

**PASSING THE BATON NUMBER 6  
THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

***“No-one knows the day or the hour but My Father in Heaven...”Matthew 24:36***

**Introduction: Anarchy and Rebellion:**

I am quite often asked why I am so sure that we are in the end times and my answer is invariably, Israel. God’s faithfulness to Israel as a nation will yet be manifested and the fact that they are now back in their own land complies with Jesus own prophecy regarding *‘when the fig tree puts forth her leaves...’* **Matthew 24:32,33.**

The fig tree is the nation of Israel back in her own land; we are on a countdown to the end of the age.

But in our own land, there is something sinister and invasive that leads me to the conclusion that the end of all things is very near, that is the rise of anarchy – everyone doing as they think fit, as it was at the time of the Judges in Israel. Rebellion and anarchy were hallmarks of **Genesis 13**, which we looked at when we talked about homosexuality. Mankind’s total rejection of the authority of God and His word, lack of honour and respect for authority and the authorities which God has set in place. Animal rights, children’s rights, whilst ignoring the abuse in the home which goes on daily, not correcting, or disciplining children, all are hallmarks of a disintegrating society which no longer follows God’s laws for behaviour and right living. We will reap what we are sowing.

If I asked you how you felt about the Monarchy, the Prime Minister, the police, magistrates – how would you react? The Bible says very clearly that no matter what type of Government you live under, you have a duty to honour and respect the people who are above you within that society **Romans 13: 1-4.**

It doesn’t matter whether they are good, bad, or ugly, honour is due and you should obey them. Submitting to or receiving and sitting under authority is something that we do not like; the principle of rebellion has dominated the universe since the fall of Satan.

At Adam’s fall, this principle of rebellion was released. Eve had a choice, God’s authority, or Satan’s authority. That’s the choice and it is still the same. Every one of us has to choose between the human viewpoint, which is Satan’s and what God says, the divine viewpoint.

What we are going to look at in a moment is what is going to happen when God says the *‘cup of iniquity is full’*, it is time for the rebellion to be judged. The whole world is currently in a day of grace before the judgement of God.

The Holy Spirit is preparing the church, the Bride of Christ for her Bridegroom, and the odds are shortening rapidly.

If you asked in the world who is right and who is wrong, they would probably answer that the *majority* is right. Unfortunately for them, God doesn't see it that way, as the majority don't believe in God's only Son, so that makes them wrong by God's standard. But in the world's view, the majority is right, and it can be summed up by saying "*if it feels good – do it*". Hedonism.

Today every man is his own sovereign, having spurned the rulership of God. The Bible says certain things are wrong, but society says '*No, if you like it, do it*' and the whole concept of sin is dying out. For us, this makes preaching the gospel harder than ever because even within the church certain things are looked upon as acceptable, which according to God's word, are totally unacceptable. For me, this is yet another sign of the end of the age. Having said that -

Today we are going to have a quick look at the book of Revelation, the unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ, the book that concludes God's word to mankind. Many believers are frightened of this book because they do not understand the content, but in its opening remarks, it states you will be ***blessed*** if you read it. This is the only book in the Bible that has this promise attached to it. So, we need to take away the mystique and begin to enjoy what God has laid out for us. There really is nothing to fear. We have tomorrow's news today and we are the only people who can say with certainty what tomorrow really holds and furthermore, what happens when a person dies. We should be the happiest people on earth.

### **The culmination of Church history:**

We are rapidly approaching the culmination of Church history, and therefore the ***continuation*** of Jewish history. There remain 7 years of the history of Israel yet to be fulfilled. This period of time is known as the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. We cannot look at the book of Revelation in isolation. The book of Daniel plays a major part in our understanding of exactly what is happening throughout Revelation.

My position and the one from which I will teach is that of a pre-tribulation millennialist, which means I believe that the Church is going to be caught up before the Great Tribulation, of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24; I believe in a literal 1,000 year reign of Jesus on the renewed earth, following His second advent.

This does not mean that I will ignore other views, I will examine them, but I will show you my reasons for what I believe and then you can go away and have a look for yourselves.

I cannot hope to do a verse by verse explanation of the Book today, but what I do propose to do is -

- a quick overview of the book, to give you an idea how to read and understand it,

- explain what God's purpose is in the time of **Great Tribulation** which is to come upon the earth,
- look at the first 3 chapters of the book, which speak to the seven churches,
- See what the various views are regarding the rapture and the millennium, so you may decide for yourself what you believe from the scripture
- look at the 'catching away' of the church,
- and finally the 'glorious appearing', the 'parousia', the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in great power and glory and what will happen at that time. **Matthew 25:31.**

### **The importance of understanding Biblical prophecy:**

*"The prophetic word made more sure...which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."* **2 Peter 1:19.** More than two-thirds of the Bible is prophecy that has either been fulfilled or has yet to be fulfilled. God cannot speak without being prophetic - He says, *"Let there be..."* and there is, prophecy. God speaks, it happens - sometimes straight away, sometimes many, many years later. That's what prophecy is, God telling us tomorrow's news today. He constantly told Israel, *"If you do this, I will do that"* warning, promise and prophecy.

It is so important that we understand the place of prophecy, because it gives us the assurance that God is in control, has had a plan from the foundation of the earth, that what He says will happen, will happen; and that Jesus is indeed coming back in power and great glory to reign.

As I don't know how many of you are aware of what is known as 'end time' teaching, I shall teach this morning as though you have no idea what I am talking about, so I will give a thumbnail sketch of what the Bible says first, to show you what it says about the time of 'Great Tribulation' (Matthew 24:21), the Second Advent (or the second coming of Jesus), and the catching away, (or not) of the church.

