

The Return of Our Lord for His Bride

By Rev. Phillip D. Mosher

“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. John 14:1–3 (NASB¹)

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” Matthew 24:36

We all have special days we remember and hold dear. Ruth’s father walking her into the auditorium and down that aisle toward me, with the best man and the pastor nearby, is one of my especially cherished memories. Repeating our promises to each other, the placing of the rings on the left ring fingers, and hearing those words, “I now pronounce you man and wife,” will always mean so much to me. For our honeymoon we went camping for a week. We have become “one flesh”; and since that moment when we said “I do”, we have lived together in our own home for more than 56 years.

Marriage was planned by God, and the Apostle Paul used it as a picture of Christ and His Church—the Lord’s bride (Ephesians 5:2-33).

In John 14, quoted above, Jesus used the Jewish customs and traditions related to marriage as a picture of His coming for His bride—the Church of Jesus Christ. At that time, marriages were contracted. Someone in the young man’s family would negotiate with the maiden’s father, and perhaps the brothers. There would be an agreed upon bride’s price and a negotiated contract which was binding. Though not consummated, from that day on the couple was married. This part of the marriage arrangement is well illustrated in Genesis 24, when the servant of Abraham was commissioned to obtain a bride for Isaac.

At the time of Jesus, we see this in the arrangement between Joseph and Mary. Though they were not yet living together, once the bride price and contract were in place, they were legally husband and wife—one flesh. After these negotiations were finalized, the groom would return to his father’s home. There he would construct a living quarters for his bride and himself. The groom went to get his bride when his father believed it was the right time to send him. Matthew 25 illustrates this aspect of the marriage. The groom had returned home with his bride, there was a celebration feast, and then the couple went into the rooms or house the groom had prepared, and they spent seven days together feasting and enjoying each other.

When Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you,” He was incorporating the marriage customs of the Jews. Once the bride price was paid, He returned to His Father’s house. Now He is involved in preparing a place for his bride where she will live with Him forever. When the Father tells His Son that He can go

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are taken from the *NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE*®, Copyright © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

fetch His Bride, He will descend from heaven in His glory, gather His bride to His side, and escort her to heaven where there will be a feast of rejoicing. After this He will take her to the place He has prepared where they will happily remain for seven years. After He comes for her, she will remain next to Him throughout eternity.

Jesus is preparing a place for us. Someday He will return for us so that where He is we “may be also”. When asked the *when* question, He said that it was with His “father alone”. We will never know the day nor the hour when God the Father will tell His Son, “You may go for your bride.” The coming of our Lord for His Church can happen at any moment. It is imminent.

Some of the older doctrinal statements say, “We believe in the imminent and pre-millennial return of our Lord.” During that period of church history (late 1800s and early 1900s), using the word *imminent* would be equal to saying “we believe in the pre-tribulational return of Christ for His Church”. *Imminent* means *at any moment*. Though there are many prophesied events that will unfold after the Rapture of the Church, such as:

- The revelation of the anti-Christ
- A one-world economy and order
- A tyrannical regime that is anti-God and anti-Israel
- The awaited victories of the Messiah during the Tribulation
- His Second Coming to earth to establish His Kingdom, etc.,

There are no signs and no prophecies which must first be fulfilled before our Lord comes for His Bride. Except for the coming Rapture, all unfulfilled prophecies will see their fulfillment after the removal of the Church. The Son’s coming in the air for His Bride is imminent. If one were to place the Rapture anywhere within the Seventieth Week of Daniel 9 (covered below), or after it, the doctrine of the imminent return is lost.

There are teachers who do not believe in the doctrine of imminence. No other position on the Rapture agrees with the imminent return of the Savior except that of the pre-tribulational Rapture. Jesus said that no one knows except the Father. That establishes the doctrine of imminence.

What does *rapture* mean?

