

The Prewrath Rapture of the Church

...a four lesson study
to grasp the foundations...

by

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Lesson One – Laying a foundation

Before we begin this study on the basics of End Times theology, I want to make sure we are all on the same page with our hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is just a big word that means method of interpretation or study. There are four basic rules you should follow when you study the Bible:

1. **Take the Bible at face value – in its natural, normal, customary sense.** In other words, don't make the Bible say something it isn't saying. If you say to your friend, "I have a dentist appointment today," she will take that at face value and understand that you have plans for the day. You expect her to accept what you say at face value. You don't expect her to think, "Hmmm...dentist appointment? She must be trying to tell me that she is struggling with her self-image because the 'dentist' represents someone who can make your teeth whiter, therefore, she is down about her image and is crying out for help!" Take the Bible at face value.
2. **Make sure you understand the context of the passage.** Don't just take one verse and run with it. Read the verses before and after. Understand what the author was teaching at the time. Remember that chapters and verses were not in the original texts. For example, Luke 12:19 says, "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" If I only read that verse, I would determine that once my debt is paid off and I have some savings, that I can rest, relax and just enjoy life. But the context of that passage is not supporting retirement, but the fact that accumulation of wealth is folly and something that man should not put his hopes in (Luke 12:13-34 is a discourse on greed).
3. **Make sure you let scripture interpret scripture.** Always compare passages. Sometimes a passage can seem unclear, but other passages on the same topic can give clarity. For example, Christ is going to point to a specific event in the heavenlies – He will talk about the sun darkening and the moon and the stars losing their light. If you look up other passages where the sun, moon and stars are mentioned together,

you will get a better understanding of the event Christ is talking about. Scripture can elaborate on itself if you do some study!

4. **The Bible never contradicts itself.** If you find an apparent contradiction, you need to do more studying. Dig deep. The answer is in there, but a contradiction is not possible, since He is God and He can't say one thing in one place and the opposite in another. Studying the Word was never meant to be easy, per se. It takes work, but with the complete revelation of God in written form and the Holy Spirit, you can find the Truth!

Just to make sure you've got it, write the four rules of study below:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Very good! Now, we are going to start by looking at a few prophecies in the book of Daniel. This will help us lay out a basic End Times timeline. There really is no argument among theologians about this timeline. It's pretty straightforward, however it does take some math skills.

Daniel 2:1-45 records a dream that the Lord gave Nebuchadnezzar of a large statue, whose head was made of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and its' feet were a mix of iron and clay. A piece of the statue was carved out of the hands and it crushed the rest of the statue. Then this piece became like a huge mountain and it covered the whole world. Nebuchadnezzar was very disturbed by this dream and Daniel ended up interpreting it. The head of gold represented Babylon who dominated Israel at

that time. After Babylon, Daniel prophesied there would be another kingdom, inferior to Babylon who would rule over Israel, and then another, and another, until the last one which was represented by a mixture of iron and clay. This represented strength, but weakened strength because of the mixture. The end of the dream represents God setting up His kingdom, crushing the other nations and overcoming the world.

We have the benefit of history to define this statue. The following are the nations that ruled over Israel and the dates:

Gold	Babylon	587 BC – 540 BC
Silver	Persia	540 BC – 320 BC
Bronze	Greece	320 BC – 63 BC
Iron	Rome	63 BC – AD 70 (to the Diaspora or the dispersion of the Jews)

So, we can see that four out of the five nations represented in the statue have come to pass. There is one left and it is the mixed one.

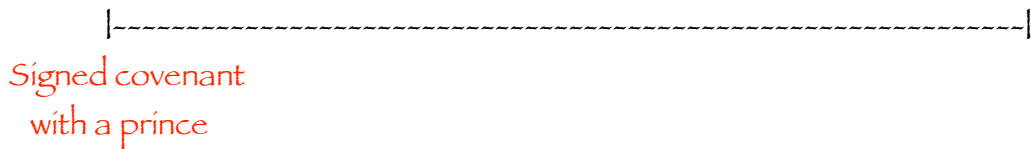
Read Daniel 9:24-27. This is the passage where we get the timeline for the final days on earth. This passage says that God has decreed 70 prophetic weeks to accomplish something in the life of His people and His holy city (Jerusalem). During this 70 weeks, transgression will be finished, sin will be done away with, atonement for our sin will be accomplished, everlasting righteousness will be ushered in and the most holy place will be anointed (or re-established).