Write your questions down if you have any and I will try to answer them this afternoon if we have time. We will be looking mainly in the books of Daniel, Matthew's gospel, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Revelation today. I have 'permission granted' to run a course next year on the book of Revelation - today is just an overview, which I hope will whet your appetites! The school on Revelation will run one day a month for 10 months - January to June 2008 and then September to December 2008 at Field View. You will have more information on this nearer the time but speak to me if you are interested. It will be on a Saturday. God would not have us ignorant on such matters.

I find as a general rule if people aren't expecting the **imminent** arrival of the Lord, they are not on the cutting edge of what is happening because it is the very imminence that keeps you on your toes. It is certainly a prompt to holy living because if you think Jesus might come tonight, or even now, in the middle of this day, it will cause you to keep short accounts with God and with those around you, as you are never sure when you will have to give an account for the way in which you have spent your time and

your resources.

I also find that Christians are sometimes as fearful as unbelievers about what is happening in the world around them, beloved, this should not be so. People who are nervous of the future are ignorant of God's prophetic timetable for this planet.

### **Prophetic destinies:**

When we are looking at prophecy, we are looking at two distinct people groups, Israel, and the Church. We will talk about unbelievers later. Israel was the 'wife' of Jehovah; the Church is the 'Bride' of Christ.

If we do not correctly separate the destinies of these two, we will find ourselves muddled and confused about what the Bible is saying and will apply scriptures which are meant for Israel to the church and vice versa, which leads to error regarding God's purposes for the nation of Israel, as we will see later on. The Old Testament never spoke of the 'Church', it was a mystery, hidden until Jesus revealed His intentions to Peter, on this rock (of truth) I will build my church. **Matthew 16:18**.

Many people find themselves confused when reading the Old Testament because of the references to 'the Day of the Lord' or 'in that Day'. These are references to the **Second Advent** of Jesus Christ and pertain to Israel's future. There are instances where there is a pause halfway through a sentence, an example of this is **Isaiah 61**, the passage Jesus quoted in Luke when He stood up in the synagogue and said '*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon Me...*' He paused halfway through that sentence because it concludes '*...and the day of vengeance of our God*'.

Over 2,000 years have passed and the last part of that sentence is still hanging, waiting to be fulfilled, for the Day of Vengeance of our God is the 'Day of the Lord', or 'that Day' which is still to come. Jesus spoke and fulfilled the first part of the sentence "*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon Me...to heal, save and deliver*". But the time when Jesus will return and judge the earth has yet to come.

Studying the book of Revelation can help you to unpick those passages which may have puzzled you for years, or which you may have avoided altogether because you couldn't understand them.

God says in **Amos 3:7** that He never does anything without telling his servants the prophets - because He wants His people to know. He is a God who constantly reveals Himself.

### **Fulfilled prophecy:**

To begin with let's have a look at some prophecies, which have been fulfilled, and then we'll go on to have a look at some of what remains to be fulfilled.

One of the most interesting prophecies in the Old Testament concerns the name of an

Old Testament saint Methuselah, whose name means, “*when I am gone it will come to pass.*” His son Lamech had a son whom he called Noah, whose name means, ‘rest’. So, what was it that was going to happen when Methuselah died age 969?

Judgement and the universal flood. *His name was prophetic.*

Then there is the prophecy of Noah, which we looked at when we examined homosexuality. Noah’s prophecy over Canaan, son of Ham, was fulfilled to the letter. Pinpoint accuracy is what you will find with Biblical prophecy.

One last one as an example, Abram **Genesis 12**, God calls him and covenants with him to make of him a great nation, He promises that Abram’s name will be great and he will be a blessing - Israel is the nation and we are all blessed because through the Jews, Jesus came. Fulfilled prophecy.

The Old Testament is packed with references both to the first and the Second Coming of Jesus, two streams. The first as the suffering servant Isaiah 53 and then secondly, as the King in great power and glory

- Isaiah 7:14 speaks of a virgin giving birth to the coming saviour,
- Micah 5 :2, His being born in Bethlehem
- Hosea 11:1 being called out of Egypt,
- Psalm 78:1,2, of His teaching in parables
- Isaiah 29:18,19, 35:4-6, 61:1 of His healing the sick
- Isaiah chapters 43-45 and 58-66 of His restoring the nation of Israel

So many times, in the Gospels we see the words ‘*That it might be fulfilled*’. What might be fulfilled? Old Testament prophecy. And there remains much yet to be fulfilled. You will remember if you were at the first of these ‘Passing the Baton’ Meetings that we looked at an overview of the Bible. In that overview, we saw that we were in the times of the Gentiles and that the history of Israel was largely on hold right now until the full number of the Gentiles comes in.

Israel is key to Biblical prophecy. I cannot emphasise enough that the Bible is a Jewish book, written for the most part by Jews but read, and sometimes largely misunderstood, by us gentiles. Keep in mind that this is about the history of two people groups, Israel, and the Church. Israel was the wife of Jehovah; the Church is the Bride of Christ. This is **not** adultery as we saw in the first Passing the Baton meeting; this is describing God’s romance with the two people groups, which is as close as a marriage union between husband and wife.

Jesus is an incurable romantic He desires that we engage our hearts with Him. God delights in us, we are betrothed to Him, we are engaged to be married, we should be excited - brides usually are. We are secured by covenant, blood covenant, the bride price has been paid, and He will fulfil that which He purposes for our lives and our eternal destiny. We have a great future ahead of us!

