

The Rapture As Taught In Revelation

Part Two

Around The Throne & The Sealed Book

Compiled/Formatted By Tom Stephens

Introduction: The Promises to the True Church:

1. Jesus about the Tribulation Period: **35)** *“For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the earth. 36) “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”* (Luke 21:35,36).

Philadelphians. As in the case with all seven of the letters to the churches in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, this letter has an application which goes far beyond the time of the original addressees. The context indicates in Revelation 3:10 there is an extraordinary promise given to the church of that day that also applies to the end times of the Church.

Jesus is crying out today to the Church at Philadelphia to repent of her sin and be delivered from wrath:

2. **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.”* **11)** *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”* (Revelation 3:10, 11).

This is true *first* because the next verse says, *“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown”* (3:11). This verse has to refer to the coming of Christ for the Church because it uses a warning that is consistently associated with it in this book: *“Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”* (Rev. 22:7) *“And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”* (Rev. 22:12).

Second, verse 11 also mentions rewards and the receiving of a crown. This is definitely to be given at the "Bema" or judgment seat of Christ. Paul speaks of receiving a crown on "that day" (2 Tim. 4:8): *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all who love His appearing.”*

Peter speaks of the "unfading crown of glory" that will be given to faithful elders "when the Lord comes" (1 Pet 5:4). This ties the context to the time of Christ's coming for the Church: *“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”*

The *third* reason why this promise must apply to the end time Church is given in Revelation 3:10 itself. The promise is said to apply to *“that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.”* So the time period concerns a test which God will send upon the whole world. It is obvious that such a global "test" has not yet occurred; but "that day" is quickly approaching.

The What, Who and Why of the Test

It is important to understand just what the original Greek word translated "test" means. Dr. Gingrich says that the word is used here in the sense of *“to try, to make trial of, to put to the test, in order to discover or reveal what kind of person someone is.”* Often the purpose of the trial is to bring out the evil that is in someone. For this reason it is sometimes translated "temptation."

In this context it is best understood as putting the world under severe trial to reveal its evil heart. The trials are launched against *“the whole inhabited earth,”* which is further defined as *“those who dwell upon the earth”* The apostle John makes this a technical descriptive clause to mark out a certain class of people.

See what John says about *“those who dwell upon the earth”* during the Great Tribulation:

- They will slay one another with a great sword (6:3,4).

- They are those who murder the Tribulation believers (Rev. 6:10-11; & 7:9-14—John with other elder).
- The wrath of God within the judgments called "three woes" specifically fall upon them (8:13).
- They will murder the two special prophets of God (who I believe will be Moses and Elijah) and rejoice over their deaths (11:10).
- The message given by these two prophets will torment them (11:10).
- They will worship the Antichrist, and their names are not in the Lamb's book of life (13:8, 12).
- They will be deceived by the miracles of the False Prophet (13:14).
- They will be intoxicated and blinded by the false one-world religious system (17:2).
- They will worship the beast and they will accept his mark (20:4).

From this survey we can easily see why God is going to have an hour of testing for this group. It is to so demonstrate the hard, evil hearts of *"those who dwell upon the earth"* that God's judgment of them will be shown as totally just; and because it is totally just, many will make decisions for Christ.

There is also a very important contrast in Revelation between *"those who dwell upon the earth"* and another special group called *"those who dwell in heaven."*

Let us consider who *"those who dwell in heaven"* are. *First*, they cannot be angels because of a statement made in Revelation 12:12 about this same group of "heaven dwellers." It says, *"For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them, woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that his time is short."* God's angels would not be exhorted to rejoice, as they are not dwelling on earth during the devil's unrestrained wrath. Satan couldn't hurt them.

Second, this is not a reference to the departed souls of those massacred during the Tribulation. Though a non-resurrected believer's soul does go to be consciously with the Lord after he dies, he is never said "to dwell in heaven" until after he receives a resurrection body. It would make no sense for the devil to blaspheme the souls of those whose bodies he has just murdered.

Third, there is a direct contrast made between *"those who dwell on earth,"* who are the unbelievers, and *"those who dwell in heaven."* The "heaven dwellers" *are* the believers. So the question is: If they are not angels, and they are not the souls of departed believers, *who are they?*

I believe the answer is that they are the translated (Raptured) saints of the Church who are now dwelling in heaven in glorified bodies. This explanation gives an intelligent reason for why the devil would take the time to blaspheme them. After all, he couldn't very well hide or sweep into a corner the news of millions of Christians vanishing. So Satan must give an explanation to his followers lest they slip into the other camp.

I believe the Holy Spirit has given us here a clear clue as to the whereabouts of the missing Church.¹

When Jesus prayed for His disciples, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one", He wants the believer to be protected from falling under the authority of the evil one (satan)" (John 17:15). That's the reason for the ministries of the Holy Spirit to the Church. We have the authority and the power to finish what Christ began—to destroy the works of the devil.

"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:19—my bold).