Verses 25 and 26 tell us that from the time that a decree is made to rebuild the Temple until the Messiah is cut off will be “7 plus 62 weeks” or a total of 69 weeks. If we do the math, we find that from the year that Artaxerxes Longimanus gave the decree to rebuild the Temple until the Passover when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was exactly 483 years. Did you see that? I said “exactly.” (God tends to be incredibly accurate with His prophecies!) Therefore, we can deduce that a prophetic week is equivalent to 7 years, because 483 divided by 69 equals 7. Read that again if you are not sure what I am saying. It’s just simple math.

Since the prophecy in Daniel was concerning 70 weeks and we know that 69 of them already occurred, that leaves us with one final week left in God’s

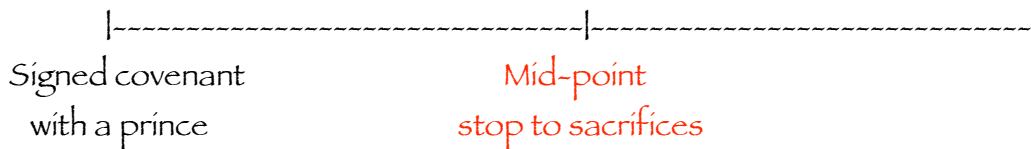
prophetic timeline, to accomplish ushering in righteousness and re-establishing the holy place. Verse 27 tells us what will happen in that final week. But look at the end of verse 26 first. It mentions “the people of the prince who is to come”. That is who verse 27 is talking about – this prince. “He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week...” There you have it. The final week begins with a covenant with a prince. So your timeline starts like this:

Final Week – 7 years



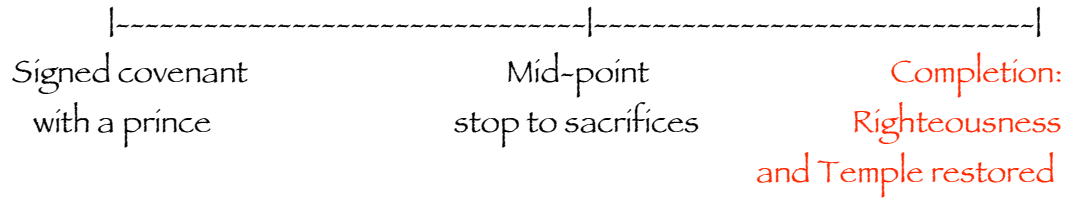
Then it goes on to say, “...but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering...” This infers a stop to sacrifice. So, let’s add this to our timeline:

Final Week – 7 years



And finally, we know from verse 24 that at the end of the prophetic 70 weeks, God will usher in righteousness and restore the holy place, so let’s complete our Daniel timeline with that:

Final Week – 7 years



Now we have laid the foundation for our study. We know that four nations have oppressed Israel (not including Egypt, since that was previous to Babylon) and that one more is still to come. We understand that a prophetic week is seven years long and we know that 69 of them were completed when Jesus died on the cross. There is one final week remaining and we will refer to it as “Daniel’s seventieth week” and not “the tribulation.” We will do this because there is no reference to that last week in scripture as “the tribulation” or the “tribulation period.” The second half of that week has been described as a time of “great tribulation” and if we use that term, you will apply that to the second half of the final seven years (you’ll see it in the upcoming scripture).

Lesson Two – the Second Parable of Christ and the Olivet Discourse

Before we get into Christ's specific teaching concerning His return, I want to take a quick look at one of the parables that He used to explain that there were events at the end of the age that effected God's people and the world. Read Matthew 13:24 – 36. Below is listed the cast of characters in this parable (you will be filling in the blanks after you read Jesus' interpretation of the parable):

- Sower of the good seed = _____
- The field = _____
- Good seeds = _____
- The enemy = _____
- The tares = _____
- The harvest = _____
- The reapers = _____
- Bundles of tares are burned = _____
- Wheat goes into the barn = _____

This parable lays out a plan to separate the good seed from the tares. Tares are weeds that look like wheat but do not produce fruit and are worthless. Now, read the interpretation of this parable in Matthew 13:36-43 and write beside the list above what each character represents.

