

Essentials

A Bible study course for the essentials of the Christian faith

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Essential #4

Eschatology
A Biblical Study of the World's Destiny

Introduction

In this fourth study in the Essentials series we will take up the doctrine of Eschatology, the biblical study of future things. The word eschatology comes from two Greek words, ἔσχατος = *eschatos* meaning last or final and λόγος = *logos* meaning discourse.¹ When you put the two words together you have the study of the last things, literally the world's destiny is summed up in the biblical doctrine of Eschatology.

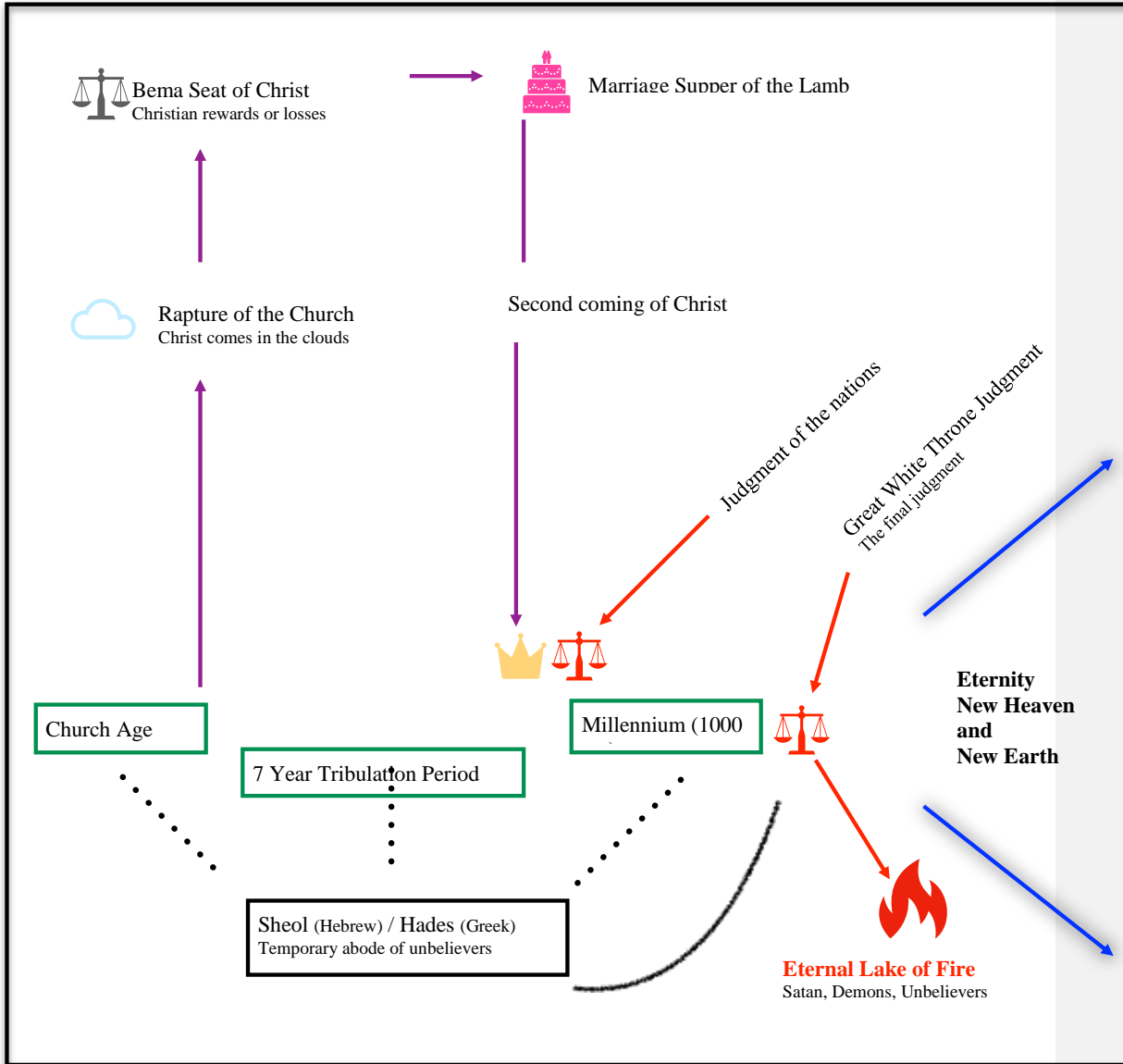
Eschatology brings together all the Bible passages that deal with God's program for the future of mankind. It does this mostly through prophetic passages that have not yet been fulfilled. The Bible is the sole source on earth that reveals with pinpoint accuracy what humanity's future entails. And although this information is available to the world through the Bible, the only people who are able to understand it are those who have been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). God reveals the future to His people for two express reasons: first, to motivate them to obey God, and second, to stimulate their hope in God (Deut. 29:29; Rom. 15:4; 1 Peter 1:3; John 15:14-15).

Man has always had a strong urge to know what the future holds. This is why men through the ages have turned to false prophets, astrologers, fortune tellers, palm readers, tarot cards, ouija boards, science fiction, etc. In the course of today's events both geopolitically and nationally the question of what the future holds for mankind is on many people's minds. Many people have a great sense of impending doom about mankind's future and sustainability on earth. Christians who are somewhat familiar with Bible prophecy are asking if we are in the last days or leading up to the last days. The point is simply this: we are living in very unstable times and people want to know what the future holds for them. Certainly from the standpoint of Bible prophecy, we are living in one of the most unique periods of human history. This is mostly due to today's technology which is clearly making the possibility of certain prophetic portions of Scripture very real for today. Until recent history the prophetic portions of Scripture dealing with the *end times* were especially difficult to understand. Throughout the centuries theologians sought to make sense of those passages from their point in history, but it was very difficult for them. Some even gave up and said that those portions of Scripture should be avoided. The great Reformer, John Calvin, wrote a commentary on every book of the Bible except the book of Revelation as he didn't know what to do with the fantastic things it contained. But today conditions have changed, and our ability to understand the Bible prophetically has increased just as God had foretold through the prophet Daniel, "*But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase*" (Daniel 12:4). Because of the era that we live in, we (Christians) are privileged to have a better view of the end times than all the previous generations before us. In a sense we have been given a ringside seat to God's future plans, which are described for us in the Bible.

