some may be true only because of His divinity. It is known that the Messiah's voice was recognized as being the same as the one He had before His death and resurrection (Jn. 20:16). Also, His physical features were recognized, though not always immediately (Jn. 20:26-29; 21:7). It was a very real body of flesh and bone, not merely a phantom body, in that it was embraceable (Jn. 20:17, 27). The resurrected Messiah was able to suddenly disappear (Lk. 24:31) and go through walls (Jn. 20:19). It was a body that was able to eat food (Lk. 24:41-43). Again, a number of these factors may be true of all resurrected bodies, but whether all these things will be true of the believer's new bodies cannot be known until the Rapture.

Finally, in verses 54-58, the change from corruption to incorruption and from mortality to immortality results in the final victory over death: *But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks*

be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord.

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B. The Timing of the Rapture

The second issue concerning the Rapture is the question, "When will it take place?" The Scriptures clearly teach that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation from several lines of evidence.

The first line of evidence is that there is no biblical passage that discusses the Tribulation in which the Church is mentioned. The fact that saints are found in the Tribulation does not prove that the Church is there any more than the existence of saints in the Old Testament proves that the Church was there. It has already been shown that the Church began on Pentecost with the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Old Testament saints are not part of the Church. In the same way, the existence of saints in the Tribulation does not prove that the Church is there either; not even once are they called the Church. That the Church, as such, is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the Tribulation is especially evident and significant in the Book of the Revelation. The Church is clearly found in chapters 1-3, which deal with the events prior to the Tribulation. Later, the Church is found in chapters 19-22, which deal with events after the Tribulation. But in chapters 6-18, which deal with the Tribulation period itself, not even once is the Church mentioned. This is most unusual in light of the prominence of the Church in those chapters dealing with events prior to and events after the Tribulation. Outside of the Book of Revelation, the fact remains that in no passage dealing with the Tribulation is the Church mentioned. Although this is only an argument from silence, within the structure of the Book of Revelation, it is a powerful case indeed. From the viewpoint of pure exposition, it is impossible for anyone to turn to a Tribulation passage and show that the Church is there.

The second line of evidence is the earliest indication of a Pretribulation Rapture, found in Luke 21:34-37: *But take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare: for so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. And every day he was teaching in the temple; and every night he went out, and lodged in the mount that is called Olivet.*

After describing the terrible events of the Tribulation, Yeshua states in verse 35 that it will come upon *all them that dwell on the face of all the earth*. In other words, no earth dweller can escape the judgments of the Tribulation. The wording of the passage allows for no exceptions: if one is on earth, he cannot escape the cataclysms of the Tribulation. Yet there is a way of escaping all these things that will come to pass in

verse 36, but not by remaining on the earth. In order to be able to prevail to escape all these things, one must be a believer. The means of escaping is *to stand before the Son of man*, a standing that must take place off the earth. That is exactly what happens at the Rapture, as shown from John 14:1-3 and I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Believers are raptured off the earth and stand before the Son of Man.

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The third line of evidence is another specific passage teaching pretribulational deliverance, I Thessalonians 1:9-10: *For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.*

The closing words of this passage are crucial. The Church at Thessalonica was waiting for the return of the Messiah, who was coming to deliver them from *the wrath to come*. The word *wrath* is used of God's general wrath against sin, as in Romans 1:18, and also of the wrath of the Great Tribulation, as in Revelation 6:17; 14:10 and 19; 15:1 and 7; and 16:1. Here, the wrath of God is future; hence, it cannot refer to the general wrath of God against sin, which is a present reality. While Hell and the Lake of Fire are also future, they cannot be what this passage is referring to. By virtue of the believer's salvation, he is already redeemed from Hell. Yeshua is not returning for the purpose of delivering the Church from Hell or the Lake of Fire, for this has already been done at the cross. Thus, the wrath from which the Church is being delivered is the wrath of the Great Tribulation. He is coming for the specific purpose of delivering the Church from *the wrath to come*, namely, the Tribulation period. The believer is guaranteed deliverance from both God's general wrath against sin (Rom. 5:9) and from the Tribulation wrath (I Thes. 1:10).

The fourth line of evidence is another passage dealing with the timing of the Rapture, I Thessalonians 5:1-10: *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that anything be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.*

In verse 9, Paul tells the Church in Thessalonica that they have not been appointed *unto wrath*. The antecedent to the word wrath is found in verse 2: *the day of the Lord*, a term that always refers to the Tribulation. Thus, concerning *the wrath of God* or *the day of the Lord* or the Tribulation, to that day the Church was not appointed. This

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discussion on *the day of the Lord* or the Tribulation immediately follows the discussion of the Rapture in chapter 4:13-18. Thus, the *comfort* in verse 18 involves the fact that these Church believers will not need to go through the period of the Day of the Lord.

