



SPECIAL LESSON: “THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE, PART 1”

May 11, 2025

(as part of “Jude: The Acts of the Apostates” series)

Instructor: Steve Schmutzer

REVIEW:

- **QUESTION:** “What has brought us to the focus of today’s lesson: ‘The Pre-Tribulation Rapture?’”
 1. In our study of Jude, we have learned Jude is deeply concerned about the invasion of false teachers into the church.
 2. The bulk of the book of Jude outlines the dangers and character of those who have ‘departed from the truth.’ These people are called ‘apostates.’
 3. We’ve seen how these sorts of people think, speak, and behave. Jude wants us to recognize them as they are everywhere.
 4. The Bible makes the case that there will be more of these folks in the church, rather than less, as the End Times draw closer.
 5. We’ve learned these kinds of people disrupt, divide, and destroy.
 6. That is most of the content of Jude. We’ve studied a lot of urgent warnings and assessments.
 7. **But things change in vs. 20.** From that point to the end of this little book in **vs. 25**, Jude lays out some clear instructions to true believers.
 8. With these instructions, Jude tells believers how they can avoid the perils of apostasy for themselves and within their fellowship.
 9. It’s God’s divinely inspired Word telling us **HOW** we can keep ourselves from falling away from the truth, and **WHAT** we need to know and practice in order to “*build ourselves up in our most holy faith.*”
 10. **THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT:** Jude’s instructions are intended to be a sharp contrast with the choices of apostates.
 11. Jude exhorts his readers to be different - to be the opposite kind of person.
- **In last week’s lesson, we unpacked Jude’s specific instruction to “*wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*”**
 1. We saw from various scriptures how God’s mercy is expressed in the true believer’s life, past, present, and future.
 2. We noted that mercy is defined as not getting what we deserve. We looked at several passages which underscore that **God’ mercy WAS, IS, and WILL BE deliverance from judgment!**
 3. This is the essence of Jude instruction to ‘*wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*’ He wants us to wait for something merciful, which is yet coming.
 4. Jude is saying (and I’m paraphrasing) “Look ahead. Hang tough. Something is coming which will be another display of God’s mercy in YOUR life. That event will ‘bring you to’ your eternal nature and destiny.”
 5. We learned that this merciful event that Jude is referring to this future deliverance from judgement called The Rapture.

6. This makes perfect sense in **Jude vs. 18**, and in the parallel passage of **2 Peter 3:3**. We learned several weeks ago that ‘mockers and scoffers’ ridicule and diminish the Biblical doctrine of The Rapture.
7. Both Jude and Peter clarify that this behavior is a hallmark of apostates – of those who have chosen to depart from the truth.
8. They will not endure sound doctrine according to **2 Timothy 4:3**, the doctrine of the Rapture being one example.
9. Leopards have spots, liberals wear masks in their cars and apostates scoff at the Rapture, and at the themes of Bible prophecy in general.
10. And now, in **Jude vs. 21** Jude says (and again I’m paraphrasing), “Don’t be that way. Don’t be like those kinds of people. Be one instead who faithfully *‘waits for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.’*”

NOTE: That now leads us to the main question for today’s lesson.

I. “What is the Rapture, and what is the Biblical evidence that we should be waiting for it to happen at any moment?”

A. Here is my outline for this lesson: it’s WHAT, WHY, WHEN, and HOW:

1. **First**, we’ll look at WHAT the Rapture is. We want to understand some of the basics about this imminent supernatural event.
2. **Second**, we’ll look at WHY the pre-Tribulation position is the strongest view.
 - a. This should give us some good indications of where the Rapture fits in God’s prophetic timeline.
3. **Third**, we’ll look at the different ideas of WHEN the Rapture will happen. With this point, we’ll examine why there are differences of opinion.
 - a. As part of this third point, we’ll examine what the early church fathers taught.
 - By ‘early church fathers,’ I mean those who were directly taught by Jesus’ original apostles.
 - And those who were 2 or 3 generations removed from that same point.
 - b. I will also address the common misperception that a theologian by the name of John Nelson Darby invented the theory of a Rapture in 1830.
 - We’ll examine why this misperception has gained momentum in the church today.
4. And **lastly**, we’ll look at HOW a proper view of the Rapture benefits our Christian Walk.
5. This is the ‘application’ part. There are upsides to understanding and studying Bible prophecy.
6. There are some specific benefits to properly comprehending the Rapture.

