

PART TWO
TRANSLATION OF THE
OVERCOMERS
OR
RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

TIMELINE

1st Trumpet_7 Judgements (Wars)_7th Trumpet_2nd Coming
RAPTURE_”Overcomers”_7 Year Tribulations_Red Dragon_
Armageddon_Millennium

What is the after-death body like?

“There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; the beauty of heavenly bodies is different from the beauty of earthly bodies. The sun has its own beauty, the moon another beauty, and the stars a different beauty; even among the stars there are different kinds of beauty.”

I Corinthians 15:40-41 Good News New Testament

Spiritual Transformation

The Apostle Paul said to the Philippian believers regarding his own anticipated death: *“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Or, put another way, *“For me, to live on earth is Christ in me, and to die is more Christ with me.”* He went on to add: *“I am torn between the two (that is, living or dying); I desire to die and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body”*.⁴⁹

In his final years Paul was isolated in prison in Rome, yet he produced his inspirational *Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*.

⁴⁹Philippians 1:20-21

While my physical circumstances are not comparable in any way with Paul's, compared with my former life I am limited in health, in travel, and in personal relationships. My life has been narrowed down to a single room, a computer, and time to reflect on what lies ahead; and even these are slowly diminishing as eyesight fails, hands tremble, and memory disappears. But as physical abilities diminish it means more time to reflect on present and future realities.

Regeneration, or new life, in a Christian believer is more than mere conversion (meaning "*to turn around*"); it is an implantation of the resurrected Christ by faith of the individual which transforms him or her into being "*a new creation in Christ Jesus*", born anew to become like Christ in every aspect of his or her life. Jews believing in Jehovah, or Islamists believing in Allah, are *subjects* in the "*kingdom of God*" if they accept the sovereignty of God in their daily lives, but they are not *children* in the "*family of God*" through new birth by the Spirit of God. This major distinction means there is no way that such "*subjects in the kingdom of God*" can be made "*perfect like God*" or "*children in the family of God*"; they are without the perfecting action of the Spirit of God in their lives. With their minds they may have chosen to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in their daily lives, but their spirits are without the transforming power of the Spirit of God to change them from sinners into saints.

This is a very important distinction, because after death it determines the transformation of the *regenerated* individual to be with "*Christ in*" him or her in "*a glorified body*" as the Bride of Christ fit for Paradise and the eternal Presence of God. The Apostle Paul describes it being nothing less than "*like the body of Christ*":

*"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await our Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transfer our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body".*⁵⁰ (my emphasis)

This does not mean that the believer will become like the physical person of Jesus at the age of thirty-three when he died; but rather the maturity of the perfectly balanced character of Christ Jesus our Lord⁵¹. This transformation after death into a "*glorified body*" altogether different from the human physical shell, or "*tent*" or

⁵⁰Philippians 3:20-21

⁵¹Ephesians 4:13

"envelope" used in one's lifetime, into a body like Christ's own, is explained by the Apostle Paul in a magnificent illustration in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain. But God gives it a body as he pleases, and to each seed its own body".⁵²

In other words, as Jesus explained to his disciples, the grain or seed that is sown—small, shrivelled, hard, ugly—bears no relation to the growing stalk of ripened wheat, or beauty of the full-grown rose. Yet the one is contained within the other, and is not only identified with it but is actually energized by it and a vital part of it. What both Jesus and Paul are saying is that the human body contains a vital element, analogous to the vital germ in a seed of corn, which does not perish when the enveloping husk of the seed dies in the soil, but becomes the fruitful seed of the new living shoot being transformed to live in a new environment. The post-resurrection body of Jesus was able to pass through a locked door into the room where incredulous disciples were gathered; and at the same time it could turn up several miles away to others on the roads to Bethany and Emmaeus, and then dramatically disappear. His after-death body was also able to eat food on two occasions, and presumably had the natural consequence to excrete it.

