

## Setting the Table

### *Selected Scripture*

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    - 2. The observer does not understand what he is seeing, so it is difficult to describe.
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- IV. The rapture of the church.
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    - 1. The word “rapture” is not found in scripture.

- a. Rapture = A “snatching away”, a removal.
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- C. The rapture prophesied.
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    - 1. 6:10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20; 19:20.
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**“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” John 3:36**

## Setting the Table

### *Selected Scripture*

Your bulletin says we will be looking at the seven seals: the four horsemen...Revelation 6

Earlier this week I had breakfast with Dr. Rice... we talked about this passage... He said “*you won’t even get through the first horse on Sunday!*”...I’m happy to prove him wrong... I’m not even going to get to the first horse this morning!...this may be a strange message this morning.

I thought I was finished with my message on Friday...but I wasn’t settled with it... had I been we’d get through all four horses this morning!... I woke up Saturday morning and I felt as though **I’ve got a lot of table setting to do before we dine on this passage!**...

So I will be throwing out all kinds of stuff this morning to help us get ready for not only this passage but the rest of this incredible book of Revelation.

We’ve arrived at the gate of apocalyptic Bible literature!... the place where you read the passage and ask “*what in the world was all that about?*... and it won’t get any easier for a long time!...Welcome!... Chapters 4 through 18 comprise the reason most people don’t read the entire book of Revelation.

Not only are the images difficult to understand... when you seek help in understanding them, you often find more confusion... for there are a plethora of interpretations and explanations that only add more confusion. ...as I’ve said before... I have many commentaries on Revelation and no two agree with each other on everything... some on anything.

So we must come to this book in humility... We must be careful of being overly dogmatic about our views... And yet... how we read and understand Revelation will affect just about all areas of our spiritual lives... it affects how we worship... how we view salvation... the lost... how or IF we do missions... whether we should whistle a happy tune or be scared out of our britches!

When we see that in the evangelical world there are many views...opposing views from serious Bible students...big disagreements on any biblical topic... we should stop and ask why?... Is it because the Bible is not 100% clear?... is it because God wants to keep some of it a mystery?...is it God’s way on getting us to dig deeper and deeper?... Is it God’s way to have us walk by faith?

There’s truth in all those...

The book of Revelation is a genre called Apocalyptic Bible literature...In fact... the Greek word for Revelation is *apokalupsis*...where we get the word Apocalypse... meaning a “revealing” or

an “uncovering”...Revelation is an unveiling of events leading to the end of the age... the end of the world...the end of time... the end of the earth as we know it...

Apocalyptic Bible literature is difficult to understand....for many reasons:

- It uses symbols and imagery that are often “otherworldly”...
- Some of the strangeness of apocalyptic literature stems from the difficulty of explaining events that the observer...in this case simply did not understand...so he says that things are “like”... “like”
- Perhaps the writer’s visions really were as unusual as they are described.
- Another reason for the strangeness is the subject matter itself. By necessity, “the end of the world” is going to involve abnormal events....especially since it involves judgement from God.
- More than likely, whatever visions an apocalyptic writer had were literal visions, faithfully recorded...John actually saw what he describes... but the visions themselves were conveyed metaphorically. That is, God chose to show the writers symbols rather than literal people or things...Chapter 6 I think is an example of this... with the four horsemen.

So...Don’t be afraid!...we’re going to hold hands and go through this together...metaphorically.

### **We can diminish our confusion by how we interpret Scripture in general...**

*Normal interpretation* of Scripture means that unless the verse or passage clearly indicates the author was using figurative language...which is true in Revelation..., it should be understood in its normal sense. .... That is a difficult task in Revelation.

We are not going to look for other meanings if the natural meaning of the sentence makes sense. Also, we are not to spiritualize Scripture by assigning meanings to words or phrases when it is clear the author, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, meant it to be understood as it is written.

One example we will see in several months...year... is Revelation 20. We are told that Jesus will return...and reign for a “**thousand years**”... Many will assign various meanings to references to a thousand-year period. Many claim the 1000 year reign of Christ is allegory ...not to be taken as literal... some say it’s already happened...and it wasn’t a measurement of time... just figurative language...it all was completed back in 70ad at the fall of Jerusalem...

Some say that we’re in it... and have been in the millennium for *two* millennium...we’ve been in the 1000 year reign of Christ for 2000 years !

Yet, the language does not imply in any way that the references to the thousand years should be taken to mean anything other than a literal period of one thousand years.

So a “*Normal reading*” of Revelation 20 is that there will be a literal 1000 year millennial reign of Jesus Christ here on earth after His second coming....Satan will be bound for that thousand

years... Jesus will reign with His church for a thousand years.... And when the thousand years are finished... the Great White Throne of judgement... the new heaven and new earth...the New Jerusalem...literally!

