Now, the Future
An Introduction to Eschatology

STUDENT’S WORKBOOK

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Now, the Future

An Introduction to Eschatology

SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Now, the Future: An Introduction to Eschatology attempts to acquaint students with the doctrine of the last things, especially as it concerns the relationship between the millennium and Christ’s Second Coming. Students will study four prominent millennial viewpoints (historic premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism) in an effort to clarify key interpretive issues and arrive at their own conclusions. In addition, students will examine such issues as the relationship between Israel and the church, the role of the Antichrist, the chronology of the Olivet Discourse, and Daniel’s seventy weeks. Finally, students will devote time to considering Revelation 20 and its implications for biblical eschatology. Throughout the course, students will learn by interacting with the biblical text, evaluating both ancient and modern authors, answering study questions, and participating in class discussion. In all of this, our goal is that students who take this course will learn to live wisely in the present age by anticipating Christ’s return with greater joy and understanding.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

▷ magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their hearts above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

▷ understand the Scriptures more fully as a result of searching them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel students to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).

▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with the millennial viewpoints as they are presented in this curriculum.
To this end students will answer comprehension questions, respond to common objections, and formulate their own questions.

▷ discuss and apply the biblical truth that is presented in the curriculum.
▷ synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course's final project.

**REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)**

▷ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)

**REQUIREMENTS**

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2–6 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives first, then read the remainder of the lesson, answer the three questions contained therein, and listen to the assigned sermon. As the student listens to the sermon, they should take notes on the corresponding sheet included in each lesson. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question.

**REFLECTION PAPER**

As a final project, students will write a brief paper explaining their current understanding of the relationship between the millennium and the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, they should select one of the four views presented in the course and argue for it. The paper should be 2-3 double-spaced pages, to be submitted at the end of the course.
## Schedule

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A Few Words About This Study

Before we begin this course, it’s important that we orient ourselves around the nature and goals of the subject matter. These six lessons focus on a subset of eschatology, namely, the relationship between the millennium and the Second Coming of Christ. This is an important issue, to be sure, but it doesn’t rise to the level of such primary doctrines in eschatology as the visible return of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and the final judgment. To say it another way, we are devoting the next six weeks to a topic of secondary significance. Two implications follow from this point.

First, we should hold a good deal of our conclusions with open hands. Sincere Christians can and do believe differently about the nature of the millennium. Without minimizing the importance of these differences or glumly resigning ourselves to a theological impasse, we should strive to maintain a healthy sense of proportion. On this point, we would do well to adopt St. Augustine’s demeanor. In his *Confessions*, after setting out his understanding of the finer points of Genesis 1:1-2 – an understanding he knew wasn’t shared by everyone – he writes, “[W]hat does it matter to me if what I think the author thought is different from what someone else thinks he thought? All of us, his readers, are doing our utmost to search out and understand the writer’s intention, and since we believe him to be truthful, we do not presume to interpret him as making any statement that we either know or suppose to be false.” Following Augustine’s lead, then, we want to do our level best, with the Spirit’s help, to understand what the biblical authors intended to communicate about the last days. But on the way, we shouldn’t lose heart if we fall short of unanimity in the details. Instead of viewing disagreement as a threat, we should embrace it as an opportunity to love our brothers and sisters and to sharpen our own understanding.

Second, the goal of this curriculum is not to corral you into a predetermined millennial fold. Instead, we want to provide you with the tools to come to your own prayerful convictions. The best way to do this, we think, is to present each of the four millennial viewpoints on their own terms and with their strongest arguments. Only then will we be in a place to carry out informed evaluation. To encourage an environment of free enquiry, your instructor will abstain from sharing his own viewpoint until the last day of class. Instead, he will devote his energies to helping you understand each of the views – their arguments, objections raised against those arguments, and possible responses.

Every millennial viewpoint has its problems, its baggage. This will become clear in the pages that follow. Therefore, the task before us is not to search for
a perfectly manicured system, buffed to a high gloss, but instead to find that position whose problems we can live with and whose explanations we feel best fit the biblical teaching. As we begin this course, may God use our studies to “train...us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:12-14, ESV).

Come, Lord Jesus!
Introduction to Eschatology

INTRODUCTION

This purpose of this course is to introduce students to the doctrine of eschatology, which concerns itself with what the Bible teaches about the last days. Though our study will focus on the narrow issue of the nature and timing of the millennium, we should remember that eschatology as a whole encompasses a far broader scope. In fact, because of its view toward the culmination of history, biblical eschatology provides us with a framework for interpreting our lives, our culture, and the wide sweep of human events. To put it another way, eschatology gives us the grand story in which we learn to read our own stories.1 Stanley Grenz explains this well:

"Taken as a whole, eschatology speaks concerning several dimensions of what is final in God’s program, as well as the inaugurated aspects of that grand purpose. It focuses on what lies beyond for individual human life; hence, it treats death and life after death. Eschatology also focuses on what is final for corporate human history; consequently it seeks to delineate how God will bring human history to its climax and how that goal is already at work in the present. Finally, the doctrine of last things addresses what is final with respect to the cosmos in its entirety; therefore, it speaks of the way in which God’s entire activity in the universe is being moved toward its intended goal in the eternal reality that lies beyond the flow of history. In short, within the context of Christian doctrine the topic of eschatology provides an overarching vision of the faith. It seeks to set forth what is the ultimate goal toward which God’s work in the world is directed, how that work will be consummated and in what manner that goal is already in the process of being realized."2


For this reason, before turning our attention to the millennial issue, we want to establish first the broad contours of biblical teaching on the last things.

Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), 16.
BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY: THE BIG PICTURE

What does the Bible teach about the future we all await, both at the end of our lives and at the return of Christ? The following texts lay out the central events we can anticipate. As you study these passages, underline key phrases that relate to the future of believers and unbelievers.³

Psalm 16:11
11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Daniel 12:2-3
2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8
6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Philippians 3:20-21
20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10
6 ...God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006).
vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

2 Timothy 4:1
1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...

Hebrews 12:22-23
22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect...

2 Peter 2:9
9 ...[T]he Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment...

Revelation 21:1-4
1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

1. Summarize what these passages teach about the future of believers and unbelievers. Your answer should address what happens to both groups at death and at the Lord’s return.
Bethlehem Baptist Church’s Elder Affirmation of Faith includes the following statement about the future of believers and unbelievers alike. Compare this description with your own summary and note any differences.

We believe that when Christians die they are made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, and are taken consciously into the presence of Christ, which is more glorious and more satisfying than any experience on earth.

We believe in the blessed hope that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to this earth personally, visibly, physically, and suddenly in power and great glory; and that He will gather His elect, raise the dead, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom. We believe that the righteous will enter into the everlasting joy of their Master, and those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery.

We believe that the end of all things in this age will be the beginning of a never-ending, ever-increasing happiness in the hearts of the redeemed, as God displays more and more of His infinite and inexhaustible greatness and glory for the enjoyment of his people.²

2. Reflect on the language used in this statement. Can you think of any false teachings that it might be intended to exclude?

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² Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith Sections 14.1-3. This document is available online at https://bethlehem.church/elder-affirmation-of-faith/
3. Significantly, Bethlehem’s affirmation includes no statement on the nature of the millennium or the possibility of a secret rapture. Why do you think this is? What does this communicate about the importance of this issue compared to other aspects of eschatology?

Another aspect of biblical eschatology has to do with the Old Testament expectation of the Day of the Lord. This was a day – sometimes near, sometimes far away – when the Lord would decisively punish the wicked and reward the righteous. Joel 2, for example, details the circumstances surrounding this event.

Joel 2:1-2, 10-14, 28-32

1 Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

10 The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. 11 The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it? 12 “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 13 and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. 14 Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female
servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

With the coming of Christ, however, we see a remarkable development in the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations about the future. Consider Peter’s Pentecost sermon below.

Acts 2:1-4, 14-21

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
4. Explain how Peter interprets Joel’s prophecy about the events surrounding the Day of the Lord. Are the predicted events still future or is there a sense in which they have already begun to be fulfilled? How do you know?

Because Peter sees Joel’s prophecy as beginning fulfillment in his day, he concludes that he and his listeners are living in the “last days” (v.17), a time ringing with anticipation. And he’s not alone in this assumption.

Matthew 12:32

32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

1 Corinthians 10:11

11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Ephesians 1:19b-21

19 ...according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3

2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
Hebrews 1:1-2

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

1 Peter 1:20-21

20 [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

1 John 2:18

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

5. Underline any phrases above that refer to the “last day(s)” or to “this age / the age to come.” To what time periods do these phrases refer? What event inaugurates each era? What implications do these observations have for the way we think about eschatology?

Anthony Hoekema summarizes the New Testament portrayal of eschatology in this way:

We conclude, then, that the nature of New Testament eschatology may be summed up under three observations: (1) the great eschatological event predicted in the Old Testament has happened; (2) what the Old Testament writers seemed to depict as one movement is now seen to involve two stages: the present age and the age of the future; and (3) the relation between these two eschatological stages is that the blessings of the present age are the pledge and guarantee of greater blessings to come.5

To picture the shift between the Old Testament and New Testament presentation of the last days, consider the following diagrams developed by theologian Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949):

**Old Testament Eschatology**

<table>
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**New Testament Eschatology**

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<tr>
<td>(in Heaven)</td>
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Beyond providing a sweeping vision of redemptive history, the “already-not yet” nature of biblical eschatology also addresses the believer’s identity in Christ. As you read the following verses, keep in mind the “New Testament Eschatology” diagram above.

John 5:25

> “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

Romans 6:8-11

> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:11

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If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Ephesians 2:4-6

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

6. According to these verses, what is true of believers in this age? How does this compare with what Christians will experience in the age to come?

The Christian life, then, is shot through with eschatological significance. For believers, the resurrected life to come is in part a present experience because of our union with Christ. And what’s more, this realization has everything to do with making progress in sanctification. Study the following passage to see this connection.

