

Will the
church be
caught away?

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Index:

Introduction

Statement	1	What do mean by 'caught away.'
	2	Where will it happen?
	3	Who will be involved?
	4	When is it likely to happen?
	5	Why?

Chapter

1	Snatched from the wrath to come.
2	Time split into ages
3	Time, times and half a time
4	A prince to come - Antichrist
5	Meanwhile in heaven - a bride in her mansion
6	Sitting on he throne
7	The child of Revelation 12
8	A catch of fish - a sign of things to come.
9	The nature of the regathering of Israel
10	Conclusions
11	Objections

Appendix

1	God's wrath in Revelation
2	Post - tribulation difficulties
3	Mid tribulation difficulties
4	Pre -tribulation difficulties
5	Rapture and second coming compared

Introduction

Virtually all Christians believe in the rapture (the catching away) of the church. The big question of discussion is when.

There can only be one right answer. In this booklet I seek to establish that answer coming from the perspective of 'sound doctrine.'

Clearly every viewpoint is likely to think their view is 'sound doctrine,' however in these pages we will raise questions which other viewpoints must answer if they are to be taken seriously.

Enjoy the read, the outcome is glorious.

Statement 1

What do we mean caught away?

In simple language we mean that the church will be removed, taken off the earth.

Is it scriptural?

'Behold I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (a reference to death), but we shall 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed.'
1 Corinthians 15:51-2

'But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep (reference to death), lest you sorrow as others who have no hope (unbelievers). For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

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 by no means precede those who are asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Therefore comfort one another with these words.' 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The scripture is clear and plain - the believers will be changed and will rise to meet Jesus in the air - there certainly will be a rapture of the church.

We have already made the bold statement that virtually all Christians believe in the rapture - the gathering together unto Jesus. The reason for the unity at this stage is that the scripture is very straightforward and very clear.

In order to disagree at this point, one would have to remove from scripture any concept of literal accuracy and integrity, and bring it into the realm of myth and fairyland. Real Christian believers find themselves unable to be so extremely liberal with the written word of God.

What is the rapture: It is the catching away from the earth of every Christian to a meeting with Jesus in the air.

Statement 2

Where will it happen?

When one has absorbed the nature of the event - the dramatic nature of the event - the next question arises -where?

The answer is very simple - it will occur everywhere on earth in the twinkling of an eye.

Everywhere - all over the surface of the earth and out of submarines and aeroplanes, the church will be taken to meet with Jesus.

The event will be shattering. Pilots will be removed from the controls of aeroplanes, drivers from cars and trains, businessmen from their desks and workers from their tools. Shoppers will be taken off the street and out of shops, pedestrians, cyclists - every member of the church changed and removed in the twinkling of an eye.

Absolutely everybody will be aware of the event. Millions will disappear. Will there be media of the day to report the event? How would they report it? A Christian plot?

Statement 3

Who will be involved?

We have probably hinted at the answer already - every believing Christian. Unfortunately that does not mean everyone who goes to a church. A true believer is one who has been born again by the Spirit of God.

'Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'
Jesus speaking in John 3:3

'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water (Hebrew idiom for natural birth) and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' (verse 5)

The language of Jesus is most emphatic. Most assuredly could be translated, definitely, definitely, definitely. There is no question of doubt about it at all, to be a true believer and thus included, YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN.

Statement 4

When is it likely to happen?

The church has never been told when to expect the rapture - it has however been told to look forward with great expectation:

Paul urges Titus to teach the church in Crete to live in a godly and sober fashion....

'looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.'
Titus 2:11

The church on a short string? Yes, down through the ages there have been those who have understood that the rapture could take place at any moment - an understanding that brings with it a diligence in seeking personal holiness.

'Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.'

1 John 3:2-3

Whatever one might think of the 'End Times,' and how close we might be to the end, we are supposed to live with an expectation that Jesus might come for us at any moment. Whilst we wait expectantly we should do everything we do 'as unto Jesus.' That means we work well and to the highest of standards - there is no excuse for laziness and shoddy work.

As the author of this booklet I believe that the rapture of the church takes place before Jesus establishes His personal rule on earth in the period known as the millennium. I further believe that the rapture takes place before the period of time known as 'The tribulation - a seven year period, ending in judgement that immediately precedes the millennium.

In this booklet we are going to see the main arguments for this doctrinal position and leave other views with questions that need to be answered.

See also 'Last Orders' for the authors view of the prophetic signs of the times.

Statement 5

Why?

This question leads us into the main body of the booklet.....

(The very short answer would be God's love, God's mercy, God's faithfulness and God's grace working together.)

Chapter 1

Snatched from the wrath to come

Summary of the main point.

There is a period of time, yet to come, which the scripture indicates will be a time of great outpouring of wrath. We, the believers in Christ, will be saved from that wrath by being snatched to Jesus.

'For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Thessalonians 5:9

Will there be a time of wrath?

Let us seek confirmation from the scripture:

Mark 13 verses 19-20:

'For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved, but for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He shortened the days.'

This passage speaks of a time of intense difficulty - such as the world has never seen. Clearly a dramatic period of time when one considers what the world has seen already! Man's efforts at destruction have been bad enough over the ages. God has already flooded the earth, saving only Noah and his family, yet there is worse to come.

When will this be?

In verse 14 of the same chapter this event is linked with the establishment of 'The abomination of desolation', which we will cover later. For the moment it is obvious from earth's history that the event has not taken place yet.

It is also clear from Revelation that the effect of the wrath of God being poured out, is massive, and on a worldwide scale. Whilst we may experience a foretaste of some of the things Revelation foretells, it is nevertheless clear by any straightforward reading of the book, that, there is yet to come something on a totally greater scale.

(Some say that this passage and its similar passages in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 were fulfilled by the various attacks on Jerusalem - in AD 70 for example, or even by Antiochus Epiphanes. The latter can be simply excluded. Jesus was clearly warning of a future event, whereas Antiochus was well over 100 years before Christ. So far as AD 70 is concerned, does the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple fill the above definition? Clearly, bad though it was, it does not fit the description above. For this description in Mark talks of something the world will recognise as desperate and that without God's intervention NO life would be saved - not no defender or no attacker but NO life.)

God's wrath will come

It is on account of sin, that God's wrath will come. Meanwhile, the way of salvation remains open. Everyone who will believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that His

sacrifice on the cross was acceptable to the Father as an offering for our sin, and who places his/her trust in Jesus will be saved:

'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.' John 3 v 16.

For everyone who believes that, God's judgement fell on Jesus, as a substitute for them - then Jesus' own blood purchased redemption for that person. (Isaiah describes Him as a guilt offering, acceptable to God in chapter 53 verse 10). These who so believe are saved.

'Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry, for it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come.' Colossians 3 v 5-6

God, who is Holy and Pure, cannot abide sin. Sin has to be dealt with either by forgiveness or judgement. The way of forgiveness is available to everyone who will accept it and the scripture declares that God would prefer that all men were saved.

'This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our saviour who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' 1 Timothy 2 v 3-4.

However, men have freewill and many choose to love darkness:

'And this is the judgement, that light is come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil.'

John 3 v 19

In the second letter to Timothy, Paul warns that in the last days difficult times will come and men will be besotted with evil. Wrath comes - but love also.

