

The Rapture

JESUS' PROMISE. It is Thursday night, the day before Jesus dies and Jesus and His disciples have finished their passover meal. Judas has left to betray Jesus, and Jesus wants to encourage His disciples to love each other. Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to leave, and Peter objects because he wants to be with his master. So Jesus tries to encourage them and let them know that He is coming again,

Simon Peter *said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you shall follow later." Peter *said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." Jesus *answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a cock shall not crow, until you deny Me three times. "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (NASB) John 13:36-14:3

We call Jesus' first appearance here on earth His first coming or First Advent. When Jesus said, "I will come again," He was referring to His Second Coming or Second Advent - this is yet future. The disciples may have thought that Jesus' appearance after His resurrection was His second coming and may have thought He was going to establish His kingdom then. This may be why in Acts 1:6 the disciples asked Jesus when He was going to "restore the kingdom." But Jesus responded by saying it would not happen now, but later in the future.

THE FUTURE. What was Jesus talking about? In order to answer this question we must go to the Old Testament in the book of Daniel. The prophet Daniel gives us an amazing overview of Israel's future when he interprets a dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in Daniel 2:19-45. The dream was about a statue (see the illustration below) which symbolizes the future nations that would control Israel while they are in the land of Palestine. Daniel predicts a succession of empires starting with Babylon. The head is Babylon. The chest is Medo-Persia. The waist is Greece. The legs are Rome, and the feet and the stone are all future kingdoms. Each new kingdom not only defeats the preceding one but is stronger than the one before it and lasts longer.

The last controlling human empire is Rome. Rome was different from the other empires. It was never defeated, but appears to have dissolved from within. But according to Daniel's explanation, Rome will return in a different form as the feet. The feet are a revived form of the Roman empire since they are made of both iron and clay. Daniel explains the stone will then crush the feet (Dan. 2:34, 45). The stone is made without hands - they are from God. That is, God destroys the empire symbolized by the feet and immediately the stone becomes a great mountain. The mountain is a new kingdom which fills the whole earth (v. 35). The mountain is a symbol of the future eternal kingdom. Notice that each symbol is a kingdom or an empire - even the stone.

Daniel 7:3-7 presents the same information using four beasts: lion (Babylon), bear (Media-Persia), leopard (Greece), and a dreadful beast (Rome). The fourth beast is the dreadful beast. In the future, the revived Roman Empire will initially have ten horns. The ten horns are ten kings (Dan. 7:23-24). The empire ends up with eight horns (Dan. 7:7-8). One of the eight

