

XII. ESCHATOLOGY

THE LAST DAYS OF LIFE AS WE CURRENTLY KNOW IT

What ARE THE “LAST DAYS”?

Eschatology is the study of “last things.” This word is sometimes misunderstood, however, not because it is a poorly chosen word, but because we tend to misunderstand what the “last things” actually are. Scripturally, the last things aren’t a handful of events that occur near the absolute end of the age in some future event or unfolding of events. Rather, the last things are a part of history that started at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church and continue until the consummation of all things, which we will soon look at.

In other words, we are currently living in the end times, and have been for the past 2,000 years. This may seem like a contradiction, the idea that the “end times” or “last things” have been going on for 2,000 plus years, but this is not so with the Lord, who is eternal. Two thousand years is a drop in the bucket for God to accomplish His plan of salvation.

For the past few chapters, we have been looking at the overall plan of salvation: the redemption of mankind. Think of how much we’ve covered, not even so much as in content or time, but the big picture of the plan. Let’s look quickly at the big picture:

Creation

- The Trinitarian God chooses to create. He does this for His glory and because of His love. When He is done, He says that it is “good.”
- God creates man and calls this new creation “very good.” Man is sinless, made in the image of His Creator, and designed to have unbroken fellowship with His Creator. Life is good.
- God creates woman from the man so that he can have other human interaction and relationship. Life is getting even better.

Sin Corrupts Creation

- The serpent deceives Eve, who in turn tempts Adam. Sin enters into the world, and the unbroken fellowship with God is now broken, as God, being holy, cannot dwell amidst sin and unholiness.
- Out of compassion and mercy, instead of God damning the man and woman to death and permanent separation from Him, He expels them from the Garden so that they don’t then eat the fruit of eternal life, thus remaining stuck in this broken state. In His mercy, they don’t die immediately, but they will surely die.
- A curse is placed on them, all of creation, and the serpent. The earth is in decay, man is separated from His Creator and is spiraling now towards eternal separation from Him.

A Promise to Restore Humanity

- God, in “eternity past,” made a covenant within the Trinity that we call the Covenant of Redemption. It was a promise that the Father made to the Son that He would have mercy on a people who deserve death. The Son, in return, as part of His promise, said that He would be the one to make this possible, and the Spirit, for His part, would apply the work of the Son to the chosen people.
- In His mercy, God made a covenant to His people, saying that “I will be your God, and you will be My people.”

A Temporary Solution is Given by God’s Grace

- However, due to their separation and sinfulness, they could not have fellowship.
- He gave them His holy law, which equated to a completely perfect life. Of course, this was not possible, so He allowed them to make sacrifices with animals for their sins. It would not be permanent, but it would “put off” His wrath until a permanent solution.
- Though these sacrifices would be temporarily acceptable, their sin still kept them separated from God. The Law was violated by man, and only by man could the Law be satisfied.

God Becomes Man as the Permanent Solution Given by His Grace

- The problem, of course, is that man is sinful, and only God is able to satisfy the demands of His own Law. Thus, the Son, as His part of the Covenant of Redemption, “became flesh,” to become the only perfect Man to ever walk the earth.
- He would fulfill God’s holy Law and then become the final and perfect sacrificial Lamb of God, thus taking on all the wrath of God and satisfying the demand of the law by paying the penalty: death.

Restoration of Man is Now Attainable

- By this act, the separation between man and God was restored, and salvation was now enabled by the Holy Spirit who, in His part of the Covenant of Redemption, would indwell in sinful man, empower him for godliness, sanctify him, preserve him, and seal him as God’s chosen.
- Salvation is now freely rampant throughout the earth by the power of the Gospel and the cross of Jesus Christ. We now await the return of Christ as He finally and forever claims His bride and conquers all of His enemies.
- In the meantime, we, as His church, share our faith and the Gospel in order to win as many souls to Christ.

⌘ The Purpose of the Church in the Last Days ⌘

When the Father sent Christ to become a Man in order to fulfill the Covenant of Redemption and forever secure our eternal salvation through the atonement, He very well could have planned it to have Jesus then take His people who were still on the earth (those who put their trust in Him and were saved) and ascend up to heaven, then casting judgment upon all of those who didn’t believe in Him. After all, it was indeed “finished,” and not only would those modern-day believers be saved, but all the believers going way back into human history.

But He didn’t, did He? Though everything necessary was done, our sins were paid for, and God’s wrath was propitiated, God the Father did not settle there. He had a bigger, greater plan in place.

God’s plan from the beginning was that Abraham’s offspring would be a blessing to the whole world. This offspring, which Paul points out is singular, speaking specifically of Jesus, points to the fact that Christ alone is the True Israel.

Galatians 3.16–20

¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. ¹⁷ This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

God’s promise was made to His offspring, but that offspring is not *directly* to us (because He knew we would break His Law), but His promise is to a *singular* offspring, namely Jesus Christ. Now, anyone who is then grafted into Christ *becomes* His offspring and a recipient of the promise, but only by faith, not of anything else. Therefore, it is through the work of Christ that the whole world is now given the great opportunity for salvation. This is all according to His desire to have His glorious grace be magnified and known to all creatures and through all the universe. And of course, as we saw in the last chapter, by His filling of us with His own Holy Spirit, He has now chosen *us* to be His instrument in bringing about salvation to the world.

Jesus’ words to His disciples after His resurrection became what we call the “Great Commission.” The Great Commission in effect is the church’s marching orders, our assignment *for* these last days.

Matthew 28.18-20

¹⁸ All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Here, Jesus gives us the task to take the Gospel, the message of hope that was previously lost, to a dying, dark, and cold world. To do this, He gives us His Holy Spirit and promises to be with us, even to the end of the age.⁸¹⁷ Not only is the command clear, it is also urgent; we see that time is short and we should make the most of it.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁷ Matthew 28.18-20

⁸¹⁸ Ephesians 5.16 // 1 Corinthians 7.29-31

But evangelism seems to be so slippery for us. Surely, we have a *number of reasons* why we don't share the Gospel:

- I don't know what to say.
- What if they say "no."
- I don't want to hurt the relationships I have.
- I don't have many non-Christian friends.
- I want to respect people's privacy/opinions.
- I'm afraid of rejection.

The list goes on, but we should look at a few things that we can and should consider when we think about this command that has been given to us.

What is Evangelism?

This may seem like a silly question, but it is important. There are a lot of phrases that accompany the word "evangelism," such as "personal evangelism," "relational evangelism," "power evangelism," "servant evangelism," and "street evangelism," etc. But what makes these "evangelism"?

First of all, the word *evangeizomai* is the Greek word for "evangelize," which our Bibles translate as "preach the good news." The Greek word for "good news" is *euangelion*, and is made up of two words: *eu*, which means "good," and "*angelion*," which is "messenger" (you can easily see that the word "angel" comes from the same root and also means "messenger"). Therefore, to "evangelize" literally means to "publish" (or make publicly known) the "good news," which is the "plain English" way of saying the "new English" word "gospel," which derives from the "old English" word "godspell" (pronounced "gode-spell"). The word "god" didn't actually mean "God," but was the old English way of saying "good." "Spell" meant "word" (which is why we still "spell" words), so therefore "godspell" is the "good word."

Okay, now that we have a little etymology lesson out of the way, we have to make the obvious observation: evangelism *must* include the "good message."

Let me give you a list of *great and amazing* tools and accompaniments to the Gospel, but tools that *in and of themselves* are *not* by themselves evangelism:

- Acts of service
- Helping people fix their problems
- Personal testimony
- Apologetics
- Saying "Jesus loves you"
- Saying "Turn or burn"
- Loving or befriending a non-Christian
- Arguing

Allow me first to first share what actual evangelism is, and then we will see how the tools in this previous list can be used *in conjunction* with evangelism.

