

## MISTAKES 23,24 AND 25

### THREE MISTAKES ARE MADE IN FINDING A PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE IN REVELATION 4:1-2

There are three statements in Revelation 4:1-2 that are commonly used as evidence of a pre-tribulational rapture of the church. We will look at each of them and discover why they should not be used in this respect.

The passage in question reads as follows:

After these things I looked, and there was a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said: “Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things.” Immediately I was in the Spirit, and a throne was standing in heaven with someone seated on it! (Revelation 4:1-2 NET).

#### THE THREE MISTAKES

In Revelation 4:1 the Greek words *meta tauta*, translated, “after these things,” is used twice. It is found once at the beginning of the verse and a second time at the end. It has been claimed that each usage provides support for a pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

There is also John hearing the voice like a trumpet that tells him to come up to heaven and he is immediately found in the heaven. This is also used as confirmation of a pre-tribulation rapture.

However, none of the three give biblical evidence that Christ will come for believers before the final seven-year period, the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, the time of Jacob’s trouble, or the more popular but less precise term, the Great Tribulation.

#### THE ARGUMENTS FOR A PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE FROM THESE VERSES

With respect to the first use of this phrase, “after these things,” in Revelation 4:1 the argument is usually as follows:

The second and third chapters of Revelation record the letters of Jesus Christ to seven churches in first century Asia Minor. It is argued that beginning with Revelation 4 we have a major change of subject indicated by the phrase, “after these things.” The new subject now concerns the future.

Often this is coupled with the idea that the seven churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3 are prophetic of seven periods of church history. Therefore, after the mention of the last church, Laodicea, which is assumed to be the apostate church at the time of the end, the church age is complete. Hence, “after the things” which begins verse 1 is speaking of events that will occur *after* the church age is over.

#### THE SECOND USE OF META TAUTA

This is supposedly confirmed by the second use of the same phrase *meta tauta* at the end of the verse, “Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things. These future events are “necessary to take place,” or “must happen,” *after* these things just mentioned, namely when the church is on the earth.

Again, it is understood that Scripture is now dealing with future events after the church age is over. To the point, the church, the true believers in Christ, is no longer on the earth because the rapture of the church has taken place.

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This second use of statement is also seen at referring back to Revelation 1:19 where we find the same phrase. It reads as follows:

Therefore write what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things (Revelation 1:19 NET).

This verse is often claimed to be the threefold outline of the Book of Revelation, things what John saw, the things that were presently occurring, and then what will happen after these things, the future.

The following connection is then made:

If Revelation 1:19 is God's inspired outline of this book, then Revelation 4 ushers us into the third division: "the things which shall be hereafter." In fact, that is exactly what God said to John when He summoned him to heaven! It would appear that, in this experience, John illustrates what will happen to God's people when the church age has run its course: Heaven will open; there will be a voice and the sound of a trumpet; and the saints will be caught up to heaven (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, God's judgment of the earth can begin (Arno C. Gaebelein, *Revelation, Believers Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson, 1989)

Harry Ironside concurs:

The opening verse begins the third great division of this book—"the things which shall be after these things," the stirring panorama of wonders, both heavenly and earthly, that must take place after the church's history is ended. From the close of chapter 3, we never see the church on earth again throughout the rest of this solemn book. We read of "saints," but they are distinct altogether from the church of the current dispensation. Israel comes into view, as does a great multitude of spared Gentiles who are saved out of the Great Tribulation, but there is no church, no body of Christ, no bride of the Lamb any more upon the earth!

The fact is patent enough for every careful reader to notice it. What is its explanation? Simply this, I believe: we must understand the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as transpiring between chapter 3 and chapter 4. Of this, the rapture of the apostle is the symbol (Harry Ironside, *Revelation*, Ironside Expository Commentaries, Kregel Publishers, Public Domain)

Ironside's statement "I believe we must understand the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as transpiring between chapter 3 and chapter 4" basically sums up the argument. The third division of the book, the things that are to come after these things, is now introduced.