The background text that defines this event and caused Bible teachers and churches to use the word *rapture*, meaning *caught up*, is 1 Thessalonians 4:17:

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.
(emphasis added)

A similar passage is 2 Corinthians 12:2:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was **caught up** to the third heaven. (emphasis added)

The root Greek word behind “caught up” is *ἁρπάζω* (*harpázō*), which means to seize upon with force, to rob, to forcibly seize, to snatch away, or take to oneself (Matt. 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28, 29; Acts 8:39;

23:10; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; Jude 1:23; Rev. 12:5). It is especially used of the *catching away* of the believers of this Church Age (1 Thes. 4:17).²

A lady is walking in the mall when a young man runs by and snatches her purse and quickly disappears with her valuables. That's the idea behind *harpázō*. One day Jesus will come in the clouds, and in the twinkling of an eye He will snatch away the saints of the Church Age. They will have been raptured to Glory by their Savior.

Not all theologians agree on the timing of the rapture.

There are three basic positions on what is commonly called the “rapture of the church”. These all relate to the last week of the prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 and that remaining seventieth week, or what is known as the “tribulation” among most evangelicals.

- One is that the “rapture” will occur at the close of the seventieth week—post-tribulationalism.
- Another is that it will be somewhere near the middle of that week—mid and pre-wrath tribulationalism.
- The third is that Jesus will come for His Church before the seventieth week—pre-tribulationalism.

I believe the Bible is clear on this matter, and herein we will look at the scriptural evidences for the pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church.³

Who will be taken in the rapture of the Church?

By Church we are not speaking of local assemblies. We mean the organism the Bible calls the “Body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:13 & 27; Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:18) and the “Bride of Christ” (Eph. 5:32; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 22:17). This Body began when the Holy Spirit took up residence in the followers of Jesus who were gathered in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), as our Lord had promised His disciples (John 14:16-18; 16:7). It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in each believer, uniting them into one Body (1 Cor. 12:13). God's Spirit taking up residence in every believer was a new thing. Because of His Spirit, the Body of Christ is universal in nature since it is composed of all who have repented of their sins, who have appropriated the offer of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who have been born anew into God's family and sealed by the Spirit. This universal Church, the Body of Christ and His Bride, started in that Upper Room experience recorded in Acts 2 and continues to grow in number until the Lord returns in the air to gather together His Church, rapturing her out of the world and into His presence. In that moment, He will resurrect those members who have passed on to Glory and give them their immortal bodies; and for those members still living on earth when He comes, they will be transformed into their immortal bodies (1 Thes. 4:16-17). This coming event is referred to as the *Rapture of the Church*. It is the snatching away of the saints of this Church Age to be with their Lord throughout eternity.

The Bible makes a big distinction between Israel and the Church.

It was Augustine and Catholic theology which taught that the Church replaced Israel, known in some quarters as a-millennialism. The purposes of God for Israel (Ex. 19:6, a kingdom of priests among the

² Based on the word study of Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000.

³ This work was not written as a detailed presentation of all views, with an effort to make arguments opposed to the other beliefs.

nations) differ from those He has for the Church (Matt. 28: 19-20, proclaiming the Gospel to the corners of the earth). In the Mosaic Covenant and the promises of God to Israel, we notice a strong emphasis on the earthly, while those to the Church look mainly to the spiritual or heavenly. In Acts 15:12-20 and Romans chapters 9 – 11, we learn that God's use and blessing of Israel has been tabled for now and that God is presently working through Christ's Body on earth. God's promises to His chosen people are without any conditions upon man, and Jesus will return to fulfill His promises to the sons of Jacob and will again use that nation as His instrument and testimony. During this interval, God is operating through the Church.

The prophetic clock for Israel has stopped. Within that parenthetical period, God brought forth what Paul called a "mystery" (Rom. 11:25; 16:25; & Eph. 3:1-10), which is the Church. This was not revealed to the prophets of old. It had been hidden. This distinction between Israel and the Church is foundational to understanding and interpreting biblical prophecies about the future.

God's vision of the 70 weeks given to Daniel sets into view a timeline for Israel, not the Church.

