

The Rapture of the Church

Revelation 4:1 (ESV)

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: We move now into the **prophetic** portion of the book of the Revelation. Thus far, we have studied the 7 churches of Asia Minor to which Jesus wrote letters through his Apostle John.

- These congregations existed in ancient history.
- Today we being the study of a portion of the book that could take place in the very near future.

These great event we will read about cast a very long shadow, the edges of which John himself saw. As the **shadow** grows darker as one moves closer in proximity to the actual object obscuring the light, some of the things we will discuss in the coming weeks will sound incredibly familiar.

Even in my lifetime the shadows have darkened considerably. I remember as a boy hearing about the increase in knowledge the world was experiencing. This was before the internet, this was before the personal computer.

We have seen the principle referred to as, “**Moore’s Law**” lived out before our very eyes. That concept that the capacity of a microchip would double about every two years.

The idea of a mark being placed in ones hand that would grant him the right to engage in commerce seemed science fiction when I was a boy. But today it is not only possible but it’s being given serious consideration.

Many have asked if there is any Prophetic significance to Russian invasion of Ukraine. Before we get into today’s study, turn with me back to Ezekiel 38.

Ezekiel 38:1–39:29 (ESV)

¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, set your face toward **Gog**, of the land of **Magog**, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

Gog and Magog is always referred to as coming from the **uttermost parts of the North. (vrs. 6)** Now, keep in mind when you read bible Prophecy - the nation of Israel is always the center of the compass. So the uttermost parts of the North relative to Israel is RUSSIA. Here it is referred to as the land of Gog and Magog.

Here we see that Gog and Magog have dominion over Mechech and Tubal.

- Mechech - Turkey
- Tubal - The Stans region.

- We see in verse 5 - Muslim Country Join in the coalition - Persia, Cush and Put. Iran, Ethiopia and Libya.
- Gomer and Beth-togarmah - These were people of the North, near Gog and Magog. Many believe this represents modern Ukraine.

This coalition of forces will in the latter years (according to verse 8) be compelled by God to invade Israel.

We are told Israel will be reconstituted as a nation from Jews scattered all over the Earth. That happened in 1948. This prophecy could not have been fulfilled before that took place.

What is the motivation of Gog and Magog? Acquisition of land and plunder. But God will defend Israel, great earthquakes will occur, and so many will die that it will take Israel 7 months to bury the dead.

It is then that the Spirit of God will be poured out on Israel, and I believe this is when they will be spiritually reborn and recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Ezekiel 38-39 could not be fulfilled unless Russia held influence over Ukraine. So whether Russia absorbs Ukraine or sets up a puppet government. They will have sway over Ukraines military and its rich stockpile of uranium.

Does this somehow make Russia innocent? No, they like Judas - this must happen, but woe to those through who it happens.

So does prophecy matter? You better believe it does.

- 25% of the Bible deals with prophecy, most of that with the 2nd coming of Christ.
- The first and last promise in the Old Testament and New Testament deals with the 2nd coming of Christ.
- Someone has reported that there are 1,845 references to the 2nd coming in the Old Testament alone and a total of 17 books that give it prominence.
- Of the 260 chapters in the entire New Testament, there are 318 references to Christ's second coming. That averages one out of every 30 verses.
- Furthermore, 23 of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event.
- That leaves only four books that do not refer directly to the Second Coming. Interestingly, three of these four books are single-chapter letters which were written to specific persons on a particular subject.

The Second Coming of Christ was a big deal to the Early Christians.

Paul was only in Thessalonica 2 weeks. If you had two weeks to plant a church, establish it and move on, what would you cover. Paul taught at great length about the 2nd Coming.

Alexander McLaren- The primitive church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death or about heaven. *They were watching not for the undertaker but for the uppertaker.*

Why? Because they saw the return of Christ as a very exciting, hope filled event.

CONTEXT: As we said earlier the tone of the book changes in chapter 4. Notice what it says -

TEXT: 1 After this I looked, and behold,

The Greek grammar did not include punctuation so words like, “behold” were used as a sort of exclamation point. So what John sees is astonishing to him.

a door standing open in heaven!

Remember in C.S. Lewis epic work, “The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe” the wardrobe closet that took Lucy to Narnia? It’s a gateway into another world. So imagine John on the isle of Patmos and he looks up and sees a door standing open and on the other side - is Heaven.

And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet,

Notice that word like - so this is not a talking trumpet, but rather a voice that is loud, sharp and clear.... like a trumpet.

It said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

Some believe that this verse is at this location to clue the reader in on the chronological location of the rapture of the church. You see, from this point on we don’t see the Church on earth. The church is in Heaven with Jesus.