So wrath will surely come and rightly so *'but God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, much more then, having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.'* Romans 5 v 8-9.

Whatever view one takes of the timing and sequence of the events to come it is certain that we shall be saved from the wrath to come. You could interpret this as being removed from the wrath or kept safe throughout events, either way we can take strength and comfort from the certain knowledge of deliverance.

God's faithful promise

God has declared that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because a new law, that of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has set us free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8 v 1-2) Instead of wrath, for His children God has made an amazing statement and promise, again in the eighth chapter of Romans.

The statement goes like this: He knew beforehand those who would believe and be born again. (He knows the end from the beginning, nothing surprises Him) Those He foreknew, He predestined to become like Jesus. Then He called them into His

kingdom and justified them and the promise goes on to say, He also glorifies them. (verses 29-30)

It is inconceivable that Jesus would prepare His bride through the outpouring of wrath - no human bridegroom would act like that and it is certain that Jesus will not act that way either.

We are all being changed from one degree of glory to another, none can say, "I have all the answers, I have made it." No, it's a matter of changing bit by bit - some cooperate with the process and some kick against it, but the process goes on. Once we are His, then, He has every right to change us because we were bought with a price.

Romans 8 makes it clear that following after the flesh will bring death whereas following after the Spirit will bring life (in verse 6), but it goes on to say in verse 38, that death cannot separate us from the love of God. We might live a life more in the flesh than in the Spirit, but we cannot be separated from the love of God. When we are face to face with Him, then, whatever transformation is left to take place will be a simple matter for Him to complete in us.

Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, took us on at the point of being born again, knowing the task He had ahead, knowing all our failings, yet He is writing the 'book' of our faith, and He has the ultimate responsibility for our perfection. Surely, if we persist in walking after the flesh we will die, but not to be separate from God, rather to be with Him and have the 'book' of our faith finished, in heaven, where the last chapter can be written without the interference of the flesh.

This is another certainty, because of His foreknowledge, He knows the end from the beginning, He knows who will answer the call to be born again, born not of the human will but of the Spirit. These He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. No 'good' human father would perfect his child through wrath, discipline yes, but wrath no.

Delivered from the wrath to come .

It is as certain as can be, that we will be delivered from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1 v 10 states it clearly: ***'wait for His son..... Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.'***

It's worth a closer look at the word 'delivers' so that we understand what it means. Here, in this text, the word is 'rhuomai', which has the meaning 'to snatch to oneself'. So Jesus snatches us to Himself from the wrath to come.

Our salvation is rooted in the same idea. In Colossians 1 v 13 it says *'He delivers us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.'* More literally we could say 'He snatched us to Himself from the domain of darkness.

It is also worth a closer look at the word 'from'. Here it's 'ek' which means 'taken out of' or 'removed from' rather than 'through'. This conveys the sense of a once and for all removal, from one place to another, rather than a bit by bit deliverance through a continuing situation.

The Tribulation ahead is a time of the outpouring of God's wrath. The church must be removed to fulfil the promise in the word that we are not destined or wrath. The church is snatched away or caught away to Jesus before the wrath.

Chapter 2

Time split into ages

Summary of the main point.

God has not forgotten the Jews, but has first revealed the mystery of the church. When the fullness of the gentiles has come in and the church has been removed, God will fulfil His promises to the Jews.

It is clear that time can be split into ages

What are we to think of history in terms of times? Has God split history into ages and if so what is the significance?

Well it's clear that history can be split into ages, for example, before and after Christ, before and after the flood, and we could make other breakdowns of time.

Indeed it should be clear that we will need to understand the breakdown of time if we are going to correctly divide the word of God. A simple illustration would be the question of vegetarianism -

Before the flood man was only given fruit and vegetation to eat - everyone was vegetarian. After the flood we read that man is now *given 'every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.'*

Before the flood vegetarianism was compulsory and after it is voluntary. Therefore no one should preach that vegetarianism is compulsory - that is not rightly dividing the word.

In this chapter we will consider another breakdown of ages.

Before Abraham

Abraham we know was the father of the Jewish race, before him there was no chosen race recorded in scripture, rather there were men who believed and men who did not believe.

In fact things had got so bad that there was only Noah left as righteous in the world and God, after warning Noah and causing him to preach warning for a protracted period, eventually sent the Flood in judgement. A number of generations later came Terah, the father of Abraham and then Abraham himself. In this period, which I will refer to as the pre-Jewish age, there was no distinction between Jew and gentile, just people.

God calls out a nation

'Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you, and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."'

(Genesis 12 v 1-3)

God's promise to Abraham was one of physical, flesh and blood descendants. This is very clear from the story of the promise of a son, in Genesis 15, continued through the delay and then the mistaken activity of Abraham with Hagar, concluding with the birth of Isaac.

So God declared His purposes (or at least part of His purposes) and 'called out' a nation for His own, the nation we know as the Jews. God made many promises to this people including the promise of a Messiah who would establish His own physical reign over them.

God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was also specifically related to the land of Israel and it is therefore incorrect to apply these promises to the church.

Indeed the disciples were looking for this reign in Acts 1 v 6 'And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "*Lord is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*" ' Jesus did not reply directly to the question with a 'yes' or 'no' answer but rather said, "*It is not for you to know the times or epochs, which the Father has fixed by His own authority.*"

The tragedy

God had selected for Himself a people, made wonderful promises to them, only to find that His chosen people rejected Him when He came in the person of the Messiah.

The problem was that they did not consider the whole of revealed scripture - they accepted some of the prophetic statements about the Messiah but not others. They saw Him as a ruler, but not as a sin bearer. Their focus was on the distance, so they missed the foreground. Actually the Law and the Prophets witness of Jesus, telling of His suffering before His rule, but they were blinded and could not see.

Indeed, He came as foretold, only to be rejected by His own, a tragedy for the Jews, but a blessing for the gentiles. For instead of pouring out His wrath there and then, He brought forth what Paul describes as a mystery - something hidden in the wisdom of God, only to be revealed at the right time.

The result for the Jews was a complete rejection of the Messiah - for a while. Paul makes it very clear in Romans chapter 11, that the rejection by the Jews was for the benefit of the gentiles and that in fact the hardening of the Jews is only partial - it has a time limit - until the fullness of the gentiles has come in.

So here we see two 'ages'. The age of the Jews, which should have culminated with the reign of the Messiah, but is in fact interrupted by their rejection of Him, and the age of the church, made up of mainly gentile believers - yet open to any individual Jew who would believe.

The mystery of the church

So what is the mystery?

Ephesians 3 explains it: 'that the gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.' (verse 6)

The promise that was given to the Jews is now extended to the gentiles. This does not mean that every gentile will take hold of the promise just as it never meant that every Jew would take hold of the promises either. It means the promise is available to all who will accept it by faith.

The promise has always been that of a personal relationship with God. Look in the Old Testament and see how many times God says "Listen, or attend to My voice". God knows the end from the beginning and He knew the Jews would reject Him - not that they all rejected Him, indeed the early church started out exclusively Jewish. Nevertheless the scripture looks forward to a time when the Jews *will 'look upon Him whom they pierced and they will mourn'* and that *'in that day two parts in it will be cut off and perish but the third part will be left in it and I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon My name, and I will answer them; I will say, "They are My people" and they will say, "The Lord is my God"*. (Zechariah 12 v 10 and 13 v 8)

There is a time coming when one third of the Jewish nation will call upon the name of Jesus and be saved.