The Great Statue

Daniel 2:36-45

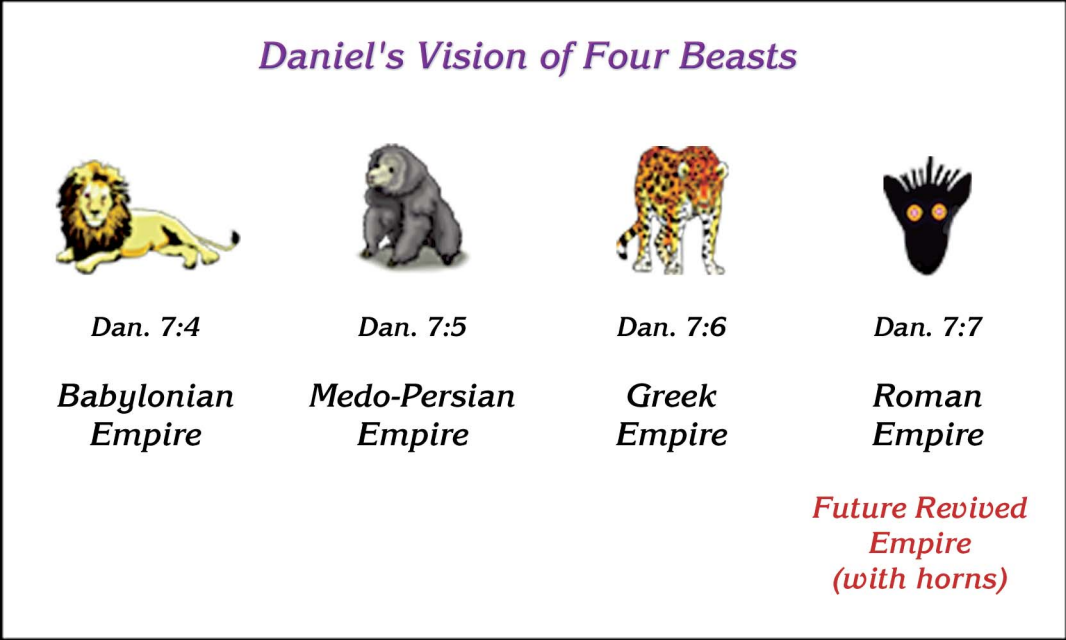


horns will be the anti-Christ or the man of sin. The fourth beast makes war with the saints (Dan. 7:21) during the last half of a period of time we call the Tribulation. The beast is defeated when the Ancient of Days comes (Dan. 7:11-12). This is the second coming of Jesus. It is interesting to note the defeated beast is later released and given an “extension of time” (Dan. 7:12; Rev. 20:1-10). But he is finally defeated (see Dan. 7:13-14), and Christ’s kingdom is established - an eternal kingdom (Dan. 7:21-28). Praise the Lord!

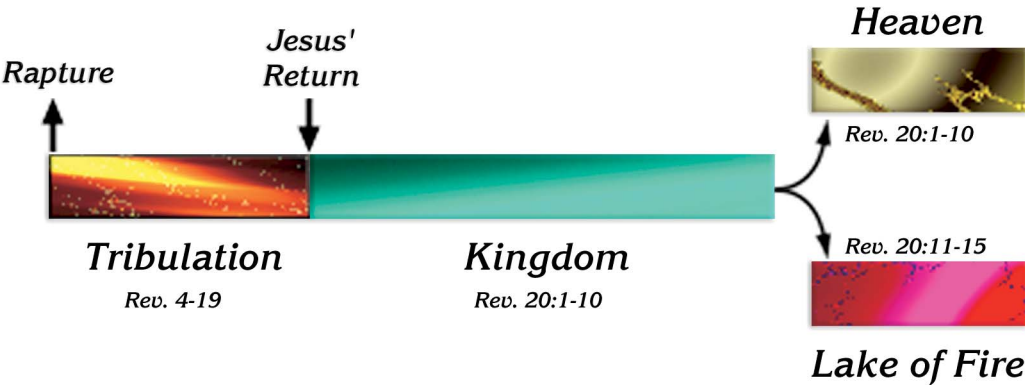
In Daniel 9:24-27, the prophet Daniel describes a dream about the future - a time we call the “70 weeks of Daniel.” There are two prophecies in this passage. An outline of the future events is illustrated in the figure below. The first prophecy predicts the time Jesus would die. This occurs at the end of Daniel’s “69 weeks” which is 483 years (69 x 7 years per week = 483 years). It was a literal fulfillment, not a figurative or symbolic fulfillment.

The second prophecy is about Daniel’s 70th week or the seven year Tribulation. It is split in half (3.5 year plus 3.5 years). In other places in scripture, the 3.5 years are also called “time, times and half a time” (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 12:14), 42 months (Rev. 11:1-2) and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3).

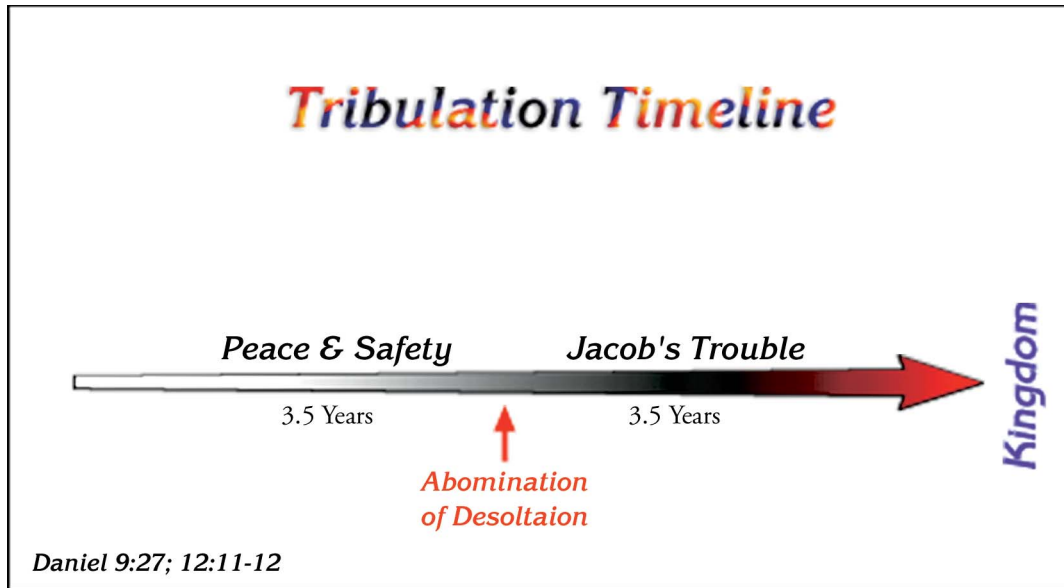
THE TRIBULATION. The first part of the Tribulation is a time of peace and safety because the antichrist or “the prince” makes a covenant of peace for 3.5 years (Dan. 9:27). The peace is broken in the middle of the week when the abomination



