

Rapture References

Recently I was challenged to make a list of all the passages in the Bible that hint of a pre-trib rapture. As you may know I believe Paul was the first person on Earth to present a clear pre-trib teaching, about 20 years after the cross. Before that time it was unknown because Jesus didn't teach it to His other disciples during their time together. And since the Olivet Discourse is directed at Israel, there's no mention of it there either, even though the end times is in view. Israel will not participate in the rapture.

Now I'll be the first to admit that doing this requires that you already have a working knowledge of the pre-trib position, because without it you wouldn't recognize some of these references as being pertinent to the subject. But ever since Paul revealed the rapture, scholars have been seeing hints of it here and there, even in the Old Testament.

Before we begin, in **1 Cor. 2:6-8** Paul explained why God's plans for the church had been kept secret until after the crucifixion. He said that if the rulers of this age (Satan & Co.) had understood all that God intended for us they would not have crucified the Lord. Not that they could have stopped it, of course. But had they known God was going to use the murder of His Son to save us all, they wouldn't have gone ahead with it, and in fact would have tried to prevent it. It wasn't until He was on the cross that they discovered the Lord's death was going to become payment in full for all our sins, so instead of it being cause for a great celebration it totally disarmed them and made them into a public spectacle (**Colossians 2:13-15**). Then, 20 years later, they learned about the rapture. These were both things that God had planned from the beginning, but a good general keeps his strategy a secret in order to take his enemy by surprise, so God didn't let Satan (or anyone else) know about these things until it was too late for him to react. Even now, Satan doesn't know when the rapture is coming. All he knows is what we know, that each new believer could be the last one, the one that takes us all out of here and beyond his reach forever.

I'm convinced that God's plan requires the Church to disappear before Daniel's 70th week begins. Remember, the Lord set aside 70 weeks (490 years) for Israel to accomplish 6 things. (**Daniel 9:24**) At the end of 69 weeks (483 years) Jesus was

crucified, the clock suddenly stopped, and Israel disappeared along with its Temple and Old Covenant worship. Daniel's prophecy was left incomplete and from that time on, God's focus was on the church.

The reappearance of Israel in 1948, the promised rebuilding of a Temple, and resumption of Levitical sacrifice during the 70th week make it clear that the Church didn't end the dispensation of Law but only interrupted it seven years short of its intended duration. We would all agree that if the introduction of a dam into a stream of water interrupts its flow, then it's reasonable and logical to conclude that removal of the dam will be necessary for the flow to resume. Therefore if the introduction of the Church after the 69th week of Daniels prophecy caused the interruption in its fulfillment, it's reasonable and logical to conclude that the Church will have to be removed before the final seven years of the dispensation of Law can run their course and Daniel's prophecy can be fulfilled.

Of course there are other sound reasons why the church has to disappear before the End Times begin in earnest. Not having a destiny on Earth, our presence here would serve no purpose during the time of Earth's liberation from bondage (**Romans 8:19-21**). Not being subject to judgment the Church has no unfinished business with God that could be concluded during the End Times. Unlike Israel we don't need to be made righteous because we're already as righteous as God is (**2 cor. 5:21**).

Jeremiah 30:11 says the End time judgments will serve a twofold purpose, to completely destroy all the nations among which Israel has been scattered and to discipline Israel. Since God does not consider the Church to belong to either group our presence on Earth during that time would be irrelevant.

But the most important reason, as we'll see, is that God said we won't be here. Those who teach the Church's presence on Earth during any part of Daniel's 70th Week have to re-define grace, re-invent the church and re-interpret the Scriptures to support their position.

With that introduction, let's look at some of the clearest hints God placed in the Scriptures to show He has always planned for a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Naturally, we'll begin in the Old Testament.