NOTE: I am not going to get through all this today. I battled to force it all into one lesson, and it was impossible. So, this will all be covered in TWO lessons, with the next one on May 25.

B. WHAT exactly is the Rapture?

NOTE: There are several primary Biblical texts concerning the Rapture, and many secondary texts. I want to briefly glance at two of the primary ones to answer this question.

1. **But**, before I do, I want to address the skeptics who always want to say, “The word ‘Rapture’ is not in the Bible.”
 - a. In one way of thinking, that is true. If one fixates on their English translation only, that is a limited point to make.
 - b. The word "Rapture" comes from the Latin term *rapere* or *rapturo* which is used in the Vulgate (the first Latin translation of the whole Bible, around 382 AD).
 - c. The Latin Vulgate translated the Greek word *harpazō*, which we render in our English translation by the phrase "caught up."
 - d. This Greek term means ‘a snatching away by force.’ Whether we say, ‘caught up,’ *harpazō*, Rapture, or anything else like that - - it’s the same Biblical concept.
 - e. It’s no issue of concern that the word ‘Rapture’ is not in our English translations. The word ‘trinity’ is not found in our English translations either, and we don’t doubt the doctrine of the triune God (or we shouldn’t!).

C. Let’s look at our first Rapture text, and it’s found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (this is Paul writing to a brand new body of believers)

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

1. (NOTE: Consider **vs. 13** where it opens with, “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed.... (other translations say ‘ignorant’))
 - a. Ignorance, in matters of Bible prophecy, is not bliss. In fact, our hope and our joy resides in our full knowledge of the truth as God has revealed it to us.
 - b. This is similar to **Daniel 9:23** where Daniel is instructed by the angel, Gabriel, to “...consider the message and understand the vision...” (It’s God saying through Gabriel, “You need to focus. You need to get this right.”)
 - c. Paul essentially says the same thing here. He says this information is ‘...by the Lord’s word.’ He’s getting this from God, and Paul is telling us God wants us to get it right.

2. Now, in this text of **1 Thessalonians**, we see The Rapture described as a future, supernatural sequence of events **(There are seven)**.

- a. **#1: The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven** – at some unknown, imminent, unmarked point in the future, our normal laws of physics and our normal routines will be supernaturally shattered.
 - A global event will take place which turns the entire world upside down. It will be the most significant event that will have taken place for about 2000 years.
 - Jesus Christ will come down from the Heaven of heavens into our atmospheric space.
 - This is also what **John 14:3** says – It's Jesus talking, and He says, "*I will come back....*"
- b. **#2: With a command or shout** – This is a Greek word signifying a military shout or command such as when a military leader steps out of his tent and shouts an order
 - This shout sets in motion the resurrection and physical translation of believers.
- c. **#3: With the voice of the archangel** – Angels are often used to execute God's plan. (They administer all the Trumpet and Bowl Judgments in the Tribulation, for example.)
 - This voice is probably Michael though we cannot be sure. We are not told what the archangel says.
 - But, if we continue in the military vein, then God's command is likely getting repeated, and the program of the Rapture begins.
- d. **#4: With the trump of God** – The trump was used for many purposes, chiefly for important announcements or to call for assembly of troops.
 - This is NOT the 7th trumpet in Revelation and it is important to understand. This is a different trumpet. This is well before that 7th one.
 - Some people feel that these are one and the same. They argue this in order to support a mid-tribulation Rapture (more on that later)
- e. **#5: The dead in Christ shall rise first** – The 'in Christ' limits the resurrection at this time to those who were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the corporate Body of Christ.
 - In other words, these are deceased 'church age' saints. These are saints who have died between the original Day of Pentecost in **Acts Ch. 2** and the time of the Rapture.
 - OT saints, and those who have died during the Tribulation, are resurrected at a later point in God's prophetic plan (**Cf. Daniel 12:1-2; Revelation 20:4**)
- f. **#6: Then we that are alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds** – The resurrection and translation of dead saints is first, and that is followed by the bodily translation of live saints.

