

The Rapture and the Boy Who Cried Wolf – Part 1

Introduction:

1. Remember the story of the little boy who cried wolf? He cried, "Wolf!" when there was no wolf so many times that people stopped taking him seriously. When the wolf finally did show up, it was a disaster.
2. I believe that the evangelical community has cried wolf so many times in regards to the Rapture of the church that there has been a serious loss of integrity. Many people fail to take us seriously because of how many times we've cried wolf.
3. Here is how it works - a world event occurs and the church cries wolf. They say things like, "The end is near." "You better pack your bags because we are about to leave." "It's *'the signs of the times.'*" "The fig tree is budding." "It can't be long now."
4. This makes for good drama and sensationalism. It may sell books, it may work people up into hysteria, it may even guilt-trip some Christians to do what the preacher wants them to do for a little while, but in the long run it is destructive.
5. Let me provide two examples of this:
 - The book "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988" - Edgar Whisenant
 - Brochure from church about the fig tree
6. I was thinking back through my years of ministry here at Crossroads and the different world events that led preachers and Christians to say that the end was near (Gulf War in 1990, Clinton's elections in 1992 and 1996, Israel's 50-year anniversary in 1998, Y2K in 2000, 911 in 2001, the war in Iraq in 2003, Obama's election). These are just a few.
7. I am so thankful that I have never jumped on the bandwagon of sensationalizing these events in an effort to get people to believe that the end of the world was near or the Rapture was sure to happen any day.
8. In this Bible Study, there are three biblical facts we will examine that would alleviate this foolishness and confusion if people would understand them.

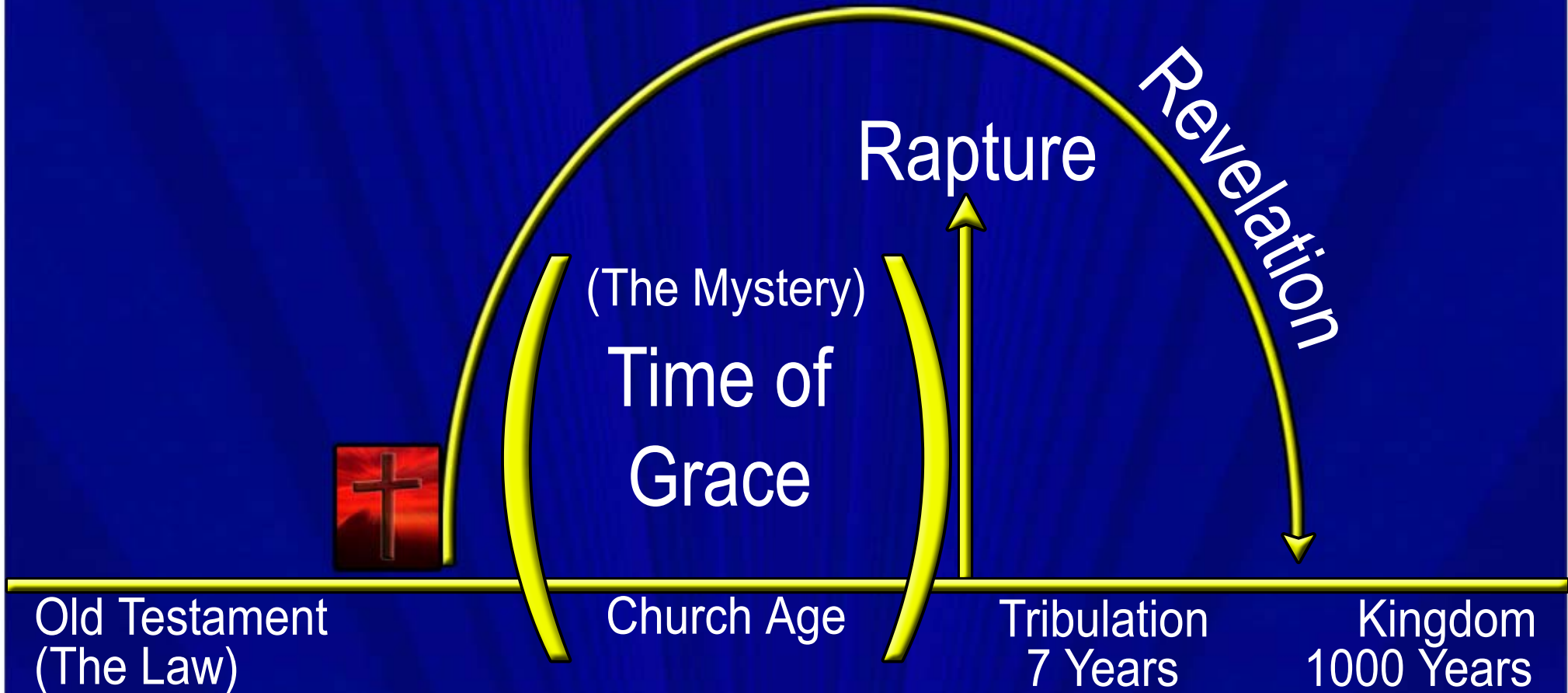
First fact: We are living in the time of the mystery, not prophecy.

