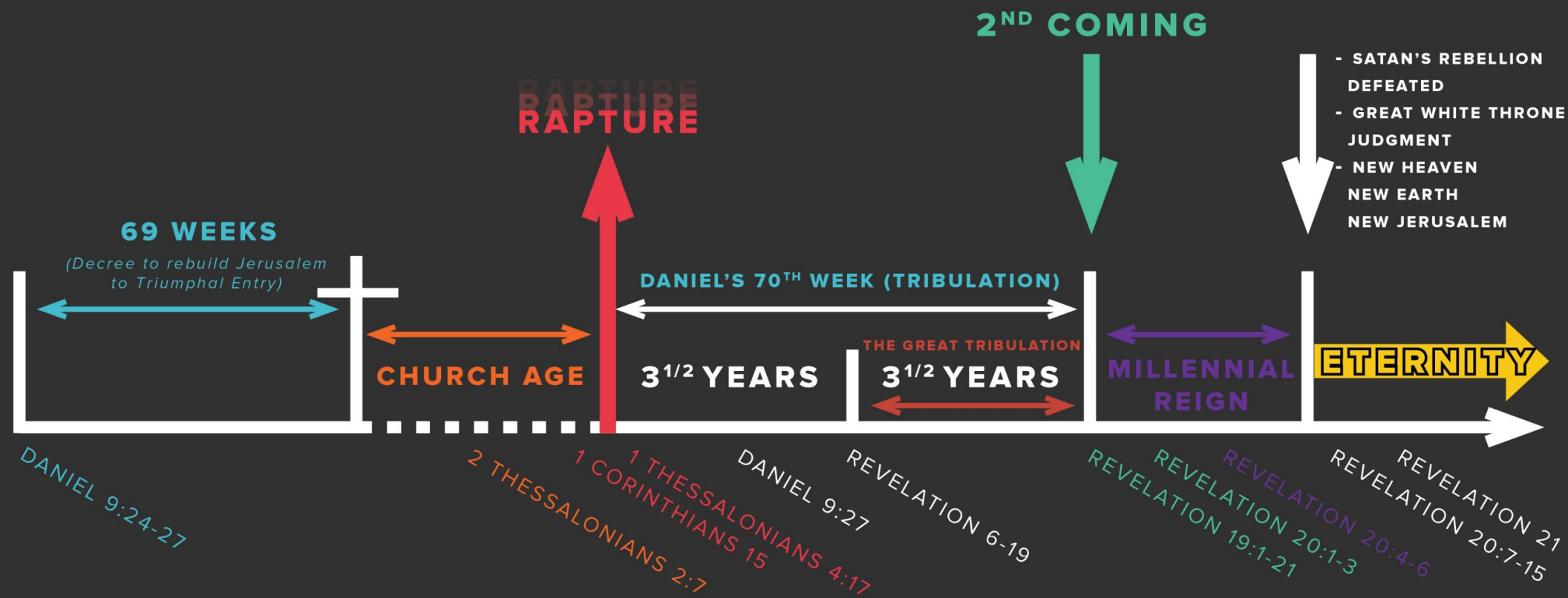


THE END TIMES IN THE CONTEXT OF DANIEL'S 70 WEEKS



Through the Bible – 1 Thessalonians

The Rapture by Troy Warner & Tyler Warner

Introduction

In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul comforts the church by telling them that the dead in Christ will rise. Part of this comfort he gives is his teaching that there will be Christians who remain until the resurrection. “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” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In this verse, the words “caught up” translate the Greek word *harpazo*, which, when translated into Latin, is: *rapturo*.^[1] This is where we get our English word “Rapture”. The Rapture is an event where believers are caught up into the presence of the Lord. Almost all Christians believe in the Rapture, but there are disagreements about when the Rapture will take place. There are three main views held among believers and each sees the event happening at different times in relation to the seven-year Tribulation as described in the book of Revelation.

Post-Tribulation

The Post-Tribulational view sees the Rapture as a simultaneous event with the Second Coming of Christ (Matthew 24 :27–31; Revelation 19:1–16).^[2] This will happen at the end of the Tribulation, when Jesus will defeat the Antichrist and establish His Kingdom on the earth. Adherents to this view believe that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. This is the biggest problem with this view. God has an established pattern of never punishing the righteous with the unrighteous (Genesis 18:25; 19:22), and the Tribulation represents not general suffering but the wrath of God unleashed on the earth. But we are not appointed to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The wrath of God was poured out on His Son Jesus at the cross. Post-Tribulation believers rely on Matthew 24:31, when Jesus said that the elect will be gathered from the four winds of the earth as a description of the Rapture. However, Jesus is referring to the same prophetic event that gathers scattered Israel (Isaiah 11:11–12) prior to establishing the Kingdom; the elect in this passage are the Jews. Those who are elect in Christ will never endure God’s wrath.

Mid-Tribulation

The Mid-Tribulational view teaches that the Rapture will take place in the middle of the seven-year tribulation. This is not a particularly popular view. Adherents identify the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the last trumpet blast in Revelation 11:15. But a closer look at these two events does not support the idea that these events are one in the same. John Ryrie says,

This is a somewhat simplistic argument that assumes that all blowing of trumpets must indicate the same kind of event. This is not true...The seventh trumpet is a trumpet of judgment, whereas the trumpet in 1 Corinthians is one of resurrection and deliverance. That they indicate the same event is a gratuitous assumption.^[3]

This view tries to avoid putting the Church in the wrath of God, so they believe that they will be removed halfway through the Tribulation. This is why it is sometimes called a “Pre-Wrath” view. But this still puts the Church in the day of judgment, even if they miss the worst of it.

Pre-Tribulation

The third view believes that the Church will be caught up to meet the Lord prior to the Great Tribulation. This is known as the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. We hold to this view. The Church and Israel are distinct entities and the Great Tribulation is a time for the nation of Israel. They will experience the persecution of the Antichrist as spoken of by Daniel the prophet, Jesus and John (Daniel 7:25; Matthew 24:15–22; Revelation 12:1–6). The Lord promises to keep the Church from the specific trouble of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 3:7). Finally, the Bible teaches the imminent return of Christ for the Church – the belief that Christ could come at any minute (Philippians 4:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7–9; Revelation 3:11). If we are waiting for certain events to take place before Christ’s return, haven’t we lost that important theme of Scripture?

Conclusion

As pertains to salvation, it is not important which of these views is taken by a Christian – we’re all waiting for the return of the Lord. But it does matter for other reasons. First of all, we ought to study to show ourselves approved and fully examine every issue. And then it affects how we will live our lives and how we will conceive of God. Do we believe that the sacrifice of Jesus was enough to spare us from the wrath of God? Do we believe that God is good and will not punish the righteous with the unrighteous? The assurance of Paul makes little sense if impending death and judgment was right around the corner for the new believers in Thessalonica. Instead we can take joy in the hope of salvation and anticipate the coming of Jesus at any moment!

^[1] Cf. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 537.

^[2] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1093.

^[3] Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 581.