- All the types of The Rapture in Scripture suggest that this is an event that is gradual, something others will watch taking place.
- Elijah went up in the view of Elisha; Jesus ascended, and His disciples watched Him go up; The Two Witnesses of **Revelation 11** will rise in the view of everyone, and so on.
- (Think of the many scenarios and their implications there will be utter chaos on earth)
- g. **#7: To meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord –**
 - Where do we meet the Lord? (In the air, in the clouds). We meet Him up there, not down here.
 - Jesus is not coming all the way down to earth in The Rapture. He does that when He physically returns to earth in **Revelation 19** at His Second Coming.
 - From the point we meet the Lord in the air, we remain with Him. This fulfills the promises of **John 14:1-3**. Jesus said, *“I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*
- h. **NOTE: ‘Therefore comfort (encourage) one another with these words.’**
(If we are not intended to understand this, then this instruction to comfort one another makes no sense.)

D. Now, let’s glance at our second Rapture text, and this is found in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 (again, this is Paul writing, but now to a different body of believers)

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

1. Here are the quick bullet points about The Rapture from this passage:
 - a. First, Paul calls it a ‘mystery.’
 - This is not a Sherlock Holmes thing where we must guess and wonder and look for clues, but rather it means that this information was not known prior to this point.
 - God divinely revealed it to Paul. Paul then reveals it to us.
 - b. Second, not everyone is going to die.
 - Some will, Paul says, but others won’t.
 - The Rapture, being an imminent event (more on that later) will be an unexpected supernatural interruption in the affairs of man.
 - Before it happens, some saints will have died. Others will be alive when it takes place.
 - c. Third, EVERY saint will experience a change in their bodies. They will be translated or glorified.
 - This CHANGE will happen in a flash. This will be a nanosecond event. It happens in an instant.

- We go from having these ordinary, sick, painful, pathetic bodies to a glorified one that is just like Jesus Christ's own body.
 - Traditionally, The Rapture has been taught as a 'disappearing act.' In one moment, we are here, but in the 'twinkling of an eye,' "POOF" we are gone. That's NOT what the Bible says.
 - We go from mortal to immortal in a flash, but we otherwise ascend gradually in the view of all.
- d. And fourth, this all takes place at '*the last trumpet*.'
- This parallels the prior passage in **1 Thessalonians**.
 - Again, this is NOT the 7th Trumpet judgment. That judgment has a trumpet blast for an entirely different purpose.
 - Besides, there are multiple trumpet blasts for different occasions throughout the prophetic Scriptures for End Time events that are yet to come.

E. Now let's move to the second issue in my outline. WHY is the pre-Tribulation timing of the Rapture the strongest position?

NOTE: I am going to give you a series of reasons to consider from Scripture, and as we move through these, more details about the Rapture itself will become clear).

- a. These are not in any particular order, although they generally move along a standard timeline – from past to future.
- b. **Individually**, these reasons may or may not be compelling. However, collectively I feel they make a strong case for a pre-Tribulation position.
- c. Remember, any right interpretation must consider the 'full counsel of God's Word' - - - not just a piece of it.

1. FIRST, THERE IS THE CENTRALITY OF ISRAEL

NOTE: Concerning ALL matters of Bible prophecy, a key truth is this: "If you get Israel right, you get your eschatology right." (Dr. John MacArthur)

- a. That is to say, if you properly respect the Bible's stance on Israel and the Jews, you will properly interpret Bible prophecy. If you don't, you won't.
- b. And so, an overarching issue that flies over everything related to the Rapture is the primary PURPOSE of the seven-year Tribulation.
- c. And that primary purpose concerns Israel's redemption and restoration. In other words, the church is not the focus (**Cf. Daniel 9:24-27**).

