

"The Rapture of the Church"

(Part 4)

Rev. 4:1

- INTRO. - Well, this is our 4th week on the subject of the Rapture of the church. And I think we will need to take several more weeks on it, because I want to look at some of the views, and critique them before we get back into the text of the Revelation.
- The Rapture is a key issue in prophecy, and I think it is worth spending some time on. After all, it is a very *practical* issue for all Christians, because if we are going to be going through part of the Tribulation, then we'd probably better be prepared for it.
- And one of the key aspects of this debate (over the Rapture) hinges on the distinction between Israel and the church. If the church and Israel are the same, (as some claim), then we would certainly be going through the Tribulation period, because the references to Israel would really be references to the church. But if they are distinct from one another, (which I believe they are), then it is *possible* for the church to be taken out before the Tribulation begins, because the focus of it is clearly Israel.
- And for the last couple of weeks I have been giving reasons why we should believe that there is still a distinction between Israel and the church -- and three primary aspects that seem to support a pretribulation

Rapture of the church. And we're going to wrap that up tonight. We focused, first of all, on:

I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

- What we saw (here) was that the *promises* to Israel are different than the promises to the church, the *hope* of Israel is different from the hope of the church, and God's *plan* for Israel is different than His plan for the church.
- Secondly, we spent some time looking at:

II. THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION

- When you understand what the *purpose* of the Tribulation period is, you will understand that it is for Israel and *not* the church. The Bible very clearly tells us that the Tribulation is for Israel. It is the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). It is a portion of history that is planned for Daniel's people (the Jews), as we clearly saw in Dan. 9.
- Sixty nine weeks of years are past. *That* was the time between the issuing of the decree by Artaxerxes (to give the political authority to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem), up until the time when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, and was officially presented as Israel's Messiah.
- And *then* there was this large "gap," (which makes up the church age), and we are still in that gap today. But

one day that 70th week will pick up Israel's history, and God will once again deal with Israel.

- They will be purged and purified during that 7-year period, and at the end of it they will recognize the One they have pierced and will repent and all Israel will be saved.
- The original olive branch (that the church has been grafted into) will be restored. The "times of the Gentiles" will be complete. Jerusalem will be established as the center of the world with Christ ruling and reigning on the throne of David.
- By the way, let me just add a parentheses right here, and talk about the significance of Jerusalem for a moment. Folks, it is absolutely incredible that this tiny city has been (throughout history) essentially the center of the world.
- Why is that? Because God declared in 2 Kings 21:7, "I will put My name [there] forever." And *that* is going to be the case in the last days as well. In Zech. 12:3 we read, "And it will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it."
- Folks, do you know, that since the United Nations was formed in 1945, a full one third of its time and energy has been spent trying to deal with the tiny nation of Israel (that represents merely one one-thousandth of

earth's population)?! Indeed Israel, (and Jerusalem in particular), has become a heavy stone that the world is bearing.

- Jerusalem is the center of the world, and it *definitely* will be in the last days, *especially* in the Millennial Kingdom. Dave Hunt points out that "twice in the Bible Jerusalem is called 'the city of our God' (Ps. 48:1, 8), twice the 'city of God' (Ps. 46:4; 87:3), eight times 'the holy city' (Neh. 11:1; Is. 48:2; 52:1; Matt. 4:5, etc.), and once 'the city of the LORD of hosts' (Ps. 48:8)."
- Jerusalem is mentioned 811 times in Scripture. There will never be another city like it in God's plan. It is the key to all He is doing. We're told (in Jer. 31) that once it is rebuilt in the last days, (and God re-gathers His people to His holy city), that it will never, ever be thrown down again.
- Listen to the words of Ps. 22:22ff. This Psalm describes this time. It says, "I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee. You who fear the LORD, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard. From Thee *comes* my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the

LORD. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee. (When will that happen? In the Kingdom.) For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations.”

- (Pause) Well, I couldn't resist that little parentheses, but let's go back (now) to what we were dealing with before. Last time I cut it short just a little bit, but we were looking at what Paul said in 1 Thess. 5:9. He said, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...”
- The Tribulation period is for Israel and the unbelieving nations of the world. It is *not* for the church. We're *not* appointed for wrath. We won't be in the Tribulation period at all (I don't believe).
- In fact, as John MacArthur points out, “There would be no point for the church to go through the Tribulation. All the wrath that God's judgment could pile on us has already been piled on Christ at the cross.”
- And then he says this, “To admit that we go through the Tribulation is to depreciate the work of Christ on the cross and to assume that there needs to be more wrath that we must take ourselves.” Do you see that? (expound)

- Listen, wrath is the destiny of *unbelievers*, *not* believers. The Tribulation period is going to be for unbelieving Israel and for the unbelieving nations of the world. And, praise God, it will lead to the salvation of Israel (and others). But it is *not* for the church.
- As Dave Hunt says, “Yes...Israel must return to the land in unbelief because it is there that they come to faith when the Messiah rescues His people in the midst of Armageddon.”
- Turn with me to Zech. 14 and let's see this again. Zech. 14:1, “Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.”
- Then drop down to v. 9, “And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be *the only one*, and His name *the only one*.”