Enoch Disappeared

Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took Him away. (Genesis 5:24)

In **Matt. 24:37**, Jesus said that the time of His coming would be like the days of Noah. He went on to explain that just as all the unbelievers perished in the flood, all unbelievers would perish at the time of His 2nd coming as well. Those who survive the devastation of the Great Tribulation will immediately face judgment and be taken off the planet. The parables of the servant, the ten virgins, and the talents explain this, as does the account of the Sheep and Goat judgment. (**Matt. 24:45-25:46**)

But if you give the Lord's statement its widest possible application, you can see that as the time of the Great Flood drew near there were 3 kinds of people on Earth. There were the unbelievers who perished in the flood, Noah and his family who were preserved through it, and Enoch, who was taken by the Lord well before it.

Just so, as the End of the Age draws near there will still be three kinds of people on Earth. They are the unbelievers of our time who will perish in the End Times judgments, modern Israel who will be preserved through them, and the Church who will be taken by God well before they begin.

There are some interesting similarities between Enoch and the Church. For starters, the name Enoch comes from a root which means to train or teach. To the church Jesus said, "Go and make disciples (students) of all men." (**Matt. 28:19**) And according to Hebrew tradition, Enoch was born on the day that would become Pentecost. It's the same day the Church was born. I believe Enoch was an early type of the Church and his disappearance before the flood gave the first hint of a pre-tribulation rapture.

Lot Had To Leave Sodom

But flee there quickly, because I can not do anything until you reach it. (Genesis 19:23)

Abraham had struck a bargain with the Lord that if even 10 righteous people could be found in Sodom and Gomorrah He would spare the cities. The fact that the cities were destroyed indicates 10 righteous people could not be found there. But there

was one, and though He wasn't bound to do it, the Lord instructed the angels to get Lot out of town before commencing their judgment. Peter referred to Lot's rescue from Sodom as evidence that the Lord does not judge the righteous with the wicked (**2 Peter 2:7-9**) Lot therefore becomes a model of the Church, who with a righteousness imputed by faith, has to be removed from the time and place of judgment before it begins.

Where Was Daniel?

Daniel 3 contains one of the most popular children's stories of the Old Testament. Many don't realize that it's also one of the clearest models of the End Times anywhere in the Bible. King Nebuchadnezzar represents the anti-Christ who decrees that anyone who refuses to bow down and worship the statue he has made will be put to death in the fiery furnace, which represents Great Tribulation. Daniel's three friends, representing Israel, refuse to worship the image and are thrown into the furnace to die. While in there they encounter the Lord, are preserved through the judgment, and are elevated to positions of honor in Babylon.

But where was Daniel? He was a prominent figure both before and after chapter 3. But in this episode his name was not even mentioned. Did he worship the statue to escape judgment? If you think that, you don't know Daniel. Did he refuse to bow down but was not accused? If you think that, you don't know his enemies. After all they rounded up his three closest friends. For the purposes of this story it's as if he has disappeared altogether. In chapter 3, Daniel was a model of the Church, who during the End times judgments will have disappeared altogether, while Israel will be preserved through them, meet the Lord in the midst of them, and be elevated to positions of honor in the Kingdom Age.

Isaiah Said It Best

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.

See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.
(Isaiah 26:19-21)

Without a doubt this is the clearest statement of the Lord's intentions for the Church anywhere in the Old Testament. It can't be tied to any event in history, but clearly awaits a future fulfillment. And it can't be intended for Israel, whose resurrection will come after the time of God's wrath, not before it. **(Daniel 12:1-2)**

Someday soon a group of people will suddenly rise from the dead. Another group, still living, will be whisked away to rooms prepared for them to be hidden from the time of God's wrath. Then the Lord will punish the people of the Earth for their sins. The fact that the groups being resurrected and hidden are not objects of his wrath is indicated by the switch from second person (resurrected and hidden) to third person (punished). Notice how similar the wording is to **1 Thes 4:16-17 & 5:9**, Paul's teaching on the rapture.

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. (The dead in Christ will rise first).

Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; (After that we who are alive and left will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air)

It's appropriate to insert **John 14:2-3** here as well to see what rooms Isaiah was talking about.

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

This promise does not point to the 2nd Coming when the Lord will come to Earth to be with Israel here, where they are. This is a promise to the Church that He has gone to His father's house to prepare our rooms for us. Then He will come for us to take us there, where He is.

See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. (For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.)