Daniel 9:24–27

²⁴ "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*. ²⁵ "So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. ²⁶ "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. ²⁷ "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

The above quoted passage from Daniel records a prophecy about 70 weeks. These are sabbatical weeks of 7 years each or 490 prophetic years of 360 days each (lunar year). From the command to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah (the triumphal entry) were 7 weeks plus 62 weeks for a total of 69 weeks or 483 years. After the 69 weeks were complete, the Messiah was crucified. This prophecy opens with these words:

"Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*." Daniel 9:24

Those 70 sabbatical weeks of 490 years lay out a timeline for Israel that measures the continuing period of Gentile dominance over their Holy City. This prophecy, plus Daniel 2 and 7, cover the Times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). At the conclusion of this 70-week prophetic time schedule:

- Gentile powers will have been destroyed
- Jerusalem and the Temple Mount will be fully liberated for their original purposes
- Messiah will have assumed His reign in holiness on the throne of David as promised (1 Chr. 17:1-15).

All of those weeks, every day in those 490 years, were designated “for your people and your holy city”. Note that this does not include the space between the 69th and 70th week, when the divine clock for Israel is stopped. Daniel was a Jew living in captivity and Jerusalem is the God-appointed capital of the Jews. This divinely revealed timeline *is for Israel*. It pertains to prophetic predictions and events related to God’s Chosen People and their Holy City. What will transpire during those weeks pertains to Daniel’s people—the Jews. The Church is not Israel! In no way are these 70 weeks for the Church, Christ’s Body and Bride, not even the 70th.

There were to be 7 weeks and 62 weeks or 483 years before Messiah would be “cut off and have nothing.” It is very apparent from within the text that the prophetic clock stopped when the last day of the 483 years had passed. We believe that the following day was His Triumphal Entry and that just a few days later Messiah was “cut off”. That 70th week does not begin until the coming “prince” makes “a firm covenant with the many for one week.” That 70th week remains unfulfilled, placing a large space or parenthesis in time between week 69th and 70th weeks (between year 483 and 484). Traditionally, among evangelicals, this still unfulfilled 70th week of seven years is referred to as the “tribulation”, using Christ’s description as recorded in Matthew 24.

Regarding the “prince” who signs a treaty “with the many for one week”, that action marks the re-starting of God’s prophetic clock for Israel and the commencement of the 70th week of Daniel 9. In Genesis 3:15, that coming “prince” is the serpent’s seed, whereas Messiah is the seed of the woman. John called that wicked man the “anti-Christ”. He is:

- The little horn of Daniel 7
- The “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonian 2
- The man on the white horse in Revelation 6.

He will oppose God and God’s people and will aspire to be God and the ruler of the universe.

God’s program for the nation of Israel is on hold. We believe that before that prophetic clock re-starts, the Church will be removed *because that seventieth week is prophesied for Daniel’s people and not for the Bride of Christ*. It is Jacob’s distress (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Zeph. 1:14-18 & Mt. 24:21), not that of the Church. The purpose of the Tribulation, the 70th week, is to bring Israel to repentance (Zech. 12:10 & Mt. 23:37-39), not the Church, and to defeat the forces of anti-Christ after which Messiah will reign. Because there is a biblical distinction between Israel and the Church and because this prophecy pertains to Israel, the Church will be removed before the coming “prince” makes a pact with many and before the time of Tribulation for Israel begins, that 70th week of Daniel 9.

The Tribulation opens with the anti-Christ and his tyrannical government which hates the Jews and anyone who fears and serves God. The Bride of Christ does not go thru one day of that 70th week. She will be with Jesus enjoying the wedding banquet and the place He has been preparing for her. They will spend seven years together before returning to earth. Afterward, Messiah will return to earth with His bride to defeat the enemy and establish His kingdom.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 through 5:11 teaches that the Church will *not* be present on earth during the Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 thru 5:11

