



VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH
ADULT EDUCATION CLASS NOTES
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INTRODUCTION TO END TIMES PROPHECY

War in the Middle East! Nuclear technology in the hands of rogue states! Instability in the world oil markets! Terror attacks on U.S. soil! Threats to wipe Israel off the map! Global economic collapse! Certainly these modern day headlines and activities sound like something out of the book of Revelation. Jesus did promise that He would return—and for centuries Christians have been looking forward to His return and wondering, “Could this be the day?” But issues surrounding the return of Christ have not only been confusing, but many people have given up because they feel they will never fully understand them. We are all left with questions like:

- How does one interpret the events of today with Bible passages?
- How should we live in light of Jesus’ soon return?
- What evidence suggests that He may return within my lifetime?

This class will hopefully clear up any confusion that we may have regarding future events that have been prophesied in both the Old and New Testaments. The goal is to answer these questions and many others while examining the passages of Scripture that deal with end times prophecy. We will begin by establishing some basics that we need to understand. Then we will focus on key end times events followed by an examination of key end times personalities. It is my desire that after moving through this course that you will be motivated to look forward to Christ’s coming with much comfort and hope, longing for that day when you will see Him face to face.

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF END TIMES PROPHECY

The study of the End Times is often referred to as ***Eschatology***. Eschatology comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means “last” and *logos*, which means “word or study” and is therefore the theological term employed to designate the doctrine of last things; the doctrine of the end times.

When we study the book of Revelation, we are studying material that has to do with the end times. Because the end times have not taken place yet, these passages are prophecy concerning the events and doctrines of the end times and are thus referred to as end times prophecy. There is much to study when one concerns themselves with end times prophecy.

In addition to the book of Revelation, one could study passages out of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel and others in the Old Testament. One could also study passages out of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians and Matthew 24-25. In fact much in the Scripture speaks of these future end times events. Therefore it is necessary that we understand these passages as we look forward to the return of the Lord.

- ***What is included in the study of End Times Prophecy?***

- 1) Eschatology or End Times Prophecy includes a study of significant events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ. These include: the rapture of the church; the seven year tribulation period; the second coming of Christ; the battle of Armageddon, the 1,000 year millennial reign of Christ; the Great White Throne Judgment and others.
- 2) Eschatology or End Times Prophecy also involves the study of topics such as death, heaven, hell, the New Jerusalem, the resurrection of the dead, judgments and the eternal state.
- 3) Furthermore, it includes the study of significant individuals who play a role in end time events, such as the glorified Christ; the two witnesses; the 144,000; Satan; antichrist, and his false prophet.
- 4) Lastly, the study of Eschatology or End Times Prophecy involves the study of theological positions such as dispensationalism and covenant theology. This includes: the timing of the rapture; the millennial reign of Christ; the future of Israel and other views and positions.

- ***Why is it necessary to study End Times prophecy?***

- 1) It Reminds us of God's Sovereignty!

In a world that often seems in chaos; in a world that seems to be in the grip of wickedness; we need to remember that God is in control of it all. The Bible proclaims the power and sovereignty of God and reminds us that His purposes for the future will come to pass. No one can thwart His mighty plans and purposes. Certainly we see God's power on display in the book of Revelation as these future events unfold. We should be comforted in knowing that He is in control. We should be driven to worship Him, because of His great power.

- In **Isaiah 40:12-26** the prophet Isaiah declared that God our Creator is not impressed with the assumed power of men and nations, which is anemic in comparison to His sovereign power? In fact, he asserted that God regards them as dust on the scales, as a drop from a bucket, and as nothing and meaningless.
- According to **Psalm 2:1-12**, God is the king of the universe and in absolute power now and in the future.

2) It Provides us with Great Hope!

The following passages emphasize how a focus on future events such as the Coming of Christ provide us with comfort and hope in times of grief or suffering.

- In fact **Titus 2:13** emphasizes that the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus is our blessed hope.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**; the key rapture passage is written by Paul to offer comfort and hope to those believers who were grieving over the loss of loved ones. So we can take comfort in times of grieving.
- **Romans 8:18** and following emphasizes hope in times of present suffering. So we can take hope in the glory that is to be revealed to us although we may be going through times of present suffering. (cf. 2 Timothy 1:8-12; 1 Peter 4:12-13)

3) It Compels us toward Godly Living!

