

**I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18**  
**WALK IN HOPE!**  
**PART 4**

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica and we finish up looking at "*Walking in Hope!*"

I think it is interesting that this hope that Paul speaks of here is based upon the return of Jesus Christ. You see, there is comfort in His return and yet, how many today have negated the return of Jesus Christ and specifically, the Rapture of the Church!

When you do that you end up taking that hope away. And if you think I am going too far on this, listen again to what Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:15, "**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.**"

In other words, Paul was expecting the Lord to return for His Bride, the Church during his day! He did not say, "**THEY which are alive and remain**" or "**YOU which are alive and remain.**" No, Paul said, "**We who are alive and remain.**"

He was expecting the Lord's return at any time, it was imminent! Then why the delay? Listen to what Peter tells us in II Peter 3:9, "**The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**"

God is giving people a chance to come to saving faith before He comes for His Bride, the Church. And when that last person comes to know Jesus, the Lord will return. I am not saying that everyone will be saved, they will not. But there is that last person, during this age of grace, that once he gets saved, the Rapture will occur, the Lord will meet us in the air and the dead in Christ will rise first and we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them!

We have been looking at what these verses here in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 are all about over the last several weeks. And the reason we are taking our time through this section is because so many people have negated what Paul is saying here.

But to negate what Paul is saying means you have to come up with your own ideas of what he means. To me, it is very clear, and like I have said, we have gone through this in great detail.

What I would like to do this morning is read through these verses once again and our focus will be on the timing of the Rapture of the Church. We looked at last time some different views of this timing that I don't think are correct. I think the Scriptures are really clear on when the Rapture occurs. Not the day or hour but the seasons and what takes place after this Rapture occurs. And there are others but these are the main ones.

We saw last time this idea of Christian Reconstructionism or Kingdom Now Theology where they believe that they will make this world a Christian world and then the Lord will come back. But as you look at the Scriptures, the opposite is true. The world is going to turn against the Lord even more, it will be even more wicked and God will judge this world for their sin and then He will return to set up His Kingdom on this earth!

Some believe that the Lord will come back at the mid-point of the Tribulation Period, the 3½ year mark, but that would not make sense. God would not pour out His wrath upon His Bride, so this makes no sense to me. It is not supported by Scripture.

The same is true with the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church where the Church is Raptured prior to God's wrath being poured out, sometime after the seal judgments, after the 3½ year mark of the Tribulation Period. But, as we saw, God's wrath is being poured out when the seal judgments begin, so this is also not Scriptural.

There is also the Post Tribulation View that says that the Rapture will occur at the end of the Tribulation Period, where we will be caught up and immediately come down with the Lord to set up the Kingdom! Again, not Scriptural as we saw last time.

And we looked at the Partial Rapture View that says only the sanctified, those who are walking a certain walk with the Lord, kind of a works theology for the Rapture, and if you don't meet that standard, which no one really knows what that is, you won't be Raptured but will have to go through the Tribulation Period. Again, it makes no sense that part of the Bride of Christ will not be with the Lord. And, of course, our righteousness is not based on our merit but it is the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed into our lives by faith. So, this is also Scripturally wrong!

This morning we are going to be looking at a view that I think the Scriptures clearly teach, it is called the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. Now before we dig into that, let's read through these verses this morning in I Thessalonians chapter 4 beginning in verse 13 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we look at this *“Walk in Hope!”*

**I 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.”**

There are a couple of things I want to talk about and then we will look at the evidence for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. First of all, when Paul speaks of being caught up with those who are asleep, those who have died prior to the Rapture, *WHO* is being caught up with these dead saints who will rise first?

Paul tells us that those of us who are *ALIVE* when the Rapture occurs will be caught up with the dead and we will meet the Lord in the air!

Now when it says, **“together with them”** the Greek word for **“together”** is HAMA, (ham’-ah) and it is a word that deals with time. Then, the Greek word for **“with”** is SUN, (soon) and this word speaks of space.

Thus, what Paul is saying is that we will all arrive together at the same time and be together in the same space – with the Lord! The dead in Christ and those who are alive will meet the Lord in the air at the same time even though the dead in Christ will rise first. That should make sense, they are six feet lower in the ground than we are! Just kidding!

