

Welcome to the End Times

REVELATION: YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY, Week 1

I. Defining Main End-Times Terms

1. The "Millennium"

- *Definition:* A thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth
- *Key Passage:* Revelation 20:1-10
- *Views:* Christians disagree whether this is literal or figurative, and on the timing.
 - *Amillennial:* This position sees the thousand years in Revelation 20 as symbolic, usually of the church age. There will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. This is the majority Christian view.
 - *Post-millennial:* This position sees the thousand years in Revelation 20 as a golden age of peace and gospel success that must take place before Christ can return. This is now a rare Christian view.
 - *Pre-millennial:* This position takes the thousand years in Revelation 20 as literal, and holds that Jesus will indeed return to earth and rule on earth for a thousand years before the next stage of restoration. This is a well-represented view in early Christianity and now (*our church's view*).



2. The "Tribulation"

- *Definition:* A particularly difficult time of suffering on earth when God will pour out his wrath before Jesus brings the final restoration of all things. This is often thought to be seven years long.
- *Key Passage:* Mark 13:19-20
- *Views:* Christians disagree whether this is literal or figurative, on timing, and on who is involved.
 - *Focused around AD 70:* Some Christian see the tribulation language focusing on the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70.
 - *Final Heightened Time of Suffering, Including the Church:* Some Christians see the great tribulation as the final period of suffering before Christ's return, with the church being present on earth during this time period.
 - *Final Heightened Time of Suffering, without the Church:* Some Christians also see the great tribulation as the final period of suffering before Christ's return, but understand God to have removed the church from earth before the tribulation begins (*our church's view*).



3. The "Rapture"

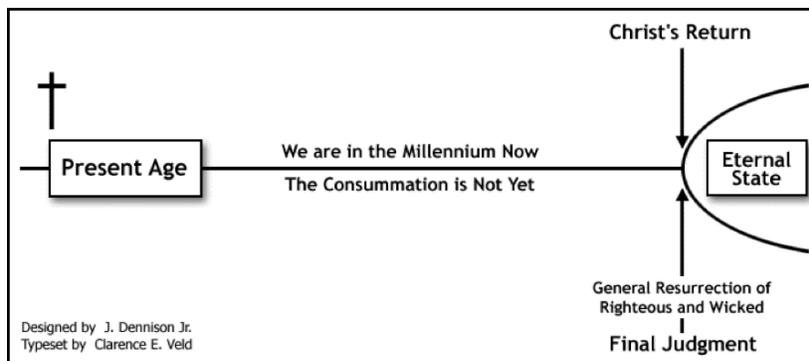
- *Definition:* The rising up of the church to meet Jesus in the air at his return.
- *Key Passage:* 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- *Views:* Christians disagree over timing and what exactly is envisioned.
 - *Post-Tribulation:* This position sees the rapture taking place after the Tribulation, at Jesus return, before beginning the Millennium. The Rapture is thus then simply a way to describe our meeting of Jesus when he returns. This view can be combined with belief in literal millennium or not. This is the majority Christian view.
 - *Mid-Tribulation:* This position sees the rapture taking place half-way through the tribulation, leaving only unbelievers for the second half of the tribulation.
 - *Pre-Tribulation:* This position sees the rapture taking place before the Tribulation, a so-called "secret rapture" where all the Christians in the world disappear and only unbelievers are left to enter the tribulation (*our church's view*).



II. Organizing Main End-Times Views

1. Amillennialism

- *Summary of View:* This view is probably the simplest. It envisions a single coming of Jesus, at which point the resurrection will take place, the final judgment will take place, and the eternal state of the New Heavens and New Earth will begin. (Since the thousand year millennium in Revelation 20 is taken to be figurative, a literal reign of Christ in that way is not envisioned). The “rapture” is not in any way distinct from simply the return of Christ.