Some passages emphasize a need to strive for personal holiness and godliness in light of future events.

- According to **1 Corinthians 15:51-58**, knowing that the Lord will return should motivate us to abound in the work of the Lord.
- The judgment seat of Christ in **2 Corinthians 5:10** should motivate us toward good works.
- **Titus 2:11-14** indicates that a focus on our blessed hope will move us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and drive us to live sensibly, righteously and godly.
- **2 Peter 3:14** is a command that we be diligent to be found in peace, spotless and blameless in light of future events.
- According to **1 John 3:2-3** in light of the coming of Christ we should be striving for purity just as Christ is pure.
- ***How do we approach the Scriptures when studying End Times Prophecy?***

1. Understand the Total Inerrancy of Scripture!

What we believe about the future directly results from how we view the Scripture. In order to study this doctrine correctly, we must agree as to where we will go for our

information and to what degree we will accept this information. Scripture is the only truly inerrant source for information regarding the end times.

- 2 Timothy 3:15-17
- 2 Peter 1:20-21
- Psalm 19:7-14

2. Utilize A Consistently Literal Method of Interpretation!

In addition to accepting the authority of the Bible, a student of prophecy must use a proper system of Bible interpretation (called "hermeneutics"). This proper system is called the literal method of interpretation.

The literal method of interpretation is also known as the normal method. It employs the following elements into its system of interpretation:

- * **Historical** - the cultural background and circumstances of the writer and recipients are considered.
- * **Grammatical** - the words are taken in their normal sense unless it is evident that a figure of speech or symbol is used. Attention is paid to the original language of the text.
- * **Contextual** - the words are considered in light of their immediate and broad context.
- * **Rhetorical** - noting the special features of the particular type of literature used.

The literal method of interpretation allows for symbols and figures of speech and adheres to the golden rule of interpretation, "if the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense."

This concept is better understood when compared with its opponent, the allegorical method of interpretation. Under this system, the words are often understood in a symbolic sense that results in a different meaning of the text.

If the allegorical method was applied consistently, the Bible would be reduced to fiction, with the meaning of the text replaced by whatever representation the reader gives to the words.

Evangelicals who use this allegorical hermeneutical system do so usually in the area of prophecy while using the literal or normal hermeneutical system for the rest of Scripture.

3. Understand the Distinction Between the Church and Israel in Scripture!

Seeing a difference between the Church and the nation of Israel is the all-determinative conviction on which Dispensationalism is based. This distinction is based upon the normal, literal method of interpretation.

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- *What does a distinction between the Church and Israel mean?*

Simply put, whenever the Bible speaks of the nation of Israel it means Israel and whenever the Bible speaks of the church it means the church. Israel is not the church and the church is not the nation of Israel.

- *Why do we believe in a distinction between the Church and Israel?*

1-The church did not exist prior to Acts 2.

a. Jesus said "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)

- Therefore, the church was at that point future.

b. The church began on the day of Pentecost

- Acts 1:5 gives the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 11:15-16 shows this promise was fulfilled in Acts 2.
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 shows that the baptism of the Holy Spirit forms the union of the believer into the body of Christ.
- Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18 shows the church is called the body of Christ.

In summary, the church began on the day of Pentecost. It did not exist prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

2-Israel will be restored.

A great deal of OT prophecy teaches that Israel will one day be restored to the land since the covenants can not be fulfilled apart from a regathering - Isaiah 27:12; 43:5-7; Jeremiah 12:15; 24:6; Ezekiel 20:42; 28:25-26; Hosea 12:9; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:14-15; Micah 4:6; Zephaniah 3:20; Zechariah 10:10.

The disciples ask Jesus in Acts 1:6 when the kingdom will be restored to Israel. Jesus answers not that Israel will not be restored but that the timing of the restoration will remain hidden.

Finally, Paul affirms in Romans 11 that Israel has not been rejected forever but will be restored.

In conclusion, it is essential that Israel and the Church not be confused. God has made promises to Israel that He will fulfill and to attempt to claim that the church is fulfilling all of these promises requires non-literal interpretation.

