

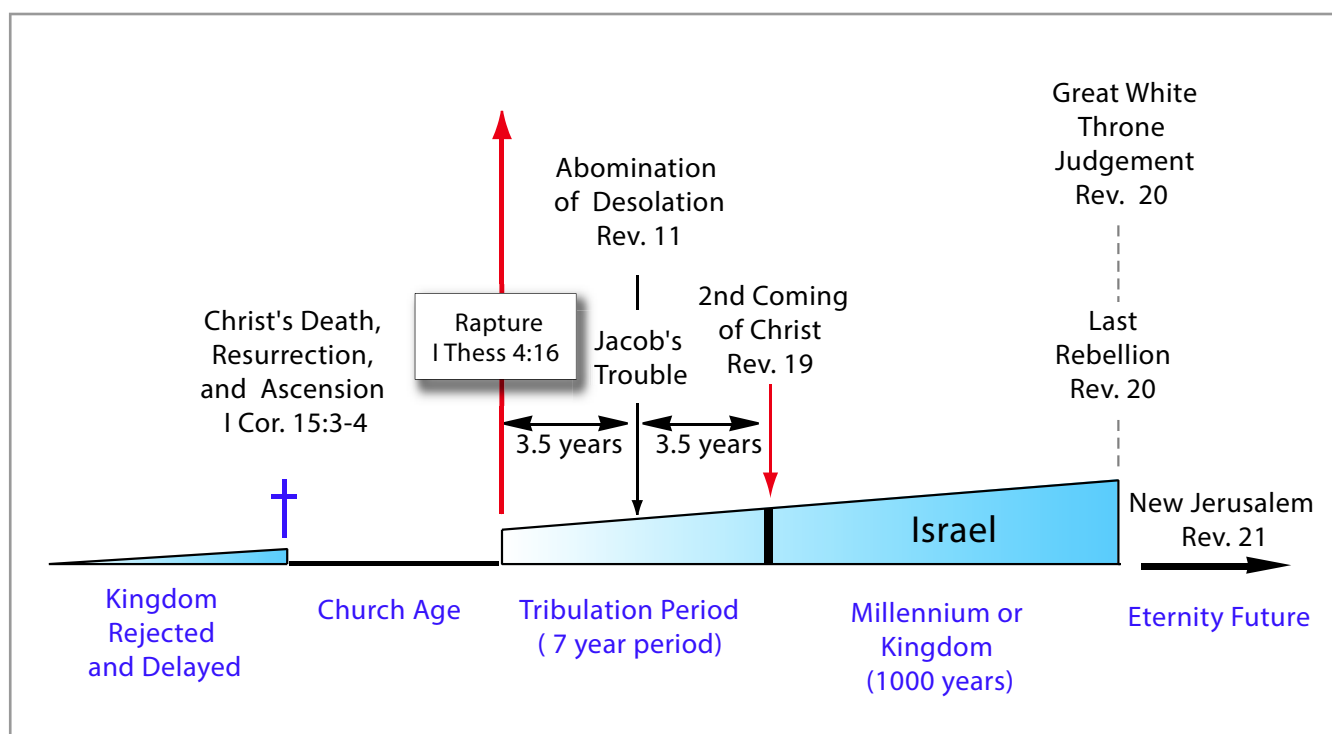
The Church Is Missing

Our study of the seven churches of revelation has come to an end, and we are now living in the white space on the page between Revelation 3 and 4. There is a gap of time between chapters three and four. Chapter 3 ended with the last of the seven churches (about A.D. 100). Revelation 4 will take us to the throne room of God in heaven where we will see a vision of the events that will occur before the start of the Tribulation. We do not know how much time will occur between Rev. 3 and 4, but so far 2,000 years have elapsed. In Rev. 1, 2, and 3 we saw many references to “church” or “churches;” but from Revelation 4 to the end of the book in Rev. 22:16, there is no reference to church or churches on this earth but only in heaven. Why are there no references to the church on earth between Rev. 3 and Rev. 22? The answer to this question is in this study.