of desolation occurs. This fact is first revealed in Dan. 7:24-25 where the large horn or anti-Christ (fourth beast) ruled for “time, times and half a time” or 3.5 years before he was defeated. It is also repeated in Daniel 12:7-11 and Rev. 11:2 and is explained in detail in Revelation 4-19. Daniel 12:1 again refers to a time of suffering or the Tribulation. Daniel 12:11-13 also refers to an approximate 3.5 year period and the abomination of desolation. Note the agreement with Rev. 11:1-3 and especially Rev. 13:1-8. What is the next future event?



DISCIPLES' EXPECTATION. Daniel's 70th week did not occur immediately after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus told them it was future (Acts 1:3-7). The disciples did not expect the kingdom to come immediately. This is true for at least two reasons. First, Peter did not expect the kingdom or a Rapture during his life time on this earth because Jesus told him he would die on a cross (history says Peter died on a cross upside down),



Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. (NASB) John 21:18-19

History tells us that Peter died in A.D. 67-68 hanging upside down on a cross - just like Jesus said. Paul did not expect the kingdom or a Rapture until he had witnessed about Jesus in Rome because the Lord had told him,

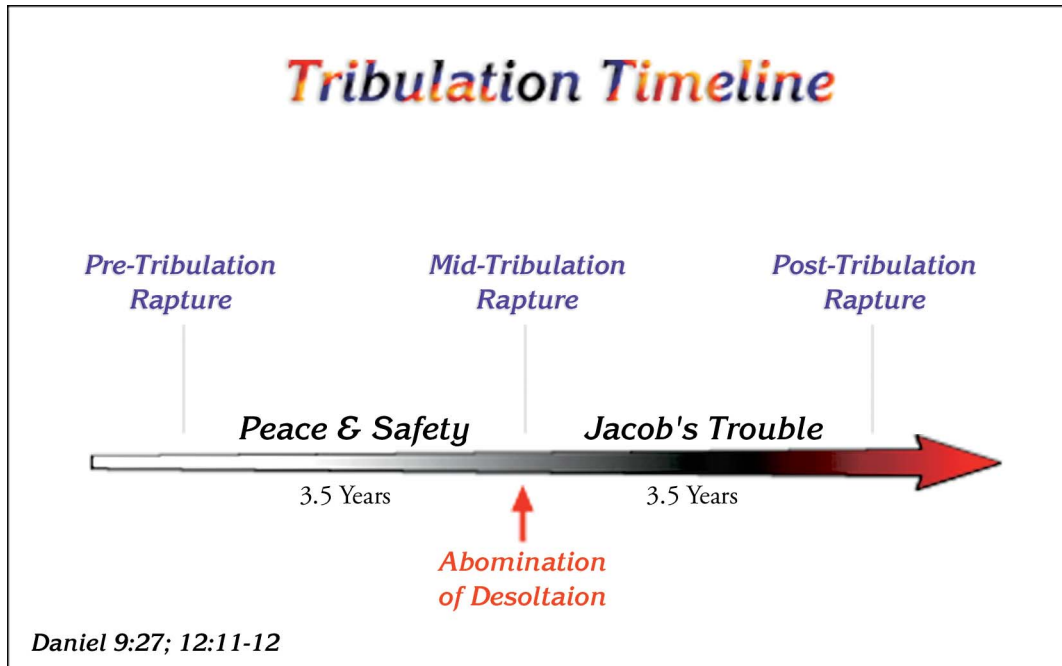
“Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.” (NASB) Acts 23:11