## Let's start at the very beginning - a very fine place to start...

World history in the Bible is split into three parts. **Genesis chapters 1 - 11** deals with 2,000 years of the history of mankind, the remainder of the Old Testament covers the next 2,000 years up to the time of Jesus, then we have the gospels and from then until now approximately another 2,000 years have elapsed. Finally, the book of Revelation which tells us about the future. Events which have yet to take place. We are talking about approximately 6 – 7,000 years of history, sorry those of you who believe the earth is millions of years old – it isn't.

Let's just do a recap to bring us up to speed. What we see, from the beginning, is rebellion, which has been passed down to us from the Garden. From Genesis to Revelation, God's voice calls '*Adam, where are you?*' Seeking to restore man to Himself. The first 7 chapters of the Bible deal with events over a year or two. Noah's flood lasted one solar year.

In **Genesis 4** we see a principle - the development of cities - in verse 9 we see one family, but godlessness and apostasy is breaking out. There is a defection, a revolt and a falling away from God, and in verse 11 Cain is cursed. Life is going to be hard work. God places a mark on Cain for his protection, but he doesn't believe it, he marries one of his sisters and builds a city verse 17. God had said He would protect Cain, but Cain didn't believe it, *God wasn't enough*. This is the first time man tries to be totally independent of God as far as God is concerned. Cain trusts the walls *he built*, now.

**Genesis 6** finds Godlessness breaking out to the extent that judgement must come, and mankind is given 120 years to repent. At the end of this time only 8 righteous are found and saved from the universal flood. Noah, his wife and three sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth, and their wives.

In **Genesis 10: 6 - 12** after the flood, we see the grandchildren of Noah and a man named Nimrod, born of Ham's son, Cush.

Ham had four sons, Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan - we know about Canaan from our study on homosexuality. We saw that he settled in the region of the coast between Sidon and Gaza.

**Genesis 11** and we see that 'they, Nimrod and party, journeyed from the east, Ararat and found a plain in the land of Shinar' - the Tigris/Euphrates valley. This is the area the bible calls Babylonia, or Chaldea, in southern Mesopotamia. Nimrod, whose name means rebellion, is described in **Genesis 10: 9** as '*a mighty hunter, before the Lord*', literally, ***against or in defiance of***, the Lord.

He is in total rebellion to God, just two generations from Noah. He would have known about Eden, the fall of Adam and Eve and the universal flood, which came because of man's wickedness and rebellion, but he still decides he is going to be ruler around here and in verse 10 he begins his kingdom by building a city in Babylon. He built many

cities, he moved on to build Nineveh where Jonah was sent. So, what is wrong with building cities? The same thing that is wrong with building a tower that reaches to heaven, by building his own protection around him he was saying, *"I don't need you God"*. So the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. He's setting himself up. This is a major sign of apostasy - apostasy is giving up or renouncing, your faith, defection, revolt and falling away. So here they are one language, one culture, they all thought the same way, they were as one in their rebellion to God.

God had said 'scatter' they said *'no Sir!'* and built themselves a tower just in case God flooded the earth again and to make sure they waterproofed it! This is the beginning of man's independent rule being established. These people knew God had interrupted man's plans with the flood and they were trying to make sure this wouldn't happen again.

It stands as an example of rank disobedience; one of the vilest things man has ever devised, **here** is the seed of the rebellion which will come into its fullness at the end of the age. A movement began here which is going to become obvious in the future like a stream which has trickled down the hillside and has gained momentum more and more until it is like a mighty river, swelling and filling as it goes - man's attempt to be independent of God on every level and to be master of his own destiny.

In the Book of Revelation this is called **'Mystery Babylon' Revelation 17**. Suddenly in the last days, this thing will be revealed, anti-God, anti-Christ in everything. A powerful religious system that will glorify man - this is the New Age movement in a nutshell.

It is also the bottom line of the United Nations and the League of Nations, the desire to be one world again so mankind can establish the perfect world order.

This is what the New Age is all about, Babylon in disguise, and not a very good one at that. One world religion, one world government, one world monetary system. Unification of mankind is the goal. Those high up in Freemasonry know that this is the goal of Freemasonry - world domination and the setting up of one man to rule. Unfortunately those lower down the scale see it only as an organisation which seeks to do good, little realising the plan behind it. The World Council of Churches, Multifaith, same thing. All get together, all worship the same God don't we - no chance, we do not! These are all man's attempts to **undo** what God did at Babel and overthrow the sovereignty of God.

Babel is the seedbed of apostasy and the seedbed of Mystery Babylon, which was birthed there.

So, God moves to stop man and confounds the language. They are now separated into little groups. God's will is done! Nations, tongues and races in watertight compartments. As Roger Price says, if one group gets into apostasy, I will only have to judge them and not the whole earth.

**Genesis 12** God now chooses His missionary base, the nation from whom the rest of

the world will learn. At least, that was the plan. **Romans 9:3-5** is their 'adoption' God chose them sovereignly and this nation now dominates the next 2,000 years of history. At the end of that period Jesus comes to them as their King. He came as King to His own **Matthew 10:5,6** *'Don't go to the gentiles. Go to the lost sheep of Israel.'* But you know what happened, they rejected Him, murdered Him and they went into judgement, the 5<sup>th</sup> cycle of discipline. I don't have time to go into that now, but you can see the various cycles of discipline in **Leviticus 26**.

Jesus then moved to the Gentile nations and raised up a brand new nation from every nation, separated to God, the church. So we have *three* major groupings, **1 Corinthians 10:32** -

- Jews
- gentiles (unbelievers)
- Church.

The church is made up of Jew and Gentile, but God still has His dealings in the affairs of the nation of Israel, their history isn't over yet. So now we have Israel on hold, the Church on show, and unfulfilled prophecy hanging over us.

