

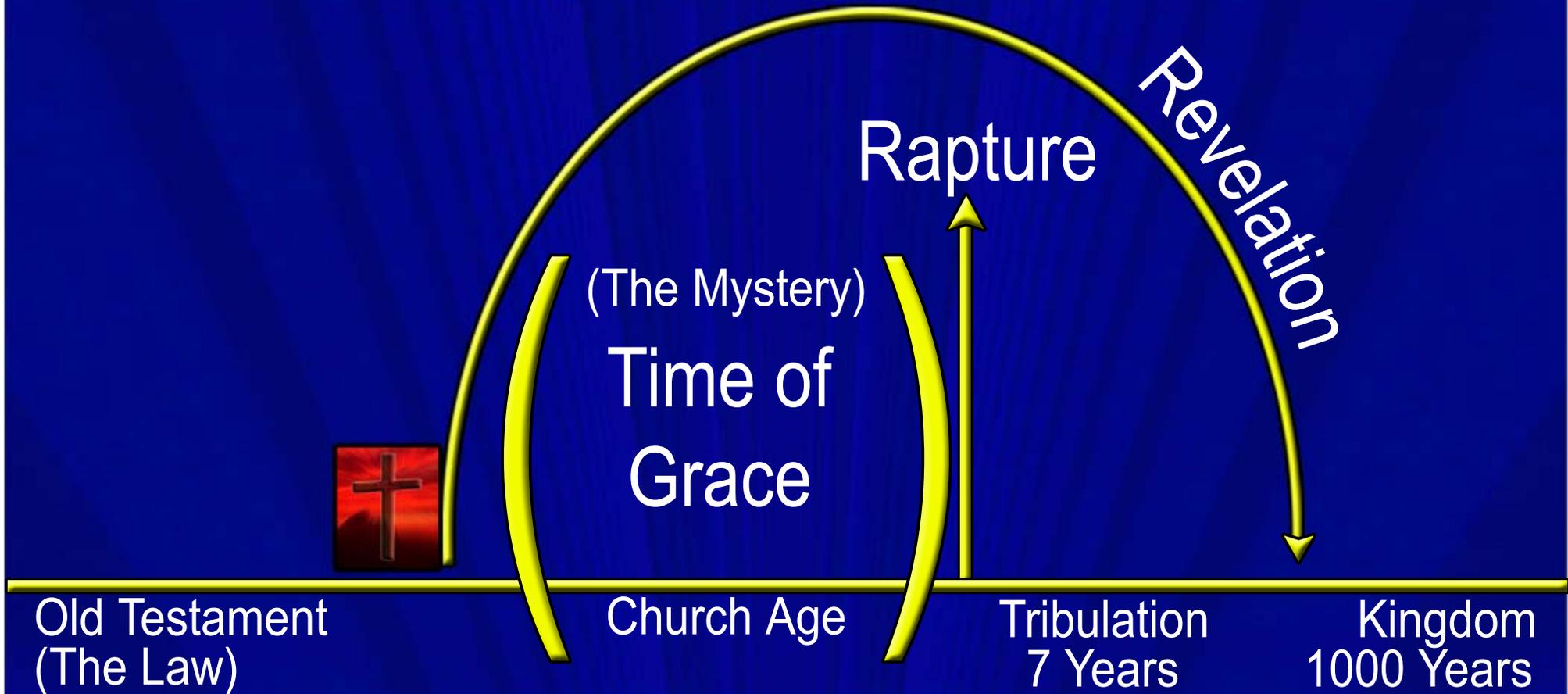
The Rapture - A Mystery Revealed Through Paul

1. The dispensation of grace that we live in was revealed to the apostle Paul. It was a mystery time period of grace that was hidden in God and kept secret since the world began. **Colossians 1:25-26; Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:1-6**
2. Likewise, the event that will end this dispensation is also said to have been a mystery (a secret, something not revealed and made known yet). **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**
3. If the Rapture of the church is the event that Jesus taught about in **Matthew 24:36-42**, there are two serious issues to consider:
 - First, what Paul taught about the Rapture would not have been a mystery at all. It would have been a well-known truth to the twelve, made known and revealed by Christ on earth. Paul would have been mistaken and our Bible incorrect.
 - Second, this would also mean that the church will go through most all of the tribulation time period. This is the context of “the return” of Matthew 24. This “taking away” coincides with Christ's Second Coming to earth.
4. What is the answer? The answer is to look at the context. In Matthew 24 Jesus is describing a time period that he breaks into two sections:
 - The Beginning of Sorrows - **Matthew 24:4-8**
 - Great Tribulation - **Matthew 24:15-21**
5. All of this ends with Christ returning in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (vs.30). Christ then sits on a throne in Jerusalem and all nations of the earth are gathered before Him for judgment. **Matthew 25:31-33**
6. All of these events will happen quickly and the generation that begins to see these things unfold (the events of Matthew 24) will not pass until Christ returns and sets up His kingdom on earth. **Matthew 24:32-34**
7. So who are the people that are taken away in **Matthew 24:37-41**?
 - These are the “*tares*” of Matthew 13:38. They are the children of the wicked one.
 - When Christ returns to the earth, the “*tares*” are gathered **out** of Christ's kingdom, and the angels take them out and cast them into a furnace of fire. You don't want to be taken **out** at the end of the Tribulation! **Matthew 13:40-42**
 - Those who are designated as “*righteous*” will stay on earth and will shine forth in Christ's kingdom. **Matthew 13:43**
 - Redeemed Israel, who has been scattered by the anti-Christ, will be gathered **together** by the angels and placed in their land never to be removed again. The tares are gathered **out**, Israel is gathered **together**. **Matthew 24:31**; cf. **Isaiah 11:10-12**
8. To summarize, when Christ returns to the earth, there are three groups in view:
 - Those taken or gathered **out** of His kingdom and cast into a furnace of fire.
 - Those left on the earth (the righteous) who are allowed to stay and shine in His kingdom.
 - The elect (redeemed Israel) who are gathered **together** from the four corners of earth and heaven and placed in their land with Christ their Messiah reigning on the Davidic throne.