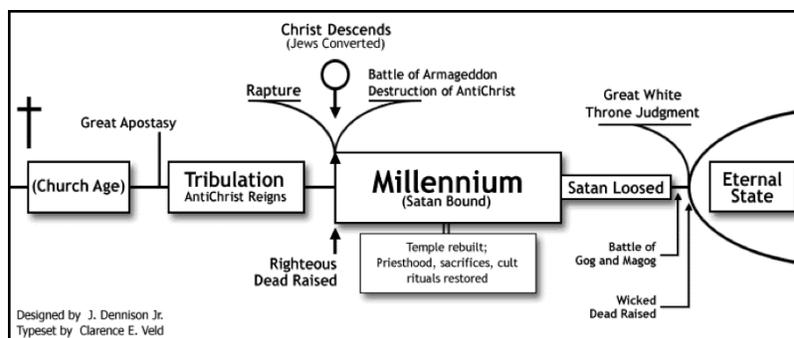
- *Generally Held by:* Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Presbyterian, Orthodox, many Baptist churches, many Non-Denominational churches, and many Evangelical Churches. *This is probably the most common Christian view.*
- *Strengths:* Its simplicity is probably its greatest strength, since it does not have to resort to complicated schemes. The New Testament does seem to most typically envision a single return of Christ and a single judgment and resurrection.
- *Weaknesses:* This view struggles to wrestle seriously with the thousand-year reign mentioned in Revelation 20, as well as the many early Christians who held to an intermediate millennial kingdom. It also sometimes struggles to show fulfillment of many “earthly” Old Testament promises to Israel.

2. Classic (or Historic) Premillennialism

- *Summary of View:* This view envisions a single return of Christ, which begins a thousand-year millennial reign of Christ on Earth, followed by the eternal state of the New Heavens and the New Earth. During the thousand-year reign on earth comes the fulfillment of many of the “earthly” promises to Israel in the Old Testament, as the nation largely believes in Jesus as its messiah. The “rapture” is not in any way distinct from simply the return of Christ.

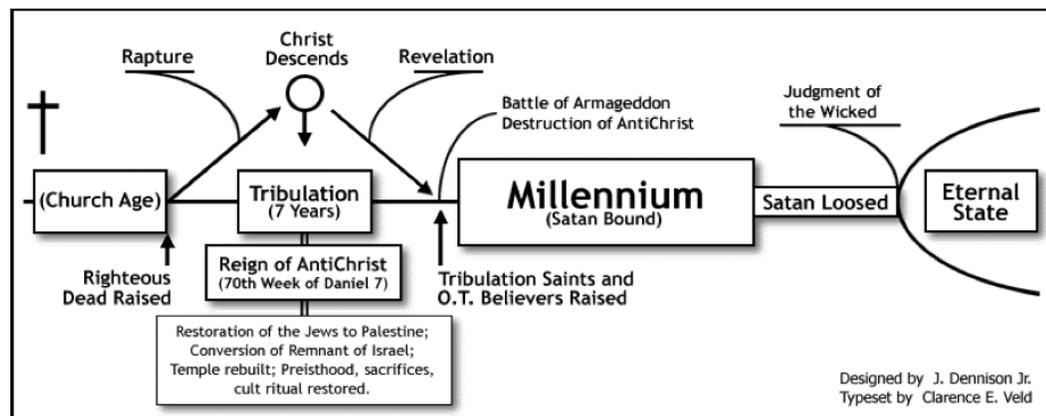
- *Generally Held by:* A variety of Reformed churches, many Baptist churches, many Non-Denominational churches, and many Evangelical Churches
- *Strengths:* This view takes seriously the thousand-year reign seemingly predicted in Revelation 20, along with heeding those early Christian voices that believed in a millennial reign of Christ. It also has a place for a more literal fulfillment of all the “earthly” promises made to Israel in the Old Testament.

- *Weaknesses:* There are of course some difficulties inherent to holding to a literal Millennial reign of Christ. Why is Satan released for a time? How can some still not believe in Jesus when he is ruling on Earth? Why is death not yet defeated?



