

THE RAPTURE

PART III

AS SEEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ANTITYPE IN REVELATION 1-4

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Christians at the time of the rapture will be removed to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And events of the judgment seat will occur between the removal of the Church before the Tribulation and the return of Christ following the Tribulation. Christ is not judging today. Rather, He is ministering as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of Christians. And He will not act in the capacity of Judge *until* He completes His present high priestly ministry, which will last throughout the present dispensation.

Thus, Christians will not be judged *until* the present dispensation has run its course and Christ returns for His Church. Once these things occur, the judgment of Christians will ensue; and this judgment must be completed prior to the time Christ returns to deal with Israel and the nations at the end of the Tribulation.

CHRIST AS JUDGE

In Rev. 1:13, Christ is seen dressed in the type garments worn by both *a priest* and *a judge*; but the position of the girdle about the breasts rather than around the waist indicates that Christ, in this passage,

is exercising *a judicial* rather than a priestly role. A priest would be girded about the waist, signifying *service*; but the girdle placed about the shoulders or breasts indicates a *magisterial* function (*cf.* John 13:2-5; Rev. 15:6).

Aside from the preceding, the entire scene is *judicial*, not priestly. *Brass, fire, and a sword* are mentioned in connection with Christ's appearance, which speak of *judicial activity*. And Christ's countenance is described by the expression, "as the sun shineth in his strength," which has to do with His glory, to be manifested during that coming day of His power (a 1,000-year period of judging those upon the earth [*cf.* Psa. 2:1-9; Rev. 2:26, 27]).

Then, more information is given, which will help to ascertain exactly what is being depicted by the scene at hand. The Apostle John was transported into "*the Lord's day [the Day of the Lord]*" (v. 10), and the vision of Christ which he saw depicts Christ as He will appear *following* the completion of His high priestly work, *anticipating* His long-awaited regal work. The entire scene in Rev. 1:13-18 is prophetic, depicting Christ as *Judge in the midst of the seven Churches at the conclusion of the present dispensation, anticipating that coming day when He will exercise governmental power and authority over the earth.*

The chronological arrangement of events opening the Book of Revelation sets forth the fact that God will deal with the Church in judgment *before* He deals with Israel and the nations after this fashion (*cf.* 1 Peter 4:17-19). The Church will be removed from the earth and will be placed in the heavens; and the Church will be dealt with during a period of time before the Tribulation begins on earth.

A review of the first five chapters of the Book of Revelation reveals that there will have to be an interval of time between the removal of the Church and the beginning of the Tribulation. That is, the present dispensation will run its course, the Church will be removed, and certain events will then transpire in heaven (while the Church is in heaven) before the Tribulation begins

on earth (which, when it begins, will fulfill seven uncompleted years of the previous dispensation).

These events — occurring while the Church is in heaven, preceding the beginning of the Tribulation on earth — concern *the Church coming under judgment* (as revealed in chapters one through three); and these events also concern *the relinquishment of crowns* which Christians will wear during the Messianic Era (ch. 4), along with *preparations to redeem the domain* over which Christians will rule at this time (ch. 5).

(The event marking the beginning of the Tribulation on earth is not the removal of the Church, as is often taught, but the ratifying of a seven-year covenant between the man of sin and Israel. The Tribulation, which will ensue following the ratifying of this covenant, will last exactly seven years, completing the full four hundred ninety years of Daniel's prophecy concerning *Seventy Sevens* "determined" *upon the Jewish people* [*cf.* Dan. 9:24-27].)

THE COMPLETE CHURCH

The seven Churches in the presence of Christ in Revelation, chapter one depict *the Church as a whole* coming under judgment at the conclusion of the present dispensation; and the fact that this judgment will occur in heaven and has to do with issues surrounding the judgment seat of Christ becomes evident as one studies the opening chapters of this book.

"Seven" in Scripture is *God's number*. It is a number showing *completion*. It is used more specifically to show *the completion of that which is in view*, and in this case, the Church is in view, with "seven Churches" showing *the complete Church* (all Christians, faithful and unfaithful alike).

The seven Churches named in the opening chapters of the Book of Revelation, though referring to seven existing Churches in the Gentile world (in Asia [1:4]) during the first century, depict *completion in relation to the Church*. These seven Churches represent Chris-

tianity *as a whole* — both on earth during the present dispensation (chs. 2, 3) and in heaven at the conclusion of the dispensation (chs. 1-4, as a whole).