- **The Gospel must declare that God is real.**⁸¹⁹

This, of course, is oftentimes no easy task. Though we can't, of course, persuade anyone to actually acknowledge this, for it is only the Holy Spirit who can change one's heart or open their understanding to even see that, it *is* on us as disciples to "present ourselves to God as one approved"⁸²⁰ and be able to present God to people who are in need of Him (whether they know it or not). Though I don't have the ability to go on a tangent of common scenarios here, it should be understood that evangelism must include the facts that God is real, He is holy and perfect, that the standard of "good" is He Himself, and that to be with Him and in His presence (including heaven), we need to live up to that standard, which is total perfection. In other words, the hearer should know beyond doubt that going to heaven and being with God is not obtained simply by being a "good person," but by being a "perfect person."

⁸¹⁹ Psalm 14.1 // Romans 3.12 // Mark 10.18

⁸²⁰ 2 Timothy 2.15

- **The Gospel must declare the facts of sin.**⁸²¹

Telling someone “Jesus loves you” and speaking *only* of “God’s love for you” and His “desire to spend eternity with you” is not the *full* truth. This is like selling someone something they would love to have and not telling them about the fine print. *Anyone* can raise their hand or answer “yes” to receiving God’s love, but there is no salvation without repentance, and there is no repentance without knowledge of the truth of sin.

To truly evangelize, part of the “good news” is actually “bad news,” that we have “all fallen short of the glory of God.”⁸²² The hearer *must* know that their sin has in fact separated them from God, and their future is hopeless if they remain in that position. This is not an easy thing to communicate unless you are 100% convinced of it yourself. When that happens, you can *humbly* share from your own experience what God has done for you.

- **The Gospel must declare that Jesus and the cross is real.**⁸²³

Which brings us to the next part, which is the fact that sharing the Gospel is not just telling people they need to behave and change their ways. The hearer *must* be shown that they have a grave problem on their hands, one that “changing their ways” cannot solve! The Gospel is about Jesus, and the fact that though they are indeed sinners in need of a solution, Jesus has provided not just *a* solution or even *the best* solution, but *the only* solution! He did this because the Father wanted to show His mercy to people and spare some from their own sin.

It’s at this point that our own understanding of what the cross is and what it has done should always be readily available in our hearts and minds. We should be “ready in season and in out of season,”⁸²⁴ and hopeful and believing in faith that the Holy Spirit will bring the words needed. We need to be able to share that the Father’s wrath is indeed aimed at all that is unholy and evil, and that includes *our sin*. It is *only* by appeasing His holy wrath that we could escape suffering the deserved consequences, and this appeasing, or as we know it as the propitiating, came through Christ who did all that was needed.

- **Be clear in declaring that it is only by grace and that repentance is necessary.**⁸²⁵

The hearer *must* be let known that salvation is *not* just by “saying a prayer” or “admitting that you are a sinner,” but that there is nothing they can do about it, unless they repent and ask for God’s mercy and grace upon them. They need to know that it is only by God’s generous gift of mercy and grace that they can be saved from their just punishment. It would be good to tell them that they should ask the Father for forgiveness, give thanks to Jesus, and ask the Holy Spirit to come in and fill us. Repentance is necessary. The filling of the Holy Spirit is necessary.

It is this and this alone that is the truth and knowledge that saves. This is why our list above is only good *accompaniment* for the evangelism, but in themselves they are not evangelism itself. So to be clear, is it *good* to do acts of service in the community or help people with their problems? Of course! Is sharing what God has done in your life good? Absolutely! Is knowing facts and historical evidence that prove God’s reality a good thing? Yes! But helping an old lady across the street, helping someone break off a drug problem, and debating over whether or not there was a real global flood will not bring people to repentance and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, remember, it is oftentimes a very *good* thing to do these as precursors or in conjunction with sharing the Gospel. Jesus was masterful at this. He befriended tax collectors and sinners, He loved them, He served them, and He even used apologetics by citing historical and Scriptural evidence, mostly with the Pharisees. But His *Good News was clear!* God is real, we will be held accountable for our sin (which is a major problem), but God, in His love, gave us a major solution, but the solution is *only* a gift of grace.

⁸²¹ Isaiah 59.1, 2 // Romans 3.22, 23, 6.23 // Ephesians 2.8, 9 // Titus 3.5 // 1 John 1.5, 6

⁸²² Romans 3.23

⁸²³ Matthew 26.28 // Galatians 3.10-13 // 1 Timothy 1.15 // 1 Peter 2.24, 3.18

⁸²⁴ 2 Timothy 4.2

⁸²⁵ Matthew 11.28-30 // Mark 1.15, 8.34 // John 1.12, 3.16-18, 6.37 // Acts 20.21

God's SOVEREIGNTY AMIDST EVANGELISM

The question has come up in our heads, “why should we evangelize if God has already chosen who He has desired to choose?” If asked honestly, it’s a great question. If asked accusatorily, be very careful that you don’t put God on the witness stand and demand He answers to you! Rather, a better solution is to look at His Word and see what He says about His own sovereignty and our responsibility.

First of all, it is true that God has chosen all of His people before the foundations of the world;⁸²⁶ indeed, before we could even choose Him, He chose us.⁸²⁷ Does this then contradict many other Scriptures that tell us to “choose” God? Apparently, the Romans thought so (which in itself is proof that Paul was teaching this as truth), and he gave them the same warning, “be careful if you feel that you are allowed to judge how God does things.”

What was Paul saying here? He’s saying “yes, you are held accountable, even if you don’t understand it, it’s not for you to throw out one doctrine or the other just because you don’t get it.” Paul was affirming both God’s sovereignty *and* our responsibility as free moral agents. Once again, we can possibly draw from the analogy of a movie or feature film and the “behind the scenes” special feature. When we read in **Romans 10.13** that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” we must also remember to *read in context* of not just the whole Bible, but even **Romans** itself that we call on the Name of the Lord *because* God has *chosen* us to do so in the first place!⁸²⁸

In the Bible, there are some things called *antinomy*. ♣ Antinomy is not a paradox, but it can be a type of paradox. A true paradox uses seemingly opposing themes to illustrate a point or make something clear (e.g. being a “slave to righteousness” (the paradox is that you are indeed free from sin, but are now a slave *to* that freedom from sin). An antinomy is when two contradicting themes (or, in our case of divine truths, *seemingly* contradictory themes) somehow are known to work together, though ultimately unexplainable (an example from our study is how Jesus is fully Man and fully God; neither is more dominant than the other, and both are 100% true).

Here, we have an antinomy, that God is sovereign and has already predetermined everything, but that we are not only responsible for our actions, but that *we ourselves in actuality make them*. These are not enemies, but as C.H. Spurgeon calls them, they are “friends.” See what he says in his great little book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*:

People see that the Bible teaches man’s responsibility for his actions; they do not see (man, indeed, cannot see) how this is consistent with the sovereign lordship of God over those actions. They are not content to let the two truths live side by side, as they do in the Scriptures, but jump to the conclusion that, in order to uphold the biblical truth of human responsibility, they are bound to reject the equally biblical and equally true doctrine of divine sovereignty, and to explain away the great number of texts that teach it. The desire to oversimplify the Bible by cutting out the mysteries is natural to our perverse minds, and it is not surprising that even good people should fall victim to it.⁸²⁹

**Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled;
man is a divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent**

–J.I. Packer⁸³⁰

If we are able to embrace *both* of these biblical doctrines, we get *so much benefit* from it when it comes to our faith and evangelism! Rather than *diminishing* our desire for evangelism (which I would call the “Frozen Chosen”), this will *increase* our faith for evangelism!

