

## Will the church go through the Tribulation?

Day 3

The Book of Revelation

June 2008

My personal belief is that every generation should live as though Jesus were coming today. We should plan as though the Lord may tarry, but live in the purity of our lives as if Jesus could come back today. When we get to the end of today, you will see why I think as I do. Be blessed then as the Holy Spirit unfolds to us God's prophetic timetable.

Here we are on day 3 and we have covered quite a lot of background material, we have looked at the question of whether the church is now Israel and concluded that of a certainty, we are not.

We have looked at the five cycles of discipline and seen how Daniel came to be in exile in Babylon. And we have examined the word of prophecy in Daniel's 70 weeks.

We are probably coming to the conclusion that the church will not go through the Great Tribulation because this is a time of judgment on Israel and the unbelieving nations. But in order to be sure of what we believe, we need to examine other views to see why they think what they do. We will approach this question with an open mind, letting the scriptures speak for themselves.

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 be face to face with Jesus and wish that you had spent your time more wisely. We will see when we come to look at the Great White Throne judgment and the judgment of believers' works, that what we lose is rewards, nothing else, at that place. Let's just recap a moment about the prophetic destinies of Israel and the church:

When we are looking at prophecy, we are looking at two distinct people groups, Israel, and the Church. 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 actually 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 well as us, 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. We will examine the difference between the Rapture, so called and the Second Coming in a moment.

We have established, I believe, the way in which the bible hides a pause of hundreds of years in one verse, instances where there is a pause halfway through a sentence and a gap of some hundreds of years of history whilst something else takes place. We saw an example of this in 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 unfulfilled, 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 as king of Kings and Lord of Lords to judge the earth has yet to come. To recap where we are then -

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

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 which we have already studied. 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.

And **secondly**, humanity's 'cup of iniquity' is filled to overflowing and God will bring judgement on the earth for their rejection of His Son. A principle found very early in the Bible is that God waits for iniquity to be full. 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. *'But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete'*. God is a God of absolute justice and righteousness. 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? 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, reeling and Isaiah says, terrible. But we will see.

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

We are rapidly approaching the culmination of Church history, and therefore the **continuation** of Jewish history.

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 24:21. I believe in a literal 1,000 year reign of Jesus on the renewed earth, following His second advent.

This does not mean, as I have already said, 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. Be like the Bereans, and search the scriptures. You can look that one up too!

**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),
- the catching away, Rapture, of the church. Firstly then...

### **The time of ‘Great Tribulation’:**

God is going to bring righteous wrath upon the world, and God is going to bring righteous wrath on the nation of Israel. The time of this judgement is known as the Great Tribulation. The seal, trumpet and vial judgements of Revelation 6, 8 and 16 are all elements of God’s wrath. He Himself is the source of the seal judgements in Revelation 6:16,17 called the *‘wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come and who is able to stand?’*

As a matter of interest, the beginning of chapter 7 shows us who is able – the 144,000 **Jews** who are sealed as God’s servants during this time.

The trumpet judgements are sent with the angels who have been around the throne of God as ministering spirits. They deliver the wrath of God in the form of the trumpet judgements in Revelation 8:1,2, *‘When He opened the 7<sup>th</sup> seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given 7 trumpets’,* and the bowl judgements in Revelation 15:7 *‘Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever.’*

Matthew 24:21 Jesus here speaking of the last half of the Tribulation – which is split into two halves of three and a half years, the latter half being the reign of the antichrist himself. *‘For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now’.*

Don’t miss that - this includes the flood, the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem, the Babylonian invasion, the persecution in Egypt, the Medes and the Persians, and Rome and their thumb under which Israel was at the time of Jesus Himself.

Jeremiah 30:5 *'This is what the Sovereign Lord says "Cries of fear are heard – terror, not peace. Ask and see: can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale?'* verse 7 *'How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it'.*

Daniel 12:1 *'At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise' – again pointing to the Jews – 'there will be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.'* Daniel stands at the fulcrum between Israel's past and Israel's future. Notice two things about this verse, the terror of that time will be unprecedented, which is mirrored in Jeremiah, and the promised deliverance, which is also mirrored in Jeremiah. **These prophecies are specifically for the Jewish nation – they have no application to the church.**

There are three great descriptions of this period to come –

- It will be the worst hour of human history
- It is called the Day of the Lord
- It is called the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel.