I'm convinced this is the passage Paul had in mind when he said *"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep."* (**1 Thes. 4:15**). I say this because with the exception of **1 Thes 4:16-17** there is no passage in all the Bible that so clearly describes the pre-trib rapture of the Church.

This is not the sum of Old Testament verses that point to a pre-tribulation rapture. But it's a good sample of the clearest ones, to help you see that God always intended to take us to be with him before He unleashes the End Times judgments upon the unbelieving Earth.

Obvious By Our Absence?

In His definitive teaching on the End Times, the Lord warned Israel they would be hated and persecuted by all nations because of Him (**Matt. 24:9**). He said many would fall away from the faith, and would betray and hate each other (**Matt. 24:10**). He said their Temple would be desecrated by another Abomination of Desolation, and when that happened those in Judea (the New Testament name for Israel) would have to flee into the mountains immediately (**Matt. 24:15**) He told them to pray that their flight wouldn't take place in the winter (winters can be harsh in the Judean wilderness) or on the Sabbath (fleeing would violate Sabbath travel restrictions) because the Great Tribulation would be coming and it would be worse than anything man has ever known (**Matt. 24:20-21**). He said if He didn't personally intervene not one of them would survive it, but for the sake of the believers among them He would put an end to it at the appointed time (**Matt. 24:22**). He said false Messiahs and false prophets would perform great signs and miracles to deceive them as the end approached (**Matt. 24:24**). (Paul confirmed this in **2 Thes. 2:9-10** placing its fulfillment after the rapture.)

He said everyone on Earth will see Him when He comes back (**Matt. 24:27**) and it will be just like the Days of Noah. Unbelievers who survive the Great Tribulation will be taken away in the judgments that follow His return and believers will be welcomed

into the Kingdom to build a new world. All this and more, He said to Israel. (**Matt. 24:36-25:46**)

But did He speak one word of comfort, or even warning, to His Bride? Did He say He'd protect us through this terrifying time? Did He even acknowledge our existence? No. Not once. Why? Because He was talking to Israel about a time after we're gone. He left it to Paul to explain the details of our rescue after it was too late to stop what He was about to do for us.

Lot Had To Leave Sodom (Revisited)

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all." (**Luke 17:28-29**)

In **Luke 17:26-27** Jesus had been saying how in the days of Noah unbelievers hadn't heeded the warnings they were given, and didn't avail themselves of the Lord's provision for their rescue. They were caught by surprise when the flood came and it destroyed them all.

At first glance verses 28-29 seem like a similar example, but it's really very different. Lot was taken away from the time and place of the judgment before it began. In fact the angels who were sent to remove him said they couldn't bring the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah until Lot was away and safe. (**Genesis 19:21-22**) As I demonstrated in part one of this series, Lot served as a model of the Church who also has to be rescued from the time and place of the coming judgment before it can begin.

The Resurrection And The Life

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (**John 11:25-26**)

This is an amazing statement. The Lord had already said that whoever believes in Him would not perish but would have eternal life. (John 3:16) Here he provided more detail, saying that even though a believer experiences physical death, he will still have life. He was referring to the resurrection of those who die in faith. And then He

said there would be some would never die, but would pass from this life directly into the next one. If we didn't already know about the rapture, we wouldn't see this, but since we do we can understand that He was talking about that one generation of believers who will be alive when He comes for the Church, and will receive eternal life without dying first. And once again the Lord confirmed that the single qualification for eternal life is to believe that His death paid the entire price for our sins.

What's To Become Of Israel?

When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: " 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages. (Acts 15:13-18)

It was not quite 20 years after the cross, and the Apostles were meeting together in Jerusalem. None of the New Testament had been written yet. 483 years of Daniel's 490 year prophecy for Israel (**Daniel 9:24-27**) had been fulfilled on schedule but with the Messiah's death everything had come to a stop. Before He died, the Lord had even told them that the Temple would soon be completely destroyed, and after His resurrection He had refused to confirm their hope that the Kingdom would now be restored to Israel. In effect He had said, "That's not for you to know." (**Acts 1:6**) And now Peter, Paul, and Barnabas had given eye witness accounts of the Holy Spirit coming directly upon Gentiles with much prophesying and speaking in tongues. If Gentiles could come straight to the Lord and receive the Holy Spirit without converting to Judaism first, did that mean God was finished with the Jews? If so what would become of Israel and all the Lord's unfulfilled promises to His people?