Of the various Greek words translated as "but," the term found here is actually two Greek words, *peri de*. This phrase is a Greek contrastive. It means that up to now he has been talking about one subject, now he introduces a new topic. So in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul has been talking about the Rapture. With the *peri de* in 5:1, he has introduced a new topic, which is *the day of the Lord* in verse 2, the period of *wrath* in verse 9. Verse 9 then states that the Church, while not having been appointed to wrath, has been appointed to *the obtaining of salvation*. In verse 8, it is referred to as the *hope of salvation*. The salvation spoken of here is future, so it cannot be soteriological, which is a present reality. The salvation here is eschatological, referring to the redemption of the body that will occur at the Rapture. It is this salvation that the Church has been appointed to, not to *the wrath of the day of the Lord*. Another point to consider in this passage is found in verses 4-8, where there is a contrast aimed to show why the Church, being the children of light, will not need to fear the coming Day of the Lord. In Zephaniah 1:14-18 and Joel 2:1-2 and 10-11, the Day of Jehovah is referred to as a period of darkness and night. The Day of the Lord, characterized by darkness, will come upon the sons of darkness, the unbelievers. But because the believer is *of the day*, the Day of the Lord will not come upon him.

The fifth line of evidence is another key verse dealing with the timing element of the Rapture, Revelation 3:10: *Because you did keep the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*
In this passage, the Church is promised to be kept from the *hour of trial* that is about to fall upon the whole earth. In the context of the Book of Revelation, it is the Tribulation found in chapters 6 19 that is this period of trial that is to fall upon the whole earth. It is from this period of trial that the Church is to be kept. This verse does not say that the Church will be merely kept safe during the trial, but it will be kept from the very hour of trial, that is, from the very time of it. This requires a removal before the Tribulation ever occurs. If Revelation 3:10 means only that the Church will be kept safe during the Tribulation, then something goes terribly wrong. Throughout the Tribulation, saints are being killed on a massive scale (Rev. 6:9-11; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7, 15; 14:13; 17:6; 18:24). If these saints are Church saints, they are not being kept safe and Revelation 3:10 is meaningless. Only if Church saints and Tribulation saints are kept distinct does the promise of Revelation 3:10 make any sense.

These passages of Scripture all state that the Church will be removed before *the wrath* or *the day of the Lord* or the Tribulation comes. The

means of the removal of the Church will be the Rapture. There are a number of other evidences for a Pretribulation Rapture that will be dealt with in another context.

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Another question that needs to be discussed is: "How long before the Tribulation does the Rapture take place?"

The Scriptures teach that the coming of the Messiah for the believer is imminent, that is, He can come at any time or moment. For instance, it is clear from John 21:20-23 that the Messiah could have returned in the days of John the Apostle: *Peter, turning about, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following; who also leaned back on his breast at the supper, and said, Lord, who is he that betrays you? Peter therefore seeing him said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus said unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? Follow you me. This saying therefore went forth among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, that he should not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you?*

In Romans 13:11-12, the redemption of the body is looked upon as being very near: *And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*
The *salvation* here must be viewed as eschatological rather than soteriological, for this salvation is viewed as future. As each day ends, it brings the believer one day closer to the time when the Rapture may occur. Because of this imminency, it is time for believers to awaken out of sleep and to live a life consistent with the position of being *sons of light.*

In James 5:7-9, His coming is viewed as being at the door: *Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: behold, the judge stands before the doors.*
The coming of the Lord is at hand, and the Judge *stands before the doors*. The Messiah's appearance is certainly viewed as imminent.

The closing statements of Yeshua in Revelation 22:20 also point to imminency:*He who testifies these things says, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus.*
While the earlier passages all clearly taught that the Rapture will precede the Tribulation, these last four passages teach that the Rapture is imminent; He could come at any moment. Only if the Rapture comes before the Tribulation can this be true. In Midtribulationism, the Rapture is at least $3^{1/2}$ years away; in Posttribulationism, it is at least seven years away. Hence, it is never

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imminent.

So then, concerning the question of when the Rapture occurs, two things should be noted. First, the Rapture does come before the Tribulation. Since the Tribulation begins with the signing of the Seven-Year Covenant, the very latest point at which the Rapture can occur would be at the time of the signing of the Seven-Year Covenant. Secondly, the Rapture is imminent. It can come at any moment, and it need not wait until the signing of the Seven-Year Covenant. It should be made clear that imminency does not mean "soon." It only means that nothing else must precede it and that it could come at any point of time.