Obviously, the resurrected body, the after-death glorified body, is not the same as the pre-death physical body or *"shell"*, whatever extra powers it may have. When the body is buried or burned after death it disappears and cannot be reconstituted. If buried, it decomposes and eventually it becomes one with the soil, is absorbed into plants and grass, is eaten by insects and animals, and is no more. But the mind does not die with the body, because as was noted in the story of the rich man and poor man, the rich man at least has the mental recollection of his past life. The body's spirit returns to God who gave it originally when He *"breathed into man and he became a living soul"*.

⁵²1 Corinthians 15:35-38

C.S. Lewis has written in *Beyond Personality*:

“The records represent Christ as passing after death (as no man had passed before) neither into a purely, that is, negatively, ‘spiritual’ mode of existence nor into a ‘natural’ life such as we know, but into a life which has its own, new nature. It represents Him as withdrawing six weeks later, into some different mode of existence . . . This presumably means that He is about to create that whole new nature which will provide the environment or conditions for His glorified humanity and, in Him, for ours . . . We must, indeed, believe the risen body to be extremely different from the mortal body; but the existence, in that new state, of anything that could be described as ‘body’ at all, involves some sort of spatial relations and in the long run a whole new universe. That is the picture—not of un-making, but of re-making . . .”

As Christians it has been said: *“We die once, but are born twice”*. Another quotation about after-death, this from the Scottish theologian, Dr P. T. Forsyth, in his *God the Holy Father*: reads

“The New Testament connects the idea of immortality with that of resurrection. Its nature is given in Christ’s. It is not the resurrection of the flesh but of a body—not of matter but of form. The idea of resurrection means much more than repristination (or, recovering) of the old life under happier circumstances . . . Christ came back to give effect to what He had done. He came back, His body (not His flesh), His person came back to be the Holy Spirit of all that He had done. That is the real value of the resurrection. It gives the next life a realism drawn from its moral reality common and continuous with this . . . We take with us the character we made . . . The other life is not the negation and arrest of this. Nor is it mere restitution . . . it is not happiness and it is not power, but it is perfection—which is the growth of God’s image and glory as our destiny”. (my emphasis)

This is the vision which inspired the Apostle Paul, especially when he said:

“While we live in this earthly tent we are depressed with a feeling of

oppression; not because we want to get rid of this earthly body, but we would prefer to have the heavenly one to overlay it, so that what is mortal will be transformed by life. God is the one who prepared us for this change, and He has given us His Spirit as the guarantee of all that He still has in store for us."

What I understand from this divine revelation to the Apostle Paul is that when I die my spirit, which has been "changed" by sixty years of being controlled by the Spirit of God, leaves the body and returns to God who gave it to me. But before my spirit enters the presence of God I must first appear before the "*judgement seat of Christ*"⁵³, the forum where all the words I have spoken and all the deeds I have done are weighed in the balance to determine their value. This evaluation was stated by the Apostle Paul to be metaphorically either "*gold silver, precious stones*" for spiritually approved activities; or, alternatively, "*wood, hay, stubble*" for spiritually worthless activities.

With this purging process completed I hope to be found worthy of the attributed "*Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord*". This is what I think Paul means when he made the earlier statement of "*the heavenly body put on . . . (and) transformed by life*". The earlier earthly body, with its earthly activities, is characterised by the Greek word *bios*, "*life*" in its crude mortal form; but the after-death "*changed*" body is "*transformed by life*", and the word used is *zoë*, "*life*" as a principle, "*life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in himself and which He gave to His Incarnate Son to have in himself.*"⁵⁴ With this life implanted in me I will be fit to live in the presence of God, and partake of all that He has said will follow and which will be detailed later in the book.