Christ taught the disciples that there was going to be an end to this world as we know it. He called this the end of the age. In the end, He will send the angels to separate His children from the look-alikes. The unbeliever's destination is hell and the believers will be gathered into God's kingdom. It is

important to note that the context of this parable is the church. The weeding out of look-alikes is something that God Himself will orchestrate. Interesting, huh?

Jesus ends this teaching with, "He who has ears, let him hear." This means more than just people with ears need to listen, but it is an idiom that implies action. This parable was meant to spur a response. Because this parable describes wheat and look-alikes, not wheat and dandelions, it means that there are people in the church who are just playing the game but have not truly committed their hearts to God. It should cause us to pause and examine the fruit we produce, shouldn't it? If you don't see fruit, perhaps you need to make a change...

On to Matthew 24. This is the beginning of a sermon which is titled "The Olivet Discourse." It is named this because Jesus was teaching on the Mount of Olives and it was His final discourse before His death. He still taught a bit, but this was a big sermon. The disciples gather together on the Mount of Olives with Jesus right after they leave the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus has just railed on the Pharisees in chapter 23, condemning their appearance-based religion, knowing their hearts were selfish and prideful, not contrite and humble. In Matthew 24:3, the disciples have just heard Jesus say the Temple is going to be destroyed and they ask Jesus when that will happen, but they also ask Him two specific questions:

1. What will be the sign of Your coming?
2. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Jesus had mentioned both events – we saw the end of the age mentioned in the Wheat and Tares parable. In John 14 Jesus tells them that He will go and prepare a mansion for the disciples and will return and gather them to Himself so that they can be with Him forever. So, the two questions above were based on His teachings and on the tirade of teaching He had just thrown at the Pharisees, ending with a lament over the lost heart of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39). Now that you have the context, let's look at Jesus' answer.

As you read Matthew 24:4-26, list out what Jesus says will happen BEFORE He returns:

vs. 5 - _____

vs. 6 - _____

vs. 7 - _____

vs. 9 - _____

vs. 10 - _____

vs. 11 - _____

vs. 12 - _____

vs. 14 - _____

vs. 15 - _____

vs. 16 – 20 - _____

vs. 21 - _____

vs. 23 – 26 - _____

Just a quick note about verse 14 – Revelation 14:6-10 tells about three angels who bring messages to the world in the last days. One gives the gospel to the world (I call him the “gospel angel”), the second declares that the Babylonian Harlot has fallen and the third warns all men not to take the mark of the antichrist, because that will guarantee their separation from God in eternity. I take these verses at face value and I believe that every person on the face of the earth will receive these messages. Therefore, Matthew 24:14 is fulfilled, not through the efforts of man, but through the gospel angel. Many people believe that through missionaries, once the gospel reaches the whole world, we can usher in the return of Christ – almost like God is waiting for us to get it done. But Revelation explains to us that God will take this into His own hands. It doesn't mean we don't evangelize, because we are to be obedient to the great commission in Matthew 28, but I think it is an interesting end times note.

So, now you have a list of what Jesus says will happen BEFORE He returns and BEFORE the end of the age. Did you see in His list a mention of Daniel and his prophecy? In verse fifteen, Jesus mentions an event which places

us smack dab in the middle of Daniel's timeline, and He even gives us a little more details of that event: "And when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place..." What event is Jesus pointing to? The midpoint of our timeline. Let's add Jesus detail to our previous timeline:

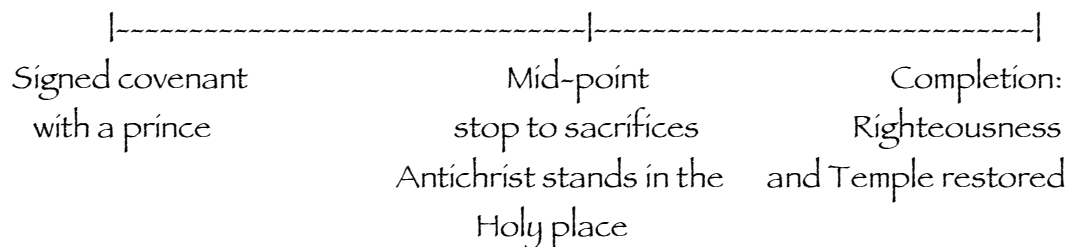
Final Week – 7 years



So, we find from Jesus' teaching that at the midpoint of the seventieth week of Daniel the antichrist, or the prince who is to come, stands in the Holy place (always a reference to the Temple) and puts a stop to sacrifices or worship. This implies that there is a Temple and that there is active worship – two things that are not happening at the present time in Israel today, however the minute the Jews acquire the rights to the Temple Mount, this worship will begin. There are orthodox Jews in Israel who believe that the blessing of God will not return to Israel until they begin the sacrificial system again, and they will not do that anywhere but where God initially instructed them to do so. At present, the Arabs occupy the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and there are constant negotiations for Israel to get ownership back of that mount. It's not an easy process, but we know from prophecy that eventually it will happen. When it does, there doesn't necessarily have to be a permanent structure for the antichrist to desecrate, he just has to stop the worship or sacrifices. This could be in a Tabernacle of sorts. I believe the Jews will not wait to erect a permanent building to begin their sacrifices. Bottom line...keep an eye on Jerusalem and that Temple Mount!

Now, you are going to be put to work again. Below is our timeline. I want you to add the events that Jesus described onto our chart, above the timeline. Keep in mind, Jesus didn't say that a covenant will be signed and then these things will happen, so His warning doesn't necessarily begin with the first hash mark. Just list the things that will happen before and after the mid-point which is consistent in both Jesus' and Daniel's teachings.

Final Week – 7 years



Remember what the disciples' questions were? What is the sign of the end of the age and the sign of your return? Let's keep reading in Matthew 24. Start in verse 29 and read through to verse 31 and answer the following questions:

1. Verse 29 says, “And immediately after the tribulation of **those days...**”
– what days exactly are Jesus talking about?

2. What is the sign of Jesus return? _____

3. Who will He send to gather us? _____ Is this consistent with His Wheat and Tares parable? _____

***Note: In an attempt to compare scripture with scripture, read Mark 13:20-27 and see that the gathering of believers is not only “from the winds” and “from one end of the sky to the other” but also from “the farthest end of the earth.” This is the rapture, folks!

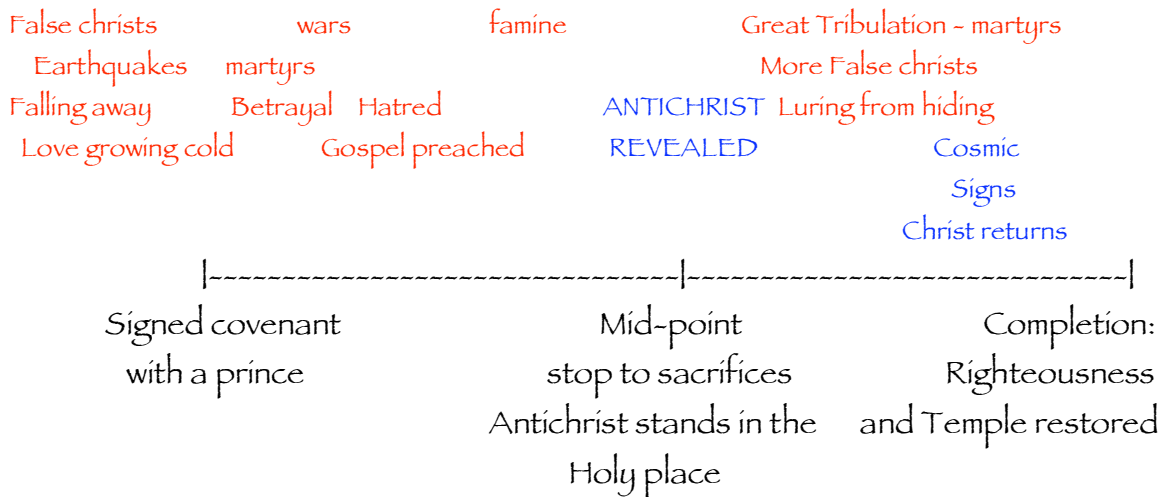
So, go back to your timeline and place the sign of Christ’s return in the appropriate place.