I trust this survey of Bible prophecy will bless your life. As the apostle John was told in the opening of the book of Revelation, "*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near*" (Rev. 1:3). Yes, the time is near as we will learn in our study of Eschatology. And as such, I pray your efforts to understand God's program for the *End Times* will stimulate your obedience to Him and develop an enormous confidence in His future plans for mankind. We have no reason to fear the future and every reason to be ready for it if we know what God has said about it.

¹ The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church (3rd ed. rev., p. 563). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

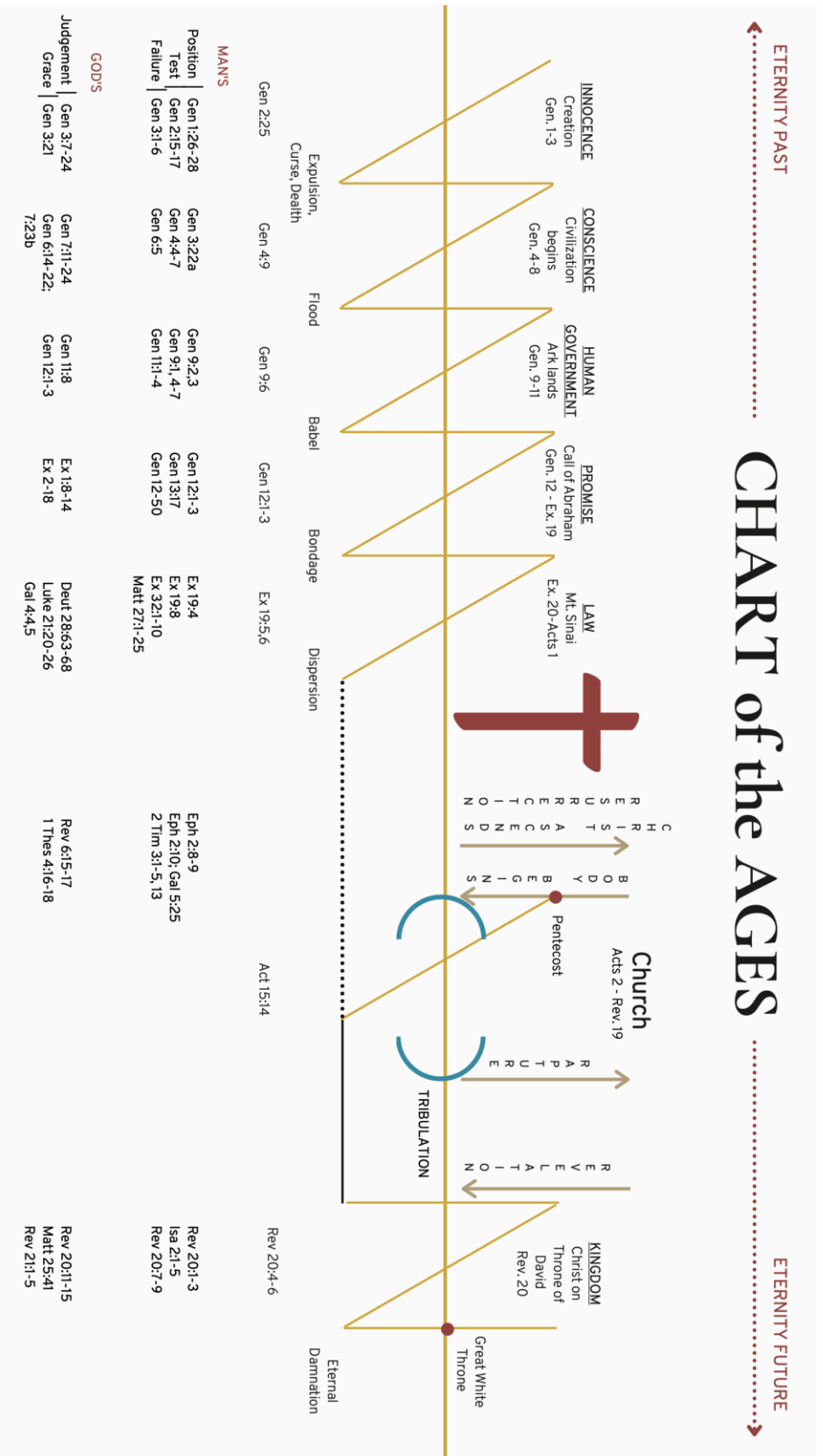
A Prophetic End Times Timeline



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Lesson 1

1. Biblical prophecy is _____ important to God

- a. Adding to or taking away from prophecy will bring the wrath of God (Deut.13:1-5; Rev. 22:18-19).
- b. One of the specific ministries of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age is revealing what the future holds (John 16:12-14).
- c. Jesus' express desire is that His servants would know what's coming and bless them by preparing them (Rev. 1:1-3).

If biblical prophecy is important to God how important should it be to those who belong to God? Many Christians have a "Pan" theology about what the Bible says about the future, "everything will pan-out in the end." If one considers the lengths that God has gone too to give us His Word throughout the ages and knowing the triune God's attitude toward biblical prophecy one would be very foolish to take an "everything will pan-out in the end" attitude toward biblical prophecy. There is no justifiable excuse to say that biblical prophecy is not important.

2. Reasons every Christian should study biblical prophecy

- a. **Prophecy is a part of Scripture and all Scripture is _____ by God** (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Bible prophecy is never guess work: it is the finished work of God yet to be unpacked.

- b. **It is the _____ of the Church to declare the whole counsel of God's Word** (Acts 20:27-32). One quarter of the books in the Bible can be classified as prophetic. This makes Bible prophecy an important theme of Scripture.
- c. **There is going to a _____ departure of sound doctrine in the last days** (1 Tim. 4:1-2).
- d. **The revealing and understanding of things to come is a _____ ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age** (John 16:12-13). We live in a time where we have the ability to understand prophecy better than in any other dispensation.
- e. **Understanding biblical prophecy gives a believers faith _____ in an era of conflicting doctrine about the end times** (Daniel 10:10-20). When you understand rightly biblical prophecy, it gives your faith strength (Dan. 10:19).
- f. **Bible prophecy gives a believer _____ when grieving the death of a Christian loved one** (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- g. **Bible prophecy builds a _____ faith in God.** Whenever we track the many fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament and see how God perfectly fulfilled them, it should build our faith in God to keep His word regarding the future things.