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

^{5:1} Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

After describing how the Lord will snatch away the saints of the Church Age (4:13-17), Paul concludes with, "Therefore, comfort one another with these words." The truth of the pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church is comforting to the soul. Chapter 5 speaks of the "Day of the LORD" which is the subject of Joel, many other Old Testament passages, Matthew 24:9-31, and Revelation chapter 6 to the close. The greater portion of these prophecies addresses the judgment of our Lord upon the earth during the Tribulation, in preparation for His earthly kingdom. The Tribulation is paramount in the passages which discuss the Day of the LORD (Amos 5:18-20 & Zeph. 1:14-18). It is described as *Jacob's Distress* (Jer. 30:7). Jesus said this would be the most horrible time to ever come upon humanity (MK 13:19). In 1Thessalonians 5:9, Paul wrote, "God has not destined us [the recipients of these words were believers in Jesus and members of His Body] for wrath,"⁴ but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, in 5:11 Paul says, "encourage [or comfort, same word as in 4:18] one

⁴ The amillennialists teach that the word "wrath" refers to eternal judgment, hell. This interpretation does not fit the context.

another and build up one another.” As a follower of the Lord Jesus, I would *not* find comfort in knowing that I might be taking part in the Tribulation. That week starts with a world ruler who hates God and His people and is described as being the most horrible tyrant and period to ever transpire in human history. Yes, the earlier portion of those 7 years are milder than the latter; but knowing this is on my list of coming miseries, I’d be stressed out. The certainty that the Church will not participate in the Tribulation gives Jesus’ followers comfort and encouragement because they will be with their Savior in heaven during those seven terrible years of anti-Christ rule and of God’s wrath being poured out upon those who oppose Him and His followers.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,” tells us twice that the Church does not take part in the 70th week, the Tribulation. From the context which is the “Day of the LORD”, a time when God judges the Gentile powers, “wrath” means that coming horrible seven years, not part of it. Paul has said the Church is not destined to “wrath”, also a promise of Revelation 3:10. The saved of this age are destined “for obtaining salvation”. The word “salvation” is broad in meaning and here it indicates deliverance from God’s coming wrath, not the salvation of the soul from hell.

There are some who believe in a pre-wrath Rapture, and they hold that the “wrath” comes during the latter portion of the Tribulation period and that the Church is spared the worst part of the 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy. In various ways, God has revealed that the Church has no part in the Tribulation. It’s for Israel and is the time when the Messiah destroys His enemies and prepares the world for His kingdom. The Bride of Christ is removed before the coming “prince” is revealed, covered more thoroughly with the next passage.

First Thessalonians 4:13 through 5:11 describes the Rapture and states that it comes before God pours out His wrath upon the earth, the Tribulation. God will deliver His Church from the pains of the Tribulation. This good news is comforting and encouraging to those who believe in Jesus during the present dispensation.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-11 teaches that the saved of this dispensation will not be present on planet earth when the antichrist is revealed.

Daniel tells us that a coming “prince” – the antichrist – will make a “firm covenant with the many for one week” (Dan. 9:24-27). There will be an international agreement which probably gives Israel liberty to build the Temple on the Temple Mount. That event signals the beginning of the 70th week in Daniel’s prophecy, when God’s clock for Israel restarts. This “prince” is the “seed” of Satan (Gen. 3:15). He’s the “little horn” of Daniel 7 and the man whose mouth “utters great boasts” and who “wages war with the saints”. In 2 Thessalonians we learn that the “Restrainer” will be removed before that wicked one is revealed.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–10 gives strong support to the doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture:

¹ Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is

revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Second Thessalonians 2:1-2 with 3:17 informs us that the Thessalonians had received a deceptive letter, one claiming to have been authored by the Apostle Paul. Paul was inspired to write the letter of 2 Thessalonians to correct that imposturous communication and its false teachings and to re-enforce the doctrines he had taught that local church while present with them in Thessalonica. That false message had disturbed and distressed the believers in Thessalonica, because it had declared that the “Day of the LORD” had already come. In other words, those Christians were in the 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy — no comfort there. Those Thessalonians were quite concerned. According to verse 5, Paul had been clear in teaching them that the Church would not be present on earth when the Day of the LORD begins — comforting news.

