

End-Time Prophecy Bible Study The Nature of Biblical Prophecy – 2 of 2

I. The Nature of Biblical Prophecy (Continued).

As we know, the terms millennial or millennium is not found in the pages of Scripture, but is in reference to Revelation 20:1-6, specifically the period of 1,000 years stated for Satan to be bound and Christ is to reign.

Rev 20:1-6

20 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. NASU

A. 3 (4?) Basic Views Regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

1. Postmillennial: The second coming of Christ is after the Millennium. The last 1000 years, or long period of indefinite time, of this present age is the Millennium, which will be an era of peace and abundance brought about through the efforts of the church. After this, Christ will come. As the name indicates, with the prefix "post-", meaning "after", coupled with millennium, denotes that Christ will return after His Church has established the kingdom on earth. Then will follow general resurrection and judgment and eternity. Interpretation is largely spiritualized with regard to unfulfilled prophecy. This is sometimes referred to as Dominion Theology, theonomy, whose proponents are called Christian reconstructionists.

Postmillennialism became popular near the end of the reformation from about A.D. 1700 up to the first and second world wars of the 20th century. For example, many of the founding fathers of our country would have been postmillennialist. This belief was a motivating factor to encourage governments to pass laws which require "Christian" conduct, thus improving the world morally. Proponents include Charles Hodge, William G.T. Shedd, Benjamin B. Warfield



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2. Amillennial: The second coming of Christ is at the end of the Church Age and there is no earthly Millennium. As the name indicates, with the prefix "a-", meaning "no" or "not", coupled with millennium, would mean "no millennium". This definition is misleading. This should be understood to mean that there is a kingdom, just not a physical one. Strictly, the present state of Christ's rule of the righteous in heaven and/or the saints on the earth, is the Millennium. The Church Age will end in a time of trouble, Christ will come, there will be general resurrection and judgment, then eternity. Interpretation spiritualizes the promises made to Israel as a nation and says they are fulfilled in the Church. According to this view, Revelation 20 describes the scene of souls in heaven and/or the history of the church during the time between the first and second comings of Christ.

Amillennialism was the dominant view from the time of Augustine, A.D. 370, beginning to lose support by the reformation. It is still the dominant view of the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church. Similar to postmillennialists, they believe in replacement theology, stating that all the unfulfilled promises and prophecies made to Israel, have been transferred to the church. The remaining unfulfilled prophecies are understood to be written in symbolic, figurative, spiritual language; not to be interpreted literally. In order to accomplish this, the amillennial view employs a dual hermeneutic, using one method of interpretation for unfulfilled prophecy and another for the rest of Scripture. Proponents include Augustine, Louis Berkhof, William Hendriksen, Anthony Hoekema, Kim Riddlebarger, Cornelis Venema.



3. Premillennial: The second coming of Christ will occur before the Millennium. The Church Age ends in the time of Tribulation, Christ returns to the earth, He sets up and rules His kingdom for 1000 years, the resurrection and judgment of the unsaved occur, then eternity. Interpretation follows the plain, normal, literal historical, and grammatical method of interpretation. Revelation 20 is understood literally. Two major distinctions within premillennialism are as follows:

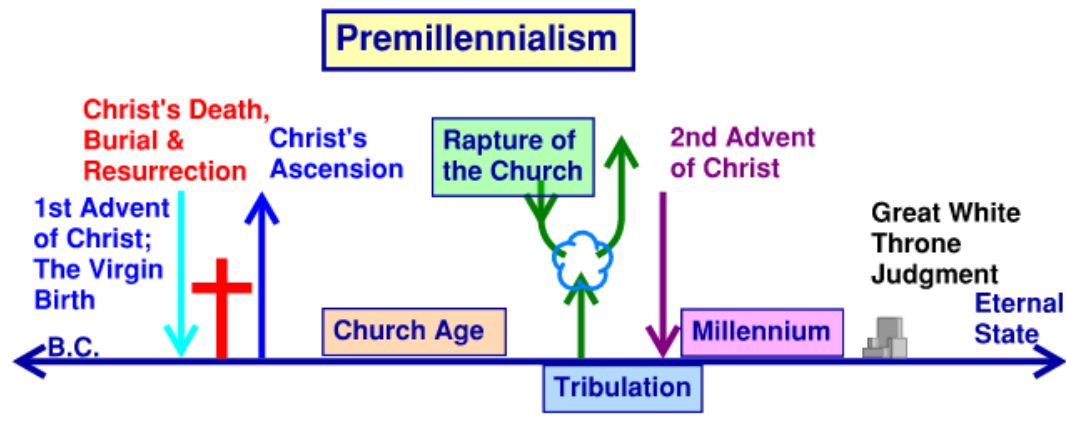
- a) Historic Premillennialism: Older form that is consistent with the teachings of the early church fathers includes:
 - (1) The Old Testament (OT) foretold of the church of the New Testament (NT)
 - (2) This current age of grace was predicted in the OT
 - (3) Earthly reign of Jesus Christ will occur after the tribulation, literal 1,000 years or figuratively for a long period of time.
 - (4) Posttribulational; the rapture of the church will occur after the tribulation, immediately prior to the return of Jesus.
 - (5) Proponents include Papias, Ireneaus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and more modern scholars, George Eldon Ladd, Walter Martin.

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b) Dispensational Premillennialism: Gained popularity among more modern evangelicals, starting as early as A.D. 1,800, with rapid growth in acceptance during the 20th century due largely to the 1st and 2nd world wars and ultimately with the return of the Jews to Israel in 1948. Distinctive points include:

- (1) The church is essentially not found in the writings of the OT prophets
- (2) This present age of grace was unforeseen in the OT, parenthetical church age introduced as a result of Israel's rejection of their Messiah.
- (3) Identifies several distinct divisions of time, dispensations.
- (4) The rapture of the church will occur prior to the tribulation or at the midpoint of the tribulation
- (5) Proponents include Donald Grey Barnhouse, Norman Geisler, Billy Graham, Harry Ironside, David Jeremiah, Tim LaHaye, Greg Laurie, Hal Lindsey, Erwin Lutzer, John MacArthur, J. Vernon McGee, Dwight Pentecost, David Reagan, Charles Ryrie, Francis Schaeffer, C.I. Scofield, Charles Stanley, Chuck Swindoll, John F. Walvoord.



4. "Pan-millennial" (Note: the only true doctrine): Everything is going to "pan-out " just the way the Lord intended it to.

It is important to realize that there is great scholarship behind all these schools of thought. Proponents for each are men and women who are deeply devoted to following Jesus Christ. As you can see, we all generally believe in the central doctrines of salvation and the eternal state of believers. However, there are vast differences of opinion regarding how the Lord's plan is progressing now and how He will bring about the culmination of this current age. Even though we may sharply disagree, grace must prevail, and the unity of the body must be held paramount.

B. Premillennial Dispensationalism with a Pretribulation Rapture Interpretation.

1. This will be the interpretation presented for this study. With the exception of number 4 above, all systems of interpretation used to analyze scripture with regard to end-time prophecy will present some difficulties and problems. In my opinion, this view gives the "best fit" approach, and one that I am able to passionately discuss and attempt to explain.

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2. Your alignment with one of the major beliefs about the end-times will not be limited to your interpretation of the six verses of Rev 20:1-6, but is a result of how you approach the Scriptures as a whole. Therefore, my understanding of end-time prophecy as presented in this study is the culmination of my prayerful research, guided by a set of principles that I adhere to in any study of The Bible. These basic premises are as follows:

a) First, and foremost, The Bible is the inspired Word of God:

2 Tim 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. NASU

2 Peter 1:20-21

20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. NASU

(1) By inspired, meaning, verbal plenary inspiration. The applicable definition of each of the three words will give insight as follows:

(a) Verbal (per Merriam-Webster): of, relating to, or consisting of words.

(b) Plenary (per Merriam-Webster): Complete in every respect.

(a) Inspiration (per Merriam-Webster): The act of drawing in; specifically, the drawing of air into the lungs; A divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him or her to receive and communicate sacred revelation.

(c) Inspired by God (per Strong's): Divinely breathed in. Combination of two root words, "Theos", God, and "pneo", to breathe hard, ie. breeze.

