

The Rapture As Taught In Revelation
Part Nine—A Recap of
The Church At Philadelphia And The Judgment Seat Of Christ
Compiled/Formatted By Tom Stephens

(All bible references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)

The sixth letter is to the church in Philadelphia, which means "brotherly love."

7) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 8) I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name... 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." (Revelation 3:7, 8, 10).

Following the Reformation there came a time when a cold, lifeless formalism seemed to settle over most all Protestant Churches—an era in which men were content to simply confess a creed, and to be united to the church by baptism. But in the 18th and 19th centuries there came over those lands—where the Reformation had gone—a great wave of blessing. God began to work afresh in mighty power within the church. There were marvelous awakenings all over northern Europe and the British Isles. A half century later the same mighty power began to manifest itself in America. Spirit-filled servants of Christ went through these various countries like fire-brands of the Lord, calling on sinners to repent, and saints to awaken to their privileges. A little later, in the early part of the last century, God, in a very special way, began to arouse many of His people to a deeper sense of the value of His Word, and its all-sufficiency for the guidance of His people. For His name's sake thousands put aside the things of this world, and began to meet, seeking to be led by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

Note what, in a special way, would mark those who seek to walk as Philadelphians. *First*, there is the very name of this church—"brotherly love." This implies that Christ's Church love one another. They are born of God, and His love is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, and they are characterized by love to all who are Christ's. If this first mark of brotherly love is missing, we may not yet be found in the Church at Philadelphia.

Second, note the character in which the Lord presents Himself to this church. "*These things saith He that is holy, He that is true.*" This is a challenge to separation from evil in life, and error in doctrine. If we would walk in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we must remember the word, "*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*" And if we would enjoy communion with Him who is true, we must refuse Satan's lies, and love and live the truth. Separation from evil must become separation *unto* Christ—from *that* which is evil.

Third, the Lord speaks of Himself as He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." In Isaiah 22:22, he who had the key of David was the treasurer of David's house. And the word used here is a reference to that passage. There it is said of Eliakim, "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open." The remainder of the passage shows that Eliakim was but a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one upon whom should be hung all the glory of His Father's house. He, by the Spirit, opens the great treasure-house of Biblical truth, and none can shut it. On the other hand where there is an unwillingness to walk in the truth, He shuts and none can open. So He has said elsewhere, "If the light that is in thee become darkness, how great is that darkness."

And it is blessed to realize that, while Christ is said to have the key of David, there is another sense in which we see that He, Himself is the key, for it is by the presentation of Himself to the souls of His people that He opens up the treasures of His Word. Thus Christ is the key to the Holy Scriptures, and no other is needed. To understand the Bible you need to know Christ, and diligently seek His face.

Though the Lord doesn't always use the words, "Prove Me", in every sense of the Word of God concerning all His promises to us, He continues—in every case—to emphasize to us, "*Prove Me*".

Fourth is our calling; The Lord Himself opens the doors for those whom He sends forth into world ministries. No one can close these doors, for the Lord closes them when He wills. This is one thing Philadelphian believers have found. Acting on the truth that Christ is Son over His own house, and that He has commanded His servants to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, thousands have gone forth, in dependence on Him alone, not only in the homeland, but to lands beyond the seas, even among heathen people, without any organization to support them, and have found the Lord Himself sufficient to meet every need, and to open and close just as He will. The 8th verse emphasizes this second application, for there He says, "*I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*" I remember, while a student at Southwestern A/G College—now a university—I learned that, when the Assemblies of God denomination was formed around 1912, most of our missionaries and evangelists were entirely self supporting—from travel expenses to the very survival of themselves and their families. This was an awesome feeling.

Note these important characteristics of Philadelphia. **1)** His Word is kept, **2)** His Name confessed, **3)** the faithful will receive the key of David, **4)** and he may open and no man can shut; he can shut and no man can open **5)** those of the synagogue of Satan will worship at his feet **6)** they will know God loves him. **7)** *Because they kept the word of His patience, He will keep him from the hour of testing which will come on all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth.* **8)** *If he overcomes to the end, God will make him a pillar in His Temple, and* **9)** he will be sealed with the name of the city of God.