### **JOHN BEING CAUGHT UP TO HEAVEN**

The third line of evidence for the pre-tribulational rapture in these verses is found in what happens with John. He, as a picture of the church, is immediately caught up to heaven:

A.C. Gaebelein explains it in this manner:

The scene changes suddenly. We are no longer on earth but are transported into heaven. The true church is gone and the apostate Church while still on earth to pass into the judgments of the great tribulation, is no longer owned by the Lord and therefore not mentioned. That is why the word "church" disappears entirely from this book after the third chapter. The open door and the voice which calls "come up hither" and John's presence in glory in the spirit, clearly indicate symbolically the fulfillment of 1 Thess. iv: 15-17. (A. C. Gaebelein, *The Revelation: An Analysis and Exposition of the Last Book of the Bible* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1915), p. 44)

In other words, John has already given us the outline of the Book of Revelation in the first chapter, now it is confirmed in Revelation 4:1-2. One Bible commentary put it this way:

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John saw a door ... open in heaven and heard a voice inviting him, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. The words “what must take place after this” are similar to those in 1:19, “what will take place later.” Whereas 1:19 indicates that the events will take place later, in 4:1b the Greek word *dei* is used, which means that the events must occur. This points not only to the future but also to the sovereign purpose of God. The similarity of the two expressions confirms the threefold chronological outline given in 1:19. Both the revelation and its fulfillment are chronologically subsequent to chapters 1-3 (John Walvoord, *Revelation, The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Therefore, the use of “after these things” twice in verse one, and then the voice calling John to come up, and then his arrival in heaven, are all seen as evidence that the church, the true believers in Jesus Christ, are in heaven during this period that begins with Revelation 6, the Great Tribulation.

To sum up, John gave the outline of the Book of Revelation in 1:19: the book contains the things that have already happened, things that were happening when John lived, and things that will happen in the future. The use of “after these things” in 4:1 is referring to those future events.

Warren Wiersbe concludes:

If Revelation 1:19 is God’s inspired outline of this book, then Revelation 4 ushers us into the third division: “the things which shall be hereafter.” In fact, that is exactly what God said to John when He summoned him to heaven! It would appear that, in this experience, John illustrates what will happen to God’s people when the church age has run its course: Heaven will open; there will be a voice and the sound of a trumpet; and the saints will be caught up to heaven (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, God’s judgment of the earth can begin (Warren Wiersbe, *Revelation*, BE 1985, David C. Cook)

This sums up the three basic arguments as to why Revelation 4:1-2 gives evidence to the pre-tribulational rapture.

### **RESPONSE: THE ARGUMENTS ARE NOT CONVINCING**

While there are a number of excellent commentators who understand Revelation 4:1-2 in this manner, their arguments claiming the rapture in the words “after these things” used twice in Revelation 4:1, and John being caught up into heaven as a picture of the rapture, Revelation 4:2, are unconvincing.

We can make the following observations.

#### **OBSERVATION 1 MANY PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE ADVOCATES REJECT THESE ARGUMENTS**

To begin with, there are a number of Bible commentators who do not see the words *meta tauta* used in 4:1 as referring to the rapture of the church happening immediately after the church age is over. Neither do they believe that John being taken up to heaven is a picture of the rapture of the church.

This includes people who believe there will be a rapture, and that it will take place before the final seven year period. However, they assert that Revelation 4:1-2 is not one of the passages that should be used to support a pre-tribulation rapture. This is our position here.