9. None of this is said to be a mystery. It is all part of God's prophetic plan for Israel and this earth and made clear during Christ's earthly ministry.
10. Many years later, Paul reveals "*a mystery*" to the church, body of Christ. It is an event in which believers (both living and dead) are instantaneously changed and given bodies that are incorruptible and immortal. **1 Corinthians 15:51-53**
11. This event involves Christ descending from heaven and those who are in Christ (both dead and living) being caught up from the earth to meet Christ in the air. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**
12. Never confuse the Second Coming of Christ to earth with the Rapture of the church, the body of Christ.
 - The Second Coming involves deliverance for Israel; the Rapture involves deliverance for the body of Christ. **Romans 11:26-27**
 - At the Second Coming, Christ comes to the earth; at the Rapture, Christ descends from heaven and the body of Christ meets Him in the air.
 - The Second Coming of Christ is a public appearance that the world will witness (**Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7**); the Rapture takes place quicker than the blink of an eye. **1 Corinthians 15:52**

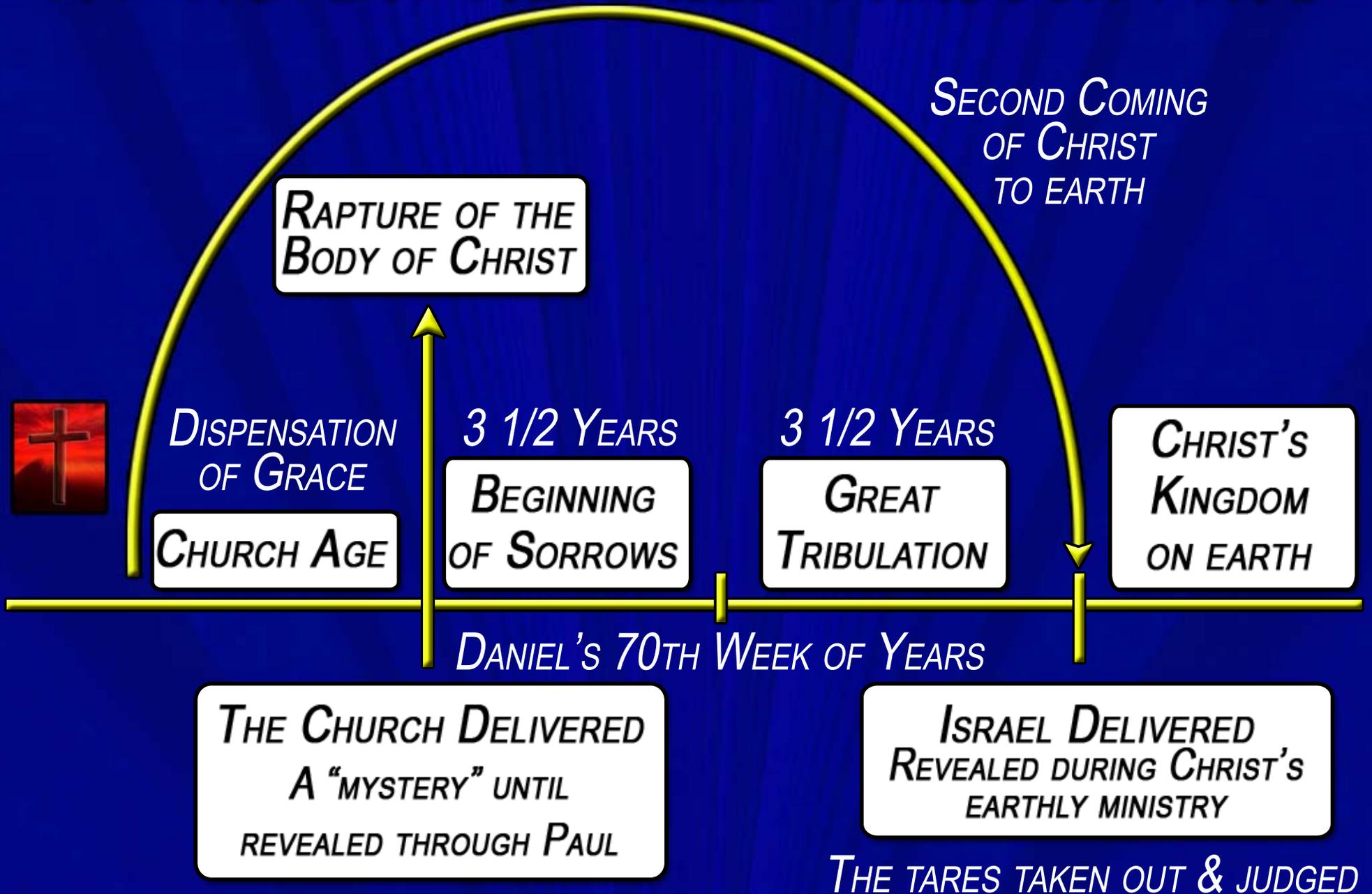
(Please scroll down to view timeline charts.)