And **HOW** is this going to happen? Paul tells us that we are going to be “**caught up**” or HARPAZO, (har-pad’-zo) in the Greek. And this word speaks of seizing or snatching away. It is something that happens very quickly, in the twinkling of an eye!

Think of it like this. We are immediately transformed when the Rapture takes place. It will take place very quickly. The twinkling of an eye can mean the time it takes for light to hit the surface of the eye till it hits the retina.

Now light travels at 186,000 miles per second, which would mean it would take 1.5 seconds for light to travel from the earth and reach the moon. The moon is 239,000 miles from the earth!

So then, in the twinkling of an eye the light would only reach 1 foot from the surface of the earth. No one will see it happen, but they will certainly see the effects!

And notice what the end result of all this is, we will “**meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.**” I Thessalonians 4:17. And then Paul closes this with, “**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**” I Thessalonians 4:18.

Now here’s the thing. We know we will suffer persecution from the world, the Bible is clear on that. But during the Tribulation Period we see that it is the wrath of God being poured out upon a Christ rejecting world from the opening of the first seal, through the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments, and thus, God would not pour out His wrath upon his Bride, the Church. In fact, Jesus bore the wrath that was due us on the cross of Calvary!

Think of it like this, before World War II started, Japan and Germany called their ambassadors home, they left America and went to their own home countries, why? Because war was about to break out and their countries wanted them to be home before war was declared!

So too with our Lord, before He declares war on this earth, before He pours out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, He will call His ambassadors home, you and me!

Remember, this is not our home, for our citizenship is in Heaven and that is where we are called to go, to be with our Lord.

Thus, Paul tells us in Titus 2:13, **“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

That is what we are doing and in knowing He is coming back, in knowing we will be with Him, what should we do? Paul told us, **“Therefore comfort one another with these words.”** I Thessalonians 4:18.

So let’s look at this topic of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church because it is what Paul spoke of very clearly and it is our hope. We are looking for the Lord’s return!

### **PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE**

Let me share with you these words from Tim LaHaye. He wrote,

When I was a boy, I took a tour of [the] Henry Ford factory in Dearborn, Mich. Then we saw an electromagnetic crane move over a large railroad car filled with what seemed to be junk steel.

At the flip of a switch, everything in that car leaped up to the magnetic crane. Then I saw a strange thing: some pieces of steel fell back into the car. I waited until others had left on the tour and then climbed up to look inside and find out why these pieces fell back in.

I found they were not steel at all. Lying on the bottom of the car were some old two-by-fours, a broom handle, and some broken pieces of wood. Only objects made of the right component responded to the magnet, the rest were left behind.

- Tim LaHaye

How true that is. The Lord will take His Bride home with Him, not those who are not His Bride. That should just make sense. Now some may look like the Bride but they are not, they have not been clothed with the wedding garments that Christ has given, the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed into our lives by faith.

Now how do we know that the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is the right doctrine? That is what we will be looking at.

And one of the reasons that we need to understand this is that there is a hostile attack on those that believe in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church today. Yes, it is important to know because it gives us great hope, but also, we need to understand why we believe what we believe or we will be swayed by their arguments. Arguments that are not supported by Scripture or history as they claim. Let me show you what I mean.

Thomas Ice, a great prophecy teacher, wrote,

Critics of pretribulationism sometimes state that belief in the rapture is a doctrinal development of recent origin. They argue that the doctrine of the rapture or any semblance of it was completely unknown before the early 1800s and the writings of John Nelson Darby. One of the most vocal and sensational critics of the rapture is Dave MacPherson, who argues that, “during the first 18 centuries of the Christian era, believers were never ‘Rapture separators’ [sic]; they never separated the minor Rapture aspect of the Second Coming of Christ from the Second Coming itself.”

A second critic, John Bray, also vehemently opposes a pretribulation rapture, writing, “this teaching is not a RECOVERY of truth once taught and then neglected. No, it never was taught-for 1800 years nearly no one knew anything about such a scheme.”