Verse 10 is for every true child of God. "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.*" This is the Lord's own pledge to those who love His Name, and seek to keep His word. They will not be left *on earth* to pass through the *time of God's wrath* which is just ahead, with *those who dwell upon the earth.* This expression is found often in Revelation. A careful reading of the various passages in which this peculiar term is found, will make it confirm "the earth-dwellers" are *not* those whose citizenship is in heaven. They are persons who, **1)** failed to come to Christ prior to the rapture; many of whom finally come to Christ *during* the tribulation, and **2)** those who adamantly refuse the heavenly calling, and prove they really belong to this world. All their hopes are here, and their treasures likewise, for the Lord has said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The coming Great Tribulation will eventually become, for them, a terrible time of judgment.

When that hour of terror comes the church of the dispensation of Grace will have been caught up to meet the Lord in accordance with the promise in 1st Thess. 4: 13-18, and Rev. 3: 10, 11:

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 Thessalonians 4: 13-18).

And in Revelation 3:11: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

The Lord's return is the hope of every Christian. We long to see Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. At His return, we will be manifested before His judgment-seat, and be rewarded according to service here. Then He will give out the crowns for service in this day of His rejection. Note the warning is, "Let no man take thy *crown*." If I am not a *faithful servant*, I may lose *my crown*.

The overcomer will be made a pillar in the temple of God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and shall dwell in the Father's house to go no more out forever. Upon him will be written the name of God, the name of the Holy City, and Christ's new name. All that is involved in this is beyond our finite understanding, but it speaks of stability, security, fellowship, and intimacy with the Lord Himself, which will make heaven to the believer—his blessed and eternal home.

Therefore we are approaching the closing days of this present dispensation of grace. The Ephesus period passed away long ago, and the same is true of the Smyrna and Pergamos periods. Thyatira speaks of Romanism and is still relevant around the world and will/has become a part of the apostasy. Philadelphia, thank God, is also here in a very strong way—at crushing odds with apostasy. Though she has little strength, she will abide gloriously forevermore with Christ. But the Laodicean church is more and more in evidence, and appears to be in a self-destruct mode as time draws to a close.

The next great event is the coming of the Lord for the church, His bride for the reception of our rewards; we will be gathered together unto Him. We yearn to see Him face-to-face—and patiently await His appearing—while our hearts cry out, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"

The Judgment Seat Of Christ

Revelation Four

As we turn from chapter three to chapter four, how different the scenes! We are no longer concerned with the church being on earth, or with events on the earth at all. A door is opened in heaven, and we are escorted by the beloved apostle John, carried far above the corrupted scenes of this world, permitted to gaze with awe-struck eyes upon a scene of glory indescribable, and to hear things kept secret from the foundation of the world.

The opening verse begins the third great division of this book—"*The things which shall be after these things*" (see Rev. 1:19); the stirring panorama of wonders, both heavenly and earthly, which must take place after the church's history is ended. From the close of chapter three, we never see the church on earth again through all the rest of the book of Revelation. We read often of "the saints," but *these* saints never knew the Savior, and was not a part of the body of Christ before the tribulation began. Israel comes into view and we note a great multitude of spared Gentiles, saved out of the great tribulation; *but no church, no body of Christ, no bride of the Lamb any more is seen upon the earth!*

Every careful Bible student should notice this. We must understand the rapture as Paul taught in I Thessalonians 4:16, 17, as transpiring between chapter 3 and chapter 4. In the first verse, the rapture of the apostle is the symbol. He sees the door opened in heaven. His attention is turned from earth to glory. He is, in the Spirit, caught up, and far above the earth scene he beholds a "throne set in heaven," and a Person sitting upon it.' The likeness of this awesome Person he cannot even attempt to portray. He only tells us he beheld a Presence whose glory was like a jasper and a sardius, The jasper of the Revelation is not the opaque stone we know by that name. It is later described *as clear as crystal* (chap.21:11); and is probably the diamond, the most brilliant of all the precious jewels. The other stone is blood-red, and may really be the ruby. Thus the two together give the idea of glory and of sacrifice. Remembering that many of the first readers of the Revelation were converted Jews, we might ask, What would these stones suggest to them? Surely every instructed Hebrew would instantly recall that *they were the first and last stones in the breastplate of the High Priest* (Ex. 28: 17-20). As these stones bore the names or the tribes

of Israel, arranged according to the births of the twelve patriarchs, the one would suggest at once the name Reuben, "Behold a Son," and the other Benjamin, "Son of my right hand." It is Christ enthroned; the Son about to reign in power who is before John's vision. Round about the throne a rainbow, like an emerald, the stone of Judah (Praise) is seen, suggesting the perpetuity of the Noahic Covenant, and God's unchanging goodness, despite all man's failure, folly and wickedness.

