

Chapter 1

THE COMING RAPTURE

The Open Door



I have said that this open door in heaven, and this calling up of the Apocalyptic seer through that door into heaven, indicate to us the manner in which Christ intends to fulfill His promise to keep certain of His saints “out of the hour of temptation;” and by what means it is that those who “watch and pray always” shall “escape” the dreadful sorrows with which the present world, in its last years, will be visited.

Joseph A. Seiss – *The Apocalypse: Lectures on Revelation*

Rev 3:8 (KJV) I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an *open door*, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

God has promised a special “open door” to the faithful Christians of the Philadelphia church in Revelation. This open door is the promised Pretribulation Rapture that will keep these faithful Christians from the “hour of temptation.”

Rev 3:10 (KJV) Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the *hour of temptation*, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

A few verses later in Revelation 4:1 the Apostle John looks up and sees this open door into heaven.

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

This is the Pretribulation Rapture of the church as seen by the great majority of Christians today, but most overlook that this open door was promised only to the faithful Philadelphia Christians. Other Christians such as those in the church of Thyatira are told that they will be cast “into great tribulation” if they do not repent. They do not receive the open door.

Rev 2:22 (KJV) Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

The timing of the Rapture is one of the most controversial issues in the Church today. The student of Bible prophecy should ask himself why so many faithful Christians believe in a Midtribulation Rapture if the Pretribulation Rapture of the entire Church is the correct view. The answer is simply that there are Scriptures that confirm a Midtribulation Rapture. Christians on both sides of the issue fail to consider the idea that perhaps the Bible teaches both a Pretribulation Rapture and a Midtribulation Rapture.

It is interesting that the pretribulation rapturists expend great efforts in trying to rebut the Scriptures that confirm a Midtribulation Rapture, and the midtribulation rapturists do the same thing with the Scriptures that confirm a Pretribulation Rapture. An honest and forthright exposition of Scripture reveals teachings for both. The Firstfruits Rapture (i.e., the taking out of faithful, mature, Philadelphia Christians) is pretribulation, and the Main Harvest Rapture (i.e., the final taking out of the remaining Christians who have been refined and purified by the tribulation) is midtribulation. This is confirmed both doctrinally and typologically throughout the Scriptures as will be seen.

The Pretribulation Rapture is the most popular view held in the Church today, but popularity is not an accurate measure of Scriptural truth. If popularity determines truth, then we should all convert to Islam since that is the fastest growing religion in the world today.

Perhaps one of the reasons the Pretribulation Rapture is the most popular view is that it requires the least accountability in living the Christian life. It is very comforting for the average Christian to believe that he can sit back and enjoy the pleasures of life and dabble in the

things of the world, while all the time believing that he will be miraculously removed before any hard times or persecution sets in during the tribulation. Any teaching that Christians might experience hardship, persecution or maybe even martyrdom is resisted by the majority of Christians today. It is difficult for Christians to understand that our present comfort is not the primary goal of our heavenly Father in accordance with the following Scripture:

1 Pet 1:7 (KJV) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

God the Father promised to meet all of our physical needs if we seek the Kingdom of God (i.e., the millennial kingdom) (Matt. 6:33), but the Scriptures are replete with examples of faithful followers of Christ suffering the most horrible circumstances imaginable. The first news that Paul received after his conversion was that he was going to have to suffer a great deal for the sake of Jesus Christ. The Church in America today does not really grasp what suffering is all about, and many consider it suffering to drive a used car and live in a modest house.

Prosperity is a difficult test that God has provided for the Church in America, and the great majority of Christians are failing miserably. Pastors are among the casualties. Some are even preaching a gospel of prosperity, which states that financial success is a sign of being a faithful Christian. This false doctrine is so far removed from what the Scriptures teach that no rebuttal is necessary. The primary point to be made is that the Church is not exempt from persecution and hardship. In fact, the Lord even allows the ones He loves the most to go through fiery trials in order to purify them and increase their heavenly rewards.