So...I take a “normal interpretation” approach to these difficult passages...as I do the entire Bible....recognizing there are many symbols, metaphors, visions.

We’ve referred to the simple outline for the book of Revelation found in chapter 1:19...those who take Revelation as allegorical do not accept this outline in a straight forward sense....I don’t see any other way to read these words other than the *normal reading*...

The risen and exalted Christ is speaking to John. Christ tells John to "**write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.**" ...It is all straight forward and there’s no reason to not take it literally...

The things John had already **seen** are recorded in chapter 1. The "**things which are**" (that were present in John's day....all the way up to our day... we call this the church age...) are recorded in chapters 2-3 (the letters to the churches). The "**things that will take place**" (future things) are recorded in chapters 4-22.

We’ve entered that period...That’s where we are this morning...everything that remains in Revelation is in the future...I do not see any reason to not see it that way...

Something else... I feel as though I should address what is called the *rapture of the church*...some of you have wondered where the rapture is in Revelation... and since it is not specifically found or mentioned in Revelation...

And in that the Bible nowhere mentions the word “rapture” some have wondered if the idea of a rapture is man’s invention...some of you may be in that camp... To reject the rapture is a popular activity these days... Over the years I’ve challenged myself in my belief and acceptance of a rapture of the church...

I’ve tried to be convinced of the *preterist* view... the *amillennial* view...which do not embrace a rapture of the church...NOR A NORMAL READING OF REVELATION...they embrace allegory... even the *no-rapture premillennial* view...but in that I embrace a “*Normal Reading*”... a more literal reading of Scripture...I keep convinced of a literal rapture of the church... which could happen at anytime.

And since I’m the one preaching through Revelation... you’ll have to put up with it!... I hope!

Even though I've been mocked, and been made fun of...nearly tarred and feathered as being an ignorant simpleton and accused of getting my theology from the *Left Behind* series while having coffee at Bucer's... I hold fast to my rapture!

So... quickly...quickly means the rest of this morning... so much *could* be said...but this does have a bearing on what is happening the rest of Revelation...I personally would rather not be on planet earth during the next 15 chapters!...

A side note... it's ok if you disagree with me on this...even though at present I am convinced of the rapture... the rapture is a secondary issue...we should not break fellowship over our views of the rapture... and most things end times for that matter...

I like what the late Dr. Michael Heiser said regarding eschatological views and matters... He said *I don't care what you believe... as long as you know WHY you believe it...* that implies that if you know why you believe it... you have poured over Scripture to come to your conclusion... *and if you do that... you'll believe in the rapture of the church!*

True... the word rapture is not found in our English Bibles... The term comes from a Latin word meaning "*a carrying off, a transport, or a snatching away.*" ...and that *is* in the Bible...

The rapture of the church [**church**...not talking about 711 Fairview drive...though I hope we are a part of the church...the church being all believers...the body of Christ]... is the event in which God "snatches away" all believers from the earth in order to make way for ***His righteous judgment to be poured out on the earth...His wrath...***this period of tribulation.

Some argue this period is only God's judgement not His wrath... that the two are different things... some have made a distinction that God's wrath is His eternal punishment while Judgement is His ongoing verdict...Judgement happens throughout the tribulation but wrath only after the second coming of Jesus Christ... the Great White Throne of Judgment.

But six times the word Wrath... the wrath of God is used to describe what happens in this tribulation period... judgement and wrath.

Which is where we are beginning in chapter 6 and will be all the way to chapter 18 of Revelation...a period we call *the* tribulation.... In John 16:33 Jesus says to His disciples

**33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart! I have overcome the world."**

Tribulation there simply means "trouble"... fact of life... in this world you will have trouble... tribulation...probably some every day... But in Revelation ...tribulation refers to a specific time of trouble... trouble like the world has never seen before...

Prophesied as far back as Deuteronomy 4:30 **When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice.**

In the last days there will be a great tribulation...The prophet Zephaniah prophesied...**“That day will be a day of wrath— a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness— a day of trumpet and battle cry”** (Zephaniah 1:15–16).

Matthew 24 says... **21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.**

We need a rapture!

The rapture is described primarily in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50–54...when does this happen?... Romans 11 tells us **“when the fullness of gentiles has come in”** meaning when the last gentile that’s going to accept Christ, accepts Christ...when the church is full...

God’s been patient... He wants all to come to Him... 1 Timothy 2:4... {God} **who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** When the last one that will acknowledge the truth... acknowledges *the* truth... That’s when Jesus will rapture the church....

We don’t know who that person is... it may be very close... it may not be... keep praying for your unsaved friends and family! Share the gospel!... this could happen at any time....nothing else needs to happen for the rapture to come.