In this passage, Paul again tells them that the Day of the Lord will come 1) after there is a departure (v 3) and 2) after “the man of lawlessness is revealed” (vs 7-8). This description of this man, whom we call the “anti-Christ”, is like that given of him by the Spirit of God in Daniel 7:8, 20-21, & 25 and 9:24-27, as well as Matthew 24:15 ff.

Many translations render the Greek word *ἀποστασία* (*apostasía*) in verse 3 with the word *apostasy*, meaning a departure from the faith or a rebellion which transpires before the anti-Christ appears on the world scene. In other words, Christianity will go apostate before the anti-Christ is revealed. Such a doctrine refutes the belief in an imminent return of the Christ. Also, how does one measure this apostasy? Can it get any worse than it was during the rule of the Roman Catholic Church in the Dark Ages?

The Greek word *ἀποστασία* can mean an apostasy of the faith, but there are other meanings as in Matthew 5:31; 19:7, Mark 10:4; and Acts 21:21 where the base meaning of this Greek word is seen as “a departure”, not an apostasy. Divorce is a departure or sending away, not an apostasy. Acts 21:21 says that it was reported that Paul was teaching the converts to Christ to depart from Jewish customs, which could be apostasy though “departure” would be the better rendering. I believe that “departure” is the best translation in 2 Thessalonians 2:3,⁵ and this English rendering would agree with verse 7, “until he is taken out of the way”. Before the anti-Christ can come into action, there must be a departure, something removed from the scene, which verse 7 refers to as the Restraint, a Person, not an apostasy. The Church, indwelt and united by the Holy Spirit, will be snatched away from this world before the man of sin is revealed—the pre-tribulational Rapture. Satan’s man will come to full power once the

⁵ This is a brief presentation. If more data is needed, please contact the author.

Restrained has departed. In his translation, *The New Testament: An expanded translation*, Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest (1959 through 1961), who taught Greek at Moody, translated verse 3:

. . . because that day shall not come except the aforementioned departure [of the Church to heaven] comes first and the man of the lawlessness is disclosed [in his true identity], the son of perdition. . .

In 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 Paul tells those believers that something is restraining this lawless and destructive person. We know from various passages that this man is anti-God and Christ and that he will kill anyone who fears and worships the Creator. The Restrainer is keeping that horrible world leader from publicly appearing and assuming his worldwide control. Though Satan is actively working in the background (1 John 4:3), Paul has told the Thessalonian church that Satan cannot bring this world leader to power until the Restrainer is removed. Though there are various views about who the “Restrainer” might be, I cannot think of any better explanation for the Restrainer than the Holy Spirit present in the Church, that Body He created by indwelling each believing individual starting at Pentecost until He is removed from the world scene in the Rapture. God did something very unique at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit came to indwell the followers of Jesus; and that indwelling unites those believers into one Body, and through that Body the Spirit has been convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment and calling people to the Savior. The Restrainer is the Holy Spirit who makes every believer one in the Church, Christ’s body on earth (1 Cor. 12:13). The devil always has a false messiah ready, through which he will deceive Israel and the world. Until the Rapture, Satan’s activities are being restrained by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11), who indwells the Church and works through her to exalt God’s Son and restrain lawlessness. When the Lord snatches away His Bride, Satan will have full liberty to institute his programs. With fury, the seed of Satan (Gen. 3:15), the coming prince, the deceiver, the anti-Christ, the hater of the saints and righteousness, will persecute and kill anyone who is God-fearing — off with their heads. No believer in Jesus would want to be left behind. Thank God, we’ll be with Jesus in that place He has prepared for us.

“Therefore, comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thes. 4:18)

The seven churches of Revelation and Revelation 4:1-4 present a pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church. (due to length, not quoted here)

Not all believe as I that Revelation chapters 2 and 3 give us a panorama of church history.⁶ A close look at those seven churches along with church history will reveal a dovetailing. Those seven letters are each written in a chiasm and the seven letters are arranged in a chiasm:

Ephesus — Lost Love
Smyrna — Standing Firm in Suffering
Pergamum — Compromising the Truth
Thyatira — Spiritual Adultery
Sardis — Losing the Truth
Philadelphia — Standing Firm in Sharing
Laodicea — Self Love

⁶ This is a brief presentation. If the reader would like more on this point, please contact the author.