In the final analysis, Christians will be ever so thankful to the Lord Jesus Christ for the three and one-half years of suffering during the tribulation after they see the rewards for faithfulness that will be received at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The tribulation will be a final period of refining and purifying for those Christians who have not allowed themselves to be cleansed and purified during the present time.

The truth is that only a small segment of Christians are preparing themselves for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The majority of the Church is concerned with building large churches with gymnasiums, plush seats, carpets, stained glass windows and numerous other superficial accoutrements designed to impress our fellow Christians and other local churches. This describes the church age called Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-19. In verse 20 Jesus says He stands and knocks at their door, but most Christians do not open their door to Him. Jesus Christ rejects this church at the Firstfruits Rapture. The Philadelphia church, however, is given an “open door” in verse 8, and this is the Firstfruits Rapture. The Sardis church and the church of Thyatira will also be rejected by Jesus Christ at the Firstfruits Rapture. Chapter 8 will discuss the seven churches including their identity and the types of Christians they represent.

Faithful Christians can see why the Pretribulation Rapture is so popular since the largest segment of Christianity today is made up of Christians in churches typified by Sardis, Thyatira, and Laodicea. These are the backslidden and lukewarm Christians who are opposed to any suggestion that faithfulness will be the criterion for rewards, let alone a special rapture prior to the tribulation. Pointing out the numerous Scriptures that clearly depict a Firstfruits Rapture is not convincing to many lukewarm Christians since searching the Scriptures to see if these things are true is not a part of their lifestyle. They simply quote the Scriptures that point to a Pretribulation Rapture and glibly say that salvation is by grace and not works. For them, everything good in the Bible is for the saved, and everything bad is for the lost. They even use Revelation 3:10 as a proof text for the Pretribulation Rapture, but they overlook that the promise of being “*kept from the hour of trial*” is only directed to the faithful Philadelphia Christians (Rev 3:7). The churches of Laodicea, Sardis and Thyatira are often labeled as mere professing Christians, tares, the false church or some other tag that relegates them to the ranks of the lost. The fact that Jesus himself clearly identifies these groups of believers as part of his Church apparently makes little difference.

In consideration of the above, this is not written to the great majority of Christians who have their minds made up and are not really interested in searching the Scriptures for the meat of the Word. This is written to Christians who are open to the Word and who are hungry to

learn. The reader should study and pray for understanding about what the Scriptures have to say about the rapture of the Church.

Not a New Idea

Many of the great men of God in the Philadelphia church age of the 18th and 19th centuries understood and taught the doctrine of the Firstfruits Rapture. They were men like J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, Dr. A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, John Wilkinson, founder of the Mildmay Mission to the Jews, and Joseph A. Seiss, one of the greatest prophecy scholars who ever lived. Once the doctrine of Firstfruits Rapture has been explained in detail to a person who is truly desirous of knowing what the Scriptures teach, that person is typically converted to a belief in the phased rapture of the Church. The teaching is clear.

The remainder of this chapter will be presented in three sections with the first section providing an exegesis (i.e., interpretation) of the Scriptures addressing the rapture. The second section will present the argument from a typological standpoint of the Old Testament. The third section will address the criticisms from some of the more famous prophetic scholars of what they call the “partial rapture theory.” The term partial rapture is not appropriate for describing the Firstfruits Rapture since it implies that only a portion of the Church will be raptured. The term phased rapture is more descriptive since the entire Church will be raptured in two phases. This section will point out how the opponents of the Firstfruits Rapture use the straw man as a technique in their attempts to refute the phased rapture position.

Section I—Why a Special Rapture?

An excellent starting place for pretribulation rapturists to understand the concept of the Firstfruits Rapture is the variety of resurrections and raptures in the Bible. Enoch and Elijah were both translated into heaven without seeing death. The Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, has already been resurrected and is currently in heaven performing his function as our High Priest (Heb. 3:1-2). These easily understood truths pave the way for a more detailed understanding of the two phases in the rapture of the Church.