#### **OBSERVATION 2 META TAUTA REFERS TO THE SEQUENCE OF JOHN’S VISIONS**

The first use of *meta tauta* in 4:1, after these things, is referring to the sequence of the visions that John had received. Instead of referring to future events, it is merely telling us what took place next in his experience in receiving God’s revelation of the future. Albert Barnes explains:

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After this. Gr., “after these things;” that is, after what he had seen, and after what he had been directed to record in the preceding chapters (Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes, Revelation)

In its explanation of *meta tauta* the Baylor Handbook of the Greek New Testament concurs:

The antecedent ... is ... the seven messages of Rev 2–3, perhaps also including Rev 1. The main function of ... is to indicate visionary sequence, not that the events of Rev 4–5 took place chronologically after Rev 1–3 (David L. Mathewson, *Revelation, A Handbook on the Greek Text*, © 2016 by Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas 76798).

In fact, when phrase *meta tauta* occurs throughout the Book of Revelation (4:1; 7:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1), in each of these instances, it always denotes a new vision, a sudden change in the content. It is never used to refer to future ages or to some future time period. A number of Bible commentaries make this point:

“After these things I looked” is a clause that, with variations, introduces a new vision each time it occurs in Revelation (cf. 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). (Thomas Constable, *Revelation, Expository Notes*, 2014).

After this I looked is a formula which, with slight variants, always in this book introduces a new vision (7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; cf. 19:1) (Leon Morris, *Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentary INTERVARSITY PRESS, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515, 1987*).

Robert Thomas, a staunch proponent of the pre-tribulation rapture concurs:

The former occurrence of the phrase *meta tauta*... in verse 1 denotes the sequence in John’s receipt of the revelation. It marks the beginning of a new vision as it does a number of times in the book... It is true that the sequence of visions given to John may coincide with the sequence of events they predict...but whenever *meta tauta* is followed by ... I saw... John’s primary reference is to the beginning of a new vision (Robert Thomas, *Revelation, Moody Press, Volume 1, 1-7, p. 333*).

### **OBSERVATION 3 REVELATION 2 AND 3 ARE NOT PROPHETIC OF SEVEN AGES OF THE CHURCH**

There is a major problem with believing that the pre-tribulation rapture occurs in these verses. Indeed, the idea that the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are prophetic of seven time periods in the history of the church is not a biblical teaching.

In fact, there is nothing whatsoever to indicate that Revelation 2-3 is speaking about the prophetic future of the entire church age.

We explain why this is not the case in one of our other common “mistakes” that we are clearing up (The seven churches of Revelation 2-3 are not predicting seven periods of church history).

### **OBSERVATION 4 JOHN BEING CAUGHT UP TO HEAVEN: NOT EVIDENCE OF A PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE**

The third argument that should not be used to support a pre-tribulational rapture of the Church has to do with John being “caught up” to heaven:

The Illustrated Bible Background Commentary makes some important observations about the concept of “doors” in Revelation:

Doors play a prominent role in the final two messages to the churches. While Jesus himself provides the open door for the church in Philadelphia (3:8), the Laodiceans are required to open the door to fellowship

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with him (3:20). This image provides a thematic transition to the next section of the book. John's next vision shares many elements with Ezekiel's initial vision, which also begins with heaven being opened (Ezek. 1:1). Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this (4:1) (Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)

As they indicate, the "door" image provides a thematic transition to the next section of the book. It has nothing to do with believers being caught up in the "rapture of the church."

Robert Thomas, who is an advocate for a pre-tribulation rapture, admits this and concludes the following:

This summons is best understood as an invitation for John to assume a new vantage point for the sake of the revelation he was about to receive (Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, Moody Press, Volume 1, 1-7, p.).

Other Bible commentators, who believes in a pre-tribulation rapture, likewise do not see the rapture in this verse:

While the present commentator holds to the view that the church does not enter the tribulation period and is taken from the world prior to the outbreak of the events described in the tribulation, he does not agree with other dispensational interpreters that any evidence of that can be found in 4:1 (...Endorsing the rapture of the church as prior to the tribulation should be done on the basis of passages other than 4:1. At most, 4:1 may be seen as John's personal visionary experience of what will happen to the church when the Lord returns. To read more than that into the verse would be to miss the point intended here, namely, that John is transported in his vision from the island of Patmos and the things of the churches into the presence of the heavenly throne room so that he can be prepared for the unfolding of the events that will transpire on earth during the great tribulation (Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary, Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 2012).