Combining this information, the conclusion is that the Rapture will occur some time between this very moment and the signing of the Seven-Year Covenant. It means that the specific span of time during which the Rapture can occur is any time between right now and the signing of the Seven-Year Covenant. Therefore, the Church may see some more pretribulational events just as it has already seen some. But, depending on exactly at what point the Rapture will occur, it may not see any more.

The relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation must be clearly focused in one's mind. The Rapture precedes the Tribulation, but it does not begin the Tribulation, a fact confused by many Pretribulationists. It is not the Rapture, but the signing of the Seven-Year Covenant that begins the Tribulation. The Rapture will merely come some time before this, and may very well precede the Tribulation by a good number of years.

III. TWO EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The two events subsequent to the Rapture of the Church are: the Judgment Seat of the Messiah and the marriage of the Lamb.

A. The Judgment Seat of the Messiah

The first event will be subdivided into two sections: the judgment itself and the rewards.

1. The Judgment

The Judgment Seat of the Messiah is a judgment of the believer's works, not his sins. Luke 21:34-36 indicates that the result of the Rapture is to *stand before the Son of man*. This particular judgment that will take place in Heaven after the Rapture of the Church is dealt with three passages.

In the first passage, Paul simply points out that such a judgment will take place in Romans 14:10-12: *But you, why do you judge your brother? or you again, why do you set at nought your brother? for we shall all stand before the*

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judgment seat of God. For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, And every tongue shall confess to God. So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

The second passage provides the basis of this judgment in II Corinthians 5:10: *For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad.*
The basis of this judgment will be the believer's works done in the body since he became a believer. It is not the believer's sins that will be judged, since this has been settled forever at the cross, for *there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus* (Rom. 8:1). This is not a question of the believer's sins, but a matter of reward on the basis of the believer's deeds.

The third and the most detailed passage dealing with this judgment is found in I Corinthians 3:10-15. Paul again points out that the basis of the judgment is the works of the believer in verses 10-11: *According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another builds thereon. But let each man take heed how he builds thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*
This judgment is portrayed as building on a foundation that has already been laid, *which is Jesus Christ*; the judgment is based on how one has built on this foundation.

Furthermore, in verse 12 this judgment of works will not be based upon quantity, but upon quality: *But if any man builds on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble.*
It will not be a question as to how much gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stubble there was; but was it gold, silver, and precious stone or was it wood, hay, and stubble? Again, it is a matter of quality, not of quantity. The concern of this judgment is whether or not the believer followed what God's will was for him. If a believer is doing the will of the Lord by obeying His commandments and fulfilling the ministry for which he received his spiritual gifts, then he is building on this foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones. But where he falls short of these things, he is building on this foundation with wood, hay, and stubble. While the believer's sins themselves are not brought out in this judgment, they do play an indirect role. During the period of time a believer is living in a state of unconfessed sin, he is building with wood, hay, and stubble, not with gold, silver, and precious stones. Thus, there are severe consequences for a believer to be living in sin, consequences that will last for the one thousand years of the Kingdom period.

The means of testing is said to be fire in verse 13: *each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is.*
When fire is applied to wood, hay, or stubble, it is burned up and only

ashes remain. But when fire is applied to gold, silver, or precious stones, these elements are refined and they become more pure. Again, the means of testing shows that it is a matter of quality, not quantity. Regardless of how little or how much wood, hay, or stubble there may be, fire burns them all. Regardless of how much gold, silver, or precious stones there may be, fire refines them all. So some believers will find all their works burned up, while others will see them merely refined.

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Finally, the results of the judgment are given in verses 14-15: *If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire.*
In verse 14, those who build with gold, silver, and precious stones will find their works not only remaining, but purified after the fire has been applied. Consequently, they will receive a reward. In verse 15, Paul states the result of those who have built with wood, hay, and stubble. All of their works will be burned up. Hence, *he shall suffer loss*. But the loss is merely one of rewards and authority, nothing more. He will not be punished for his sins any more than a runner in a race is punished for not coming in first, but he does lose out on his reward. Lest anyone conclude that a believer loses his salvation, the text states in no uncertain terms that *he himself shall be saved*. His works do not determine his salvation; his salvation is assured because he trusted in the Messiahship of Jesus; and a believer's salvation is by grace through faith apart from works. But he will spend the Kingdom period with nothing to show for his spiritual life.