There are christ followers on earth, but they are primarily ethnic messianic Jews, worshipping in ways that they did before the Gospel went into all the world.

We will see a temple in Jerusalem. Sacrifices being made. Even Prophets walking the streets like Elijah and Moses.

What is the cause of this dramatic shift? Well Paul spoke very clearly about it in Romans 11.

Jesus came to the Jews but they did not receive Him. So in the words of Paul, they, the natural branch were cut off. Then we Gentiles, the unnatural branch were grafted in. So for the last 2000 years the people of God have been Gentiles of every tribe and tongue.

But the day is coming when suddenly - the Gentile Believers will be REMOVED and the JEWS, the natural branch will be regrafted.

I believe this happens suddenly, dramatically, at an event that **2 Thes. 2:1** calls our GATHERING, our **ἐπισυναγωγή** [*episunagoge* /ep·ee·soon·ag·o·gay/]¹ It's the word form which the Jews got the word, "synagogue". It means a gathering together.

Or 1 Thes. 4:17 calls in the Greek the **Harpazo**, means snatched away, translated in the LATIN as **rapturo**, from which we get the word **Rapture**.

So let's talk about the idea of rapture -

The word rapture is not in the Bible. It was a word created to describe a theological concept that we do clearly see in the bible. It's like the word Trinity. The word isn't in there, but the concept is. BTW, the word bible isn't in the Bible.

I like what Bob Pitman said, "Turnip greens aren't in the Bible, but I'll take a mess of 'em".

Christians have ALWAYS believed that just as Jesus was raised we will be raised. No debate there. **The argument has been - when does this happen?**

THE WORDS TO DEFINE - Millennial, Tribulation, Rapture

3 basic positions in Relation to the Millennium:

- **Amillennial** - The Millennial Reign is not literal but figurative. It happens through the church.
- **Post Millennial** - There will be one great massive resurrection at the end of the Millennial Reign.
- **Pre Millennial** - Somehow before Christ reigns, there has to be a resurrection of the dead in order for them to reign with Him in the Kingdom.

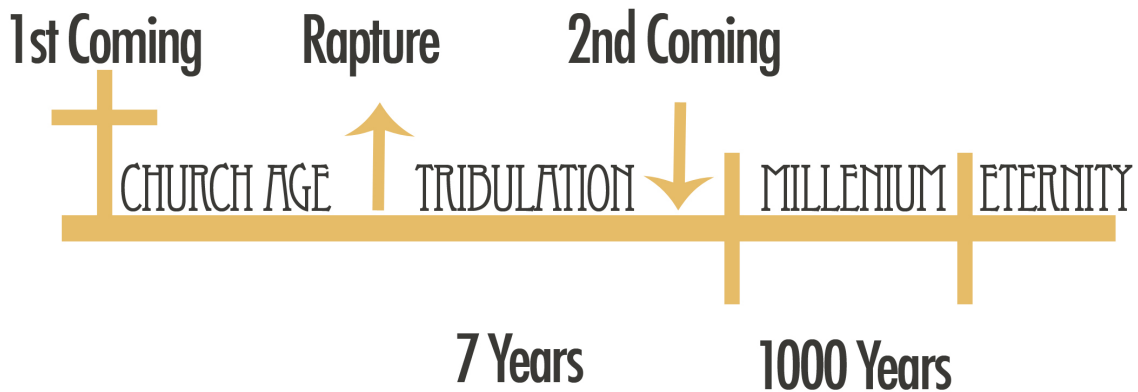
3 Basic Positions in Relation to the Tribulation:

- **Post Tribulation** - The rapture occurs after the tribulation. The problem with that is, it seems pointless. We are caught up to come right back to reign.
- **Mid Tribulation** - That is, the church is raptured approximately half way through the tribulation before the last 3.5 years called the, "great tribulation"
- **Pre Tribulation** - That is, the church is raptured prior to the tribulation. Which would make the rapture of the church the next event on the prophetic timeline.

¹ James Strong, [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#) (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

However, if we are going to make any sense of this book you need to know the interpretive perspective I am coming from.

I hold to the Pre-millennial Pre-tribulational rapture of the church.



I hold this position, simply because when I take the Bible as a whole it is the system of understanding that makes the most sense to me. Now if you disagree, feel free to start your own church, get called into the ministry and teach it your way. But for now, I'm the guy behind the desk.

Why I Believe in the Pre-Millennial, Pre-Tribulational rapture of the Church.

Now I don't think any one of these clues are irrefutable evidence, but taken together they are pretty compelling.

1. The Flow of Revelation and the location of Rev. 4:1

Before this verse in Chapters 2-3 Jesus is dealing heavily with the Church - the word Church occurs 19 times, after this verse you will not see the church explicitly referred to again while wrath is being poured out on the planet. One might conclude by that that the church will not be here.