It's the worst hour of human history for the world, and it is the worst hour of human history for Israel. Listen to the passage that relates to the world Isaiah 24:3-6 *'The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The Lord has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant'.*

A prominent scholar of things pertaining to the Tribulation period has said there are ten words that characterize the period. The words are:

- Wrath
- Judgement
- Indignation
- Trial
- Trouble
- Destruction
- Darkness
- Desolation
- Overturning
- Punishment

It will be the worst hour in human history for the world.

What begins the Tribulation period? There are a variety of views about the tribulation period, when it will be, when it was, and some even believe that we are in the tribulation period now. But it seems to me from an examination of the scriptures that the key to the start of this devastating time in the history of the earth, when the wrath of Almighty God is poured out on unbelieving Israel and the Gentile nations would be -

Daniel 9:27 *'Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week:'. As we saw when we studied the book of Daniel, one week equals 7 years. So the signing of this covenant, or contract, with the Jews is the act that starts the prophetic clock ticking. The moment the agreement is signed, we know that things on earth have just 7 years left. Now the Lamb is going to start breaking the seals on the judgements, for the judgements of God to begin. Picking up in Revelation 6:1 'Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see".'*

What exactly did John see? He saw the four riders on four horses, the first was a rider on a white horse with a bow, no arrows – the antichrist himself - who goes forth *'conquering and to conquer.'* The releasing of the work of the antichrist is part of God's judgement on mankind. We can come to no other conclusion, that Satan's last onslaught is part of God's eternal plan and Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is the **only One** found worthy to open the scrolls to release the wrath of Almighty God upon the earth. Again, we do have scriptural warrant for this – Job 1:8 *'Have you considered My servant Job?'* God Himself is the author of Job's trouble.

I'll leave you to think about that.

Let's dial down a bit now and have a look at the disciples and the Olivet discourse as it is called. Here they are asking Jesus what will be the sign of Your coming – they want to know what to look for when He comes in great glory at the end of the age.

#### **'The Second Coming', 'the Second Advent' 'That Day' or 'the Lord's Return':**

**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 – end) 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 silly 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 future.

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 follows this time of Great Tribulation upon the earth.

Matthew 25:31 and 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.

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.

You can see that Matthew 25 is key to understanding the end times.

The Jewish people's understanding of the Messiah coming and ruling the earth was like this:

The Jewish people thought in the last days there would be a time coming which was called the time of Jacob's Trouble. They thought it would be a seven year period of very dark times, but that they would get through it. At the end of the 7 year period Messiah would come down from heaven and He would land on the Mount of Olives and then He would sit in judgement over the whole earth. His throne would be on the earth and He would gather all the nations together, Jewish people and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers and He would separate them. All unbelievers would be on His left hand side and all believers on His right hand side. The next thing Messiah would do would be to remove all the unbelievers from the earth and leave only believers on it. That is what the Jewish people thought would happen, so when they talked about the **Lord's return**, they meant the day when the Messiah would come down from the heavens on to the earth. What we understand as the Second Advent of Jesus.

The first question we need to answer is, where did they get this idea from –

Ezekiel 20:33-38 *"As surely as I live," says the Lord God, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples*

*and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will judge you face to face, just as I judged My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I judge My case with you,” says the Lord God. “I will make you pass under the rod and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord”*’.

In verse 35, if you have the word ‘plead’ it is not correct, the correct word is judge, and the NIV has the word ‘judge’ and this is correct. What we have is on this terrible day, there is going to be a separation and the unbelievers are going to be removed from the earth, but the believers will remain on it. The believers will go through into the Millennium and populate the earth. The Jewish people have no problem with this view, it is only us in our day that have the problem.

The Jewish people knew what had happened in Noah’s day. In Noah’s day there had been believers and unbelievers living together on the earth. Then God’s universal judgement came in the flood and who was left after the flood? Believers, the unbelievers had been removed. The vast majority of believers had either died, or in one case had been removed **before** God’s judgement started. Not all the believers had been removed, some went through the judgement of the flood, but they were sealed in the ark before the judgement began. They were there, but unharmed. The principle is that the believer has to be **safe** before the judgement can begin. But the Jewish people always expected the unbelievers to be removed.