Understanding the Major Views of End Times Prophecy

What are these divergent views? There are three main views regarding the return of Christ and His millennial reign upon the earth.

The first view is amillennialism, which believes that there will not be an earthly kingdom of Christ.

The second view is postmillennialism, which believes as the coming of Christ approaches; Christ through the Church will bring in a long period of peace and righteousness.

And lastly there is the view of premillennialism, which believes that the return of Christ will be prior to the 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth. This view usually accepts a rapture of the church, a future period of tribulation upon the earth, and the second coming of Christ followed by His one thousand year reign upon the earth as described in the book of Revelation. Let us now examine these major views of the End Times Prophecy.

1. *The Amillennial View:*

Amillennialism is considered to be the majority end times view since both the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church have adopted it. It has also been embraced by a large segment of Protestantism as well. Although it may be considered the majority view, the validity of any view must be determined by a study of the Scripture.

Description of Amillennialism

Often times placing an “a” in front of a word negates it. Therefore, the word amillennial actually means, “no millennium.” Unfortunately this does not accurately describe what amillennialists truly believe. Amillennialists hold that there will be no physical

millennium. They do not believe in a literal, physical reign of Christ on the earth. Rather they believe that there will be a spiritual millennium.

They view Satan as bound since the first coming of Christ and that the present age between the first and second comings is the fulfillment of the millennium. Amillennialists are divided on whether the millennium is being fulfilled by the saints in heaven or in the hearts of believers upon the earth during this age.

Amillennialists also believe that until the return of Christ, good and evil will develop in parallel. After the second coming of Christ at the end of the world there will be a general resurrection and a general judgment of all people.

History of Amillennialism

Amillennialism as a system of theology is usually traced back to Augustine (A.D. 354-430). Prior to this time the majority view of the church was that of Premillennialism. There is one notable exception and that is Origen of Alexandria Egypt (A.D. 185-254). Origen and others from Alexandria were greatly influenced by Greek philosophy.

According to this particular philosophy all things that were material and physical were inherently evil. Therefore, they could not accept a view where Christ would rule in an earthly kingdom with physical blessings. Origen believed that this one thousand year reign must be a spiritual, nonphysical reign.

Origen was also the first to adopt the allegorical method of interpretation. He had a desire to find hidden and mystical meanings in the Scripture. His approach to Scripture was simply to spiritualize it. He came to deny any literal meaning of prophecy.

Although Origen and the Alexandrian school began to question premillennialism, amillennialism as a view was popularized and systematized by Augustine. Augustine was also educated in Greek philosophy and he also embraced the allegorical method of interpretation for prophetic passages. Augustine taught that this one thousand year reign of Christ was found in the existence of the church in the world.

Since the time of Augustine the amillennial view has dominated the church. Most of the reformers were also amillennial as they took that system of eschatology with them from the Catholic Church when they separated from it or were cast out.

However it must be noted that many of the reformers never got around to seriously addressing the doctrine of eschatology. As a result amillennialism continues into the modern era, and is even defended by some conservative theologians.

Doctrinal Distinctives of Amillennialism

Many amillennialists are liberal in doctrine and many are conservative, however, they are united on several points:

- While premillennialists argue that the biblical promises of a future earthly millennium are yet to be fulfilled, amillennialists believe those promises are either fulfilled spiritually in the church or they were conditional and the conditions were not met.
- Amillennialists deny there will be a literal, physical reign of Christ upon the earth. They view this reign as taking place in the hearts of believers in the church and will continue over the souls of the saints in heaven.
- Amillennialists believe that this spiritual millennial kingdom began at the first coming of Christ and will continue until His second coming.
- Amillennialists therefore, deny the rapture, believing that there will only be a second coming of Christ to usher all of God's people into heaven and to judge all of the ungodly.
- Amillennialists deny there will be a Great Tribulation period, believing that all passages referring to a tribulation period or to a coming wrath are the trials and suffering of the church on earth. Remember they tend to spiritualize prophetic passages.
- Amillennialists believe that Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ and that Christ is now ruling in heaven on the throne of David (cf. Revelation 20).
- In regards to the two resurrections found in Revelation 20:4-6, amillennialists believe the first to be a spiritual resurrection that takes place at the new birth and the second to be a physical resurrection that takes place at the end of the spiritual millennium.