More recently, pre-trib opponent Robert Van Kampen proclaimed, “The pretribulation rapture position with its dual *parousias* was unheard of in church history prior to 1830.” . . .

Christian reconstructionists have also consistently and almost universally condemned premillennialism and pretribulationism, favoring instead, postmillennialism. One sample of their prolific and often vitriolic opposition can be seen in Gary North’s derisive description of the rapture as “the Church’s hoped-for Escape Hatch on the world’s sinking ship,” which he, like MacPherson, believes was invented in 1830.

- Thomas Ice, Examining an Ancient Pre-Trib Rapture Statement



Now I am not sure why they say that it was not taught for 1800 years because Paul taught it in I Corinthians chapter 15, Jesus spoke of it in John chapter 14 and clearly Paul taught that the Church would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air in I Thessalonians chapter 4 and this could take place at any time. Paul thought it would happen in his day and he was looking for it!

A writer who thinks this is just ridiculous to believe in the Rapture, that it is not Scriptural, had this to say. He wrote,

. . . Rapture doctrine is one of the most recent “new doctrines” in the history of the Church. The only doctrine more recent is the invention of the sinner’s prayer for salvation by Billy Sunday in 1930, which was made popular by Billy Graham in 1935.

. . . The fact that John Nelson Darby invented the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine around 1830 AD is unquestionably true. All attempts to find evidence of this wild doctrine before 1830 have failed, with a single exception: Morgan Edwards wrote a short essay as a college paper for Bristol Baptist College in Bristol England in 1744 where he confused the second coming with the first resurrection of Revelation 20 and described a “pre-tribulation” rapture. However Edwards ideas, which he admitted were brand new and never before taught, had no influence in the modern population of the false doctrine. That prize goes to Darby.

. . . Prior to 1830, no church taught it in their creed, catechism or statement of faith.

. . . Darby has had a profound impact on religion today, since Darby’s “secret rapture” false doctrine has infected most conservative, evangelical churches. While the official creeds and statements of faith of many churches either reject or are silent about Rapture, neither do they openly condemn this doctrine of a demon from the pulpit.

. . . While not all dispensationalists believe in the Rapture. All those who teach the Rapture also believe in premillennialism. Both groups use Israel's modern statehood status of 1948 to be a beginning of a countdown to the end.

- <http://www.bible.ca/rapture-origin-john-nelson-darby-1830ad.htm>

What is interesting to note is that when a person has a misconception about Israel, that God is done with the Jewish people, then their view of End Times Theology is way off as well, and that is what we see here.

And there are others. For instance, Dave MacPherson. "Since the early 1970's, Dave MacPherson has aggressively attacked the pretribulation rapture by attributing its origin to Margaret Macdonald, whom MacPherson considers to be occult influenced. He claims J. N. Darby derived the pretribulation rapture from her and this was done secretly, lest the true origin of the rapture be discovered. Macpherson develops this idea in his books *The Incredible Cover-Up* and *The Great Rapture Hoax*. It has been successfully demolished in works by R. A. Huebner, Thomas Ice, and Gerald Stanton, to name a few." (Dave MacPherson's the Rapture plot: weighed and found wanting by Frank Marotta)

Even Marv Rosenthal has a problem with this Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church. We are told, "Recently, pre-wrath advocate Marvin Rosenthal wrote that the pre-trib rapture was of Satanic origin and unheard of before 1830. 'To thwart the Lord's warning to His children, in 1830' proclaims Rosenthal, 'Satan, the "father of lies," gave to a fifteen-year-old girl named Margaret McDonald a lengthy vision.'" Rosenthal gives no documentation, he merely asserts that this is true. However, he is wrong. He is undoubtedly relying upon the questionable work of Dave MacPherson. (*Is the Pre-Trib Rapture a Satanic Deception?*, Thomas Ice)

And there many, many more who are coming down hard on those who believe in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. That just tells me it is important to know what we believe!

And to say that there is no evidence prior to 1830 when John Nelson Darby introduced this doctrine, is fake news! Sorry, but it is. Let me show you what I mean.