James, the Lord's half brother, helped them understand what was coming. What we now know as the Dispensation of Law had been interrupted while the Lord takes from among the Gentiles a people for Himself (the Church). In Greek the phrase "taking from" literally means to take out of, or carry away from. It denotes an exit, a separation of time, place, and cause.

After He has taken the Church, James said, the Lord will turn His attention once again to Israel. The Temple will be rebuilt and the remaining 7 years of the Dispensation of Law will run their course. This is the time we know as Daniels 70th week. He concluded by saying the Lord has known for ages that He was going to do this.

Paul's Confirmation

Paul, who was there, explained it to the Church at Rome this way. *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is (or will be) my covenant with them when I take away their sins."* (**Romans 11:25-27**)

The Greek word translated "full number" was often used in a nautical sense to define the number of sailors, oarsmen, and soldiers required to man a ship. Once a ship had its full number it could set sail for its intended destination. When it arrived it was said to have "come in." I believe Paul's intention was to say that the Church has a "full number" and once that number is reached it will set sail for its intended destination, heaven. No one on Earth knows this number and that's why no one will know the day or hour of the rapture in advance.

Some commentators believe the same thought was conveyed in Genesis 7 with the Ark. It had to contain 2 of every kind of animal, 7 of the "clean" animals, Noah, his 3 sons, and their 4 wives. That was its full number. Once they were all aboard, the door was shut and the Ark floated away.

When the Church's "full number" has "come in" to its heavenly destination God will turn His attention once again to Israel and the final 7 years of Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy will be fulfilled, culminating in the Lord's return to establish His Kingdom. This is the Kingdom promised to Israel that Daniel said would never be destroyed, or left to another people, but will endure forever. (**Daniel 2:44**).

The Rapture Goes Public

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1 Thes 1:10)

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thes. 4:16-17)

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thes. 5:9)

These are the rapture verses, named for the Latin translation of the Greek word *harpadzo*, which means to be caught up or snatched away in English, and which appears in **1 Thes. 4:17**. In part one of this series I showed how closely they resemble **Isaiah 26:19-21**. I believe Paul was using Isaiah's words to support his claim that this wasn't just his idea, but had been announced by the Lord nearly eight hundred years earlier.

With the first letter to the Thessalonians Paul gave the first clear promise of a pre-tribulation Rapture. When He called Jesus the one who will rescue us from the coming wrath in chapter 1, he meant that sometime before the seal judgments of **Rev. 6**, which signal the beginning of God's wrath (**Rev. 6:16-17**) Jesus will separate the Church from the time and place of the End Times Judgments. (Look up the full meaning of the Greek word translated "from" in **1 Thes. 1: 10** to confirm this.) In Chapter 4 he said this separation would happen when the Lord comes to take us to be with Him in Heaven. First, believers who have died will be raised up. Then, we who are still alive will be snatched away with them to meet the Lord in the air. Then in chapter 5 he repeated the reason for our sudden rescue. It was never intended that the Church would suffer through the time of God's wrath.

Say That Again, Paul

Between the two letters we call 1st and 2nd Thessalonians something happened that would have scared the recipients right out of their socks had they been wearing any. They received a letter that appeared to be from Paul but was in fact a forgery. According to **2 Thes 2:1-2** it said the Day of the Lord had already come. Confused and frightened, they dashed off a hurried request for clarification since this new letter contradicted what Paul had previously taught them.

Here we get an extraordinary insight into their understanding of the sequence of End Times events. Receiving word that the Day of the Lord had come would only have upset them so much if they'd been led to believe that the Rapture of the Church would precede it. Think about it. From any other view, this kind of news would have been scary for sure, but their fear would have been tempered by a certain amount of joyous anticipation. Sure the next few years would really be rough, but whether by martyrdom or survival they would soon be in the presence of the Lord forever.

