

HEAVEN – Part Five
“What Did John See?” #2
Sermon – March 17, 2019

For the past several weeks we have been looking at Heaven; what Jesus said about Heaven and what the requirements for entry are. We also looked at what the apostle John saw taking place in Heaven, his descriptions of the throne of God, the four living creatures surrounding the throne, the worship going on in heaven, what the Book of Life is, and what happens to those whose name are and are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Today we will continue to look at the things John saw and wrote about in the book of Revelation. We’ll see the method Jesus will use to bring all believers together to be with Him in Heaven, the period of time when we will reign with Him on the earth, and the events that will lead up to the end of the age. Let’s start by looking at the timeline of events that occur during what we call “the end-times”. There are six main events which Scripture says will occur as part of the times of the end. They are:

RAPTURE
TRIBULATION
SECOND COMING
MILLENNIUM
GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT
NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

Let’s take a look at these one at a time.

RAPTURE

The Rapture is an event that involves Christ and His church. To be raptured means “to be taken up”. The Rapture occurs when Christ comes in the clouds and the dead in Christ arise from their graves and we who are alive are taken up to the clouds; Both the believers who have died and those who are still alive when He comes will meet Christ in the air and be taken up to Heaven to be with Him forever. Here are a few Scriptures that speak of the Rapture.

JOHN 14:1-3

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me, In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-53

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

As you can see from these passages of Scripture when Christ come to receive His own unto Himself the dead in Christ will receive their resurrected bodies and the bodies of those who are alive will also be changed. The mortal or perishable bodies of the living believers will be changed into immortal, imperishable bodies. This signifies that they will receive the same body as those who are resurrected from the dead, only they will not have to suffer death before they receive their new bodies. It is from this point on that we will forever be with the Lord. Wherever He is there we will also be.

There are different views on when the Rapture occurs but no one refutes that it does occur. I believe it takes place before the next event which is the Tribulation. I will explain why in a minute. But first, let's look at the Tribulation.

TRIBULATION

The Tribulation is a seven year period of time when the wrath of God is poured out on the earth. It involves the rising of the Anti-Christ, a one-world government run by the Beast and his prophet, and a seven-year treaty between Israel and the Anti-Christ. Mid way through the Tribulation the Anti-Christ breaks this treaty with Israel by setting himself up as God in the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This will usher in what is known as the time of Jacob's troubles, for the Anti-Christ will wage war against Israel in hopes of destroying her forever. But God rescues Israel from the clutches of the Anti-Christ.

As I said before, there are differing views as to when the Rapture occurs and it revolves around the Tribulation. Some believe the rapture occurs before the Tribulation, others in the middle of the Tribulation, still others say at the end of the Tribulation. I believe it occurs before the tribulation for the following reasons.

GOD HAS NOT DESTINED US FOR BUT INSTEAD DELIVERS US FROM WRATH

1 THESSALONIANS 5:9

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.”

THESSALONIANS 1:9-10

“For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

As we have just seen, God has not destined us for wrath but will instead deliver us from it. But there is still more proof.

HISTORICALLY, GOD HAS REMOVED THE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE JUDGING THE UNRIGHTEOUS

Noah was found to be the only righteous person on earth when God decided to pour out His wrath on the unrighteous through the use of a world-wide flood. God did not pour out His wrath on Noah but instead instructed him to build an ark so that he would rise above the waters and be saved. Jesus used Noah as an example of the righteous being taken out of the world when He comes for His people.

MATTHEW 24:37-41

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So will the coming of the

Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.”

As with Noah, God also removed Lot from evil Sodom before He poured out His wrath on that city and the surrounding plain. The angels even had to take Lot by the hand and physically remove him from Sodom before the wrath of God could rain down upon Sodom.

GENESIS 19:15-17, 22

“When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.’ But he hesitated. So the (angel) seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city...When they had brought them outside, one said, ‘Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away...Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.’”

We see from the story of Lot that God would not do anything to the city until Lot was safely away from it. The pouring out of God’s wrath upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was inevitable, but it could not occur until Lot, called a righteous man in 2 Peter 2: 8, was taken out of the city and put in a place of safety. The city may have been doomed to suffer God’s wrath but the righteous man Lot was not.

