

Scriptures Most Compelling Argument for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Richard R. Schmidt, D.Min.

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Introduction

The heartbeat of the prophetic calendar beat in perfect timing until an event occurred that caused the heart to flat line for an undetermined period of time (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29). The stopping of the heartbeat was not fatal to God's prophetic program for the Jewish people or the nation of Israel, but God's program specific to Israel was paused and remains paused temporarily (Dan. 9:26-27). God, in His sovereign will, paused the prophetic calendar and inserted the current church age. The church age, as will be argued throughout this paper, is a temporary interruption to God's prophetic calendar, which is specific to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. When God completes the church age and removes the church age saints (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:51-54) the prophetic timeline will once again start ticking as a heart that has once again started beating (Dan. 9:27).

Never before has the Christian church so desperately needed to reignite its mandate for teaching and preaching the full council of God. Specifically, the contemporary Christian church must vigorously teach the doctrine of eschatology with biblical and scholastic excellence, in a manner that is comprehensible to all Christians.

The basic tenets of proper Biblical interpretation are under attack by Bible interpreters who seek to allegorize and spiritualize the Scriptures. The four basic principles of Bible interpretation that must be used by Bible expositors are: the historical, contextual, grammatical, and literal. The literal interpretation of the Bible is by far the principle least utilized even though it is of utmost importance. Failure to interpret the Bible literally results in the current trend of scholars and students creating Bible doctrine as they see fit. In other words, the reader of the Bible will turn to any passage in Scripture and determine what it means based upon how they "feel" it applies to them, or what they think it means. In addition, well intentioned Bible teachers and theologians who disregard the literal interpretation of God's prophetic calendar deny the distinctly dispensational interpretation of the church age. Following the rapture of the church age saints, a literal seven-year Tribulation will ensue, followed by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to inaugurate and rule over His literal one-thousand-year millennial kingdom. Setting aside a literal interpretation of the church age greatly exacerbates the issue.

The subject matter of God's prophetic calendar and the relationship to the current church age has produced a plethora of theological presuppositions and conclusions. The result is in well-intentioned preachers and teachers conveying confusing and contradictory information to the sheep entrusted to their care. God inspired Scripture with only one valid theological conclusion. The fact that there is only one valid conclusion requires teachers of the Word of God to seek relentlessly after the truth (2 Tim 2:15).

Students of the Bible must determine prophetic truth by properly interpreting the Scriptures (2 Pt 1:20-21). This paper provides a solution to one major controversial theological challenge, specifically the relationship in the prophetic calendar to the Jewish people, Israel, and the church age. A proposed conclusion is presented regarding the mystery of the church age, as given to the apostle Paul, and its relationship to the “gap” that exists between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy, notably the most detailed prophetic passage regarding God’s prophetic timeline (Dan 9:26-27). The basis of the forthcoming contention is the premise that there is Biblical evidence to support the existence of two gaps of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth prophetic weeks; the first gap in time revealed to Daniel, and the second gap revealed to the apostle Paul. Within the theological community, specifically including eschatology (the study of future events) and ecclesiology (the study of the church), these truths provide a tenable answer to a long-standing controversy regarding when the rapture of the church age saints will literally take place. Therefore, the specific intent of this paper is to prove from Scripture that an allowance for two gaps in time exists between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 9:26-27), which constitutes *Scriptures Most Compelling Argument for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture*.

Daniel prophesied the first gap, which includes the time from the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel’s prophecy through A.D. 70 (Dan 9:26). God revealed a second gap to the apostle Paul as the mystery church age (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29). This claim implies the mystery church age started subsequently to the sixty-ninth week of Daniel, and strongly suggests the church age ends before the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy, known as the pre-tribulation rapture of the church (Dan 9:26-27).

The arguments set forth in this paper use the dispensational interpretive model. Four main categories of dispensational theology comprise sub-groups, including the ultra or hyper-dispensational position, the historic or classical dispensational position, the revised dispensational position, and the progressive dispensational position. The theological concept of dispensationalism has a wide variety of specific parameters based on the particular sub-group under review. For the purpose of this paper, the operative dispensational construct is specific to what two covenant theologians, Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, describe as the issue of discontinuity or in contrast, continuity between Israel as a nation and the church. They state in a description of dispensational theology, “they primarily distinguished between God’s purposes in the dispensations prior to grace (i.e. prior to the church), the dispensation of grace (i.e. the church age), and the kingdom viewed as the millennial reign of Christ on earth.”¹ The only important aspect missing in their definition of dispensational theology as used in this project, consists of the placement of Daniel’s seventieth prophetic week (Dan 9:27; Rev 4-18), which is between the end of the church age and the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth to inaugurate His millennial kingdom (Rev 19:11- 20:6).