Jesus Himself confirmed that view in his own teaching as we have already seen.

*Matthew 25: 31-33 ‘When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.’*

This is the judgement at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus is on the earth and He is judging the Gentile nations, which is what the word ‘nations’ literally means. The believers in their *natural body* go through, inherit and populate the earth during Millennium.

So that is Second Advent, Day of the Lord, that day, or the Lord’s return.

### **The Rapture of the Church:**

Let’s now have a look at this question of the catching away of the church before the seven year tribulation period. The rapture of the church means the removal or catching away, of the church from the earth, prior to the 7 year tribulation period.

As always, there are a number of views as far as what is called the rapture is concerned, as to when it occurs, who is involved in it etc.

We have already established God’s principle of removing believers before He brings judgment on the earth, so the issue of the rapture again, could be seen to be an issue that **calls into question** the very

nature of God, like the church becoming spiritual Israel casts doubt on his immutability, having changed His mind about Israel being His chosen people with whom He had made an everlasting covenant.

So will He indeed change His pattern of not judging the righteous with the wicked, and cause His bride to go through a time of the greatest horror the earth has ever seen to purify her – as is the view of some - even though in the past He has always removed the righteous before judgment takes place.

God is a God of principles and the principle is, there is **always** grace before judgement with Him. He **never** sends judgement, or discipline, of any kind without first giving grace and that grace is in the form of increasingly severe warnings to the people concerned.

Another principle which we will reinforce as we study is that He never judges believers and unbelievers together. That is one of the reasons why I absolutely know that we as believers will be removed before the end time judgement of this earth begins - God's character is actually at stake in all of this. Does He change? No, of course He doesn't, He is immutable.

Just let's recap on what happened in the past. In Genesis we saw that on two occasions, He removed the righteous before He brought judgment on the wicked –

- The universal flood and Noah and his family are removed before judgement comes
- Lot and his daughters, together with his wife, are led away by angels before judgement comes.
- We can see a further instance of this in Joshua, where Rahab the harlot is spared because she is a believer and by dropping a scarlet thread out of her window, she and her family are saved when Jericho is over-run by Israel.
- You could also feasibly cite the Passover, where when the blood was applied to the doorposts, the angel of death 'passed over' and the believers inside were safe. There is a separation of unbeliever from believer, before the judgement takes place.

We would appear to have established a principle that God removes the righteous, separates them from the unrighteous, before He brings judgement. So, whether you are mature or not, getting it right (whatever that may be) or not, you are made righteous by the blood of Jesus, you are not made righteous by anything but **His precious Blood**, so that makes you a candidate for being removed before judgement of the earth takes place.

Having looked at the Old Testament principle, let's look at some New Testament scriptures and see what we find - is there consistency? We need to see that God is exactly the same in His dealings with mankind in the New Testament as He was in the Old.

Let's start with what Jesus said in Matthew 25 and then we will go on to see what Paul had to say on the subject.

Matthew 25: 31-33,46 this is Second Advent, at the end of the Tribulation time, and He is talking to the Jews : *'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit*



*on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.’ Verse 46 ‘And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’*

So, it appears, that at the end of the age, He will do exactly the same thing – unbelievers will be on His left hand side and believers or the righteous, on His right.

The next thing Messiah will do will be to **remove** all the unbelievers from the earth and leave only believers on it, to go into the Millennial Kingdom. The point is there is a **separation** going on, before judgement begins. So we now have a New Testament principle. Exactly the same as the Old Testament.

What does Paul say?

*1 Corinthians 15:51-55 ‘Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘death is swallowed up in victory’. O death where is your sting, O grave, where is your victory?’*

Paul is talking to believers, those made righteous in Christ. Those who have died will be raised first. Those who are alive at the catching away will be changed. These verses are talking about the removal of the church, or the rapture.