BASIC TIMELINE



THE RAPTURE

A MYSTERY REVEALED THROUGH PAUL



The Rapture: Before Daniel's Seventieth Week

Introduction:

1. There are many today who teach that the church, the body of Christ, will have to endure part or all of the Tribulation time period described in Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation in detail.
2. One of the primary reasons for this is a lack of understanding concerning what God is doing today in the formation of the church, the body of Christ.
3. In this lesson, we will examine the prophecy of Daniel concerning the 70 weeks of Israel in **Daniel 9:24-27**. This will help us to understand why the church, the body of Christ, will not be involved in the Tribulation time period.

First, 70 weeks of years are determined upon Israel. vs. 24

1. This prophecy is very clear. Seventy weeks are determined upon Daniel's people. Who were Daniel's people? Israel. The next phrase makes this clear beyond doubt when the angel says, "*...and upon thy holy city...*" This is the city of Jerusalem.
 - This is 70 weeks determined upon a physical people and a physical city.
2. The word "weeks" simply means "seven." The idea is "seventy sevens."
3. When we look at the context of the passage it is clear that the prophet is referring to seventy weeks of years.
 - Each week is not seven days, but seven years.
 - Seventy weeks would equal 490 years.
4. What would happen at the end of the 490 years according to this prophecy in verse 24?
 - Neither Israel nor Jerusalem will ever be transgressed again.
 - There will be full reconciliation for iniquity.
 - There will be a bringing in of everlasting righteousness.
 - The most Holy (Jesus Christ) will be anointed as King.
5. This is the fulfillment of the New Covenant that God promised Israel.
Ezekiel 36:16-38, 37:21-28; Jeremiah 31:31-40

Second, these 70 weeks of years are said to begin with a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. vs. 25

1. The Persian King Artaxerxes made this decree in **Nehemiah 2:1-10**. He made a decree that Nehemiah could return and lead a rebuilding project in Jerusalem. Don't confuse this with the decree from Cyrus in Ezra 1. This decree dealt with the rebuilding of the temple.
2. When did King Artaxerxes make this decree to kick off the first of Daniel's 70 weeks of years? It came on March 14, 445 B.C.
3. In the first 49 years (7 weeks) the city would be rebuilt, including the street and the wall. vs. 25

Third, after 69 weeks (483 years), Messiah would be cut off. vs. 26

1. The Bible breaks it down this way:
 - Seven weeks (49 years) of rebuilding.
 - After 62 more weeks (434 years) Messiah would be cut off.

- This equals a period of 483 Biblical years.
2. This takes you exactly to the time period in which Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem and presented Himself as Israel's Messiah. **Luke 19:28-44**
 3. Only His disciples (the little flock) recognized Him as the Messiah. The leadership of Israel refused to acknowledge Him as their Messiah. **Luke 19:39-40**
 4. Jesus then proceeds to weep over Jerusalem (**Luke 19:41-44**) because they are oblivious to the fact that this day was the time of their visitation.
 5. This was Israel's decision day, but as a nation they chose to cut off their Messiah which culminated a few days later in the crucifixion of their Messiah.

What happened to the last week of years?

1. Just like Daniel prophesied, Messiah was cut off after 69 weeks of years, but Daniel was told that 70 weeks were determined upon Israel, and after 70 weeks Messiah would bring everlasting righteousness and the transgression of Israel and Jerusalem would be finished.
2. We are also told that during the 70th week, a prince will come and make a seven-year covenant with many, but at the mid-point of the seven years he will bring an end to the temple worship and commit great abominations. He will eventually (within the seven years) destroy Jerusalem and the temple.
vs. 27
3. None of these events happened in the seven years after the cross. Nor has Christ brought everlasting righteousness to Jerusalem or made an end of sins in Israel.
4. What happened to the 70th week?