Colossians 3:1-10

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing
that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

7. Explain the use of the word “therefore” in verse 5. How does Paul teach us to put sin to death in our lives?

Richard Gaffin writes:

[The NT has no more important or more basic perspective on being a Christian than this: The Christian life is resurrection-life... It is part of the resurrection-harvest that begins with Christ’s own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20); the believer’s place or share in that harvest is now – not only in the future but already in the present. The radical edge of Paul’s outlook on the Christian life comes to light in the observation that, at the core of their being (the ‘inner man,’ 2 Cor. 4:16; or what he also calls the heart, Rom. 2:29; 6:17; Eph. 1:18), Christians will never be more resurrected than they already are! Christian existence across its full range is a manifestation and outworking of the resurrection life and power of Christ, the life-giving Spirit (Rom. 6:2ff.; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-4).]

Now that we have established the connection between eschatology and the believer’s progress in holiness, we can better appreciate the importance of properly understanding the Lord’s return. Study the following texts to see the practical implications of this doctrine.

Matthew 24:42-44

42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have...
let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18
(15) For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2
(1) Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, (2) not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

Titus 2:11-13
(11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, (12) training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, (13) waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

8. In the passages above, underline any phrases that describe the consequences of a right or a wrong understanding of Christ’s return. Summarize your observations in the space below.
INTRODUCING THE LESSONS TO COME

In the remainder of this lesson, we’ll take a look at the structure of the coming lessons so that you can know what to anticipate and can begin thinking about the central issues and texts. Beginning with the next session, we’ll cover each of the four main eschatological positions in some detail. The order of presentation will follow a loose chronological progression throughout church history. Thus, we’ll begin with historic premillennialism and proceed to amillennialism and postmillennialism. Dispensational premillennialism will round up our study, as it is – comparatively speaking – the youngest member of the family. Our last lesson will focus on the book of Revelation.

The next four sessions (Lessons 2-5) will generally follow the order below:

- Survey the historical development of the position under consideration
- Clarify distinguishing features
- Consider biblical support
- Draw attention to salient objections
- Provide responses to objections
- Summarize and review lesson content

To help stimulate your thinking, below is a brief description of each of the millennial views from Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology.8

Historic Premillennialism

According to this viewpoint, the present church age will continue until, as it nears the end, a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth…. After that time of tribulation at the end of the church age, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom. When he comes back, believers who have died will be raised from the dead, their bodies will be reunited with their spirits, and these believers will reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years. (Some premillennialists take this to be a literal one thousand years, and others understand it to be a symbolic expression for a long period of time.) During this time, Christ will be physically present on the earth in his resurrected body, and will reign as King over the entire earth. The believers who have been raised from the dead, and those who were on earth when Christ returns, will receive glorified resurrection.

bodies that will never die, and in these resurrection bodies they will live on the
earth and reign with Christ. Of the unbelievers who remain on earth, many (but
not all) will turn to Christ and be saved. Jesus will reign in perfect righteousness
and there will be peace throughout the earth. Many premillennialists hold that the
earth will be renewed and we will in fact see the new heavens and new earth at
this time (but it is not essential to premillennialism to hold this, for one could be a
premillennialist and hold that the new heavens and new earth will not occur until
after the final judgment). At the beginning of this time Satan will be bound and
cast into the bottomless pit so that he will have no influence on the earth during the
millennium (Rev. 20:1-3).

Amillennialism

According to this position the passage in Revelation 20:1-10 describes the present
church age. This is an age in which Satan's influence over the nations has been
greatly reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world. Those who
are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years are Christians who
have died and are already reigning with Christ in heaven. Christ's reign in the
millennium, according to this view, is not a bodily reign here on earth but rather
the heavenly reign he spoke of when he said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me' (Matt. 28:18).

This view is called 'amillennial' because it maintains that there is no future
millennium yet to come. Since amillennialists believe that Revelation 20 is now
being fulfilled in the church age, they hold that the 'millennium' described there is
currently happening. The exact duration of the church age cannot be known, and
the expression 'thousand years' is simply a figure of speech for a long period of time
in which God's perfect purposes will be accomplished.

According to this position, the present church age will continue until the time of
Christ's return.... When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of both believers
and unbelievers. The bodies of believers will rise to be reunited with their spirits
and enter into full enjoyment of heaven forever. Unbelievers will be raised to face
the final judgment and eternal condemnation. Believers will also stand before the
judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), but this judgment will only determine degrees
of reward in heaven, for only unbelievers will be condemned eternally. At this
time also the new heavens and new earth will begin. Immediately after the final
judgment, the eternal state will commence and continue forever.
Postmillennialism

According to this view, the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase, so that a larger and larger proportion of the world's population will be Christians. As a result, there will be significant Christian influences on society. Society will more and more function according to God's standards, and gradually a 'millennial age' of peace and righteousness will occur on the earth. This 'millennium' will last for a long period of time (not necessarily a literal one thousand years), and finally, at the end of this period, Christ will return to earth, believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will occur, and there will be a new heaven and new earth. We will then enter into the eternal state.