Now we are up to date and we need to see what is next and there is a simple scripture that will show us the next thing on God's prophetic timetable -

### **The Consummation of the Age:**

**Matthew 24: 3 -31** *"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' And Jesus answered and said to them: take heed that no one deceives you...."*

The disciples are asking, *"Tell us, **when** will these things be? And **what** will be the sign of Your coming, **and of the end of the age? When shall these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?**"*

The word 'end' here is 'suntelelia' which signifies **a bringing to completion, or consummation** of the various parts of a scheme Vine's p.367, they were asking Him about the end times, the consummation of all things, the end of the world. What follows is a description of the things they can expect. This is known as the 'Olivet discourse', the disciples, having drawn Jesus' attention to the Temple and been told not to look at these things, they then ask, when, what, signs....?

Keep in mind Jesus is a Jew, speaking to Jews, not to Greeks, Gentiles, like us. We think Greek even if we aren't. So, He is talking about things they are familiar with. I love Jesus' sense of humour at this point, He's saying lads, this is how it is going to be - all this will happen, and I'm going to come back, *and He is sitting on the very spot His feet will touch when He comes back – sense of humour or what? Zechariah 14:4* *'His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.'*

But, verse 15, total mystery to us, or it always was to me – *'the abomination of*



*desolation (let the reader understand)' - never did understand, frightened me to bits until I received teaching on the end times; so they had just left the temple and Jesus refers back to the time in **Daniel** when Nebuchadnezzar puts his statue up both inside and outside the temple, on the flying buttresses – this, He says, will happen again. It will happen again, during the Great Tribulation period when the Antichrist does the same thing, and Jesus is here laying out God's prophetic timetable for **Israel**.*

He is telling **them** what they can expect, and how to recognise what is happening **when** it happens, He's saying don't be afraid, look up, understand, discern correctly. Read the signs. *This passage is prophetic, it is future.*

What is the tribulation of those days verse 21? - trouble. This verse shows that this is a period of trouble the like of which the earth has never seen.

**Verses 29,30** - show what is coming *"immediately after the tribulation of those days...the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"*. He's referring to His **Second Advent** or Second Coming, which is what *follows* this time of Great Tribulation upon the earth.

**Matthew 25:31 - 32** After the Second Advent of Jesus there is judgement, and Jesus separates the believers and the unbelievers. The believers are the sheep, the unbelievers the goats, and the unbelievers are removed from the earth and kept for judgement, the believers who remain, go on to repopulate the earth.

**Matthew 25:33,34** After the judgement of Jesus, His Kingdom is set up on earth for 1,000 years. The believers start living on the earth and children are born to them and the earth is populated again.

That is a general sweep of history to bring us up to speed and to see what the Bible says about God's intentions, His eternal plan.

### **Overview of the Book of Revelation:**

Just as Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is the book of consummation. In it the divine program of redemption is brought to fruition, and the Holy name of God is vindicated before all creation.

Although there are numerous prophecies in the Gospels and Epistles, **Revelation** is the only New Testament book that focuses primarily on prophetic events. Its title means 'unveiling' or 'disclosure' or 'revelation'. Thus the book is the unveiling, disclosure or revelation of that which would otherwise be hidden. The title comes from the first verse Apokalypsis Iesou Christou. *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show His servants - things which must shortly (quickly or swiftly) take place."* God **reveals** to us His plan. There is nothing to fear in this book, in fact we are told in verse 3 that we are blessed if we read it and hear the words of the prophecy. Couldn't be clearer than that. I do pray that if you have been frightened of

this book by the enemy that by the end of the day you will jump in head first and enjoy what it shows you of God's eternal plan, being convinced there is nothing to fear.

The book opens on the Isle of Patmos where John, the remaining disciple, who was by this time around 96 years old, is imprisoned because of his testimony of Jesus. This island of volcanic rock was one of several places to which the Romans banished criminals and political offenders. John has been exiled to die of exposure and starvation. But here the Lord appears to John in a glorious vision. The vision is called the Revelation, that is 'the unveiling. 'The Apocalypse', the unveiling of Jesus Christ in His glory, in His majesty and in His Kingdom. Here is the Warrior King, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah revealed in His fullest glory.

The book was written at a time when hostility to Christianity was erupting into overt persecution. After he had 'done his time', at the end of the reign of the emperor Domitian, it is likely that John was released and allowed to return to Ephesus, where he died.

The subject and object of the book is the revelation of the awesome majesty of the resurrected Christ.

It begins Chapter 1 with a vision of His glory, wisdom and power. He alone is the firstborn from the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, and the end. Here is our Lord Jesus Christ, revealed in all His unspeakable Majesty as the Word of God, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the undisputed sovereign ruler of the universe at whose name every knee bows and every tongue confesses, He is Lord! He is the Head of the Church to whom He writes in chapters 2 and 3.

In chapter 4 we are transported to heaven to see everything from heaven's viewpoint. John is with the Saviour in heaven, as the judgements of Almighty God, the Lamb, are poured out on the earth.

In **chapter 5** we see Jesus as the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the earth, Who **alone** is found worthy to open the scroll written on both sides and sealed with 7 seals. This scroll is the title deed to the earth.

In **chapter 6** to **chapter 18** His universal judgement on mankind is revealed, as He begins to open the 7 seals, followed by trumpets and vials which show the order of events.

**Chapter 19** deals with the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, which is right at the end of the outpouring of the 7<sup>th</sup> vial, at the end of the 7-year tribulation period.

