**VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY SERIES:**

**THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

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**CHAPTER FOUR: “WHERE DID THE CHURCH GO?”**

John’s vision in chapters 4 and 5 is at the heart of the entire book of Revelation. It is in essence a visualization of the Lord’s Prayer:

**“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Chapter 4 focuses upon the throne of God, judgment and the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Throne of God is mentioned seventeen times in chapters 4 and 5 with twelve of those being in chapter four. When mentioned here it is signifying a throne of government. Revelations four and five are said to be one vision in two parts. They show the glory of God on His throne and the Glory of the Redeemer Son who comes to receive a throne from His Father. The purpose of the vision is to show that God and Christ are sovereign over all that follows in the rest of the book. It shows that God rules in redemption and in judgement. He rules the redeemed and the damned. He rules over the obedient and the rebellious. He rules the process of history and in the fulfillment of history.

**Psalm 115:3**

**3 But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.**

Revelation chapter 4 **begins John's vision of the future**. John sees a door open in heaven and is invited to “come up hither” and glimpse God's plan from a divine perspective. Chapter 4 is brief, but it sets the stage for much of the rest of Revelation. It also makes the transition from John's description of things which are—or were, at the time he wrote—to those things which are yet to happen—again, at least at the time he wrote. John writes and says, **“After this” or After these things” v.1, which raises the question** "after what things?" A question that is an important one.

It is important because among the interesting properties of this passage is that the word "church" no longer appears in the book of Revelation, until the very end and when it is, it is only used to repeat that "the churches" should take the message seriously. The church is the focus of Revelation until this point and is never mentioned again throughout the book. However, saints are mentioned throughout the tribulation period. The definition of saint is one who is set apart for God through faith in Christ. There is no question that there will be believers on this earth during the tribulation period. The question in debate is when did these become believers? Are they the church, or did they believe after the church was taken? This absence of references to the church has served to raise questions regarding the whereabouts of the church in terms of what is known as the “Great Tribulation.” Before we begin to explore the aspects of the Throne of God in chapter four we will discuss the four main schools of thought regarding the church, the Great Tribulation and the Millennial Reign of Christ on the Earth.

**Declaration of Faith**

**We Believe In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.**

**There are Three main views:**

1. **Midtribulationism** is the view that the church will be present for and go through the first half (3 1/2 years) of the tribulation, but he raptured out at the half-way point and so be absent for the latter 3 1/2 years. The first half is seen as natural tribulation whereas the second half is God’s wrath. More recently, the “pre-wrath” view has emphasized that the rapture occurs just prior to the outpouring of God’s wrath.

**Main Lines of Support**

a. The church is seen to be part of the tribulation spoken of in Matt 24. The “elect” spoken of

there are not Jews, but saints in the general sense and so includes the church (Matt 24:22).

**Matthew 24:21-24**

**21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. 23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.**

b. The seal judgments and trumpet judgments of Revelation are not divine judgments but

natural. Therefore, there is no need for the church to be absent for these that take place in the 1st half of the tribulation. But the seventh and final trumpet opens the beginning of the outpouring of the bowls of divine wrath. The seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15 is identified with the trumpets of Matt 24:31, 1 Thess 4:16, and the last trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52.

**Revelation 11:15**

**15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.**

**Matthew 24:31**

**31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

**1 Thessalonians 4:16**

**16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:**

**1 Corinthians 15:52**

**52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

c. Jesus statement in Matt 24:29 “after the tribulation of those days” is taken to indicate a shift from the natural forms of tribulation of the first half, to the divine wrath of God to be poured out in the second half.

**Matthew 24:29**

**29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:**

But since God’s wrath is not for the church, God will remove the church from the earth just prior to the outpouring of His wrath.

**Romans 5:9**

**9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.**

**1 Thessalonians 1:10**

**10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:9**

**9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**Revelation 3:10**

**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.**

**2. Post-Tribulation:** The church will go through the tribulation rather than being raptured out before or in the middle of the tribulation. Thus, the rapture of the church and the resurrection of all dead saints occur at the same time at the end of the 7 year tribulation. This unitary event is distinguished by 1st a coming for the saints (1 Thess 4:16) and the immediately a coming with the saints (Rev 19:11ff). Generally, posttribulationists see the church as having replaced national Israel as the covenant people of God.

