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Daniel

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel contains two quite different literary genres. Chapters 1-6 are a cycle of stories, whereas chaps. 7-12 consist of a series of four apocalypses. The stories concern the fate of four young Jews, exiled to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem, who rise to power in the courts of the Babylonian, Median, and Persian kings. It has long been recognized that these stories are fictional narratives: short stories with historical settings. The careful plots, folkloristic motifs, and historical errors indicate their character as fiction. This in no way diminishes their theological value, however, for narrative is a powerful tool for theological reflection. These narratives probably originated in the fourth or third century BCE in the eastern Jewish Diaspora, that is, among Jews who lived in Syria or Mesopotamia, and the stories explore themes of particular concern to such Jews. The tales tend to be optimistic about the possibilities for Jews to succeed in the Gentile world, though they acknowledge the vulnerability of Jews who might be caught in a conflict of allegiance between God and the Gentile

king. Thus the overriding theme of the collection is the nature of royal or state power in relation to the sovereignty of God.

Chapters 7-12 are not stories but apocalypses, that is, revelations about heavenly mysteries concerning the future course of history, communicated to Daniel in dreams, visions, and angelic visitations. In contrast to the narratives, which were critical but ultimately optimistic about Gentile kings, the apocalypses see Gentile power as irredeemably evil and destined for ultimate destruction by God. The difference in perspective reflects the different historical context in which the apocalypses were written. They were composed in Palestine between 168 and 164 BCE during the time of the persecution of the Jews by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the revolt led by Judah the Maccabee. Although the historical references in Daniel to this period of time are clear, the mysterious and veiled style in which the apocalypses are written encouraged later interpreters to perceive in them allusions to their own times.

COMMENTARY

The Narratives

Although most readers tend to think of Daniel and his three friends as the heroes of the stories in chaps. 1-6, the real focus of the narratives is on the character of the kings and whether they are capable of

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

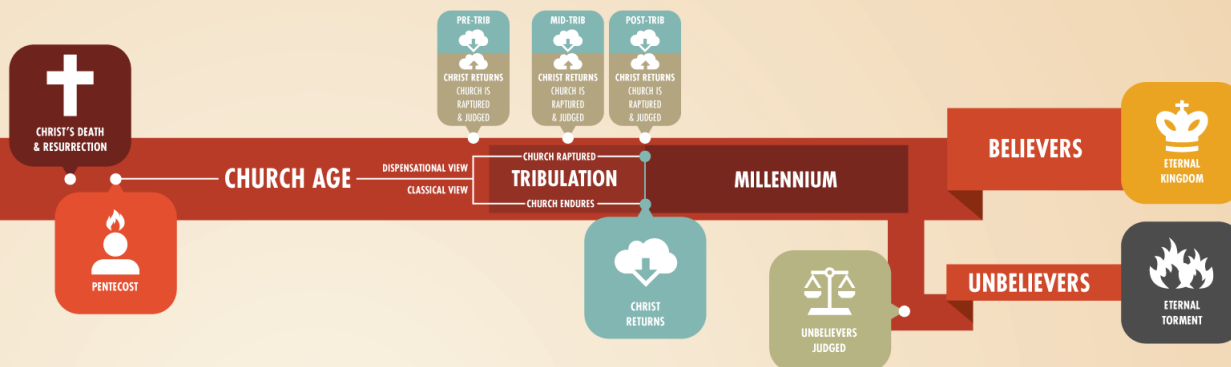
VIEWS OF THE END TIMES

PREMILLENNIALISM

Premillennialism is the belief that the Second Coming of Christ occurs before the millennium, which is a literal 1000 years.

Premillennialists believe that believers will be caught up (raptured) into heaven at the end of the church age before a time of great tribulation on the earth. They will then return with Christ to rule with Him for a 1000 years after which unbelievers are judged and the eternal kingdom is set up.

Premillennial theologians have historically been divided on whether the church will go through a time of great tribulation or whether the church will be raptured from the earth before the tribulation. Dispensationalists have also differed on the timing of the rapture believing it to occur before, in the middle, or at the end of the period of tribulation.



POSTMILLENNIALISM

Postmillennialism is the belief that the Second Coming of Christ occurs after the millennium.

Some that take this position believe the millennium is a literal 1000 years while others believe it is a figurative concept referring to the entire New Testament age.

Postmillennialism teaches that the forces of Satan will gradually be defeated by the expansion of the Kingdom of God throughout history up until the Second Coming of Christ.

The view that the tribulation has already taken place is the Preterist position. The view that the entire church age is in tribulation is the historicist view.



AMILLENNIALISM

Amillennialism is the belief that there is not a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth but that His Second Coming occurs at the end of history.

The millennium is purely spiritual in nature and at the end of the church age, Christ will return in final judgment and establish a permanent physical reign.

The Preterist view believes the tribulation has already taken place while the classical position views the tribulation and anti-christ as symbolic in the book of Revelation.