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ‘But I do not want you to be ignorant brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 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 by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words’.*

In verse 14 Paul uses the phrase ‘in Jesus’ – it is only the church who are ‘in Jesus’ or ‘in Christ’ - this verse is not talking about the second advent which we will look at a little later. Those who are alive in Christ, he says, will be caught up together in the clouds, or as some versions say, in the air.

The word caught up in Latin is the word ‘rapio’ from which we get the word rapture. Rapture means to be caught up. Jesus here in these verses is not coming to the earth, His feet will not touch at this point, as they do at the Second Advent, but He is in the **air**, and we who are alive at that time will be caught up to meet Him. There is a view that this is escapism – beloved, this is just not so, the scriptures are **so** clear on the nature of God and the way He does things, you cannot miss it.

**Views on 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 and where a wrong belief about one thing, can lead you into a wrong believe about something else, one thing as we say, invariably leads to another:

### 1. The amillennial view:

This view teaches that there is **no** separate millennium or golden age. We the church are the new Israel, again, this is what is known as '**replacement**' **theology**, the church is now Israel, and the Jewish people cannot expect any restoration because God has finished with them. We studied this on day one.

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 judgment 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. So we can see that the belief that the church is now Israel, leads to the belief that the next event on God's calendar is the Second Advent of Jesus. **So the amillennial view - the next event on their calendar is the Second Advent.**

### 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. Again this sidelines Israel in God's end time purposes. 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" or 'Dominion' theology. The groups who generally see prophecy in this way include 'Kingdom Now!', 'Word of Faith', 'Manifest Sons', 'Dominion' and 'The Latter Rain Movement'. There is much talk of new power, taking territory, winning nations, worldwide revival etc. There is a renewed emphasis on healing, and complete wholeness and spiritual authority which 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 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. This view encompasses a future for Israel and the Rapture of the church, seeing them as separate entities. They see the Great Tribulation as being the time of judgement on the unbelieving nations and Israel in particular, which will bring her back to God.

This view says 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. A major sign to the nation of Israel will be the catching away or, rapture of the church.

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 rise 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 midpoint 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 of 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 be physically 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 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.

#### **Objections to views (1) and (2): the next event on the calendar is the Second Advent:**

Now, once the church is removed, the tribulation will begin on the earth. But as I have just said, you will meet people who believe that the church will go through the tribulation. The only problem is there are some questions arising from that view I believe they should have to answer. I want us now to look at the problems that these believers have if they think the church is going through the tribulation.

- 1. Imminency:** that is that Jesus could come at any time. The New Testament shows that Jesus could return for His church at any time. If you believe the church is going to go through the Tribulation, you cannot believe that Jesus could come at any time, it's a contradiction. If you believe we are going through the tribulation, you are looking for signs of things to be fulfilled, we are never told to look for signs. For example, if you are looking for signs, the Temple in Jerusalem has not been rebuilt yet. There is no statue of the antichrist there, because there is no Temple. If you believe that the church is going through the tribulation, then Jesus could certainly not come yet and **you do not believe in the doctrine of imminency. So you are not believing what the New Testament clearly says.** That is just one problem that you have.

2. **Comfort.** 1 Thessalonians 4:18 *'comfort one another with these words'*. If you wanted to be comforted it is no comfort to be told that you have to go through the worst judgement period the earth has ever had or ever will have – that is no comfort at all. Imagine you have just led someone to Christ and they are full of joy, then the bad news, but brace yourself for the worst time the earth has ever experienced – where's the good news in that! Doesn't make sense.
3. **No signs.** The Old Testament and Jesus told the Jews to look for signs. Matthew 24:4-8 *'when you see...'* But in the New Testament, whenever the church is mentioned, we are **never** told to look for signs. We are told to look for Jesus coming for us. We could go at any time. So if we were going through the Tribulation, we would be told to look out for signs, but we are not, we are told to look for Jesus.
4. Jude 14,15. (last book before the book of Revelation) *'Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him'*. What a statement! This is not a quotation from the Old Testament. Everyone knew this statement, but it was not recorded in the Old Testament. Why? Because it refers to the church and the church was not mentioned in the Old Testament. This shows when Jesus returns to the earth, Second Advent, we will be with Him. And Enoch, the 7<sup>th</sup> from Adam, prophesied it!
5. The fifth point is a problem that people get into if they try to answer number 4 by saying that the church will go through the Tribulation period, and Jude makes it clear that we do not. What they say is this – the church is going through the Tribulation then Jesus returns and those who are alive are caught up to meet Him in the air and then return to the earth with Him straight away – the up-down theory – as I call it. If you believe that you are left with a **major** problem.