But from the pre-trib perspective, hearing that the Day of the Lord had come would be horrifying, because it would mean that they had missed the rapture. And that would mean they weren't saved. No wonder they wrote Paul for clarification!

It's important to understand that they had asked Paul two questions. The first concerned the Day of the Lord and the second was about our being gathered to Him, the Rapture. Paul answered the 2 questions in that order using verses 3-5 to describe conditions that would bring about the Day of the Lord and verses 6-8 to explain when the rapture would occur in relation to them.

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (2 Thes. 2:3-5)

Confirming and amplifying Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy (**Daniel 9:27**) and the Lord's warning from the Olivet Discourse (**Matt. 24:15**), Paul pegged the beginning of the

Great Tribulation to the moment the antichrist stands in the Temple in Jerusalem proclaiming himself to be God.

And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. (2 Thes. 2:6-8)

Before the antichrist can be officially revealed, One who is currently limiting the power of lawlessness has to be taken out of the way. The phrase “out of the way” literally means out of the midst, or from amongst. Some force that restrains the power of evil within certain predetermined limits (for this power is already at work on Earth) has to be removed.

Scholars who read the passage literally identify this force as the Holy Spirit. And since the Holy Spirit is sealed within us, if He’s taken out from amongst the people of Earth, we have to go too. You can’t take the Restrainer without taking the container, as someone has said. This is the Rapture of the Church, and once we’re gone the power of evil will be free from restraint and all Hell will break loose on Earth until the Lord returns at the end of the Great Tribulation to put a stop to it.

Here then is the sequence. Before the Day of the Lord can come, the antichrist has to be revealed, and before he can be revealed the church has to be raptured. So according to Paul the next prophetic event involving believers will be our own disappearance.

We concluded with Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians. Written about 20 years after the cross, they were the first definitive teaching on the rapture given on Earth, and as we saw Paul placed it before the End Times judgments, saying the Church was not appointed to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (**1 Thes. 5:9**).

About three years after the Thessalonian letters Paul wrote **1 Corinthians** and in chapter 15 added more detail to his rapture teaching. We'll begin the final installment there.

What Will We Look Like?

In **1 Corinthians 15** Paul was teaching about the resurrection, responding to questions about how the dead will be raised and what we'll look like. He used an example from agriculture to describe it. You can't tell what a plant will look like by examining the seed. You have to plant it and wait till it grows. When it does the plant will look different from the seed, but the farmer will recognize it as having come from the seed he planted. He said that's the way it is with us. We can't enter Heaven in our earthly state, so we have to be changed into our heavenly state. When we are, the splendor of our heavenly body will be different from the splendor of our earthly one, but we'll still be recognizable. Just as we can tell the sun from the moon and the stars from either and from each other, so it will be with us. We'll all be unique, recognizable individuals.

Then in **1 Cor. 15:51-53** He wrote;

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

The Greek word for mystery means secret. By saying he was going to tell them a mystery, Paul was saying he was about to reveal a secret. And here it is. When the Lord comes down to meet us in the air we'll receive no advance notice. In one instant we'll be going about our business here on Earth and in the next we'll be standing in the Kingdom. It will happen so fast we won't have time to blink our eyes. We'll hear the Trumpet call of God and the voice of the archangel and we'll step out of this world into the next one. As we look around we'll realize that multitudes of believers from the Church Age have joined us. The dead will have been given new bodies and the living will have been transformed from mortal to immortal. Paul said we'll know as we're known (**1 Cor. 13:12**), so just as the Lord will recognize each of us, we'll recognize each other. And John said that what we'll be is not yet known, but we

know that when He appears we'll be like Him (**1 John 3:2**) To me that means we'll have the same capabilities that He demonstrated after His resurrection.

Don't confuse the trumpet we'll hear with the 7th Trumpet of **Rev. 11:15**. In the first place what we'll hear is the trumpet of God, mentioned elsewhere only in **Exodus 19:13 & 19**. The 7th Trumpet is blown by an angel in Heaven, announces the beginning of the Great Tribulation, and is never called the last trumpet.