- h. **Bible prophecy builds a greater _____ to God** (2 Cor. 5:10). When a believer understands he or she is going to give an account for the life they were given in Christ, it ought to motivate them to ready themselves for that day.
- i. **Bible prophecy gives us an accurate _____ for this present dispensation** (2 Cor. 5:8). Our focus should be on eternity. We belong to another nation (1 Peter 2:9). We are citizens of heaven and ambassadors from Christ (Philip. 3:20; 2 Cor. 5:20). We are destined for the throne of God (Eph. 2:6; Rev. 4-5). As Christians, our responsibility is not to make this world a better place to live in, our job is to be a witness of Jesus Christ and make disciples to build His Church (Matt. 26:19-20; 16:18). This world is passing a way, so why would a Christian make a huge investment in it when they are headed for eternity (1 John 2:15-17; Matt. 6:19-20, 25, 31-34).
- j. **Studying biblical prophecy will make a Christian a better _____** (2 Cor. 5:10-11). Knowing what the future holds will help clarify the Word of God for unbelievers.
- k. **Studying biblical prophecy gives a Christian _____ knowledge of what is prophetically true.** There is only one true system of biblical prophecy. There is only one true interpretation to a text. There may be multiple applications but there is only one true interpretation of the passage. This being true, it begs a question, "How come we have so many different ideas about the end times?" For instance, there are different views of the rapture of the church: no rapture, pre-rapture, mid-rapture, post-rapture. Who is right? Not everyone can be right, someone has to be wrong. The answer is found in the study of hermeneutics, the science of Bible interpretation. The right hermeneutic will lead you to the right interpretation. A correct method of Bible interpretation will include things like interpreting the Bible normally, historically, grammatically, contextually, and inductively.

We will talk a little bit more about these things in an upcoming study because they are essential to properly interpreting Bible prophecy. **But for now this is what I want you to know, there is only one true interpretation of any passage of Scripture.** God is not the God of confusion; therefore He would not have given us His word to confuse. We just need to interpret what He said accurately.

Comment [1]:

Comment [2]:

3. How do we account for the different _____ about Bible prophecy?

- a. **The _____ condition of a person will influence their understanding of prophecy.**
 - i. Many people who are not born-again still have an interest in what the future holds. They may dabble in Bible prophecy to search for answers but they will never be able to understand Bible prophecy (1 Cor. 2:14).
 - ii. A carnal Christian is very susceptible to false teaching because they are immature in their faith when they should be mature (1 Cor. 3:1-3).
- b. **One's _____ of the Bible will influence their understanding of the Bible.**
 - i. A liberal theologian does not accept the fact that the Bible is inspired by God. From their view point, the Bible is a good moral book but not to be taken literally; thus you can't get specific with it, especially when it comes to prophetic portions of Scripture.
 - ii. A conservative theologian sees the Bible as inspired by God; therefore it can be taken at face value.

c. **A lack of _____ can influence a person's understanding of prophecy** (Eph. 1:15-18). Many Christians have never attended churches where eschatology is taught and this has left a large number in the Church who are ignorant of God's future plans. A lack of knowledge will lead to faulty thinking that will lead to misapplication of Scripture in one's life. *Illustration - When I was a young teenage boy living in Southern CA the sky in the summer time would turn red due to the heavy smog. My best friend's mother, who would take me to church with her sons, told us boys one day that the red sky was a sign of the end times because she had read in the book of Revelation something about a red sky.* That was convincing to us young lads because it came from someone we trusted but it was wrong and we were all wrong because of a bad interpretation of the Bible.

d. **A person's particular _____ of interpretation will influence their view of biblical prophecy.** For this class there are essentially two schools of interpreting Bible prophecy.

- i. *The allegorical method:* This method takes a passage's basic meaning and sees it spiritually, esoterically (intended for only a small number of spiritually minded people), or even mystically. *Example;* seeing Adam and Eve not as literal people but as persons who symbolically represent something else. Or, understanding the devil to not be a real person but a symbol of evil in the world. This method of interpretation looks for hidden meaning in the words of prophecy instead of taking them at face value.

The allegorical method leads to several problems:

- It does not interpret the literal sense of a passage. There is an old saying that goes like this, “If the literal sense makes good sense, seek no other sense, lest it result in nonsense.”
 - It allows for all kinds of interpretations making it difficult or impossible to know which one is accurate
 - It relies on the authority of the one interpreting instead of the Bible
 - It is subjective and gives way for perverting the true meaning of Scripture
 - It confuses God’s people, leaving them with a sense that cannot understand Bible prophecy.
 - It does not have an answer for why so many prophecy have been literally fulfilled.
- ii. *The literal method:* This method understands prophecy through a literal, grammatical and historical method. The literal method of interpretation seeks to interpret the words of Scripture in their normal sense as they are found in a text. Using this method of interpretation is key to being able to understand the Bible and especially prophetic portions of Scripture. In this method we allow the words of Scripture to have the exact basic meaning one would have in normal, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.²

² Pentecost J. Dwight, *Things to Come*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Pub. 1958, p.9

The key question of which method you will use to interpret the Bible comes down to the words in the Bible and what you believe about them. If you do not really believe the Bible is God-breathed, produced, and maintained by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will naturally have to explain the words of Scripture through an allegorical method. But if you do believe the Bible is literally the Word of God, down to every jot and tittle, then you will use the literal method of interpretation. This is the only method of interpretation your pastor uses and it is the only accepted method of the Ukiah Bible Church.