Analysis of Amillennialism

Amillennialism is based in Covenant Theology as opposed to Dispensational Theology, and holds that God has a single overall program in all ages for His people. Since, according to this view, the Church and Israel share in one continuous plan, then God's promises to Israel are applicable to the church.

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By using an allegorical method of interpretation and spiritualizing prophetic passages, God's promises to Israel about a land, a nation, a king and a kingdom will be fulfilled by the church. Therefore the millennium is to be interpreted spiritually as fulfilled in the Christian Church.

The primary problem with the view of Amillennialism is that it is rooted in this allegorical method of interpretation. Many amillennialists will interpret Scripture literally until they come to prophetic passages, where they will adopt an allegorical method of interpretation.

Many amillennial theologians have acknowledged that if they took a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies and of Revelation 20, they would conclude that there would indeed be an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures.

The decision therefore is not, "which millennial system should I choose?" but "how do I think the Bible should be interpreted?" Out of this primary problem, the allegorical method of interpretation many secondary issues with Amillennialism show forth.

- First, they understand the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 as taking place at the first coming of Christ, which they view as the beginning of the Millennium. This does not square with the Scripture, which emphasizes Satan's present authority over the earth (1 John 5:19). Nor does it take into consideration the chronological consistency of the book of Revelation.
- Second, they ignore the emphatic nature of the phrase, "a thousand years" used six times in Revelation 20:1-6 and understand it figuratively. This does not agree with the book of Revelation's consistent, definite and literal use of time. While there is some use of symbolism in the book of Revelation, a great majority of the numbers and time references used in the book are quite literal.
- Third, they misunderstand the two resurrections found in Revelation 20:4-6. According to the Apostle John in the passage, the first resurrection mentioned occurs before the millennium begins, while the second resurrection takes place after it is over. Once again a normal reading of the text would indicate that both of these resurrections are literal, physical resurrections. In addition, those who participate in the first resurrection were beheaded because of their identification with Christ. They were already regenerated before they were put to death, therefore this resurrection cannot refer to a spiritual resurrection at the new birth, as Amillennialists would view it.

In analyzing amillennialism the great issue remains the spiritualization of prophetic passages, especially those pertaining to the millennium. If one evaluates Scripture with a consistent method of interpretation, it would not lead to the amillennial view.

2. The Post-millennial View:

Description of Postmillennialism

The term “postmillennialism” conveys the idea that Jesus Christ will return after the millennium. This view holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals.

They see the world as eventually being Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the “millennium.”

Most postmillennialists do not hold to a literal 1,000 years for the period of the millennium. Some view it as encompassing the period of time between the two advents of Christ, while others see it as applying to a golden age of peace and righteousness that will be brought in by the spread of the gospel. They view the millennium as a time of glorious triumph for the church rather than a physical reign of Christ on the earth.

History of Postmillennialism

There is no trace of postmillennialism during the first three centuries of the church. During the first three centuries, premillennialism was the predominant viewpoint, while amillennialism became the predominant view after the time of Augustine. However, in the centuries that followed some theologians found deficiencies in Augustine’s amillennial view and began to suggest changes.

In addition they were turning away from much of the allegorization of amillennialism. Some turned back to premillennialism, but others began to follow the postmillennial view of Daniel Whitby (1638-1726). Whitby, who was a Unitarian minister in England, believed that after the world was converted to Christ, the Jews would be restored to the Holy Land and then Christ would return.

Whitby was viewed as a theological liberal and his writings on the Trinity were publicly burned since he was denounced as a heretic. Although Whitby was branded a heretic, his postmillennial viewpoint was well received and quickly became popular.

The emphasis on man’s role in bringing in the kingdom of God fit very well with the prevailing views of the time. Many began to see the marvelous advances in science and the industrial revolution as evidence to support postmillennialism. Liberal scholars who believe the world is getting better by the power of man joined the camp of postmillennialism with their more conservative counterparts.