As I said, the phrase Trumpet of God only appears twice in the Bible. The first one is in **Exodus 19** at Mt. Sinai and the last one is in **1 Thes. 4**. There are some incredible parallels between the giving of the Law and the Rapture of the Church. And as you might expect there are also some big differences. We'll look at the similarities first.

Both are accompanied by the audible voice of God and both create a Kingdom. At Mt. Sinai the Israelites were redeemed from slavery, at the Rapture we're redeemed from sin. They were consecrated, we're perfected. They washed their clothes, we're given clean clothes. God came to the Mt. top, Jesus comes to the air. At Mt. Sinai Moses and Aaron went up, at the rapture we go up. At Mt. Sinai Israel was wed to God. At the Rapture the Church is wed to Jesus. At Mt. Sinai God dwelt with Israel and at the rapture the Church will dwell with Jesus.

Since many Biblical models are necessarily incomplete, there are also some obvious differences. Only Moses and Aaron could ascend the mountain. Anyone else going up passed from life to death. At the rapture we all go up and everyone passes from death to life. God promised to dwell with Israel if they obeyed. We will dwell with Jesus because He obeyed. They changed themselves temporarily, He changes us permanently. Theirs was an event accompanied by great fear, ours is an event anticipated with great joy. After all Mt. Sinai was the presentation of God's Law, and the Rapture is the manifestation of His grace. God blew the First Trump in **Exodus 19** in preparation for the giving of the Law, and will blow the the Last Trump in **1 Thes. 4:16** to initiate the Rapture.

Rescuing The Righteous

Abraham had reminded the Lord that His character wouldn't allow Him to judge the righteous with the wicked. Even though the negotiated requirement of 10 righteous

men to spare Sodom and Gomorrah hadn't been met, God instructed the angels to remove Lot before destroying the cities. Speaking of this Peter wrote, *"if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment."* (**2 Peter 2:9**)

Peter wanted us to see from the example of Lot that it wasn't an isolated incident but was meant to convey a general principle. The Greek word translated "from" in the NIV is more clearly rendered "out of" in the King James. It means away from the time and place of the event being referenced. We see a similar idea conveyed in **Isaiah 57:1**:

The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.

Here the Hebrew word translated "taken away" means to gather in, receive, or remove. God's character is such that He can't allow the righteous to be punished with the wicked.

The 7 Churches Of Rev. 2-3

In a previous study I've demonstrated how the seven churches of **Rev. 2-3** chronicle Church history. I showed how the first 3 churches (Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamus) have all disappeared and the remaining 4 Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) are all present today. Viewed in chronological order and compared to Church history these four represent the Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Apostate churches of today.

In **Rev. 2: 22-24** the Lord warned that some from the Church in Thyatira will face the tribulation while others will be rescued and share in rewards that are uniquely reserved for true believers, which includes the rapture. The distinction will be made on the basis of their beliefs. Those who've remained true to the Gospel will go while those who adhere to the Catholic church's "Jesus plus Mary, grace plus works, and Scripture plus sacraments" doctrine will not.

In the letter to Sardis, which represents the main line denominations, Jesus warned of dead orthodoxy having only the appearance of life. "Remember what you have

received and heard and obey it," He said, "Or else you won't know at what time I will come to you." He was referring to the Gospel, and notice He said "to you", not "for you". Many in the main line denominations don't know they need to be born again, haven't got a clue that we're in the end times and have never even heard of the rapture. As in Thyatira, he said there are a few in Sardis who have remained true. They'll walk with Him for they are worthy. Once again some will be taken and some left based on what they believe.

Philadelphia is often called The Church of the Rapture because of the Lord's promise to keep us from the hour of trial that's going to come upon the whole world (**Rev. 3:10**). The Greek word translated "from" here is the same one Peter used in describing the Lord's ability to rescue godly men from trials. Remember it means away from the time and place of the event being referenced, in this case the End Times judgments that are coming upon the whole world. Because we've kept His word and not denied His name, He has promised us a place in the New Jerusalem, where only those whose names have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life can enter (**Rev. 21:27**). This is the Lord's personal confirmation of a pre-trib rapture, which when John wrote this in about 95AD had been taught on Earth for nearly 50 years.