Dispensational Premillennialism

According to this view, the church age will continue until, suddenly, unexpectedly, and secretly, Christ will return part way to earth, and then will call believers to himself: 'The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Christ will then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth. When that happens, there will be a great tribulation on the earth for a period of seven years.

During this seven-year period of tribulation, many of the signs that were predicted to precede Christ's return will be fulfilled. The great ingathering of the fullness of the Jewish people will occur, as they trust Christ as their Messiah. In the midst of great suffering there will also be much effective evangelism, especially carried out by the new Jewish Christians. At the end of the tribulation, Christ will then come back with his saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years. After this millennial period there will be a rebellion, resulting in the final defeat of Satan and his forces, and then will come the resurrection of unbelievers, the last judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state.

9. As you survey the options, which position best represents where you stand right now? Why? If you're not yet sure what you think, write down any questions you would like to explore in this course.
In addition to studying the four millennial viewpoints, each lesson will include a section devoted to one of the following passages:

- Romans 11
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- Matthew 24
- Daniel 9:24-27

These passages are provided below. As you read, circle any words or phrases that stand out to you as especially important for understanding what the author or speaker is trying to communicate. Feel free to take notes in the margins as well. After you’ve read through these passages, you’ll be asked to identify a key interpretive question for each.

Romans 11:1-36

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 3 “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” 4 But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8 as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”

9 And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; 10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”

11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. 12 Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry 14 in order somehow to make my fellow
Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. 59 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off:

23 And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; 27 “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” 35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 12 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Matthew 24:1-51
1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

4 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” 5 And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. 6 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. 7 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 9 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”
9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

35 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 36 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 37 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 38 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 39 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 40 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 41 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. 42 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. 43 Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 44 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 45 See, I have told you beforehand. 46 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 believe it. 47 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. 48 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

25 “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. 26 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. 27 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. 37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 47 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know 51 and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Daniel 9:24-27

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. 25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. 26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. 27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”
10. In the space below, write one question for each of the four passages above that identifies an important interpretive issue. (E.g., 2 Thessalonians 2:4: “What does the ‘temple of God’ refer to?”)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


9 The resources provided in this section are intended simply as suggestions for further investigation. Bethlehem Baptist Church and its affiliates do not necessarily agree with everything contained in these books. The reader should always use discretion and seek to test everything according to the Scriptures.
INTRODUCTION

Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return before the thousand-year period of Revelation 20:1-6. However, this millennial view comes in two primary varieties: dispensational and historic premillennialism. In the introduction to A Case for Historic Premillennialism, Craig Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung explain the difference in terms:

*Although representatives of all three millennial perspectives may be found in almost every era of church history, premillennialism appears to have commanded a majority of proponents in the first four centuries, amillennialism dominated from the time of Augustine’s major writings in the fifth century onward, and postmillennialism found its greatest support in the modern missionary movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The nineteenth century also saw the development of a new form of premillennialism with the founding of the Plymouth Brethren denomination in Great Britain and Ireland by J. Nelson Darby. To distinguish this branch of premillennialism from its predecessor, scholars today speak of the newer development as dispensational premillennialism and the older form as historic or classic premillennialism.*

As we will see, a distinction between the two forms of premillennialism lies in the timing of the rapture. Dispensationalists believe the rapture occurs before the Great Tribulation. Historic premillennialists believe it occurs after. In this lesson, we will examine this distinction in greater detail by surveying the history of classic premillennialism, its claims, and its common criticisms. Finally, we will conclude by studying Romans 11 in order to better understand its message.

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LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:
▷ articulate a basic understanding of historic premillennialism.
▷ identify key objections to this millennial viewpoint.
▷ suggest potential responses to those objections.
▷ discuss the role of ethnic Israel in God’s plan of redemption.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Final Judgment: The last and ultimate proclamation by Jesus Christ of the eternal destinies of all people which will take place after the millennium and the rebellion that occurs at the end of it.

Great Tribulation: An expression from Matthew 24:21 referring to a period of great hardship and suffering prior to the return of Christ.


Hermeneutics: The study of correct methods of interpreting texts.

Historic Premillennialism: The view that Christ will return to the earth after a period of great tribulation and then establish a millennial kingdom. At this time believers who have died will be raised from the dead and believers who are alive will receive glorified resurrection bodies, and both will reign with Christ on earth for a thousand years.

Imminent: A term referring to the fact that Christ could return and might return at any time, and that we are to be prepared for him to come at any day.

Millennium: A term that refers to the period of 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5 as the time of the reign of Christ and believers over the earth (from Lat. millennium, “thousand years”).

Posttribulational Premillennialism: Another term for historic premillennialism (or “classic premillennialism”). This is distinguished from other premillennial views by the idea that Christ will return after the great tribulation.
**Posttribulational Rapture:** The “taking up” of believers after the great tribulation to be with Christ just a few moments prior to his coming to earth with them to reign during the millennial kingdom (or, on the amillennial view, during the eternal state).

**Premillennialism:** A term that includes a variety of views having in common the belief that Christ will return to the earth before the millennium.