Add to that - in chapters 4 & 5 there is the voice like a trumpet, John is taken into Heaven to be with Jesus.

Then in chapter 6 you see the Tribulation. Then in **Rev. 19** you see Christ returning with saints clothed in white.

2. The Lack of Instruction for Tribulation Survival

Another thing to consider - there are NO instructions given ANYWHERE in the New Testament about how we as the church can survive in an AntiChrist World when the whole universe collapses. That's odd. All that comes to us is about our blessed hope, waiting for him.

3. The Echoing Hope of Jesus Coming

There are 3 times outside of Revelation where the coming of Christ is described in detail. Each time it describes the Church being taken into Heaven. Now if this happens at the end of the tribulation... what's the point? It's up and right back down again. But if it happens before the tribulation it makes sense what Christ is doing.

- For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil. 3:20 nasb)
- Training us to ... live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:12-13)
- Encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb. 10:25)

The second coming for us is not something to fear, but a HOPE filled event.

John 14:1-4 (ESV)

¹“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.”

1 Corinthians 15 was Paul’s most lengthy discussion of the resurrection.

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 (ESV)

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that

we who are alive, who are left 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 cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

4. The Prevalence of Wedding Language

Luke 12:35–36 (ESV)

³⁵ “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.

The picture you see throughout the New Testament in relation to the return of Jesus is that of a **Jewish Wedding Celebration**.

In Jesus day marriages occurred in 3 parts:

- **The Arrangement** – Two guys make a legal agreement for marriage of their children. EX. Me and Jim.
- **The Betrothal** – A Ceremony when the two come of age that tells the world these two will one day be married. They are spoken for.

Then the groom would go and prepare a place for the bride. Then when the place was properly prepared the Father of the groom would send him to get the bride. There would be signs given that would clue the bride in that the time was near, but part of the game for the groom was to come at an unexpected hour.

- **The Actual Marriage**

5. The Difficulty of Placing the Rapture After Tribulation

- If Jesus raptures the church at the end of the tribulation, his feet are about to touch down on the Mount of Olives - it simply doesn't make sense for him to catch us up on his way down.
- If there is no pre-tribulation rapture, who are the Saints with Jesus at the 2nd Coming in Revelation 19:18? The OT saints haven't been raised.
- (Rev 19:19-21) When Jesus returns at the end of the tribulation, He will be coming for battle. For those who believe in a post-trib rapture, it would be strange to meet your Lord and Savior just as He's rushing into battle.

6. The Immanent Nature of New Testament Language

Throughout the scriptures you see the recurring idea is that this could happen anytime. If it must be preceded by 7 years of tribulation... it's not immanent and frankly we could see it coming.

- **The Parable of the 10 Bridesmaids** Matthew 14 - the groom comes suddenly at midnight and takes the 5 prepared away.
- It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch. **(Mark 13:34–37)**
- Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord ... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand ... Behold, the Judge is standing at the doors. (James 5:7–9)
- The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know. (Matt. 24:50)
- Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt. 25:13)
- The end of all things is at hand. (1 Peter 4:7)
- The time is near. (Rev. 1:3)
- Behold, I am coming soon. (Rev. 22:7)
- He who testifies to these things says, *“Surely I am coming soon.”* Amen. *Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev. 22:20)

7. The Pattern of God’s Behavior Throughout the Bible

- In Genesis, God protects Noah and his family from the Flood.
- God brings Lot and his family out of Sodom before Judgement.
- The children of Israel come out of the Red sea before it falls on Pharaoh and his army.
- Jesus is taken out of Israel before Herod slays the first born.

These are simply clues, but they are important clues.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUSTRATION:

I couldn't believe it - I went into Hobby Lobby.

a few days ago my family went into K-mart. At the front of the store they had swimsuits and flip-flops on clearance. At the back of the store there was Christmas trees. It seems to get earlier and earlier every year doesn't it?

In our home, the Christmas tree goes up the day after thanksgiving.. you would think there was a verse in the bible about it.

NOW - we are seeing signs for Christmas, but the next holiday on the calendar is Thanksgiving. So if we know Christmas is getting close - thanksgiving is REALLY close.

In the same way from my understanding the rapture of the church is the next event on the prophetic calendar... but we are already starting to see signs pointing to the 2nd coming. So if the 2nd coming is close... the rapture IS VERY CLOSE. If my interpretation of scripture is correct, it could happen at any moment.

Years ago, I was talking to my 11 year old about these concepts and after talking about all of these things... she said, "Oh daddy, if this is true... we really need to do all we can to get Caityln (5 year old sister) saved!!!.