God will resurrect all believers *who have died*, give them glorified bodies, and take them from the earth, along with all living believers, who will also be given glorified bodies at that time. The rapture will involve an instantaneous transformation of our bodies to fit us for eternity. **“We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”** (1 John 3:2).

Some believers in the early church at Thessaloniki were worried about their dead family members and Christian friends who had died.... *Would they miss the coming of Christ?*... So Paul writes 1 Thessalonians 4 to comfort them.

**13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the**

trumpet of God, **and the dead in Christ will rise first.** 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be **caught up together** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**

How can you be comforted if you are waiting for the tribulation?

Notice we are **caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds**... we go to Him... He doesn't come to the earth to meet up with us... He takes us out!

This passage tells us there will be **a specific time** when Jesus will return and snatch His church from the earth...**there is comfort in these words**... why?...if you are in Christ you won't experience the coming wrath of God!...the judgement that will be released on the entire world at the tribulation.

Are there other reasons to accept a rapture?

**1.** Relevant to the book of Revelation is the fact that the church is very, very important in the first three chapters... 19 times the church is mentioned in these three chapters...we spent weeks looking at chapters 2 and 3... the seven letters to the seven churches...

But when chapter 4 begins... the church is not mentioned again until chapter 19... when Jesus returns in all His glory to earth... with His Saints...the church...those chapters are completely silent regarding anything about the church...

No instruction to the church... what it should do what it shouldn't do...how it should view the tribulation... how it should navigate through the tribulation...NOTHING!... everything in the New Testament is directed to the church... the body of Christ... all the epistles... from Paul, John. Peter.... All instruct the church....how it is to be... but not through the most wretched time in all history?

Why would instruction to the church end at the precipice of the greatest judgement the earth has ever seen? It is a very conspicuous absence!...and why is the church not mentioned during the 15 chapters which contain the Great Tribulation?....I believe it's because it is not there!

**2.** More support...after Paul tells of this rapture of the church in chapter 4 of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians... He encourages his church by telling them that when the Day of the Lord Comes... referring to the Tribulation period...

Because of their **faith and love**... and their salvation in the Lord... they do not need to worry about the Day of the Lord... God's wrath...1 Thessalonians 5:9 ...Paul writes... **God has not appointed us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.** **Therefore comfort one another and build up one another, just as you are also doing...**

Earlier in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Paul writes...1 Thessalonians 1:10 ...**wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.**



He takes us out... He saves us from going through it.

3. Remember Revelation 3:10?...Jesus is talking to His church in Philadelphia... remember the church at Philadelphia and the church at Smyrna were the only churches of the seven which Jesus was well pleased... had nothing against them... they were pure churches.

Remember what Jesus said to the church at Philadelphia?... **Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**

Tribulation was right around the corner!...*you kept your word... you are mine...I will keep you from the hour of testing...*

This is not some general statement... Jesus is talking about a specific time... **the hour of testing**....a specific time of testing that is coming to the entire world.... *I will keep you from the hour of testing...*

4. John 14... Jesus says **Do not let your heart be troubled...** If I thought I was going through the tribulation I would have a hard time not having a troubled heart!... especially if I had an advanced copy of the book of Revelation!...

But listen to what Jesus says to comfort His disciples...

**“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go...Jesus was getting ready to die on the cross and He’s telling His disciples He’s leaving soon...traumatic words for these men who left their occupations and families to follow this man Jesus...but not to worry!...**

He’s going away...He’s leaving the earth **to prepare a place for you.3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you** to Myself, that where I am Heaven! **there you may be also.**

*I’m going to come and take you to heaven where I live...* if the second coming established His kingdom on earth...and *whatever* Jesus is talking about... takes us to heaven to be with Him... that’s two events!

There’s no judgement in this passage... there’s no threat... no warnings... we will be with Him... the rapture makes sense...

5. So...When does the rapture happen?... before the tribulation?... in the middle of the tribulation?... at the end?...I’ve given you the answer I think...In that Jesus rescues us from God’s wrath how could it be anything but a pretribulation rapture?... before the tribulation.

How can you still say?... there is an increasingly popular view that the church will go through the first three and a half years of the seven-year Tribulation period (Daniel 9)...this view...says these will be very difficult times for Christians... there will be tribulation of course... there will be persecution...suffering for the faith... **some think we may be in that now**....that we are currently in the first three and a half years of the tribulation.

They believe that the first three and a half years is not part of **the wrath of God**... the second three and a half years is the wrath of God... this would be the “*mid-tribulation rapture*” view or the “*Pre-wrath rapture* view”...

Their view attributes the first three and a half years of Tribulation to be caused by Satan... or specifically his man the “Anti-Christ”... they were not caused by God...these are not His judgements.... His wrath....this is Satan’s messing with us.

*“Yes... the church will be exempt from God’s wrath being poured out on the earth... but the first half of the tribulation is NOT God’s wrath.”*so the church will be raptured in the middle of the tribulation.