We have an ancient manuscript from 373 A. D., it is from Ephraem the Syrian or a writing derived from his teaching and is called, Pseudo-Ephraem. Thus, this manuscript is dated from 373 A. D. to 627 A. D., but long before the 1800's of Darby's day! This is what it said,

All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.

- Ephraem the Syrian (AD 373 or Pseudo-Ephraem and early seventh-century text based on Ephraem the Syrian)

Grant Jeffery writes,

While the text is attributed to Ephraem the Syrian (AD 373), his teaching was so popular in the early Byzantine church in Syria that numerous authors later wrote commentaries on his works and incorrectly attributed their later manuscripts to Ephraem the Syrian. These attributed works are designed as *pseudo* (false) if scholars are not totally convinced the books were actually written by the attributed authors. Some scholars have suggested that this text should be called Pseudo-Ephraem, while others conclude that Ephraem is the original author.

- The Popular Handbook on the Rapture, Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, Ed Hindson, p. 107

Let's look at what this early church writing teaches because it lines up with the Pre-Tribulation Rapture teaching.

First of all, we see that *ALL* believers will be gathered together *BEFORE* the Tribulation Period begins! Notice that this writing teaches that the Tribulation Period did not begin yet, before the end of the first century!

Where will we be *TAKEN!* It says that we will be gathered together to the *LORD!* And through this there is a clear *DISTINCTION* between those who are living in sin in the Tribulation Period and those who have had their sins forgiven in Christ and are with the Lord!

So, to say that Darby invented this teaching in the 1800's is foolishness, it is not true, it is fake news to support the claim that the Pre-Tribulation Rapture was not taught in the church, it was!

We also have this ancient writing known as The Shepherd of Hermas (140 A. D.) and it seems to be speaking of a possible pretribulation concept of escaping the tribulation. It reads,

“You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly.”

Then there is Irenaeus from 180 A. D. who wrote the following,

“And therefore, when in the end the church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’”

Now let me also say this about Irenaeus. Sometimes it seems like he is speaking of the church going through the Tribulation Period and other times they are removed. But as you look at this writing it seems to be saying that he believed in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church!

I think it is important for us to understand that the early church did speak of the Rapture before the Tribulation period and the Lord's return was eminent or it can happen at any time. Now just because the early church taught it or believed it does not make it right. What makes it right is because that is what the Scriptures are saying, that is what the Scriptures are teaching!

Now let me show you why I believe the Scriptures teach the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. Now, to do that let me take you to the book of Revelation. Let's begin reading in Revelation 4, starting in verse 1 where John tells us, **"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.' Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne."** Revelation 4:1-2.

Notice that John opens up this chapter with the phrase, **"After these things . . ."** or *META TAUTA* in the Greek. After what things? After the things of the Church, I believe that is what John is telling us here. Revelation chapters 2 and 3 deal with the Church and Church Age!

Interestingly enough, the book of Revelation gives to us an outline. In Revelation 1:19. Jesus tells John, and us what this outline is all about. He said, **"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."**

Thus, the things that John *HAS SEEN*, are the events found in Revelation chapter 1. They are the things that God has shown him so far.

The *THINGS WHICH ARE*, speak of the events which are taking place now, the things of chapters 2 and 3, the things of the Church or the Church Age, as I have said.

Keep in mind that these letters Jesus wrote to these seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, modern day Turkey, actually existed during the time of John.

But, as you read these letters you will see that they also portray church history from the first century up and through today.

And lastly, this book is divided into *THE THINGS WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE AFTER THIS*, or after the Church Age comes to a close, the age of grace. You see, it is the same Greek word used in Revelation 4:1, *META TAUTA*.

And thus, we see the last division of this book divided like this. Chapters 4-18 deal with the events leading up to the Second Coming of Christ, including the seven years of tribulation.

Chapter 19 deals with the Second Coming.

Chapter 20 deals with the aftermath and the setting up of the Kingdom of God on this earth.

And chapters 21 and 22 deals with the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth.