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and

desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

- d. This "seventy weeks" prophecy in **Daniel** is one of the most significant prophecies in the Bible. It's imperative that we grasp its main points:
 - The angel, Gabriel, is giving Daniel a vision of Israel's future. This is why Gabriel says to him, "*YOUR people and YOUR holy city.*"
 - This prophecy is about Daniel's people, the Jews. It's about God's plans for national Israel.
 - Gabriel says, "*Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city.*" This should be understood as seventy "weeks" (or sets of seven years). That makes a total of 490 years.
 - These 490 years are divided into three smaller units: one of 49 years, one of 434 years, and the last one is 7 years. The final 7 years is divided into two halves. This text in **Daniel** makes this clear.
 - Gabriel says the prophetic timeline starts from the point a decree is issued to rebuild Jerusalem. From the date of that decree to the Messiah's arrival would be exactly 483 years – to the day!
 - This decree was given by King Artaxerxes of Persia in 444 B.C. (**Cf. Nehemiah 2:1-8**)
 - Those initial 483 years concluded in AD 33 on the very day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.
 - This prophecy further specifies that, after the completion of the 483 years, "the Anointed One will be cut off." This was fulfilled when Jesus was crucified a few days later.
 - **Daniel 9:26** also predicts that, after the Messiah is killed, "the people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary."
 - This was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The "ruler who will come" is a reference to the Antichrist who will have some sort of connection with the Roman Empire.
- e. What is being emphasized here is a key point: this 70-week prophecy is about the Jews. It's about Israel, and there is one more period of seven years remaining. That is the Tribulation.
- f. You and I now live in a parenthetical gap of time between the conclusion of the 483rd year and the start of the final seven years of this prophecy.
- g. This gap of time is known as the church age. It was unknown in Daniel's time and throughout the Old Testament period, but, in hindsight, we can see it's there in Scripture. The New Testament talks very plainly about the church age.
- h. The critical point I'm making here is the last seven years of this 70-week prophecy are **ALSO** focused on "*YOUR people and YOUR holy city.*"

- i. Gabriel's words apply to the future 7 years of The Tribulation as much as they applied to the past 483 years which culminated on the first Palm Sunday. It's ABOUT Israel! It's about the Jews!
- j. There is no divine purpose in seeing the church endure The Tribulation. Moving the church into those 7 years muddies the focus of those years being about Israel.
- k. **So, what's the point?** The point is God will return His attention to the redemption and restoration of the nation of Israel during the time of the Tribulation.
- l. The church will not be a key factor at this stage. The church age will have ended. The Bride of Christ will have been removed BEFORE The Tribulation (as we will later see), and God will return his primary concerns once more to the Jews, exactly as Gabriel told Daniel God would do. God is keeping things on schedule.
- m. (SO much more I could say here, but I need to move on....)

2. BIBLICAL TYPES OF THE RAPTURE

NOTE: By saying 'Biblical types,' I am referring to a picture or a representation. That's what a 'type' is.

NOTE: Here, I want to examine God's pattern of rescuing a specific population before a prescribed widespread judgment (READ THAT AGAIN...)

- a. There are two types I want to focus on here: Noah and Lot.
- b. Most scholars agree the story of Noah is an OT picture or a type of the pre-Tribulation rapture. However, nearly everyone who tries to explain it gets the symbolism wrong.
 - The conventional view is Noah was lifted up in the water and that is a picture of the church being lifted up in The Rapture.
 - This notion believes we need to pay attention to the fact that Noah floated.
 - Because Noah was not physically on the Earth (terra firma) when God's judgments fell, so the church will not physically be on Earth during the Tribulation.
 - This kind of thinking is somewhat in the ballpark, however it's a ways away from being accurate. They forget Enoch. He's an important part of this type with Noah.
 - Enoch lived BEFORE Noah, and he was raptured BEFORE Noah was born. Consider this: Enoch knew Adam personally, and Enoch's son was Methuselah, the oldest recorded person in the Bible.
 - Methuselah's name means "when he dies, judgement" or "when he is dead, it shall be sent." It is interesting to note that the year Methuselah died is the year The Great Flood came.
 - So, here's the total picture concerning Noah. Here's why he is a type for a pre-Tribulation Rapture:

- Enoch lived and was supernaturally raptured (**Cf. Genesis 5:24**). He didn't die. Enoch's Rapture is a type of our rapture before widespread judgement.
 - Then there is a gap of time which follows. That will happen again between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. The name of Enoch's son, "Methuselah," carries a message of pending judgement.
 - Noah builds the ark and enters it with 7 others. God shuts the door of the ark in **Genesis 7:16**, symbolizing His ability to sovereignly preserve those He wants to save.
 - Noah and his family do not represent the church – that was Enoch who was raptured BEFORE this point.
 - Instead, Noah and his family represent Israel. God saved a remnant of humanity from that past worldwide judgment just as God will save a remnant of the Jews during the Tribulation from a future worldwide judgment.
 - So, we see a specific population is supernaturally saved before a prescribed widespread judgment arrives.
- c. It's the same pattern with Lot. Here we have another type where God rescues the righteous before He sends judgment.
- Most of us are familiar with the story of Lot. He lived in Sodom. This city, and its twin 'sin city,' Gomorrah, were slated for destruction.
 - These two cities were so wicked that God announced He would utterly exterminate them.
 - God sent two angels to extract out Lot and his family BEFORE fire and brimstone was rained down on the two cities.
- d. These two examples, Noah and Lot, establish an important typological pattern that Jesus Himself talked about (**Cf. Luke 17:26-30**):

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed."

- e. IMPORTANT: We see in this passage the phrases '*the days of the Son of Man*,' and '*the day the Son of Man is revealed*.' This is similar to phrases like '*the Day of the Lord*,' or '*that Day*.'
- f. I think the best way to think of these various terms and phrases and there are others like these, is to consider them all as starting at the time of the Rapture and ending at the conclusion of the Tribulation.
- g. There are passages where the immediate context makes it clear a specific timeframe within those parameters is the focus, but '*the Day of the Lord*,'

or “*days of the Son of Man*” prophetically refer to a time that starts with the Rapture and ends at the conclusion of The Tribulation when Jesus Christ’s Second Advent takes place.

- h. It’s pertinent to note that Peter and Jude both also refer to Sodom and Gomorrah as types. They use this example as a warning to all humanity – concerning the last days (***Cf. 2 Peter 2:6, Jude 7***).
- i. Further, and in the larger context, both Peter and Jude also call out those who scoff at The Rapture. The connection between these two types and the Rapture is reinforced too.
- j. (NOTE: There are other types like Lot and Noah we could discuss, like Rahab, for example, but time does not permit).
- k. The point is God established an Old Testament pattern of rescuing or removing a specific population of His faithful BEFORE widespread prescribed judgment.

3. THEN WE HAVE JESUS’ OWN WORDS CONCERNING THE RAPTURE

NOTE: The passage I want to focus on is ***John 14:1-4***. I want you to take note the directional and destination elements. As we will see, these are different than the same issues regarding His physical Second Coming.

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. **My Father’s house** has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am **going there** to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**”*

- a. Here, in this passage, we see several important points being made about the Rapture:
 - Jesus is talking about His Father’s House. That’s in heaven. It’s not on earth. Keep that in mind throughout the rest of this lesson.
 - Jesus says He’s going to leave His disciples and ‘go there.’ That happens in ***Acts 1:9-11***. He ascended into heaven where He is now preparing a place for us.
 - And He says He’s going to come back to do what? To take us to be with Him where He has gone. That’s not down here; that’s ‘up there.’
 - You and I are heaven-bound. The Rapture is when Jesus takes us to ‘*be with Him so that where He is we will also be!*’
 - WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?
 - Because at Jesus’ physical Second Coming, He descends to earth. The place He ‘will be’ at that point is earth.
 - He will renew this earth, and He will rule it, but the point is He’s going to be down here at that time, not ‘up there.’
 - He is not going back up after coming down in ***Revelation 19*** “*with the armies of heaven.*” He’s coming all the way down and we’re coming all the way down with Him.