The doctrine of the Firstfruits Rapture is closely related to the doctrines of Grace and Works. The doctrine of Grace pertains to the salvation of the spirit, and the legal term *justification* is the most descriptive term of what took place at the moment of salvation. *Positional sanctification* has also been used to describe the believer's position in Christ as a saved individual. By contrast, the doctrine of Works is related to the believer's spiritual growth and maturity, and the most frequently used term for this process is *sanctification* or *progressive sanctification*. 1 Peter 1:9, describes this progressive sanctification the "**salvation of the soul.**"

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to "rightly divide" the Word. The difference between Grace and Works is one of the most fundamental divisions in Scripture. By grace, our spirits are saved by faith in Christ. We then have *positional sanctification*. Our souls are being saved by obedience to Christ. We are being *progressively sanctified*. This *progressive sanctification* will determine our rewards and final standing in the Kingdom of God. The following Scriptures refer to this process of progressive sanctification:

Phil 1:6 (KJV) Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

1 Peter 4:19 (KJV) Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing as unto a Faithful Creator.

James 1:21 (KJV) Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

The biggest question in this process of sanctification is the cooperativeness of the believer. Those Christians who cooperate with the Holy Spirit in their *progressive sanctification* will receive greater rewards. Those Christians who are uncooperative will lose rewards and will suffer great anguish at the Judgment Seat of Christ because of their shame and the contempt of the Lord Jesus Christ. An excellent analogy from Scripture is Peter when he wept bitterly when the Lord Jesus Christ gave him a soul-piercing look of judgment after Peter had denied the Lord three times. It has been stated that everyone's cup will be full in heaven, but the size of the cups will vary greatly.

The Firstfruits Rapture can probably best be described as a special entrance into heaven before the trials of the tribulation start. It is an exemption from the final exam for those Christians who have already demonstrated their Christian maturity during the course of this life. The following Scriptures describe this exemption:

2 Peter 1:10-11 (KJV) Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Luke 21:36 (KJV) Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

In the 2 Peter 1:10-11 passage we see again a reference to an “entrance” or door offered to those mature Christians who “give diligence” as characterized by the Philadelphia Church. Luke 21:29-36 is a scripture addressed to the Church. This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on The Olivet Discourse. This Scripture is an exhortation for believers to pray that they would be accounted worthy to escape the tribulation. The word “watch” refers specifically to a state of readiness or preparation for the Lord’s return.

Christians today should be watching for the return of the Lord, and they should be praying that they will be accounted worthy to be part of the Firstfruits Rapture. It is doubtful that many Christians are following this exhortation from the Lord Himself. It is the height of arrogance to assume that one will automatically be accounted worthy to escape the tribulation. Even Paul said he was “pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling” in Philippians 3:14. The following Scripture describes the Firstfruits Rapture, but it is often misinterpreted as referring to a saved and an unsaved individual:

Mat 24:40-42 (KJV) Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 42 *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

This Scripture is in the Christian section of the Olivet Discourse, and it is a warning to Christians that they need to be in a state of readiness if they are to participate in the Firstfruits Rapture of the Church. This Scripture is not an exhortation to get saved for the rapture. It is a warning to believers to get ready so they will be taken with the Firstfruits. Verse 42 confirms the subjects of the warning. It is absurd to think that this warning is to depraved unbelievers since it would be an exhortation to watch for someone whom they believe is dead, buried and returned to dust.

The Ten Virgins

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 is one of the clearest proof texts for the Firstfruits Rapture. The text is as follows:

Mat 25:1-13 (KJV) Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. 9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and ***they that were ready*** went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13 ***Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.***

The ten virgins represent the entire Church. The number ten is the number of ordinal completion so it represents all of whatever is in question. The term virgin is in reference to the Church rather than Israel since Israel is pictured as the adulterous wife of God the Father.

See the book of Hosea, which pictures the history of the nation of Israel.