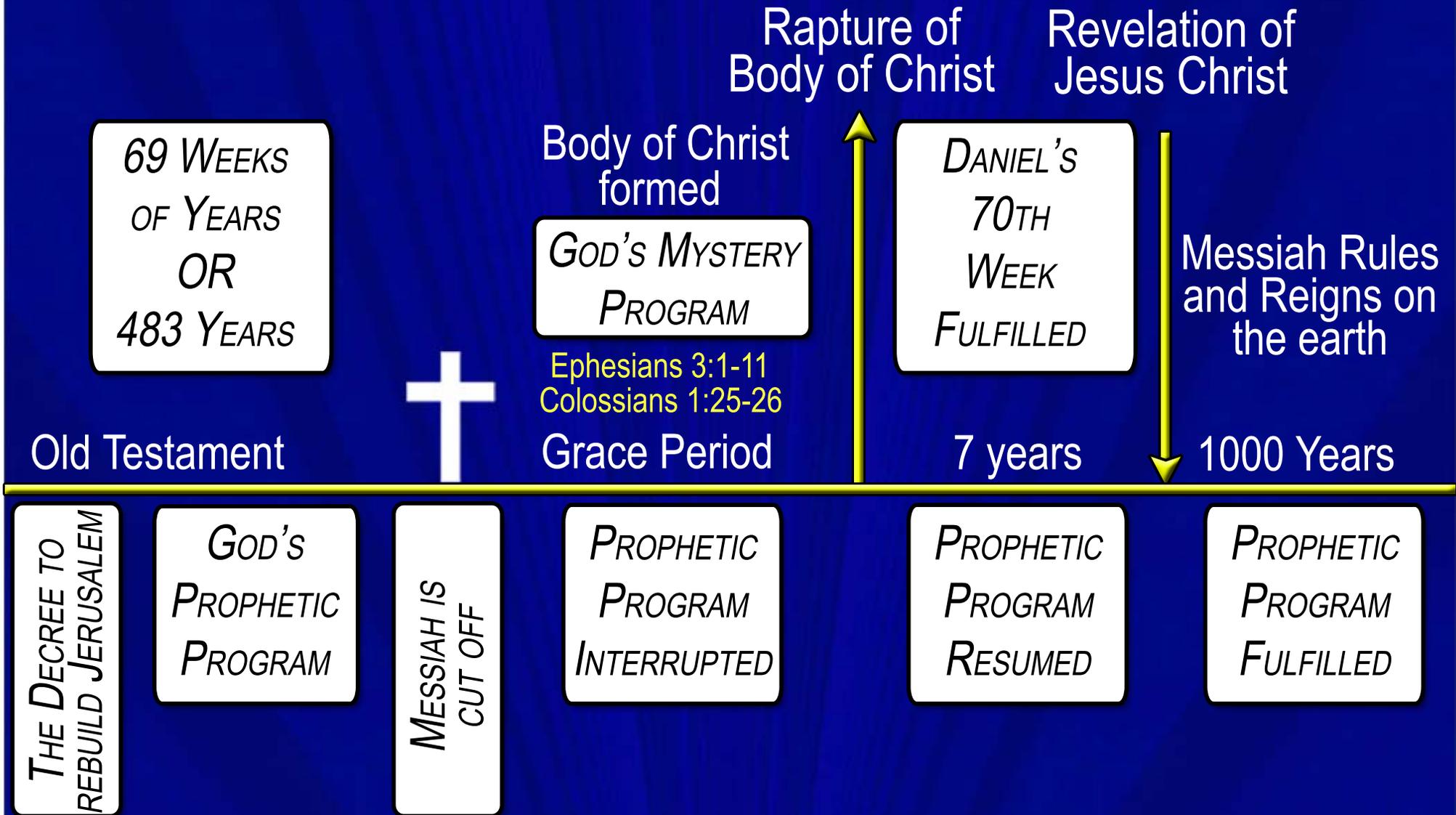
Fourth, the 70th week of Daniel still awaits its fulfillment.

1. After Israel cut off their Messiah, God's wrath was supposed to come on the nation of Israel. Christ (the rejected King) would ascend to heaven and begin to make His enemies His footstool by opening up the seal judgments that would kick off the 70th week. Revelation 5-6
2. This was the prophesied program (Psalm 2), but hidden in God was a secret purpose that He did not reveal to anybody until the "*due time*."
3. Instead of bringing wrath on Israel, Christ appeared suddenly to the ringleader of Israel's rebellion (Saul of Tarsus) and saved him in sheer grace. **Acts 9:1-9**
4. He then revealed to Paul the mystery that He had kept hidden from the foundation of the world. There would be a time of unprecedented **grace** for the world in between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel.
5. During this time God would form a new creation, a new organism called the church, the body of Christ. Paul called it "the dispensation of...grace." **Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25-26**
6. We are living in a grace time period in between Daniel's 69th and 70th week. The prophetic program for Israel has been temporarily postponed and suspended. The prophetic time clock has stopped.
7. Daniel's 70th week is determined upon Daniel's people - Israel. The body of Christ was not in the first 69 weeks, nor will it be in the 70th.

8. Daniel's 70th week **will** happen, and God will have a little flock to witness to Israel and the world (**Revelation 7:4-8**). God **will** complete the prophetic program.
9. But prior to Daniel's 70th week, God will bring this dispensation to a close by means of the Rapture (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). The body of Christ will take its place and fulfill its purpose in the heavenlies (**Ephesians 2:6-7**).

(Please scroll down to view timeline chart.)

DANIEL'S 70 WEEKS (DANIEL 9:24-27)



70 weeks are determined on Daniel's people (Israel) and the holy city (Jerusalem).