Therefore, the basic dispensational system of Bible interpretation specifically addresses the time between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophesy. The position concludes that Israel was the main subject of God’s interaction with humanity through the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 9:24-26), and starts again after the mystery church age. The mystery church age, made up of converted Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:32), regards God’s main interaction with humanity

¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 47.

until the removal or rapture of the church age saints (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29). The rapture takes place prior to the commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophesy (Dan 9:27; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-54). The seventieth week of Daniel, which refers to the seven-year Tribulation period, includes God returning His focus toward the nation of Israel, and resuming the prophetic calendar as revealed to Daniel (Dan. 9:27). Therefore, the basic dispensational model is God's focus on the Jewish people and the nation of Israel in Daniel 9:24-27, with a parenthetical gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:26-27), where God literally halts the Jewish prophetic calendar and inserts the mystery church.

The major contribution of this paper is specific to two areas. The first area is the bringing together of two theological concepts that have remained bifurcated in theological literature, specifically the gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:24-27) and the "mystery" church age (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29). The two concepts, Daniel's "gap" and Paul's "mystery" church age, are often discussed within the confines of a single book or article, but all of the consulted literature fails to synchronize the relationship of the two concepts. The concept of the church existing between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy is a position held by dispensational authors. However, the concept of the "mystery" church results in significant theological implications. The second area of contribution is the concept of two gaps existing between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy. This paper contends for the existence of two gaps between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. The first gap, or the traditional single gap theory, existing between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, includes only the specific content prophesied in Daniel 9:26, which history bears record of fulfillment by A.D. 70. The second gap is the mystery church age, which God kept secret until revealed via special revelation to the apostle Paul. The second gap began after the end of the sixty-ninth week and will cease just prior to the commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy. Thus far, this period has composed a period of nearly two-thousand years (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29).

The Distinctive Time for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

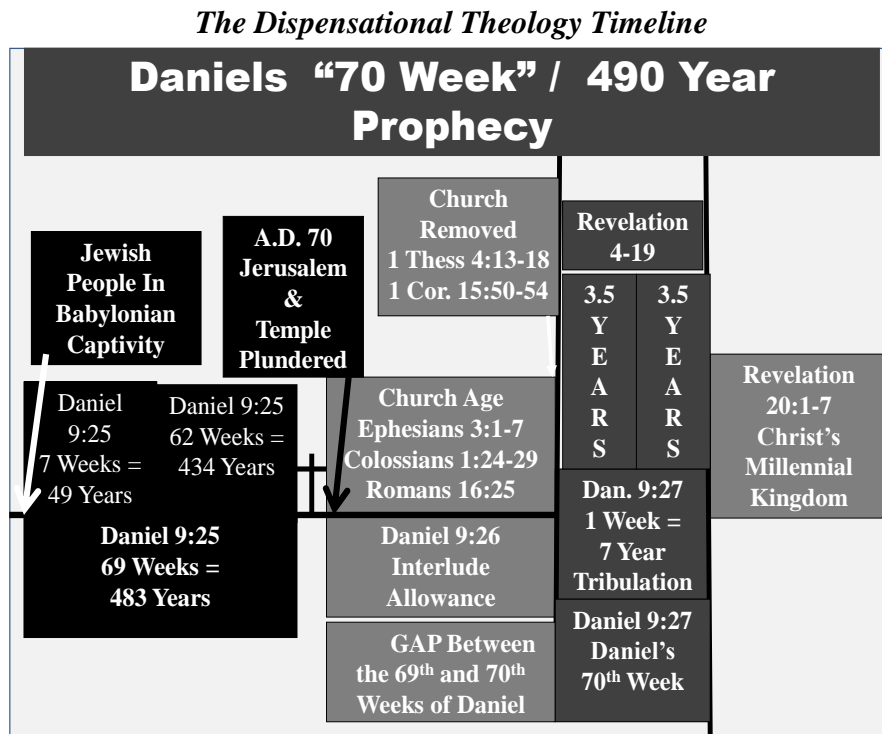
"Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate." (Daniel 9:24-27)

The focus of this section is the relationship between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks in Daniel's prophecy and the mystery church age, as revealed to the apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:1-7, Colossians 1:24-29 and Romans 16:25. God concealed the information regarding the present church age until He fully revealed it to the apostle Paul. The premise regards the mystery church age comprised of a predetermined, specific period, beginning after the sixty-ninth prophetic week

of Daniel. The argument further contends that the church age will cease before the commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan 9:27).

