



Magnolia Bible Church Men's Group - Prophecy Series

Lesson #4: Key Concepts Overview (2/3)

Dispensations, Israel, the Kingdom, **the Bema, the Tribulation Period**, the Millennial Reign, Eternity

Thursday, September 22, 2016

This is the second of a 3-part series dealing with “key concepts” that serve as the foundation for much of this Prophecy Series. In this particular lesson we will be addressing the Bema and the Tribulation Period. In this lesson we will be discussing the importance of each of these events in relation to our own lives and the overall “End Time continuum” (sounds a little bit like the “space-time continuum” from the *Back to the Future* movie, doesn't it?!).

The Bema

If you have been at Magnolia Bible Church for any length of time, you have likely been exposed to Joe Wall's book, *Going for the Gold*. It is a wonderful book that provides for modern-day Believers a framework for understanding the Bema, also known as the *Judgment Seat of Christ*. Provided below is a description of the book (from Amazon.com):

People of all ages have one thing in common: they want their lives to count. Although some are content with mediocrity, most want to make an impact. The biblical teachings about the Judgment Seat of Christ are meant to illumine the path to a life with eternal value.

The concept of the Bema (or Bema Seat) comes from the ancient Olympics, where a judge would sit on the Bema Seat at the finish line. The judge's purpose was to determine what position the runners came in—first, second, and so on—and then to give out the appropriate rewards. That is the imagery behind what is known as the Bema Seat.¹

In a Biblical sense the Bema Seat is described in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15: *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* What we do in this life is evaluated and only those actions driven by Christ-like motives will withstand the “purification fire” of Jesus.

In the context of judgment at the end of our lives I am also reminded of Solomon's wise words in Ecclesiastes 12:3-4: *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

Also, Paul wrote an excellent explanation of the Bema in 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.* Paul is not teaching that the Bema determines our justification (salvation) before Christ; rather, it is for rewards based on how we have lived for Christ and our faithfulness in honoring Him. In some regards it is an assessment of our stewardship with the gifts and talents we have been given.

¹ <http://www.allaboutgod.com/bema-seat.htm>

In terms of when the Bema occurs, there is some debate regarding its timing. The traditional position held by most Bible churches is that it occurs after the Rapture, as illustrated in Dr. Dave Reagan's chart provided in **Figure 2**. Others believe it will occur at the moment of death for each Believer. Finally, others believe the Bema will occur at the end of the 1,000-year reign. Regardless of when the Bema occurs, the central fact is that we need to live holy lives in preparation for this most important event.

It is very important to not confuse the Bema Seat with the Great White Throne judgment, where those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are judged and condemned, as described in Revelation 20:11-15.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Here is the main point in this discussion – it is not enough to just exist as a Believer. We need to continually be focused on honoring Him with our lives and bearing fruit; very much like Jesus communicated in John 15:5 that we can only bear fruit when we are *abiding in Him*.

As Scot Wall once asked us in one of his sermons, "Are you playing to win, or not lose?"

The Tribulation Period

Needless to say, along with the Rapture and the 1,000-year Period, the Tribulation period is one of the more contested subjects in any prophecy-related discussion. As part of discussing the Tribulation Period, I would like to briefly discuss the Rapture. Among those who believe in the Rapture there are differences of opinion as to when it will occur. Worse yet, there are many within Christendom who do not believe the Rapture will ever occur as they only see Christ's return as a one-time event with His return to the earth (also known as the Second Advent). The traditional position held within the Bible church is that the church is "taken up", or Raptured, prior to the start of the Tribulation Period; a position known as the pre-tribulation Rapture². **Figure 1** depicts this, along with the other held views on the Rapture.

The start of the Tribulation Period is a covenant made between the Antichrist and the nation of Israel (Daniel 9:24-27). The seven year period that follows this signing is also known as Daniel's 70th Week. Descriptions of the events that occur in the Tribulation Period are detailed by John in Revelation 6- 19.

One might be compelled to ask – what is the purpose of the Tribulation Period? Based on what I have read, I think Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum identifies three of the best explanations as to why God has planned this future event, as discussed in the following text.³

² The pre-tribulation Rapture doctrine originated in the eighteenth century, with the Puritan preachers Increase and Cotton Mather, and was then popularized in the 1830s by John Darby. Pre-tribulation rapture theology was popularized extensively in the 1830s by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, and further popularized in the United States in the early 20th century by the wide circulation of the Scofield Reference Bible. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapture>).

³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, (Tustin, CA: 1982). <https://www.raptureready.com/featured/ice/PurposeForTheTribulation.html>.