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.
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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.
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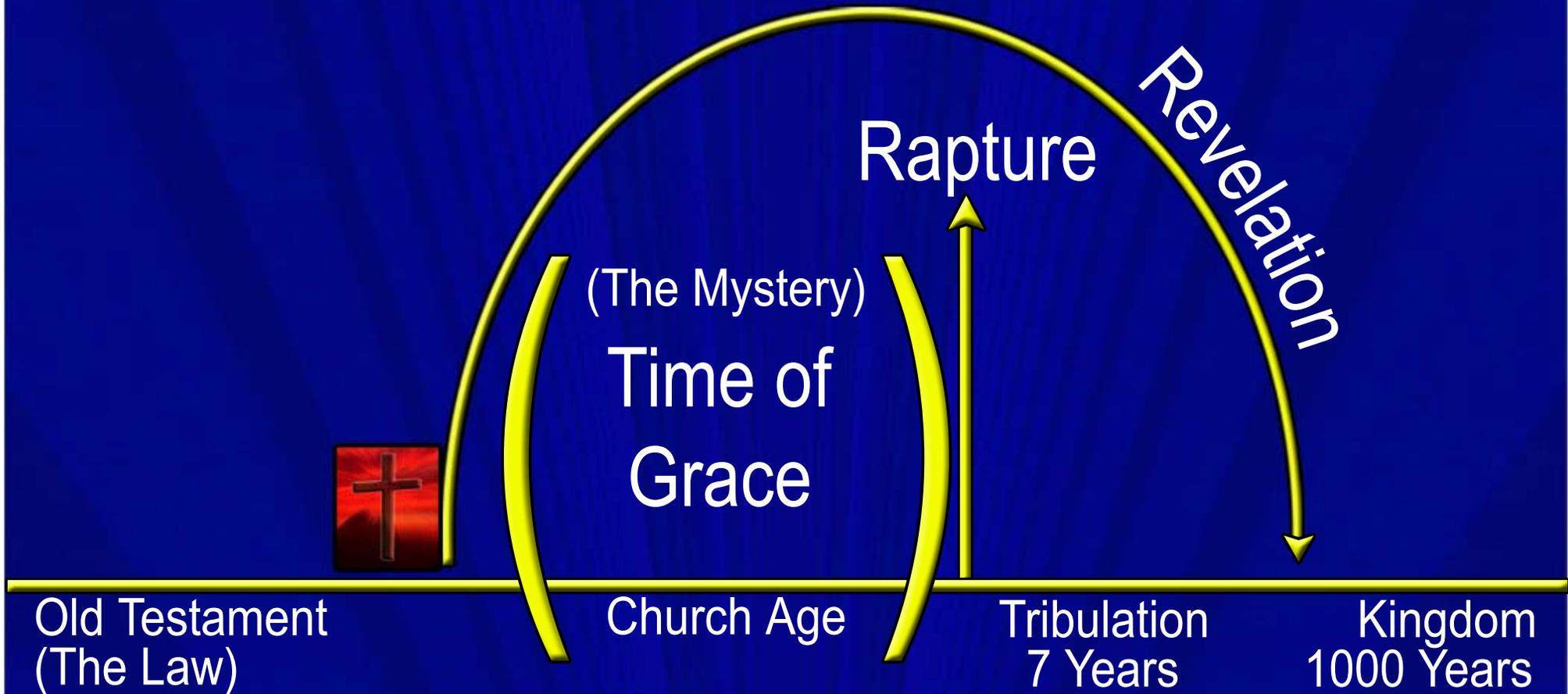
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2. It is amazing how many believers are ignorant as to these two distinct programs.
3. Who do these programs deal with?
 - Prophecy deals with Israel and their relationship to the Gentile nations. This distinction is seen throughout the Bible. Example: **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.

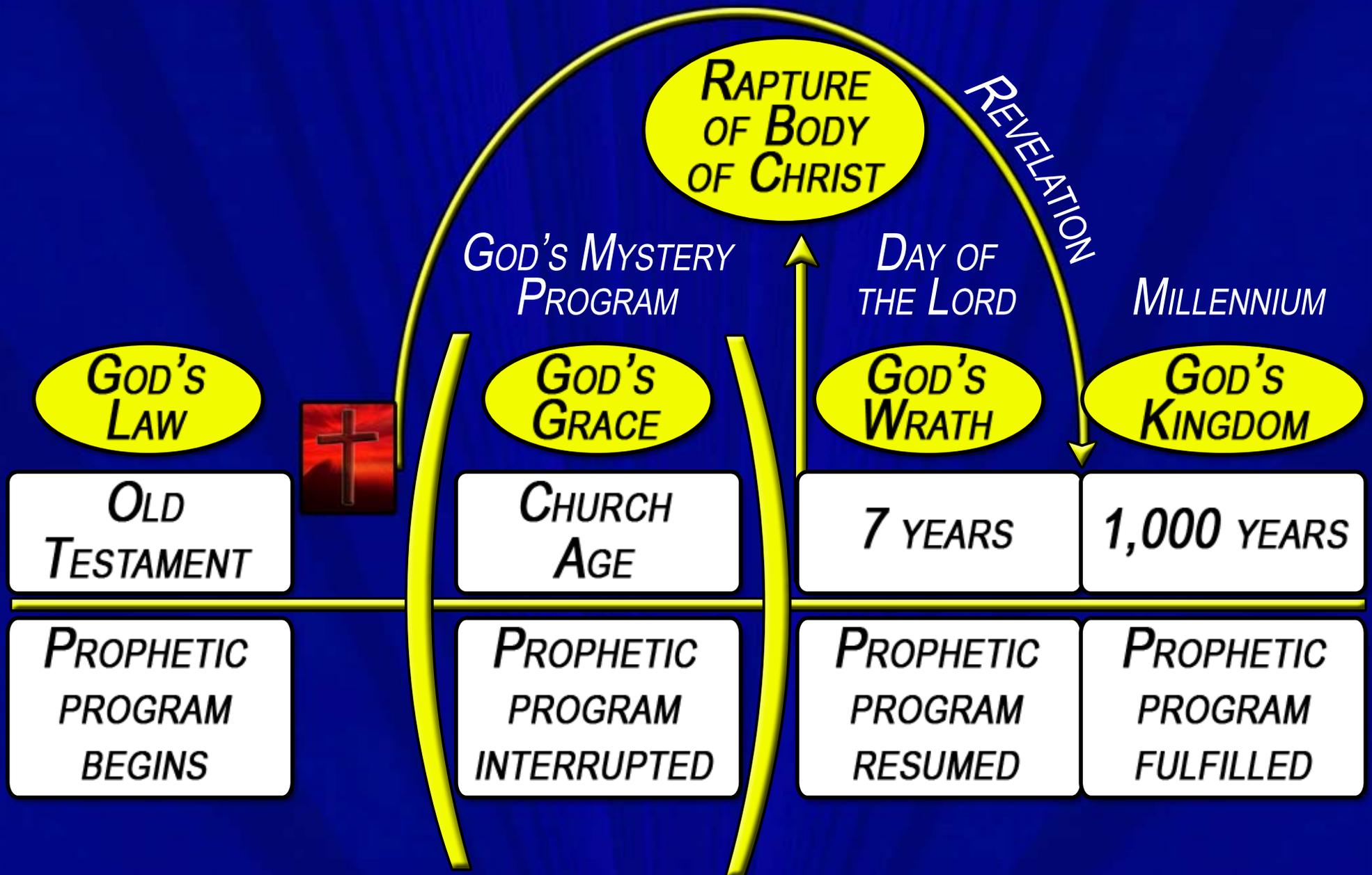
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 - The **earth** would involve the subject of **prophecy**, that is, Christ one day ruling and reigning over a visible kingdom on the literal earth in Jerusalem, with Israel as the head, and the nations of the earth subject to Christ and the nation 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.
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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