One of the most beautiful earthly examples of the transformation which takes place is when a butterfly is born. At first simply a worm, crawling on the earth, it is tied to the lower world of dirt and darkness. Then it seems to die, folded up in the narrow shell of the chrysalis. Finally, out of that restraining "*coffin*" it struggles forth into the glorious winged splendour of the dipping, darting creature that delights all eyes. Science informs us that the gloriously varied beauty of designs in the wings of different butterflies is already determined in the ugly chrysalis.

⁵³2 Corinthians 5:10

⁵⁴W.E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words—page 336

To the individual being “transformed into Christ-likeness” while still alive the challenges of life’s circumstances comprise both the cosmic and personal conflicts between “good and evil”, between God and satanic evil in the life of that individual. Spiritual growth is determined by the increasing amount of values acquired through experience in those conflicts, whose worth and relevance was pre-determined by God. As the spiritual values are proved so is the individual’s faith increased, and expectation and confidence raised to meet the next challenges. The idea, or conviction, that attending a weekly church service, or even several weekly church services, accumulates spiritual values, is ludicrous; that is only a “seat-warming” exercise, with no spiritual value in God’s sight. The spiritually transformed Christian has a direct communication with God through the implanted Holy Spirit at conversion, and God expects that communication to be used in a daily relationship with Him in a “sanctifying” process that turns a sinning individual into a saint fit for the presence of God. The object of the death and resurrection of Jesus was not just to make individuals care-free, but to make them “perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect”, in the words of Jesus.

Immediately after death, the Scriptures inform us, there comes judgement—“the judgement seat of Christ.”, as described earlier. At that judgement seat there is divinely determined the “gold, silver and precious stones” spiritual inheritances of those in the family of God who have victoriously earned the princely crowns to “reign with Christ”; and there are those whose earthly activities are worthless “wood, hay and stubble”, and whose heavenly rewards are commensurate with what survives the fire of purging judgement.⁵⁵ At that judgement seat the heavenly “Book of Life” containing the names of all those who have chosen to be identified with Christ as “Christians” will have to give an account of how “Christ-like” they lived their lives, not how often they attended church services or donated to charities.

When that individual stands in the paradisaal presence of God and hears the divine words of approval, “Well done, my good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of the Lord” there are two possibilities for

⁵⁵1 Corinthians 3: 12-15 and Revelation chapters 2 and 3

that individual: (i), the translation, or rapture, of the true believers at *“the end of the age”* foretold by Jesus; or (ii), the *“purging”* process of being *“saved as by fire”* in passing through the apocalyptic judgements at that time.

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The “Overcomers”

The “Overcomers”

“To him who overcomes, who conforms to my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, to rule them with a rod of iron and break them to pieces like clay pots, with the same authority I received from my Father”.

Revelation 2:26-28 *Good News New Testament*

Believers and Unbelievers

When the “gospel”, or good news of God’s offer of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, was first preached by the Apostles, there was a clear distinction between “believers” and “unbelievers”. This was probably because to become a believer involved persecution and punishment from both Jewish rabbis and Roman officials. But, within the lifetime of the Apostles, and the rapid spread of this gospel throughout the then Middle East, a third category emerged, “converts”, or “God-fearers”, who practiced a superficial version of a selection of the moral teachings of Jesus or of the Apostle Paul. When Jesus was still alive

he had warned such individuals:

*“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters,—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple, And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple . . . Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple . . .”*⁵⁶ (my emphasis)

Let me give a personal experience of this challenge as presented by Jesus. We had scarcely settled into a home in California, USA, temporarily provided by a former patient of Meg’s, when I was completely incapacitated by an excruciating neck pain. From her own experience Meg diagnosed it as a pinched nerve between the sixth and seventh cervical vertebrae, rendering me helpless, and it seemed that nothing could be done about it. I could not drive the van (and Meg had not been able to drive it, either, because she had a chronic back pain from her youth and could not manipulate the stiff clutch and gears), nor go shopping. I could not even move from the downstairs couch to go to the toilet. We had no money or health insurance to see doctors or go to hospital. It looked as if we had reached the end of the road of Meg’s research at last. For even if we returned to Britain we had no home, no money and, if I had an operation on my back, it only had a fifty per cent chance of being successful.