There. Nicely done! That was a lot of work for one lesson! Are you starting to see the flow of scripture and the flow of the timeline? Well, wait until the next lesson, because everything is going to fall into place!

Lesson Three – The Seals of Revelation

Let's move into Revelation. Up to this point, we have laid out the prophetic timeline for the final seven years, starting with a covenant with the antichrist and we saw Daniel mention the mid-point being a marked event, with the antichrist stopping sacrifice. Then we went to Matthew, studied Jesus' parable about the end of the age and then went on to the Olivet Discourse. There, we read of the disciples asking Jesus what to look for in regards to the end of the age and His return – those two things being closely related. Jesus listed out the events that would take place, noting the mid-point of the Daniel's timeline as something that would trigger the call to hide because greater persecution would follow that event. Then He gave them the sign of His return – the sun, moon and stars either are darkened or fall from the sky and then He will return with His angels to gather the elect from the earth. Your timeline should now look like this:

Final Week – 7 years



We have placed the return of Christ somewhere in the second half of Daniel's seventieth week because Christ does not tell us exactly when it will happen, except for two specifics: first, in Matthew 24:22 He says that the time of that great persecution will be cut short so that some survive, which is an indicator

of how bad it will be, and second, in Matthew 24:36 He says that only the Father knows the exact moment that it will happen.

***Note: This is a curious statement by Christ, since we know that God the Father and Jesus are One. I believe He put it this way for possible two reasons. First, in His humanity, there were some attributes He set aside – His omnipresence being a very obvious one. Perhaps at the time He taught this, He sincerely was unaware of the timing due to His humanity. A better thought I have though, is Jesus desire to teach the disciples that God is in control and that even Jesus, who is part of the Godhead, submits to the will of the Father. In essence He said, this is the Father's will. I do what He tells me to do. (Which is true in more circumstances than just end times theology!)

On to Revelation...we're going to read through the seals of Revelation. There are four units of seven in Revelation – the seven churches of Revelation (Revelation 2 and 3), the seven seals (Revelation 6 and 8), the seven trumpets (Revelation 8,9 and 11) and the seven bowl judgments (Revelation 16). Taking this study at face value, you can simply read through Revelation and read what will happen. Some people go into great detail of overlapping seals and bowls and trumpets, but it is rather easy to just follow them as they are presented and assume when the text says, This will happen, then this, then this...that it goes in order. There are some "flashbacks" in Revelation, where descriptions of certain events that were described earlier in the book are referred to, but when that happens, it's pretty clear by the text what is happening.

So, you are going to find that it looks like this: there are seven seals. These seals are not supernatural, except for the scene in the heavens with the final seal being broken which is announcing the beginning of the trumpet sequence. When I say they are not supernatural, I mean that the events that occur after a seal is opened is something that is rather normal here on earth – it will just be exaggerated or intensified – i.e. wars, false christ, earthquakes, martyrdom...After the seven seals, the trumpets are blown and with each trumpet you will see a supernatural event occur – fire and hail thrown to the earth, sea turning to blood, stars falling from heaven and hitting the earth like a mountain on

fire, the stars being smitten...And then you come to the bowls. When you pour out a 2-liter of pop, it glug-glugs it's way into the sink. But when you dump out a bowl of water into the sink, it empties hard and fast. That is the bowl judgments – hard, fast supernatural judgments that fall one by one on the earth. So, I believe that you will see, after reading these three categories of events that there is a difference between the seals and the trumpets/bowls.

After seven letters of warnings and commendation to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, John's attention is turned to the throne room of God. He sees the Father, sitting on the throne with a book, or better, a scroll in His hand. The scroll has seven seals running up its' side. An angel steps forward and asks who is worthy to open the scroll, or to crack the seven seals. When no one is able or worthy to do it, John starts to cry, as if he wants the scroll to be opened but will not be able to find out what is within the scroll because no one is there to open it. Then the Lion of Judah enters, and He is also a Lamb, with evidence that He had been slain and He takes the scroll from the Father and the angels praise Him because He is Worthy to open the scroll! And this Lion/Lamb is obviously Jesus.

