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Bridgeway Church / Foundations
The End Times (3)

The End Times
Our Hope & God's Promise
Part Three

Dispensational, Pre-Tribulational, Premillennialism

The best way to describe the dispensationalist's view of the millennial kingdom is chronologically, i.e., by means of the temporal order in which the events actually occur. Although there are variations among those who call themselves dispensationalists, I will focus here only on the majority view known as dispensational, pretribulational, premillennialism.

(1) First, according to this scheme of end-time events, Jesus will appear suddenly and unannounced in the heavens at which time he will *rapture* or translate or "catch up" to himself all Christians currently alive on the earth. This event is *imminent*, which is to say that no other prophesied event must first occur. Thus the rapture could occur "at any moment" and without warning. All believers at that time are transformed or glorified and receive their resurrection bodies in conformity with that of the risen Lord himself. Some embrace a "partial" rapture of the church, insisting that only those who are living in expectation of Christ's return and the godliness that this necessarily entails will be caught up to their Lord in the heavens. All others will be "left behind" to endure the horror of the Great Tribulation, together with the unbelieving populace of the earth.

(2) Subsequent to the Rapture, there will ensue a period of seven years during which the judgments and wrath of God (as expressed in the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments of the book of Revelation) will be poured out on the non-Christian peoples of the earth. This seven-year period is the seventieth and final week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27). A world leader, popularly known as the Antichrist will emerge. He will initially establish a covenant of peace with Israel, only to betray the agreement at the mid-point of the Tribulation (3½ years), at which time he will orchestrate a global persecution of the Jewish people and any who may have come to saving faith in Christ subsequent to the Rapture.

(3) At the Lord's second coming after the Tribulation, in conjunction with the Battle of Armageddon where the Antichrist and the enemies of the gospel are finally and fully defeated, the vast majority of Israelites who survive that period of time will be converted to faith in Christ (Rom. 11:25-27). Those who remain in unbelief will be put to death and not permitted to enter the millennium (Ezek. 20:33-38). Thus Christ's return is in *two stages*: a coming in the heavens (but not to earth) *before* the Tribulation to rapture the church, and a coming to earth at the *close* of the Tribulation to defeat and judge his enemies at Armageddon.

(4) All Gentiles who also survived the Tribulation will be judged (Matt. 25:31-46): the sheep (who are saved) being left on the earth to enter the millennium and the goats (the lost) being cast into everlasting fire and condemnation. These saved Israelites and saved Gentiles will therefore enter the millennium in their natural, physical, un-glorified bodies.

(5) When Christ returns at the close of the Tribulation there will also occur the bodily resurrection both of OT saints and those believers who died during the Tribulation period.

(6) Satan will at that time be bound and sealed for 1,000 years (he and the Antichrist having been defeated at the battle of Armageddon), wholly prevented from perpetrating evil during the millennial kingdom.

(7) Christ now begins his millennial reign. He ascends a throne in Jerusalem and rules over a predominantly Jewish kingdom, although Gentile believers share in its blessings. The subjects of Christ's rule are primarily those Israelites and Gentiles who entered the kingdom in their natural bodies. Thus, at the *beginning* of the millennium there are no unregenerate/unbelieving people alive on the earth. This reign of Christ also fulfills the promises made to Israel in the OT.

(8) Those who have entered the millennium in their natural bodies will marry and reproduce, and though they will live much longer than they would have prior to Christ's coming, most of them will eventually die. This period is a time of unparalleled economic prosperity, political peace and spiritual renewal. Worship in the millennium will center in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem in which animal sacrifices will be offered: these sacrifices, however, will not be propitiatory but *memorial* offerings in remembrance of Christ's death. Some dispensationalists, such as J. D. Pentecost, believe that the millennial kingdom will see a virtual revival of much of the Mosaic and Levitical systems described in the OT.

All resurrected saints (i.e., OT saints, Christians raptured before the Great Tribulation, and believers who came to faith during the Tribulation but were put to death by the Antichrist) will live in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-22:5). J. D. Pentecost argues that this New Jerusalem will be above the earth, in the air, shedding its light and glory thereon. Resurrected saints will play some role in Christ's rule on the earth; their primary activity, however, will be in the New and Heavenly Jerusalem.

(9) Children will be born to those believers (both Jew and Gentile) who entered the millennial kingdom in their natural bodies (and it is reasonable to assume that these children will themselves in turn live long lives, get married, and in turn bear yet more children). Many will come to faith in Christ and be saved. Those who persist in unbelief will be restrained by the righteous rule and government of Christ. At the end of the millennial kingdom Satan is released and will gather all unbelievers in one final conflict against Christ (Rev. 20:7-10). The rebellion will be crushed and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, where the Antichrist and False Prophet already languish (having been judged and cast there at the close of the Tribulation). Two more bodily resurrections now occur: that of all unbelievers of every age and that of believers who died during the millennial kingdom.

(10) The consummation will then come with the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15), at which all unbelievers of every ethnicity and every era of human history will appear. They will be judged in accordance with "what they had done" (i.e., according to their works; Rev. 20:13-14). Finally, the New Heavens and New Earth are created as the everlasting dwelling place of God and his people, and thus begins the eternal state (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

Discussion Questions

(1) What view of eschatology were you raised and taught to believe? Is it different from what you believe today? What changed your mind?

(2) On what basis does the dispensationalist differentiate between two "comings" of Christ: his coming before the Tribulation to rapture the Church and his coming after the Tribulation to consummate his kingdom and destroy his enemies? Do you see any biblical basis for this?

(3) What are some of the problems, if any, that you see in the dispensational, pre-tribulational, premillennial view?

(4) Why do you think so many Christians are so passionate and zealous about this particular eschatological scheme?

(5) Study the attached charts and talk about the differences between the two views.