As if that were not enough gloom, the family news from UK was bad. I had not been able to go to my father’s funeral; my mother had a series of shocks, and was left very frail; our daughter, Myrrh, had been worryingly sick for months, and had just been diagnosed as suffering from mononucleosis; Sean, our younger son, had been struck by a car while cycling home from university.

I was lying on the couch one day, contemplating our disastrous situation, and trying to work out some kind of scenario for the present and future, when Meg brought in the morning’s mail. She passed me over a letter, holding it in front of me to read where I lay on the couch, because I was unable to sit up.

It was from Luci Shaw, an old friend and probably America’s leading Christian poet. She and her husband owned a publishing company and wanted to know if Meg would write a book about her

⁵⁶ Luke 14: 25-27, 33

treatment. She also included in her letter a copy of her most recent poem. I read it, then read it again and again, while my despairing and darkened world changed around me:

*"Perform impossibilities
or perish. Thrust out now
the unseasonal figs
among your leaves. Expect
the mountain to be moved.
Hate parents, friends and all
materiality. Love every enemy.
Forgive more times than seventy
seven. Camel-like, squeeze by
into the kingdom through
the needle's eye. All fear quell.
Hack off your hand, or else,
unbloodied, go to hell.*

*Thus the divine unreason.
Despairing now, you cry
with earthy logic - How?
and I, your God, reply:
Leap from your weedy shallows.
Dive into the moving water.
Eyeless, learn to see
truly. Find in my folly your
true sanity. Then, Spirit-driven,
run on my narrow way, sure
as a child. Probe, hold
my unhealed hand, and,
bloody, enter heaven."*

I let the words flow through me, permeating my spiritual being with their inspirational Scriptural meanings, lighting up the dark corners where despair had lurked, frustrating all vision. Perform impossibilities or perish! How true these words were in my own experience, yet how easily forgotten in the harsh circumstances of life.

My gaze wandered from the couch to the kitchen where Meg was working; to the staircase which I had not climbed for some weeks. And I thought of the van outside, the road steeply winding down the hillside to the stores, and then to the highways leading out across America, and the airways of the world. I ruminated on the plans we had made, and the challenges that lay beyond them yet to be considered. I remembered other occasions when I had to make decisions involving possible death, and concluded that the issues facing me now, while not so urgent nor so critical from a physical standpoint, were spiritually more immediately critical.

God had brought me to this moment for a purpose. He had made it important for His own reasons. What were they? The seemingly impossible situation was only, in Luci's phrase, "*the divine unreason*" to me; not to God. It took me several days to work out but at the end I knew not only "*why?*" but "*how?*"

To drive home the lesson, Jesus gave the account of a man who gave a great banquet and invited many guests. But one said he must be excused as he had just bought a field and must inspect it. Another said he had just bought a yoke of oxen and must try them. Still another said that he had just got married and could not come. The host who made the offer was angry and he ordered his servants to go out in the streets and alleys of the city and bring in the poor, crippled, blind and lame, saying "*Not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.*"⁵⁷

In other words, Jesus was emphasising that all those who chose to be his disciples must be "*overcomers*", not only of this world's challenges, but also of the nether world's satanic temptations. In modern terminology, they were to be "*fundamentalists*", meaning those who passionately practice primary beliefs of any system of values. It is not the derogatory attribution that has emerged recently in political circles with fundamentalism as a pejorative derivation from the time of the French Revolution "*Enlightenment*" in the late eighteenth century to decry and dismiss anything beyond the duality of "*mind and body*" as religious rubbish. Jesus was a fundamentalist teacher and prophet who said to his disciples regarding witnessing for him, "*Don't be afraid; I have overcome the world.*"