There are multiple theological positions regarding the relationship of Daniel 9:24-27 and the church age. The discussion includes the argument that the current period comprises a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel’s prophecy. The contention set forth, is a proposed second gap of time not revealed in the Old Testament prophetic literature, but kept secret by God until fully revealed to the apostle Paul.

The Dispensational Timeline



The argument for the necessity of the church age gap between Daniel 9:26-27 includes the following concepts. Daniel 9 reveals God’s prophetic timeline as specific to Israel and the Jewish people (Dan 9:24). Scholars have debated over the specific dates of the events in the prophecy. According to Thomas Ice, a dispensational writer, the first sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy, or four-hundred-and-eighty-three years, transpired without a gap in time.² Leon Wood contends that Daniel then states that the “cutting off” of the Messiah, interpreted as the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, takes place “after” the conclusion of the sixty-ninth week. God then includes within the gap the time to accomplish the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple. The period involves the approximate forty-year time span from the crucifixion of Christ through the destruction of the temple and the plundering of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.³ The contention is that the

²Thomas Ice, “The Seventy Weeks of Daniel,” 2013,[on-line] accessed 23 December 2013, available from <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-TheSeventyWeeksofDani.pdf>, Internet.

³Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 255-256.

seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy starts immediately after A.D. 70 and is a reasonable chronological assumption. However, the contention remains that the gap continues beyond A.D. 70, and continues almost two-thousand years to this present day. This raises the question as to why God did not start the seventieth week as held in the dispensational construct.⁴ God unequivocally states that the church comprises a mystery, kept secret since the foundations of the world (Eph 3:5; Col 1:26). Therefore, the reasonable theological conclusion is that the church age provides a new dispensation, resulting in the temporary halt of the prophetic calendar. Rolland McCune contends that the mystery church age, and the time during which it exists, must cease before the seventieth week commences. Therefore, the dispensational view that the physical removal of the church must transpire before the seven-year tribulation period begins provides a logical conclusion (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1Cor 15:50-53).⁵

Determining when the mystery church began constitutes a matter of significant importance in determining the relationship of the gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy. Benjamin Gladd provides an in-depth examination of the concept of "mystery." He points out that two general divisions in literature exist in the use of the term. The first regards the "mystery" of the pagan environment, which includes the mystery cults, magic, Gnosticism and philosophy. The second division regards the use of "mystery" in the Old Testament, specifically the book of Daniel, Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament.⁶

Gladd affirmed "virtually every major NT commentator now recognizes that the term μυστήριον (mystery) stems, to some degree, from a Jewish apocalyptic environment."⁷ Gladd looks to the concept of "mystery" in Daniel as instructional on the use of the word in the Pauline epistles, which regards an important issue. The most simplistic definition of mystery provided by Gladd stated, "We can generally define mystery as God revealing his wisdom."⁸ Expanding on the basic concept, Gladd stated:

Revelation, albeit in several mediums such as dreams, writing, OT Scripture, is hidden or encoded until the interpretation has been provided. The initial revelation remains incoherent to individuals, even to the seer (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel). It is not until the interpretation has been given that the initial, hidden revelation is sensible. In other words, our study affirms the general maxim that mystery constitutes a revelation that was previously hidden but now has been revealed.⁹

Gladd further expands on the word "mystery" in relation to the apostle Paul's use of the word in Ephesians 3:4-6. The mystery in the passage regards information not previously made known by God until God revealed it to the apostles. Gladd adds, "This aspect of hiddenness concerns something in the OT which was not perceivable even to the covenant community until

⁴Reginald Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord, Come! A Definite Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 239-241.

⁵Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 3: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Detroit: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 337-338.

⁶Benjamin L. Gladd, *Revealing the Mysterion: The Use of Mystery in Daniel and Second Temple Judaism with its Bearing on First Corinthians* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 8.

⁷Ibid., 13.

⁸Ibid., 32.