2. The Rewards

This passage says nothing about the nature of the reward, but other passages speak of these rewards as being crowns. The Greek language has two words meaning "crown." One is the word *diadem*, which is a king's crown, the crown of a sovereign, a person who is royal by his nature and by his position. This is the kind of crown that Jesus wears. The second Greek word translated "crown" is *stephanos*, a crown given to an overcomer, a victor, one who has won a race. This kind of crown is available to believers because they overcame in the spiritual warfare and are now crowned at the Judgment Seat of the Messiah. There are five such crowns mentioned in the Scriptures.

The first crown is called the incorruptible crown in I Corinthians 9:24- 25: *Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. And every man that strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*
This crown is given to those who exercise *self-control* and gain the mastery and victory in the spiritual life. It is for those who have gained the victory over the "old man" or the sin-nature. It is for those who have learned to live a Spirit-controlled life.

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The second crown is called the crown of rejoicing in I Thessalonians 2:19: *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming?*
This crown is given to those who win souls for Yeshua the Messiah. It is a crown available to all those who do the work of evangelism and the fruit of their labors is seen in people coming to the Lord through them.

The third crown is called the *crown of righteousness* in II Timothy 4:7 - 8: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing.*
This is a crown for those who have kept the faith both doctrinally and morally in spite of adverse circumstances. It is a crown given to those who *have loved his appearing*, those who look longingly for the return of the Messiah. Looking for His return is the result of sound doctrine and keeping the faith. A life lived in conformity with the New Testament will include the expectation of the soon return of the Lord. For such, there is a *crown of righteousness.*

The fourth crown, called the *crown of life*, is mentioned in two passages. First, it is a crown for those who endure trials in James 1:12: *Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him.*

Secondly, it is given to those who suffer martyrdom for their faith in Revelation 2:10: *Fear not the things which you are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be you faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Finally, the fifth crown is the *crown of glory*, mentioned in I Peter 5:2-4: *Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fades not away.*
This crown is for faithfully feeding the *flock of God*. It is available to those pastors, elders, and others who feed the sheep with the "milk" and "meat" of the Word of God.

There may be other crowns available, but these are the only ones referred to in the Scriptures. At least these five are available to those whose works remain; those works built of gold, silver, and precious stones.

The purpose of these rewards of crowns is to determine the degree of authority in the Messianic Kingdom, not for the Eternal Order. In eternity, all believers will be equal, but this is not so in the Messianic

Kingdom, where believers may have different positions of authority. This truth is found in parabolic form in Luke 19:11-27.

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B. The Marriage of the Lamb

The second event subsequent to the Rapture of the Church is the Marriage of the Lamb. To fully understand what is involved at the Marriage of the Lamb, one must first understand the background of the Jewish marriage system as it was practiced in that day. Four distinct steps make up this system.

First, the father of the groom made the arrangements for the marriage and paid the bride price. The timing of the arrangement varied. Sometimes it occurred when both children were small. At other times, it was a year before the marriage itself. Often the bride and groom did not even meet until their wedding day.

The second step, which could have occurred a year or more after the first step, was the fetching of the bride. The bridegroom would go to the home of the bride in order to bring her to his home. In connection with this step, two other things should be noted. First, it was the father of the groom who determined the timing. Secondly, prior to the groom's leaving to fetch the bride, he must have a place already prepared for her as their abode.

This was followed by the third step, the wedding ceremony, to which a few would be invited. Prior to the wedding ceremony, the bride underwent a ritual immersion for ritual cleansing.

The fourth step, the marriage feast, would follow and could last for as long as seven days. Many more people would be invited to the feast than to the marriage ceremony.

In the Marriage of the Lamb, all four steps of the Jewish marriage system are evident. First, God the Father made the arrangements for His Son and paid the bride price, which in this case was the blood of the Messiah. This is the background for the statement in Ephesians 5:25-27:*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*
Just as a long period of time often transpired between the first and the second steps of the Jewish marriage system, this has been the case here. Almost two thousand years have now passed since the first step occurred. But in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, which was discussed in connection with the events of the Rapture, the second step will occur. The Rapture corresponds to the fetching of the Bride. Yeshua will come in the air in order to fetch His Bride to His home in Heaven. Only God the Father knows the timing of this event (Mat. 24:36). Furthermore, it will only happen once the place of residence has been prepared (Jn. 14:1-3).