⁵⁷ Luke 14: 14-34

So, according to Jesus, these are "*overcomers*", true believers who will inherit all the promises of God reserved for children of the family of God who are faithful to the commands of their Master; These "*true believers*" are the "*overcomers*" in the battle of life's challenges, the children of the family of God who form the true "*Church of Jesus Christ*" who will inherit "*ruling with Christ*" in their promised future. The "*converts*", or lukewarm believers in any religion will have rewards in the hereafter appropriate for their performances on earth; "*citizens in the kingdom of God*", subjects who will be ruled over by the "*overcomers*" in the hereafter. The "*unbelievers*" are those who make no attempt, through carelessness or outright rejection of God, to find out their destinies and, like "*the rich man*", will be cast into their self-chosen hell for all eternity.

From the first until the eighteenth century most of the few people able read the Bible did so as a form of realistic narrative written by servants or prophets of God of previous centuries. It was understood as a God-inspired and God-purposed record of the world from the Creation to the Apocalypse. But since the eighteenth century European "*Enlightenment*", and the emergence of "*secular democracy*" with its implicit when not explicit exclusion of God from daily life, the Biblical Scriptures were adapted to fit into "*secular reality*". Where their duality world did not they were dismissed as "*myths*", and the Scriptures no longer regarded as "*real*".

Revelation or Apocalypse

The so-called *Revelation of St John the Divine*, to give the final book in the Bible its most common *Authorised Version* title, was a special victim of this process. *The Apocalypse*, to give the book its proper title, in its record of the experience of the Apostle John is a "*real*" story, a divinely authorised account of the consummation of history from God himself, an affirmation of all that was foretold by the prophets and validated by Jesus himself. The *Apocalypse* is unfolded through a series of consecutive "*Visions*" revealed by God to the Apostle John, with the interpretations either given by Jesus himself or by appointed angelic messengers. It is the only book in the whole canon of Scripture of which it is said – not once but twice⁵⁴

⁵⁸ Revelation 1:3, 22:7

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it, and take to heart what is written in it . . . Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”

It should be noted that there is a distinct difference between the “prophecy” and “apocalypse” associated with the Visions. The Apostle Peter described prophecy:

“. . . the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ which was in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things . . .”⁵⁹

Prophecy is concerned with events in the future and their impact upon contemporary earthly circumstances; on the other hand *apocalypse* is principally concerned with events in heaven, and only peripherally concerned with their impact on earth, if at all. Further, *prophecy* is usually associated with easily understood imagery, while *apocalypse* is usually oblique and esoteric. This is evident from the statement of Jesus to John regarding the *Apocalypse*: “*And now I have told you before it could come to pass that, when it came to pass, you might believe.*”

In the *New Testament* the word *apocalypse* is used in two ways: subjective and objective:⁶⁰ the subjective is that which is presented to the mind directly, usually to demonstrate the acts of God, or person of God; the objective use is when something is presented to the senses, sight and hearing, such as the revelation of Christ to Paul on the road to Damascus. The *Apocalypse*, meaning “*revealed*”, is often confused with Armageddon; or even the Apocrypha having the opposite meaning “*concealed, not authentic*”; the latter arising from confusion with the collection of books appearing in some Bibles between the *Old* and *New Testaments* adopted and held sacred by the Roman Catholic Church

Historically, the esoteric character of the last book of the *New Testament* with its many metaphorical visions has elicited a

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁶⁰ W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*—page 292

prejudice, and even antagonism, that has militated against it being preached in churches let alone being appreciated or its contents applied in practical terms to the lives of believers. Even the major institutional churches avoid the first two chapters concerning the *Letters to the Seven Churches* of the *Apocalypse* to be read in their public services. According to the noted Archbishop Trench of the Church of England it is impossible, if the canons of the Anglican Church are to be followed, for these *Seven Letters* to be read:

"It is very much to be regretted that, while every chapter of every other book of the New Testament is set forth to be read in Church, and wherever there is a daily service, is read in Church, three times in the year, and some or portions of some, oftener, while even of the Apocalypse itself two chapters and portions of others have been admitted into the service, under no circumstances whatever can the second and third chapters ever be heard in the congregation". (his emphasis)

Historically, the *Apocalypse* has been subjected to three broad schools of interpretation: (i) the *Visions* were said to be of early Christian events which were the product of human ingenuity, and not divine revelation: (ii) the *Visions* were real prophecies regarding the course of the Church's history from the fall of Jerusalem to the return of Christ and, as such, were highly colourful and complex exegeses, with political and religious prognostications and timetables: or (iii) the *Visions* were interpreted as allegorical and spiritual

This reluctance, prejudice or fear, in interpretations of the *Apocalypse* did not exist in the Plymouth Brethren "*assemblies*", or churches, amongst which I grew up, and still have a peripheral association. In the mid-nineteenth century they emerged with a remarkable group of scholars who believed and taught a return to the first century Biblical principles of church practice. From among them emerged two distinguished scholars, John Nelson Darby and Dr C.I.Scofield who, between them, produced a prophetic theory of interpretation emphasising the distinction between Israel and the Church, a literal interpretation of events, an emphasis on the future of the events, and the pre-millennial reign of Jesus Christ, which still predominates in evangelical circles. But another Brethren scholar,

GH Lang, taught a different aspect of the “*second coming*” of Jesus known as “*partial rapture*”, which divided the second coming into two segments: a coming “*to the air*” for his “*overcoming*” saints before the time of Tribulations, and a coming “*to the earth*” with his saints before the Millennium. I identify myself with GH Lang’s interpretation.

Jesus Christ is central in all the *Four Visions* recorded in the *Apocalypse*. In the *First Vision* the Apostle John is taken from the island of Patmos into the presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of the “*Overcoming Church*”; (1 v 13); in the *Second Vision* he is taken into heaven and shown Christ on the throne with authority over the world (4 v 12); in the *Third Vision* he is taken into the wilderness to see Christ confront Satan (17 v 3); and in the *Fourth Vision* he is taken up into a mountain to see Christ in all his glory for eternity (21 v 10). The *Four Visions* are divided into three sections: (i) “*the things which I saw*” —*past*; (ii), “*the things which are*” —*present*; and (iii) “*the things which shall be hereafter*” —*future*. The first two of the three sections, *past* and *present*, are covered quickly in the first few chapters of the *First Vision* and then, from that point forward, are revealed the *future* events.

Within this bird’s-eye view of the overall eternal purpose of God there is the inter-related purpose of God regarding the destinies of the *Old Testament Israel* and the *New Testament Church*. The veil between heaven and earth is drawn aside, showing how the angelic administration operates the divine will, and how this heavenly administration will be replaced and/or expanded to include the “*faithful Remnant Israel*” and the Church—defined in the first two chapters as “*overcomers of the world through faith*”. The *Apocalypse* most of all is an unveiling of the delight God the Father has in his Son, Jesus Christ—“*the Lamb and Lion of the royal tribe of Judah*”—and the glories of his divine inheritance in both earth and heaven.

The other, more catastrophic aspect of the *Apocalypse*, is the unveiling of the final judgement of God on all unbelievers who have rejected his provisions in both *Old* and *New Testaments*; and who have chosen instead to follow the great adversary, Satan, in his cosmic rebellion against God throughout earth’s history. Because

these rebellious human creatures and demonic angels have wreaked destruction on earth and in heaven, their related punishments are described in a series of cataclysmic “*Judgements*”, culminating in the horrendous final Battle of Armageddon and eternal hell-fire.

I had been brought up absorbing these teachings but found them part of a Biblical academic framework, like Newton’s mathematics or Einstein’s relativity. It is only now as I face the reality of an imminent death, and consider them as a spiritual reality affecting me personally in the near rather than distant future, that they take on a new and challenging significance. How do the events relate to me personally as a potential participant, and not just to the Apostle John as a Biblical experience?