Verse 5 confirms that the entire Church “beckoned or slept,” and this means that the entire Church was divided between those looking for the Return of the Lord, and those who had fallen asleep. The doctrine of the second coming was lost to the main body of the Church during the Pergamum church age after 312 A.D., and it was not revived until the Philadelphia church age in the eighteenth century. The Laodicean or the end times church is lukewarm and indifferent to Christ’s return as described in Rev. 3:14-21.

All ten virgins had oil in their lamps, which is a picture of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Unbelievers are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. All ten virgins trimmed their lamps, and this is a picture of getting sin out of the life through confession and turning from sin (1 John 1:9). All ten virgins had their lamps burning, and this is a picture of the outward confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures could not be any clearer that the ten virgins represent born again, blood-bought, justified Christians, but there is a division between the foolish and the wise.

The only difference between the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins is the extra measure of oil, signifying maturity, which the wise virgins took with them. The abundance of oil represents the overflowing presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the five wise virgins. They are Christians who are continually filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit. The five wise virgins have matured in the faith, and they have advanced greatly in their *progressive sanctification*.

It is important to note that in the original Greek the lamps of the five foolish virgins were “going out”—not “gone out”—and the five wise virgins told the foolish virgins to “go ye rather to them that sell, and *buy for yourselves*.” This clearly teaches that the extra measure of oil is related to works since it had to be bought. Grace can not be bought. The indwelling Holy Spirit is a free gift of grace, but the filling of the Holy Spirit is clearly a work involving our submission to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18). The five wise virgins had made preparation for the coming of the Bridegroom, and they were given the open door. The five foolish virgins had not prepared themselves, and they were turned away.

Verse 10 is a clear and concise description of the Firstfruits Rapture of those Christians who had prepared themselves for the coming of the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom came while the foolish virgins were out buying oil. The wise virgins went in with him to the marriage, ***and the door was shut.***

The reference to “the door” is the same door that is promised to the Philadelphia Christians in Revelation 3:7-8 and that John saw in heaven in Revelation 4:1. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures in Revelation 4:4-6 represent the same group of Christians as the five wise virgins and the Philadelphia church. This is the Pretribulation Rapture of mature, *progressively sanctified* believers. These are the ones who have “renewed their minds” with the mind of Christ according to Romans 12:2.

Verse 11 confirms that the five foolish virgins came to Jesus later calling Him “Lord, Lord,” and asked Him to open the door to them. Jesus stated that He did not know (i.e., recognize) them. Jesus then summarizes the parable with a warning to “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” The lesson of this parable is for Christians to be alert and prepared for the second coming of Jesus so they will be able to go into the wedding. The necessary preparation is to be filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit day by day and moment by moment. One of the primary signs of a maturing believer is a daily watching for the return of Jesus Christ. Worldly believers are busy with their own plans and life goals. Mature Christians need to be faithful to the Lord and consciously looking for His return.

Two Raptures Prophesied in the Feasts

Another important teaching tool from the Bible that will help explain the two phases of the rapture is the seven feasts of Leviticus 23. The type of the harvest is probably the clearest presentation of the Firstfruits Rapture since it involves degrees of maturity and successive reapings. The seven feasts are a clear presentation of this type. The following chart provides a brief overview of the feasts that the Jewish nation celebrates to this day:

	<u>Feast</u>	<u>Prophetic Fulfillment</u>	<u>Scripture References</u>
#1	Passover	Death of Jesus Seed Dies	John 12:24
#2	Unleavened Bread	Burial of Jesus Seed Planted	John 6:51; 1 Cor 5:7-8
#3	Firstfruits	Resurrection of Jesus Sheaf of Grain	1 Cor 15:20
#4	Pentecost-Day of Firstfruits	Firstfruits Rapture Two Loaves with Leaven	Luke 21:36, Rev 4:1, and Rev 12:5, 14:1-5
#5	Trumpets	Main Harvest Rapture All Remaining Christians	1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:51-52 Rev. 7:9-17
#6	Atonement	Reaping of Corners Israel Saved	Dt. 4:30-31; Zec 12:10; Jer 8:20
#7	Tabernacles	Gleaning--Gentiles in Tribulation Saved	Mt 25:32

Bible scholars have been curious as to why there are two feasts that celebrate Firstfruits. The Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-13) was celebrated in the late spring by offering one sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest before the Lord along with a meat (i.e., meal) offering of unleavened bread and wine. Leaven in the Bible has always been used to symbolize sin or that which is evil or corrupting. Jesus lived a sinless life, and He was resurrected from the dead on this feast day as a fulfillment of prophecy.