Look again at Revelation 4:1. As the Church Age comes to an end, John sees a door open in heaven. And then a voice, *LIKE* a trumpet is calling to him to come as God will show him what *WILL* or *MUST* transpire after the Church is removed from the earth.

Please understand these are not chance events or accidents, but it is God's divine will!

Also, this voice, like the sound of a trumpet, is the same voice spoken of in Revelation 1:10-11, where we read, **“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,’ and, ‘What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.’”**

Now the question is, “Who is the one speaking here?” I can tell you with 100% surety that Jesus Christ is the one speaking in this verse. How can I be so sure?

If you continue on reading in Revelation chapter 1, you will see a description of Jesus Christ and then in verse 18 we read something that only the Son, Jesus Christ experienced. We read, “**I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.**”

Thus, Jesus is the one who is calling John up into heaven. And I believe John is a type of the Church, a picture of the Church, and as the Church Age comes to an end, the Lord will call us home!

Do the Scriptures support this view? You bet they do! Remember what we have been reading here in I Thessalonians chapter 4 over the last several weeks!

Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:16-17, “**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.**”

As you put this all together, I believe that Jesus Christ gives the shout to call both the living and the dead believers to meet Him in the air, where we will receive our glorified bodies.

Then, as you move on to Revelation 4:2, notice what takes place as soon as John heard the sound like a trumpet calling him, *IMMEDIATELY* he was transported to the throne of God!

He was in the presence of God. This should remind us of what Paul said to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians chapter 15, beginning in verse 50, where we read, **“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 Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”** I Corinthians 15:50-57.

In the twinkling of an eye, immediately we are transformed, as I have said this morning already. Instantaneously it will take place!

You see, these bodies must be changed because these physical bodies of flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

Thus, we all will be changed or a metamorphosis will take place. Like a seed when it changes into a flower, or a caterpillar when it changes into a butterfly, these bodies will be changed so they can enter God’s Kingdom.

All those who have died in Christ and all those who are living in Christ will be changed in a moment, a twinkling of an eye, as we are caught up to be with the Lord in the air and thus, we will always be with Him!



Now here is a definition of what we believe the Scriptures are teaching, the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. In this view, we say that all true believers in Christ will be caught up in the air with Christ. That is *ALL* believers throughout the Church Age, living or dead.

They will receive their eternal heavenly bodies as we have seen. Then following the Rapture of the Church we see the Tribulation Period, which leads into the return of Christ, which leads into the Millennial Kingdom and finally a new heaven and earth.

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia, the faithful church, said, **“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”**

This is important for us to see and understand. Jesus said, **“... I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”**

That word, **“from”** is the Greek word EK and it means “out of.”

In other words, this trial that is coming upon the earth dwellers, not Christians for our citizenship is in heaven, has a definite period of time, and here it is spoken of as the, **“... hour of trial ...”** which speaks of the last 7-year period known as the Tribulation Period or the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel.

God will keep us **“out of”** this period of time for God does not appoint us to wrath, but to salvation!

As Jesus said in Luke 21:34-36, **“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

The only reason we are worthy to escape this judgment is because of what Christ has done, not what we have done! But for the earth dwellers, those living on the earth, it will be a snare for them ***ALL!***

Like I have said, our citizenship is in heaven, we are not earth dwellers and this judgment is for those who have rejected Christ, not His Bride, the Church!

Also, in Genesis chapter 19, before the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God because of their wickedness, righteous Lot and his family first had to be removed.

The angel said to Lot, **“Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there. . .”**

The pre-requisite to the destruction of the city, Lot had to be removed!

And in II Peter 2:9 we read, **“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”**

Thus, the pre-requisite to the Tribulation Period, I believe, is that the Church ***MUST*** be removed before God can pour out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world.

Why? Paul put it like this in I Thessalonians 5:9, **“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Again, this is key. God did not appoint us to His wrath and thus, before the Tribulation Period begins, before the judgment of God is poured out, before that first seal is open, the Church is Raptured to be with the Lord!

Also, as you read the book of Revelation you will see that in the first 3 chapters of the book of Revelation the Church is mentioned some 18 times.