This system of eschatology began to fade as the twentieth century arrived. By the First World War, many became convinced that the world was not improving. After the Second World War, postmillennialism fell out of favor to the point where it had practically no adherents and many proclaimed postmillennialism dead.

Recently however, postmillennialism has been growing in popularity as some amillennialists have become attracted to postmillennialism under their belief in theonomy, which is discussed below.

Doctrinal Distinctives of Postmillennialism

Most postmillennialists believe that God will work through the church to bring about the millennium on earth by fulfilling the Great Commission. At the end of the millennium, Christ will return, followed by a general resurrection of the dead and a general judgment. There are three different groups of postmillennialists, but the basic elements of postmillennialism remain the same:

- As the name “postmillennial” indicates, this view teaches that the return of Christ follows the period of the millennium.
- Postmillennialists believe that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 should not be taken in a literal way, but represents a long period of time. Thus they see the length of the Millennium as not necessarily 1,000 years, but probably a much longer time period. It will be a time of peace where Christian principles will dominate the earth and sin will be greatly reduced.
- Postmillennialists do not view the millennium as a literal earthly reign of Christ, rather it is considered to be spiritual as Christ rules in the hearts of believers.
- Postmillennialists possess an optimistic view of this present age. They believe that the world will continually be improving. Certain examples are cited: social conditions are improving (i.e. for women); money given to the church is growing; the Bible is the best-selling book in the world; and the gospel is spreading out further than ever.
- Postmillennialists view Revelation 20 in a similar way as do amillennialists: They see the binding of Satan as having already taken place; they view the thousand years figuratively rather than literally and they see the first resurrection of Revelation 20 as a spiritual resurrection and the second as a physical resurrection.

- Postmillennialism agrees with premillennialism as far as the chronology of Revelation 19 and 20, however they see the rider on a white horse in Revelation 19 as a picture of Christ being victorious over His enemies through the preaching of the gospel in the present age rather than a literal second coming of Christ to the earth.
- Postmillennialism also endorses an allegorical interpretation for some Scripture passages, as do Amillennialists.

Types of Postmillennialism

1. Liberal Postmillennialism

This view promotes the world as getting better through humanism rather than through the power of God and His Word. They have a tendency to focus on societal transformation rather than on personal conversion. They view the church as a liberating force to free mankind from poverty, racism, disease, war and other injustices. They believe that through progress mankind will overcome all problems and bring in a golden age.

2. Classic Postmillennialism

This view was very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This classic view of postmillennialism takes seriously the doctrines of the Scripture and the need to spread the gospel. Proponents of this view believe that the church operating in the power of the Holy Spirit will bring dramatic changes and thus transform the world. Most postmillennialists view the millennium as coming at the latter part of the age between the first and second coming of Christ, while a few postmillennialists view the millennium as being the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ.

3. Theonomic Postmillennialism

This newer view, also known as "reconstructionism" or "dominion theology", has become popularized in recent years through the writings of R.J. Rushdoony and several of his followers. This view believes that the millennium will come through the preaching of the gospel and the imposition of the Old Testament Law.

Theonomy (meaning "law of God") sees no distinction between the church and Israel and therefore believes the whole Mosaic structure is operative for today (in contrast to Dispensational Theology). Furthermore, theonomists believe it is the duty of the church to bring civil powers into subjection to God's law, with its precepts and penalties. It is through the law of God that the world will become Christianized and prepared for the postmillennial return of Jesus Christ.

Analysis of Postmillennialism

Unfortunately many of the same comments about amillennialism can be made here about postmillennialism. Like amillennialism, postmillennialism adheres to a figurative method of interpretation rather than a literal one. This once again results in the same interpretative problems for Revelation 20 as with amillennialism.

- First, they understand the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 as taking place at the first coming of Christ. As mentioned earlier, this does not agree with the scripture, which emphasizes Satan's present authority over the earth (1 John 5:19).
- Second, they ignore the emphatic nature of the phrase, "a thousand years" used six times in Revelation 20:1-6 and understand it figuratively. This does not agree with the book of Revelation's consistent, definite and literal use of time. While there is some use of symbolism in the book of Revelation, a great majority of the numbers and time references used in the book are quite literal. If the literal sense makes plain sense, then we should seek no other sense.
- Third, they misunderstand the two resurrections found in Revelation 20:4-6. According to the Apostle John in the passage, the first resurrection mentioned occurs before the millennium begins, while the second resurrection takes place after it is over. Once again a normal reading of the text would indicate that both of these resurrections are literal, physical resurrections.