The details of the *Apocalypse* do not constitute a divine calendar to be “*ticked off*” as read; they are the explications of the divine consummation of earthly and heavenly history in view from before the foundation of the world. All divine history from Creation moved forward to the appearance of Jesus Christ and the three-plus years of his ministry; all final divine history will be concentrated in the second *Apocalypse* of Jesus Christ in the world’s “*last days*”. Everything between these two divine interventions—the rise and fall of empires, the ebb and flow of Jew and Gentile political circumstances, the successes and failures of the claimed “*divine revelations*” of Judaism, Christendom and Islam—are significant but irrelevant in the context of the looming *Apocalypse* of the “*Last Days*”.

The early Church of the first few centuries experienced little of the later controversies regarding the significance of the *Apocalypse* because they anticipated an early return of their Messiah and Lord. The majority of early authors and commentators—Papias, personal friend of the Apostle John, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Jerome and Augustine—all accepted the Apostle John as the true author of the *Apocalypse* and its application to the early Church. The shift in emphasis in both expectation and interpretation began with the “*Papal Rome*” institutionalising of the Church under Constantine in the fourth century, and the “*city of God*” eschatology of Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century.⁶¹

In the *New Testament* the Apostle Paul, writing to the believers in

⁶¹ See my book GOD’S SECRET TRUTH: Church of the Messiah or Churchoid of Satan: available from www.classictravelbooks.com

Corinth, speaks of them as being enriched in every spiritual gift, confirmed in the testimony of Christ, and *“waiting for the Apocalypse, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”*. So, also Peter, writing about the trials of faith among his fellow believers, *“being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.”*

Prophetically, Daniel’s visions incorporated three empires, and anticipated a future fourth empire. The first empire is named as Babylon; the second empire is named as Persia, the third empire is named as Greece; but the fourth empire is not named at all. Among Christian evangelicals in the twentieth century the fourth empire is generally thought to have been Rome, but there is absolutely no basis for this interpretation. The fourth empire has no name in Scripture. What is significant is all three empires were only Scripturally important when their central capital was *in Babylon*. Rome’s ambitions were to reach Babylon but their empire never reached there. Hitler’s ambition was to reach Babylon, but he was never successful. No empire since Greece has had its centre in Babylon. The fourth empire is a spiritual one—Daniel’s *“stone out of the mountain”*—which will crush all others, to be revealed *“in the last days”*.

Meanwhile, the promise of Jesus to *“build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it”* continues to be evident world-wide—in the continents of Asia, Africa and South America, if not in Europe—with the number of *“overcomers”* multiplying daily. In Europe the number of both believers and converts is diminishing as the desire for life insurances, *“property ladders”*, twenty-five year mortgages, three bedrooms, two cars, two television sets, computers and mobile telephones for the family, is now the norm for Christians as well as unbelievers. Semi-believers, superficial converts who have *“made a profession”* at popular evangelical crusades, and then only attending a church once on Sunday, their bottoms on pews and their minds elsewhere, are at best *“nominal Christians”* whose only reward will be as subjects of the kingdom of God but with no association in the Church of the Messiah throughout eternity.

It is the *“overcomers”* who have suffered as they struggled,

as the Scriptures have described,

*“. . . through faith, subdued kingdoms, fought for justice, shut the mouths of lions, triumphed over the fury of flames, faced down the terrors of persecutions and battles. They were tortured, chained, flogged, burned, scourged, blinded, raped, stoned, sawed, exiled from homes and countries”. None of them received what had been promised in the Scriptures, but God had prepared something better for these overcomers—they would be made ‘perfect like God’.”*⁶² (my emphasis)

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will be available on this site on the 1st January 2009

⁶² Hebrews 11:33-40