Then we don't see the Church on earth again until we return with Christ in Revelation 19:7-14. During chapters 4 through 18 we see that when the Church is mentioned they are in heaven.

Now please don't misunderstand what I am saying here. The Church has and will endure trials that come upon them, that is the trials of this world! But they will not experience God's wrath which is being poured out upon a Christ rejecting world.

That is what the Tribulation Period is all about, besides God dealing with the nation of Israel.

Thus, with the start of the 70th week of Daniel, the beginning of the Tribulation Period, the Church will be home with the Lord.

And with that line of demarcation, the Rapture of the Church, we also see the beginning of **“the Day of the Lord.”**

And the Day of the Lord begins with the introduction of God's wrath being poured out and it extends through the Millennial Kingdom.

Thus, with the Rapture we see the Day of Grace end and the Day of the Lord begin, the time of Jacob's trouble, according to Jeremiah 30:7.

David Breese says this regarding the difference between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ.

“The rapture, therefore, comes before the tribulation, and takes Christians out of this world before that seven-year period of the wrath of God. Notice that, in the Rapture, Christ does not come all of the way to this world. Rather, Christians are caught up to meet Him in the air (I Thes. 4:17). At the second coming of Christ, His glorious return, He comes with His saints. In fact, He returns with an army from heaven for the conquest of the world (Rev. 19:11-16). Remember, in that this is an army of His saints (Jude 14), you and I will be a part of that glorious conquest that centers on the return of Christ in power.”

- David Breese

Why am I making such a big deal about this, the Rapture of the Church? There are certainly many other things we can be looking at? That is true, but Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:13, “**But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren . . .**”

Why is that so important? Because Paul wants to give us a hope about the future, that the Lord is coming back and those who have died prior to the Rapture and those who are living at the time of the Rapture will be gathered together and we will meet the Lord in the air! He does not want us to be ignorant about the Rapture!

And let me say this. I think we can learn from history, I think we can glean what the early church was about, but keep in mind that the early church does not establish doctrine for us. Do you know what establishes doctrine for us? It is the Word of God!

When you look at the letters that Jesus wrote to the churches in Asia Minor, written around 100 A. D. through the Apostle John in the book of Revelation, you can see how messed up they were already!

First of all, there is the letter to the church in Ephesus, and they did good, worked hard but they had lost their first love, Jesus. It was all motion and no emotion and Jesus rebukes them for this.

Then there is the letter to the church in Smyrna, and this was the persecuted church. They were doing well, it seems like the persecution they faced made them stronger in the faith and Jesus is encouraging them to continue on.

Then there is the letter to the church in Pergamos and this is the compromising church. They accepted false doctrine and sexual immorality!

Which then leads to the letter to the church in Thyatira or the corrupt church. And again, more false doctrine, more sexual immorality!

Then we see the letter to the church in Sardis and this church started out well but became a dead church because the relationship they had with God was based on rituals and not a relationship with Him! It became an organization instead of a living organism!

Then there is the letter to the church in Philadelphia, the faithful church who loved the Lord and His Word! And they did well also.

And finally, the letter to the church in Laodicea, the lukewarm church. They were not on fire for the Lord nor were they cold for the Lord, they just went to church, did their thing and went home. They saw all that they had and they really did not see their need for the Lord. And the Lord pleads with them to open the door of their church, open the door of their heart and let Him in for He wants to dine with them, but they refused!

So, church history is not too good, even from early on. Our standard has to be the Word of God and if something is contrary to God's Word, then we toss that out. But often today we see people tossing the Word of God out!

I want to share this warning to you regarding changing God's Word to fit your meaning and moving more towards a mystical view of the Scriptures instead of a literal interpretation. Yes, there are places that are figurative but the Scriptures make that clear as they use the words, "like" or "as" and-so-on.

This is what Thomas Ice had to say,

If the evangelical church continues to follow its current trend of moving away from literal interpretation, the only direction it can move is back toward the mysticism of the Alexandrian school and the hermeneutical trends of the Middle Ages. This is not progress; if it were to happen, it would be retrogression and a downgrade. . .

