**Revelation Bible Study**

**Week 5**

**The Church Raptured**

**Chapter 4 of Revelation** begins the third section of the book—"The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter." This chapter steps into the future. Some people would probably like to step out of the present, but they might not want to step into the future.

People like to talk about the future, but they are not sure they want to go there.

**The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter**

The first three words of Revelation 4:1 are, "After these things." That is an important phrase in the Greek, which points specifically to the things that have just happened.  
This phrase does not have the casual feel of, "Well, after this happened" This is a statement that directly points back to chapters 2 and 3: "After these things." This phrase refers to the churches Christ addressed, as well as the church age. The church age extends from A.D. 30, when Jesus died on the cross and Pentecost occurred, until the present day. The church age can be seen as seven periods of time:

* Ephesus- The Apostolic Church A.D. 30-A.D. 100
* Smyrna - The Persecuted Church A.D. 100-A.D. 312
* Pergamos - The State Church A.D. 312--A.D.590
* Thyatira - The Catholic Church A.D. 590-A.D. 1517
* Sardis -The Reformation Church A.D. 1517-A.D. 1750
* Philadelphia -Missionary Church A.D.1750-A.D. 1900
* Laodicea-Last Days Church A.D.1900-Tribulation period

After the church age, John said, "This happened." In the first three chapters of Revelation, the word church is mentioned 19 times. This is significant, because after chapter 3, the church is not mentioned again until 22:19, which is happened to the church?" Many Bible scholars believe that between Revelation 3 and 4 the church was taken out of the world. The reason the church is not mentioned during the Tribulation could be that the church is not going through the Tribulation. The majority of traditional, conservative scholars believe the Rapture could occur before the Tribulation.

The phrases which occur in verses 1 and 2 are reminiscent of verses in other places in the Bible. For example, the phrase which says, "The first voice which I heard was like a trumpet" reminds the reader of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, which says: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." The next phrase says, "Come up here." The word rapture is not mentioned in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word raptus. However, the Greek word *harpage* means " to catch away or to snatch away." Rapture is a "catching away." The word immediately in verse 2 has the connotation of something happening quickly—"snatching away, being caught away." Then, John says, "I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven." The throne which was set in heaven means the very presence of the Lord Himself.

**The Bride of Christ**

Now the question is, "What will the church be doing?" The church will not go through the Tribulation. However, further clarification is needed. The church is part of a big picture called the bride of Christ. Some people say the bride of Christ is the church. This is true; however, the bride of Christ has a component which is the church. But the complete bride of Christ is made up of all believers—past, present, and future—not just the people from the church age. The bride of Christ will be made up of the Old Testament saints who looked forward to the Redeemer and the New Testament saints—the church—who look back to the Redeemer. It will include the 144,000 Jews during the Tribulation who are willing to give themselves for the Redeemer. The bride of Christ will also include the remnant of Israel who will be slain during the Tribulation. Thus, the  
bride of Christ will be composed of the great host of millions of people, not just the church age.

**The Judgment Seat of Christ**

Another aspect of the Rapture, which believers need to consider, is the judgment seat of Christ. After the Rapture, Jesus is not just going to say to the church, "Run around on the streets of gold, dangle your feet in the River of Life, go by the Tree of Life and take off a leaf, go here and go there and do your own thing." The rapture of the church will be followed by the judgment seat of Christ. Revelation does not describe the doctrine of the judgment seat of Christ; however, other places in the Bible make this doctrine plain.

People wonder about those who die during the Tribulation. When people die who are saved during the Tribulation, they are raptured. There are raptures throughout the Tribulation  
period. As believers die, they will be "caught up" into heaven. The witnesses will die, and they will be caught up. Those who refuse to take the mark of the beast will die and be caught  
up. All of those raptures are called the first resurrection. The first resurrection includes all the saved people.

As the believers are raptured during the Tribulation, they will stand at the bema-the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ will be occurring while the Tribulation is taking place on the earth. So, when believers go to be with the Lord in the clouds at the Rapture, it will be a solemn occasion. Scientists say that the phrase, "in the twinkling of an eye," is one millionth of a second. In other words, in a split second, God's people will be changed. Immediately, millions of people will be gone to be in the presence of Jesus, and that is where one-on-one with Jesus begins. That means, according to 2 Corinthians 5:10, each believer will stand individually, without husband, wife, parents, career, degrees, or money, before Jesus. This judgment is not the judgment for sin. If a person goes in the Rapture and is in heaven, then he is not being judged for his sins. This judgment is to determine the quality of one's life as it relates to service.

Several words stand out when discussing the judgment seat of Christ. First is the word trepidation. There will be much trepidation at the judgment seat of Christ. No doubt believers will tremble when everything they have ever done in the flesh is exposed to His scrutiny. In fact, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." The quality of one's life as a child of God will not be forgotten. When one stands before Him, there will be trepidation, because there will be things revealed that could have been done better. He will know every ill-spent dollar. He will know every secret closet in one's life. Believers will be saved from hell, but they will not be saved from accountability as children of God.