The Rapture and the Boy Who Cried Wolf – Part 2

Introduction:

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 - 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**
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Second fact: Signs of Christ's coming are for Israel, not the body of Christ.

1. In **Matthew 24:3**, the twelve ask Jesus a very pointed and direct question: "*...what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*"
 - The word "sign" simply means "an indication."
2. So the twelve say, "Jesus, give us some indicators of when you are going to come and do away with this world system and replace it with your glorious kingdom."
3. Jesus does just this in verses 4-31. It will be an unprecedented time of:
 - Spiritual deception. vs. 5, 11, 23-26
 - War among nations. vs. 6-7
 - Geological disturbances and disasters. vs. 7
 - Persecution against Israel. vs. 9, 15-21
4. The good news of Christ's approaching kingdom will be proclaimed unto all nations (vs. 14), then there will be supernatural disturbances in the heavens (vs. 29), and Christ will return with power and great glory (vs. 30).
5. When Christ gets all done giving them these signs, He uses an illustration of a fig tree. vs. 32
 - A fig tree will begin to put forth its leaves and buds in late spring and may even yield a small crop of figs. But the main harvest time is in late summer.

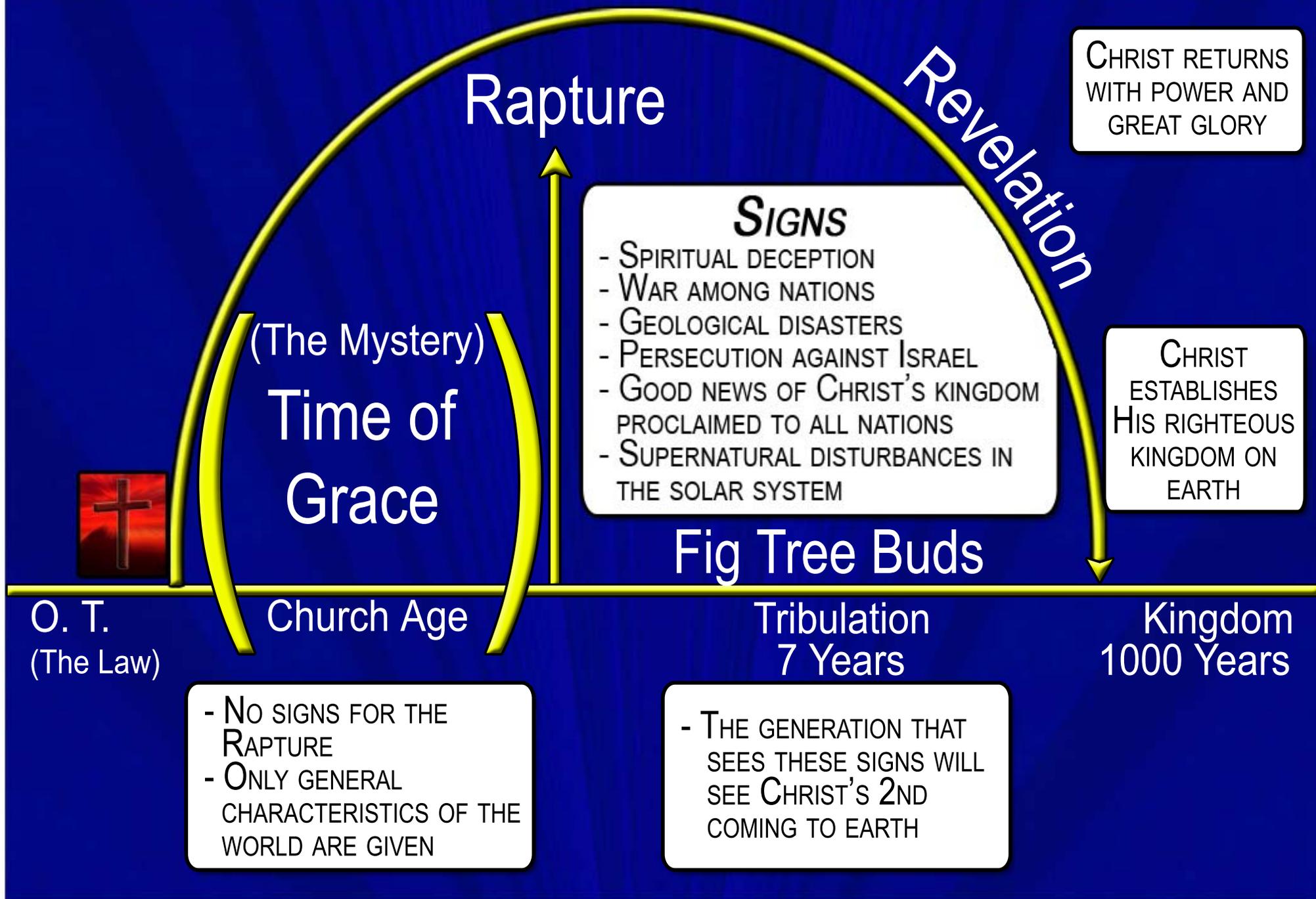
- When a fig tree begins to put forth its leaves and buds appear, you know that winter is over, spring is here, and that summertime is near. The sign of the branches and leaves tell you where you are at in regards to the time of harvest.
 - If you are paying attention, then you know that harvest time is getting close.
 - Christ's coming and the end of the world is likened to harvest time.
- Matthew 13:39**
6. In verse 33, Jesus applies this illustration to their original question in verse 3.
 - When they begin to see the events (signs) of verses 4-31 unfold, they will know that His coming (summer or harvest time) is near, "*even at the doors.*"
 7. You will hear people say that when Israel became a nation in 1948, this was the proverbial budding of the fig tree, so we know the end is close. It has now been over 60 years, and the events in Matthew 24 have not taken place.
 8. **Matthew 24:32** has nothing to do with Israel gaining status as a nation. And anybody that attempts to set dates based on that assumption will fail.
 - One sidenote: The fig tree doesn't represent Israel nationally in the Bible. It is the vine tree that represents the national life of Israel. **Isaiah 5:1, 7**
 - The vine tree speaks of the fact that God has made Israel a nation in the earth, and when the life of Israel as a nation is considered, it is the vine tree, not fig tree.
 9. Jesus said, "*...This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*"
 - What generation? The generation that sees the signs of Matthew 24 come to pass.
 10. How does this apply to us today living in the time of grace?
 11. Nowhere does your apostle (Paul) instruct you to look for signs in order to figure out the timing of the Rapture.