**Rapture:** The “taking up” or snatching up (from Latin rapio, “seize, snatch, carry away”) of believers to be with Christ when he returns to the earth.
DAY 1

WHAT IS HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Whenever we study a particular doctrine, it’s important to understand that Christians throughout the centuries have reflected on many of the same questions we puzzle over today. In fact, those very reflections have produced the variety of positions that pepper our theological landscape. As we begin our study of historic premillennialism, let’s orient ourselves to the discussion of eschatology in the early centuries of the church. Read the following statements from select church fathers.11

Papias (late 1st – early 2nd century)

There will be a period of a thousand years after the resurrection from the dead when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth.

(Fragments of Papias, 3.12)

The days will come when vines will grow, each having ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand branches, and on each branch ten thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand clusters, and in each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when crushed will yield twenty-five measures of wine. Similarly, a grain of wheat will produce ten thousand heads, and every head will have ten thousand grains, and every grain ten pounds of fine flour, white and clean. And the other fruits, seeds, and grass will produce in similar proportions. (Fragments of Papias, 14)

Justin Martyr (d.165 AD)

I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there

11 Unless otherwise noted, all citations in this section are from Gregg R. Allison, Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 685–87. In the dates beside each name, “d.” indicates the year of death.
will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged. (Dialogue with Trypho, 80)

Epistle of Barnabas (end 1st – mid-2nd century)

[Commenting on the creation account in Genesis]: Observe, children, what 'he finished in six days' means. It means this: that in six thousand years the Lord will bring everything to an end, for with him a day signifies a thousand years.... Therefore, children, in six days—that is, in six thousand years—everything will be brought to an end. (Epistle of Barnabas, 15.3-4)

1. Based on the excerpts you’ve just read, summarize in your own words some of the important features of early Christian thinking about the millennium.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 38-42
• “Millenarian Thought in the Early Church” (partial section)

2. According to Grenz, what did Irenaeus (c.130–c.200 AD)\(^\text{12}\) teach about the last days?

\(^{12}\) The abbreviation “c.” stands for “circa,” which indicates an approximate date.
Many of the ideas found in Irenaeus and other early Christian writers anticipate key elements of the (aptly named) historic premillennial position. To see this, read the following section from *The Millennial Maze*.

**REQUIRED READING**

*The Millennial Maze*, 127-31
- “The Main Features of Historic Premillennialism”

3. From your reading, list and briefly describe the main events on the historic premillennial timeline. As best as you can, try to order this list chronologically.

Having listed the main events of historic premillennialism above, try to place those events on the following timeline. It might help to draw arrows to indicate relocation (e.g., the binding of Satan). It might also help to create icons for important events. For illustration purposes, consider the baseline arrow as the earth, the area above as heaven, and the area below as both the realm of the dead and the location of the lake of fire.

![Timeline: Historic Premillennialism]

**Present Age**  
**Eternal**
DAY 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Now that we’ve laid out the features of the historic premillennial chronology, let’s turn to the biblical support for this position. Before we look at specific texts, we’ll begin by examining the theological method that underlies historic premillennialism. By “theological method” we mean the assumptions that inform a person’s understanding of Christian teaching. Specifically, these assumptions concern a person’s view of such matters as Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. How does a historic premillennialist view these issues? Read carefully the following comments from Don J. Payne:

Scripture

One methodological distinction not to be overlooked…is the theological weight assigned by historical premillennialism to the New Testament as the interpretive lens for the Old Testament, and vice-versa for dispensational premillennialism….

[Another difference is historic premillennialism’s] recognition of, and willingness to live with, tension. Having chosen a basic posture of literal interpretation yet recognizing that in some spiritual sense the church does fulfill the role of Old Testament Israel, historic premillennialists live with tension and are criticized by both dispensationalists and amillennialists for their apparently selective approach….

Tradition

Premillennialists implicitly value arguments from history…. Premillennialism has developed its own tradition of sorts. Premillennialism began to appear in the statements of faith of various free-church denominations such as the Conservative Baptists and the Evangelical Free Church in the middle of the twentieth century. Perhaps this indicates a deeply entrenched creedal instinct in even those who are most resistant to the risks and restrictions of tradition…. When a doctrine acquires a diagnostic status within a theological system, the boundaries of a tradition have

been drawn and perpetuated, even if it is not institutionally defined....

Reason
Premillennialism’s approach to Scripture must also be viewed against the broader intellectual backdrop of a philosophical current known as common-sense realism. The ‘common sense’ philosophy popularized in Scotland by Thomas Reid (1710-96) became an important intellectual resource for evangelical Christians because it provided a methodology that restored hope in the perspicuity [clarity] of the Bible’s message and the reasonableness of faith in that message…. Reid attempted to eliminate the grounds for scepticism [sic] of sense perceptions by arguing that human sense, or ‘common sense,’ is in fact innately capable of perceiving reality because the capability of perception corresponds to the reality that may be perceived....

[I]t turns out that premillennialism’s apparent reliance upon a rather objective, unencumbered reading of Scripture in fact depends on a particular epistemology [theory of knowledge], giving reason a much more influential role in its method than is typically recognized....