THE MEANS ARE CONNECTED TO THE END

In God’s preordination, *everything* is upheld and occurs solely by His Word. **Matthew 10.29** even says that the sparrow, which is sold in the market at the price of two for a penny, dies according to the decree of the Father, and that even the number of hairs which you are given is declared. The encouragement is that God does indeed care for us and that *nothing* happens in our life except by His plan. This is good news!

⁸²⁶ Revelation 13.8

⁸²⁷ John 15.16, among many others.

⁸²⁸ John 15.16 // Romans 8.28-30, 9.10, 11 // Proverbs 16.9 // Ephesians 1.11

⁸²⁹ pg. 22 and 23

⁸³⁰ Ibid., pg. 30

Therefore, we should be *excited* to know that God has not just simply chosen whom He willed to save, but that He *even chose the means and way* in which He would bring them the knowledge they need to save them! And that includes *you and me!* Packer again says that it all “depends on God, who raises up men to do His will.”⁸³¹

Let me use a silly example: if I told you, “tomorrow night you will have a nice full stomach filled with tasty food,” would you then say to yourself, “oh good, that means I don’t have to eat tomorrow since I already know it’s going to happen.” Of course not! *Rather*, you will be looking forward to, anticipating, and *looking for* that opportunity to come, and you will *jump on it* when it is there!

The same goes for evangelism. *Knowing* that God has *already chosen and purchased* people who are still dead in their trespasses should give us the great and exciting desire to go find them! Knowing that *He* has already done the work gives *me* the excitement of partaking in the introducing of salvation by being what Jesus called a “fisher of men.”

God's SOVEREIGNTY AND PRAYER

With this in mind, it then gives much weight to our prayers for those that are lost. We discussed this a little bit earlier, but it needs to be mentioned again. If we believe that salvation is by God’s sovereign grace alone, it gives us greater faith with the prayers that we offer to God.

I have a good friend from my childhood that I have always wanted to see come to faith in Christ. He has rejected Christ countless times, and I must confess, I gave up hope. In my mind, I felt that “he’s too deceived” or “he’s too blinded” or “he’s too proud.” But wasn’t I also at one point?

Yes, I very much was. So, if my friend’s salvation is dependent on his own desire or ability to repent and see his need for a Savior, then indeed, I should stop praying, because it isn’t up to God. Look at what Paul says to the Corinthian and Roman church:

1 Corinthians 2.14

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Romans 8.7, 8

⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Look again at how Packer puts the necessity of God’s grace and election needing to be the *central* truth for evangelism:

Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian Gospel.⁸³²

This is dire news for our loved ones. Unless, of course, salvation *is indeed* dependent on God’s grace alone, then all of a sudden I have greater faith to ask and seek God’s mercy on my friend’s life and seek *God’s* ability to open my friend’s eyes and see his need for Jesus. In this way, I am not trying to change God’s mind, His mind has already been made; rather, I am wanting to, as His body, agree and partner with Him by partaking in the love and desire He has for His people. I want my heart to break for His lost sheep the same way His heart breaks for His lost sheep. As part of His bride, I want to be unified with Him in pursuing and fishing for those whom He has chosen.

Through this prayer, I *know* that my friend’s salvation is *not remotely* dependent on himself, *nor* is it dependent on *my ability* to do something or say something. My prayer, however, makes appeal to God and acknowledgment to Him that it is He alone that saves, and that *who* He saves is intrinsically connected to *how* He saves, and that includes the prayers of His body.

**The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God’s hand,
but a humble acknowledgement of helplessness and dependence.**

-J.I. Packer⁸³³

⁸³¹ Ibid., pg. 38

⁸³² Ibid., pg. 116

⁸³³ Ibid., pg. 17

God's SOVEREIGNTY AND SHARING THE GOSPEL

Along with the freedom and faith we get by understanding God's sovereignty and how it relates to our prayer, we get a similarly exciting freedom and faith when it comes to God's sovereignty and our evangelism. When we realize that God has indeed already chosen His people before the foundation of the world, it levels the playing field for everyone. All of a sudden, *everyone* becomes a candidate for salvation, not just those that "seem" open or willing.

To be absolutely clear, we have no idea who has been chosen by God, but we know that they are out there. We know that we live in a dying world with dying people who are walking around alive, yet dead. The pressure isn't on us to go convince a bunch of "dead in their sins" spiritual corpses to somehow all of a sudden come alive. No! That is solely and only an act of the Holy Spirit as He does the will of the Father who has chosen a people for His Son! *Our job as His body* is to do the task and work of evangelism, but it is *God* who does the saving, according to His election.

Look at Paul's great Gospel message to the Corinthians church:

2 Corinthians 5.17-6.2

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and *gave us* the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and *entrusting to us the message* of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, *we are ambassadors* for Christ, *God making his appeal through us*. We implore you on behalf of Christ, *be reconciled to God*. ²¹ For our sake he *made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*.

^{6.1} *Working together with him*, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Paul put forward the message of the Gospel clearly and completely. He made it clear that the Gospel is about God's righteousness, their sinfulness, Jesus as the solution, and that it is only by grace. He also acknowledges that it is the ministry that God gave to the church to be ambassadors, or official message bearers, as ministers of reconciliation to God. Indeed, God has chosen to use us, His body, to be the message bearer to the lost!

Romans 10.14

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

Do you have friends or family that don't know the Lord? How will they know Him? Do you wait for them to ask? Do you hope that someday they will just repent? Paul here asks "how are they to hear" that they even *need* to repent unless someone tells them?

God *has* in fact appointed us as ambassadors, His means to bring the Gospel message to the lost. And yet, in this truth, we are reminded that it is *only* by God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit that sinners who are yet dead in their sins and trespasses can be made alive and able to see their need for a Savior. This is why Paul gives this reminder to us:

1 Corinthians 3.6, 7

⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Yes, we are the message bearers, but God alone opens eyes. Our task is to share the clear, pure, truthful Gospel.

**You don't succeed at evangelism when you see conversions.
You succeed at evangelism when you share the Gospel.**

For this reason, we need not be afraid to share the Gospel. We also don't need to carry any pressure or guilt when a conversion does not happen. It is God and God alone who will be the one, in His timing and desire, to save someone. Our task is to share the incredible news of salvation, driven by our love for God, our recognition of what we have been saved from, and our love for the lost.

Jim Elliot, a 28 year old missionary, was killed in 1956 by Ecuadorian native Indians whom he was attempting to share the Gospel with, said this:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

His widow, Elisabeth, continued sharing the Gospel with them a few years after they killed her husband.

The Reality of Hell

The decree to “go into all the world” is a decree of urgency. Death is all around us, and not just physical death, but spiritual death. And when spiritual death meets physical death, then comes eternal death. It is absolutely necessary for us to grasp both the urgency and reality of our need to evangelize.

As humans, we were created as eternal beings, having been made in the image of God. When we sinned in the Garden, that eternity did not go away, but our eternal destination was altered. Now, in God’s great mercy, He kicked us out of the Garden, because He didn’t want us to, now in a fallen and dying state, take again from the Tree of Life, eat it, and permanently and eternally be destined to eternal death. He kicked us out so that when we died our natural death, the destination was now dependent on His desire to show mercy. This would come, of course, by grace through faith that the Messiah would come to purchase us back from the grave.