In addition, those who participate in the first resurrection were beheaded because of their identification with Christ. They were already regenerated before they were put to death; therefore this resurrection cannot refer to a spiritual resurrection at the new birth, as the postmillennialists or amillennialists would view it.

Although postmillennialism has the same problems as amillennialism, there are other issues that must be overcome:

- First, there is a failure of most postmillennialists to see Israel and the church as distinct. The Law of Moses was given to the nation of Israel, not to the church (2 Corinthians 3:1-11; Romans 7:1-6, 10:4). The Old Testament promises made to Israel are for Israel, not for the church. (See the position paper on "The Christian's Obligation to the Law of Moses")
- Second, the close of this present age will be marked by apostasy, not by the triumphal success of the gospel and a golden age of success by mankind (cf. Matthew 24:4-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff; 2 Timothy 3:1-5). Nor does it seem in

line with reality that the world is consistently improving. In fact, it appears to be consistently deteriorating and consistently growing more wicked.

Postmillennialism must be rejected as an acceptable eschatological view based off its lack of consistency with the Scripture. If one evaluates the Scripture with a consistent method of interpretation, it would not lead to the postmillennial view.

3. The Pre-millennial View:

Definition of Premillennialism

Premillennialism teaches that the second coming of Christ will occur before He establishes His earthly millennial reign of one thousand years. After Christ's return to earth, He will establish His kingdom for 1,000 years, after which will be the eternal state with a new heaven and new earth. Premillennialism is sometimes called "chiliasm", after the Greek word CHILIOI meaning, "a thousand."

History of Premillennialism

Premillennialism was the dominant belief in the early church although it was not specifically called so in the early stages of the church. Leaders such as Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian affirm premillennial ideas. However, they did not appear to teach extensively on eschatology. After opposition by Augustine (d.430), premillennialism was overtaken by amillennialism as the majority view.

The reformers came out of the Roman Catholic Church and took amillennialism with them. Only the smaller reformation movements held to premillennialism, such as the Anabaptists, the Moravians and the Mennonites. However, it should be noted that the reformers did not deal extensively with the doctrine of eschatology.

Over the last century, premillennialism has seen a resurgence. Today it is the most commonly held millennial position among conservative evangelicals. It is endorsed most strongly in Bible churches, the majority of Baptist churches, Evangelical Free churches, and the para-church movements. In addition, most mission boards are either exclusively or primarily premillennial.

Doctrinal Distinctives of Premillennialism

Liberal scholars usually reject premillennialism and therefore those who hold to this view tend to be conservative evangelicals, embracing a high view of Scripture. While

there can be small differences among premillennialists, the following is a list of the major distinctives of the premillennial position:

- Premillennialists adopt the literal method of interpretation consistently throughout the Scripture including all prophetic passages unlike amillennialists and postmillennialists.
- Premillennialists believe there will be a literal one thousand year millennium on earth, with Christ reigning as King.
- Premillennialists believe that the second coming of Christ to the earth occurs just prior to the establishment of His millennial reign on the earth.
- Premillennialists believe that Revelation 20:4-6 speaks of two literal physical resurrections, which are separated by the thousand year reign of Christ. The first resurrection refers to the resurrection of believers, which will take place prior to the start of the millennial kingdom. After the thousand-year reign, another resurrection will take place, this time for unbelievers.
- Premillennialists believe that the purpose of the millennial kingdom is to fulfill the Old Testament Covenant promises made to Israel. They see a distinction between the church and Israel.

Analysis of Premillennialism

As mentioned, premillennialism is based upon the literal method of interpretation. This method can be seen in the two major arguments used to support premillennialism:

(1) The Old Testament promises of a future glorious age will be established on the earth (cf. Isaiah 4; 11; 32; 34; 52; 61; 66; Amos 9:11-12; Zechariah 12:8-9; 14:16).