I think the Bible is clear that **the entire seven years is God’s wrath being poured out**... if that is the case... I believe the church will be removed before the seven years. ... careful reading of the Word tells us that...I think this is worth the trip....for instance:

Last week we saw in chapter 5... still in the throne room of heaven... God’s throne room... God was sitting on His throne... in His right hand is a scroll... we might call this special scroll “*The Title Deed for the Universe*”...the scroll is sealed up with seven seals.

Nobody was worthy to open up the scroll... no one but God was worthy to hold the title deed of the universe... but One...who fits that description... the lamb of God... Jesus Christ... THE ONLY ONE IN ALL OF HISTORY WORTHY TO TAKE THE SCROLL FROM THE HAND OF GOD...AND OPEN THE SEVEN SEALS...

**5:7 And He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sits on the throne...** and all in that throne room fell to their knees and worshipped Him...**he is worthy**... Each one of the seven seals when opened.... Does not give property descriptions of the earth as a deed would...but reveals and releases the judgements...that only the deed holder of the earth could reveal and release.... The wrath that God will pour out on all the earth.

Chapter 6 Verse 1 **Then I (John) looked when** *who opened the first seal?*... this would be the very beginning of that seven year tribulation period... who opened the seal?....Satan?.... the Anti-Christ? NO!

**Then I looked when the *Lamb* opened one of the seven seals...** Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ is the One who is qualified to open the scroll... break the seals open... which each seal brings judgement to the world... who's judging?... God!

This is one of those cases where we see God working out His will using the wicked... using external "indirect objects" to do His work...to carry out His will... sometimes its wicked people... {Pharoah}... Joseph's brothers... **they meant it for evil, God intended it for good** Genesis 50...

And now... in verse 1... God, through His Son...the only One worthy... releases His wrath through external beings... HIS WRATH... Satan is VERY active in the tribulation period... but he doesn't do ANYTHING that God doesn't want him to do!

So Jesus in the very beginning of this seven year period launches God's wrath to pour over all the earth... **the church is not destined to wrath... not appointed to wrath...**

look how it works... it's a pattern for each of the seven seals... Each seal is individually opened by Jesus Himself... then John tells us he hears **one of the four living creatures saying with a loud voice of thunder, "Come"!**

these four creatures were introduced to us in chapter 4:8 **And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within, and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."**

A special class of angels... the Cherubim...become the announcers of each judgement... Jesus causes the judgement... HE opens the seals... these high ranking angels announce the judgements...

Notice after each seal.... The angels say "**Come**"... six times... six seals in chapter 6... "**Come**"... and finally in verse 17 it says **the great day of their wrath has** what? **COME!...**that repetition of **Come** after each seal is connected to this final statement of **God's wrath has come....**the entire 7 years of the tribulation period is the wrath of God...

1 Thessalonians 1:10 **...wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.** ... I can only see a pretribulation rapture of His church...

A few final points... quick points...

**Purpose of the Tribulation**—Daniel 9:24 speaks of a period of time in which God’s purpose is **“to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.”**

Right in the book of Revelation itself gives us the purpose:

6:10 **and they** (martyrs who died for Christ) **cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Master, holy and true? Will You not judge and avenge our blood** on those who dwell on the earth?”

16:6 **And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who is and who was, O Holy One, because You judged these things; 6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” 7 And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”**

17:6 **Then I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. 7 And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.**

18:20 **Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.” 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”**

19:2 **because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her sexual immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His slaves shed by her hand.”**

The great Tribulation avenged the blood of all those who died for Christ...

**There will be believers in the tribulation**.....during that seven years... there will be a revival greater than any other time in history....there will be the preaching of the gospel... by the 1/3 of the Jews that will become evangelists...

People from every tongue and every tribe and nation will come to Christ... the gospel preached by a flying angel and two witnesses that are resurrected in front of everybody... there is a great mass of people who are converted... many will die as martyrs for the faith... **to die is gain.**

When Jesus returns with His church many of them will be alive and will join the rest of the church..... Jesus will separate the redeemed from the lost... the sheep from the goats... Matthew 25

Jesus will say to His sheep... **Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**

All unsaved people run the risk of entering this terrible time of tribulation after the rapture of the church...

On the cross....Jesus said **it is finished**... *“paid in full.”* When Jesus uttered those words, He was declaring the debt owed to His Father was wiped away completely and forever. Not that Jesus wiped away any debt that He owed to the Father; rather, Jesus eliminated the debt owed by mankind—the debt of sin.... His blood on the cross... paid in full...so

**It is finished**...for the believer... no wrath of God... no judgement for our sins... it is finished. It is not finished for the unbeliever...he goes through the tribulation....

John 3:36 says, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”**