Lesson 2

Important Rules that Govern a Literal Interpretation of the Bible

1. The _____ of Scripture are to be understood in their normal, natural, sense unless there is clear evidence in the context that the words are used some other way.
2. The _____ of a passage must be observed. What comes before and after a passage is of vital importance to accurately understand a passage of Scripture. You work from the immediate context and move out to paragraphs, chapters, book and then how it fits into the context of the whole Bible. An example of understanding a passage in it's immediate context is found in 2 Chronicles 7:12-22.
3. The _____ in which a passage takes place has to be taken into account to properly interpret it. An example of the importance of understanding historical settings can be seen in Jesus' words of comfort to his disciples in John 14:2-3.
4. Understanding _____ in its original language is an important tool to properly interpreting Scripture. The words of the Bible are connected together with grammatical structure that gives it a flow of thought, but the flow of thought is not determined by the structure in

English but by the structure in the original language.³ Thus, the interpreter must ask the following questions of a passage:

- a. What is the _____ of a sentence?
- b. What _____ are present to identify the action or conditions of the subject?
- c. Is the action past, _____, or future (tense)?
- d. Does the verb express a fact of reality, a _____, or a conjecture (mood)?
- e. Does the subject perform the action of the verb or does it _____ the action of the verb (voice)?
- f. Is the action _____ or incomplete (aspect)?

Turning to Romans 12:1-2 will give us an example of paying attention to grammar. “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to ***present*** your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be ***conformed*** to this world, but be ***transformed*** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

- In verse one, the verb “***present***” in its grammatical form is a simple action that can be completed.
- In verse two, the two verbs “***conformed***” and “***transformed***” grammatically convey a different message. They are written in the form of a continuing action. Keep on resisting the pressure to ***conform*** to the world. Keep on being ***transformed*** by the renewing of your mind. The transformation Paul is speaking of here is not a one-time experience as in the transformation that happens when you are born again, and we know this because of the Greek

³ McQuilkin Robertson, Understanding and Applying The Bible, Chicago, Moody Press, 1992, p.135

grammar. Also, not being conformed and being transformed are put in the imperative making them commands that we are obligated to obey.

You can see having an understanding of grammar is an important tool to use to get the right interpretation of any passage. Fortunately, we live at a time in history where technology affords us good resources for teachers and students of the Bible. Also, good Bible translations have given Christians extremely dependable Bibles that are translated on a word-for-word basis to the original languages. My top six recommendations in order would be: New American Standard Bible, Amplified Bible, English Standard Version, Revised Version, King James Version, and the New King James Version. Any of these Bibles, especially in a study Bible format, will give you a trusted translation you can depend upon.

5. Understanding the _____ a particular passage is found in, is an important aspect of good Bible interpretation. In the case of Bible prophecy, it is often encased in figurative language. Whenever figurative language is used, the context has got to be used to determine the point. In Bible college, I had one professor who hammered this point into all of us: “If the literal meaning of the word makes good sense in context, take it literally and if the literal meaning does not make good sense in the context, take it figuratively.” Revelation 7:4-8 drives this point home as a good example of what we are talking about.

Lesson 3

Special Rules of Interpreting Prophecy

1. Interpret the prophecy _____.

There are two types of bible prophecy: Prophecy that has been fulfilled and that which has not. To date, 50% of all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled.⁴ When you examine the prophecies that have been fulfilled, you will find they have been fulfilled literally. Examples of this are easily seen in the life of Christ: The virgin birth (Is. 7:14), born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and so on. This leads us to say that, if half of the prophecies of the Bible have been fulfilled literally, then the rest of Bible prophecy will also be fulfilled literally.

2. Interpret the prophecy according to prophetic _____.

In 2 Peter 1:20-21 we read this, “ *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*” What we understand from this is that God, the Holy Spirit, has weaved the prophetic word of God together in harmony to bring about God’s plans. An example of this is seen in prophetic portions of Scripture that only pertain to the nation of Israel and those that pertain only to the Church. In the end, they both accomplish the ultimate plans of God.

3. Interpret prophecy from a perspective that carefully understands _____.

Prophetic portions of Scripture can look at time in various ways. For examples:

- Isaiah 9:6 speaks of the future but as if the present was in view.

⁴ Wolvard, John, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, Wheaton, IL. Victor Books, SP Publications, 1990, p.14.

- Isaiah 53 speaks of the future as if it were the past.
- Isaiah 61:1-2 speaks of two different times: the first and second comings of Christ (Lk4:17-21).

4. Interpret prophecy _____.

Jesus Christ is the culmination of all prophecy. He is the central theme of all Scripture; therefore, Bible prophecy must be understood through Him.

- Rev. 19:10: Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.
- 1 Peter 1:10-11: The prophets wanted to know the time of the Spirit of Christ within them and predicted the sufferings of Christ.

In his book, *The Best Is Yet To Come*, Tony Evans notes that “Christ is the centerpiece of prophecy, the cause of prophecy, the content of prophecy and the culmination of prophecy.”⁵

5. Interpret prophecy according to the law of double _____.

In this rule, one prophecy can have a near and a far fulfillment. An example of this is found in Daniel 8:21-26. Here we find God warning the nation of Israel that a man would arise who would be devastating to Israel. The reference is to Antiochus Epiphanes, but this man also references the coming antichrist in the Great Tribulation. What makes these kinds of prophecies stand out is that they will not be able to be fulfilled in the first reference but fulfilled in the second.

6. Interpret prophecy _____

The danger one must avoid in this point is not to start interpreting a certain text with a literal method and then switch to an allegorical method. Consistency in one’s method of interpretation is necessary to coming to the right conclusions. The literal method of interpretation is the only method that will keep the interpreter on the right track.

7. Determine if the prophecy is _____ or _____ .

⁵ Evans, Anthony, *The Best Is Yet To Come*, Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 2000, pp.29-41.

The thing to keep in mind here is that if the prophecy is conditional, it is possible it will never be fulfilled; and if the prophecy is unconditional, it is absolutely certain that it will eventually be fulfilled. To mix these up will cause great confusion.

One example of a conditional prophecy is when Jonah went to Nineveh and said God was going to destroy them if they didn't repent. They repented and God held off His judgment. The fulfillment of the prophecy was dependent on human response, but an unconditional prophecy is solely dependent upon God. An example of this would be found in the prophecy Nathan delivered to David regarding the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam. 7:4-17).

8. Take into account the _____ kinds of Bible prophecy
- a. There are prophecies aimed at specific _____ (Gen. 6:13-14; 19:12-14; Ex. 3:10; Joshua 6:1-5).
 - b. There is a specific prophetic program concerning _____ (Jude 6; Rev. 20:2-3).
 - c. There is a specific prophetic program pertaining to _____ (land, king, kingdom)
 - d. There is a specific prophetic program pertaining to the _____ nations (Matt. 25:32).
 - e. There is a specific prophetic program pertaining to _____. (His first and second advent, His earthly ministry, His coming judgment).
 - f. There is a specific prophetic program pertaining to the _____.