Meanwhile God has brought in the mystery of the church, His surprise tactic. Instead of a nation for Jesus to rule over, He brought in a bride for Him to 'marry', and with whom to share His rule when it does come in due time. The mystery is further explained in Colossians 1 v 27 where it is described as *'Christ in you the hope of glory'*. The indwelling Holy Spirit was not given in Old Testament times - He came to anoint for various tasks, to fall upon people to prophesy, but not to indwell.

It is clear that the Spirit was not given previously from the discourse in John 16, where Jesus tells the disciples that it is to their benefit that He goes away. This is followed in John 20, by the risen Christ breathing on them and saying, *"Receive the Holy Spirit"*, (verse 22) with the emphasis being RECEIVE NOW.

So we have an age of a different character, an age in which the Holy Spirit will dwell within man.

Jesus showed Nicodemus in John chapter 3 the need to be born again - a fact often ignored or misunderstood. Even under the law (as Nicodemus was at that time) it was necessary to be born again - the Law could not save. Jesus makes it clear to Nicodemus, "You must be born of water and the Spirit".

Water is most probably a reference to natural birth as Nicodemus had just said he couldn't climb back into his mother's womb. (The phrase born of water is a known Jewish idiom for natural birth.)

'That which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (verse 6) is an abundantly clear statement of the fact that rebirth needs to come to the human spirit. After all, the scripture which declares that we all died in Adam could not apply to our flesh and blood or we would never have existed. It can however apply to the human spirit - that part of us which is made in the image of God, who is spirit.

(This explains Paul's comment in 1 Thessalonians 5 v 23 *'may your spirit, soul and body be preserved complete'*. Spirit, the human spirit, born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit is saved - an irreversible gift of God at the point of salvation. The body will be changed in the twinkling of an eye when we receive our glorified bodies (1

Corinthians 15 v 52). We work out the salvation of our soul (mind, will and emotions) with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2 v 12)

So, whereas men were born again in the Old Covenant by believing in a sin bearing Messiah who was to come, now in the church we are not only born again by believing in a Messiah who has come, but are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

The mystery revealed

This understanding that the human spirit was born dead, i.e. we enter the world alive in body and soul but dead in spirit, together with the realisation that through Christ we are born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is the mystery unveiled.

The Jews should have come into this as their inheritance - but God knew that they would reject - and instead it is largely gentiles who have become the body and bride of Christ. No wonder Paul said that the Jews' failure had become riches for the gentiles.

Has God finished with the Jews then?

'May it never be', Paul declares, 'From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers, for the gift and calling of God are irrevocable'. (Romans 11 v 28) (Note that this frequently quoted line refers to the calling of the Jews.)

When they are regathered and refined, as we read earlier, Jesus the Messiah will rule over them as a nation - just as promised. Only the church, His bride, will rule with Him.

So now we can see three ages:

A pre-Jewish age

A Jewish age

A Christian or Church age

According to Romans 11 the church age will continue until the fullness of the gentiles has come in, and after that, all Israel will be saved. (Bear in mind earlier in chapter 6 Paul has declared that not all the physical descendants of Israel are the real Israel but only those who are of promise - i.e. those who have recognised the Messiah - the one third we referred to in Zechariah.)

This seems to relate to a return to the Jewish age. For that to happen the church will have to be removed. God reveals future Jewish history to Daniel, as we see in the next chapter. The church, being an insert, must be removed so that Jewish history can be completed.

Chapter 3

Time, Times and half a Time

Summary of the main point.

God in His wisdom has set ages into a framework of time. The time of Jesus personal rule for 1,000 years is due to come. Before that can come about there must be the regathering and refining of Israel and the period of wrath.

One day is as 1,000 years

'One day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.' Peter declares in his second letter chapter 3 verse 8. So often this is interpreted to mean 'time means nothing to God' because He is eternal. However time is very much a part of the creation of God in which we live. Whilst we accept an eternal dimension yet to come, it is impossible to separate life from time, whilst we are on earth.

There is another way of interpreting the statement of Peter:

'Even in the beginning of creation He makes mention of the Sabbath, and God made in six days the works of His hands and He finished them on the sixth day and He rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. Consider my children what that signifies, in 6,000 years the Lord will bring all things to an end. For with Him one day is as 1,000 years as Himself testifieth saying "Behold this day shall be a thousand years" therefore children in 6 days, that is 6,000 years shall all things be accomplished.'

'6,000 years must needs be fulfilled that the Sabbath may come, even the rest, that Holy day on which God rested from all His work. The Sabbath then is a type and image of the future kingdom of the saints, when they will reign with Christ after His coming down from heaven as John declares it in the apocalypse.'

These are two statements from two early church writings, the first from the Epistle of Barnabas and the second from Hippolytus. They are recorded here to demonstrate at least one line of early church thinking on the matter. Clearly these early church writers say time on earth as lasting for a total of 7,000 years.

In fact the idea that the creation week represents 7,000 literal years is also known to be ancient Jewish thought.** see footnote.

If correct we should be able to find some reference to a one thousand year reign of Christ in the scripture. Though many interpreters try to read all sorts of other possibilities into the passage, Revelation chapter 20 states clearly and unambiguously that Jesus will personally reign for one thousand years. In fact the passage repeats the phrase 'a' or 'the' thousand years' six times as if to make the point very clear.

We can now summarise four ages:

A pre-Jewish age

A Jewish age

A Christian age

A reign of Christ lasting 1,000 years.

If our interpretations so far are correct then we should be able to look back over nearly 6,000 years of history and define three ages each of 2,000 years. To do this would take us deeply into chronology, which is beyond the scope of this booklet.

Suffice it to say here that chronology does prove the two completed periods of 2,000 years (the pre-Jewish and the Jewish ages) - the proof requires an understanding of jubilee cycles and of the different calendars included in the scripture. Nevertheless it is very clearly provable and very accurate, even to the day.

We can therefore expect that the third period will run true to form and after that the personal rule of Christ will be established as the scripture foretells.

God's plan for the Jews in Daniel's 70th Week

In one of scriptures' most interesting and clear prophetic passages, God reveals to Daniel how long remains for his people. (That is the Jews - Daniel's people.)

'At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, (Gabriel speaking) for you are highly esteemed, so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. Seventy weeks (literally sevens) 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 the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.

So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks (literally sevens) and sixty two weeks (literally sevens); it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

Then after sixty two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come (antichrist) 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. And he (antichrist) will make a firm covenant with the many for one week (literally seven), 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.'

Daniel 9:23-7

We can trace through history the coming of the Messiah and His cutting off - so we know that 69 weeks of the prophecy have been fulfilled. We also know that the antichrist has not yet been revealed. So there is evidently a gap between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th week.

The church is not mentioned in the prophecy for it's still a mystery at this point, not revealed until Paul. Whilst the 70th week follows the 69th week, we know that nearly 2,000 years has separated them. This gap is the 'church age' which was inserted between two parts of the Jewish age.

Logic will require that the church is removed again before the 70th week of Daniel can have its fulfilment as it requires a return to the Jewish age.