- Then drop back to 12:10, “And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.”
 - And Paul says in Rom. 11:26, “all Israel shall be saved.” This hasn’t happened yet. This is still future. They have *not* yet recognized Jesus Christ as their Messiah. But they will one day! Yet only after they have gone through the time of Jacob’s trouble.
 - Only at the very end, when all the nations of the world gather against them to destroy them, and Jesus Christ Himself rescues them with His glorious appearing, will they come to see who He really is, and repent with great bitterness and be saved.
 - But this is a different destiny than that of the church. The church is *not* appointed for this kind of wrath. In fact, the church will be *with* Christ when He returns in glory. Once the wedding has been consummated in heaven, the bride of Christ will never leave His side.
 - Well, we have one more line of argument we need to explore tonight, and that is:
 1. At the Rapture, the saints meet Christ in the air; at the Parousia, Christ returns to the earth.
 2. At the Rapture, the Mount of Olives is untouched; at the Parousia, the Mount of Olives splits in two.
 3. At the Rapture, living saints are translated to heaven; at the Parousia, the saints come to the earth with Christ.
 4. At the Rapture, Christ comes *for* His saints; at the Parousia, He comes *with* His saints.
- The word “parousia” simply means “appearing,” but this is the technical term for the Second Coming of Christ, when He comes with power and great glory.
 - This is *not* the Rapture of the church, (and we need to keep these two things clearly distinct in our minds). Those who reject the doctrine of the Rapture, often do it on the basis of saying that there is only *one* second coming of Christ.
 - They say, “You pre-millennial pre-tribulationists have two second comings, while the Bible only speaks of one.” But folks, listen, the Bible *clearly* speaks of *both* the Rapture and the Second Coming -- and makes it clear that these are two *different* events.
 - Now, we won’t look up all the Scripture passages that declare these differences, but let me just run down the list of differences:
 1. At the Rapture, the saints meet Christ in the air; at the Parousia, Christ returns to the earth.
 2. At the Rapture, the Mount of Olives is untouched; at the Parousia, the Mount of Olives splits in two.
 3. At the Rapture, living saints are translated to heaven; at the Parousia, the saints come to the earth with Christ.
 4. At the Rapture, Christ comes *for* His saints; at the Parousia, He comes *with* His saints.

III. THE NATURE OF THE PAROUSIA

5. At the Rapture, the world is *not* yet judged and sin gets worse and worse; at the Parousia, the world is judged and righteousness is established on the earth.
 6. At the Rapture, the purpose will be to present the Bride to Christ in heaven; at the Parousia, the purpose will be to execute judgment and set up the Kingdom.
 7. At the Rapture, there are no preceding signs; at the Parousia, there are many specific, detailed signs that must be fulfilled (especially the battle of Armageddon).
 8. At the Rapture, Jesus appears to believers only; at the Parousia, every eye will see Him.
 9. At the Rapture, Satan will still be free to work in the world; at the Parousia, he will be cast into the bottomless pit.
 10. At the Rapture, believers are given glorified bodies; at the Parousia, humans without glorified bodies populate the earth.
 11. At the Rapture, the doctrine of imminence is maintained; at the Parousia, the exact day can be determined.
- And this is *not* even an exhaustive list. But the point is, that the Bible clearly describes these two events as being different and distinct from one another.
 - And the point I would want to make (here) is that one is for the church and the other is for Israel. The church wasn't part of the first 69 weeks of Daniel, and

we won't be in the 70th week either. We will be taken out before this period of Tribulation begins.

- And, by the way, be careful about the Olivet Discourse (in Matt. 24-25) in regard to this distinction between the Rapture and the Parousia. Many people read the Olivet Discourse as a Rapture passage. It isn't! It deals with the same things we see in the Revelation that describe the Tribulation, leading up to the Parousia.
- It doesn't deal with the Rapture. But many verses in Matt. 24 are taken out of context and incorrectly applied to the Rapture. For example, turn with me to Matt. 24:27. Notice what it says, "For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."
- I can't tell you how many times I have heard that applied to the Rapture, but that is *not* talking about the Rapture. It is referring to the Parousia, the time when Christ comes to judge the nations.
- Look with me at v. 40. Here's what it says, "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left." Folks, that's *not* talking about the Rapture. (And some of you are looking at me like a calf looking at a new gate because this is the way it is always taught...)
- But this is talking about people being taken in judgment while others will be left to populate the

world during the Millennium. Verse 41 is taken the same way, “Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.”