From this we see the true doctrine as the original manuscripts, "Text Receptus", Received Text, and extends to all the actual words, forms of words, combination of words, and wording written by the author. God, supernaturally guided, not dictated, the writing to express the exact truth that He desired, without error.

b) Literal system of interpretation of Scripture: The Bible should be interpreted in its ordinary grammatical and historical meaning in all areas of theology unless contextual or theological reasons make it clear that this was not intended by the writer. The literal plain sense approach does not ignore the fact that prophecy often uses symbols and figures of speech. The point to emphasize is that the interpretation of such figures and symbols is not to be left up to the reader's imagination or ingenuity. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, understand that The Bible will not contradict itself and often interprets itself. Obscure and secondary passages should be interpreted in light of clear and primary passages.

A common response, "Well, that's just your interpretation!", begs the question of whether there are many valid interpretations or whether there is only one interpretation intended by the author. Understanding that genuine believers will differ in their interpretations on a number of difficult passages, the truth is that every passage has only one valid, correct interpretation. Therefore, it is imperative that all sincere believers be very careful in our approach to interpreting and discerning the truth given to us in the Scriptures.

"Meaning" (of the Scriptural passage) is not our subjective thoughts read into the text but God's objective truth read out of the text. As someone has well said, the task of Bible study is to "think God's thoughts after Him." The miracle is that He used human authors to do so. Working through

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their personalities, their circumstances, and their concerns, the Holy Spirit superintended the crafting of a document. And each of the human authors—God's coauthors, we might call them—had a specific message in mind as he recorded his portion of the text. That's why I like to refer to the step of Interpretation as the recreation process. We're attempting to stand in the author's shoes and re-create his experience—to think as he thought, to feel as he felt, and to decide as he decided. We're asking, What did this mean to him? before we ever ask, What does it mean to us?"

(Dr. Howard Hendricks; Living by the Book, The Art and Science of Reading the Bible)

c) Why interpret Scripture based upon these principles? See the following examples of Christ's teachings:

Matt 12:38-42

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."
39 But He answered and said to them, " An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 " The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. NASU

(1) From this sample, there is no discussion whether or not Jonah was really swallowed by a fish or whale. There is no hint that Jesus understood this as a symbolic event. He declared the truth of scripture as written and just as Jonah was literally swallowed by a sea monster he would be placed in the earth. Just as in every instance that we see Jesus quote Scripture, He taught the truth exactly as stated, without ambiguity.

Matt 22:23-33

23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, 24 asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.' 25 "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 "Last of all, the woman died. 28 "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her."

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 ' I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. NASU

(2) These verses illustrate how Jesus demonstrated the veracity of the resurrection simply based upon the tense of the verb in scripture, "...I AM THE GOD OF ...".

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Matt 5:17-19

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. NASU

(3) Here Jesus declares the accuracy of every stroke of the pen in the original text of scripture, thus embracing the verbal plenary form of inspiration of scripture.

d) Distinction between Israel and the Church: two purposes of God expressed in the formation of two peoples who maintain their distinction throughout eternity.

2. What do we hope to gain from this study?

a) To gain understanding of our present time. Many believe the topic of the end-times is relevant today. A recent survey of 1,000 pastors from evangelical and historically black denominations was conducted January 24 to February 11, 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the findings of the survey presented by Lifeway Research was as follows,

"Almost 9 in 10 pastors see at least some current events matching those Jesus said would occur shortly before he returns to Earth."

b) To provide the overall picture of where God is headed and the character of God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

"God does not have to conform to our eschatology. We are not studying this book in order to set dates, chart a course, etc. The truth is that we cannot go very far into Revelation until we have many diverse interpretations. However, God never gives us anything that is superfluous." (Jimmy T. Draper, Jr.; The Unveiling)

c) The return of Jesus Christ is prominent teaching in the NT, often repeated especially for the comfort of believers. Not intended to be avoided because considered controversial or difficult to understand, but a source of encouragement for living this Christian Life. Understood correctly, it is a teaching that will motivate the Church with an ongoing sense of urgency.

Acts 1:11

11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." NASU

1 Thess 4:14

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. NASU