We can trace the actual fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel in history. We know that the decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem was given by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah (not to be confused with other decrees to rebuild the temple) in 458BC and that 483 (69 x

7) years would then pass to the coming of Messiah. That brings the coming of Jesus to 26AD which is when John the Baptist started to prepare the way.

Jesus was indeed cut off when He was crucified in 33AD with nothing, yet will return to inherit everything.

The period of seven years covering the preparation of John and the earthly ministry of Jesus is graciously cancelled by God from Jewish chronology but only to come again as a 'Time of Jacob's trouble' with which we deal later.

The Daniel prophecy makes it clear that a time must come again when there is a Temple and sacrifices, both part of the Jewish order of things. We can be sure that it is yet future because antichrist has not yet been revealed and indeed won't be whilst the church is around.

Matthew makes it clear in chapter 24 that the great period of tribulation to come is after the 'abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel' (verse 15 and verse 21).

Earth's history has not yet experienced something more dramatic than the flood so this tribulation is future.

So we can see a time (of 2,000 years) to Abraham, then times (2 ages each of 2,000 years) to Jesus and then for the church, and half a time (1,000) for a millennial rule of Christ

The promises given by God to the Jews and the promises given by God to the church are very different. Yet both must come true, otherwise either God is a liar or the scripture is wrong - and neither of these two statements is true. Therefore future events must include both sets of promises. For this to happen we must return for a short while to the Jewish age so that God's unfinished business with the Jews can be completed - for this to happen the church must be removed.

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Footnote:

The concept of 7 days of creation being likened to 7,000 years is found in many Jewish writings:

Tanakh Psalm 90:4

Brit Chadashah 2 Peter 3:8

In the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin section sections 96 - 99. Here many prominent rabbis expressed views along these lines.

The Jews also expected the Messiah to appear on the 4th day - i.e. during the Jewish years 3,001 to 4,000. In fact Jesus was probably born in the Jewish year 3999 or 4,000.

Chapter 4

A Prince to come - Antichrist

Summary of the main point

The man of lawlessness cannot be revealed until the church is removed.

Do not be quickly shaken

Paul urged the Thessalonians not to be quickly shaken, disturbed or deceived in his second letter:

'Now we request you brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may 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. 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, 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'. (2 Thessalonians 2 v1-4.)

This man of lawlessness, also known as antichrist, and the beast - when he is associated with the system over which he rules - derives his power from satan. This is made clear in Revelation 13 v 2. (Also, see 12 v 9 to check that the dragon is satan.)

When will antichrist be revealed?

According to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, there is a restraint holding back the revelation of antichrist, recorded in verse 7 of chapter two.

'For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way'.

(More literally: 'only the one restraining just now until out of the midst it comes') This verse has led to a number of interpretations of who restrains this revealing of antichrist - however the most straightforward and logical answer is that it is the church who restrains, and must be removed, before antichrist is revealed. Consider, for instance, that the disciples were told, that they had authority over all the power of the enemy in Luke 10 v 19 - that was because, at that time, Jesus delegated His power to them. The church is seated with Christ high above every name. Resist the devil, we are told, and he will flee from you. The gift and calling of God are irrevocable, we saw in Romans 11 v 19.

So there cannot be a revealing of antichrist whilst the church is still here, or the church would dismiss him. Antichrist cannot have authority over the church or God's gift and call become revocable instead of irrevocable. No, it is clear that the church must be removed.

In Revelation 7 we are told that antichrist is given power to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue. Is this a contradiction? Surely not, for God's word is inspired for teaching and He knows everything. This passage simply states that in the period we call 'The Tribulation' (after the removal of the church) antichrist will have authority over the saints, that

is the people on earth who are then called saints - the people who become born again believers during the tribulation.

There is absolutely no difficulty in this passage. In fact we have already determined that the tribulation is a return to the Jewish age. Search the Old Testament as hard as you may, there is no reference to resisting the devil. In the Old Testament the saints were not given power over satan, because they did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit, as we have already discussed.

This throws light onto the person of Job and the fact that satan had to ask God's permission to attack him. God had put a wall of protection around Job - in the New Covenant He puts power inside His children to resist and to overcome all the works of the enemy.

God is totally true to His word and to the gift and calling He makes. It is up to us to correctly divide the word, bearing in mind that His character makes it impossible for Him to lie. (After all, if God can change His mind or lie, then what value is there to any of His promises?)

The church removed

From this we can only conclude that the church is removed before antichrist is revealed, whether or not we wish to agree that the church is the specific restraining factor Paul mentions. (Some commentators like to say that it is the Holy Spirit who restrains and that He is removed, but this cannot be the case, as some people will be saved during the Tribulation - and only the Holy Spirit can bring new birth.)

Who will be God's witnesses now?

With the church gone, God raises up two witnesses to stand in Jerusalem. Over the years many people have speculated about their identity and quite a few aspirants have turned up in Jerusalem.

We can be confident about the identity of one of them because Malachi chapter 4 verse 5 is very clear: *'Behold I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord'*.

We also know from Luke 1 v 17 that John the Baptist was not Elijah: he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, but was not Elijah himself. Further we know from Matthew 11 v 14 that if the Jews would have accepted him then he would have been Elijah - this is a clear case of God's foreknowledge at work - He knew the Jews would not accept Jesus so He couldn't send Elijah, in person, this time - so He sent John in the same spirit and power.

Malachi's prophecy therefore remains to be fulfilled.

Revelation 11 describes one of the witnesses as having the power to shut the sky so that it does not rain for the time of their prophesying - three and a half years. Guess who prayed and it did not rain for three and a half years - James 5 v 17 has the answer - it was Elijah.

If we allow logic a place in our understanding, then the other witness would be identified as Moses, for the same Revelation verse ascribes the deeds of Moses to the witnesses. There is further consideration to substantiate this view - Elijah and Moses would be the representatives of the Law and the Prophets and Moses and Elijah are the two we find present at the transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17 v 2 and Mark 9 v 2.

More Witnesses

Revelation goes on to reveal 144,000 witnesses, specially anointed and protected and said to be 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. No need to do anything other than just take this absolutely straightforwardly, now that we are not trying to shoe-horn the church in here somewhere

In this chapter we have seen that in order for it to be possible for antichrist to be revealed the church must be removed..

Foot-note

'Let no one deceive you, for it (the day of the Lord) will not come unless the apostasy comes first....

The reference to John being in the spirit on the Lord's day in Revelation 1 v 10 is not a reference to Sunday but to the 'Imperial' day of the Lord - when He comes into His kingdom and might, indeed the whole period of Revelation is the day of the Lord.

Chapter 5

Meanwhile in heaven, the bride in her mansion

Summary of the main point

Jesus promised to collect His bride and take her to the prepared place in His Father's house.

Jesus makes a wonderful promise in John chapter 14:

'Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house there are many dwelling places, if it were not so I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you, and 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 also be.'

(verses 1-3).

Here Jesus is making a wonderful promise to the believers - I am coming to collect you. I have prepared a place especially for you. We will always be together.

The concept of Jesus receiving us to Himself (in Greek '*paralambano*' - to take hold of alongside) agrees beautifully with the 1 Thessalonians 4 v 17 statement of 'being caught up to meet Jesus in the air'.