 12. Two of the last books Paul wrote were 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul mentions "*the latter times*" in **1 Timothy 4:1** and "*the last days*" in **2 Timothy 3:1**.
 - In both these passages, Paul gave general descriptions of what would characterize this world.
 - Any believer from the time the Romans sacked and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 until the present could look at these characteristics and see them ever present in their culture.
 13. When the Word of God was completed and Israel was judged and scattered in A.D. 70, we have, in essence, been living right on the precipice of the last days.
 - At any moment, this time of grace could end, and the last days in the prophetic program could commence and the events of Matthew 24 could unfold.
 - There are no signs for the Rapture and the end of this time of grace. God only gave us general characteristics that have been true of every generation in this time of grace.
 14. A person can look at world events in this time of grace and speculate whether they are a precursor to some of the events in Matthew 24, but that is exactly what it is - speculation!
 - People have been doing this for decades and even centuries, but we are still here.
 - The only way to know if a world event **today** is a precursor to something that will happen in the Tribulation will be **after** the fact. In other words, after the

Rapture you could look back and say, "Hey, that event was a foreshadowing of something in the prophetic program."

- There is no way to know that now. Those who are trying to "read the signs" and get people all worked up and convinced that the Rapture has to happen at any moment become like the boy who cried wolf. After a while, people stop listening.
 - The prophetic program gives definite world events and time tables, but the mystery program of today does not.
15. What should we do then? Quit trying to look for prophetic signs and take that energy and use it to proclaim the gospel of Christ while we still have time!

(Please scroll down to view timeline chart.)

SIGNS OF CHRIST'S RETURN TO EARTH



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2. So the twelve say, "Jesus, give us some indicators of when you are going to come and do away with this world system and replace it with your glorious kingdom."
3. Jesus does just this in verses 4-31. It will be an unprecedented time of:
 - Spiritual deception. vs. 5, 11, 23-26
 - War among nations. vs. 6-7
 - Geological disturbances and disasters. vs. 7
 - Persecution against Israel. vs. 9, 15-21
4. The good news of Christ's approaching kingdom will be proclaimed unto all nations (vs. 14), then there will be supernatural disturbances in the heavens (vs. 29), and Christ will return with power and great glory (vs. 30).
5. When Christ gets all done giving them these signs, He uses an illustration of a fig tree. vs. 32
 - A fig tree will begin to put forth its leaves and buds in late spring and may even yield a small crop of figs. But the main harvest time is in late summer.