The next feast that the Israelites celebrated in early summer was Pentecost, also called the Day of Firstfruits. Pentecost was when the Israelites could start eating the grain from their field that had matured early. It was celebrated by offering two loaves of bread baked with leaven. “They are the Firstfruits unto the Lord” (Lev. 23:17). This feast represents the pretribulational rapture of mature believers who, though forgiven, are not sinless. These are the Philadelphia believers “clothed in white raiment” who are given the “open door” of the Firstfruits Rapture (Rev. 4:1-4).

At the end of summer, the next feast was the Feast of Trumpets to celebrate the main harvest when all believers will be raised at the last trump. Now, all the grain has matured from the heat of the summer sun. This feast represents the main harvest of all remaining believers

who “have washed their robes” and have matured during the trials of the first half of the tribulation (Rev. 7:9-14).

If the reader can understand these three feasts, two firstfruits and the main harvest, then he will be able to clearly see that there is a Firstfruits Harvest of the Church in addition to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the first of the firstfruits. Jesus is the one sheaf of grain offered *without leaven*, and the two loaves of bread baked *with leaven* are the firstfruits of the Church.

The following Scriptures are often used as arguments against the Firstfruits Rapture since they clearly refer to the entire Church being raptured. It is true that these Scriptures are referring to the entire Church still on the earth since they are describing the Main Harvest Rapture of the Church.

1 Th 4:13-18 (KJV) But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Cor 15:51-52 (KJV) Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Paul is teaching about the Main Harvest Rapture in both of these passages. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Paul emphatically states that belief is all that is required for this rapture of both dead and living believers.

The faithfulness of believers is not the issue in focus here. Those that understand the Firstfruits Rapture have no problem with these verses since all believers who “remain” will be raptured regardless of faithfulness in both of these passages of Scripture.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 17 above, Paul is referring to the living believers who will be translated without seeing death. The word alive is sufficient to show that these believers are not dead, but Paul adds another descriptive word for these living believers. The Greek word is *perileipo* (G #4035), and it literally means to be left behind. This word is almost universally understood as referring to people who were left behind by the ones who had died, but this is a redundancy since the word alive is sufficient to establish that they are not dead. Since the word is repeated in verse 17 after it has already been stated in verse 15, the word carries a special emphasis from the Holy Spirit. Not only are these Christians alive, but they have been left behind by other believers. In this Scripture, Paul even alludes to the Firstfruits Rapture when he is teaching about the Main Harvest Rapture.

Earlier in the chapter, Paul writes about the Thessalonians who were faithful Christians and had the “work of faith,” the “labor of love,” and the “patience of hope.” Many of the Thessalonians were candidates for the Firstfruits Harvest. Unfortunately, there were also Christians in the Church of Thessalonica who were caught up in the sins of the flesh (1 Thess. 4:1-12). The Thessalonians were concerned about these relatives who were believers but had fallen away to unfaithfulness and died. Paul was assuring them that every believer would be resurrected from the dead at the return of Jesus. It is a truth that every Christian will be resurrected or translated before the wrath of God falls on the earth, and faithfulness is not a criterion for this Main Harvest Rapture. Belief in Jesus Christ is the only criterion for this rapture.

The Scriptures are just as clear about the Firstfruits Rapture as they are about the Main Harvest Rapture. The book of Revelation provides a clear chronological sequence of both raptures for those Christians who are willing to understand the plain meaning of Scripture without changing literal statements into figurative language. There are also numerous types depicting a Firstfruits Rapture of faithful Christians.