- Now, there *is* a *sense* in which the Bible writers saw the totality of the second advent as one event. This means that all of the things described in the Bible as occurring in the last days would be seen *as a whole*, even though they happen over 7 years duration.
- And so the parables of Matt. 24 (that talk about being ready and *not* knowing the day or the hour) would apply to the Rapture, as well as the Day of the Lord (or the time of judgment).
- So there is the sense of readiness for the imminent return of Christ that applies to us as Christians. But we need to be careful about the Olivet Discourse and how we interpret it.
- I think we can lay the Olivet Discourse right alongside the Revelation, because it deals with exactly the same thing: the 70th week of Daniel, leading up to the judgment of the nations and the Second Coming of Christ (the Parousia). I still hope (at some point in the future) that we can go through the Olivet Discourse in more detail.
- But for now, what I want to do with the rest of our time tonight, is to try to walk you through this confusing issue of the covenants. Dr. Pettegrew, (who used to be a Professor at the Master’s Seminary), has

an excellent section on this in his book *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*.

- So, let’s go through this, and I think this may clear up a few things for some of you. Let’s begin with the biblical basis of the new covenant. “What is the new covenant?” Well, it is one of the three irrevocable covenants that God made with Israel. The other two were the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants. (Remember now, the Mosaic covenant was a conditional covenant—it was dependent upon their obedience)
- But one of the key passages (where the new covenant is found) is Jer. 31:31-34. So turn with me in your Bible to Jer. 31. Let’s read this together: “‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD.”
- What covenant was that? The Mosaic covenant. (What some have called the covenant of law.) They couldn’t keep it. Let’s keep reading, “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”

- Do you see the difference here? This covenant will *not* be something *external*, but will be *internal*. Go on to v. 34, “And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”
- Now, who is this covenant made with? Israel. Who is the promise of the new covenant for? Israel. Pettegrew writes that “the new covenant is also revealed under other names such as the ‘everlasting covenant’ (Jer. 32:40), a ‘new heart’ and ‘new spirit’ (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26), the ‘covenant of peace’ (34:25), and simply ‘my covenant’ (16:60-63).”
- So what are the provisions of the new covenant? Well, the *main* provision is that of a new heart. Jer. 24:7 says, “And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.”
- Gerhard von Rad insists that the Bible student who neglects this feature of the new covenant will “never grasp the characteristic feature of the salvation envisaged by Jeremiah, for here is his prophecy of the new covenant compressed into one sentence.”
- This is the *primary* characteristic of the new covenant, but there are some others as well. (1) There is the promise of the final forgiveness of sin, (2) there is the consummation of God’s relationship with Israel (where we see the formula, “I will be your God and you will be My people”), (3) there will be physical and material blessings (such as those listed in Jer. 31 – the blessings of being gathered into their land [vv. 8-11, 15-17], the blessing of productivity [v. 12], expressions of great joy [vv. 13-14], increased herds and flocks [vv. 23-24], and the rebuilding of their cities [vv. 38-40]), (4) there will be the permanent indwelling of the Spirit (as Ezek. 36:27 says, “And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”), and (5) there will be the reality of the law *inside* the believer (Jer. 31:33; see also 24:7; 32:39-40; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26).
- And listen, we need to understand the nation of Israel’s relationship to the new covenant. Pettegrew writes, “All of the Old Testament passages that discuss the new covenant have something to say about the nation Israel (e.g., Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 37:15-28). The fulfillment of the covenant, in fact, is associated with the nation’s regathering and restoration to its Promised Land following a time of judgment and dispersion (Jer. 31:27-29; 32:36-38).”
- He points out that “the prophet Isaiah refers to the new covenant at least five times: 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; and 59:21.” He says, “All references clearly are directed to national Israel.”