(2) Revelation 20:1-6, speaks directly to a reign of Christ for 1,000 years. It is a difficult passage for non-premillennialists to deal with. They suggest that this reign of Christ is in heaven, not on earth.

However:

- The earth is the setting for Christ's return (Revelation 19:1-16; Acts 1:11; Matthew 24:15-51), and the saints will reign with Him (Revelation 20:4).
- At the conclusion of the thousand years the saints are still on the earth when Satan comes to attack them (Revelation 20:9).

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- Revelation 5:10 claims the saints will reign on earth.
- OT Messianic prophecies look to an earthly kingdom (Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 11:1-10; Daniel 7).

Non-premillennialists also say the one thousand years is not literal but is symbolic of a long period of time. They suggest that the nature of prophetic literature refers to completeness, not a period of time.

However:

- Note the frequent mention of the time frame in Revelation 20:2-7 (six occurrences of "thousand years").
- In the Bible whenever a Greek or Hebrew word for "year" is used, the reference is always to a literal meaning for year.
- Prophetic literature is not entirely symbolic but uses symbolism. There must be evidence before concluding that a symbolic figure is being used.
- 1 Peter 3:8 used often by amillennialists against premillennialism, states that a thousand years is as one day with God but it does not deny that it is actually a thousand years with man.

Non-premillennialists also say the occurrence of the thousand years is not future but present.

However,

- The events of Revelation 19-20 are in a natural chronological sequence beginning with the second coming of Christ. Note phrases like "and I saw" and "when." Since the text shows that the second coming precedes the thousand years, the thousand years are still future.
- Revelation 20:1-3 is future since it depicts Satan as bound. While Satan has been judged (1 John 3:8; Gen. 3:15; Isaiah 53:12), he is not presently bound (1 John 5:19; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4) as that judgment is yet to be executed.

Non-premillennialists also say the resurrection, which occurs first in Revelation 20:4 is a spiritual resurrection occurring at salvation, while the second resurrection of Revelation

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20:5 is an actual bodily resurrection. Therefore, there are not two separate future resurrections but those who are regenerated will be raised from the dead after a thousand years.

However, the first resurrection of 20:4-5 is a literal bodily resurrection and is one thousand years before the second bodily resurrection because:

- The use of the verb "came to life" is used elsewhere in Revelation 2:8; 13:14; Matthew 9:18; and Romans 14:9 to refer to a bodily resurrection.
- The verb "came to life" should be taken in the same sense in verse four as it is in verse five. To change the meaning of the verb from spiritual resurrection in verse 4 to bodily resurrection in verse 5 requires a compelling reason.
- Of the over forty occurrences of "resurrection", all are bodily resurrections with the exception of Luke 2:34.
- From the context, the two resurrections involved different groups. The first resurrection is for the saints who enter the millennium and the second is a resurrection to judgment for unbelievers (cf. John 5:29).

While the premillennial system does not rest solely upon one text, nevertheless Revelation 20 poses a very substantial problem for amillennialism and postmillennialism.

Types of Premillennialism

Within premillennialism there exists differing views regarding the timing of the rapture: pretribulationism, posttribulationism, midtribulationism, the pre-wrath rapture view and the partial rapture theory (see Rapture position paper).

There is a segment of individuals who hold a view called covenant premillennialism or historic premillennialism, which usually embraces a literal thousand year reign of Christ following His second coming, but they base it completely on Revelation 20 and leave Israel out of the picture. They accept a literal reign of Christ, but apply the Old Testament promises made to Israel to the church.

Summary of Premillennialism

Premillennialism is the view that Jesus Christ will return to this present earth prior to the establishing of His millennial kingdom. Jesus will reign supreme in power and great glory and will be the object of worship for all mankind. This kingdom will be on an earth

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where the curse of sin has been removed and where righteousness and peace are universal.

Prior to the millennial kingdom there will be a resurrection of believers and following this thousand years there will be a resurrection of unbelievers for judgment. The primary purpose of this period of time will be to fulfill the covenant promises made to Israel. When this kingdom comes to an end, the next phase of God's plan, the eternal state on a new earth will commence.