Experience
[We might ask whether premillennialism’s insistence on a more-or-less literal approach to apocalyptic literature has fostered a preoccupation with world events and how they might correspond to biblical prophecy. Watching events in the Middle East unfold on the news is certainly an experience that has kept many premillennialists vigorously engaged with their eschatology. Whether their conclusions have been galvanized or modified along the way, this type of experience has actively contributed to shaping premillennial thought....

The theological method of premillennialism begins with and unapologetically upholds a commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The fascinating irony is that although its proponents and developers have been clearly suspicious of tradition, reason, and experience…. it turns out that these factors have been, and continue to be, significant influences in the formation of premillennialism’s conclusions. Tradition, reason, and experience have shaped the way Scripture has been read and which parts of Scripture have been granted controlling status.
4. Summarize, according to Payne, what historic premillennialists believe about Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

In the following section we will present some of the foundational biblical arguments for historical premillennialism. They will be grouped under two headings: (1) a posttribulational rapture and (2) the earthly millennial reign of Christ.

1. Posttribulational Rapture

Though not all historical premillennialists agree on this position, many affirm that believers will be raptured after a period of intense suffering known as the Great Tribulation. This belief contrasts with the common dispensational understanding of a pretribulational rapture, which we will investigate later in the course. The following texts are viewed by historic premillennialists as supporting a posttribulational rapture, either by positive affirmation or by lacking any evidence that would support a pretribulational rapture.

Matthew 24:9-14, 21-22, 29-31

9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

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.

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. 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. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Matthew 25:1-7

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.
2 Thessalonians 1:5-8
5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—
6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,
7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels
8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8
1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,
2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.
3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,
4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.
5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?
6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.
7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.
8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

5. In the texts above, underline important phrases that relate to the return of the Lord and the gathering of believers to him. What do you think a historic premillennialist would say if asked to give a biblical defense of a posttribulational rapture?
2. Earthly Millennial Reign of Christ

Historic premillennialists believe that Christ will reign on the earth during the thousand years described in Revelation 20. They differ over whether the millennium refers to a strict one thousand years or simply to a long period of time, but all agree that this era concerns an earthly reign of a bodily-present Christ. This age will be marked by prosperity and righteousness, and yet conditions will still fall short of the perfection to come in the eternal state. The following texts, for historic premillennialists, support such a conclusion.

Isaiah 65:17-20

17 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. 20 No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

1 Corinthians 15:22-26

22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

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 foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 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.

6. Consider the two resurrections in Revelation 20. For the historic premillennialist, do you think these resurrections are physical, spiritual, or some combination of both? Why would this matter? (See question 3 for a refresher on the historic premillennial timeline.)

7. Underline both occurrences of the word “then” in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 above. From your understanding of historic premillennialism, where might the millennial age fit in this text? Following this argument, what will be Christ’s primary purpose during the millennium?
1 Corinthians 15:23-26 establishes for many historic premillennialists a theological justification for the millennium. Far from being an anomaly in the history of redemption, the millennium serves a distinct purpose in God’s plan for the world. Read the following explanation from George Ladd (1911-1982):

_The millennium is one interval in the accomplishing of God’s redemptive rule (the Kingdom of God). Paul says nothing about a millennium, but he sees three stages or crises or triumphs of God’s conquest over death. The first is the resurrection of Christ, the second is the parousia [the Second Coming], the third is the telos [“end”] which occurs some time after the parousia. The final goal is the ‘destruction’ of death. The Revelation tells us that death will not be finally destroyed until it is cast into the lake of fire at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:14); apparently death exists during the millennium. Yet death has already been ‘destroyed,’ for Christ, by his death and resurrection, has ‘abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.’ The ‘destruction’ of death is future, but it is also present; it is, in other words, accomplished in several great victories. There are two future stages in the Revelation of the victory over death, and in 1 Cor. 15:23-26 there are three stages: the resurrection of Christ, the parousia, and the telos. Paul says nothing about a millennium, but he knows that Christ’s mediatorial reign will extend beyond the parousia to the telos; and the millennium of the Revelation falls into this interval as the final stage of the reign of Christ._

**REQUIRED READING**

_The Millennial Maze, 131-39_
- “The Biblical Basis for Historic Premillennialism”

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DAY 3

Having established a basic understanding of the historic premillennial position, we’ll take some time in this section to reflect on common criticisms directed toward this viewpoint as well as potential responses to these criticisms. Before looking at what others have said, however, use the following question to process your personal response to historic premillennialism.

8. What do you feel is the strongest argument in favor of historic premillennialism? What do you feel is its greatest weakness? Explain.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 139-47
“The Critique of Historic Premillennialism” and “Conclusion”

9. From your reading, make a list of common objections to historic premillennialism. Choose the objection you feel is the strongest and interact with it. What makes it a strong objection in your opinion? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?
10. Having identified what you feel is the strongest objection to historic premillennialism, how do you think a historic premillennialist would respond to this objection? (If you already disagreed with the objection you selected in question 9, choose another objection from the list and attempt a response.)