It is clear the early church had high expectations of Jesus’ return, but the apostles had to let them know Jesus’ return was still distant. This is the message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians (50 A.D.). In both letters, Paul encourages them that Jesus has not come yet and he tells them what to look for. The apostle John, who was Jesus’ best friend, did not experience the kingdom or the Rapture during his life time either. History affirms that he wrote the epistle of Revelation between 90-96 A.D. He was later banished to the Isle of Patmos and died a natural death.

The apostles believed the next prophetic future event was near, but not immediate. It was the removal of Christians (Rapture) from this earth before the Tribulation. It is clear that Peter did not expect Jesus to come tomorrow, yet he knew the signs of His coming (2 Peter 3:9-13).

THE RAPTURE. The Rapture refers to the removal of Christians from this world by Jesus before the great period of suffering starts (Tribulation). 1 Thess. 4:15-17 describes the Rapture,

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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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 4:15-17



There are three major views as to when the Rapture will occur. They are called the pretribulation rapture, midtribulation rapture, and posttribulation rapture (see illustration above). The pretribulation rapture simply means that Christians will be removed from this world (Rapture) by God before a great period of suffering starts (tribulation). The midtribulation view says the Rapture occurs in the middle of the tribulation. The posttribulation view says the Rapture occurs at the end of the tribulation. All three views have some weaknesses, but I believe the pretribulation view best agrees with scripture.

Comment	Passage
SIGN OF JESUS'S COMING APPEAR (temple built, apostasy, famine, war, earthquakes, beginning of birth pangs, etc.)	2 Thess. 2:3-5; Matt. 24:3-14
RAPTURE OCCURS - Christians are caught up to Jesus in the air	1 Thess. 4:13-17
START OF TRIBULATION - Man of Sin comes	Dan. 9:27
Peace & safety - Covenant	1 Thess. 5:2-3; Dan. 9:27
Birth pangs - Suffering has arrived	1 Thess 5:3; Matt. 24:7-8
Abomination of Desolation	Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess 2:3-4
Jacob's Trouble - Great Tribulation	Matt. 24:21; Jer. 30:7
SECOND COMING - Jesus comes, conquers the nations and destroys the Man of Sin	Matt. 24:29-31; 2 Thess. 2:8-12
KINGDOM ESTABLISHED - Jesus reigns	Dan. 7:21-28; Rev. 19:11-20:6
SATAN RELEASED - Last war	Dan. 7:12; Rev. 20:7-10
JUDGMENT - Book of Life is opened	Dan. 12:1-3; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15
HEAVEN OR HADES - Eternal Life with God or eternal suffering away from God	Dan. 12:2-3; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 21-22; 2 Thess 1:9

The heart of the pretribulation position starts with Daniel, a book that has proven to be literally, historically accurate. -It is here we are told that the “prince,” “man of lawlessness,” or the antichrist will make a firm covenant of peace at the beginning of the seven years of tribulation (Daniel 9:27).

When does the Rapture occur? According to 2 Thess. 2:1-3 the Rapture (v. 1) occurs before the Day of the Lord (v. 2) which comes after the spiritual apostasy and after the man of lawlessness appears (v. 3-4). The table above presents a timeline of events.

The pretribulation view is rejected by some because Jesus said the end would come as a thief in the night (Matt. 24:43). They ask, “How can the Rapture (Jesus’ catching up the Christians) come as a thief in the night when the signs of Jesus coming are visible? 1 Thess. 5:4-6 answers the question by explaining that Christians should not be surprised. We will know - it is the world that will be surprised.

CONCLUSION. The next prophetic event is the Rapture of Christians before the Tribulation period. At the end of the Tribulation, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings - Jesus Christ - will come in glory and power and defeat the world’s armies. He will establish His kingdom which will have no end: an earthly temporary reign and then an eternal glorious reign called the new heaven and new earth. Praise God!