Jesus comes (Second Advent) with His saints, separates the sheep from the goats, imprisons Satan in the Abyss for 1,000 years, and consigns the Beast and the False Prophet to the flames of the Lake of Fire.

Here commences the millennium.

**Revelation 20** At the end of this time, Satan is released for a short while, and goes forth once again to lead men in rebellion against God. This is the final *conflict, which ends forever man's refusal to accept the will of God for their lives*. The counterfeit religion, spawned in the garden is brought to a final end as the **Great White throne** judgement takes place and all unbelievers together with Satan, who joins the Beast and the False Prophet, are flung into the lake of fire. Tears, death, sorrow, pain and crying are passed away.

**Revelation 21** A new heaven and a new earth are described, and paradise lost at the fall becomes paradise regained.

**Revelation 22** The book closes with the incomparable message of hope, salvation and redemption accomplished in the person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. .

### **God's purpose in the time of tribulation which is to come upon the earth:**

To see this we need to go to the book of Daniel - **Daniel 9:24** *"Seventy weeks are determined for **your people (the Jews) and for your holy city**, (and this locates the scene – Jerusalem) **To finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy.**"*

- To finish transgression - this will finish Israel's time of apostasy - they will return to Him
- To put an end to sin - humanity's cup of iniquity is filled to overflowing and God will bring judgement on the earth for their rejection of His Son
- To atone for wickedness - a reference to Israel's restoration to the Messiah
- To bring in everlasting righteousness - when they (Israel) experience revival the millennial kingdom can come in
- To seal up vision and prophecy - when Israel have found their Messiah there will no longer be any need for vision and prophecy - all will have been fulfilled
- To anoint the Most Holy - Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords to reign and rule

The purpose of the tribulation, which is to come upon the earth, is twofold. The **first** is the time of trouble, which was prophesied to Israel as the time of 'Jacob's trouble'. **Jeremiah 30:7** This will be the time of the final ingathering of the nation of Israel when they *"look upon Him whom they have pierced and mourn as for their first born son."* **Zechariah 12:10**. Their refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah led to their being dispersed among all the nations. The 5<sup>th</sup> cycle of discipline already referred to **Leviticus 26:33**. This will be the time, prophesied in Isaiah, of the great restoration of Israel as God's own nation, a people for Himself and all eyes will again be upon Jerusalem.

**Secondly**, humanity's 'cup of iniquity' is filled to overflowing and God will bring judgement on the unbelieving earth for their rejection of His Son. By the time of the **Great Tribulation**, the cup of evil will be full to such an extent that God's righteous

judgement must be poured out.

Whilst it will be a time of tremendous harvest, it will also be a time of unparalleled rebellion towards God. It is a principle that God never judges until *'the cup of iniquity is full'*. **Genesis 15:16**. Mankind is given every opportunity, but rebellion is bound up in their hearts.

But what of the church? Will it go through this terrible time? Throughout scripture there is a principle of **safety** for God's own people during times when His wrath is poured out.

Noah, saved from the universal flood by going into the ark. Lot, saved from Sodom and Gomorrah when fire and brimstone was rained down, and the church, saved from the scene before God brings his judgement to bear on an unbelieving world.

The catching away of the church will be a **major sign** to Israel in those days and will result in them being an evangelistic nation **Revelation 7** and the 144,000 witnesses and **Revelation 12:11** 'who loved not their lives to the death'.

Anyone who thinks the church is to go through this horrendous time has no real understanding of what is going to happen. It is a time of trouble that has never been seen before, it is so awful. The sun darkened, the earth removed from its present orbit, terrible.

### **Letters to the 7 churches:**

Ephesus: **Revelation 2:1 – 7**

*'I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance, I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.... You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.'* Ephesus had heart trouble. It had forsaken its first love, walked away, left it. *'I just don't love Him anymore'*. Honeymoon love had eroded into routine married life. The thrilling flush of the newfound conversion experience had evaporated in the pressure of normal life.

Smyrna: **Revelation 2:8 – 11**

Smyrna was the persecuted 'Iron curtain' church. There was no condemnation for them but commendation. They were pulled apart by pressure, poverty, and persecution, but they were being encouraged to stand. Believers in Smyrna were afflicted by false teachers who had claimed to be Jews but really were not. Any church that preaches a gospel other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is a synagogue of Satan, regardless of what it is called.

Pergamum: **Revelation 2: 12-17**

*'I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name...Nevertheless I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.'* This is where Satan had his throne. The city of Pergamum was deeply entrenched in the worship of the god Asclepius – the god of healing. This was a church, which slid into compromise, the toleration of evil. Worldly standards had crept in.

The government provided money for the operation of the church, and many pagan temples were taken over by Christians. To please the emperor, the leaders adopted customs that were parallel to pagan practices. One compromise invariably leads to another, and what seemed at the start to be a great blessing ended up a great curse. During the succeeding three centuries of this period, many anti-Christian practices of pagan origin were adopted, which robbed the church of its fire and its evangelistic fervor. The influence of paganism on the church increased over the years step by step. The church began to shroud itself in 'mystery' and ritualism that had a strong resemblance to Babylonian mysticism.

The name Pergamum literally means 'marriage' or 'elevation'. As the church became married to governmental authority and elevated to a place of acceptance, it declined in spiritual blessing and power.

#### Thyatira: **Revelation 2:18 –29**

*'I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance and that you are now doing more than you did at first. But you tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols'. Beneath the exterior of piety was a cesspit. 'That woman Jezebel'.*

Jezebel was the epitome of immorality and idolatry. The program of merging paganism with Christianity begun under the church of Pergamum increased, the light that Jesus entrusted to His church all but flickered out during what was called the Dark Ages and was not rekindled until the days of the reformation.

