

Revelation

A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #12
Revelation 4:1-11
9/27/2006

“After this ... the things which shall be hereafter”
The Rapture and God’s throne in heaven
Part 1

INTRODUCTION

“After this” indicates a very significant and drastic change in the vision that Christ gave unto John. In 1:19 Christ had given to John an outline of the vision he was to receive.

“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”

“The things which thou hast seen” (the past) were presented in chapter one.

“... the things which are” (the present and the church age until the rapture) were presented in chapters two and three.

“... and the things which shall be hereafter” (the future events of God’s judgment upon the Christ-rejecting world as well as Christ’s victorious return, His millennial Kingdom and matters pertaining to the blessings awaiting the believers) will be presented in the remainder of the book beginning in chapter four.

As far as the early Christians were concerned, they could read and study and be taught the Old Testament Scriptures, which is what is meant most of the time when the Scriptures are mentioned in the New Testament) and the Old Testament contained many prophecies about **“the last days.”** However, two matters complicated their understanding.

First, the Old Testament did not refer to the church. It was an unknown mystery to the saints of God in the Old Testament up until Acts 2. Paul wrote about this mystery in Ephesians 3:5 when he said **“...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”** Consequently, the prophecies of Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel about “the last days” was highly focused on Israel and other nations regarding their relationship with Israel. There was little that the early Christians could derive from those prophecies to help them understand the role of the church in **“the last days.”**

Second, while the Old Testament had many prophecies concerning the coming of Christ it usually did not distinguish His first coming and His second coming, which, for John and other New Testament believers, was to be sometime in the future. Even though the New Testament believers could certainly see that some of the prophecies of the Old Testament had already been fulfilled, there were many that were yet unfulfilled and about which they had little understanding. This is evident from their questions and concerns addressed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 as well as other passages.

That Revelation 4:1, **“After this,”** signals a tremendous change is easily seen when one recognizes that the church has been mentioned 19 times thus far, but the word **“church”** does not appear again in the remainder of the book. The wedding feast between Christ and His **“bride,”** the church, is described in Revelation 19:7-9 and **“the bride of Christ,”** the church, is seen coming down out of heaven in Revelation 21:2.

Some have asked, **“If the church is seen coming down out of heaven, how did the church get into heaven?”**

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That question is answered in the first verse of our study today, Revelation 4:1.

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

Revelation 4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

Revelation 4:3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

Revelation 4:4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Revelation 4:5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Revelation 4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

Revelation 4:7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

Revelation 4:8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Revelation 4:9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

Revelation 4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Revelation 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

“After this” signals many things to us.

First, as mentioned above, the church is gone from the earth, caught up into heaven. Let us clarify this.

This does not mean that all of the organizational church, all local churches with all of the members in them, is caught up into heaven. From our study of Christ’s letters to the churches we have seen that many, who claim to belong to Christ, do not. In those letters Christ had clearly indicated that there were many members of the churches that did not worship Him or belong to Him. He even said to the church at Laodicea that He would **“spew thee out of my mouth”** as He addressed the pretenders. Previously He had said, **“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?”** and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name

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done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23). Again, in Matthew 10:32-33 He said, **“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”** Thus, Jesus had made it very clear that only the true believers would be caught up away from the earth to be with Him in heaven. All false believers, who have not been cleansed by His blood and yielded their lives to Him as Master and Lord are to be left here on this earth to go through His judgment upon all unbelievers.

We said, earlier, that the word **“church”** is not found in the remainder of the book of Revelation, that the true church with all true believers is removed from the earth. However, the false church, with all of its unbelievers, is seen again in chapter 17 where it is pictured as **“..MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”** It is a terrifying picture of what happens to those unbelievers, even though they are members of some church, **“whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world....”** While being religious people, they are those who chose not to yield their lives to Jesus, didn’t want Him to be the Lord of their lives, would not trust Him and did not really want to be with Him. Rather, they insisted upon their own ways, even choosing to yield themselves to serving Satan. For the Lord to have raptured them or caught them up away from the earth would have meant that He took into His heaven those whose sins had not been washed away by His blood as well as meaning that He forcibly removed some people from the place they loved, earth with all of its sinful culture, and forced them to come into His holy presence in heaven against their will. Our Lord would never do such a thing so the only alternative is to leave them here to worship, serve and share in their master’s destiny and judgment. Thus, when the Lord comes for His own He will leave them here because they do not belong to Him and are not His.

Second, the **“after this”** introduced the opening of a door in or into heaven. Following that, John heard a voice which was **“as it were of a trumpet talking”** with him. Such a description of a voice like a trumpet in the Scripture always refers to the voice of God and issues a summons to action. It was like the voice he heard in 1:10 which he identified as the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. At that time the Lord commanded him to **“write the things thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”** Now that same voice, the voice of the Lord, commands him to come up hither so that the Lord could show him the **“things which shall be hereafter.”**

“Come up hither” is the Lord’s way of signifying the rapture. John represents the church, the true church composed of those who believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was being treated as the church, i.e., removed from the place of judgment and punishment. It is as if the Lord was saying to John, **“before I proceed with my judgment upon sinful mankind, I am going to get you out of the way. You will not experience this judgment because I was judged in your place and suffered for you and your sins so that you don’t have to suffer punishment and judgment for them.”**

Twice in 1 Thessalonians Paul had told the believers in the church at Thessalonica that they did not need to be concerned or worry about the coming judgment. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 he addressed

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those who had **“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”** and that they were **“to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us (them) from the wrath to come.”** Again, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 Paul wrote that **“God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Removing those who had become His children, through the miracle of the new birth, from the pagan and sinful earth allows Christ to freely execute His judgment upon those who have chosen to reject Him without His children being in the way.

This rapture of the true church, where Christ comes for His own and catches them away to meet Him secretly in the air, was carefully explained by Paul to the believers at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and is referenced in many other places in the Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; Titus 2:11-13; 1 John 3:2-3; and many other places. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul explained (1) That when the Lord comes to get His own He will bring those believers who have already died before His coming with Him, (2) That those believers who are still alive at that time will be **“caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”** and forever be with the Lord. The passage in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 tells us that **“we shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed (into another form). In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound and we shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”** We can confidently conclude that both those believers who have already died and those who are still alive will be suddenly, instantaneously, removed from this earth, changed into our resurrection bodies and be in the presence of the Lord. This is what is commonly known as the rapture or catching away of the believers.

Third, the **“after this”** indicated that God was through with the church. There would be no more church on the earth. The church age was finished. God was now turning His attention back to the Jews. In spite of the fact that some theologians think God has forsaken Israel, He has not done so. They are wrong. He said that He would never forsake them nor would they ever cease to be a people, a nation (Jeremiah 31:35-36). He would discipline them, **“cause you to pass under the rod”** (Ezekiel 20:37), but He would never turn His back on them. In Deuteronomy 4:30-31, even at the beginning of the time when Israel became a nation, God told them, **“When thou art in tribulation and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice; for the Lord thy God is a merciful God; He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He sware unto them.”** In Jeremiah 30:7 God called this time following the rapture of the church **“the time of Jacob’s trouble.”** It will be a time when God, through punishment and discipline, cause His people Israel to choose to return to Him. Many, many thousands of Jews will return to the Lord Jesus Christ during the tribulation which follows the rapture or removing of the church out of the way from the earth.

Later in Revelation, John would learn that the time of tribulation would culminate in the victorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ to completely and finally defeat Satan and his followers and then the establishment of the millennial kingdom, that kingdom which all Jews have looked forward to with great anticipation, would come.