Starting in Revelation 6, Jesus opens the seals, one by one. Read the following verses and write what was sent to earth or what happened on earth as a result of each seal being opened:

Seal One – Rev. 6:1,2 - _____

Seal Two – Rev. 6:3,4 - _____

Seal Three – Rev. 6:5,6 - _____

Seal Four – Rev. 6:7,8 - _____

Seal Five – Rev. 6:9-11 - _____

Seal Six – Rev. 6:12-17 - _____

That gets us through six of the seals. Let's go back to the timeline and see if we can spot any of the seals in Christ's teaching. On the timeline that we are

Tribulation - martyrs” because of the pleading of these saints, it seems to me it was a terrible time. Then the sixth seal is the darkening of the sun, moon and stars – definitely a reference to the cosmic disturbances which Jesus taught about. So, a (6) needs to be placed by “Cosmic Signs.”

Now, according to our timeline, what else happens when the cosmic signs occur? That’s right, Jesus returns for His children. The rapture. The angels gather believers together to meet the Lord in the air. If you read I Thessalonians 4:16-18 you will get a picture of exactly what will happen. (We will look at that whole passage later.)

So, if the rapture happens after the sixth seal, we should find the church in heaven after the sixth seal is opened. Revelation 7 now takes a break from the seal openings and John observes two things. First in verses 1-8, he watches as God seals 12,000 men from each tribe of Israelites – 144,000 in all. Then he sees something he hadn’t seen before. Read Revelation 7:9-17.

What is this scene? Who are these people? If the rapture occurs at the sixth seal, then these are the believers who have been taken off the earth – they are the raptured saints, arriving in heaven exactly when Jesus said they would! Are they [souls](#) like the martyrs or are they in bodily form, as if they were taken right off the earth? Yes, they are in bodies and given white robes, with palm branches in their hands. This is the church.

If we compare scripture with scripture, we have just discovered that during the great tribulation, after the antichrist reveals himself in the Temple and lays a heavy persecution on believers, God will cut this time short for the sake of His elect, by putting the natural lights out of the sky and then returning for His beloved church, gathering them together and taking them to heaven. This is taught in Matthew 24 by Jesus and in Revelation 6-7, which is Jesus’ revelation of the future events to John. Both line up perfectly.

These are three examples of passages that prophesy the wrath of God coming upon the earth, associated with cosmic disturbances. So, in addition to the sun, moon and stars darkening to indicate Jesus' return, it also indicates the arrival of God's wrath. List below what judgment is put down on the earth through the specific trumpet or bowl:

- Trumpets –
1. Revelation 8:7 - _____
 2. Revelation 8:8,9 - _____
 3. Revelation 8:10,11 - _____
 4. Revelation 8:12,13 - _____
 5. Revelation 9:1-12 - _____

 6. Revelation 9:13-21 - _____

 7. Revelation 11:15-19 - _____

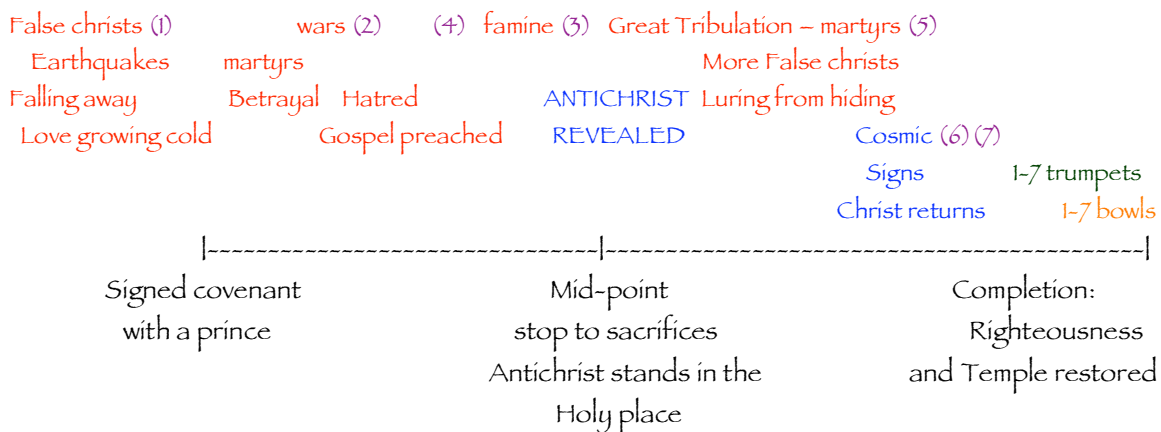
- Bowls –
1. Revelation 16:1,2 - _____
 2. Revelation 16:3 - _____
 3. Revelation 16:4-7 - _____
 4. Revelation 16:8,9 - _____
 5. Revelation 16:10,11 - _____
 6. Revelation 16:12-16 - _____