⁹Ibid., 38.

the latter-day coming of Christ (cf. Col 1:26).”¹⁰ Therefore, the concept of mystery is information that God kept hidden until He chose to reveal the information. Therefore, it is further contended that God chose to place the mystery church period between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 9:26-27), a mystery that God never revealed in the OT or the Gospels.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a dispensational scholar, contends that the word “mystery” in Scripture is not synonymous with the contemporary usage of the word in English. The scriptural meaning involves the concept of a total secret of plans, and specifically in this study, the secret nature of the church age and the associated dispensation. God had not previously made known to anyone what He revealed to the apostle Paul, regarding the mystery of the church, the body of Christ. God revealed the mystery at the appointed time, and not before. The definition used of the word “mystery” in the current vernacular, suggests that a mystery is something kept secret, difficult to understand, or, incomprehensible. According to Fruchtenbaum, that is not the case with the use of “mystery” in the Pauline epistles. When God informed Paul of the mystery in Ephesians 3:24-29 and Colossians 1:7-9, the apostles and the NT prophets enjoyed the privilege of receiving the announcement of the unveiling of the mystery kept secret since the foundation of the world (Eph 2:19-22; 3:1-10; 1 Cor 2:14). This was the revealing for the first time of a true secret, thereby fitting the scriptural intent of the word “mystery.”¹¹

Paul Benware, a noted dispensational scholar, agrees with Fruchtenbaum’s definition on the hidden, secretive nature of the word “mystery” as used by the apostle Paul. A key concept brought out by Benware is the distinctive nature of the church as a mystery, which sets the church in contrast to Israel. The church and Israel are not synonymous terms, nor is the church an extension of Israel. The scriptural way for a person to become a member of the body of Christ is faith and acceptance of what Jesus accomplished on the cross through His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The Lord Jesus Christ paid the complete price for the sins of all people (John 3:16-17; 1 Cor 15:3-4). At the moment a person places their faith in the finished work of Christ, and realizes that there was nothing possible for them to do on their own to earn a place in heaven (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5-6), the Holy Spirit places them into the body of Christ, making them a member of God’s mystery church, the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

Benware contends Scripture mandates spiritual baptism for every true Christian to obtain entry into the body of Christ. The baptism, or placing into the body of Christ, is an involuntary, automatic event that is an immediate benefit for all new believers in Jesus Christ. Benware, like the majority of Christian scholars, holds the position that baptism into the body of Christ began at Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus Christ became the head of the body of Christ after His resurrection and ascension (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18), and therefore the placement into the body of Christ was applicable in Acts 2.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., 135.

¹¹Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “Mystery” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology, A Practical Guide to the People, Viewpoints, and History of the Prophetic Studies*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 274.

¹²Paul N. Benware, *Understanding the End Times Prophecy, A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 204.

The apostle Paul received the revelation of the mystery church personally by Jesus Christ. This allows for the conclusion that the mystery church exists during the gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week. The church has existed during the gap between the prophetic weeks, which has been accepted as true by various theologians, such as Darby, Baker, Scofield, Chafer, Walvoord, Ryrie among many others.

The manner in which God deals with humankind during specific periods comprises C. I. Scofield's methodology for the categorization of the dispensations. Each dispensation accounts for a specific period where God tests His people on the issues of their responsibilities towards Himself and their choice of embracing or rejecting sinful practices. The periods, referred to as ages (Eph 2:7) and dispensations (Eph 3:2), all end in judgment by God. In summary, under Scofield's division of the dispensations, he determines there are seven dispensations.¹³ A brief examination of a portion of Scofield's dispensational categories is instructional for defining the placement of the mystery church age, and its relationship to the gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks in Daniel's prophecy.

Classical Dispensational Approach¹⁴

<u>Dispensation</u>	<u>From/To</u>	<u>God's Dealing With</u>	<u>Relation to Law</u>
Innocence	Creation to Fall	Gentiles Gen 10:5 Rom 2:14-15	Without Law Rom 2:12a; 5:13-14
Conscience	Fall to Flood		
Human Government	Flood to Babel		
Promise	Abraham to Moses	Israel Gen 12:2-3	
Law	Moses to Pentecost	Matt 10:5-6	Under Law
Grace	Pentecost to Rapture of the Church	Gentiles/Jews/ Christians 1 Cor. 10:32	Under Grace Rom 6:14
Kingdom	Tribulation to the Great White Throne	Israel Rom 11:26	Law Within Jer 31:33

Scofield contends the events in the fifth dispensation (Law) occurred during the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel's prophecy, and therefore, were completely separate from the church. Scofield's dispensational outline reveals an extremely important aspect in arguing the distinctive nature of the church age, or as he called the specific dispensation, the time of grace. According to Scofield, dispensations one through five clearly focused on non-church people groups. Scofield determines the sixth dispensation is that of "grace." The dispensation began after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will cease when Jesus removes the believers in Him, both those who have died and those who are living on the appointed day, and then takes them to heaven (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-53). The age, which is currently in existence, is not under the OT law, but enjoys the privilege of living under the free unmerited gift of grace, which is received by personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-4; Eph

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Company, 1896), 12-13.