Basic Eschatological Terms

1. **Eschatology:** This word comes from two Greek words (*escheats* - last, and *logos* - word). Eschatology means a word or study about last things, meaning things about the future.
2. **Rapture:** This word is the Latin translation of the phrase “caught up” in 1 Thess. 4:17. It refers to Christ coming in the clouds to take all believers with Him.
3. **Tribulation:** This refers to a time of great suffering which Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:21 (see also Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1). Daniel 9:27 indicates this period will be seven years long (a “week” here means a seven-year cycle). The last half of the Tribulation is called the Great Tribulation and is 3 1/2 years long (see Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14; “time, time, dividing of time;” Rev. 11:2; 13:5; “forty-two months;” Rev. 11:3; 12:6; “1260 days”).
4. **Different views regarding the Rapture:**
 - a. Pre-Tribulation Rapture: The view that believers will not go through the Tribulation but will be raptured before it begins. This view gives us the best interpretation Scripturally.
 - b. Partial Rapture: This view teaches that Christ will remove “spiritual” Christians before the Tribulation but allow others to remain to face the Tribulation.
 - c. Mid-Tribulation Rapture: This view teaches that believers will be on earth for the first 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation but will be raptured before the Great Tribulation (i.e., the last 3 1/2 years).
 - d. Post-Tribulation Rapture: This view teaches that believers must go through the entire seven year Tribulation. Then Christ will come again. With this view there is no difference between the Rapture and Second Coming of Christ. Both would occur at the same time.
5. **Judgment Seat of Christ (Bema Seat):** This judgment pertains only to Christians. It occurs after the Rapture while the Tribulation is on the earth. Christians will be judged on the basis of their works done for Christ and rewarded. Salvation is not the issue at this judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:14-15).

6. **Marriage of the Lamb:** The church is the bride of Christ in the sense of being engaged to Him (2 Cr. 11:2). Revelation 19 places the wedding itself in heaven just before the Revelation, or Second Coming of Christ.
7. **Revelation or Second Coming:** Though the phrase “Second Coming” is used loosely to refer to either Rapture or Revelation, technically the terms Second Coming and Revelation refer to Christ coming to the earth with his saints at the end of the Tribulation. (The Rapture refers to his coming in the clouds for his saints before the tribulation.) There are seven years between the Rapture and the Revelation. At the Revelation, Christ is coming to destroy the antichrist at Armageddon to set up his kingdom on the earth (Jude 14-15).
8. **Judgment of the Nations:** This is the judgment that takes place after the Revelation when the Lord is beginning to set up His rule on earth. The word “nations” comes from the word *ethan* (ethnic) in Matthew 25:32, and it should be understood to mean a judgment of individuals who are of different ethnic groups. Christ will start His kingdom by removing all non-believers to judgment (Matt. 25:46) and permitting those who have been saved in the Tribulation to enter the kingdom (Matt. 25:34).
9. **The Kingdom or Millennium:** After the Revelation of Christ, the Lord will remove all the unbelievers and rule on the throne of David in Jerusalem for 1000 years. The word *mille* is the Latin word for 1000 and it comes from Revelation 20:8.
10. **Different Views of the Kingdom or Millennium:**
 - a. Pre-millennialism: The belief that Christ will come before the 1000 year reign and will be present to rule over the earth from Jerusalem. This is the best view.
 - b. A-millennialism: The position that there will be no earthly rule of Christ over the Jews from Jerusalem. One basic view among a-millennialism is that the Jews rejected their King and, therefore, are not entitled to have the Old Testament promises fulfilled.
 - c. Dominion Theology, Reconstructionism, Neo-Post-millennialism: These are all terms for a movement that teaches the church should and eventually will dominate the world. Those in this movement believe in political involvement with the goal

and expectation that the world will become better and better spiritually.

With post-millennialism, there will be a 1000-year Christian kingdom on earth before the Second Coming.

11. **Great White Throne Judgment:** At the end of the Millennial Kingdom, the unsaved dead will be raised to stand trial and to be formally condemned for not receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior (Revelation 20:11-15).

12. **Eternal State:** At the end of the 1000 years, Christ's earthly kingdom will merge with the Kingdom in Heaven. The Eternal State is the same as Heaven.⁶

⁶ This section on terms was taken mostly from, Steven W. Waterhouse book, *Not By Bread Alone*, Amarillo, TX, Westcliff Press, 2007, pp.376-378.

Lesson 4

The Rapture of the Church

Part 1

Introduction

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 *“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 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 will be changed.”*

Biblically speaking, the next event on God’s prophetic calendar is the Rapture. When the last soul is brought into the Church by trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, the Rapture can take place. The doctrine of the Rapture is built upon a prophetic promise made specifically to the Church. God’s promise to the Church is that Jesus Christ will return in the clouds to call to Himself everyone who has trusted in Him to be their Savior. This event will occur just prior to the beginning of the period of history the Bible identifies as the Tribulation.

There are many Bible passages in the New Testament that address the coming Rapture of the Church:

1. _____, Jesus told his disciples He was leaving them, and to comfort them He said, *“I will come again and receive you to myself.”*
2. _____, When Jesus ascended to heaven, the angel told the disciples, *“This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”*
3. _____, Paul noted that the Church in Corinth was *“awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
4. _____, Paul used the word Maranatha in the closing of his letter, which means *“our Lord comes.”*

5. _____, Paul emphasizes the heavenly citizenship of a believer and how “*we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*”
6. _____, Paul noted how the Church at Thessalonica was anticipating the return of God’s Son, “*waiting for His Son from heaven...*”
7. _____, Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica that they would be his reward when he stood in the “*presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming.*”
8. _____, Paul highlighted how believers were being prepared for the “*coming of our Lord Jesus with all His Saints.*”
9. _____, the apostle Paul said, “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven...then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up...*”
10. _____, addressing the Day of the Lord, Paul said, “*with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him...*”
11. _____, Paul charged Timothy to fulfill his calling, and he used Christ’s return as a witness, “*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom...*”
12. _____, the Lord will give a crown to “*all who have loved His appearing.*”
13. _____, Paul counseled a young pastor named Titus to be “*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*”
14. _____, James instructed believers to “*be patient...until the coming of the Lord.*” and “*strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*”
15. _____, Peter told Christians that their present testings would bring “*praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