3. Pre-Tribulational (or Dispensational) Premillennialism (*Our Church's View*)

- *Summary of View:* This view combines a belief in the millennial reign of Christ (as in the previous view) and adds a novel element—the timing of the “rapture” takes place before the seven-year Great Tribulation, which separates the “rapture” of the church from the Second Coming of Christ.
- *Generally Held by:* Those who hold to “dispensational theology,” found in a variety of Baptist Churches, Bible churches, Non-Denominational Church, and Evangelical Churches.
- *Strengths:* A “secret rapture” with no warning signs fits well with Jesus’ unexpected return without the need to first fulfill predicted signs. These signs would then be part of the Tribulation. This alleviates the tension about how Jesus’ coming could be both unexpected and yet preceded by certain signs.
- *Weaknesses:* This position is a “theological inference,” which is never taught clearly in any one place in Scripture. Rather this position arises out of combining various passages in ways that result in an order of events that itself is not laid out anywhere in Scripture. This view is also not an ancient view, but relatively new. Additionally, it is particularly difficult to demonstrate a secret “rapture” of the church that is not simply part of Jesus’ single return.



III. Our Church's Doctrinal Statement on End Times

- (7) *We believe* that, according to the Word of God, the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of Christ into the air to receive to Himself both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in the gospel, and for this we should be constantly looking. We believe, next, that the taking away of the saved ones will be followed by the great tribulation in the earth, which was predicted by our Lord, and that finally He will bring to end that time of judgment for the whole earth by His own appearing. *John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:51,52; Phil. 3:20; I Thess. 4:13-18; I Thess 5:9,10; Rom. 5:9; Titus 2:11-14; II Thess. 2:7-10; Matthew 24:29-31.*
- (8) *We believe* that this same Jesus Christ will return to the earth as He left it, and will set up His Kingdom on the earth to rule and to reign for one thousand years, and the day and hour of His return no man knows. *Acts 1:10,11; Psalm 2; Rev. 19:11-16; 20: 4-6; Matt. 24:36.*
- (14) *We believe* that all who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ shall be raised from the dead into everlasting blessedness; and that all others shall be raised from the dead into everlasting conscious punishment in Hell. *I Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:4-6; 11-15.*

IV. Our Church's Position, Organized by Relative Levels of Confidence



1. Held with *Great Confidence*

- Jesus Will Return Bodily (Acts 1:9-11)
- At Jesus' Return the Kingdom will Come in Fullness, Restoring All Things (1 Cor 15:23-28; Rev 21:1-4)
- Jesus will sit in Judgement, with Individuals Either Receiving Resurrection and Eternal Life or Condemnation in hell (Matt 25:31-34, 41, 46; 1 Cor 15:20-23)
- Christians will Be Judged Based on Their Service to the Lord in Life (2 Cor 5:9-11)
- No one Knows the Day and Hour of Jesus' Return, but We All Must Strive to be Ready at All Times (Mark 13:32-33)



2. Held with *Moderate Confidence*

- Jesus will Reign on Earth in an "Intermediate" Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20:1-10)
- During This Time Many of the Old Testament Promises to National Israel Will be Fulfilled (Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6-8; Rom 11:25-27; Isa 65:17-21; Zech 14:5-17)



3. Held with *Less Confidence*

- Timing of the Rapture will be Pre-Tribulational (1 Thess 4:13-18)

In my opinion, the strongest piece of evidence for a pre-tribulation rapture is that it helps explain how the return of Jesus can happen anytime with no warning, and yet have certain signs precede his return. It makes sense to split the return of Jesus into two parts in this case, an unexpected "rapture" not preceded by signs, and later events of the Second Coming, preceded by signs. For examples of passages setting up this tension, see: Matt 24:45-51 (Jesus' Return could happen anytime); 2 Thess 2:1-5 (Jesus Return is Preceded by Signs).

Yet let's also bear in mind that a pre-tribulation rapture is the element of our end-times beliefs that has the weakest biblical evidence and is the most unusual when viewed against what most Christians have believed over the centuries.

The Bottom Line

_____ **in** _____ **of** _____

...by Living _____ because of Jesus' _____ and _____.

...by _____ to Central _____ about _____.

...by Holding _____ with _____ of an _____.

Three amusing slogans reflect aspects of this attitude:

"I believe in pan-millennialism; I believe it will all pan out in the end!"

"We need to make sure we're on the welcoming committee, not the planning committee."

"Eschatology is not the end of the world!"