2:8-10; Tit 3:5-6). This particular dispensation is synonymous with the mystery church age, which exists between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy. Scofield determined that the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy, or the seven literal year tribulation period, consists of the judgment immediately following the rapture, or physical removal of all of the church age saints to heaven, thus bringing the dispensation of grace to a close. When the removal of the church age saints from the earth occurs, and the Antichrist subsequently confirms a covenant or peace treaty with Israel (Dan. 9:27), the seventieth week commences, and the prophetic calendar will immediately resume.¹⁵

The seventh and final dispensation in Scofield's plan is, "man under the personal reign of Christ." This dispensation covers the future one-thousand-year period of time when the Lord Jesus Christ shall return to earth to set up His theocratic kingdom, centered in the city of Jerusalem (Isa 2:1-4; 11; Acts 15:14-17; Rev 19:11-21; 20:1-6). Scofield further contends the great White Throne judgment closes out the seventh dispensation, where all those who have rejected the true God, from Adam through the last person born, will stand before Christ and face the judgment of God in the person of Jesus Christ. When the judgment concludes, all of the redeemed will be ushered into the newly created heaven and earth to dwell with Jesus Christ for eternity. Those who reject the Lord will suffer permanent, everlasting torture in the lake of fire, separated from God and His people (Rev 20-22).¹⁶

Regardless of whether Scofield properly defines the seven stated dispensations, or whether there are more or less in number than he purports, the concept of the "dispensation of grace," as a specific scripturally defined period, provides an additional concept in determining the reality of the gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy. The concept of a literal period of time that began after the sixty-ninth week of the prophecy ended, and which expanded upon the prophecy in Daniel 9:26-27, is the crux of the issue. The contention is the premise for the allowance of two gaps. The argument includes the existence of the first gap, which comprises the prophesied period between the end of the sixth-ninth week and the plundering of the city of Jerusalem and the second temple. The second gap currently exists, and will cease just prior to the start of the seventieth week of Daniel. The defined period specifically regards the mystery church age as revealed to the apostle Paul. According to Showers, God started the church shortly after the end of the sixty-ninth prophetic week, and God brought the church into existence fifty-seven days after the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel's prophecy, using the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ as the end date of the sixty-ninth week.¹⁷ The application of Showers formula results in a sixty year time frame when it is adjusted to refer to the baptism of Jesus as the end date for the sixty-ninth week, as Miller contends.¹⁸

Lewis Sperry Chafer, a noted classical dispensational theologian, and former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, provides excellent arguments for the distinctive nature of the church age. Chafer strongly espouses the church age exists between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks

¹⁵Scofield, 14-15.

¹⁶Ibid., 16.

¹⁷The examination of the potential for an overlap between the gap prophesied in Daniel 9:26, and the parameters of the mystery church age gap, receive attention in Chapter 7, *Daniel's Gap Paul's Mystery*.

¹⁸Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 19 in *The American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 257.

of Daniel's prophecy. He argues the church age is completely unrelated to the prophecy contained in Daniel. Chafer stated, "The age of the Church, it must be restated, is so perfectly isolated from the rest of human history that it draws nothing into itself of that gone before, nor does it contribute anything to that which follows. If this detached, disassociated, segregated character of this age is not granted, there can be no tracing of God's time-periods as they are revealed."¹⁹ Therefore, the conclusion is the Old Testament did not predict or reveal the church age, a position consistent with the contention of this book.