We see another example of this in the book of Revelation. John begins by saying he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day when heard a voice speaking to him. He is then instructed to write down what he is told about the seven churches on earth. After the messages to the seven churches were finished John looked and saw a door standing open in heaven, and a voice say to him, *“Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things.”* It is at this point that John sees the throne of God and the four living creatures surrounding the throne. From this point on the terrible things that happen on earth as the wrath of God is poured upon it are seen by John from a position not of being on the earth but from a position of being in heaven as an observer.

We can see that it has always been God’s desire for Christians to avoid His wrath. He provided a way for Noah to avoid His wrath through the building of an ark and He provided a way for Lot to avoid His wrath by taking him out of his town before it was destroyed. As with Noah and Lot, the Rapture is God’s provision for believers in Christ today to avoid His coming wrath. I believe this is also confirmed by John being taken up to heaven before he sees the wrath of God being poured out upon the earth. We move now to the next big event which is the second coming.

SECOND COMING

The term “Second coming” of Christ can be at times confusing. Obviously the occasion of His first coming was when He was born of a virgin, lived as a man, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose again. His second coming then would be a time that occurs after the first. But Scripture speaks of two occasions when Christ returns before the final day of Judgment. The first occasion is the Rapture when He comes to take believers out of the earth and bring them to heaven with Him. In this instance Christ does not return to earth but rather stays in the clouds where believers both dead and alive will meet Him in the air. He then returns to Heaven with those whom He has redeemed. The second occasion of Christ’s return is when He comes and plants His feet on the earth. This instance is rightly called the Second Coming because it is the second time Jesus sets foot on the earth.

At His second coming to earth Jesus brings with Him the saints who had died and were raised from the dead as well as those who were alive at the time of the Rapture who met Him in the clouds when

the Rapture occurred. All of these have been in Heaven with Jesus until the time of His Second Coming. The purpose for His Second coming is to put an end to the Tribulation, to seize the beast and the false prophet and throw them into the lake of fire, and to take hold of Satan and imprison him for a thousand years in an abyss so that he would not deceive the nations any longer. This is important because Christ is about to establish His rule over the peoples and nations of the earth. His rule over the earth is called the Millennium.

Before we speak of the Millennium we need to know what is happening to the Old Testament saints. We have seen that those who believed in Christ have either been raised from the dead or their bodies transformed from mortal to immortal flesh at the Rapture. What about Abraham, Moses, Elijah, etc.? Those whom Scripture says “*were looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*” (Hebrews 11:10)? What has happened to them? There is not much known about the resurrection of the Old Testament saints.

We do know that Moses and Elijah were seen by Peter, James and John as talking with Jesus when He was transfigured on the Mount of Olives. So we do know they were in Heaven with the Father. We also know that at the moment of Jesus; death “*the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many*” (Matthew 27:52-53). So some Old Testament saints were raised from the dead during the death and resurrection of Christ. But these were like the resurrection of Lazarus. They were temporary. They still inhabited a body of flesh and would soon die again and lie back down in their grave to await their final resurrection.

Hebrews says, “*And all these (Old Testament saints), having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect*” (Hebrews 11:39-40). The “something better” surely is Christ Himself as well as the Spirit given to us upon belief. But this scripture may also suggest that the “something better” awaiting us (perhaps our resurrection) would come first and then would come the fulfillment of their resurrection.

This view might be confirmed by another Scripture used by some to suggest the resurrection of the Old Testament saints is separate from the resurrection of those who died after Christ rose from the grave. It comes from the book of Daniel.

DANIEL 12:1-2

“Now at that time (the time of the Anti-Christ) Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people (the Jews), will arise. And there will be a time of distress (tribulation) such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time. And at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”

This Scripture suggests that the Old Testament saints would not be raised to life until after the end of the Tribulation. Since the Second Coming of Christ rescues Israel from the hand of the Anti-Christ and puts an end to the Tribulation, it may also follow that the resurrection of Daniel’s people, the Jews, will occur at this time and not before. Whether this is true or not we may have to wait and see. Let’s look now at the Millennium.