Jesus returns twice

A point that is sometimes missed or overlooked is that there are two returns of Jesus to come, not one. Consider the following passages of scripture which describe His return:

1 Corinthians 15 v 51-3: *'Behold I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep but we shall 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 shall be changed, for this perishable must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality.'*

And 1 Thessalonians 4 v 13-18: *'But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Christ*

Jesus. 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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 shall be caught up, together with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.'

From these two passages and the previous passage it is clear that we meet Jesus in the air and he takes us to a place prepared for us in heaven.

Now compare Revelation 19 v 11-21: *'And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and true; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon*

Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that

with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."'

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in mid-heaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free and slaves, and small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.'

(See verse 7 and 8 to identify that the bride has made herself ready and is clothed with fine linen.)

There are clearly two different events here. Firstly the bride is collected and taken to heaven, where she makes herself ready (v7). Then later on Jesus returns to earth in majesty and might and full of power to conquer and His bride comes with Him. Our understanding, therefore, has to allow for a catching up to Jesus for the church, the bride of Christ, for preparation and the marriage to the Lamb, before the return to earth in majesty and might.

(Some ideas suggest that this takes place right at the end of the tribulation - however this is not possible, because, when we rise we meet with Jesus, we are transformed - that is given glorified bodies. At His return to earth all unbelievers are separated and extinguished, that is made clear in Matthew 25 v 41. If then all the believers have been given glorified bodies and formed the bride of Christ and the unbelievers extinguished, who is left for Jesus, and us with Him, to rule with a rod of iron? Who will form the nations referred to in Revelation 19 v 15?)

It is clear that people will become believers during the tribulation and that because the days are shortened some will survive and go through to populate the earth for the millennium (the 1,000 year rule of Jesus) (Mark 13 v 20). It is the survivors who will form the nations over whom Jesus and His bride will rule.

The Ten Virgins

Actually our scenario is clearly confirmed in the parable of the ten virgins found in Matthew 25 v 1-12:

'Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were

prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, "Behold the bridegroom! Come out to meet Him." Then all the virgin rose and trimmed their lamps and the foolish said to the prudent, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the prudent answered, saying, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too, go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." And while they were going away to make the purchase,, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came saying. "Lord, lord open for us." But He said, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you."

Where is the bride?

This is where a little knowledge of the customs of the time is helpful. The bridegroom went to collect his bride from her dwelling house and took her to his own dwelling house for the wedding feast - so the bride, the church, is with the bridegroom. Here indeed is a picture of the rapture of the church embedded in Jewish custom.

Just as Jewish custom demands that the bridegroom comes to the place where his bride lives to collect her - so Jesus promises in John 14:3. Just as Jewish custom demands the bridegroom prepares a place for his bride to dwell - so we find that Jesus has prepared a place for us in John 14: 2

So in the parable of the ten virgins we find that the bridegroom has gone to collect his bride and his return with her is awaited. The bride is with the bridegroom.

Who then are the ten virgins?

At the end of the tribulation there will be a host of 'religious' people about - some will be true born again believers and the rest will not. Oil is often used to signify the presence or work of the Holy Spirit and each believer will have been born again by the Spirit bringing new life to them. The five wise virgins then are born again believers. The five foolish virgins are religious people but not born again. Waiting inside for the feast will be the people who died as believers before Christ, that is in the Old Testament period, now to be joined by the bridegroom and His bride and all the surviving believers of the tribulation time. The ones who inherit the physical kingdom over which Jesus and His bride reign are the survivors of the tribulation prominent amongst whom are one third of the Jews.

So now we can see that God's promise to the Jews will be fulfilled and that it does not in any way conflict with what He has said to the church - rather it makes it possible for His promises to the church to be fulfilled also.

Chapter 6

Sitting on the throne

Summary of the main point

The church is found present in heaven before the unfolding of the events of the tribulation in the vision given to John

Jesus reveals to John

Jesus gives John, recorded in Revelation, a vision of what is to come. The message however starts with information to seven churches. Two meanings have been attributed to the messages to the churches, firstly, each message was to a particular church of that time, and secondly, that the message to the churches covers the predominant aspects of the church through seven stages of church development.

It would seem most likely that the seven churches were selected by the Spirit because they represented the predominant character of the church in stages through future church history. Otherwise we would have to ask why some churches in Asia were omitted! (Colossae and Hierapolis for example)

It is of course possible and likely that both views contain truth - the messages were applicable to the church of the time and also reflect the predominant character of stages of the future church.

As no further mention of the church is made and the book of Revelation takes us right through the tribulation and into eternity, it is logical to say that the church is covered by these references in its entirety, as well as there being specific instructions for the churches of the day.

(We should bear in mind that the word 'church' and the expression 'body of Christ' or 'bride of Christ' are not exactly interchangeable. Body and bride refer to born again believers - those who have had personal encounters with Jesus and become His own possession; whereas church means gathering or meeting and any church gathering can contain those who are born again and those who are not.)

Reading verse 20 of the first chapter of Revelation the scripture specifies that the seven churches are represented by seven lampstands and verses 12 and 13 have those lampstands circling Jesus. So here we have - Jesus, in a vision on earth, in front of John, surrounded by the church.

If we pursue the concept that the message to the churches has meaning for the church through the ages to come we will be able to discern a message about the rapture.

Outline of church age see footnote:

(Please bear in mind that churches of every type will be found in every age - we are looking only for dominant characteristics that fit with the letters.)

Church:	Description:	Time AD:
Ephesus	The Apostolic church	30 - 100
Smyrna	The church of the Roman persecution	100 - 313
Pergamum	The age of Constantine -	313 - 600
Thyatira	Dark ages	600 - 1517
Sardis	Reformation	1517 - 1648
Philadelphia	Great missionary movement	1648 - to date
Laodicea	Apostasy	Yet to come

If we now look at what was said to the present day church, represented by Philadelphia, we find certain characteristics:

Revelation 3: 7-13:

'And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who as the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.

I know your works. See I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold I am coming quickly! Hold fast to what you have, that no one may take your crown.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall go out no more.

I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

He who has the key of David has opened a door for us that no one can shut.

We are promised to be kept from the hour of trial to come upon the whole world. (This is a promise of rapture before The Tribulation.)

[The church of Laodicea could fairly be described as being made up of unbelievers - this will of course be true immediately after the rapture when religious people, who are not born again, will be left behind. - This is the apostate 'church' of the Tribulation period]

Come up here

The next part of the Revelation starts in chapter 4 as follows:

'After these things I looked and behold a door opened 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." (verse 1)

Why was John told to 'come up here?' - To join the church which is now in heaven and to view the action from there.

In heaven John finds 'One sitting on the throne' who must be God the Father and, 'around the throne were twenty four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.'

Who are the elders? Views differ, some say angelic elders, whilst some say outstanding church leaders. Actually we know from Matthew 19 v 28 that the disciples will occupy twelve thrones when Jesus comes into His glory (The probability being that Paul replaces Judas). It is also apparent that the elders are human, not angelic, from the fact that the word 'elder' is never used of angels, only humans.

We also find the lamps there again in verse 5. From this it is apparent that the church is there, present with Jesus, in heaven. We know from 1 Thessalonians 4 v 16 that if the apostles are there, then we, the whole church, are there also for that passage says: *'...the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.'*

Footnotes

The word elder - presbuteros - is used 63 times in the New Testament, of which 12 appear in Revelation. Nowhere else is it ever thought to refer to angelic beings. The word means literally 'older man' and this could never apply to angels who are eternal.

