

Church, missing after Revelation 4:1

As post-tribulationists, how do you respond to the fact that the word “church” does not appear after Revelation 4:1? This means that the Church is missing and has been raptured to Heaven.

In the opening chapters of Revelation (chs. 1-3), the Apostle John is given specific instruction by Yeshua the Messiah that he is to deliver to the seven assemblies of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea). After John relays Yeshua’s messages to these congregations, John is told by the Lord, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things” (Revelation 4:1b, NASU). Notice what John says as this command is given to him: “After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me” (Revelation 4:1a, NASU). This is a directive that is given only to the Apostle John, as he is called to step into the Heavenly realm, and be shown a vision of the future that, as far as Yeshua and those assembled are concerned, has already taken place. John is asked to step forward in time and be shown things that he does not know about.

This is not a command that is given to “the Church.” As Messianics are keen to emphasize, the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) should be properly translated as either “assembly” or “congregation” in our English Bibles, as opposed to the anachronistic term “church.” Likewise, *ekklēsia* was used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), referring to the congregation or assembly of Israel, and the Apostolic writers most often use *ekklēsia* with this understanding in mind.

In Johannine literature (John, 1-3 John, Revelation) *ekklēsia* is never used to refer to the Body of Messiah at large, but instead the localized assembly. Douglas J. Moo poignantly remarks in *Three Views on the Rapture*, “John, himself, never uses ἐκκλησία other than as a designation of a local body of believers. Moreover, it is important to note that John never in chapters 4-19 calls any group in *heaven* the church.”¹ The reason that *ekklēsia* does not appear after Revelation 4:1 is because the letters Yeshua has John write to the seven, localized assemblies of Asia Minor are complete. It is not because “the Church” has been raptured to Heaven. In fact, at the end of Revelation, we are told that the apocalyptic revealing of Yeshua to John is for the *ekklēsia*, indeed implying that the Body of Messiah will be on Earth when these events take place:

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16, ESV).

It is notable that there is an urban myth that frequently circulates among Messianic post-tribulationists relating to Revelation 4:1. It often goes along the lines of, “The Church is mentioned after Revelation 4:1—and it is the whore of Babylon!” Unfortunately for those who adhere to this line of reasoning, it is not based in a sound exegesis of the text, neither in a sound examination of what end-time Babylon actually is. While there are religious elements of the end-time Babylonian system, there are also political and economic elements. To simply say that that end-time Babylon is “the Church,” is to misidentify end-time Babylon, which is the multifaceted, anti-God world system.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo, Richard R. Reiter, *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 201.