Reason #1 Gentile Judgment: Before the Lord can personally rule on earth in the Person of Jesus Christ He must first judge the world in order to prepare it for His righteous rule. The first purpose for the Tribulation Period is to put an end of wickedness and wicked ones (Isaiah 13:9; 24:19-20); a punishment in history upon the whole world for its sins against God is in a way similar to that of the global flood during Noah's days (Matthew 24:37-39).

Deuteronomy 30:7 tells us that God will "inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you." This will take place during the Tribulation Period and will be retribution to the nations for how they have treated the Jews during the last 2,000 years. This purpose does not encompass the church.

Reason #2 World-Wide Evangelism: The seven-year Tribulation Period will be a time of phenomenal evangelistic outreach. It will be a time unlike any previous period of history as discussed in Revelation 7:1-17. During the first half of the Tribulation Period, God will evangelize the world via the 144,000 Jews and thus fulfill the prophecy found in Matthew 24:14. In addition to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, typical evangelism taking place as we see today among Believers converted during the Tribulation Period. Further, the Two Witnesses identified in Revelation 11 will provide an evangelistic witness to Israel. Finally, at the mid-point of the tribulation Revelation 14 tells us that God Himself will use angels to preach the Gospel and warn "earth dwellers" not to take the mark of the beast.

Reason #3 Conversion of Israel: One of the most important purposes of the tribulation will be the conversion of Israel. The Tribulation Period will be a time in which God, through evil agencies, prepares Israel for her conversion and acknowledgment Jesus as their Messiah, resulting in the Second Coming of Christ. The Bible teaches us that God will use tribulation to bring His elect people to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. It appears that God will accomplish this goal by first returning Israel to the land before the Tribulation Period, "I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out (Ezekiel 20:34). The re-gathering before the Tribulation Period is what God has been doing since 1948 with the modern state of Israel.

Once the Tribulation Period begins He " shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 20:37-38). This tells us that the unbelieving Jews (i.e., "the rebels") will be removed during the Tribulation Period. From Zechariah 13:8-9 we learn that two-thirds of Israel will be purged through the fire of the tribulation, leaving the one-third elect who will be converted to Jesus as their Messiah. This is also reflected in Romans 11:26-27: "all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ' The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins'".

It should be noted that nowhere in the Tribulation Period do we find any reference to the Church. The purpose of the Church has always been to be "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13-16) and make disciples of the world (Matthew 28:19-20). With the presence of the 144,000 Jews, the Two Witnesses, and the "evangelizing" angels during the Tribulation Period there is no reason for the Church as our purpose is being accomplished by others ordained by God. Thus, this observation supports a position for the Church having been raptured prior to the start of the Tribulation Period.

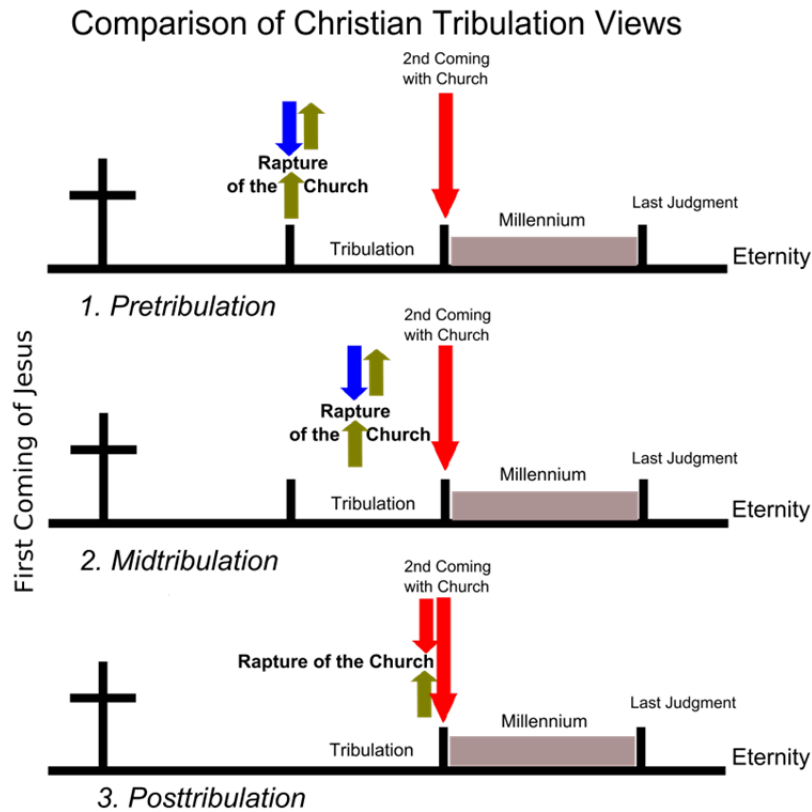


Figure 1: Three views regarding the timing of the Rapture (pre, mid, and post)

Questions for Consideration

1. The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 sets a framework for God's expectations for Believers regarding this issue of stewardship. In what ways has God gifted you in terms of talents or resources where He expects you to use them to honor Him? How are you doing?
2. Be able to explain the differences between the pre-trib, mid-trib, and post-trib positions (feel free to reference **Figure 1**). Based on your review of the provided Bible passages in this lesson, to which position do you hold?
3. Using the line provided below, identify the following events on the timeline (feel free to review the chart provided in **Figure 2**).