 7. Revelation 16:17-21 - _____

In a short paragraph, explain the difference between the seals and the bowls and trumpets in general:

So, if we pulled out our timeline again, where do you put the trumpets and bowls? Right, after the cosmic disturbances, with the seventh seal heralding their arrival. And how would you describe the trumpets and bowls? As God's wrath. This is why the rapture position is called the "Pre-wrath Rapture of the church", because it places the rapture right before (pre) the wrath of God is brought down on the earth. Does this make sense to you? So, now our timeline looks like this:

Final Week – 7 years



And now, we will end with just a few famous end times passages, so that you can see how they fit into the last days. Let's start with the church in Thessalonica. They were struggling under persecution and some were being killed for their faith. In his first letter to that church, Paul addresses their concern about those who died before the return of Christ.

Read I Thessalonians 4:13 – 18 and answer the following questions:

1. Who were these people worried about?
2. What did Paul say would happen to those people when Jesus returned?
3. When Jesus returns, who will rise first, the dead in Christ or the living in Christ?

***Note: Two notes of interest about these verses. First, in verse 15 and 17, the phrase "we who are alive and remain", note that the word "remain" can also be translated "survive". In essence, these verses say that we who are alive and survive until the coming of the Lord will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. What are we surviving? The great tribulation. Doesn't that make sense? If we don't go through the great tribulation, what is there to survive? Also, note that chapters were not put in place until later for the reader's sake, so chapter five is a continuation of chapter four.

Now, read I Thessalonians 5:1-11 and answer the following questions:

1. In verse 1, what times and epochs are Paul talking about? (I'll help with this one – the timing of the rapture or the event of being gathered which he just mentioned in the previous verses.)
2. What event does Paul mention in verse 2 and 3?

3. In verse 4 he says the Day of the Lord will not surprise believers, therefore he has connected what two end times events? (the event in 4:16,17 and 5:2)

4. Who does the Day of the Lord overtake like a thief?

5. Why will it not take believers by surprise? What are the conditions for us not to be surprised? (verse 6)

6. Why are we taken before the Day of the Lord (v.9)?

So, are you starting to see the theme? The Day of the Lord and the gathering of the saints (or the rapture) occur on the same day. By the way, the word "Day" as in Day of the Lord refers to a broad period of time. An example of this is to say, "In his day, Abraham Lincoln was misunderstood." It means a time period. Since we know all the judgments that fall on the Day of the Lord, we know this is a time period. But I Thessalonians puts the gathering of believers and the Day of the Lord as the same event. So we are taken and the wrath comes.

Let's look at II Thessalonians. The church is also worried that they missed the return of Christ. Read II Thessalonians 2:1-9 and answer the following questions:

1. What were they worried about now (v.1,2)?

2. What does Paul say has to happen first, before Jesus returns to gather us together with Him? (v.3,4)

3. Does this relate to anything Jesus taught? (Provide the reference.)

4. When does the antichrist's reign come to an end according to verse 8?

And why does it end there? (what event is described in verse 8?)

And finally, Christ gives some general instructions about how to live as He finished out the Olivet Discourse. Read the following passages and summarize the teaching:

1. Matthew 24:42-44 - _____

2. Matthew 24:45-51 - _____

3. Matthew 25:1-13 - _____

4. Matthew 25:14-30 - _____

Well, now you know the basics of the Prewrath Rapture of the church. There is a lot more prophetic scripture in God's Word, but you have to start with a foundation. I pray that you have seen a consistent hermeneutic (study method) used throughout this study and I also pray that you see the consistency

between Jesus' teaching and the writings in Revelation. Undoubtedly you will have more questions, but with this foundation laid, I believe you will be able to understand some of the more complex writings and will be able to continue to study from books like *The Sign* and *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, written by my father, Robert VanKampen.