By way of a general historic premillennial response to objections, consider these words from George Ladd:

>Critics of premillennialism raise many questions which cannot be answered. This, however, is due to the character of prophecy, not to the error of the teaching. Some think of prophecy as pre-written history and insist that only a system which has answers to all questions is worthy of support. However, prophecy is not pre-written history but ‘a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns’ (2 Pet. 1:19). A Palestinian lamp provided only enough light to guide the traveler along his way and disclose the rocks and pitfalls; all about were shadows. This is readily illustrated by Old Testament prophecy. It looks forward to a single great day of redemption when the conquering Messiah would rule over God’s people in his kingdom. True, there are prophecies of a suffering servant, but the Old Testament prophets do not integrate these prophecies with those of the victorious King. It is historically sound that neither the Jews in general nor Jesus’ disciples in particular could understand how Messiah should first suffer and die. It remains for the New Testament to show that what appears in the Old Testament to be a single great day of redemption is in fact two days.

>The New Testament provides us with a few glimpses of the fact that the two days are really three; that beyond the parousia [the Second Coming] is a further extension of Christ’s reign over the world before the telos [the end]. The millennium is a manifestation of God’s redemptive rule in Christ by which his enemies will finally be destroyed. God has not seen fit through the prophetic Scriptures to answer all the questions we may have about these future events, but he has provided the main outlines of the consummation of his redemptive purpose.”

DAY 4

This section provides you with an opportunity to review what you have learned about historic premillennialism, both to consolidate what you have studied and to reflect on the merits of this position.

11. The following chart identifies key issues that distinguish each of the millennial positions. Using this lesson’s content and the reading you’ve done from Grenz, fill out the “Historic Premillennialism” column to the best of your ability.

12. Having studied historic premillennialism, do you find it to be a compelling position? Why or why not? If you want to suspend judgment until you’ve examined the other views, explain any hesitancies or questions about historic premillennialism that you have.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Historic Premillennialism</th>
<th>Premillennialism</th>
<th>Postmillennialism</th>
<th>Dispensational Premillennialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there continuity or discontinuity between this age and the millennium?</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium of Revelation 20 literal or metaphorical?</td>
<td>Literal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the millennium future, past, or present?</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium an earthly or heavenly reign of Christ?</td>
<td>Earthly (Christ on earth.)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does Revelation 20 follow Revelation 19 chronologically?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are the resurrections of Revelation 20 physical, spiritual, or both?</td>
<td>Physical (believers then unbelievers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there continuity or discontinuity between Israel and the church?</td>
<td>Both continuity and discontinuity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about Scripture?</td>
<td>Inspired, authoritative Literal hermeneutic NT interprets OT</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about tradition?</td>
<td>Doctrinal statements create a kind of tradition</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about reason?</td>
<td>Common sense realism, &quot;plain sense&quot; of Scripture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about experience?</td>
<td>Focus on world events as fulfillment of prophecy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
DAY 5

One of the pressing questions when studying eschatology is the future of ethnic Israel. Should we expect, as some believe, a massive conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity in the last days? Or, as others hold, has the church replaced Israel in God’s plan of redemption? Was the declaration of Israel’s statehood in 1948 a fulfillment of biblical prophecy? Should the United States maintain a pro-Israel foreign policy? Though we won’t be able to address all of these questions here, we can at least take a step in their direction by looking at Paul’s discussion of Israel in Romans 11.

The central interpretive issue in this chapter is the meaning of Paul’s statement in verse 26: “And in this way all Israel will be saved.” Specifically, the question concerns the identity of “Israel.” Who does Paul have in mind? Before considering the options, read through Romans 9-11 in your Bible and make observations about how Paul describes Israel in these chapters.

13. In the space below, record your observations from reading Romans 9-11.
What is Israel’s status in Paul’s day? What is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles? What hope does he have for his fellow Jews?

14. Read Romans 11:26 in its context (see below). In light of the observations you have just made, what do you think Paul means by the phrase “and in this way all Israel will be saved”? Who is “all Israel”? Even if you’re not completely confident of your answer, write what you’re currently thinking and give some reasons for your conclusion.
Romans 11:25-32

25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; 27 “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Three main options exist for the identity of “all Israel” in Romans 11:26. Below are selections from representatives of each view. As you read, compare your own observations with these authors’ arguments and see which position you find most persuasive.

1. “All Israel” refers to a future mass conversion of ethnic Israel.

   Paul signals the importance of what he says next with an interruption to get our attention: ‘I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers’ (v. 25). ‘Mystery’ (mystērion) refers to a complex cluster of theological ideas in Paul’s writings. Generally, it has the sense of a purpose of God that previously has not been revealed. What is the mystery here? It might be the hardening that Israel is experiencing. It might be the promise that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (v. 26). But probably it refers to the process of Jewish hardening followed by Gentile salvation followed by Jewish salvation that he has been talking about throughout this section.