The "Church" at Laodicea is really an apostate movement, a spiritual rebellion. Although it has been around through out the Church Age, it's current prominence is a sign that the End of the Age is approaching (**2 Thes. 2:3**) Thinking of itself as rich and self sufficient, it lacks the one thing money can't buy, a Savior. He's outside the door knocking, hoping someone will hear. There's no promise to rescue the group, who will be spit out of his mouth, only to individuals who hear and respond.

Come Up Here!

At the beginning of **Rev. 4**, John was called forward to the End of the Age and up into Heaven to observe and report on events that were nearly 2000 years in his future. When he arrived at the throne of God he saw a group never before seen in any of the Bible's pictures of God's throne. Isaiah didn't see them (**Isaiah 6**) Ezekiel didn't see them (**Ezekiel 1 & 10**), and even Daniel, whose vision was oriented in the End Times only saw a vague hint in the form of plural thrones (**Daniel 7:9**). I'm speaking of the 24 elders sitting on thrones encircling the Throne of God (**Rev. 4:4**)

These 24 elders confuse some people, but they shouldn't. Their appearance gives them away. They have thrones, so they're rulers. They surround the Throne of God, so they're assisting Him. They're seated, so their work is done. They're dressed in white, so they're righteous. They're wearing crowns, so they're kings. It's the Greek "stephanos" crown so they're victors, over comers. They're called Elders, a title associated with the Church. That's a pretty strong case for them representing the Church, and no one has ever come up with a better one.

Some try to explain the 24 thrones by saying that they belong to an unidentified group of ruling angels. But four prophets saw the throne of God and recorded their experience. Of the four, only John saw them. And note that the Church won't receive crowns until the Bema Seat judgment that takes place after the Rapture. Is this a symbolic view of the church in Heaven before the judgments begin? It looks that way to me.

The Song Of The Redeemed

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men (us) for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them (us) to be a kingdom (kings) and priests to serve our God, and they (we) will reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:8-10)

This is a controversial passage and taken by itself its difficult to understand. But even though most of the modern translations read like the one above, both the King James Version and Young's Literal Translation put the passage in the first person plural as I've indicated in parentheses. The first person version helps supports the view that the 24 Elders represent the Church.

Also the Greek word for King and Kingdom is the same, differing only by gender. King is the masculine form and is the one that appears in **Rev. 5:10**. (Kingdom is feminine.) So the verse is more grammatically and theologically correct when it's translated Kings and Priests, which define the Church, rather than a kingdom and priests. And there's no other group that fits the description of verse 9. Finally, the

song is more consistent with the context of the passage when it's sung by the redeemed Church, not by a third party singing about the Church. Taken together **Rev. 4-5** present a good circumstantial case for the Church being present in Heaven before the wrath of God begins in Rev. 6. As we've already seen, this is what the Bible has promised from the beginning.

Who's That With The Lord?

Speaking of the anti-Christ and his 10 king confederacy **Rev. 17:14** says, *"They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."*

This is an overview statement that describes the Great Tribulation, during which Satan, working through the anti-Christ, will attempt to assert his ownership claim to Planet Earth. **Rev. 17:13** says these 10 kings will have only that one purpose during the time of their reign. In **Rev. 3:10** Jesus called that time the hour of trial that's coming upon the whole world. In **Matt. 24:21** He called it the Great Tribulation. **Rev. 17:17** says that the Lord will agree to their rule in order for them to accomplish His purpose, not theirs, and that's to destroy the Great Prostitute. Once they're finished with her He'll appear to personally oversee their defeat. And guess who'll be with Him when He returns? His called, chosen and faithful followers. That can only be the Church, in Heaven during the Great Tribulation, and returning with Him at its end.

From Genesis to Revelation, the overwhelming weight of evidence, some circumstantial and some testimonial shows that the Lord always intended to remove the Church from Earth before the End Times Judgments and to hide us in His Father's house until His wrath has passed by. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

By Jack Kelley.