Chafer further contends that Scripture does not provide an allowance for the existence of the church during the first sixty-nine weeks, or four-hundred-and-eighty-three years of Daniel's prophecy. The current church age lies separately from the seventy-week prophecy. Therefore, according to Chafer, the removal of the church must occur before the prophetic calendar can commence, specifically the start of the seventieth week of Daniel. The church has no part in the first sixty-nine weeks, and therefore, the church will not have any part in the last week.²⁰

The statements of Chafer are dogmatic and clear, and in line with other dispensational theologians.²¹ However, Chafer, like all of the other dispensational literature researched, does not include the concept of the "mystery" in his explanation of Daniel 9, resulting in the failure to synchronize Daniel's gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth prophetic weeks and Paul's mystery (Dan. 9:26-27; Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29). The arguments from dispensational theologians include the concept of the church age existing between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel. However, the theologians have failed to link the word "mystery" with the gap, parenthesis, interlude, or dispensation in the examined literature. Classical and revised dispensational theologians agree on the overall chronology of God's timeline as it relates to the ending of the sixty-ninth week, a gap in time for the church age, the removal of the church and the commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel. The contention remains that the mystery church age, as revealed to the apostle Paul, theologically fits between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:26-27; Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29; Rom 16:25).

The Distinctive Transition & Transformation of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 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 will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will

¹⁹Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systemic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 6:339.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 340.

²¹ The following is a summary list of supporting authors of the Pre-Tribulation rapture of the church age saints.

Ed Hindson and Mark Hitchcock, *Can We Still Believe in the Rapture?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017), 106-109.

Mark Hitchcock, *The End* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 145-176.

Randall Price, "Will All Christians be Raptured Before the Tribulation?" (Rapture Ready:

<https://www.raptureready.com/faq-will-all-christians-be-raptured-before-the-tribulation/>, 2019) accessed November 11, 2019.

Ron Rhodes, *The End Times in Chronological Order* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2012), 41-45.

John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2011), 468-471.

descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" (1 Cor. 15:51-54)

The pretribulation position removes the church age saints before the seven-year tribulation period commences. Mal Couch, from the dispensational construct, contends the pretribulation rapture of the church consists of the premise that God removes all church age saints, dead and alive, from the earth before the seven-year tribulation period (1 Thess 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 1 Cor 15:23-24, 50-54).²² Couch describes a multi-phase chronology for the removal of the church age saints from the earth. This occurs prior to the commencement of the seventieth prophetic week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:27), following the sequence of events in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. 1 Thessalonians 4 speaks comforting words to believers in Jesus Christ (1 Thess 4:14) who have "fallen asleep," or literally "have died"²³ (1 Thess 4:13). Jesus Christ, on a date known only to God, will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. God will immediately resurrect the deceased Christians (1 Thess 4:16). Immediately following the stated resurrection, the living believers in Jesus Christ will be "caught up," or raptured, to the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air (1 Thess 4:17). The passage concludes with the promise of God that the raptured believers remain with the Lord forever (1 Thess 4:17). Couch concludes the raptured Christians receive new immortal, glorified bodies during the rapture process (1 Cor 15:51-53).²⁴ The analysis provides a sound scriptural account of the actual events of the rapture of the church. The critical issue that requires addressing is the specific timing for the rapture.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum presents the rapture as one phase of a four-part marriage God will specifically follow with the church-age saints. The first phase is the payment by the father for the price of the bride, the church, which consists of the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph 5:25-27). The second stage is the actual fetching of the bride. Fruchtenbaum contends this directly refers to the rapture of the church age saints to heaven before the beginning of the Tribulation (1 Thess 4:13-18). The third stage is the marriage ceremony, which transpires in heaven just prior to the second advent of Jesus Christ on earth (Rev 19:6-8). The final stage of the marriage consists of the marriage feast (Rev 19:9). Fruchtenbaum contends God resurrects the Old Testament saints (Dan 12:2), and the saints martyred during the seven-year tribulation (Rev. 20:4), and they join with the church age saints, who return to the earth in glorified bodies for the millennial reign of Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:11-21).²⁵ The conclusions by Fruchtenbaum correlate with the premise that God physically removes the mystery church age saints prior to the commencement of the seventieth prophetic week of Daniel.

²²Mal Couch, "1 Thessalonians," in *Exploring Bible Prophecy, from Genesis to Revelation*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 445-447.

²³Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 838.

²⁴Couch, 448.

²⁵Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2004), 587-589.

Lewis Chafer states in regards to his firm commitment regarding the pretribulation rapture position the following.