16. _____, there are going to be rewards for the faithfulness of leaders in the Church, *“When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”*
17. _____, the apostle John encourages believers to abide in Christ *“so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”*
18. _____, John gives his readers some idea of what it will be like when they see Christ, *“...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”*
19. _____, John records Jesus’ own words to His Church, *“...I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”*
20. _____, when Jesus returns for His Church, He is bringing His rewards, *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”*
21. _____, the final words of the book of the Revelation highlight the coming of the Lord, *“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’”*

Conclusion

With so many passages predicting the return of the Lord Jesus for his church, it should encourage a believer’s hope for the future return of their Savior. Also when one considers that the purpose for this present dispensation is for Christ to build His Church (Matt. 16:18) by calling out a people for His name (Acts 15:14; 1 Peter 2:9), we can conclude His promises to return for His Church will happen just as the Word of God has prophesied it will.

Lesson 4

The Rapture of the Church

Part 2

Introduction

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*

In our last lesson, we introduced the subject of the Rapture by examining many different passages that speak of this next great event on God’s prophetic time table. I will remind you that when we talk about the Rapture, we are speaking of the prophecy that addresses the return of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church. In our lesson today, we will take into consideration the most significant passage in the Bible pertaining to the Rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Understanding this passage is the foundation that supports a proper perspective on the other prophetic passages that speak of the Rapture of the Church. Such passages (such as 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12) speak of the Rapture but in the sense of its implications to the Church and the world. The truths revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 will help you interpret those other passages in their proper prophetic order.

We will divide this lesson into three parts. First we will define the meaning of the word “rapture” to give you a clear understanding of what is being spoken about. Second, we will consider the reasons the prophecy was given to the church at Thessalonica. And finally, we will discover the chronology of the Rapture. So, let’s see what we can discover in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 about the Rapture of the Church.

1. The meaning of the word “rapture”

- a. When we use the word “rapture” in our context, we are considering the _____ ramifications of the word.
- b. The word *rapture* comes from the words translated “_____,” found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
- c. The Greek word “*harpazo*,” translated as “caught up” in our English Bibles, can also be translated as “seize,” “catch up,” “snatch away,” or “carry off by force.” The following passages are examples for us to consider.
 - i. Matt. 11:12 “take it by force.”
 - ii. Matt. 12:29 “carry off.”
 - iii. Matt 13:19 “snatch away.”
 - iv. John 6:15 “take Him by force.”
 - v. John 10:12, 28-29 “snatches them.”
 - vi. Acts 8:39 “snatched Philip away.”
 - vii. Acts 23:10 “take him away by force.”
 - viii. 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 “caught up.”
 - ix. 1 Thess. 4:17 “caught up.”
 - x. Jude 23 “snatch them out.”
 - xi. Rev. 12:5 “caught up.”
- e. Our English word “rapture” comes from a _____ translation of the Greek word “*rapture*” which means to seize, or actually remove or carry one away from one spot to another. In reference to 1 Thess. 4:17, it refers to the removal of the Church to *heaven*. And the way the verse is written in Greek, it conveys the absolute *certainty* of a factual event that will happen sometime in the future (it could be a few minutes or hours or days, or months, or years), that only God will perform.

2. The reasons for the prophecy

a. What precipitated Paul's addressing the subject of the Rapture for the Church at Thessalonica?

b. What does the general overview of the Rapture look like (v.15)?

c. What was the prophecy of a Rapture intended to do for the believers at Thessalonica?

3. The chronology of the Prophecy

a. Jesus, Himself, will _____ for His Church (v.16a).

b. Jesus will _____ from heaven to receive His Church (v.16b).

c. Jesus, Himself, will _____ the Church's rapture by a shout (v.16c).

- d. The _____ will come from the voice of an archangel (v.16d).
- e. Jesus will come for His Church with the sound of a _____ of God (v.16e.).
- f. Jesus will _____ His Church from the dead (v.16f).
- g. Jesus will _____ His Church from the earth (v.17a).
- h. Jesus will bring His Church together in the _____ (v.17b).
- i. Jesus will _____ Himself to the raptured Church (v.17c).
- j. Jesus' Church will _____ be with Him (v.17d).

Lesson 4

The Rapture of the Church

Part 3

Introduction

As we continue our study of the Rapture, we'll take into consideration the spiritual mood in the church that will occur just prior to the Lord Jesus coming for His church. There are two main indicators pointing to the approaching rapture of the Church: an intensification of doctrinal apostasy and the movement toward ecumenicalism. We will consider both of these in some detail.

1. Doctrinal apostasy in the Church will intensify.

- a. There will be a _____ to endure doctrine that is sound (2 Tim. 4:3).
- b. There will be a _____ of the doctrine of the Trinity (1 John 2:22-23).
- c. There will be a denial of the doctrine of the _____ of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7). There will be a denial of Jesus as the Messiah, Savior, and God.
- d. There will be a denial of the doctrine of the _____ of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:4).
- e. There will be a lack of _____ lifestyle among those saying they are right with God (2 Tim. 3:1-8). Paul indicates twenty different traits that will characterize the apostasy of the Church:
 - i. Love of self
 - ii. Love of money
 - iii. Boastfulness
 - iv. Arrogance
 - v. Revilers
 - vi. Disobedience to parents
 - vii. Ungratefulness
 - viii. Unholiness
 - ix. Unloving
 - x. Irreconcilable
 - xi. Malicious gossips

- xii. Lack of self control
- xiii. Brutal
- xiv. Haters of those good
- xv. Treacherous
- xvi. Reckless
- xvii. Conceited
- xviii. Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God
- xix. A pretense of worship without any true godly power in one's life
- xx. An opposition to one who teaches the truth

The more one drifts from sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3), the more these traits will be displayed in one's life. And as the individual slips into these traits, the more the Church will demonstrate these characteristics. All of this will occur with great intensity just prior to the rapture of the Church.

