

THE RAPTURE IN REVELATION

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Our Lord Yeshua said in John 14:3: *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”* At our Lord’s ascension into heaven, two men in white apparel said: *“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”* The promise of the Second Coming of the Messiah, our blessed Lord Yeshua, is clearly established. The Apostle Paul had made this matter quite clear in his words to Titus, his *“own son after the common faith (Titus 1:4)”* when he wrote in Titus 2:13: *“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”* In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul wrote: *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.”* In Colossians 3:4 Paul wrote: *“When Christ, Who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.”*

The Apostle Peter wrote in I Peter 1:7: *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”* In II Peter 1:11 he wrote: *“For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

The Apostle John, the writer of the Book of Revelation, also wrote in I John 3:2-3: *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”*

In our desire to be accurate about the details concerning the Second Coming of our blessed Lord, may God help us to rejoice in His promise, and be watching and waiting!

THE USAGE OF THE WORD “RAPTURE” IN THE BIBLE

Among those who do not believe that the Second Coming of our Lord will

be in two phases, they often point out that the word “rapture” does not appear in the English Bible. But, as we all know, the New Testament was written in Greek, not English. The word which is used in Greek to give us the understanding of the Rapture is *harpazo* – translated in I Thessalonians 4:17 with the English words “*caught up*.” Additional usages of *harpazo* include Matthew 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28-29; Acts 8:39; 23:10; II Corinthians 12:2, 4; Jude 23; and Revelation 12:5. Our English word “rapture” is a transliteration of the Latin translation of I Thessalonians 4:17 which uses the word “*rapturo*.”

Some use Acts 8:39 as a reference to the Rapture where we read: “*the Spirit of the Lord CAUGHT AWAY Philip*.” However, it is clear from verse 40 that this verse is not referring to the Second Coming of our Lord. Some see a connection in II Corinthians 12:2 where Paul refers to “*such an one CAUGHT UP to the third heaven*.” Again, in verse 4 he repeats: “*How that he was CAUGHT UP into paradise*.” While interesting in the usage of the word *harpazo*, it does not specifically refer to the Second Coming of our Lord. The primary passage is, of course, I Thessalonians 4:17 which reads: “*Then we which are alive and remain shall be CAUGHT UP together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord*.”

The word *harpazo* is also found in Revelation 12:5 where the “*woman clothed with the sun*” gives birth to a son, and the text says “*and her child was CAUGHT UP unto God, and to His throne*.”

THE RAPTURE IN REVELATION

The Book of Revelation is primarily an unveiling of the majesty and glory of the Messiah of Israel, our blessed Lord Yeshua. Certainly the event of His Second Coming is a powerful message of this book.

Revelation 1:7 says: “*Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen*.” Most Bible teachers believe that this verse refers to His Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation (often called “The Revelation”) which is described powerfully in chapter 19 of this book.

In Revelation 1:19 we have an outline of the book given to us: “*Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter*.” This threefold outline includes the vision of our resurrected Lord in chapter 1 as “*the things which thou hast seen*”; the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 as “*the things which are*” (meaning – existing in John’s day); and from chapter 4, verse 1, to the end of the book – “*the things which shall be hereafter*.” The word

“hereafter” (Greek: *meta tauta*) or **“after these things”** (following the **“things which thou hast seen”** and the **“things which are”**) is an important clue to the order of things in this book. We read in Revelation 4:1: **“After this”** (Greek: *meta tauta*) and at the end of the verse the word **“hereafter”** (Greek: *meta tauta*). It would appear, therefore, that the third part of the outline of the Book of Revelation begins with Revelation 4:1 and continues to the end of the book. These events follow the **“things which are”** or the messages to the seven churches existing in John’s day.

The following issues seem to be at the heart of the question concerning the Rapture in the Book of Revelation:

1. The **PROMISE** to the Church of Philadelphia – Revelation 3:10
2. The **PROBLEM** of any Gentile believers surviving the Tribulation -
cf. I Thessalonians 4:17 with Revelation 6:11; 7:9-17; 11:7; 13:7, 15; 14:13; 15:2; 16:6; 18:24; 20:4
3. The **PLACE** of John in heaven – Revelation 4:1
4. The **PRESENCE** of 24 elders in heaven during the judgments on earth – Revelation 4:4, 10; 5:6, 8-14; 7:11-14; 11:16-18; 19:4
5. The **PROCLAMATION** of a new song by the 24 elders – Revelation 5:9-10