So, what happens if we do not repent, again as morally free agents who are responsible for our actions and choices? As we have seen throughout the whole study, the wage of sin is death. We have been separated from God by our sins and trespasses, and we, as a people, have become children of wrath, sons of disobedience, and deserving of our eternally designed lives to live forever separated from God. So, what does this look like?

Hell is not a fun topic. And there has been much discussion from within various Christian circles. Some say that hell doesn’t exist because a God who is all love could not punish people eternally. Others say that He will punish, but that eventually they will be allowed to “cross over” into heaven upon repentance after they “pay their dues.” Then others say that He will punish for a time, only to finally destroy them into non-existence.

**The attempt of liberal Christians to deny hell is teaching about how
a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment
through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.**

-Richard Niebuhr

But what does the Word say about hell? Indeed, Jesus speaks on the topic of hell more than any other person in the Scriptures, even tough guy Paul! In fact, 13% of His sayings are about hell and judgment, with more than half of His parables relating to the eternal judgment of sinners.⁸³⁴ He said in **John 3.36** that if we believe in Him we will have eternal life, but if we deny Him the wrath of God will remain on us. **John 3.18** says that we are, outside of faith in Him, currently and already condemned. He also says in **Matthew 25.41** to the unbelieving “goats” to depart into the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Luke 16.22-29

[Jesus speaking:] ²² “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried,²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’ ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ “

⁸³⁴ This comes from a great article called “To Hell with Hell?” which can be found at <http://theresurgence.com/2011/03/14/to-hell-with-hell>

Revelation 14.9-11

⁹ And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

Matthew 25.46

[Jesus, speaking of unbelievers, said] ⁴⁶ “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Matthew 25.30

[Jesus said] ³⁰ “And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here are a few noted truths about hell:

- There will be misery and darkness. **James 5.1-5, Revelation 14.10, 11**
- It will be conscious punishment. **John 5.28, 29, Matthew 5.29, 30, Mark 9.42, 43**
- It will be exclusion from God’s presence and love, and instead will be filled with His wrath. **Revelation 14.10**
- It will be restless. **Revelation 14.11**
- It will be eternal. **Matthew 3.12, 25.41, Mark 9.48, Revelation 14.11, 20.10**
- There are different “degrees” of punishment according to sins committed. **Romans 2.5-8**
- We will partake in issuing the judgment. **1 Corinthians 6.2, 3**
- Satan does not rule and reign there; it is his place of eternal torment as well. **Matthew 25.41**

It is important for us to remember that, in one sense, God does not “send anyone to hell.” We, by our own choices and actions, have chosen to turn from God. We, as a people, continually reject God and insist on living according to our own rules, and we are without excuse. Our punishment is just and deserved. Therefore, the idea of ultimate reconciliation (that people will eventually go to heaven), is simply unbiblical, as **Hebrews 9.27** says that “it is appointed for men *once* to die, and after that comes judgment.” Again, **Luke 16.26** says that no one can cross over.

This is no easy topic, but it should be a sobering and motivating one. One that motivates us to be in awe and worship over God’s gift of salvation, first and foremost, and that worship should then become the fuel for our evangelism. Even as John Piper says,⁸³⁵

Worship is the fuel and goal of missions.

So we have our marching orders, and we should be excited and motivated to partake with Christ, as His body, in bringing the message of salvation to His lost sheep. We are in an incredible part of history in light of God’s great and glorious plan. These are the last days, because everything, from a big picture standpoint, has been accomplished. We now wait with eager anticipation, yet we also “go” with fervent excitement. We are awaiting the great Day when Jesus returns for final and total victory, and we are awaiting what we call the *consummation of all things* or the *consummation of this age*, ♣ when all things will be “put under His feet.”⁸³⁶

So what does happen between now and the consummation of the age? Can we know when this consummation is going to take place, or are there any signs that give us indications? The thing is, eschatology is a hot topic, one that many discuss, debate, and divide over. Though study, discussion, and even a healthy, cordial, and respectful debate is good and necessary, we have to humbly recognize that there are some things that are “debatable,” for lack of a better word. Eschatology is one of them (or at least, as we will see, certain aspects of it are debatable).

⁸³⁵ *Let the Nations be Glad*, pg. 15

⁸³⁶ 1 Corinthians 15.25

When Will Christ Return?

One major point of contention among believers is the question of “when” Christ will return. Could He return at any time, as many Scriptures give us warning to be watchful and ready?⁸³⁷ Or do certain events have to first take place for Him to return, as other Scriptures point out?

The Word specifically says that “no one knows the day or the hour” of His return.⁸³⁸ Despite this, however, there have been numerous claims throughout church history that state a date, or maybe a particular year, when Christ would return.⁸³⁹ The results of these types of predictions range from sheer embarrassment to ridicule from the world around us (*not* the kind of ridicule that is good and God glorifying, as not all “persecution” is good; sometimes it’s because of our own stupidity). Worse yet, it can damage the faith of believers who buy into it and wait in earnest expectation. In some cases, like the Heaven’s Gate cult in 1997, it leads to suicide.

This isn’t to say that we should just blow off the idea that Christ will return and could return at any moment. But we also should not live in a “head for the hills” or “stick our heads up in the clouds” mentality. Rather, we live in faith, and we take advantage of every earthly moment we have for His glory, because we have a divine purpose in these last days. Furthermore, the fact that every generation from the first church until now has been living in the last days should give us an indication that we may be here for a while. Beyond that, Jesus says that even He Himself does not know the hour, but only His Father who is in heaven.⁸⁴⁰ He is still submitted to His Father even in this great event, and in His humanity is unaware of the “when” of this event. Only God the Father knows.

The Millennium

Most of the varying views on eschatology and the “when” of Christ’s return (not as in an actual date, per se, but in the order of events of eschatology) revolve around a time frame called the *millennium*,^{*} which means “a thousand years.” In this millennium, Christ will rule and reign over the earth, as most noted in **Revelation 20**. The particulars of this millennium are the things that are up for discussion. The defining of this millennial age and when it exactly is as well as *what* it exactly is rests at the core of each Christian’s view of eschatology. First, let’s read through the text and then consider some of the key qualities of the millennium that each view must consider to fit within its own theology.

Revelation 20.1–15

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. 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 ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is

⁸³⁷ 1 Corinthians 16.13 // Colossians 4.2 // 1 Thessalonians 5.6

⁸³⁸ Mark 13.32 // Matthew 24.36

⁸³⁹ Among these are Jehovah Witnesses who claimed the return of Christ on October 1, 1914; Chuck Smith (Calvary Chapel) claimed the year would be 1981; Sun Myung Moon (Unification Church) throughout his life was thought to be the Christ (until his death in 1930); Rastafarians claimed that Haile Selassie I (aka Ras Tafari) was the Christ, despite his objection and plea for them to worship Christ alone; Jerry Falwell claimed in 1999 that the second coming would be within the next 10 years; Nostradamus claimed that “from the sky the great King of Terror” would come in 1999; Jack Van Impe, a televangelist, claims it will be 2012 (a common secular end-of-the-world view as well, due in large part to the “sudden” ending of the ancient Mayan calendar); Edgar Whisenant wrote *88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988*. When that didn’t happen, he came up with 1989, then 1992, 1995 and more; there is a claim that the Great Pyramid predicts the rapture for 2010, and some circles believed that the 7.0 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand was the indication for the rapture coming in September 2010 (part of the reason is because it was a 7.0, which was seen as an indication pointing to the seven of Christ’s churches (get it?) in Revelation 2).

⁸⁴⁰ Matthew 24.36

like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

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.