Thyatira comes from two words meaning 'sacrifice' and 'continual'; this introduces a central heresy that has produced other false doctrines: such as, the Church of Rome that denies the *finished* work of Christ but believes in a **continuing sacrifice** hence Jesus is always depicted as still on the cross, when in fact price has been paid and He is risen.

That produces such things as sacraments for the dead and praying for the dead. All of these were borrowed from Babylon, the seedbed of all pagan customs and idolatry. Jesus gave this adulterous woman 'time to repent', but she refused. Not everyone was involved with her, and Jesus gives some marvellous promises to those who hold on to their faith until He returns.

## Sardis: **Revelation 3:1 – 6**

The reformed 'liberal' church. The dead church.

*'These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.*

*<sup>4</sup>Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Sardis means escaping ones, or those who come out.

- 1) They became state churches – and had a tendency to please the government rather than God.
- 2) They did not sufficiently change many customs and teachings of the Church of Rome.

The city of Sardis was wealthy but degenerate. Twice the city had been lost because the leadership and citizenry were too lazy to defend themselves from their enemies. Like the city, this church had won a good reputation at one time and the members thought they had arrived, they were content in the beautiful building they had erected on the corner of Self-satisfaction and Complacency streets. Cause of death: rested on its laurels. Died from neglect, lax moral standards and a failure to recognise its own spiritual condition – they had a form of godliness but denied the power - **2 Timothy 3:5**

## Philadelphia: **Revelation 3:7-13**

The church Christ loved.

*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. <sup>8</sup>**I know your deeds.** See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup>I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.*

<sup>11</sup> *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.* <sup>12</sup> *The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.* <sup>13</sup> *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

***'I know your deeds.***

The name Philadelphia means brotherly love. Jesus selected that church to describe the kind of church age that was initiated around the year 1750 and will continue to the Tribulation.

Just as Sardis came out of Thyatira, so Philadelphia came out of Sardis. Philadelphia was marked by vitality of life. In this church age God worked in a thrilling way that produced revivals in Europe and the British Isles which in turn produced what is known today as the modern missionary movement.

We all want to belong to this one. No condemnation. Right doctrine and right living going hand in hand. Doctrine without love is legalism where love is present without doctrine it is humanism.

God promised to open doors for this loving church, to give it an opportunity to reach out to a lost world. It is the Holy Spirit who prepares the hearts of men to receive the good news, not our plans, tracts, crusades, or feeble witnessing. They were commended because they couldn't do it they had '*little strength*' and knew it! They were completely dependent on Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Except for some churches in America the Philadelphia church age is characterized by small congregations, which according to human standards are weak.

This of course, is real strength. They kept His word. This church not only believed the word of God, but obeyed it.

The reformation churches, past and present, believe the word of God but are not characterized by obedience to it. The church of Philadelphia a fitting contrast to this pattern is characterized by obedience to His word. Promises to the church: 1) vindication – He will do it. 2) Preservation: since you have kept my command to endure I will also **keep you** from the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

The world has never known a universal period of tribulation. This passage is an obvious reference to the Tribulation period of 7 years. The promise, however, is to the church of Philadelphia - brotherly love - she will be **raptured** before that Tribulation begins.

**Laodicea: Revelation 3:14-22**

The luke-warm church.

*“So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth. You say ‘I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit on My Throne.’*

The final church mentioned in Revelation is the lukewarm church of Laodicea.

The church which received the last letter from the postman at Patmos was outwardly impressive. It had all the trappings of wealth, but something was missing. The Laodicean church was a halfhearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today.

The Laodicean church today would be at the forefront of the gay rights movement, multifaith, ordination of women and the feminizing of the deity, the ‘God is female’ lobby.

### **Views regarding the Rapture of the church and the millennium:**

There are many opinions about the book of Revelation and the Lord’s return, but I am going to look at the three main views - there are many, but these are the three you are most likely to come across, and you will be able to pick out where people are coming from when you understand them:

**1. The amillennial view.** This view teaches that there is no separate millennium or golden age. We the church are the new Israel - this is what is known as ‘replacement’ theology - and the Jewish people cannot expect any restoration because God has finished with them. All the Old Testament prophecies relating to the coming King and his reign refer to the church, which started at Pentecost and will finish when Jesus returns. We are in the full Kingdom of Christ now. If pushed to explain their position, they may say we are in the millennium or conversely we are in the tribulation, I have heard both. After this there will simply be the final judgement followed by heaven and hell. Jesus’ return is a long way away and there is no urgency because we can’t know when He is coming back. **The next event on their calendar is the Second Advent of Jesus.**

**2. The post-millennial view.** This view teaches that there *is* a future golden age, but that Jesus will not return until *after* it arrives. It will come about through the activity of the Church. The church will become more and more influential in world affairs through the increasing power of the Holy Spirit. It will not happen through Israel. Any revival of Jewish fortunes will be accidental. The Old Testament references are to be understood spiritually as referring to the Church and its influence, not Israel and her King. Again, replacement theology, the church is the ‘spiritual Israel’. The post-millennial view has had a great revival under the Charismatic movement and is often



known as “Restoration” teaching. Groups that generally see prophecy in this way include Kingdom Now! Word of Faith, Manifest Sons of God, Dominion and Latter Rain etc. There is much talk of new power, taking territory, winning nations, worldwide revival etc. etc. A renewed emphasis on healing, complete wholeness and spiritual authority underlies this movement because it is believed, we are moving into the fullness of the Kingdom now - *and we will bring it in*. When the church has done the job - Jesus can return! I leave you to draw your own conclusions about that one. **The next event on their calendar is the Second Advent of Jesus.**

**3. The Millennial or pre-Millennial view.** This view teaches that the golden age, or Millennium, is a *literal* period of one thousand years, *which will follow the Lord’s Second Advent*. He will establish His worldwide reign from Jerusalem, occupying David’s throne and fulfilling Jewish Messianic hopes.