- Jesus is coming back to earth at that point to do what? He will set up His Millennial Kingdom, to rule and reign from Israel for 1000 years.
- This passage in **John 14:1-4** shows some direction and location elements which are unique to The Rapture. These happen BEFORE Jesus returns at the end of The Tribulation.

4. THE CHRONOLOGY OF REVELATION

NOTE: Generally speaking, the book of **Revelation** moves along a timeline. There is a sequence from one event to the next event.

- To illustrate, there is the introduction in **chapter 1**, and then we have the church age seen in **Revelation chapters 2 and 3**.
 - Here, seven literal churches from John's time are presented. Their home cities are named, and qualities about each church are given.
 - But they also represent, in their order, the history of the church age from when it started at the Day of Pentecost to our present time.
 - Right now, the time in which WE live is represented by the Laodicean Church which is the only one of the seven that receives no compliments.
 - The Laodicean Church, like the greater church today, is blindly wallowing in a cultural tarpit. It is unaware of its dire condition.
 - It claims it's on fire for God, but God sees it as lukewarm. He sees it as something He will reject.
 - It has the resources and definition of being a cultural success, but it is totally unaware, unteachable, and deluded.
 - It has nothing that Jesus values. Despite the modern church saying "it's all about Jesus," Jesus says instead that He's trying to become part of it.
 - This is the condition of the greater church today. Its situation is a very grave one. The Bible makes the case that this will be the state of the church **just before The Rapture**.
- Right after **Revelation Ch. 3**, right AFTER the conclusion of the church age, the timeline moves forward and we have a representation of the Rapture in **Rev. 4:1**. John writes:

"After this (or AFTER the church age is complete) *I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place **after this**."*

- Note the 'after this' language. This sort of language is sprinkled generously throughout the book of **Revelation**. "**After these things**," or "**Then**," (etc.)
 - Here, we go from the conclusion of the church age to the Rapture.

- After this snatching up, John records scenes of raptured believers in heaven (more clarification on that in a moment)
- But the church itself (Greek: Ekklesia) which is mentioned 19 times from **Revelation Ch. 1** up through **Ch. 3**, is not mentioned as a corporate body at all in **chapters 4 through 18**.
- The church is mentioned 6 more times AFTER Jesus Christ's Second Coming in **Revelation Ch. 19**.
- The Tribulation instead is described in detail from **chapter 6 through chapter 19**. The church is mentioned ZERO times in this same section.
- WHY? Because the church has been caught up as we saw in **Rev. 4:1**.
- (Back to the timeline). After the Rapture in **Revelation**, there are the Seal Judgments > then the Trumpet Judgments > then the midpoint of the Tribulation and the antichrist's Mark of the Beast > then the Bowl Judgments > then Jesus Christ's physical Second Coming in **Rev. Ch. 19** > then the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom, and so on. It's all orderly and logical.
- Every now and then, a portion of **Revelation** will glance backwards or forwards to catch certain things up and orient us to the full picture, but it's otherwise a chronological sequence of events.
- That's why John is instructed in **Revelation 1:19**, "*Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*"
- God is telling us in His divinely inspired Word that a certain order of events is being presented in **Revelation**, moving from past to future.
- And so with that in mind, we see Scripture presenting the Rapture as an event that happens BEFORE Jesus Christ's Second Coming, and BEFORE the start of the Tribulation.
- (Now, there is a key matter related to what I've just shared. Let's look at that now...)

5. THE 24 ELDERS IN HEAVEN (and this is a significant matter...)

NOTE: Over the centuries, there has been much debate concerning the identity of the 24 elders in **Revelation chapters 4-5**.

- b. Bible is clear these 24 elders are representatives of the entire Church which has already been raptured and is in heaven before the Tribulation begins. Let's now prove that using Scripture. The Bible always interprets itself.
- c. In **Revelation 4:1**, John is immediately caught up to heaven, hearing a voice that sounded like a trumpet.
 - BTW, there's that trumpet-sounding voice of God.