Church Age	Rapture	Bema	Tribulation Period
Jesus 2 nd Coming	Armageddon	1000-Year Reign	White Throne



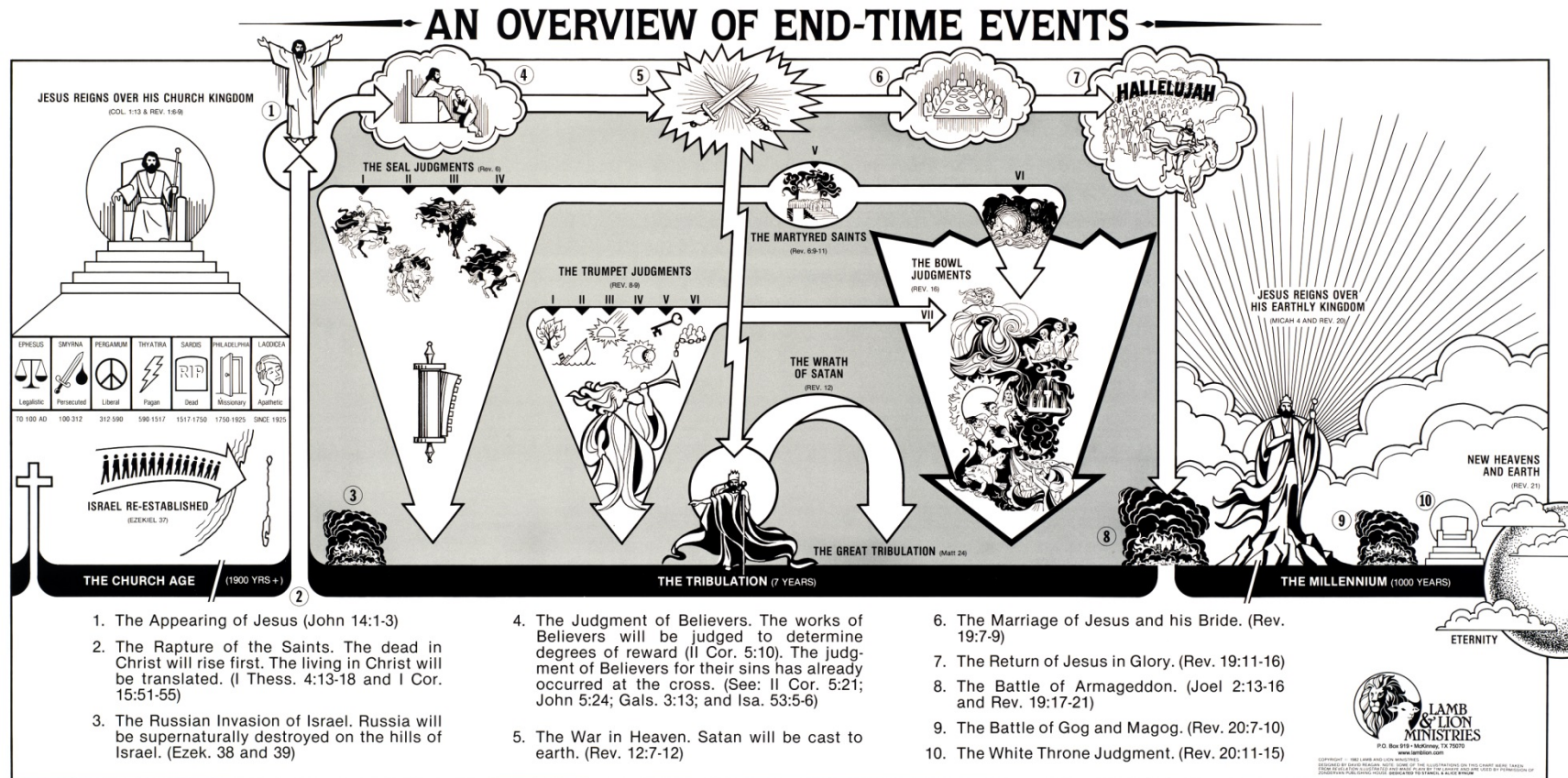


Figure 2 – Chart showing *An Overview of End Times* (Dr. Dave Reagan, Lamb & Lion Ministries, printed with permission)