But now the fourth verse brings before us a sight never beheld in heaven on any previous occasion: twenty-four thrones (not merely "seats") surrounding the central throne, and upon them twenty-four elders seated with victors' crowns (not diadems) upon their heads, and clothed in priestly robes of purest white. Who are these favored ones gathered around the glorious central Being? For me, there's no doubt as to their identity, if we compare scripture with scripture and distrust our own imagination, which can often lead us astray.

In 1st Chronicles, chapter 24, we read of something very similar; and again I would mention that many of John's first readers were Hebrews thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament. Every Jewish believer would instantly remember the twenty-four elders appointed by King David to *represent the entire Levitical priesthood*. He divided the priests into twenty-four courses, each course to serve for two weeks at a time in the temple which Solomon was to build. The same arrangement was in force when our Lord's forerunner was announced. Zacharias, was "of the course of Abiah," the eighth order (Luke 1:5).

The priests were many thousands in number; they could not all come together at one time, but when *the twenty-four elders met* in Jerusalem temple precincts, *the whole priestly house* was represented. Here's my explanation of this: The elders in heaven represent the whole heavenly priesthood—that is, all the redeemed who have died, who are still living at the Lord's return. In vision they were seen—not as a multitude host of millions of saved worshipers, but just twenty-four elders, symbolizing the entire company. Every one is a priest. Everyone worships. There were twelve patriarchs in Israel, and twelve apostles introducing the new dispensation. The two together would give the complete four and twenty. Another view is that the Twenty-four elders are made up of the twelve tribes of Israel from the Old Covenant and the twelve Apostles of the New Covenant. The showing of both can make absolutely no difference as concerning *who* the bride of Christ is: She is that body which found salvation by faith through the precious blood of Christ—simply because He drew them by His own Spirit—to commit to Him for the remainder of their lives, because the bride and the Groom chose the other. (Eph. 5:22-32).

Then, observe further: these persons are not angels. They are redeemed men who have overcome in the conflict with Satan and the world, for they wear victors' wreaths upon their brows. Angels are never said to be "crowned," nor have they know redemption.

There are two kinds of crowns mentioned in this book: the victor's crown, and the ruler's diadem. The former is the word here used. It refers to the wreath, of laurel or of pine, bound about the brow of the victor in the Greek games; it is the same word so often used in the New Testament when reward for service is the theme. And now, note carefully: *no saints will ever be crowned until the apostle Paul receives that crown of righteousness*, which the Lord revealed to him as his reward. In 2 Timothy 4:8, he says: "*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 them also that love His appearing.*" The expression "at that day" refers to the day of Christ, when He shall come for His own, and they will all be manifest before His judgment-seat. He says: "*Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*" (Rev. 22:12). Surely it follows then that no rewards are given out till He returns for His saints. **Therefore there can be no crowned elders in heaven until after the rapture.** Remember the Lord saying through Peter, especially concerning the judgment seat of Christ, immediately following the rapture of the Church:

“For the time [is come] that *judgment must begin at the house of God*: and if [it] first [begin] at us, what shall the end [be] of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17—see also Ezekiel 9:3-7 [My Italics]).

“**3**) And the *glory* of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer’s inkhorn by his side; **4**) And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. **5**) And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: **6**) slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: *but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary*. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. **7**) And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew the city.” (Ezek. 9:3-7) - My italics).¹

This, I believe, is a point of greatest importance today; for many are being troubled by the thought that perhaps the great tribulation has begun already. But all such fears are set at rest when the facts are reachable. My hope is this; that I trust you might understand the elders are the Church (saints), in heaven, surrounding the Lord in glory; and God the Son sitting on the central throne.