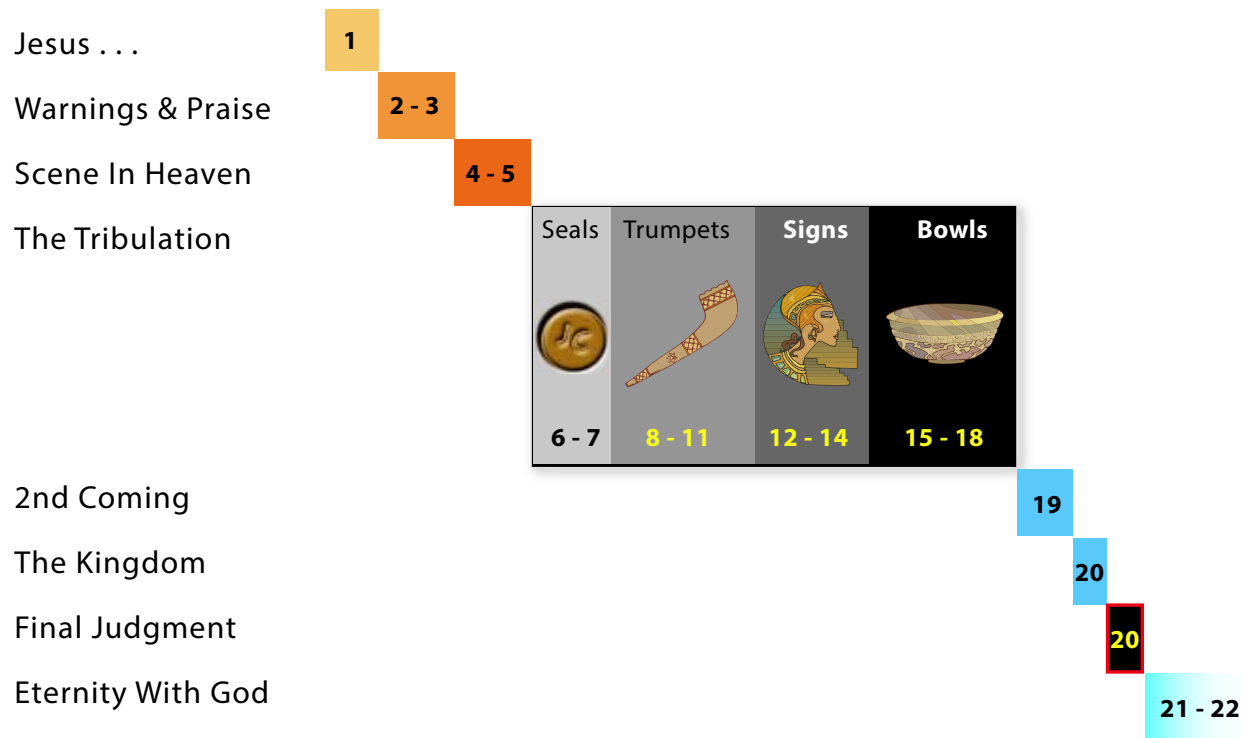
THE TRIBULATION. What is the Rapture? The Rapture is the next major event in God’s timeline of the future. Christians are waiting for it because Jesus Christ will return and remove them from this evil world before the Tribulation starts. The Tribulation is an event the entire world will experience. It is a seven year period of suffering, war, famine, destruction, pain, and great sorrow. The prophet Daniel tells us that the first part of the seven year Tribulation lasts for 3.5 years. It begins when a government leader makes a peace

treaty that includes Israel. This brings peace to the Middle East.

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate. (NASB) Dan. 9:27



Outline of Revelation



However, in the middle of the Tribulation, the leader ends the peace with Israel and so divine judgment comes onto the world. Jesus warned us about the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation. He called these years the “Great Tribulation.”

But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. (NASB) Matt. 24:20-21

God told the church in Philadelphia that this time of trouble or “testing” would be worldwide and not just a local event. It will be the world against Israel and God against the world.

Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. “I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order

that no one take your crown.” (NASB) Rev. 3:10-11

WORRIED CHRISTIANS. Earlier we said that the Rapture comes before the Tribulation. The English word “rapture” comes from the Greek word *harpazo* that means “to snatch away, pluck up, or to be caught up.” Where is the Rapture referred to in the New Testament? It is found in the first letter to the Thessalonians.

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 shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (NASB) 1 Thess. 4:16-17

The phrase “caught up” is the Rapture. When the Rapture

What Were The Thessalonian Christians Worried About?

2 Thessalonians 2:1- 2

Were they worried that they had missed . . . ?

Heaven

No! Otherwise, they would be living in heaven.