Thyatira being in the center of the chiasm indicates that all is not well with the Church on earth. Thyatira represents the Dark Ages for Christianity, when the Catholic Church ruled most of the world, had a hierarchal system of government, was corrupt, and was idolatrous. Sardis pictures the protestant movement when Catholicism lost to the Reformation. Philadelphia pictures an era in church history which had the largest missionary movement of all times. In chapter 3, verse 10, the Lord tells this church that it will be preserved “from the hour of testing” which will come over the entire world. Missions will continue until the Rapture, but we can see that doors have shut and the number willing to go is slowly diminishing. Laodicea represents the era of the current church. Bible doctrine is no longer of interest whereas Ephesus was praised for taking a strong doctrinal stand (Rev. 2:2-3). Love without distinctives or commitment is the norm (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-5, & 2:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). This picture of the Church closes Church history with Jesus standing outside inviting individuals to dine with Him.

Jesus promised those local churches and believers in the Philadelphia era,

“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” Revelation 3:10

This guarantees those followers of the Lord that they will not go through the Tribulation — a pre-tribulational Rapture.

Revelation 1:19 is an inspired outline of the book:

“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”

- Chapter one covers what John saw — the **past**.
- Chapters 2 and 3 cover the “things that are” — the **present** Church Age.
- Chapters 4 through 22 cover the things that “will take place after these things” — the **future** after chapter 3.

Opening the section of the book which gives us pictures of future coming events, we see John raptured to heaven,

After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. (Revelation 4:1–2)

In chapters 4 and 5 are visions of John in heaven with Jesus. John observes the Lamb opening the first seal of the scroll which begins with a picture of a world leader — the anti-Christ. The pictures continue through the events of the Tribulation, the Lord’s Second Coming, His kingdom, and the new heaven and earth in eternity. Revelation is a picture book, and here (4:1-2) we see John has been caught up to heaven after the Church Age and before the appearance of the coming “prince”, the anti-Christ. Here we are seeing a picture of the pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church, after which the lawless one is revealed.

Conclusion

Jesus is waiting. The place He's been preparing for us is of the finest materials and is ready for occupancy, awaiting the arrival of His Bride. With His Father's permission, He will soon descend from heaven and will quickly snatch away His Church and escort her to the marriage banquet and then to the dwelling places He has prepared. What a "day of rejoicing that will be."

Some believe that the Church goes through the Tribulation. Others say that the Lord will remove His Church at the middle of the seven years before the heavy "wrath" begins, or at the "last trumpet" in the Revelation. Those who teach such are standing on sandy soil. Their doctrines create fear, causing people to hide food, arms, survival gear, etc. in caves, in the desert, in country cabins, etc. Only the doctrine of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church is comforting to the saints; plus it is hermeneutically accurate.

Therefore comfort one another with these words.⁷

The pre-tribulational Rapture of the Church is the only position which upholds the imminent return of the Savior. It's the only interpretation which gives the followers of Jesus Christ the true comfort and encouragement the Bible promises, because the saints of this age will not experience the anti-Christ and the wrath of God upon the ungodly world.

When We All Get To Heaven

Author: E. E. Hewitt (1898)

<p>1 Sing the wondrous love of Jesus, sing His mercy and His grace; in the mansions bright and blessed, He'll prepare for us a place.</p>	<p>Refrain: When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory.</p>
<p>2 While we walk the pilgrim pathway, clouds will overspread the sky; but when traveling days are over, not a shadow, not a sigh. [Refrain]</p>	<p>3 Let us then be true and faithful, trusting, serving every day; just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay. [Refrain]</p>
<p>4 Onward to the prize before us! Soon His beauty we'll behold; soon the pearly gates will open; we shall tread the streets of gold. [Refrain]</p>	

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11