The breakdown of the church age follows the scheme proposed by Arnold Fruchtenbaum in 'The Footsteps of the Messiah' with adjustment to Laodicea.

Chapter 7

The child of Revelation 12

Summary of the main point

Revelation 12 shows that Jesus and the church are in heaven before the tribulation.

The detail

'And a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labour and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven; and behold a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems, and his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness.....'

The woman in this symbol is the Jewish race. This can be understood by looking in Genesis 37 v 9-10 which shows that the sun, moon and stars picture represents Israel. The male to rule with a rod of iron is clearly Jesus, prophetically foretold in Psalm 2 v 9 'Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron'.

Now we come to an interesting point, the text says her child was caught up to God. There are two things about this terminology which suggest strongly that it refers to Jesus and His body, the church, together.

Firstly, 'child' is in the neuter and not in the male form as it should be if it were to refer to Jesus alone. Further we know that Jesus is the head and the church the body, so in terms of a child born from Judaism this can mean Jesus plus body (church) together.

Secondly, 'caught up' represents an involuntary action. This applies to the church who expect to be caught up in accordance with 1 Thessalonians 4 v 17 'Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them. The concept does not however apply to Jesus Himself who ascended of His own volition to the Father.

The passage then goes on with Jewish future history which is completely in line with our understanding.

Chapter 8

A catch of fish - a sign of things to come

Summary of the main point

There is a numerical and pictorial confirmation of the principle of the rapture given in the gospel of John.

Breakfast on the beach - John 21 v 1 - 11.

The risen Jesus meets some of the disciples at Galilee. Peter has declared a return to his old profession of fishing and the others have gone with him.

Going back proves to be a completely fruitless operation - all night they catch nothing!

Then the man on the shore, who seems to know that they have no catch, points out their fundamental error - they have been fishing on the wrong side of the boat! There must have been some compulsion in His voice for they again cast their net and caught, this time for a huge catch.

This was the point at which John recognised Jesus 'it is the Lord' he says to Peter, who responds by throwing himself into the sea to get to Jesus.

Well, the catch is landed - 153 large fish - described as being many for the size of net and boat in use, and yet the net did not tear.

Was there any significance in the number of the fish?

The gospel of John has eight sign miracles recorded in it - that is miracles that were more than just the straight forward physical event - they also carried a message. In this example the message is in the numbers.

The Greek alphabet represents numbers such that if you replace each letter with the relevant number you get arithmetic. So the numbers can have significance.

153 is equal to 10 plus 7 times 9. ($10+7=17$, $17 \times 9 = 153$)

10 is the number associated with numerical completeness.

7 is the number associated with spiritual completeness

9 is the number associated with 'the end'

So 153 can be said to represent 'the numerically and spiritually complete number at the end, and in the context taken out of the water (used to represent the world) and taken to Jesus.

8 is the number that represents 'resurrection' and so it is not surprising to find that 153 times 8 equals the same in numerical value as 'the net'. The net in the story representing the force of resurrection.

That is	t =	300	
	o =	70)
	d =	4) 'to diktoun' is Greek
	i =	10) for
	k =	20) 'the net'
	t =	300)
	u =	400	
	o =	70	
	n =	50	

		1224	
		=====	
153 x 8	=	1224	
		=====	

So our numerical picture could be interpreted as saying, At he end, the complete number of the spiritually perfect will be taken out of the world in resurrection and given to Jesus. What a wonderful picture of the rapture of the church.

(For references to the numbers see 'Numbers in Scripture' by E.W. Bullinger published by Kregel Publications)

Without wanting to base our theology on numbers we can nevertheless see that the numbers give assurance to the message - the church, which will be numerically and spiritually complete when the last of the gentiles comes in, is taken out of the world and taken to Jesus.

Chapter 9

The nature of the re-gathering of Israel

Summary of the main point

Israel must be regathered and face the 'Day of Jacob's trouble' through which all the true Israel will call upon the Messiah and be saved. The 'Tribulation' is part of God's dealing with the Jews and not the church.

So let's look at the scripture:

Jeremiah 16 v 14-15

'Therefore behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when it will no longer be said, As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but, As the Lord lives who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them. For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.'

The 'exodus' from Egypt was one of the most dramatic events of the Old Testament and yet this scripture speaks of something even more remarkable. Clearly this has not yet come to pass, and what we have seen up to now of the re-gathering in Israel would not yet qualify as the fulfilment of this passage. Therefore it must be yet future. (Some commentators try to say that the return from Babylon fulfils this passage - but it is clear in reality that it does not. Babylon is not north of Israel and what about all the other countries?)

Isaiah 11 v 11-12

'Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations and will assemble the banished ones of Israel and will gather the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth.'

These passages really have to apply to the Jews, it would be extremely tortuous to try to make them fit the church.

Isaiah 43 v 6-7

'I will say to the north, Give them up, and to the south, Do not hold them back. Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth. Everyone who is called by My name and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made.'

Ezekiel 28 v 25-6

'Thus says the Lord God, "When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered and shall manifest My holiness in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will live in it securely, and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgements upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God."

Objection

Commentators object that Israel is not being regathered in even partial fulfilment of these scriptures because it remains secular and unholy in its attitudes but:

Jeremiah 3 v 12-14:

'Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, Return faithless Israel, declares the Lord; I will not look upon you in anger, for I am gracious, declares the Lord, I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity that you have transgressed against the Lord your God and have scattered your favours to the strangers under every green tree and you have not obeyed My voice declares the Lord. Return O faithless sons, declares the Lord for I am a master to you and I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.'

and Ezekiel 39 v 25-29:

'Therefore thus says the Lord, Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land, and I will leave none of them there any longer. And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord.'

The promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was, of descendants, and a specific land. These scriptures cannot be applied to the church.

Having determined that the Jews will be regathered - why?

According to scripture for a refining:

'Behold I am going to send My messenger and He will clear the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgement, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow, and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me, says the lord of hosts.'

Malachi 3 v 1-5

'And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon My name and I will answer them, I will say they are My people, and they will say, The Lord is my God.'

Zechariah 13 v 9

This cannot apply to the church - we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, fully and totally forgiven in Him.

God's heart is that every Jew and every gentile would repent and believe in Jesus before all this happens, but the word confirms that not all will believe.

Tribulation

So tribulation will come, and through it some will be saved. The time is known as the time of Jacob's trouble which emphasises the Jewish element. Then they will look upon Him whom they pierced and they will mourn for Him as one who mourns for an only son. Jesus will be recognised even by the Jews who come through the refiner's fire.

Conclusion

The nature of the regathering of Israel is to fulfil promises made to the forefathers regarding the people as a nation before God. (This has nothing to do with the bride of Christ.) The Jews will again become such a nation and Jesus (with His bride) will rule over them, and the world, literally, from Jerusalem. The 'Tribulation' is part of Jewish history and by definition the church will have to be removed - otherwise it would be part of church history - and every Jew who believed would become part of the church

Chapter 10

Conclusions

The scripture is one complete picture

God has revealed through the scripture past, present and future history. Nothing revealed is contradictory, but does need to be understood within a framework of time, which is still unveiling.