Chapter one introduces the matter at hand, (judgment awaiting *all Christians*); chapters two through four then form a commentary on chapter one; and chapter five leads into that section of the book covering the Tribulation (6:1ff).

(Note: When studying the Book of Revelation, look for the book's own built-in interpretation, as in chapters one through four. A unit of truth will be given; then, following Scriptures will provide commentary upon this unit of truth, allowing the Holy Spirit Himself to interpret that which He gave through John [*e.g.*, *cf.* 12:1-6 and 12:7-17; *cf.* 12:1-17 and chs. 13, 14; *cf.* 12:3; 13:1-18; 17:1-7 and 17:8-18].)

The trumpet beckoning to John in Rev. 4:1 can only be synonymous with the trumpet in Rev. 1:10. In this respect — because of the revealed events which follow in each instance — the trumpet in these two sections is apparently the trumpet which will be heard when the Church is removed from the earth at the end of this dispensation, subsequently appearing in the presence of Christ to be judged, as revealed in chapters one through three (*cf.* I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16-5:9). Then, a sequence of events, revealed throughout the remainder of the book, begins to unfold.

John, transported into the Lord's Day, at a future time, in chapter one, was instructed to record that which he saw and send the record to seven existing Churches in Asia. These Churches, along with a brief description of each, are seen on earth in chapters two and three; but the scene back in chapter one, as well, has them in the presence of Christ in heaven, at the end of the dispensation, about to come under judgment.

An overcomer's promise is listed for each Church in chapters two and three, and in chapter one the Churches are seen as they are about to be judged rela-

tive to these overcomer's promises. Chapters two and three not only furnish the background material to show *why* and *on what basis* the judgment set forth in chapter one will occur, but these chapters actually *have to do with that judgment*.

Note the structure of each of the seven epistles to the seven Churches. All seven are structured exactly the same way: 1) I know thy works, 2) judgment is then seen to be on the basis of these works, and 3) this judgment is with a view to showing whether the Christian has overcome or has been overcome. There is an overcomer's promise concluding each epistle, and these overcomer's promises are millennial in their scope of fulfillment.

Christians will be judged on the basis of works, with a view to showing whether they have overcome or have been overcome; and this will be with a view to their realizing or being denied regal promises and blessing in the Messianic Era which follows.

As previously seen, John's experience of being transported into the Lord's Day in chapter one is synonymous with his being removed from the earth at the beginning of chapter four. Thus, events about to be revealed in chapter four begin at exactly the same place events in the previous three chapters began — with the removal of the Church to be judged. But this judgment is not repeated in chapter four. Rather, events surrounding the judgment seat shift to related events which will immediately follow this judgment.

The scene in heaven throughout chapter four provides additional details concerning the seven Churches in the presence of Christ in chapter one. *All Christians*, comprising the complete Church in the presence of Christ in that future day, will not only see that which John saw in chapter one, experience that depicted in chapters two and three, but also see that which John saw in chapter four (along with, it would appear, the things which John saw in the remaining chapters of the book as well).

By way of summation, to grasp exactly what is

being taught in these opening chapters of the Book of Revelation, keep several things in mind:

1) The main tenor of thought throughout these chapters is "*judgment*," first upon the Church and then upon Israel and the nations. The book begins with events occurring in that future day when Christians will be judged, after being removed from the earth; and the book then leads into the judgments of the Tribulation which are to come upon the earth-dwellers. These things (affecting the Church, Israel, and the nations) will come to pass at the conclusion of the present dispensation, preceding the Messianic Era.

2) All *seven Churches* are seen in Christ's presence during this time, even the lukewarm, naked Church of Laodicea which had shut Christ on the outside (1:12, 13, 20; *cf.* 3:14-21). The seven Churches, denoting *completeness* both upon the earth (chs. 2, 3) and in heaven (chs. 1-3), reveal that *every Christian* will be removed from the earth at the termination of the present dispensation to appear before Christ in judgment.

This is completely in line with any Scriptural teaching on the subject. The widespread teaching that either all or part of the Church will remain on earth during the Tribulation has no basis whatsoever in Scripture. The Scriptures teach, unequivocally, that *the complete Church* — all of the saved from the entire 2,000-year dispensation — will be removed before the Tribulation begins; and that *the complete Church* will, at this time, appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven — a judgment which, as previously seen, will apparently be completed before the Tribulation even begins on earth.

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