“Only the blindest eyes of ...theology would ignore the overwhelming evidence in the Scriptures that the Church is not in Daniel’s 483 years, or in any period of the Old Testament history. Those who would thrust the church into the last 7 years of Gentile times are guilty of introducing an element into that period which has no place in that period since it is not to be on earth during the eventful years which that period consummates.”²⁶

Chafer argues, in reference to the seventieth week of Daniel, that the church is completely unrelated to any of the events that occur in Daniel’s seventy-weeks prophecy. He contends God made no place in Daniel for the unforeseen and unpredicted “age of grace,” which specifically applies to the church. He asserts that Daniel 9 maintained continuity between the sixty-ninth and seventieth prophetic weeks, which specifically applied to the governmental and political areas. Daniel never received any inclination regarding the formation of the church, and therefore, Scripture finds no allowance for the church existing during the tribulation period.²⁷

Erdman rightly states the pretribulation rapture position contends for the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Mal Couch states Scripture mandates that no signs must occur prior to the rapture of the church. In addition, the apostle Paul, when referring to the removal of the church age saints, uses the pronouns *we*, *you* and *us* on several occasions, referring to the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Paul used the pronoun “we” in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, “I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” Paul infers that God could remove all those under his immediate ministry. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 used the pronoun *us*, “and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Paul uses *we*, *you*, *us* and *our* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 – 2 “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ²not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.”²⁸

Erickson adds that an essential tenet of the pretribulation rapture position includes the necessity of the imminence of the rapture; it can occur at any time. No further prophecies require fulfillment, and no future events must take place. Therefore, the pretribulation position rightly argues that the mystery church age, revealed by special revelation to the apostle Paul, and placed between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel’s prophecy, faces the imminent return of Jesus Christ, to remove the church age saints physically from the earth before the commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29; Rom 16:24-25; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-54; 2 Thess 2:1-2; Dan 9:26-27).

²⁶Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systemic Theology* 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 4:364.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 339-340.

²⁸Mal Couch, “Biblical Study of the Rapture,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 333.

Interpretive Challenges and Conclusion

The specific intent of this paper was to prove from Scripture that an allowance for two gaps in time exist between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel, one, which Daniel prophesied, and a second gap, which God revealed to the apostle Paul through special revelation, which is the current church age. The implications included that the mystery church age began after the sixty-ninth week of Daniel, and must conclude by being raptured before the implementation of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:26-27).

The interpretive challenges regarding Daniel 9:24-27, comprise a myriad of opinions from the scholarly community. The first exegetical issue regards the first two words of the prophecy, "Seventy weeks" (Dan 9:24). Determining exactly what the "seventy weeks" refers to provides the main interpretive challenge. The first conclusion is that the seventy prophetic weeks each consisted of seven literal years, or heptads, for a total of four-hundred-and-ninety years. The second conclusion regards the four-hundred-and-ninety-year period began when Artaxerxes I decreed that the Jewish people leave Babylon to return to Israel and restore the plundered Jerusalem. The end of the sixty-ninth prophetic week of Daniel occurred at the baptism of Jesus Christ according to Miller²⁹, or the latest date possible was at the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ as argued by Sir Robert Anderson.³⁰ The timeframe between the two events accounted for the first sixty-nine prophetic weeks, or four-hundred-and-eighty-three consecutive years of the prophecy. The next interpretive challenge is determining to whom the prophecy applied. The conclusion is that the prophecy specifically addresses Daniel's people, the Jews, and the holy city, Jerusalem (Dan 9:24). That determination results in the conclusion that the current church age has no connection to Daniel's prophecy.

The next major interpretive challenge is Daniel 9:26. Daniel stated that *after* the sixty-nine weeks, the Messiah would be *cut off*. The *Messiah* refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, and *cut off* refers to His crucifixion. Daniel adds additional content that will occur before the commencement of the seventieth week. The thrust of the remaining items regards the destruction of the city and the sanctuary, with the additional statement, "the end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined." The "city" and the "sanctuary" refers to Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The plundering of Jerusalem includes a horrific destruction, in likeness to the massive damage caused by a severe flood. The final conclusion regards Daniel 9:26 "till the end of the war desolations are determined." The conclusion most consistent with the entire focus of the research, regards the phrase meaning, that the war against Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would continue until the city of Jerusalem lay desolate.³¹

The last verse of the prophecy Daniel 9:27, specifically referencing the final prophetic week of Daniel's prophecy, consists of seven literal years that are synonymous with the seventieth

²⁹ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 19 in *The American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 268-269.