MILLENNIUM

Millennium means “time”, “age”, or a “period of time”. The Bible tells us that the amount of time Jesus reigns on the earth is a thousand years. Which means the Millennium reign of Christ will last a thousand years. John describes what is happening during this time in this way:

REVELATION 20:4-6

“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life unto the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

Evidently it is possible to live through the tribulation and come to faith in Christ because this Scripture says that during the tribulation, when worship of the beast was required in order to buy and sell, those who refused to accept his mark of allegiance were beheaded. They were beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God. It also appears that at His second coming the dead in Christ who died during the Tribulation also come to life and reign with Christ along with those who had already died and descended with Christ at His second coming.

Not much else is said about the Millennium but there is one thing we must understand. The millennial reign of Christ on the earth is only the beginning of the eternal reign of Christ. Other things must happen before the eternal reign comes into being. The Millennium is the beginning of the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever”*, but it is just the beginning. Here’s why.

REVELATION 20:7-10

“When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, God and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophets are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever.”

So the thousand year reign of Christ on earth is interrupted by the release of Satan from his prison who deceives the nations once again and gathers them together to fight against and Lord and His saints. But wait. If the Millennial kingdom is inhabited by resurrected saints who no longer have a sinful nature which would cause them to rebel against the Lord, who then is rebelling? Who populates the nations which are deceived by Satan? To find the answer let’s go to Zechariah.

ZECHARIAH 8:3-5

“Thus says the Lord, ‘I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.’ Thus says the Lord of Hosts, ‘Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in the streets.’”

ZECHARIAH 14:16

“Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations of the earth that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the king, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, there will be no rain on them.”

It appears that during the millennium there will be children playing in the streets of Jerusalem and

people will grow old. This cannot be referring to the resurrected saints of either the New or Old Testament for they have already received their new age-proof bodies. We also know that once resurrected they neither marry nor procreate. Since we also know that there will be punishment for those who refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Since resurrected believers would never refuse to worship the Lord, it would appear that there are others residing in the Millennium kingdom than just the redeemed of the Lord. There are those who would rebel against worshipping Him.

Scripture does specifically say who these are but Zechariah speaks in general terms of those “*who are left of the nations of the earth that went against Jerusalem*” so most likely these additional residents of the Millennium are the remnants of those who survived the Tribulation. If so, they still have mortal bodies subject to the whims of their sinful flesh. Since Satan has been imprisoned for a thousand years they are not subject to deception from him. But as soon as Satan is released they once again become pawns in his scheme and, as unreal as it may seem, they join Satan in his rebellion against the Lord.

But their rebellion will not succeed. For when they gather together and surround the camp of the saints and the city of God fire will come down from Heaven and devour them all. It is at this point that the final destruction of Satan occurs. He is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where he will be tormented day and night forever. This ends the Millennium, the thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

What happens next occurs at the Great White Throne Judgment which we looked at last time. There is more that happens there than I have previously revealed, but our time is up for today so we will look at this place of judgment next week, as well as the final event where God creates the New Heavens and the New Earth.

I have done my best to be truthful to what I believe Scripture is saying. Others perhaps more scholarly than I and having done more research than I hold differing opinions on when the Rapture occurs, what happens during the Millennium, whether the Millennium is just an analogy rather than a literal thousand year reign on earth, and when the resurrection of the saints, both old and new, occur.

I have given you the best answers I can find after much study and have laid out my case. Regarding the Rapture I believe it occurs before the Tribulation which is known as the pre-tribulation view. But feel free to disagree with me. As my father-in-law used to say, “I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture until that does not occur. Then I will believe in the mid-tribulation rapture until that does not occur. Then I will believe in the Post-tribulation rapture when that occurs.”

What matters most about the Rapture is not when it occurs (though I suspect those who may have to go through at least part of the tribulation would disagree with me). What matters most is that the Rapture will occur and that when it occurs we will finally be free from this earthly body of sin and will start our eternal life in the presence of the Lord. May the Lord grant us that freedom soon, As Jesus says at the end of the book of Revelation (22:12),

“Behold, I am coming quickly.”

And as John replied, may we too reply,

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 2:20-21).

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