The four "beasts" connected with the throne, should read four "living ones", or “creatures” They are not beasts. The word is very different to that used in chapter 13. They are in the midst of the throne, where Deity dwells, and they are linked with it. They represent the attributes of the Living God. They have four faces. The lion is the well-known symbol of divine majesty. The young ox, the divine strength graciously serving man. The face of a man indicates intelligence and purpose (It shows us that deity is far above mankind). The eagle suggests swiftness in detecting evil and executing judgment. Six-winged and full of eyes, they speak of constant activity and omniscience. *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."* They cry, *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."* for all God's attributes glorify the Eternal Son.

The elders bow in worship at this announcement, and cast their crowns at the feet of Him that sits upon the throne, adoring Him as Creator, saying, *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."* The blessed truth is here proclaimed, that Christ died on the cross and is worshiped by all the redeemed in heaven. If John chapter 1, and Hebrews chapter 1 are all carefully compared with this closing verse, it makes it perfectly clear that it is Christ Jesus, the Son, who created all things. *Without Him* was nothing made that was made. All things are by Him and for Him. So He it is who fills the throne and is the centre of the worship here described.

In our day, when His glory as the Eternal Son is so often denied, when His true Deity, His virgin-birth, His sinless humanity are all alike flouted by apostate teachers as so much traditional lore to be rejected at will, it is refreshing to turn from earth to heaven and see the glory displayed there as His and the unhindered adoration of His own as they prostrate themselves before His throne. If He is not God, then heaven will be filled with idolaters, for it is written: *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."*

But we need not for a moment enter such an "if." He is *"God over all, blessed forever,"* and He is also Man. God the Son in grace was born of the virgin, and it is He who fills the throne above. Nor will He ever abdicate that throne, even though He shall soon descend to gather His own to Himself, and to reign over all the earth as Son of Man, sitting on the throne of His father David. Both thrones are His, for all glory belongs to Him by the Father's firm decree. Thus shall all men eventually honor the Son even as they honor the Father.

¹ **Ezekiel The Prophet**, By H.A. Ironside; Pgs 57, 58; Loizeaux Bros Publ.; Neptune, New Jersey. © 1949

I feel I should add something as to the living creatures at this point. In chapter 4 we see them linked peculiarly with the throne; and in chapters 5:5; 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 7:11; 7:13; 11:16; 14:3, & 19:4-7, we see they are most strongly linked with the elders. We have suggested that they represent the divine attributes of God. Up to the present age, and before the Lamb takes the book of judgment, these are largely seen in angelic ministry. But "*Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the age to come.*" In that day God will work through His redeemed ones, hence the living ones *join in the New Song*, voicing the joy of the saints in whom the divine glory will be displayed.²

- The living creatures of Ezekiel's vision and the cherubim on the mercy-seat tell the *same* story:

The Elders and the Four Beasts (Creatures) In Revelation:

Rev. 4:10: **The four and twenty 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,

Rev. 5:5: And one of the **elders** saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Rev. 5:6: And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the **four beasts**, and in the midst of the **elders**, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Rev. 5:8: And when he had taken the book, **the four beasts** and **four [and] twenty elders** fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

Rev. 5:11: And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and **the beasts** and the **elders**: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

Rev. 5:14: And **the four beasts** said, Amen. And the **four [and] twenty elders** fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Rev. 7:11: And all the angels stood round about the throne, and [about] **the elders** and **the four beasts**, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Rev 7:13: And one of the **elders** answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

Rev. 11:16: And the **four and twenty elders**, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

Rev. 14:3: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before **the four beasts**, and the **elders**: and no man could learn that song but the hundred [and] forty [and] four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Rev 19:4-7: And the **four and twenty elders** and **the four beasts** fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. .

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace *and* confidence. In the world you have tribulation *and* trials *and* distress *and* frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [*I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.*]" (John 16:33—Amplified Bible). I cannot see the Church to be "*appointed to wrath*" here.

—end of part nine—

Blessings from Tom and Linda Stephens;
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² **Lectures On Revelation**, By H.A. Ironside; from pgs. 79-87; Loizeaux Bros. Publ.; Neptune New Jersey; © none. 1920.