The Kingdom

No! Otherwise, they would be living in the kingdom.

Christ's 2nd Coming

No! Otherwise, they would be with Jesus.

The Rapture

Yes! They thought that they had missed the rapture and were in the tribulation.

occurs, Christians who are already dead will receive new bodies and “rise first” to meet Jesus. Then those Christians who are alive will be “caught up” or will ascend upwards to meet Jesus in the air. The Greek word for “air” is *aer*, which means “atmosphere.” Since the atmosphere is as high as 560 kilometers (348 miles), this could imply that Jesus will meet His saints anywhere from the clouds and upward. What we do know is that Jesus will not meet us on land. Why were the Thessalonians worried?

It is important to remember that Jesus’ First coming was as a human on earth and His second coming is a return to the earth. The second coming is a return. The Rapture is not a return to the earth. When the rapture occurs, Jesus does not return to the earth. We will meet Him in the air.

The problem in Thessalonica was that someone was teaching them that dead Christians would miss the rapture. So the apostle had to correct the false teaching in 1 Thess. 4-5.

WORRIED AGAIN. Later the apostle discovered that he had to correct yet another false teaching. Therefore in his second letter to them he says,

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed

either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (NASB) 2 Thess. 2:1-2

They are worried that the Day of the Lord had already come. Why? Why should they care? Were they worried that they had missed the Kingdom, Christ’s second coming, or the Rapture?

But why would they worry about something that they could not miss? If the end of the world had come and men and women had gone to either heaven or hell, they would be in one of those places. If Jesus Christ had returned to the earth (Christ’s second coming) and then set-up the kingdom on earth, they would not have missed that either, since the scriptures say,

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. (NASB) Rev. 1:7

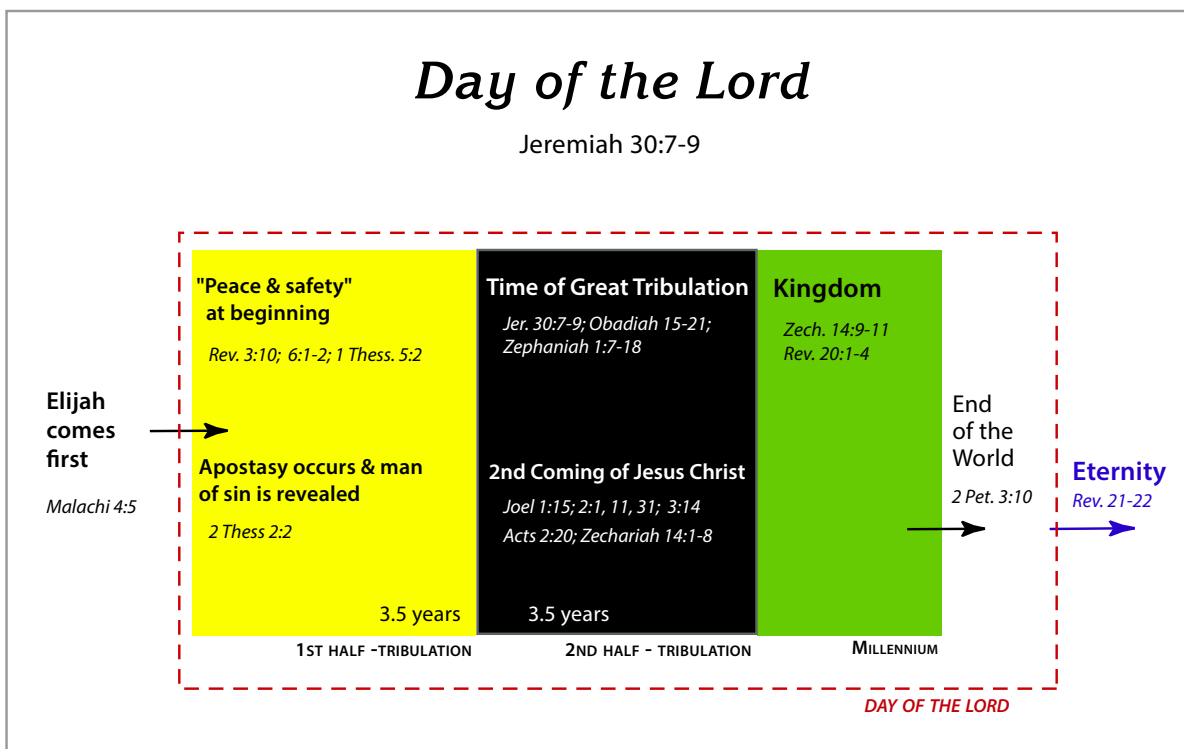
The only answer that makes sense is that they were worried, that they had missed the “gathering to Him” - the Rapture They thought that they missed the Rapture and were living in the period called the “Day of the Lord.”