1. Your Bible can be broken into two major divisions - mystery and prophecy.
 - The subject of prophecy has been revealed by God to his prophets **since the world began. Luke 1:68-70; Acts 3:21, 24; 2 Peter 1:21**
 - In contrast to this, the mystery of the body of Christ was kept **secret** since the world began (**Romans 16:25**), and was **not made known** in other ages (**Ephesians 3:9**), was **hid** from ages and from generations (**Colossians 1:26**) until revealed to and through the apostle Paul (**Ephesians 3:3**).
2. It is amazing how many believers are ignorant as to these two distinct programs.
3. Who do these programs deal with?
 - Prophecy deals with Israel and their relationship to the Gentile nations. This distinction is seen throughout the Bible. Example: **Isaiah 2:1-5, 59:20-60:3**
 - The mystery is all about a new living organism that God has created called the body of Christ (**Ephesians 2:14-16**). In the mystery program there is absolutely no distinction between Jew and Gentile (**Galatians 3:28; Romans 10:12**). In the mystery program, God is not dealing with nations, but individuals.

4. God has two distinct ultimate purposes for these two programs:
 - The **earth** would involve the subject of **prophecy**, that is, Christ one day ruling and reigning over a visible kingdom on the literal earth in Jerusalem, with Israel as the head, and the nations of the earth subject to Christ and the nation of Israel. **Zechariah 8:20-23, 14:9, 16**
 - The **heaven** would involve the subject of the mystery, that is, a people whose citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**), raised with Christ and seated in the heavenlies (**Ephesians 2:6**), and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (**Ephesians 1:3**).
5. When people fail to understand this great division of the Bible, they begin to do ludicrous things like set dates for the end of the present-day **mystery** program based on Scriptures and events in the **prophetic** program.
6. To tell the church that the Rapture could happen at any moment is absolutely right and should be reiterated. But to convince people that it **has** to occur soon based on a world event is subjective and very speculative.
7. People have been engaging in this kind of thing heavily for the past 60 years and we are still here and the Rapture has not occurred.
8. **There are no timetables** for when this mystery program called the dispensation of grace must end. Only God knows how long He will continue to extend this time of grace. It could be a day or a thousand years. God is under no time restraint.
 - Trying to look at world events and determine the timing or nearness of the Rapture is an exercise in utter futility. The church needs to quit doing this and focus on preaching the gospel of Christ with the time we **do** have.
9. On the other hand, there **are** timetables for the prophetic program which we will discuss in the next point.

(Please scroll down to view timeline charts.)

BASIC TIMELINE



GOD'S PROPHETIC PROGRAM