If it is true that the church does go straight up and comes straight back down again, then who are the believers that are in their physical bodies here on earth when Jesus returns? The Old Testament shows when Jesus returns the believers and the unbelievers will be separated. The New Testament does the same thing. Matthew 25:31-46, we looked at it just now - *'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.'* Verse 46 *'And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'*

The believers who are left go through into the Millennium – Jesus 1,000 year reign on the earth, and these believers start having children and repopulate the earth for 1,000 years. If all the believers are suddenly Raptured and given a **resurrection body** then who has the children of the believers? Who gives birth to the children in the Kingdom of God on the earth because no one will be left of the believers to have the children. Big problem. So you can see from Matthew 25 alone that this view is not right.

6. Finally, where in the New Testament does it say the church is going through the Tribulation? The answer is, nowhere. There is no scripture that says the church will go through the Tribulation, or even hints at it, but there are scriptures that say the church will **not** go through the Tribulation period. Paul would have been sorely deficient in his duty towards us if he had not given us some instructions on how to conduct ourselves through this time of tremendous upheaval, had he known we were going to experience it, wouldn't he? Why didn't he say anything? Because, simply, there is nothing to say. We don't need any instruction because we will not be going through it.

Just a couple of scriptures then to show that the church is not going through – Titus 2:11-14 *'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.'* This tells us we should look for His appearing.

2 Timothy 4:8 Paul here speaking *'finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me on that Day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing'*. This tells us there is a reward, a crown even, for looking in anticipation towards His appearing. The doctrine of imminency in a nutshell folks.

1 Thessalonians 1:9,10 *'For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.'*

Verse 10 shows us the rapture and that the tribulation is *not for the church*.

The tribulation period is also called the time of God's wrath.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 *'Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposed and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.'*

Verse 1 talks about the rapture. The King James version in verse 3 has the words 'falling away', in the NIV it says rebellion, but the King James is correct. It is falling away, but the falling away here does not mean that people will go into rebellion against the things of the Lord, that applies to a lot of people today. The word for falling away is the word 'apostasia'. It does mean apostasy, but it also means depart – Acts 15:36-38 *'Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John, called Mark, but Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.'*

The word in verse 38 is the word apostasia, to depart, not desert. Desert is a modern word that does not give the true meaning of this verse. Mark physically left Paul and Barnabas – that is the same word ‘apostasia’ with the same meaning as in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 falling away. Mark left, and with the church, it leaves. The Tribulation cannot come until the church leaves the earth and incidentally, the rapture of the church will be a major sign to the Jews that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

So there we have the for’s and against’s for the rapture or catching away of the church. Personally I would rather not rest on simply the scriptural evidence for the catching away, though it is self-evident, but upon the consistent nature of God. He is GOOD. And He never, ever changes and in His immutability, He will not change the way he deals with the righteous and the unrighteous and the whole issue of judgement.

### **Recap:**

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. He hasn’t revealed it to the unbelievers out there, He has shown His glory to us, His church.

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 out 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 plans being convinced there is nothing to fear.

You have heard what I am about to say now before, but it bears repetition. The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ 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.

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. Jesus is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega. I have realized that so many teachings on this book major on the antichrist and the mark of the Beast etc. but Jesus is the One we should be captivated by, this book is about Him and the culmination of His plan.

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 and glory 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. Let's take a little time now, to unpick what He said to them.

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

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 any more'. 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: that is, the Church of Rome denies the *finished* work of Christ but believes in a **continuing sacrifice**. 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. “I know your deeds, you have a reputation being alive....but you are dead...I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, remember, therefore what you have received and heard, obey it, 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’.

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. '***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.' 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 wide spread 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.

So there we are – will the church go through the Tribulation? You decide.

Tomorrow, the Millennial issue.