DAY OF THE LORD. The Day of the Lord is a phrase found in both the Old and New Testaments. The Day of the Lord includes both the first part of the Tribulation period and the last part. The Tribulation starts with peace and ends with war and terror. The Day of the Lord even includes the kingdom that Jesus told His disciples was yet to come (Acts 1:6-7). Jesus' point is that it was not going to occur soon! The Day of the Lord starts with the Tribulation and ends after the kingdom.

When the Apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians with the fact that the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"

man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction . . . (NASB) 2 Thess. 2:1-3

What other scriptures teach that the Rapture occurs before the Day of the Lord? The answer is found in a statement that God made to the church at Philadelphia. In Revelation 3:10 He told them that He would keep them from the hour of testing that would come on the whole world. We will see in our coming study of Revelation 6:1-2 that this hour of testing includes the first part of the Tribulation - the time of "Peace and Safety."



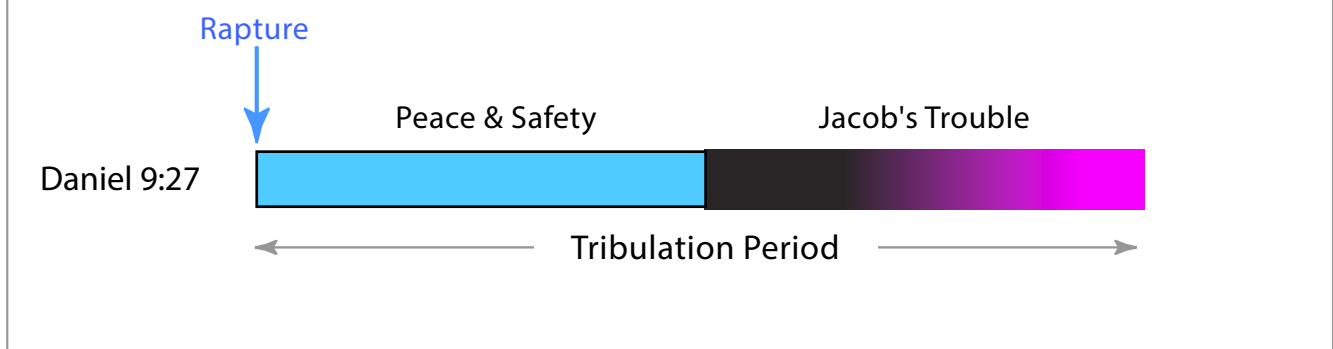
or Rapture, occurs before the Day of the Lord, he revealed that the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" is not the second coming of Christ, since the second coming occurs during the Day of the Lord and not before. The Rapture is for Christians but the second coming is to make war.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the

CONCLUSION. The Rapture is the next event in God's plan for us. John the Baptist came preaching the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Jesus' disciples were wondering when the kingdom would come (Acts 1:6-7), but apparently they had forgotten that Jesus had told them that they would not see it.

And He said to the disciples, "The days shall come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. (NASB) Luke 17:22

Rapture Comes Before The Tribulation



Jesus has returned to heaven, and we are still looking for the kingdom. But God is not late, nor did He make empty promises. The Holy Spirit reminds us in Heb. 10:36-38 that God made the same promise to Israel in Habakkuk 2-4, which was written long ago - about 600 B.C. To this the apostle Peter says,

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (NASB) 2 Peter 3:9-10

Is Jesus coming? The answer is yes. For the world, Jesus' second coming will be judgment and suffering. But for Christians, the Rapture is escape from this world into the presence of God. Are you ready? Do you believe that Jesus

is the Savior-God of this world? If you do, eternity with God will be great.

Think of -

Stepping on shore, and finding it Heaven!

Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God's hand.

Of breathing a new air, and finding it celestial air.

Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality.

Of passing from storm to tempest to an unknown

calm.

Of waking up, and finding it Home.

Hazel Felleman

Poems That Live Forever