

Class 2: Considering Views of the Millennium

Our Unique Journeys to our Eschatological Views

How did you come to hold your current position on eschatology? We are all influenced, consciously or not, by a variety of sources. We all like to think that our views are simply our plain reading of scripture, but more often they are influenced by things like:

- our personal study of scripture
- the teachings of pastors we respect and books we have read
- our personal interpretation of current events and history (the newspaper)
- the way the end of the world is portrayed in media and culture (*Left Behind*)

Many of us informally form our own opinions about what we think the Bible teaches *before* we begin studying the texts carefully.

Personal Example...

Terms

...with a little/lot of help from *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem.

- **eschatology** – the study of last things or future events
- **millennium** – the period of 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5 describing the time of the reign of Christ and believers over the earth
- **dispensationalism** – “A theological system that began in the nineteenth century with the writings of J. N. Darby. Among the general doctrines of this system are the distinction between Israel and the church as two groups in God’s overall plan, the pretribulational rapture of the church, a future literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, and the dividing of biblical history into seven periods, or “dispensations,” of God’s ways of relating to his people.”¹
- **rapture** – the “taking up” of believers to be with Christ when he returns to the earth.
- **parousia** – the second coming of Christ
- **The Great Tribulation** – an expression from Matthew 24:21 referring to a time of significant suffering and hardship before the return of Christ.
- **The Final Judgment** – The last and ultimate proclamation by Jesus of the eternal destinies of all people which will take place after the millennium.
- **apocalyptic literature** – “A genre of biblical writing that reveals God’s actions and coming judgment in symbolic language. The transition from prophecy and apocalyptic is characterized by an increased use of symbolism and an increased use of heavenly mediators explaining the vision. The latter half of the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are representative of the apocalyptic genre.”²
- **Armageddon** – Literally “Mountain of Megiddo.” The place at which all the kings of the Earth gather in Rev 16:16. This is possibly referring to the final cosmic battle between God and evil.

¹ Wayne Grudem, [Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine](#), Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1505.

² D. A. Neal, [“Apocalyptic Literature, Introduction to.”](#) ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

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Key Biblical & Theological Issues

Why are there divergent views of what to expect in the future?

- Prophecy and apocalyptic literature can be difficult genres to interpret.
- Many different passages of scripture address the time period under consideration, but the Bible is not seeking to systematically answer our questions..
- Theologians and Christians throughout church history have studied these biblical passages in the midst of very different historical contexts.
 - During times of great upheaval and persecution, certain interpretations have grown in popularity.
 - During times of great peace and revival, other interpretations have grown in popularity.

How do we read and interpret apocalyptic literature?

- See the Introduction to Revelation in the **ESV Study Bible** for a good overview of the four primary interpretive frameworks for apocalyptic literature.
 - **Historicism** – the events in Revelation 4-20 symbolize the chronological order of events in church history from the Apostolic age to Christ’s return.
 - **Futurism** – Revelation 4-22 primarily portrays events still future to us (and therefore distant future from the biblical authors)
 - **Preterism** (Partial Preterist) – most of the events portrayed in Revelation took place in the early years of the church.
 - **Idealism** (recapitulation) – the events portrayed in Revelation do represent events in church history, but not necessarily in Chronological order. In this view, the idea of recapitulation is used to interpret the events in Revelation from different perspectives.

How do we understand phrases like “The kingdom,” “Israel,” and “the people of God?”

- What is the relationship between The Church and Israel as the people of God?
- What are God’s future plans for the Jewish people?
- How do we interpret OT prophecies about the Jewish people which have not taken place yet?

Why does the millennium question dominate discussions about eschatology?

- We are drawn to mystery, puzzles, charts, and visual aids.
- We want to see where **our lives fit** into the timeline of history.
- In our efforts to systematize what the Bible teaches, the discussion around the millennium offers an opportunity to map biblical events to human history.
- In a helpful way, the millennium question brings other, more significant interpretive questions and answers to light.

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Views of the Millennium

Millennial views are named according to their *relationship to the return of Christ*. There are *three basic views*, though we will subdivide one of them and treat as two separate views.