Then, in Revelation 3:10, John, the same author, expresses the same idea; saying God will protect the believer *from the time* of testing, not just from the testing. The "hour of worldwide tribulation (testing)"

¹ Vanished Into Thin Air, Hal Lindsey; Pages 217-222; Published by Western Front Ltd., Beverly Hills, Ca. © 1999

must be understood in light of the main focus of the book of Revelation. Revelation specifically details the judgments, events and personalities of the seven years of Daniel's 70th week. It begins with the worldwide deception and takeover by the Antichrist. It ends with the worst holocaust of all time. Its purpose is to bring the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to faith in the true Messiah and to judge the unbelievers from all nations called "those who dwell upon the earth." So "the hour" must apply to the whole seven year Tribulation where all these things fall upon the world.²

Around God's Throne (Revelation 4: 10, 11)

As suggested in Part One of this series, The twenty-four elders are strongly indicated to be the Church raptured by the Spirit of God into heaven before God's throne. Their seats (thrones) show a *reward* of authority in the millennial kingdom (cf. 20:4); their crowns are crowns of *reward* from the judgmental seat of God, indicating a previous judgment and awards ceremony because of their holy lives and their righteousness while on earth (cf. Rom.4:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10—see my article entitled, *Caution, Some Works Are Unto Death*), and their white raiment shows their righteousness which has now been judged, *rewarded* and purified. Twenty-four represents the Church as priests before God.

10) *"The four and 20 elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11) Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou has created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*

There is continual rejoicing and worshipping the Lord before His Throne—angels, beasts, creatures, along with the twenty four elders—in perfect unison. They follow where the Lamb goes and heed all that He says! I'm seeing a multitude so large and glorious that it is not possible to fathom the intensity of these scenes of praise and worship in heaven. When I see this scene, I think of Balaam of the Old Testament.

Balaam's story is in Numbers 22-24, a long and complicated story. I want to express one thing that keeps coming back to me surrounding Balaam's situation.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness camped out in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho, Balak, king of Moab, sent messengers to Balaam, the prophet, because *Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field."* (Numbers 22: 1-4).

Here's essentially what Balak said to Balaam, the prophet, *"Look, a people has come from Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me. I need you to come now and curse these people, for they are too mighty for me. I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse, is cursed. And the only way I can overcome this great nation is if they are a cursed people."*

Balaam went before the Lord to see if he could ratify this curse against Israel; but God responded, *"No, you cannot go up to curse My people, for they are blessed."*

The next morning, Balaam told the messengers to go back home because *"the Lord forbade me to return with you for this evil"*. But Balak sent another message with a larger caravan and promised Balaam he would make it well worth his while if he would petition his God once again.

Balaam responded in this manner, *"Even if Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now, therefore, please spend the night, that tomorrow I might see what the Lord says."*

This time the Lord told Balaam to go with the men, *"But speak only the word that I will give to you."* But

² Vanished Into Thin Air; Hal Lindsey; Pgs 215-223; Western Front, Ltd., 1999; © 1999 Western Front Ltd., 1999

Balaam prophesied four times concerning the great company of Israel down below. This scene, to Balak was so awesome that he requested they move to another place so that this huge Israeli army might look smaller because of the terrain on the high place. This request was made at least three times. Each time they presented themselves before the valley housing the Israelite army, he still shook with fear. It seemed that, no matter where they were when Balaam completed the sacrifice, Israel just became even more awesome. It has been said by some scholars—and is in my notes on the Tabernacle—that the Israelite nation coming out of Egypt was over three million people—the camp spreading approximately 12 square miles! She was in such a grand and organized setting with the tabernacle and the people in such unity, that the Lord’s presence would seem to visibly hover over the camp, causing great fear to Moab.

Though the comparison is absolutely minimal, I think of Balaam when I see the worship services before the throne of God in heaven—in the book of Revelation. Count all the Christian people from Christ’s resurrection through today; then two-thirds of the created angelic beings, and the beasts...then add the uncountable number of the newly saved who died giving their lives during the tribulation period on earth—all standing and worshipping before the throne of God in heaven.

Just as Balak was intimidated with the massive army of God in the wilderness, so will the antichrist system be *much more* intimidated with the *wrath of God* during the Great Tribulation!

“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then a white robe was given to them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”

(Rev. 6:9-11). The tribulation saints in this chapter were still under the altar.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’” (Rev. 7:9-12). **But now**, these same saints are before His throne with their white robes!

How do we know these are *not* the church? Read the entire chapter seven to solve this enigma.

The Seven Spirits Of God (Rev. 4:5)

He Who is, and Who Was, and Who Is to come,” is Jehovah. This is the literal meaning of the name communicated to Moses. “Jehovah” is a compound formed from three words; the first meaning *He is*, the second, *He was*, the third, *He will be, or He will come*. Jehovah is the triune god, so the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are alike called by this name. But in the present passage it is clearly speaking of God the Father.