- The last trump that triggers the Rapture may not be a trumpet at all. It may simply be the voice of God perceived as a trumpet. Again, John writes in **Revelation 4:1-2**:

*“After this I (John) looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was **as it were of a trumpet** talking with me; which said, **Come up hither**, and I will shew thee things **which must be hereafter** (AGAIN – note the order and sequence). And **immediately I was in the Spirit**: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”*

- In this passage, John, after his Rapture, goes directly into the throne room of God in heaven.
- Around the throne are 24 elders, who are also seated just like Jesus is. Let’s take note of their description (**Cf. Rev. 4:4,10**)

*“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. ... The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and **cast their crowns before the throne...**”*

- The Bible tells us who these 24 elders are in **Revelation 5:8-10**, where they sing a of praise to God for what He has done for them. It reads:

*“And when He (this is Jesus) had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, **and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.**”*

- So, what do we see about these 24 elders? Three things:
- **First, they are singing that they were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb –**
 - That can only be referring to believers. These 24 elders are Christians.
 - They are not angels. Angels aren’t redeemed by the blood of Christ.
 - **Ephesians 1:7** says, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” These 24 elders are Church Age Christians.
- **Second, they are singing that they have been redeemed “to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” –**

- How many kindred, tongues, people and nations are there? Definitely much more than 24.
 - So, these 24 elders are not singing only about themselves, but rather they are singing about a much larger group of people.
 - This larger group of people has ALSO been redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation.
 - These 24 elders are saying they are part of that group.
 - The word “elder” means someone who is representing a larger group.
 - These 24 elders use the words “us” and “we;” this indicates they are not the only ones.
 - Their point is they are self-identifying as representatives of a much larger group of people who are just like them.
 - We can conclude from Scripture that this much larger group comes from every kindred, tongue, people and nation.
 - This is not an “us” vs. “them” situation. It’s not “us here in heaven” and “them down there on the Earth.” It’s just “us.”
 - This is an issue of everyone who is redeemed, and everyone who is redeemed is in heaven by this point - - and the Tribulation has not yet started.
- **Third, let’s assess their appearance and what they are wearing.**
- Their description is found in **Rev. 4:4,10**. Looking at this passage now should make a lot of sense to us:

*“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw **four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.** ... The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne...”*

- John says that they are clothed in white. **Revelation 19:8** says that this kind of white garment represents the righteousness of the saints.
- So, these are Christian saints. And they have crowns of gold. Where did they get this white raiment and the golden crowns, and is that significant in any way?
- The answer is the Church doesn’t get these white garments and golden crowns on earth. **There’s only one place where those rewards are given. We get them at the Judgment Seat of Christ / AKA ‘the Bema seat’ (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:10, et Al.)**
- The Scriptures define five different kinds of crowns we will get as rewards for specific acts and habits of faithfulness during our lives on earth.

- These 24 elders already have their glorified bodies, which takes place at the time of the Rapture. They have already been given their white raiment and golden crowns.
- They got these rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ which the Bible teaches is an event that follows the Rapture.
- Concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ, there are not multiple occurrences of this event. There is one.
- If one believer went through the Judgment Seat of Christ, then the entire Church has also gone through it.

➤ **IMPORTANT: That means the rapture and the Judgment Seat of Christ have already taken place, and that also means the entire church has gone through this sequence.**

- They are in their eternal resurrected bodies, which happens at the Rapture.
- They have already been rewarded with their crowns at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- They are wearing white which represents the '*righteousness of the saints.*'
- And these 24 elders have said (a.) they are saved by the blood of Christ, (b.) they represent a much larger group of who are just like them, (c.) they refer to them and identify with them using the words "us" and "we," and (d.) they have been redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation.
- And – oh, BTW! - the Tribulation hasn't started yet! The chronology of the book of **Revelation** makes that clear.
- All to say, there is a pretty strong case being made here that the Church is already in heaven in their eternal and glorified bodies before the start of the Tribulation.

NOTE: I'm going to stop there. Next time (May 25th) we'll examine more evidence that the pre-Tribulation timing is the strongest one for the Rapture. We'll look at the other theories concerning the timing of the Rapture (and why these arguments are made), and we'll look at what the early church fathers taught.