- **PRE**millennial – Christ will return **before** (pre-) the millennium.
- **POST**millennial – Christ will return **after** (post-) the millennium.
- **A**millennial — There is **no future literal 1,000 year reign** of Christ on earth after the 2nd coming of Christ. The “A” is a prefix that means *not* or *without*. A better way of describing what amillennialism teaches is that Revelation 20:4-6 describes *now*—the period between Jesus’ first and second advent—the church age. According to amillennialism *we are currently in* the millennium.

For each of the millennial views, we will attempt to answer these questions:

- How would you draw the timeline of future eschatological events?
- What are some of the primary theological distinctives of this view?
- What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this view?
- When in church history has this been a dominant view?
- Who are some historical or modern-day proponents of this view?

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I. Premillennialism (Dispensational)

Left Behind. The Late Great Planet Earth. Drama. Mystery. Secret Rapture. Anticipation about the restoration of the nation of Israel. This view is very popular today.



Life
Death
Resurrection
of Jesus



NEW
heavens
and earth

Theological / Biblical Distinctives

- The adherents claim to interpret the Bible the most literally. They oppose applying the promises made to Israel to the Church in the NT.
- Rigorously maintains a distinction between the Church and Israel, even into eternity. Traditional Dispensationalists even teach that Israel will occupy the New Earth, and the church will occupy the New Heavens.
- Views the Church as a “parenthesis” in the dealings of God with Israel.
- Emphasis on the Secret Rapture before the Great Tribulation. This rapture could happen at any time, and according to traditional dispensationalists, is necessary to separate the Gentiles from Israel.
- During the Great Tribulation many of the signs that are predicted to precede Christ’s coming will take place, including a widespread acceptance of Christ among the Jewish people.
- Emphasis on the 70 Weeks of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27) as a framework for salvation history, including the church age, and the tribulation.
- Emphasis on the current-day geo-political nation of Israel as a preparation for the Tribulation and millennium.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- Strength: Dispensationalists do engage with the Biblical text and care about fidelity to scripture. Recent changes among Progressive Dispensationalists show that some are willing to change their positions when they are shown not to be defensible biblically.
- Weaknesses
 - Insisting on separate tracks for Israel and the Church contradicts the emphasis of the NT (and OT prophecies about the people of God).

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- Emphasis on renewal of Jewish temple worship contradicts the message of Hebrews.

This View in Church History and Today

- Is a relatively new position in church history. It was initially taught by Darby in the late 19th century and popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible (1909/1917) and many Bible conferences in the 20th century.
- During the Modernist controversies in the early twentieth century, Dispensationalists used their “literal” interpretation approach as a litmus test for biblical faithfulness.
- Scofield reference Bible.
- Dallas Theological Seminary. The Master’s Seminary.
- John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield, Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, David Jeremiah, John MacArthur (a “leaky dispensationalist”), J. Vernon McGee, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye

What about *Progressive* Dispensationalism?

- There have been some significant changes to the traditional dispensationalist system in recent decades. Many thought-leaders in Dispensational seminaries have adopted these changes (though the typical church member in dispensational churches still holds traditional views).
- A simplification of the number of dispensations from 7 to 4.
- A greater focus on the spiritual union of Israel to the church, which therefore does not “require” the Pretribulational Rapture to “get the church out of the way” in order to deal with Israel. There is one plan of salvation for Israel and the church.
- Authors: Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, and Robert Saucy

II. Premillennialism (Historical or Classic)



Life
Death
Resurrection
of Jesus



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Theological / Biblical Distinctives

- Does not maintain the same separation between Israel and the Church of Dispensational Premillennialism.
- Gentiles grafted into Israel.
- “Covenant of grace unfolding over time and culminating in Christ.”³
- Descriptions from the OT of Israel reigning over its enemies will be experienced in the reign of the Church in the millennium. These texts don’t seem to describe either the current age or the New Heavens and New Earth.
- Claims to be a represent a more straightforward reading of Revelation 20:1-6 than Amillennialism or Postmillennialism.
- Affirms “rapture” but as a part of the 2nd Coming, not as a separate event.
- Millennium could be 1000 years or a long period of time.