Now, the Holy Spirit comes to use in the next clause, *“and from the 7 Spirits that are before His throne.”*

Since it is so hard to understand how the one, eternal Holy Spirit can be so pictured, let’s turn over to Isaiah 11: 1, 2. There we read of the seven Spirits who rest upon the Branch of Jehovah, our Lord Jesus Christ. These seven Spirits are: *Note the order given:*

1. The Spirit of the Lord.
2. The Spirit of Wisdom. (Proverbs 8)
3. The Spirit of Understanding.
4. The Spirit of Counsel.
5. The Spirit of Might.

6. The Spirit of Knowledge.
7. The Spirit of the Fear of the Lord...

One Spirit in the 7-fold plenitude of His Miraculous power, seven being the number of perfection, and is used in that manner here. Then, along with the Father and the Spirit, we have Jesus Christ as “the faithful Witness” when here on earth, “the First-begotten of the dead” in resurrection glory, and “the Prince of the kings of the earth” when He returns the second time to reign.

No wonder there is an outburst of praise and worship which follows in the next verse at this full revelation of His glories: *“Unto Him that loves us, and has loosed us from our sins by His own blood, and has made us a kingdom, priests to God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* (Revelation 1:6).

John’s heart was so full of adoration and praise for Jesus, a spontaneous result of knowing Christ as Prophet, Priest, King – but not least – Savior!

The Seven-Sealed Scroll—Worthy Is The Lamb (Chapter 5)

John saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then he saw a strong angel calling out with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose the seals?” No one in heaven or on the earth was able to open the scroll and to loose the seals. No one in heaven or on the earth was able to even look at it.

4) John wept much, because no one was found to open and read the scroll or to look at it—this scroll that would return ownership of the earth to the Lamb of God. 5) But one of the elders said to John, *“Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”* 6) *“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain (Isa. 53:1-8), having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.* 7) *Then he came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”* (Rev. 5:6,7).

All judgments in the book of Revelation are presented as judgments of God on a Christ-rejecting world no matter who or what the agency of that judgment may be.

This seven-sealed scroll containing the judgment of the seals, is presented as so dreadful in chapter five that no one in heaven or earth is worthy to open, or even look except the Lord Jesus, the Messiah Himself. So the authority and source for the unleashing of the seal judgments is the Lord; and this is the wrath of the Lord on evil and corruption.

The first seal unleashes the antichrist to go forth and establish his control upon the earth. He will begin the seven years of tribulation by signing a covenant guaranteeing Israel’s security and the Middle East’s peace (Daniel 9:27).

In this seal, the antichrist will apparently conquer through ingenious plans for world economic recovery, prosperity and world peace—somewhat like what is taking place today. Yet, in Daniel’s prophetic description of this dictator, he says, *“and by means of peace [he] shall destroy many...”* (Dan. 9:25b).

When you read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, you cannot fail to see the clear connection between the divinely permitted unveiling of the antichrist and all his evils, attended by satanic miracles and a deluding influence from God, and the resulting condemnation of all peoples yet on the earth who have rejected our Lord and His truth. This passage clearly shows the antichrist to be the chief entity of God’s judgment on the earth. The antichrist is one of the greatest expressions of God’s wrath; for he is the one who will slaughter believers and lead the entire world down the road to destruction. Those left behind need Christ.

8) Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: **9)** “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, **10)** and have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:8-10).

These bowls full of incense in the hands of the living creatures and elders are shown again in chapter eight: **3)** And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer [it] with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **4)** And the smoke of the incense, [which came] with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. **5)** And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast [it] into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.” (Revelation 8: 3-5).

The contents of the bowls of incense held by the living creatures and the elders are now in the burning altar near the Lord's throne. Both passages state the bowls are full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they were singing a new song about their own salvation unto the Lord. Now, in chapter eight, God calls on the angel to stand by the altar with a golden censer; and was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne of God.

The smoke of the incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God as a sweet aroma. And the angel took the censer, filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, thundering, and lightnings, and an earthquake!

This incense—the prayers of the saints—came up before God as a sweet aroma into His nostrils! These prayers obviously were cast upon the antichrist system in the form of supernatural weather turbulances, and an earthquake, as His wrath was poured out on the earth in this seventh seal! How awesome is God!

The song of salvation: (Revelation 5:8-10)

- Jesus Christ is worthy to take the scroll and open the seals thereof.
- He was slain, and redeemed US by His own blood out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation.
- He has made US kings and priests to OUR God;
- And WE shall reign on the earth.³

11) “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands, **12)** saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!” **13)** “And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, “Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!” **14)** Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

Blessings from Tom and Linda Stephens
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³ **These are the elders**—the body of Christ during the dispensation of Grace. The Tribulation saints will not be introduced until Revelation 6: 9-11; and these were **1)** slain for the word of God, and for the testimony they had; **2)** They were still under the altar, crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” **3)** White robes were given to them; **4)** They were told to wait a little longer, till their brethren were killed as they were...this must be fulfilled. *But then*, we find them standing before the throne of the Lord, in Revelation 7: 9-17. (More on Revelation 7:9-17 in part three).