2. Ecumenical unifying of churches regardless of doctrinal differences.

- a. The Bible prophesies that during the Great Tribulation there will be a religious ecumenical movement to unite the world. This is described in Revelation 17, and is called the "*mystery Babylon the great the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth*"(v.15). In chapter 17, this Babylon represents a false religious system that will take place worldwide in those days.
- b. In his book, *Basic Theology*, Charles Ryrie noted that the groundwork for such a system will apparently have to be laid before the Tribulation begins, that is, during the closing years of the church age.
- c. In the last 30 to 40 years, there has been a push to bring all churches under one unifying banner. Some of the ways I have seen this take place in my years of ministry are:
 - i. Local ministerial associations to do the work of God (with every domination represented). I personally know of a pastor who resigned his pastorate due to the pressure he received from a small group of head-strong congregants who insisted he join the local ministerial association. He simply could not join any ministerial group that was made of ministers who subscribed to a false gospel.
 - ii. Local community worship services (holiday services).

- iii. Organizational efforts to unify men of every faith (Promise Keepers and their acceptance of Catholicism).
 - iv. Cults wanting to be viewed as Christians (Mormons).
 - v. Movies portraying all religions as equal (*Oh God*, starring George Burns and John Denver).
 - vi. The elevation of a social gospel over a biblical gospel.
- d. How does one who is in favor of ecumenicalism square their ideas with the apostle Paul's admonishment to the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 6:14-18)? Just because someone or some group of people call themselves Christian does not mean, in fact, that they are. Not everyone can be right. According to Ephesian 4:5, there is only one true faith. Anything outside of that is to be considered doctrines of demons and grounds for eternal damnation (Gal. 1:6-9).
- e. In the closing days of the Church Age, there will be a greater push by men to bring all people into one religious community, thereby setting up the removal of the true Church so the false church can unify the hearts of mankind.

Lesson 4

The Rapture of the Church

Part 4

Introduction

To this point in our study of the Rapture, we have considered three things: the many passages that address the Lord's return for His Church, the chronology of the event as found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and the prevailing spiritual mood at the time of the Rapture. To conclude lesson four's study of the Lord's return for the church, we will analyze the Scriptures to see when the Rapture will take place.

The Bible does not tell us the exact hour the Rapture will take place; and, therefore, theologians have sought to understand the placement of the Rapture in the sequence of End Time events. This has led to several different views regarding when the Rapture actually takes place, and the question that arises is this: Does the Rapture take place before, in the middle of, or at the end of the Great Tribulation? The answer to this question will depend on one's view of the Tribulation period.

There are basically five prevalent views concerning the time of the rapture: The Pre-Tribulation view, a Partial-Rapture view, a Mid-Tribulation view, the Post-Tribulation view, and the Pre-Wrath view. We will spend the bulk of our time on the Pre-Tribulation rapture view as I believe the preponderance of biblical evidence clearly supports this view.

Let's now consider each of these views to discover when the Rapture takes place on God's prophetic time table.

1. The Pre-Tribulation Rapture View

This view holds to the position that the church, in its entirety, will be raptured before the Tribulation begins. This means the church must be removed from the world before the Tribulation can begin

(Dan.9:26-27) and the Antichrist can be revealed (2 Thess. 2:18). To support this view, the following biblical arguments are given:

- a. The Church is instructed to be on alert for the _____ return of Jesus Christ.

- b. The separation of the sheep from the goats only makes _____ if the Church has been raptured.

- c. The population of the earth during the Millennial Kingdom _____ the Church to be raptured before the second coming of Christ.

- d. Revelation 3:10 promises that the Church will be _____ from the Tribulation.

- e. The Church is not related to anything that _____ to the Tribulation.

- f. The Tribulation is classified as the wrath of the _____ (Rev. 6:16-17), and the Bible specifically states the Church is not _____ to the wrath of God (1 Thess. 5:1, 9).

- g. The ministry of God during the Tribulation is not _____ to the Church.

- h. The salvation of people during the Tribulation does not include the _____.

- i. Revelation 19:7-11; 22:17, implies the Church is in _____ during the Tribulation.

- j. There are great differences between the _____ of the Church and the _____ Coming of Christ.

- k. The Church was given certain exhortations that may only be _____ by a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Some well known people who take this view are: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Charles Swindoll, J. Dwight Pentecost, John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg, Henry C. Thiessen, Leon Wood, Hal Lindsey, Alva

McClain, John A. Sproul, Richard Mayhue, Tim LaHaye, J. Vernon McGee, Chuck Smith, Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, Chuck Missler, Thomas Ice, David Jeremiah, John F. MacArthur, and John Hagee, and Jimmy Swaggart.⁷

2. The Partial-Rapture View

This view contends that only spiritual believers who are ready, watching, and waiting for Christ to come to Rapture His Church will actually be raptured before the Tribulation begins. According to this view, the rest of the Christians (who are not ready but are carnal and fleshly) will be left behind to pass through part or all of the Tribulation as a means of their purification.

- a. Matthew 24:13; This verse has _____ to do with the Rapture or the Church.
- b. Luke 21:36; This verse is dealing with the tribulation period, _____ the rapture.
- c. Philippians 3:20; The context of this verse is addressing the _____ between unbelievers and believers not godly believers and carnal believers.
- d. 2 Timothy 4:8; This verse has to do with winning _____ when Christ returns, not participating in the Rapture when He returns.
- e. Hebrews 9:28; The context of this verse falls within the _____ warning the writer gives to his readers who are falling away from the faith into degeneracy and not maturing as a Christian. The point of this verse is that there will be a judgment that comes when Christ returns (Heb. 9:27-28). For those believers eagerly await the Lord's return, they will have no worry of sin matters at His return, which can cost them lose of rewards. On the other hand, for those believers who do not eagerly await the return of Christ because they have slipped into degeneracy and not matured in their faith, their sin will cost them rewards.

⁷ House, Wayne H. & Price, Randall, Charts of Bible Prophecy, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Pub., 2003, p. 88.