The church age, which began at Pentecost, comes to an end amid a catastrophic deterioration in world affairs socially, politically, economically and environmentally. There will be clear signs of the approaching end, principally involving Israel and the return of the Jews to Israel. The 7 years before the Lord’s return are known as the Tribulation period, with the last three and a half years being known as the Great Tribulation. During the Tribulation a political leader referred to in scripture as the Antichrist will arise to dominate the world’s affairs.

Premillennialists differ as to the timing of the rapture of the church, some believe it will happen before the Tribulation - pre-tribulationists. Some believe it will happen at the mid point before the Great Tribulation - mid-tribulationists, and some believe it will happen at the same time as the Lord’s physical return to reign - the so called up down theory - the post-tribulationists. Whatever the view, pre-millennialists take as to the *timing* of the rapture, they clearly distinguish between the Lord’s coming for His church - the rapture - and His Second Advent, when He returns to the earth “*with power and great glory*” **Matthew 24: 30,31**. **The next event on their calendar is the rapture, or catching away, of the church.**

So there you have the three main views. As I said before I am a pre-tribulation millennialist. I believe that the church *will* physically be removed from the earth before the period known as the Great Tribulation. That this is substantiated by the way God has dealt with the believer and the unbeliever in the past. That during this time of Tribulation on earth, we will be having our wedding breakfast in heaven, because Jesus was, and is, a Jew and that is what He was talking about when He said ‘*If I go, I will come again and take you to Myself...*’ **John 14:3**. That we will subsequently return *with* Him at His Second Advent when He comes in great power and glory, and judges between the sheep and the goats - believers and unbelievers, who come through the Great Tribulation **Matthew 25: 32**: and we will reign and rule with Him on a renewed earth for 1,000 years, the Millennium.

So far as I can see any other theory does not stand up when examined in the light of the scriptures. For this reason, my teaching is one of the imminent return of the Lord to catch His bride away, so, we need to be ready with our bags packed, wise virgins

that we are. To substantiate my view, I want to talk now about -

### **The Jewish Wedding Ceremony and the Rapture of the Church:**

We must first understand the Jewish wedding system, which was common in Jesus' day and also common among Jews up until the last generation. The Jewish marriage system had four distinct stages, all of which are to be found in the relationship of the church as the bride of Christ.

1. The father of the groom makes the arrangements for the bride and pays the bride price. This first stage might happen before the children are born, or when they are very young, or perhaps even a few short weeks prior to the marriage. But a long period of time could transpire between the first and second stages. Often the bride and groom do not see each other until their wedding day.
2. Eventually comes the second stage, which is known as the 'fetching of the bride'. In this second stage the groom will come to the home of the bride to fetch her and bring her to his home. This is often done in accompaniment with a wedding procession. Then comes the
3. Third stage which is the marriage ceremony followed by the
4. Fourth stage, the marriage supper, or feast.

All four stages of the Jewish wedding system are to be found in the relationship of the church and Christ. First of all the Father of the groom made the arrangements for the bride and paid the bride price. In this case, the price was the blood of Christ **1 Corinthians 6: 19,20** and **2 Peter 2:1**. So then, the first stage is already completed but the three other stages are yet future.

*The second stage* – the 'fetching of the bride'. Even as a long period of time can transpire between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stages in the Jewish system, even so has it been with us today. It has been over 2,000 years since the first stage was accomplished but some day, the second stage will take place when Jesus comes in order to fetch the bride to take her to His home. This 'fetching of the bride' is referred to today as the rapture or catching away of the church. **1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18** and **1 Corinthians 15:51 – 52** Paul expected Jesus to come for His bride in his day, how much more should we be expectant and make ourselves ready NOW. Thus, with the catching of the church away to be with Jesus some time before the beginning of the tribulation, the second stage of the wedding ceremony will be completed.

*The third stage*, the marriage ceremony will take place in heaven, just prior to the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. This is described in **Revelation 19: 6 – 8**. The wedding announcement is made (**verse 6**) and the bride is finally made ready (**verse 7**). The reason the bride is now fully ready for the marriage ceremony is because she now has her entire bridal gown on (**verse 8**). This bridal gown is said to be the '*righteous acts of the saints*' this tells us two things. First, it shows that the process of sanctification will indeed be completed, for all that will be showing on the bride are her righteous acts. Secondly, this also shows that the marriage ceremony takes place *after* the judgement seat (Bema) of Christ when the saints are rewarded

for their deeds on the earth **1 Corinthians 3:10 – 15**. After the marriage ceremony we come to the fourth stage, the marriage feast, described in **Revelation 19:9** Since many are called – bidden - to the marriage feast, this passage seems to indicate that the marriage supper, or feast, will be at a different place than the marriage ceremony. We know that the Old Testament saints are resurrected, not with the church before the tribulation, but at the end of the tribulation **Daniel 12:2**. John the Baptist who was the last of the Old Testament prophets, called himself a friend of the Bridegroom and did not consider himself to be a member of the bride of Christ, the church **John 3: 27 – 30**. Hence, it seems that the ones who are bidden to attend the marriage supper are all the Old Testament saints resurrected after the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus on earth. In fact, it would seem possible that the marriage supper is what begins the millennium or Messianic age. Our 1,000 years of co-reigning with Christ will start with a tremendous marriage feast.