The Moody Bible commentary, which also supports a pre-trib. rapture, agrees:

Some see "Come up here" as a reference to a pretribulational rapture of the Church. It is better understood as God's call to John to behold the next vision (see 6:1, 3, 5, 7). He was invited to look through a door in heaven to see events that were yet future (Daniel Green, *Revelation*, Moody Commentary, Chicago, Moody Press).

Keith Essex sums up the problems that are connected with these arguments of the rapture being found in this context:

**The Proposal.** The first use of "after these things" refers to this event as being after the church age. The mention of heaven, a voice, and a trumpet (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18) with the command to "come up here [to heaven]" and John's entrance into heaven points to this event being the rapture. Thus the rapture is between the end of the church age and the beginning of the tribulation.

**Evaluation.** The evidence points to this being a statement of John's personal experience in the first century and not the church's future experience. The expression "after these things" marks the beginning of a new vision for John (cf. 7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

According to 1:10, the first voice like a trumpet that John heard was the voice of Jesus Himself (1:12–16); therefore, the voice referred to here is that of Jesus, not that of the archangel at the rapture, John is summoned by Jesus to heaven to receive revelation of future events. This occurs "in the spirit"; John is transported spiritually to heaven while his body remains on Patmos (Keith Essex *Masters Seminary Journal* 13:2, Fall 2002, p. 229).

Other commentators come to the same conclusion:

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In conclusion, it seems that unless one is specifically seeking the rapture of the Church before the Great Tribulation, Revelation 4:1-2 does not naturally lend itself to such an interpretation. In this context, it is best to interpret the passage as the sole experience of John in the ecstatic spiritual state in which he receives his visions. Christ will show John “what must take place after this,” meaning what God will reveal after the throne-room vision of Revelation 4–5 (J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation, Teach The Text*, 2013).

Merrill Tenney writes:

There is no convincing reason why the seer’s being ‘in the Spirit’ and being called to heaven typifies the rapture of the church any more than his being taken into the wilderness to view Babylon [17:3] indicates that the church is there in exile (Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957 p. 141).

### SUMMARY

We conclude that none of these three common arguments which are used to claim a pre-tribulational rapture in Revelation 4:1-2 are convincing.

While there is a major break between the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, the first use of *meta tauta* in Revelation 4:1 is merely a reference to the next vision that John would receive after these previous ones. Simply put, the phrase signifies a sequence, moving on from what was previously mentioned to what follows in the order of time. It has nothing to do with the end of seven prophetic periods of the church.

The second use of *meta tauta* in verse 1 is not merely referring to the sequence in which John received the visions, as in the first instance the phrase is used, rather it speaks of a future time frame. This will eventually include the coming of Lord Jesus to set up His kingdom upon the earth (Revelation 19). However, this second use of the phrase neither says, or infers, anything about the rapture of the church or of its timing.

Finally, John being caught up to heaven is the experience of one individual. It was for the purpose of getting a vantage point from heaven to view the last days events that will take place in our world. Again, nothing is said, or inferred, about the rapture of the church taking place at the time of him being taken up.

To the contrary, it is describing in normal language the authentic experience of the Apostle John in receiving this prophetic vision from the Lord Jesus Christ. It is absolutely not pointing to some future event for believers.

In sum, the author certainly believes in a pre-tribulation rapture and has documented it elsewhere (*The Rapture, The Pre-Trib Rapture Defended* a free download on our website [educatingourworld.com](http://educatingourworld.com) under the heading of *Bible Prophecy*).

However, these three common arguments from Revelation 4:1-2 should not be used to support the pre-trib. position. Indeed, it is a mistake to do so.