The main defining points of this chapter are:

- Satan is bound for 1,000 years (most views see 1,000 to be symbolic of a long time period. It could be 1,000 exactly, it could be 1,256, it could be 3,412 ½). He is not allowed to deceive the nations until the millennium is up. Afterward, he will be loosed for a short time. **Revelation 20.2, 3**
- After Satan is temporarily released, he is conquered and cast into the lake of fire forever. After this, the dead will stand before the Lord, and those whose name is not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire as well. **Revelation 20.7-15**

Now, we'll take a look at each position, and then we'll look at some of the pros and cons of each of these views. We should note, first of all, that each position is named after their view of when Christ returns in relation to the millennium. Each of these views have significant differences.

✪ VARYING VIEWS ✪

AMILLENNIALISM

The word *amillennial* means that there is no actual *future* millennium, as the prefix *a-* means “no.” So, the word “amillennial” is an unfortunate one, because the amillennialist view (which we will shorten to *amil* hereafter) *does* believe that there is a millennium, but that we are *currently* living in the millennium, and that **Revelation 20** is being lived out in this current age. They believe that after Christ rose, He ascended to heaven to take His place at the right hand of God, and that He is now currently reigning from heaven. They believe that during this reign, we are yet awaiting when He will come again when He will judge everyone and usher in the new heaven and new earth.

The amil view believes that when Jesus died on the cross, Satan's power was greatly diminished, and they would say that his “binding” in **Revelation 20** speaks of his new inability to “deceive the nations” in totality. Previous to the cross, only Israel had the blessing of salvation; but with the cross, Satan's ability to deceive the nations is gone. Not only that, but we were given the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon all flesh and the mandate to “go into all the nations.” The amil view wouldn't say that he is *completely* powerless, but that his power is greatly bound, and that his total ability to deceive the nations is gone. This is evidenced in simply looking at how wide and far the Gospel has gone since the cross.



Major Points for Amillennialism:

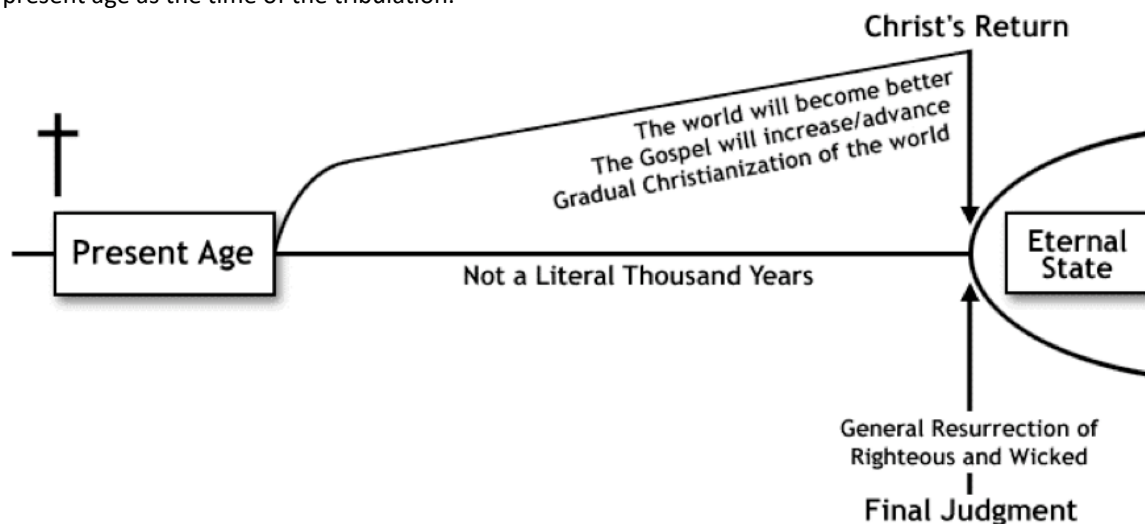
- No *future* millennium.
- Millennium is now, during this church age. It could also be referencing the fact that believers in heaven are *currently* reigning with Christ from heaven.
- Satan is not allowed to deceive the nations any longer. The Gospel is able to go out with full power. This does not mean he can do nothing, similar to the time between D-Day and V-Day, but that this specific ability is bound.
- The days will get worse, with many amil folks believing that there will be a time of tribulation before Christ returns.
- Satan will be allowed out at the end of this age to deceive. After he is then permanently defeated, he is cast into the lake of fire, and all believers go into the eternal state with Jesus.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

The *postmillennial* view (*postmil* hereafter) is that there will be a millennium (which may or may not be a literal 1,000 years) and that Christ will return *after* this millennial time. They believe that as the Gospel goes forward, the church will have more and more influence on society, eventually bringing to fruition a time of righteousness and peace, which would transition and usher in the millennium of Christ ruling and reigning upon the earth. After this millennium, Christ will usher in the new heaven and new earth.

The difference between the amil and postmil view is that the postmil view believes that the church will, slowly but gradually, fill the earth with the glory of God through their mission to “go into all the world.” They believe that the binding of Satan to deceive (which is the same as that of the amils), the giving of the Great Commission, and the indwelling and empower of the Holy Spirit will make it possible to see the Gospel, in time, transform the world. When this is done, Christ will return and usher us into the eternal kingdom of the new heavens and new earth.

Some postmils believe that the millennial age (like the amil view) starts right at Christ’s defeat of Satan at the cross. Others, however, believe that the millennial age starts sometimes afterward, when the Gospel has advanced enough that the current age “switches” into a millennial age. They would also possibly view the preceding “build up” time period in the present age as the time of the tribulation.



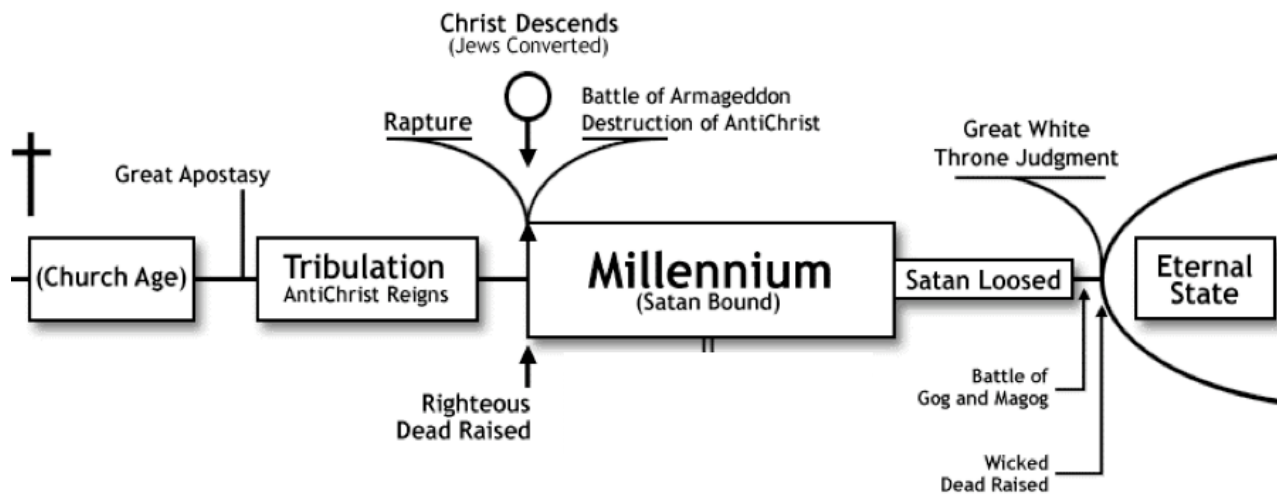
Major Points for Postmillennialism

- Some believe the millennium is now, some believe that this age will eventually “switch” into a millennial reign.
- Satan is not allowed to deceive the nations any longer. The Gospel is able to go out with full power, and that it *will* in time accomplish what Christ intended it to accomplish, “to make disciples of all nations.” They are *very* optimistic in their view of the power of the Gospel message and the value and ability of the Holy Spirit.
- The days will get better. They would *not* say that the church will be less and less persecuted. They would believe that it is mass persecution that is the *means* to the *end* of a Gospel-centric world. They would actually point to the fact that more Christian martyrs died in the 20th century than *all previous centuries combined* as evidence that the Gospel is filling the earth.
- Satan will be allowed out at the end of this age to deceive. After he is then permanently defeated, he is cast into the lake of fire, and all believers go into the eternal state with Jesus.