- When a fig tree begins to put forth its leaves and buds appear, you know that winter is over, spring is here, and that summertime is near. The sign of the branches and leaves tell you where you are at in regards to the time of harvest.
 - If you are paying attention, then you know that harvest time is getting close.
 - Christ's coming and the end of the world is likened to harvest time.
- Matthew 13:39**
6. In verse 33, Jesus applies this illustration to their original question in verse 3.
 - When they begin to see the events (signs) of verses 4-31 unfold, they will know that His coming (summer or harvest time) is near, "*even at the doors.*"
 7. You will hear people say that when Israel became a nation in 1948, this was the proverbial budding of the fig tree, so we know the end is close. It has now been over 60 years, and the events in Matthew 24 have not taken place.
 8. **Matthew 24:32** has nothing to do with Israel gaining status as a nation. And anybody that attempts to set dates based on that assumption will fail.
 - One sidenote: The fig tree doesn't represent Israel nationally in the Bible. It is the vine tree that represents the national life of Israel. **Isaiah 5:1, 7**
 - The vine tree speaks of the fact that God has made Israel a nation in the earth, and when the life of Israel as a nation is considered, it is the vine tree, not fig tree.
 9. Jesus said, "*...This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*"
 - What generation? The generation that sees the signs of Matthew 24 come to pass.
 10. How does this apply to us today living in the time of grace?
 11. Nowhere does your apostle (Paul) instruct you to look for signs in order to figure out the timing of the Rapture.
 12. Two of the last books Paul wrote were 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul mentions "*the latter times*" in **1 Timothy 4:1** and "*the last days*" in **2 Timothy 3:1**.
 - In both these passages, Paul gave general descriptions of what would characterize this world.
 - Any believer from the time the Romans sacked and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 until the present could look at these characteristics and see them ever present in their culture.
 13. When the Word of God was completed and Israel was judged and scattered in A.D. 70, we have, in essence, been living right on the precipice of the last days.
 - At any moment, this time of grace could end, and the last days in the prophetic program could commence and the events of Matthew 24 could unfold.
 - There are no signs for the Rapture and the end of this time of grace. God only gave us general characteristics that have been true of every generation in this time of grace.
 14. A person can look at world events in this time of grace and speculate whether they are a precursor to some of the events in Matthew 24, but that is exactly what it is - speculation!
 - People have been doing this for decades and even centuries, but we are still here.
 - The only way to know if a world event **today** is a precursor to something that will happen in the Tribulation will be **after** the fact. In other words, after the

Rapture you could look back and say, "Hey, that event was a foreshadowing of something in the prophetic program."

- There is no way to know that now. Those who are trying to "read the signs" and get people all worked up and convinced that the Rapture has to happen at any moment become like the boy who cried wolf. After a while, people stop listening.
 - The prophetic program gives definite world events and time tables, but the mystery program of today does not.
15. What should we do then? Quit trying to look for prophetic signs and take that energy and use it to proclaim the gospel of Christ while we still have time!

Third fact: The rapture is imminent and does not depend on signs.

1. What do we mean by the word "imminent?"
 - Webster's defines "imminent" as "ready to take place."
2. When we speak of the Rapture as being imminent, we are saying that there is nothing standing in the way of its occurrence. There are no signs that have to take place first.
3. In **Philippians 4:5** Paul admonishes believers, "*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*" What is the context of this?
4. Look back at **Philippians 3:20-21**. The context is the Rapture.
 - The word "look" carries the idea of expectation. If you are looking for it, then you are expecting it to happen.
 - "I don't know when it is going to happen, but I'm looking, watching, expecting, and anticipating it."
 - This is the attitude that we are to have towards the Rapture. **Titus 2:13**
5. Let's compare this to the Second Coming of Christ to earth, also called "The Revelation."
 - In **Acts 1:6** the twelve inquired after Jesus' resurrection if He would at that time restore Israel's kingdom. He answered "...*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*" **Acts 1:7**
 - In **Acts 1:9** Jesus ascends from earth to heaven and the twelve are gazing up into heaven, presumably wondering if He is coming back.
 - In **Acts 1:10** they are rebuked for looking up to heaven by the angel, and the angel assures them that Christ will return from heaven to earth as He ascended from earth to heaven.
6. But why shouldn't they have been looking up with expectancy? The answer is revealed in **Luke 21:25-28**.
7. Christ reveals specific signs that will occur before He returns to establish His kingdom on earth.
 - There will be unparalleled peculiarity in the solar system (sun, moon, and stars).
 - There will be unparalleled destruction and catastrophic events on the earth that will be worldwide, affecting all nations of the earth. It won't simply be a destructive event in an isolated section of the earth.
 - There will be unparalleled panic and fear across the earth.

- The powers of heaven will be shaken. cf. **Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 21:22** with **Isaiah 34:5** (His sword of vengeance is first bathed in heaven.)
8. The Bible says, "**And then** shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." **Mark 13:26**
 9. Notice Jesus' instruction to His disciples in verse 28. He told them, "...when these things begin to come to pass, **then look up**, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." **Luke 21:28**
 - So when were they to start looking up? Not until they saw the things happening that this text describes. There is a prophetic time schedule and the saints in the Tribulation will have the ability to know where they are in the time schedule.
 - When they see these signs, they are to start looking up because then Christ's coming will be imminent. Once the signs occur, then there will be nothing standing between them and Christ's coming to earth.
 - The Tribulation saints aren't to start looking up until the time schedule says, "It's time." Then start looking up.
 10. But in so many passages Paul is waiting, looking, and expecting Christ to come. **Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13; Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:10**
 - If the Rapture of the body of Christ is not imminent, then what is Paul doing patiently waiting and looking for it? If many things have to happen **before** Jesus can return, then Paul looks kind of silly looking for it and anticipating it.
 11. What does this mean? It means there is nothing standing in the way of Christ coming for us, and the blessed hope taking place. There are no events that have to happen before He comes.
 12. This is what we mean by the imminent return of Christ and this is one reason why we believe in a Pretribulation Rapture of the church.

(Please scroll down to view timeline chart.)

SIGNS OF CHRIST'S RETURN TO EARTH