When these verses are viewed through a proper exegesis, it is clear they do not support a Partial-Rapture viewpoint. There are many objections to this view which force us to completely reject it:

- It conditions participation in the Rapture and the glorification of the body on our _____, which is totally contrary to the whole scheme of New Testament salvation, which is purely by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6; 13:11).
- It rejects the sufficiency of the _____ work of Jesus Christ who delivers the believer from any form of judicial condemnation (Rom. 8:30-34).
- It violates the concept of church _____ for which Christ prayed (John 17:21-22).
- It misinterprets passages of scripture to _____ its position.
- It neglects to deal with 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, which plainly says “_____” shall be changed.
- It neglects to deal with 1 Corinthians 12:13, which says “_____” were baptized into one body.
- It fails to explain why there is not one passage in regard to the Rapture, such as found in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 that makes it a _____ for godly living.
- It fails to explain rewards and _____ of rewards for the Christian.

- It fails to explain why the church is never mentioned as being _____ or _____ during the Tribulation.

Some people who have taken the Partial Rapture view are: Joseph Seis, G. H. Lang, Robert Grovett, G. H. Pember, Ira E. David, D. H. Pantton, Watchman Nee, and G. Campbell Morgan.⁸

3. The Mid-Tribulation View

This view holds to the position that the church will be raptured in the middle of the Tribulation, before the final 3 1/2 years of wrath. Thus, the church is not exposed to God's wrath due to His wrath not starting until the bowl judgments, which occur 3 1/2 years into the Tribulation (Rev. 16:1).

The main objection to this view is that the entire seven-year Tribulation is classified as being "the wrath of God." For example, in Revelation 15:1, we are specifically told that the remaining things will "finish" or "complete" the wrath of God, indicating that all previous things were also the wrath of God. This is also established early in the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:17). Therefore, the entire Tribulation may be classified as a time of wrath, and the church is not destined or appointed to wrath (1 Thess. 5:9).

Mid-tribulationist teachers include: Gleason L. Archer, Norman Harrison, J. Oliver Buswell, Merrill C. Tenney, G. H. Lang, Harold Ockenga, James O. Buswell (a reformed, Calvinistic Presbyterian), and Norman Harrison.⁹

4. The Post-Tribulation View

This is the view that the Lord will return and remove his church from the earth at the end of the Tribulation, just before or as part of His Second Coming.

Those who hold to a Post-Tribulation view have three different inconsistent perspectives of the Tribulation:

- Some believe the Tribulation has passed and the Rapture may occur at any moment.

⁸ Ibid. p.89.

⁹ Erickson, Millard J. (1977). *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House. p. 164

- Some believe the church is in the Tribulation right now and the Rapture will occur in the future.
- Some believe that the Tribulation is still in the future, the church will go through it, and then the Rapture will occur at the end of it.

Those who hold to the Post-Tribulation rapture view do so based on the following arguments:

1. The word “_____” in Matt. 24:27 is the same word used in 1 Thess. 4:15, and therefore they must be the same single event.

These words are describing two separate events in two separate contexts, one for Israel and one for the church. The use of the same word proves nothing other than Christ will come in both instances. They do not prove one event.

2. The church is not said to be in _____, but on earth during the Tribulation.

As we examine the facts of the book of Revelation, we see that the word “church” occurs 19 times between Rev. 1-3, and then it disappears throughout Rev. 4-19, which deals with the Tribulation period. It is not until Rev. 22:16 that the Church is brought back into view.

Secondly, the Post-Tribulationists says the word “saint” found in Revelation 13:7, 10; 17:6) is referring to the church. In each of these uses, John uses the article “the” before the noun “saints” indicating he wants them specifically identified. Furthermore, the word “saints” is not the word “church.” There were “saints” in the Old Testament who are a part of the Church (Ps.85:8). There will be saints in the Tribulation who are not part of the Church. Church-age saints are entirely separate from Tribulation saints.

3. Post-Tribulationism takes the position that the Pre-Tribulation view is a _____ teaching and that the vast majority of ancient and modern scholarship were Post-Tribulationists.

Dr. Steven Waterhouse helps answer this objection, “What is ignored is that an age of a position is not the final indication of its truth. Do we want to assert that truths maintained before the Reformation are superior to those taught after the Reformation? Actually, it is only a half-truth to teach that Pre-Tribulationism is relatively recent. Early church writings

indicate that the Church believed in the imminent return of Christ. It also tended not to have any definite views about the Tribulation. Thus, the church after the apostolic age was neither Pre-Tribulational nor Post-Tribulational.”¹⁰

4. The parable of the Wheat and the Tares found in Matt. 13:24-30 establishes a Post-Tribulation Rapture at the _____ of the Tribulation.

In this case what is ignored is the possibility of another interpretation of this text. This passage is not a church age passage; it is a text aimed at Israel. The passage is clearly about the kingdom and teaches that there will be a false religious group who will look almost identical to those who are true, who will be uncovered at the end of the Tribulation. This parable in no way proves a Post-Tribulation rapture.

Some of those who support the Post-Tribulational view include Pat Robertson, Walter R. Martin, John Piper, George E. Ladd, Robert H. Gundry, and Douglas Moo, J. Sidlow Baxter. Robert H. Gundry, Dave MacPherson.¹¹

5. The Pre-Wrath View

This view is very close to the Mid-Tribulation view but is a little more specific in saying that the Rapture occurs sometime between the sixth and seventh seal judgments in Revelation 6:12-8:1. Pre-wrath proponents maintain a difference between "the Day of the Lord" and "the Great Tribulation." The argument is that there is no wrath of God during the Tribulation time and there is no Tribulation during the wrath time.

The fact is, the entire time period of the Tribulation is classified as a time of wrath and the Church is not appointed to the time of wrath (Rev. 6:15-16).

Those who purport this view are: Marvin Rosenthal, Robert Van Kampen¹²

Conclusion

¹⁰ Waterhouse, Steven W., *Not By Bread Alone*, Amarillo, TX, Westcliff Press, 2007, 394.

¹¹ House, Wayne H. & Price, Randall, *Charts of Bible Prophecy*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Pub., 2003, p. 92.

¹² *Ibid.* p.90

After a brief examination of the above views, the position of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture is the only one that gives sufficient evidence as to when the Rapture will take place. The Rapture of the Church is the next prophetic event to take place; and after that, the Tribulation will begin.