In case someone should think this judgment is unjust, consider the following scenario. If a believer were lazy and indolent, not serious about reading the Bible, allowing others to go to hell all around and never mentioning Jesus, watching people hurt and never extending a hand to care for them. attending public worship every six to eight weeks, never tithing, or having skills, gifts, and talents and never utilizing them, when he gets to heaven, should he occupy the same place of prominence as the apostle Paul? Absolutely not! The idea that heaven is going to be a land of total equality is false. Every individual will feel trepidation as he stands before the Lord Jesus.

**Second**, there will be tears. Revelation 21:4 says, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Tears have to be present if they are going to be wiped away. Perhaps many will weep as they stand before the judgment seat of Christ thinking about lost opportunities to make a difference. Some will think about immaturities and petty misunderstandings that allowed fellowship to be fractured. Some will recall times when they failed to reach out to someone, and now that person is in hell or Tribulation. Others will remember when they wasted dollars that could have sent missionaries to the mission field. Even though their sins are gone, believers  
will give an account of their actions and the faithfulness of their lives. 2 John, verse 8, says, "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward." In other words, one can get into heaven, but lose the rewards!

The **third** word is terror. When believers stand looking into His eyes—eyes of fire—there will be terror. The Judge of all the earth is going to take the believer's life and, like a great video, He is going to show it on the screen of His revealed omnipotence. He and each believer will watch the believer's life scroll by and He will set a torch to every work to test it by fire. If the works are wood, hay, or stubble—the result of misplaced motives, or based on power, politics, or manipulative techniques, and not rising out of love for Him—they will be burned up. It will be a terrifying time.

When I stand before Christ, He will not be impressed with any building I may have built. He will take holy fire and put it to everything I have done. If I pastor a church for 20 years, He will take all 20 years and touch it with fire. And if my motive is wrong, if my life is incongruent, if I'm  
manipulative, domineering, and not faithful to Him, if I don't have His heart and love Him and do it for Him, not for me, if I'm more concerned with ***my*** ministry than ***His*** ministry, then in a puff of smoke, 30 years will be consumed. I will have received my reward on earth.

Built into the fabric of the kingdom of God is accountability. When the Rapture takes place, one-on-one, believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

In a book by David Jeremiah, Escape the Coming Night, he tells the story of Adoniram Judson who was a missionary who went to Burma in the early 19th century. While he was serving in Burma, the missionary was arrested and falsely accused of being an enemy agent. He was imprisoned in a tiny cell and forced to stand so that others could lie down and  
sleep. The sun was unbearably hot, and because prisoners were not allowed to bathe or have restroom facilities, the stench was horrible. One day, the official’s decided prison was not enough punishment for this man, so they hoisted Judson into the air, hanging by his thumbs. Pain filled every fiber of his body. Upon returning to his cell, his precious wife Ann would creep in after dark and whisper to him, "Hang on, Adoniram, God will give us the victory." Week after torturous week, Ann would come by every night to encourage her husband with the same words, "Hang on, Adoniram, God will give us the victory.

One night she did not come, and another night passed without her return. Weeks went by. His loneliness grew to an unbearable level. No one told Judson that Ann was sick and dying. Months later, he was released—a man whose body was so broken it was a miracle he could walk. Upon his release, he began his search for his beloved wife and daughter. He returned to the place where they had lived. As he limped toward his home, he saw a child sitting in the dirt. The little girl was so covered with filth that he failed to recognize her as his own daughter. He picked her up, staggered into the tent, his eyes squinting through the darkness. Then, as he held his little girl, he saw his wife—a bundle of bones and rags lying on a cot, so weak and frail she looked like a skeleton. It was his Ann. Her beautiful hair had fallen out, and her bright blue eyes were staring blankly. Hugging his daughter to his chest, he knelt down and wept, calling her name over and over: "Ann, Ann, oh my darling Ann." His hot tears fell on her face and slowly her eyes began to move with recognition. She struggled to speak, and finally she did. Her last words were, "Hang on, Adoniram, God will give us the victory." That day, Adoniram Judson lost his sweetheart, but not his faith. He lost his loved one, but not his courage. He began to preach again, and soon he was building churches. When he died, he left scores of churches and hundreds of Christian converts in that Muslim nation. He had fought the good fight; he had finished the race; he had kept the faith. He will receive a crown.

**The Marriage of the Lamb**

The believer's judgment will be followed by the Marriage of the Lamb. Revelation 19 records the most magnificent of all marriage ceremonies, which will take place just before the return of Christ to the earth.

Oriental marriage customs of the first century were well known to John's readers. First, the parents of the bridegroom and bride negotiated the marriage contract (often while the betrothed couple was very young). Second, the bridegroom and his friends would go to the bride's home and take her back to the bridegroom's home for the wedding. Third, a marriage feast would take place and last for several days.

The marriage of the Lamb will somewhat parallel these Oriental marriage customs. For example, the bride of Christ was chosen for Him before the foundation of the world. The "espousal" could not take place until after Christ assumed humanity, and so it was not until after Christ's incarnation that Paul could write: "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2 KIV). Second, the Bridegroom will come to the bride's "house" to take her back to His home for the wedding ceremony. Jesus said in Matthew 25:6; "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (KJV). Christ will come for those who are ready, watching, and waiting for Him. Third, there will be a wedding feast. Revelation 19:9 says: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (KJV). This will be a feast that surpasses all feasts imaginable to man.

In the meantime, the bride of Christ is making herself ready for the grand occasion when she will be joined to the One who first loved her and gave Himself for her.