Questions, Strengths, and Weaknesses

- Weakness: Separates the resurrection of believers from resurrection of unbelievers and other final events (judgment, New Heavens and Earth)
- Strength: better understanding of Israel and the Church, compared with Dispensationalism.

This View in Church History and Today

- has been a widely held view throughout church history, especially in the early church and among the Church Fathers.
- Dean Alford, Nathaniel West, S. H. Kellogg, George Eldon Ladd, Walter Martin, John Warwick Montgomery, R. Laird Harris, J. Barton Payne, Wilbur Wallis, Craig Blomberg, **Wayne Grudem**

³ Bryan Chapell, *Are We Living in the Last Days? Four Views of the Hope We Share about Revelation and Christ's Return* (Baker, 2024), 219.

III. Postmillennialism



Life
Death
Resurrection
of Jesus



NEW
heavens
and earth

Theological / Biblical Distinctives

- Similar to the amillennial view in certain respects.
 - Keeps the events surrounding the return of Christ together (Rapture/2nd coming, resurrection, final judgment, new heavens and new earth)
 - The millennium may or may not be exactly 1000 years—this could simply mean a long period of time.
- Christ's rule prophesied will come to pass. (Psalm 2)
- Optimistic. Expects the increasingly successful evangelism of the world to lead to the dominant influence of the church in all of society to make the earth a place where God's peace and righteousness dwells.

Questions, Strengths, and Weaknesses

- When does the millennium begin?
- How should we measure the amount of success/victory of the church to know if we're in the millennium or not?

This View in Church History and Today

- Popular view during times of Christian dominance
- Calvin, Luther
- Augustine (but he was also Amillennial in some respects), Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, W. G. T. Shedd, Robert Dabney, Augustus Strong, Benjamin Warfield, Loraine Boettner, Iain Murray, D. James Kennedy, J. Jefferson Davis, R.C. Sproul
- **Theonomy:** R. J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, Ken Gentry, Doug Wilson
- **Charismatic/Pentecostal:** Paul Yongli Cho, Kenneth Copeland, John Hagee, Pat Robertson⁴

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Are We Living in the Last Days? Four Views of the Hope We Share about Revelation and Christ's Return* (Baker, 2024), 223–224.

IV. Amillennialism



Life
Death
Resurrection
of Jesus



NEW
heavens
and earth

Theological / Biblical Distinctives

- The Kingdom of God is here.
- Thousand year reign is symbolic of the Church Age
- The millennial reign is in heaven with Christ and his saints.
- Satan is bound by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Church
- Progressive Parallelism through Revelation

Questions, Strengths, and Weaknesses

- What about the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3? When did this take place, and how extensive is it. Grudem objects to the understanding of the binding of Satan in amillennialism:
 - *To say that Satan is now in a bottomless pit that is shut and sealed over simply does not fit the present world situation during the church age, in which Satan's activity is still very strong, in which he "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8), in which he can fill someone's heart "to lie to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3), and in which "what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10:20).⁵*
- Who is reigning with Christ in heaven during the millennium?
- How do we understand the "first resurrection" of Revelation 20:5?
- Strength: Understands the Church as the New Covenant people of God.
- Strength: keeps the final events of the last days together (resurrection, judgment, new heavens and new earth)
- Strength: recognizes the significance of the change that took place through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to bring in the Kingdom of God.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, Second Edition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1378-1379.

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- Weakness: This view is very dependent on the reading of Revelation 20 as a “restart” in the Progressive Parallelism (recapitulation) of Revelation. If Chapter 20 is read as chronologically after Chapter 19, this interpretation of the millennium faces difficult challenges.
- Weakness: How do we interpret passages which seem to describe something different than the current age, yet not quite the New Heavens and New Earth? Grudem makes this objection as well.
 - *Finally, many premillennialists argue that several other passages, especially in the Old Testament, require us to believe in a future period that is far greater than the present age but that still falls short of the eternal state (see Ps. 72:8–14; Isa. 11:2–9; 65:20; Zech. 14:6–21; 1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).⁶ These passages, they say, portray a period that looks very much like the millennium as they understand it.⁶*

This View in Church History and Today

- Majority of Christians during the majority of the Christian era
- Augustine, Louis Berkhof, Geerhardus Vos, John Murray, Abraham Kuyper, William Hendriksen, J. I. Packer, Michael Horton, Anthony Hoekema, Tim Keller, Sam Storms
- Reformed Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwells Theological Seminary
- **The pastors of Cornerstone Fellowship Church** and other pastors in Trinity Fellowship Churches.