With the marriage feast all four stages will be completed.

The final picture we get of the bride of Christ is contained in the closing chapters of the Bible itself **Revelation 21:9** in this passage we are told that as a result of the four earlier stages, the bride is now the married wife. Then in the following verses **Chapters 21:10 – 22:5**, we have a graphic description of the glorious eternal wife of Christ in her eternal abode.

Now perhaps we can see that only as we look at the bible from a Jewish perspective and see that the wedding is a picture of a **covenant**, can we begin to understand its mysteries. Paul, John and the apostles would have written of things totally familiar to their culture. The people of ancient Israel understood what Jesus was going to do because they understood the model of the wedding. It is only when we Gentiles overlay our understanding of the culture on the word, that mistakes occur to our cost. Does this explain Jesus words *'The first will be last and the last first?'* Israel was first, and they will be last to be joined to Him, we are the 'last' and we will be first to be joined to Him. Just a thought.

#### **The Glorious appearing or Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ:**

*"For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."* **Matthew 24:27-31**

This prediction of Jesus concerns His Glorious Appearing and is taken from the Olivet discourse. All attention will be focussed on Him - all those living at that time on the earth, who have come through the time of Great Tribulation, will see the risen Christ

in all His glory.

The nations will mourn because they have not prepared themselves for that Day. The Day of the LORD, and it will be too late because He will separate them - those who do not believe will be removed and go to the unseen state to await the Great White Throne judgement, the believers will remain to populate the renewed earth.

Not us, however, we will be in our glorified bodies - no more marriage or babies for us!

*“Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel, you will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come and all the holy ones with Him.”* **Zechariah 14:3 – 5.**

Here we are at the end - or is it the beginning, of our trip through Revelation - the revealing of the Glorious King of kings and Lord of lords who is the lover of our souls - the Lord Jesus Christ.

We stand on tiptoe to see the fulfilment of God’s eternal plan coming to culmination and fruition in the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour and the establishment of His literal Kingdom here on earth.

This Kingdom has both an inward and an outward expression - Jesus said *‘the Kingdom is neither lo here, nor lo there, the Kingdom is within you’*. In us it is the reign and rule of the Spirit of Jesus in our innermost man. Externally we look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the King **Titus 2:13**. There is actually a crown for those who eagerly wait for His coming **2 Timothy 4:8**. There are other crowns too: rejoicing **1 Thessalonians 2:19**, life **James 1:12**, glory **1 Peter 5:4**, imperishable **1 Corinthians 9:25**.

Reviewing what we have seen so far in the book of Revelation of Jesus Christ we see that we stand on the edge of the culmination of the church age, the culmination of Jewish history and the history of the world itself. All the actors are in the wings, waiting for the final act to commence. For us, as believers, the time scale is the catching away or rapture of the church and our wedding breakfast in heaven during the 7 years of Jacob’s trouble, then our return to earth with Him at His glorious appearing.

We are blessed indeed if we can say, “I’m ready” - part of this ministry, if not all - is to prepare the Bride for her Bridegroom.

Sometimes I think the church is so consumed with herself she forgets **Who** she’s here for. Certainly the ‘doctrine of imminency’ as it is called, is rarely preached, much less

taught, but the early believers had an urgency about His return. In the two letters to the Thessalonians written in AD 51 - about 18 years after Jesus death and resurrection, Paul urges them not to lose sight of Jesus' imminent return. **1 Thessalonians 2:19** 'at His coming': **1 Thessalonians 3:13**: 'at the Coming'. **Chapter 4:15 -18** he gets specific and goes on to urge them to holy living whilst they wait. **Chapter 5:23**. There is an expectation here. His second letter is similar. Now he's dealing in **2 Thessalonians 1:10** with rumours that the Day of the Lord has already come, so he explains what must take place first. The Thessalonians have now downed tools, as it were, because they are so convinced of the imminent return of Jesus they have stopped work! So the doctrine of the soon coming requires a balance between waiting and working.

No one can know what our glorified Lord will look like, but we have some clues. **Revelation 1:12-16** sun full on - can anyone look at that? What's John's reaction? **Verse 17**, he falls as one dead. We're not talking about our mate next door, this speaks of unspeakable glory, brilliance too great to behold or stand in the presence of. This is our God, this is our King - one of the prophets says '*who would not fear thee O Lord, King of the Ages*'. In **Revelation 20:11** we see earth and heaven flee from His face. We need to know **Whose** we are.

This is our God.

Jesus said only His Father knew the day and the hour. We've seen that those left behind will have 7 years to come to their senses. Jesus also said it will come on you like travail to a woman in childbirth. Ladies, we know that once that process starts, there's no stopping it. That baby's going to be born. So, He told us to look for signs of the end. Wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes etc. etc. He also said, '*know this, when the fig tree puts forth its leaves...*' **Luke 21:29-33** when Israel - who is the fig tree - is back in the land that is a sign...

It's the easiest thing to become lukewarm; we are urged to keep our spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Satan leaves you alone before you change sides, once you do the fight is on to discredit you and get you back into his territory. So, what are our instructions whilst we wait for our Bridegroom - '*live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age.*' **Titus 2:12,13**. '*Eagerly await His coming*'. **1Corinthians 1:7**. Keep in mind '*You will be like Him when He comes*' **Colossians 3:4** and '*press on towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*' **Philippians 3:14**.

Beloved, time is short. Live as though He were coming today, with expectancy and joy, that when He comes, '*His reward will be with Him*' **Revelation 22:12**

*'Behold I come quickly and My reward is with me to give to everyone according to his works.'*

God bless you and thank you for listening.