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In Heaven, the third step will take place. This is the marriage ceremony given in Revelation 19:6-8: *And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

The marriage ceremony takes place in Heaven and involves the Church. That it must take place after the Judgment Seat of the Messiah is evident from verse 8, for the Bride is viewed as being dressed in *fine linen*, which is *the righteous acts of the saints*. This means that all the wood, hay, and stubble have been burned away and all the gold, silver, and precious stones have been purified. The Judgment Seat of the Messiah corresponds to the Jewish practice of the ritual cleansing of the Bride. Thus, following the Rapture of the Church in which the Bridegroom brings the Bride with Him to His home in Heaven, and following the Judgment Seat of the Messiah, which results in the Bride having the white linen garments, the wedding ceremony takes place before the actual Second Coming of the Messiah.

In the context of Revelation 19, verses 1-10 describe events in Heaven prior to the Second Coming, while verses 11-21 describe the Second Coming and subsequent events. What should be carefully noted here is that the Church is already in Heaven before the Second Coming. Furthermore, the Church has been in Heaven long enough to undergo the Judgment Seat of the Messiah. This clearly means that the Rapture and the Second Coming cannot be the same thing, but must be separated by some duration of time. Previously, passages have been cited to show that the Rapture must come before the Tribulation begins. Revelation 19:6-8 is further evidence of this.

The marriage ceremony will take place in Heaven after the Rapture and before the Second Coming, and involves only the Church saints.

The fourth step, the marriage feast, will take place on earth after the Second Coming, and with the feast, the Messianic Kingdom will begin. For that reason, some of the Messiah's Kingdom parables were in reference to the marriage feast (Mat. 22:1-14; 25:1-13). Whereas the marriage ceremony involves only the Church, the marriage feast will include the Old Testament saints and the Tribulation saints. It is clear from the Scriptures that the Old Testament saints are not resurrected with the Church saints before the Tribulation, but rather, they are resurrected with the Tribulation saints after the Tribulation; that is, after the Second Coming. This is seen in Daniel 12:2, which describes the resurrection of the Old Testament saints, but the timing of Daniel 12:2 is after the events of the Tribulation, about which he has been speaking since Daniel 11:36.

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The invitation has already gone out in Revelation 19:9: *And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are true words of God.*
The result of the invitation is their resurrection and the wedding feast, which will last at least seven days, and will either conclude the Seventy- five Day Interval, or perhaps the more likely scenario is that it will inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom itself for the first seven days, since the wedding feast parable was connected with the Kingdom.

One such wedding feast parable is found in Matthew 22:1-14: *And Jesus answered and spoke again in parables unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.Then said he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment: and he said unto him, Friend, how came you in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few chosen.*
The point of this parable is that those who were originally bidden to the wedding feast, the Pharisees and the Jewish generation of Yeshua's day, will not partake of the feast, the Kingdom, due to their commitment of the unpardonable sin. However, the Jews of the Tribulation generation will. But this will include only believers; the unbelievers will be cast *into outer darkness* and excluded from the Messianic Kingdom. This parable deals with Jews who will or will not enter the Kingdom.

A second parable is in Matthew 25:1-13: *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom*

came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

The contrast here is not between two types of believers, but between believers and unbelievers. The believers are the wise virgins who have oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, while the unbelievers are the foolish virgins who *take no oil with them*. Thus, the foolish ones were excluded from the marriage feast, the Messianic Kingdom, for the Lord *knew them not*, while the wise virgins *went with him to the marriage feast.* Based on the application of the parable given in Matthew 25:31-46, these two sets of virgins represent believing and unbelieving Gentiles in the Tribulation. This parable deals with Gentiles who will or will not enter the Kingdom.

Isaiah also connects a feast with the Kingdom and with a resurrection from the dead in Isaiah 25:6-8: *And in this mountain will Jehovah of hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He has swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of his people will he take away from off all the earth: for Jehovah has spoken it.*

In a sense, then, there will be a double wedding feast: one for the Church as the Bride of the Messiah and one for Israel as the remarried Wife of Jehovah.

One more thing to note in regard to the Jewish marriage system is that John the Baptist referred to himself in a very unique way. In John 3:27 -30, John denied being two things: first, he denied being the groom because he was not the Messiah. Secondly, he also denied being the Bride or part of the Bride. Instead, John the Baptist classified himself to be in a third category, which was the friend of the bridegroom. As the *friend of the bridegroom*, he did not consider himself to be a member of the Bride of the Messiah, the Church. Since John is the last of the Old Testament prophets, we can understand from this exactly where the Old Testament saints will fit along with the Tribulation saints. They are "the friends of the bridegroom," and they are the many who *are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb* by Revelation 19:9.✡

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