- Isaiah's teaching can be summarized this way: (1) In each instance, there is a covenant promised to the nation, following by a period of national calamity, and preceding a period of unparalleled material and spiritual blessing; (2) the servant of Yahweh is commissioned to function as the mediator of this covenant; (3) in connection with this the servant is presented as a future David who delivers and rules the nation; and (4) the servant in conjunction with the covenant, fulfills a salvific role toward the Gentiles, granting spiritual discernment and deliverance to the ends of the earth.
- Ezekiel mentions the new covenant directly in 16:60; 34:25; and 37:26. But he gives us two additional features: First, the Davidic descendant will rule as a prince over a reunited and restored nation (34:23-24; 37:24-25), and second, the land to which Israel will be restored is identified as Palestine, the land given to the patriarchs (37:25).
- And one other emphasis (we need to throw in here) is that the NT reaffirms that the Lord's covenants with Israel are irrevocable. For example, turn with me to Rom. 3. Look with me at v. 1, "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar..." (apply)
- Turn to Rom. 11. Look at v. 25, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.' And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." (He's talking about this very thing, the new covenant) But notice what he says in v. 29, "...for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (expound)
- Now, let's think about how various groups of people relate to the new covenant. First of all, how do the Gentiles relate to it? Pettegrew writes, "The OT prophets did anticipate Gentile participation in the new covenant. But it is very important to keep in mind that the future blessings promised to the Gentiles in the OT will be fulfilled through the nation of Israel. From the beginning of the covenant program, God promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). So when the new covenant is fulfilled with Israel in the future kingdom, the Gentiles will receive 'trickle down' blessings."
- Turn with me to Is. 56. Look with me at vv. 6-8, "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from

profaning the sabbath, and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, ‘Yet *others* I will gather to them, to those *already* gathered.’” (expound)

- The OT prophets taught that the Gentiles would be blessed through Israel, but the problem with the Jews rejecting their Messiah, is that it left the Gentiles without this intermediary nation.
- Pettegrew writes, “The only hope for Gentiles and cursed Jews, as it turns out, was a mediator who could *not only* enter into the new covenant himself but also enable others to enter into it. This mediator would have to be a Jew, one who in some way epitomized the nation and represented it in faith and righteousness. At the same time, He would have to have a special relationship with Gentiles.”
- And this is exactly what we see in the servant passages of Isaiah. There (and in other places) the Messiah and Israel are identified almost interchangeably. You can study that on your own, but even more interesting is the fact that Messiah is designated as the personified covenant.
- For example, Is. 42:6 says, “...I will appoint you as a covenant to the people...” We see the same thing in

49:8. In both of these two verses, the word for “people” refers to Israel, but in 42:6, the word for “nations” refers to the Gentiles. The KJV even translates it “Gentiles.”

- So what’s the point? The point is, that the Servant/Messiah would have an impact on both the Jews and the Gentiles. And when Jesus Christ was born, we read in Luke 2:32 that He was born as, “a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.”
- Pettegrew sums it up by saying, “Both the Old and New Testament writers thus point to a faithful and righteous supermediator representing and personifying the nation in covenant relationship. He is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.”
- And, of course, what did Jesus say at the last supper? He said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). Covenants (in the OT) were ratified by the shedding of blood, and the new covenant was ratified by the shedding of Jesus’ own blood on the cross.
- Then, on the Day of Pentecost, Christ inaugurated the new covenant by pouring out the HS. And to explain how to live under the new covenant, a new revelation was given by God that we call the (what?) the New Testament.

- But now, what is the problem with all this? The problem is, that the new covenant was promised to (whom?) Israel. So *here* is where the distinction occurs between covenant theologians and dispensationalists.
- The issue is, that the new covenant was promised to Israel, but it is obviously operative today in the church. So how does the church get to benefit from the new covenant that was made especially for Israel? How does that work?
- Pettegrew writes, “The most biblically informed solution is that the church *participates* in the new covenant but...the new covenant will *not* be finally fulfilled until Israel comes into a right relationship with God and its Messiah at the end of the Tribulation.”
- He says, “The church does *not* participate in the land blessings, and may *not* have full benefit of the spiritual blessings, because the king is *not* yet here on earth, ruling from Jerusalem as the OT prophets promised.”
- But we *do* enjoy some benefits and blessings of the new covenant *now*. Although the Servant/Messiah was rejected by the covenant nation, and although the OT promises to the covenant nation will *not* be fulfilled until the millennial kingdom, the Servant/Messiah has already begun to be the mediator of a better covenant (the new covenant).
- And we can see *this* in a number of NT passages. For example, in Eph. 2:12, Paul explains the *bad* news to the Gentiles, that they were “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”
- But *then* (in the next verse) he gives them the good news, “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Pettegrew writes, “The answer to the question of how church saints participate in the new covenant is thus found in being ‘in Christ,’ the personified new covenant.”
- So, *now*, (in this dispensation), both Jews and Gentiles can share in the blessings of the new covenant by becoming “in Christ.”
- But then, here is the clincher. The best is still yet to come. Pettegrew writes, “Another generation of Israelites some time in the future will accept the Messiah and the provisions of the covenant through an outpouring of the Spirit (Zech. 12:10-14; Rom. 11:26). The realization of the new covenant blessings today does not mean that the promises to Israel have been canceled.”
- One day all the fullness of the covenant promises will come to pass. And all the world will be blessed through the covenant nation. And her Messiah will rule and reign as God has decreed.