³⁰ Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (Grand Rapids, Kregel Classics, 1957), 128

³¹ Miller, 268-269

prophetic week. The eschatological Antichrist will make a covenant with the people of Israel for a seven-year period. In the middle of the agreement, or after three-and-a-half literal years, the Antichrist will break the covenant, resulting in sacrifices in the yet-to-be built third temple to cease, and the Antichrist performs an abominable act in the temple defiling the sacred edifice (Dan 9:27; Rev. 13:11-15). The conclusion of the final section of the verse is the destruction of the desolator, the Antichrist. The “desolator” finally experiences the judgment of God when judgment is “poured out” upon him. God will capture the desolator and send him to the lake of fire that burns with brimstone, where he will remain for eternity (2 Thess 2:8; Rev 7:9-11; 19:19-21).

Paul Benware provided an excellent summary statement that directly correlates with the conclusion of this research in regards to the concept of the mystery church, the body of Christ.

That the church is a “mystery” also points to its distinction from Israel. The New Testament uses “mystery” to refer to divine knowledge that was not revealed by God in the past, and that people could never have discovered on their own, but that God has now revealed (e.g., Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:7-8; Eph 3:4-9; Col 1:26). The idea of regenerated Jews and Gentiles being united in one body was not known in the Old Testament. The Old Testament did reveal that Gentiles would be saved, and it clearly revealed the priority place occupied by Israel. But the unity and equality of the body was new and unrevealed until God gave this truth to the apostles. The revealing of this mystery, which took place shortly after the actual beginning of the church, points to a distinction between the church and the nation of Israel.³²

Three specific areas in Scripture point to the church’s distinctiveness from a dispensational perspective. First, Scripture states the church was a mystery kept secret since the foundation of the world, and not revealed until the Lord Jesus specifically spoke the message to the apostle Paul (Col 1:24-29). Second, the building of the church rests upon the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, also known as the body of Christ, based on His resurrection from the dead (Eph 1:20-23). Third, the baptism by the Holy Spirit occurred after the ascension of Jesus Christ, and specifically occurs immediately as believers place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, placing them into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Col 1:18).³³

This paper concludes that Daniel’s prophecy only addressed the children of Israel, Daniel’s people (Dan 9:24). The Gospels addressed the Jewish people and Gentile proselytes. The mystery church, as revealed to the apostle Paul, was not in focus in Daniel or the Gospels. The impact of embracing the stated conclusion enhances the argument that the mystery church bears a separate and distinct position in the Scriptures as contrasted with the OT and the Gospels, which have a

³²Paul N. Benware, *Understanding the End Times Prophecy, A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 254-255.

³³Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 132.

Jewish and eschatological kingdom emphasis. The Jewish people await a Messiah who will set up His theocratic earthly kingdom (Matt 24:3). The Christians of the mystery church period await the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will physically remove them from the earth and gather them to heaven (1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Cor 15:50-53). Looking for the kingdom on earth, and looking for the rapture of the church age saints from the earth, are not synonymous.

Therefore, it is concluded that the mystery church age remains completely separate from the Jewish prophetic calendar as cited in Daniel 9:24-27. This requires the temporary halting of the prophetic timeline, which occurred after the destruction of the second Temple and the plundering of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Dan 9:26). The church age began shortly after the ascension of Jesus Christ, and the temporary pause of the prophetic timeline remains in place to this current day. An allowable overlap of the gaps occurred at the beginning portion of the second gap, when holding that the church began in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, which was approximately forty years before the first gap ended in A.D. 70. Immediately after the rapture of the church-age saints, which occurs before Daniel's seventieth week, more commonly referred to as the pretribulation rapture, the resumption of the prophetic calendar will take place with the implementation of the seventieth prophetic week of Daniel's prophecy, and the arrival of the Antichrist and his seven year agreement with the Jewish people (Dan 9:27).

Finally, it is concluded that Scripture does provide for an allowance of two gaps in time that exist between the sixty-ninth and seventieth prophetic weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:26-27). The first gap occurred according to the prophecy of Daniel (Dan 9:26), and a second gap is currently in progress, which God revealed to the apostle Paul as the mystery church age (Eph 3:1-7; Col 1:24-29; Rom 16:24-25). The implications include that the mystery church age began subsequent to the sixty-ninth week of Daniel, and will terminate before the commencement of the seventieth prophetic week (Dan 9:26-27), thereby placing the mystery church age between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy, *Scripture's Most Compelling Argument for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture*. Look up, Jesus could come and take believers home at any moment!

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