PREMILLENNIALISM (CLASSICAL OR HISTORICAL)

The *premillennial* view (*premil* hereafter) has a couple variants. The first we will look at is called “classical” or “historic” premil, and has its roots in early church history. In this premil view, when the current church age is complete, there will be a time of great tribulation.⁸⁴¹ After this time, Christ will return and usher in a time of righteousness and peace on the earth. This millennium (again, which may or may not be a literal 1,000 years) has Christ returning *before* the time of this physical reigning on the earth in His physically resurrected and glorified body. At the time of His coming as well, He raises the dead bodies of Christians from the grave who have died and have been in the intermediate state (intermediate heaven, more on this in the next section) to rule and reign with Him. He also glorifies the bodies of believers who are living at the time of His second coming for the same purpose (called the rapture).

In the meantime, unbelievers who are alive at His second coming won’t receive renewed bodies, but the hope is that many who don’t believe and worship Christ will get to encounter this time of great peace and turn their hearts toward Him, receiving salvation. This age of ruling and reigning with Christ happens until the consummation of all things, and in the meantime, Satan is bound in the bottomless pit but is let out at the end to deceive once more. Sadly, many unbelievers (but *no one* who has already been saved) will be deceived by him. At that point, *all* unbelievers of all time will be raised from the dead, and their actions will be judged accordingly as they step into their eternal state, which is hell (more on this in the next section).



Major Points for Historic or Classic Premillennialism.

- We are currently in the “present age” and there is a future millennium where Christ physically reigns on this earth.
- Satan is not currently bound in the bottomless pit, but he is prowling like a lion in this current age, though he does have a mortal wound.
- The days will progressively get worse. Everything will lead to the time of the Great Tribulation.
- At the end of that Great Tribulation, Jesus will return for His bride and conquer His enemies.
- He then ushers in His people, as well as those unbelievers who survived the Great Tribulation (assuming that “defeat” doesn’t mean “destroy”) to live on this current earth but with glorified saints ruling and reigning with Jesus on the earth.
- Satan will be allowed out at the end of this age to deceive. After he is then permanently defeated, he is cast into the lake of fire, and all believers go into the eternal state with Jesus.

⁸⁴¹ Matthew 24.3-31

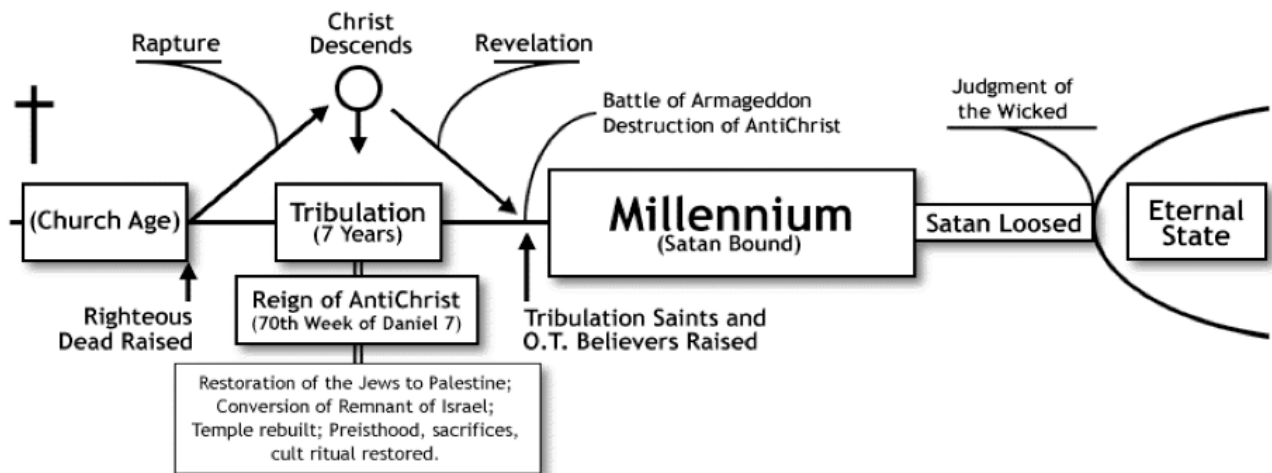
DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM

So many big words, it can get confusing. Nonetheless, this particular *dispensational premillennial*★ view (*dispy premil* hereafter) has gained a lot of popularity in recent years. It is a very new doctrinal framework, having come about in the 1830's by a teacher named John Darby, who was a pastor in the Plymouth Brethren movement. It is sometimes said that this is the eschatological view that includes the rapture, but in actuality *all* of these views we have seen have a rapture in which Christ raises the dead bodies of His church from the grave (whether they call it a rapture or not). However, this view distinctly separates the rapture, at least immediately, from the second coming. It basically has two distinct Christ-centered events.

In this view, like classical premil, as the church age comes to a close, there is a time of great tribulation that precedes the second coming of Christ. However, most of the dispy premil folks believe that there will be a rapture that occurs *before* the great tribulation. This sub-category of the dispy premil view is called *pretribulational premillennialism*★ (*pretrib premil* hereafter)

There are essentially two main reasons for the belief that God will take His church out of the world before the Great Tribulation. One reason is the view that this Great Tribulation is the time when God pours out His wrath upon the earth, which, as we know, God will spare believers from because Christ took His wrath already. The other view is due to the fact that most pretrib premil folks are dispensational in their viewpoint (since it is a sub-category of dispy premil). In other words, they view Israel and the church as a distinct people of God, so God takes the church out of the earth so He can now go back to working on Israel's salvation. During this time of the Great Tribulation, His focus is on national Israel, and many Jews (the "probably symbolic" number given in **Revelation** is 144,000) will be spared from His wrath and saved during this time.

At the end of this Great Tribulation, Jesus returns to the earth and defeats His enemies. The rest is the same as historic premil, but that the dispy premils believe that the main purpose for the millennial reign is so that ethnic, national Israel will rule on the earth with Christ as the King. They believe that the Old Testament prophecies and covenants were only literal, so this will all be fulfilled in the millennium.



Major points of historic or classic premillennialism.

The major points are the same as classic premil, except for the following:

- Christ raptures His church before the Great Tribulation.
- God "goes back" to dealing with Israel and establishes a Jewish religious system again.
- Right before the Great Tribulation, Christ will rapture His bride before He pours out His wrath.
- Satan will be allowed out at the end of this age to deceive. After he is then permanently defeated, he is cast into the lake of fire, and all believers go into the eternal state with Jesus.