THE PROMISE TO THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

Revelation 3:10

“Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

It is this one verse that gives the primary understanding of the pre-tribulational rapture of the Church. The debate over this verse between Pre-tribulationists and Post-tribulationists seems to center on whether it is a promise of immunity from the judgments of the Tribulation or a promise of removal from this awful period of time known as the **“Day of the Lord.”** One thing is for sure – it is the promise of our Lord Himself – **“I also will keep thee.”** A few things must be kept in mind concerning the meaning of this verse:

1. The definite article in Greek appears in front of the word **“hour”** and the word **“temptation.”**

It is not referring to any particular period of trial, but to a specific one that is obviously still in the future at the writing of the Book of Revelation. It speaks of “THE hour of THE temptation/trial.”

2. The specific trial is global in impact, not a local situation.

John says concerning this coming trial: “*which shall come upon ALL THE WORLD.*”

3. The purpose of this “*temptation/trial*” is to “*try them that dwell upon the earth.*”

In the Book of Revelation these earth-dwellers appear to be non-believers, NOT believers! Consider Revelation 6:10; 11:10; 13:12, 14; 14:6; 17:8.

4. The preposition following the word “*keep*” is *ek* whose primary root meaning is “*out of*” – teaches removal, not immunity.

THE PROBLEM OF ANY GENTILE BELIEVERS SURVIVING THE TRIBULATION

The words of I Thessalonians 4:17 say: “*Then we which are alive and remain.*” It appears from the words of I Thessalonians 2:14-16 that the church in Thessalonica was composed primarily of Gentiles. I Thessalonians 4:17 implies that when the Lord comes, there will be Gentiles alive when it happens (Paul also uses the editorial “*we*” and includes himself!). But, in the Book of Revelation, it appears that the Gentile multitude of chapter 7 who are saved during the tribulation – do NOT survive the wrath of the dragon and his “*beast.*” The false prophet also adds to this terror against the Gentile believers (Revelation 13:15) and causes as many as do not take the mark and worship the beast to be killed. Revelation 13:7 says that this beast will “*overcome*” the believers, and comparing this with Revelation 11:7 (in the case of the two witnesses) it appears that to “*overcome*” them means to kill them. Revelation 20 then describes the martyrs of the tribulation being resurrected at the end of the tribulation (along with Old Testament saints – cf. Daniel 12:1-3, 12-13). The “*first resurrection*” refers to believers being resurrected; it appears to be in two phases – one at the Rapture, and secondly, at the Revelation, or the end of the tribulation. The “*second resurrection*” refers to all unbelievers being resurrected to stand before the great white throne judgment to hear the verdict of the Lord Himself – this occurs 1000 years after the “*first resurrection.*”

THE PLACE OF JOHN IN HEAVEN

Revelation 4:1

“After this I 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.’”

Revelation 4:2 adds: “And immediately I was in the spirit.” The definite article **“the”** is not in the Greek text. John simply says that he was **“in spirit.”** The same thing is found in Revelation 1:10. By some means of spiritual transference, John was ushered into heaven where he could view the events that would transpire on the earth in the future. He also heard a voice like a **“trumpet”** talking with him; The words of I Thessalonians 4:16 include **“the trump of God.”**

The very fact of this detail would point to a possible Rapture that would precede the coming tribulation. John, both as an apostle and as a believer, would certainly picture such an event.

THE PRESENCE OF 24 ELDERS IN HEAVEN DURING THE JUDGMENTS ON EARTH

There is no doubt that the issue of the 24 elders is critical to the whole argument of Pre-tribulationism. George Eldon Ladd, a Post-tribulationist, admits that very fact in his commentary on the Book of Revelation.

Here are the facts about the 24 elders:

- 1. They sit on thrones around the throne of God in heaven – Revelation 4:4a**
- 2. They are clothed in white raiment – Revelation 4:4b**
- 3. They have crowns of gold on their heads – Revelation 4:4c**
- 4. They are pictured as ones who fall down before God and worship Him, casting their crowns at His feet – Revelation 4:10-11; 5:14.**
- 5. They are also pictured as falling down before the Lamb, and have harps and bowls of incense representing the prayers of the saints – Revelation 5:8**
- 6. They sing a new song about the worthiness of the Lamb – Revelation 5:9-10**

The very fact that the 24 elders are seen in heaven, NOT on earth during the judgments of the Tribulation forces us to connect them with the following possibilities:

- 1. They refer to angels.**
- 2. They refer to all believers who have died and are now in heaven.**
- 3. They refer to Gentile believers who are saved during the Tribulation and are martyred.**
- 4. They refer to church-age believers only.**

The 24 elders cannot refer to angels because they are identified separately from them in Revelation 5:11 and 7:11. They cannot refer to the Gentile multitude who is saved during the tribulation on the basis of the discussion of Revelation 7:13-14.