**Revelation 19:11-14**

**11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.**

Main Lines of Support

a. The church is never told that it is to escape tribulation. The Greek word thlipsis (“tribulation”) is used 55 x in the NT, and 47 of these relate to tribulation to be endured by the saints. The same word is used in Mt 24:21 of the great tribulation.

b. 1 Thess. 4:17 describes the church “meeting” the Lord in the air but does not say that the Lord takes the church on to heaven for 31⁄2 or 7 years.

c. Throughout Revelation 6-18, the people of God are present and this includes the church. There is no reason to exclude the church from these tribulation passages.

d. 2 Thess 2 describes believers who thought they were enduring the day of the Lord. If they believed in a pre-trib rapture, they wouldn’t have thought so. Paul only tells them that their current persecution is not the Day of the Lord, not that they will be spared from it.

**2 Thessalonians 2 “1. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. 8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:**

**3. Pretribulation Rapture View**: The church is taken up or raptured just prior to the 7 years tribulation period. This time of tribulation is seen as unique in its intensity or severity, and so is called the “great tribulation” to distinguish it from all other persecutions, trials, and tribulations the church goes through. And the church is exempt from it. Christ’s second coming, then, is in two stages, the first when Christ comes for the church and meets the church in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18),

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-16**

**13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 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. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.**

**1 Corinthians 15:51-52**

**51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

 and the second when Christ comes with the church to set up His kingdom and usher in the millennium (Rev. 19:11-21; Zech 14:1-8).

**Zechariah 14:1-8**

**Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. 4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. 5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee. 6 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: 7 But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. 8 And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.**

**The purpose of the tribulation is two-fold**:

1) to conclude “the times of the Gentiles”

**Luke 21:24**

**And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.**

2) to save the Jewish people and prepare for the restoration of Israel in the millennial Kingdom.

**Three resurrections are required:**

1) The resurrection of the righteous dead to meet the Lord in the air prior to the tribulation (I Thess. 4:16),

2) the resurrection of martyred tribulation saints who died during the tribulation

**Revelation 20:4**

**4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**

3) the resurrection of all unbelievers at the end of the millennium.

**Revelation 20:5**

**5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.**

**Two main judgments are seen:**

1) the judgment of believers taking place at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), so that the church is made pure prior to Christ’s coming to earth (Rev. 19:7-9)

**2 Corinthians 5:10**

**10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.**

**Revelation 19:7-9**

**7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.**

2) the great white throne judgment of all the unsaved at the end of the millennium

**Revelation 20:11-15**

**11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.**

**Main Lines of Support**

**God does not intend the church to undergo his wrath** (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9), and

furthermore that He plans to keep the Church from the tribulation that is to come on the whole world (Rev 3:10). Notice that in Rev 3:10, one is kept form a time, an hour, which affects the whole inhabited earth. To be protected from the hour of testing is best fulfilled if one has been removed altogether from the earth.

**The early judgments** (e.g. seal judgments, trumpet judgments) are not merely natural judgments but they also are the outpouring of the wrath of God on the earth. After all, it is the Lamb in Rev 6 who breaks the seals and this brings forth judgment upon the earth. Rev 6-19 describes, then, divine judgment of enormous proportions.

**The Need For an Interval Between the Rapture of the Church and the Return of Christ.**

1) Since Rev 19:7-9 portrays the church as pure before Christ comes, the judgment seat of

Christ where works are judged and rewards given has already occurred.

2) The marriage supper of the Lamb also takes place before Christ comes (Rev 19:7-10),

and this requires the church is purified (“in white garments”) prior to his second coming.

3) Last, there is the need for non-glorified saints to populate the millennial kingdom, to

account for death and apostasy (Rev 20:7-9) in the millennium. But if all believers are raptured and glorified at the end of the tribulation, and all unbelievers are killed at the return of Christ (Rev 19:17-21), then there are no people to enter the millennium in non-glorified bodies.

**Over and again we are told to be ready, on the alert, watchful, for the coming of Christ:**

**Matthew 24:42 “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”**

**Matthew 25:13 “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”**

**James 5:8-9**

**8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. 9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.**

This only makes sense if there is nothing needing fulfillment that stands between now and Christ’s coming.

**Matthew 24:40-42**

**40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-4**

**5 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.**

 **Declaration of Faith**

**We Believe In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.**