MILLENNIALISM

Arguments for the Amil View

1. The “binding of Satan” that is mentioned was done by Christ when He died on the cross. The evidence that now salvation is “for all” (as opposed to being limited to Israel) is proof that Satan has been bound and the Gospel can freely be brought to all nations. This shows that the nations can no longer be deceived *in totality*, that many people from all tongues, tribes, and nations can freely receive salvation. The claim is that Satan does not have *near* the power or authority that he did prior to the death of Christ. They would claim that the existence of sin and evil still in this world is due to us still being inherent sinners, as well as the idea that the demons are still at large despite him, their leader, being in captivity. One could liken it to any radical leader, such as Saddam Hussein, being captured and then hanged, but his followers and effects of his leadership and legacy still remain, even if they are lessened and his actual authority is bound.
2. Amils would argue that two resurrections (i.e. in the premil view) are not warranted by Scripture. The idea that Christ would first raise the saints to rule and reign for a thousand years, and then much later raise the unbelievers for judgment is not taught in Scripture.
3. Amils would argue that the picture of glorified saints along with a glorified Christ living amidst sinners would not make any sense. It seems too outlandish, both theoretically and theologically, for these glorified saints to have fellowship with unredeemed man for a thousand years.

Arguments Against the Amil View

1. Concerning the “binding of Satan,” though all circles would absolutely agree that Satan’s power has diminished in the sense that his back has been broken, it is seen still that he is fighting his last stand. Some, again, would compare this to the difference between D-Day and V-Day. D-Day saw a decisive, imminent and practical victory in World War II, but it was only until V-Day when victory was thoroughly realized in totality. Opponents of the amil view would claim that though the power of death has been broken on the cross, death has not been swallowed up in victory yet, and the same goes for Satan himself. His sure and eternal binding is imminent because of the cross, but he is still very much at work today.

Opponents would also point to passages such as **1 Peter 5.8** that says, “your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” This was obviously written *after* the cross and the Great Commission, and speaks specifically of the devil, rather than his minions. Additionally, and specific to the words of **Revelation** that speak of his inability to deceive, **2 Corinthians 4.4** says that the “god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ.” Also, **1 John 4.3** says that the “whole world is in control of the evil one.”

Lastly, and maybe most convincingly, **Revelation** itself in **chapter 12.9** and **18.23** says that Satan is deceiving the “world” and that the “sorcery of Babylon” is deceiving “all nations” before its judgment comes (which is **Revelation 20.10**). This shows that Satan, up until **Revelation 20.2, 3** (in other words, up until the millennium) is very much at work and *not* bound in the way that this passage describes. Also, the picture of Satan being *thrown* into the bottomless pit and *locked up* is a far more graphic picture of him having *no* role to play in the world; it is a far cry from the amil’s stance of a “lessening” of his ability to deceive nations as a whole.

2. Concerning the “two” resurrections, opponents of the amil view that say there is definitely only one resurrection would say that the proposed Scriptures don’t necessitate a single resurrection, *or* at least that they don’t necessitate that the single resurrection must take place simultaneously. In actuality, one verse quoted to show that there is only one resurrection could very well be stating that there are indeed two resurrections. **John 5.28, 29** speaks of “the resurrection of life” and “the resurrection of judgment.” This could prove to go either way, that it is one resurrection for two distinct people groups, or that it is two resurrections, one for each people group. However you see it, neither way necessitates that they are simultaneous.

3. Concerning the perfect dwelling with the imperfect, though this may *seem* illogical or contradictory, Scripture repeatedly alludes to a future time on earth that has many heavenly qualities, but is not quite perfect. There seems to be a time on earth when there is a substantial level of divine qualities, not just godly behavior. Additionally, Christ Himself dwelt on the earth for forty days *after* His resurrection in His glorified body. Not only that, but other Old Testament saints appeared on the earth with no bad “theological” consequences.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

Arguments for Postmillennialism

1. Many Scriptures seem to point to the idea that the Gospel will grow in influence, such as some of the parables of Jesus.⁸⁴²
2. The Great Commission itself gives us an optimistic hope that we are to fill all the corners of the earth with the Gospel and glory of Christ.
3. Postmils would also point to the idea that world has heard the Gospel at more than any point in human history. They would point to the fact that more Christian martyrs have died for Christ in the 20th century than in all previous centuries *combined*. Of course, the amil and premil folks would say this is proof that the world is getting *worse*, but the postmil would say that it is only *by the fruit* of these martyrs that the world becomes more and more evangelized.

Arguments Against Postmillennialism

1. Though the verses that support a growing Gospel do seem to be clear, the extent or nature of that growth is not intended to be shown, particularly in the parables. You can have massive growth of the Gospel and conversion without having a “Christianized” world. For instance, you could have the Gospel grow and convert, let’s just say 40% of the world, and that would be tremendous growth for the Gospel, proving those parables true without having the other 60% knowing Jesus.
2. Arguments against postmil would use the similar argument that mass persecution is going on. These arguments would say that “yes, the Gospel is increasing due to missions, but the world is simultaneously getting worse, not better.”

2 Timothy 3.1-5, 12, 13, 4.3-5

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

.....

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

^{4.3} For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Matthew 24.21-30

²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not

⁸⁴² Matthew 13.31-33

believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

3. Scriptures in the Word that speak of a noticeably different world and earth seem to indicate that there is a vast difference between this current earth that has the Gospel and a renewed earth (of some sort) with resurrected believers and Christ physically reigning on it. See the next article noting the arguments for premillennialism.

CLASSICAL OR HISTORICAL PREMILLENNIALISM

Arguments for Pretribulational Premillennialism

1. There are many verses that seem to indicate neither the current earth’s situation, nor the future eternal state.⁸⁴³

Isaiah 11.6-11

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. ⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. ¹¹ In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

Here, there seems to be quite a difference in the make-up of how the earth operates. **Verse 10** and **11** even seem to indicate that this peculiar earthly time will be yet *another* instance of God giving sinful man a chance to see who He is. It could be that those that survived the Great Tribulation (in particular the Jews) who would go on to marry and have children, could possibly raise their children as we do today. This would mean that there is no guarantee that their children would be saved, *even in a renewed society and earth* and *even with Christ physically reigning* on the earth. What would the point of this be? To show *unequivocally* that as humans, *no matter what we may think, we will rebel* against God! This would further *magnify* and *amplify* His glorious grace as He continues to save and elect, *even* those who rebel in a millennial kingdom.

2. Many verses seem to indicate that the millennial kingdom is in fact a future kingdom, not current, as the amil and postmil view ascribes, such as **Revelation 2.26, 27, 12.5, 6, and 19.15** as well as **1 Corinthians 15.23-25**.⁸⁴⁴

Arguments against Pretribulational Premillennialism

For arguments against the premil position, re-read the arguments for amil and postmil, as they cover all the reasons why they believe premil would possibly not be true.

⁸⁴³ Isaiah 65.20 // Psalm 72.8-14 // Zechariah 14.5-17

⁸⁴⁴ See Grudem’s notes in *Systematic Theology*, pg. 1130

As you can imagine, the arguments already stated for and against historical or classical premil are similar with the arguments for and against pretrib premil. For that reason, we'll just look at the distinct differences, knowing that the previous pros and cons also apply. The obvious difference here is the nature and timing of the rapture, as well as the differentiation between the church and Israel.

Arguments for Dispensational Pretribulation Premillennialism

1. Concerning the question of "why would God do this," proponents would point to various Scriptures that speak of God sparing His elect from His wrath. They would claim that this "great tribulation" is not just simply any old tribulation that has occurred in the past (since we know that all believers must face persecution), but it is a time for God to pour out His wrath, something that believers are spared from because of Christ.

Many would point to seemingly explicit Scriptures, such as **Revelation 3.10** that says that Christ, as He speaks to the church in Philadelphia (which pretribbers would say represents the "true church" or "truly saved"), "I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth."