It has been observed that culture cycles back and forth between rationalism and mysticism over the years. Since the 1960s, American culture has definitely moved in the direction of and is now firmly dominated by a mystical worldview, especially in the area of personal beliefs. However, biblical Christianity is not based on reason or mysticism as its starting point for truth; instead it is built upon revelation or God's Word. When mysticism dominates a culture's mind-set, it predisposes one hermeneutically toward mysticism and nonliteral interpretation.

Some years ago Dr. John Walvoord was asked, "What do you predict will be the most significant theological issues over the next ten years?" He answered, among other things, "the hermeneutical problem of not interpreting the Bible literally, especially in the prophetic areas. The church today is engulfed in the idea that one cannot interpret prophecy literally."

Veteran evangelical scholar Walt Kaiser suggested almost 30 years ago that the church is “now going through a hermeneutical crisis, perhaps as significant in its importance and outcome as that of the Reformation.” In this crisis, “the meaning of the text lies in its subject matter, rather than in what an author meant by the text. . . .

Norman Geisler has also expressed concern with the direction of evangelical hermeneutics and said that it “is based on an allegorical method of interpreting prophetic Scripture that if applied to other teachings of Scripture, would undermine the salvation essentials of the Christian Faith.”

It is clear from 2000 years of church history that if we do indeed continue to adopt current evangelical trends for interpreting Bible prophecy, then we will return to the subjectivism and mysticism of the Dark Ages. Could our current downgrade lead us toward the false mysticism that will be widespread during the Tribulation?

- Thomas Ice, *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, pp. 210-212

I think we are moving in that direction and we are moving very quickly. Let me give you this little piece of advice that will help you as you study the Scriptures. This is from Dr. Cooper and it is his golden rule of Biblical interpretation. Listen carefully,

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic [obvious, clear] and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.

- David L. Cooper, *The World's Greatest Library: Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970) p. 11

When we look at this teaching of the Rapture, look at what God's Word has to say instead of what man has to say. I am not saying that we can't learn from others but if what they are saying goes against the Word of God, they are wrong, like I have said.

Now, look at what the Scriptures say regarding the Rapture, **“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.”** I Thessalonians 4:13-17.

As you read this, as you take it literally, you can clearly see that something is happening where both the dead in Christ and those who are alive are going to be caught up to be with the Lord! Again, “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense!” May we do that!

As I close this morning, remember the story I told of what happen before World War II started. Japan and Germany called their ambassadors home, they left America and went to their own home countries, why?

Because war was about to break out and their countries wanted them to be home before war was declared!

So too with our Lord, before He declares war on earth, before He pours out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, He will call His ambassadors home, you and me!



Remember, this is not our home, we are aliens and strangers just passing through, for our citizenship is in heaven and that is where we are called to go, to be with our Lord.

I love what Paul says in Titus 2:13, “**looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**”

That is what we are doing and in knowing He is coming back, in knowing we will be with Him, what should we do?

Paul told us, “**Therefore comfort one another with these words.**” I Thessalonians 4:18.

I realize that as some Christians look at all that is happening in this world they think things are out of control. They are not. They are all in the control of the Lord.

You see, we know what the last days are going to be like and I believe we are living in them now.

We see this global government trying to form as both the Democrats and the Republicans seem to be moving in that direction, as well as the world leaders, even the Pope is pushing for this global government, just as the Scriptures teach!

We see this global religious system that the Pope is putting together and trying to give power to the United Nations to oversee the things of this world, the nations of this world. And what is interesting is the number of Protestant leaders that are supporting, praising and coming in agreement with the Pope, to put our differences aside and be one! Folks, our differences can't be compromised!

And I can go on as we look at immorality, sexual sin, people having hearts cold towards others, and-so-on.

But the Lord has warned us and if we truly trust in Him and what His Word is saying to us, we should not be anxious, worried, terrified of what is to come. Yes, in this world we will have persecution, that is what the Bible says.

But we also know that before the Lord pours out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world, the Lord is coming back for His Bride, the Church and we should be looking upward for our redemption is drawing near and we are comforted in that and can bring the comfort of God to others in Christ!

Thus, may we ***WALK IN HOPE!***