Rather like a jig-saw puzzle, we must seek to fit each piece into its proper place and resist the temptation to 'force' pieces to make a picture of our design rather than His design.

The rapture in its proper place

We have seen that there are promises of God yet to be fulfilled both to the Jews and to the church. We saw in chapter 5 that the church rises to meet Jesus and is taken to a place He has already prepared for us. The scripture showing that this place is in Heaven in John 14.

The release of antichrist

We have seen that antichrist cannot be revealed to the world until the church has been removed.

Wrath and judgement

We have seen that a time of wrath is coming and that we are to be snatched by Jesus to Himself beforehand because we are not destined for wrath.

Ages

We have seen that the history of the earth splits into ages and that there is a short piece of the Jewish age yet to be worked out before the millennium can start. The church must be removed to allow that piece of the Jewish age to be completed.

Scriptural confirmations

We have looked at some detailed texts and seen that the church is in heaven during the tribulation.

No other understanding fits

In the understanding we are showing, every part of scripture has its proper place and fits together to make one complete whole, without having to, in any way, 'force' a fit.

Therefore:

Before the tribulation can start the church will rise to meet Jesus in the air.

The fig tree and all the trees

Jesus said to the disciples: 'Behold the fig tree and all the trees, as soon as they put forth leaves you see it and know that summer is now near. Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognise that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you - this generation will not pass away until all things take place.'

It is generally agreed that the reference to 'fig tree' is a reference to Israel because of the reference to fig tree in Luke 13 v 6 -9. The reference to putting forth leaves speaks of its establishment as a nation -i.e. it is planted and growing.

We live in a time when Israel is again planted (as promised). We also live in an age when many other 'trees' are establishing their own national identity just as the word in Luke says. Therefore the time is near.

The glorious expectation

The outcome then: We can look forward to the glorious appearing of Jesus with great expectation. We can join together with the Spirit and say 'Come Lord Jesus' with all our hearts and with enthusiasm - knowing that we are delivered before the wrath to come. (Who would say 'Come Lord' Jesus if they knew they faced the most horrendous time the world has ever seen, with the high expectation of persecution and martyrdom)

Jesus is coming soon. Amen.

Chapter 11

Objections

Summary

Objections are, usually, either not based on a scriptural understanding at all, or based on a scriptural view which allows great latitude of interpretation.

I want to be here in the Tribulation

There are some who say that they would choose to be here during the tribulation in order to witness to the lost or to stand with the Jews and the others going through that period of time.

This view is entirely misled, they would just get in the way of God's purposes.

The main purpose of the church is that it is a bride for Christ, called to love Him above everything and everyone.

'Lord permit me first to(go and bury my father) But Jesus said to him, follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead.' Matthew 8 v 21-2. You can write your own request into the verse but the answer is still the same. Jesus has bought you with a price, you belong to Him, and are therefore subject to His desires above your own desires.

His desire is that you be caught up to meet Him in the air before the tribulation starts.

I don't believe in a personal millennial rule of Jesus

There are many commentators who do not agree with the outline that has been given.

One of the main sources of objection comes from those who believe that the church has replaced Israel.

It is common among such objectors that they do not correctly and fully apply the written word of scripture.

For example: Those who believe that the church has replaced Israel will take Old Testament passages which mention Israel and Judah and Zion and apply them to the church, but only if the message of the passage is 'good and acceptable', otherwise the passage is ignored or attributed to Israel.

This is not to deny that the church can learn from the Old Testament scripture, of course we can, for there is great wisdom and revelation contained therein. However to go so far as to say that God will make promises to Israel and Judah and then go back on those promises, substituting the church for Israel, is to malign His character. It also denies His statement in Romans 11 v 29 - that His gift and calling are irrevocable - and this said in the context of the Jews.

It is also common in this camp to look for 'spiritualised' interpretations or to assume that the scripture is figurative where the straightforward meaning of the words is just as valid.

For example: Revelation chapter 20 is a major problem to this view, so the answer becomes, "Oh the references to 'a or the thousand years' mean 'an undetermined time' or 'there is no reign of Christ at all'."

A straightforward reading of the words says 'a, or, the thousand years' which is repeated five more times. It also reads in a straightforward manner. If the Spirit was trying to imply 'an undetermined time' He would hardly have underlined the phrase 'a, or, the thousand years' so heavily.

Even if one were to agree that the language in this part of Revelation is entirely figurative, it would still have to convey the essence of truth. The message of the passage, even removing the imagined pictorial element, is that Jesus returns to reign with His church. However these objectors deny that and say that the church will rule without the personal presence of Jesus, which is so clearly pictured in chapter 19

The point of picture language is to illustrate the truth not to completely deny or reverse it.

The unacceptable face of a- and post- millennialism.

Amillennialism means there is no millennium. The view denies the personal rule of Jesus over the earth at any time.

Post millennialism sees a 'millennial' rule but not a personal rule, rather a rule through the church. Thus this view sees the church becoming stronger and stronger and presenting a 'christianised' world to Jesus at the end when all things are wrapped up into eternity. A root of this thinking is pride - which often takes with it a wrong understanding of authority both of and within the church.

The view is unacceptable because it lifts the church high instead of Jesus, it denies God's character in relation to His word to the Jews, and it tends to remove Jesus from His place of headship of the church.

These views cannot allow the scripture to be precise and straightforward - they have to 'find other interpretations'. The result is that the same latitudes can creep into their understanding of other issues of scripture which then also become fogged.

Appendix 1

Revelation events - the wrath of God

- | | | |
|---------|---|--|
| Seal | 1 | Wars |
| | 2 | Removal of peace, outbreak of murder, etc. |
| | 3 | Famine |
| | 4 | One quarter of earth's population killed |
| | 5 | View of slain believers |
| | 6 | Earthquakes etc., on massive scale |
| | 7 | Release of seven angels with trumpets - followed by: |
| Trumpet | 1 | One third of the earth burned up |
| | 2 | One third of sea life killed |
| | 3 | One third of rivers become bitter, with many deaths |
| | 4 | One third of the heavenly bodies smitten |
| | 5 | Release of "locusts" with power to inflict pain (not death) |
| | 6 | One third of remaining mankind killed |
| | 7 | Announcement of Christ's reign and release of angels with bowls (vials) - followed by: |
| Bowl | 1 | Malignant sores on those with 666 mark |
| | 2 | Every living thing in the sea dies |
| | 3 | Rivers become blood |
| | 4 | Sun increased in power to scorch mankind |
| | 5 | Beast's kingdom "darkened", men gnaw their own tongues because of pain |
| | 6 | Release of armies from east for Armageddon |
| | 7 | Hailstones and climax - followed by |
- the return of Christ with His bride.

Appendix 2

Post-tribulational view - Difficulties

Set out in this appendix are the parts of the post-tribulational doctrine which cannot be reconciled with either the text or the overall meaning of scripture.

1) *Eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*

The post-tribulational view requires that the church go through the tribulation. Unless one is going to abuse the normal expectation of language, the events of Revelation must be described as horrific in the extreme (see Appendix 1).

The only group recorded as having protection in the tribulation period are the 144,000 witnesses (explicitly Jewish) found in Revelation 7.