Additionally, pretribbers would point to other "foreshadows" of the rapture, such as the story of Noah and even the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. With Noah, God spared the righteous from His wrath being poured out on the earth by keeping them safely in the ark. On the other end of this outpouring, Noah and his family emerged into a "new" earth. This could be a picture of His faithful church being taken out of the time of God's wrath, hidden in the safety of Christ, and emerging on the other end to enter into a newly formed earth as it will be in the millennium.

With Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham struck a deal with God to spare His wrath from going upon the cities until all the righteous were gone. Again, pretribbers would see this as another picture of God withholding His wrath until the righteous are taken out of the line of fire.

2. Knowing that an argument against "two" returns of Christ would be imminent, some proponents, however, would not necessarily classify this rapture as a "coming" of the Lord, but rather simply exactly what it is called: a "rapture" of the church. In other words, Christ doesn't "come" to the earth for His church, but rather He "calls" her up to Him. They would then maintain that the only second coming would come at the end of the tribulation.

Some pretribbers would point to certain examples, such as Enoch who was "taken away" into heaven,⁸⁴⁵ or Elijah who went into heaven.⁸⁴⁶ God didn't come down here to get them or "return" to earth to get them, but He simply "called him up." Many opponents also would call the pretrib rapture view a view of a "secret" coming of the Lord, though many pretribbers view the rapture as a very visible action, but not of the coming of the Lord, but the catching up of the church.

3. Pretribbers would also make no issue with a non-simultaneous rapture/second coming combination. Since other camps see their version of the rapture as occurring only mere "moments" before the second coming, a pretribber would have no problem with claiming that "moments" or "seven years" would theologically be inconsequential to the Lord, since time is relative to an eternal God.

Arguments Against Dispensational Pretribulation Premillennialism

1. Naturally, opponents of this view would state that Scripture doesn't warrant *two* second comings (which would really then be *three* comings of Christ) and that therefore this view is faulty. They would also point to the fact that this is a very new teaching that came out of the 19th century. Additionally, it has mainly picked up steam and popularity in America almost exclusively. While America makes up only about 15% of all professing

⁸⁴⁵ Genesis 5.24 // Hebrews 11.5. Additionally, some would say that the "rapture" of Enoch could possibly even be a very specific foreshadow of a rapture before God's wrath, since this comes right before the flood. Opponents would say "but there was only one that was taken, what kind of a rapture is that?" But as the story of Noah goes, it seems that he and his family were the only "righteous," so having only one before him could make sense. In this view, the foreshadowing would have Enoch be a picture of the church and Noah be a picture of believers who are saved *after* the rapture, enduring the *time* of the tribulation, but are protected by their faith in Christ during it. Some, even more specifically, would claim that Noah would be a picture of the remnant of Israel (the 144,000) that are spared during the Great Tribulation.

⁸⁴⁶ 2 Kings 2.11, 12

Protestants in the world, it also makes up about half of all dispensationalists in the world. The rest are found in countries mainly where American missionaries, mainly Pentecostal or prosperity Gospel missionaries, have brought the Gospel. It is a uniquely American export to the nations.

2. Opponents would also claim that a rapture before the tribulation makes no sense because as believers we are clearly not exempt from tribulation and suffering for the Gospel. They would say that this time is not God's full wrath being unleashed against humanity, but that it is exactly what it says it is: great tribulation. Therefore, to assume that we are taken out of the world at this time would not make sense.
3. Thirdly, and probably most importantly, opponents of Dispensational Pretribulation Premillennialism simply don't agree that there are two peoples of God, which this "rapture theology" necessitates.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT

I myself don't ascribe to dispensational theology, which would most naturally tend to do away with a rapture that occurs previous to the second coming, *mainly* because that type of a rapture presumes a distinction between Israel and the church. I don't see that distinction (which I covered in the last chapter). I also see the Great Tribulation as being simply that: tribulation. And we, as a church and as believers, are not exempt from tribulation, even if it is great. Due to this, it seems most likely that we, the church, will be a part of this Great Tribulation, since tribulation was indeed even promised to us.⁸⁴⁷

Yet there is a time at the end of the Tribulation that is spoken of when God's wrath is poured out. One theory, largely championed by Messianic Jewish scholar Marvin Rosenthal, is called the "pre-wrath" theory. This theory has the church being raptured sometime after the sixth seal (which is **Revelation 6.12**), but before the bowls of God's wrath are poured out in **Revelation 16.1**. This theory is different than the mid-trib theory, which occurs at the "turning point" in the middle of the 70th week of Daniel, which then ushers in the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. This position says that the church will be around for much of the Great Tribulation, but will finally be taken out when God's wrath is poured out. I find this theory intriguing for a few reasons:

- I do believe that we are not exempt from tribulation, but I do believe we are exempt from God's wrath.
- I don't think that this necessitates a distinction between the church and Israel.
- I could very much see this as a means to "opening the eyes" of ethnic Israel, which the Word says will see a great revival within herself in the last of days for the sake of God's love for Abraham. If the church is taken out of the earth right as God's wrath is poured out, it could be a sign to the Jews that they did in fact miss the Messiah. This view does not necessitate a differentiation between the church and Israel as God's two peoples.

This theory is not without its own interesting questions, and for that reason, I personally hold onto my own beliefs with a very open hand. It is fun discussion, and it does have a bearing on how you view some of how you live out your faith, but we always must major in the majors and minor in the minors.

CONCLUSION

That said, as we can see, there are intriguing positions that these varying views hold. There are also intriguing objections to all of them. It is with great humility and openness that we should continue our studies of these positions, discuss them, and choose how tightly we should hold on to our particular position.

Of utmost importance isn't so much "when" Christ will return, but that He *will* return for us. Whenever, and however, that is, should not bear as much weight in our theology as much as the very fact that He will indeed return. This, indeed, is a "close handed" doctrine that we must not sway in, though we can have latitude in the particulars of "how" and "when." Let's now look at the core nature of the second coming of our Lord.

⁸⁴⁷ Matthew 24.9 // John 16.33

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Regardless of *how* Christ comes back, we can certainly know, and all Christians believe, that Christ *will* in fact come back. He has made a covenant with His Father and a covenant with us, and God has sworn by Himself that He will remain true to His promise. He even went so far as to put His Holy Spirit in us as a guarantee of the completion of this truth. But what will happen upon His second coming?

Revelation 5.1–14

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”
¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Recommended Resources

Theology Books

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem. Chapters 54-56 deal with the return of Christ, the millennium, the rapture, and hell.

Salvation Belongs to the Lord by John Frame. Chapters 18-21 cover the themes in this chapter.

Books

Understanding Dispensationalism by Vern Poythress.

Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond by Stanley Gundry and Darrell Bock

The Gospel and Personal Evangelism by Mark Dever

Let the Nations Be Glad by John Piper

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer

Heaven by Randy Alcorn

Sermons

www.christianessentialsbc.com/messages This is Wayne Grudem's sermons going through his book, *Systematic Theology*. Go to the sermons on Chapters 54-56.

www.desiringgod.org This is John Piper's ministry. Along with audio or video sermons, he has the transcripts as well. Type into the search field on desiringgod.org to find these audio sermons that have attached articles. Simply type in "millennium," "eschatology" "hell," etc.

- "A Night of Eschatology." This is a very helpful look at three views of eschatology: amil, premil, and postmil. It features Doug Wilson, Jim Hamilton, and Sam Storms presenting views, with John Piper mediating.

Web Articles

www.monergism.com is a great site in general, but this particular link has a lot of information on ecclesiology.

www.gotquestions.org If you tend to have lots of questions in general, this is a great website to get to know. Go here and search "church," "dispensationalism," "covenant theology," "new covenant theology," "hell," "millennium," "eschatology," you name it.