The description of these 24 elders in Revelation 4:4 connects them with the promises to church-age believers in Revelation 2 and 3. The words about them sitting on thrones remind us of Revelation 3:21; the reference to them being clothed in white raiment connects us with the words of Revelation 3:5; the picture of them with crowns of gold on their heads reminds us of Revelation 2:10 and 3:11.

These 24 elders are not called “*priests*” or “*saints*” but rather “*elders*.” That is a specific description of church leaders as well as the “*elders*” who acted as judges and administrators of justice among the children of Israel.

However, the “*elders*” of the Sanhedrin who are often connected with the priests and the scribes are not treated as genuine believers in the New Testament. They are the ones who condemned our Lord to death and delivered Him to the Romans for crucifixion.

The use of the number “24” is also very instructive. There have been many attempts by Bible teachers to divide this number into the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Church. But, there is no Biblical warrant for that kind of exegesis. The number is found in I Chronicles 24 and 25 and refers to 24 divisions of priests and musicians for the Nation of Israel. But, these are not called “*priests*” but rather “*elders*.”

**THE PROCLAMATION OF A NEW SONG BY THE
24 ELDERS IN HEAVEN
*Revelation 5:9-10***

This issue is the most important of all and involves a great deal of controversy among Bible teachers. Consider the various English translations of these verses:

King James – *“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.”*

New King James – *“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed US to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made US kings and priests to our God; and WE shall reign on the earth.”*

New International – *“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because You were slain and with Your blood You purchased MEN for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made THEM to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and THEY will reign on the earth.”*

New American Standard – *“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood MEN from every tribe and tongues and people and nation. And Thou has made THEM to be a kingdom and priest to our God; and THEY will reign upon the earth.”*

Christian Standard Bible – *“And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because You were slaughtered, and You redeemed PEOPLE for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made THEM a kingdom and priests to our God, and THEY will reign on the earth.”*

Complete Jewish Bible – *“And they sang a new song, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals; because You were slaughtered; at the cost of Your blood You ransomed for God PERSONS from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You made THEM into a kingdom for God to rule, cohanim to serve Him; and THEY will rule over the earth.”*

The Net Bible – *“They were singing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because You were killed, and at the cost of Your own blood You have purchased for God PERSONS from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You have appointed THEM as a kingdom*

and priests to serve our God, and THEY will reign on the earth.”

The English Standard Version – *“And they sang a new song saying, Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed PEOPLE for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And You have made THEM a kingdom and priests to our God, and THEY shall reign on the earth.”*

The New Revised Standard – *“And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed PEOPLE for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And You have made THEM a kingdom and priests to our God, and THEY shall reign on the earth.”*

First of all, in relation to the differences in verse 10 between the King James Version and other English translations, the Greek text shows a number of variant readings. If the third person plural is preferred, it still does not prove anything because it can simply refer to those mentioned in verse 9. It is interesting that we have in Revelation 1:6 these words: *“And hath made US kings and priests unto God”* – and there is no variation in the manuscripts supporting this reading. It would appear that Revelation 5:10, therefore, should support the reading of Revelation 1:6.

Secondly, the real problem depends upon the manuscript evidence behind Revelation 5:9. Does the evidence support the word “US” or a reading of “THEM” or “MEN” or “PEOPLE” etc.? The Greek manuscripts (that we have today) of the passage in Revelation 5:9 are 24 in number, and 23 of them read “US” – only Codex Alexandrinus differs in this regard. We also have many Latin manuscripts of this verse and all of them read “US.” Even the primary languages into which the Greek version was soon translated – all read “US.” The issue is critical to the argument – are the 24 elders singing a song of redemption about themselves or about others who would be redeemed during the Tribulation? It appears that the evidence is overwhelming and that the King James translation is the correct one of Revelation 5:9.

CONCLUSION: It would appear that the Rapture is indeed pictured and stated in the Book of Revelation and that church-age believers will be removed from the judgments of the great Tribulation upon the earth!