Satan is described as having authority over the saints (Revelation 13 v 7) in the period with many martyred. If these saints are the church, it is an absolute contradiction to expect the church now to eagerly await Christ's return.

2) *Comfort*

In I Thessalonians 4, Paul states that the rapture is a matter of comfort. For the same reasons as stated above, the idea that the rapture might come within a few years would not be comfort but quite the opposite.

3) *Do not let your hearts be troubled (John 14 v 1)*

This is Jesus' own exhortation, again a contradiction if the church faces the tribulation before the rapture.

4) *"Quick up and down"*

Post-tribulationism teaches a "quick up and down" at Christ's return in order to fit in the clear statements in 1 Thessalonians 4 v 17. This view is in contradiction with John 14 v 1, which states that Jesus comes for us (from heaven) and takes us to be with Him to a place prepared for us in heaven.

5) *Imminence and alertness*

The scripture calls us to be alert and watchful (i.e. I Thess 5 v 6). Jesus does not teach an intervening event when He says in John 14 v 3, "I go . . . I come again to receive you to myself." There has historically been an expectancy of Christ's return at any time, borne out by I John 3:1-3, where those who hope for His appearing purify themselves. If there had to be an intervening period of tribulation, with little or

modest expectation of survival, the imminence is lost, the alertness is unnecessary and the purifying can be put off.

6) *Loss of literal interpretation*

Various passages have to be “spiritualised” to sustain a post-tribulational view, e.g. 144,000 explicitly Jewish witnesses become “spiritual” Israel, i.e. the church. A one thousand year millennial rule of Christ is “spiritualised” away, either completely or partially.

7) *Loss of identity of the Jews*

Though the scripture makes many promises to the Jews in the Old Testament regarding their nationhood before God and their land, and although the promises are not conditional, the post-tribulationists almost invariably replace the Jews with the church. Paul is explicit in Romans 11 that the church is not to take this position vis-a-vis Israel.

8) *Nature of the tribulation*

The post-tribulational view has to water down the nature of this period. Appendix 1 lists the events clearly without adding or taking away. The problem for post-tribulationists is the clear nature of the period, i.e. wrath poured out.

Everyone agrees that the church is not destined for wrath - herein lies their problem.

9) *The church not mentioned in tribulation passages*

In order to consider this question we need to understand the distinction in meaning of the following words:

Body of Christ = church = those born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Saint = a believer, whether Old Testament, or church, or post-church. Therefore “saints” is not synonymous with “church”

Elect = chosen by God in any age and like “saints”, not restricted to the church age.

There is no mention of the church as being present during the tribulation in any Old or New Testament passage. As Revelation gives a detailed account of the tribulation, this is extremely strange, if, indeed, the church is present. However, if the church is already gone (as represented by the 24 elders of Revelation 4 v 4), then there is no problem. ‘Elders’ are always human.

10) *Daniel’s 70th week*

The meaning of this passage is lost if one supports post-tribulationism.

11) *The mystery of 1 Corinthians 15 v 51*

Paul is revealing a mystery - a mystery is generally accepted as something not previously referred to or revealed in the scripture. In this passage the mystery is that we will not all sleep but be translated - given immortal bodies. Translation is not anywhere mentioned in relation to a post-tribulational coming of Christ.

12) *Nobody left*

If post-tribulationism is correct, every believer receives his/her new body at the end of the tribulation, whilst every unbeliever is liquidated (sheep and goat separation). Who then is left for the church to rule over with Christ?

13) *Blessed hope*

Titus 2 v 13 tells us to be godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus. This is a contradiction for the same reasons as given in Note 1.

14) *Matthew 25 v 31 onwards*

If believers are translated (given new immortal bodies) in a “quick up and down” before or as Jesus descends to earth, this separation described in Matthew 25 becomes superfluous - the separation already having occurred at translation.

This list is not exhaustive.

Appendix 3

Mid-tribulational view - Difficulties

Set out in this appendix are the parts of mid-tribulational doctrine which cannot be reconciled with either the text or the overall meaning of scripture.

As this is the only reference to this view in these notes, a brief description is required:

The translation or rapture of the church is placed at the mid-point of the seven year tribulation period, i.e. after 42 months. The view's foundation relies upon aligning the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 v 15 with the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15 v 52 and stating that the wrath of God/tribulation commences at this point. The view states that the great tribulation starts after month 42, the previous period being the beginning of sorrows.

1) *Wrath*

The reason for stating that the wrath of God starts with the seventh trumpet is to exempt the church (translated at this point) from God's wrath, thus achieving harmony with other scriptures on this point.

However, it is clear from Revelation 6 v 16-17 and 7 v 14 that the "wrath" and "great tribulation" had started much earlier.

2) *Trumpets*

The view relies upon the identification explained above. However, there are other equally reasonable interpretations.

The scripture elsewhere uses trumpets to define the end of periods of time (i.e. the camps in the wilderness). It is equally valid to explain the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15 v 52 as the end of the church age, whilst the seventh trumpet of Revelation is sounding the beginning of the suffering of the last section of the tribulation troubles.

A further significant problem for this view of the "last trumpet" is that Matthew 24 v 31 records another loud trumpet call after the great tribulation when the gathering of those alive for election and separation takes place. This trumpet is after both the previous trumpets!

Common usage at the time of the "last trumpet" as the signal to break camp and move out fits perfectly well with 1 Corinthians 15 v 52, where the trumpet call marks the rapture. This fits perfectly with the pre-tribulational viewpoint.

3) *Antichrist*

As discussed in this booklet, antichrist cannot be revealed until the church is removed. This view allows antichrist to appear.

4) *The Kingdom of God*

When Jesus came the first time, His ministry lasted three and a half years. He described the Kingdom as suffering violence since John the Baptist in Matthew 11 v 12. Detailed chronological study, beyond our scope here, will reveal that John ministered for three and a half years also, making a whole period of seven years.

This period is repeated in the tribulation with two 42 month periods. The first sees Elijah proclaiming, just as John did in the same spirit, that the Kingdom was here. The second 42 months the first time was a ministry of grace and blessing, the second time is for judgement.

The point is that the period is a cogent seven year period split into two halves, i.e. the 70th “week” of Daniel’s prophecy. It is not correct to try to split the period into a first half which is part church/part Jewish and a second half which is exclusively Jewish in terms of its administration.

5) *Imminence*

See note 5 of Appendix 2 - the same argument applies.

Appendix 4

Pre-tribulation view - Difficulties

Set out in this appendix are the parts of the pre-tribulation doctrine which cannot be reconciled with either the text or the overall meaning of scripture:

None.

Appendix 5

Inherent differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ

Rapture:

Church meets Jesus in the air.

Translation, i.e. new, glorified bodies for the church.

On translation, church returns to heaven to the place prepared.

No judgement of sin and no installation of righteousness on earth.

Before the day of wrath.

Imminent.

New Testament revelation or mystery.

Deals only with saved of the time.

(nothing stated)

Second Coming:

Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives.

Separation of sheep and goats; no translation at this point.

No return to heaven at this point - but the establishing of a kingdom on earth.

Sin judged and righteousness fills the earth.

After the day of wrath and to end Armageddon.

Can't happen for at least seven years.

In both Testaments.

Deals with saved and unsaved of the time.

Earth in total darkness.