A closer look at Revelation 20:4-6

Revelation 20:1-6

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

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1378.

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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**.

Five Questions for Interpreting Revelation 20:1-6

1. Should we read Revelation 20 as coming chronologically after Revelation 19?

- With our “Progressive Parallelism” (recapitulation) view of Revelation, Chapter 20 actually begins our seventh and final restatement. The clock is reset to the beginning of the church age.

2. When did the events of Revelation 20:2 take place?

- This seems to be the main question.
- Amillennialists would say this took place at the First Advent (life, death, resurrection of Jesus. What is the eschatological point of the demonic exorcisms in the New Testament? To show that the Kingdom of God has come.
- Matthew 12:29 – “unless he first **binds** the strongman”
- Matthew 12:28 – “If it is by the Spirit of God that I **cast out** demons...”
- **Lk 10:17-18** • The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.
- **Jn 12:31** • Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

3. What does it mean that Satan is bound?

- The text gives us the answer in vs. 3, namely, that so that he cannot deceive the nations any longer.
- Example from Dr. Kruger at RTS – “Dog on a leash”
- Does this mean that Satan has no impact on the earth, or that his influence is greatly reduced?

4. Where does the reign in vv. 4-6 take place?

- There is no mention of earth or Israel or Jerusalem.
- There are some clues that we should interpret this as being in Heaven, not earth. Do we have any exegetical reason to place vv. 4-6 on earth?

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- “Thrones”
- “Souls” of those who had been beheaded. There is no mention of “all the saints” or any general phrase that would represent all believers on earth.
- These “came to life” and reigned with Christ.

5. What is meant by the “first resurrection?”

- The saints who have died and are with Christ. “Today, you will be with me in Paradise...”
- The full resurrection has not occurred yet, which will happen after the 2nd coming.

A Broader Case for Amillennialism

The Kingdom has come... and is coming

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was present during his ministry.

- **Mk 1:15** • and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
- **Mt 12:28** • But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
- **Lk 7:28** • I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”
- **Lk 10:18** • And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.
- **Lk 17:20–21** • Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”
- **Ro 14:17** • For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God, therefore, is to be understood as the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of God’s people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. It means that the great drama of the history of salvation has been inaugurated, and that the new age has been ushered in. The kingdom must not be understood as merely the salvation of certain individuals or even as the reign of God in the hearts of his people; it means nothing less than the reign of God over his

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entire created universe. "The Kingdom of God means that God is King and acts in history to bring history to a divinely directed goal."⁷

Jesus also taught that the Kingdom of God would be a future reality.

- **Mt 7:21–23** • “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”
- **Mt 8:11–12** • I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
- **2 Ti 4:18** • The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- **1 Co 6:9** • Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,
- **1 Co 15:50** • I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

The People of God

There are not two different peoples of God, but one.

- **Ge 12:3** • I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”
- **Eph 2:14–15** • For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,
- **Ro 10:12** • For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.
- **1 Pe 2:9** • But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
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⁷ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 45.

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Resources and Further Study

Chapell, Bryan. *Are We Living in the Last Days? Four Views of the Hope We Share about Revelation and Christ's Return*. Baker, 2024.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

Hoekema, Anthony A. *The Bible and the Future*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.

<https://reformedtheologicalsemin.subspla.sh/bg3fhf2> — Excellent teaching (audio) on Millennial views from Dr. Michael Kruger at Reformed Theological Seminary this is one of his seven lectures on interpreting Revelation.

Daniel Baker preached on Daniel's 70 weeks back in 2021.

<https://cornerstoneapex.org/messages/daniels-70-weeks>

Sermon series on Revelation from 2014.

<https://cornerstoneapex.org/messages/category/revelation-series>

Questions