   Paul succinctly states this process in verses 25b-26a. The ‘hardening in part’ that Israel is experiencing repeats the idea of Israel’s ‘transgression’ (vv. 11-12), ‘loss’ (v. 12), ‘rejection’ (v. 15), the natural branches that are cut off from the olive tree (v. 17). This hardening will last ‘until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.’ ‘Full number’ translates the same Greek word we encountered in verse 12, plērōma. As I argued there, the word usually has a qualitative meaning, and so a more literal translation would be ‘fullness.’ But since that fullness is achieved by numerical addition, the NIV’s ‘full number’ is probably accurate enough. Paul looks for Israel’s hardening to last only until the destined number of Gentiles to be saved has
entered into the kingdom. It is ‘in this way’ that ‘all Israel will be saved.’ I think that this refers to a significant number of Jews who will be saved in the last day, after the full number of Gentiles has been saved. After this era, during which God is saving many Gentiles and Jews, he will turn afresh to Israel, increasing the size of the remnant. This interpretation of verse 26 is the most popular among recent commentators on Romans. It explains the ‘until’ of verse 25b, fits in well with the sequence that Paul has rehearsed several times in this chapter, and makes sense of the reference to the coming of Christ in glory that follows in verse 26b....

I think that verse 26a predicts the conversion of a significant number of Jews at the time of Christ’s return in glory, and I am deliberately vague about the timing. When will this conversion take place with respect to the rapture? Will it happen when Christ appears at the end of the tribulation? Paul does not give us the detail we would need to be this specific. One might also wonder how I can interpret ‘all Israel’ to mean ‘a significant number of Jews.’ But a look at the way that the Old Testament uses the phrase ‘all Israel’ shows that the phrase almost never refers to every single Israelite; rather, it refers to a representative collection of Israelites. Note, for example, 2 Samuel 16:22: ‘So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.’ Did every single Israelite witness Absalom’s sexual sin? Obviously not. The text suggests that a representative number did. So, in the last days, I believe, God will turn again in his grace to Israel, saving a representative number in fulfillment of his promises to the people.

These promises are the focus of verses 26b-29. Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9 (with a possible allusion to Jer 31:31-34) to show that the Old Testament promises forgiveness of sins for Israel in accordance with the covenant when ‘the deliverer will come.’ A few scholars think that this deliverer might be God, but Paul is probably referring to Christ’s return in glory. Verse 28 captures the essential tension that drives the argument of Romans 9-11. Israel’s failure to respond to the gospel has made them ‘enemies’ of God; they stand condemned under his wrath for refusing to believe in Christ. However, the word of judgment is not God’s last word about Israel, for Israel remains beloved of God because of his promise to them in the patriarch. God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable. The promises that God has made to his people imply an increase in Jewish converts in the last days."

2. “All Israel” refers to the remnant of believing Jews that exists throughout history.

I interpret this passage...as meaning that God fulfills his promises to Israel in the following way: Though Israel has been hardened in its unbelief, this hardening has always been and will continue to be only a partial hardening, never a total hardening. In other words, Israel will continue to turn to the Lord until the Parousia, while at the same time the fulness [sic] of the Gentiles is being gathered in. And in this way all Israel will be saved: not just the last generation of Israelites—all those who are not just of Israel but are Israel, to use the language of Romans 9:6. Another way of putting this would be: all Israel in Romans 11:26 means the totality of the elect among Israel. The salvation of all Israel, therefore, does not take place exclusively at the end-time, but takes place throughout the era between Christ’s first and second coming—in fact, from the time of the call of Abraham. All Israel, therefore, differs from the elect remnant spoken of in 11:5, but only as the sum total of all the remnants throughout history....

In support of this interpretation, the following further considerations may be advanced:

(1) The main point of Paul's previous discussion in Romans 11 has been to indicate that God, who in times past dealt almost exclusively with Israel as far as the bringing of salvation to his people was concerned, is now dealing with Jews and Gentiles together. This point is strikingly brought out by the figure of the olive tree, which had some natural branches removed, some wild branches grafted in, and then some of the removed natural branches grafted in again. There are not two olive trees (one for Gentiles and one for Jews), but one olive tree. The way in which Jews are now being saved, in other words, must not be separated from the way in which Gentiles are saved, since God now deals with both groups together. To make verse 26 refer to a time of salvation for Jews which will be separate from (because subsequent to) the time when Gentiles are saved, is to go contrary to the main thrust of the chapter.

(2) The gathering of the fulness, or full number, of the Gentiles takes place throughout history, not just at the end-time. Why should the gathering of the fulness [sic] of the Jews be different?

(3) The verses which follow Romans 11:26a support the interpretation advanced above. The composite quotation from Isaiah 59:20 and 27:9 which follows
immediately (‘the Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins’), commonly applied by dispensational writers to the Second Coming of Christ, does not need to be so interpreted, but makes perfectly good sense as a description of Christ’s first coming and of the taking away of sin which follows that first coming. As a matter of fact, if this quotation was intended to be a description of the Second Coming of Christ, one would have expected the prophet to say, ‘the Deliverer will come from heaven’ (rather than ‘from Zion’). What is especially significant, however, is that in verses 30-31, where Paul is summing up the argument of the chapter, he speaks not in terms of what will happen in the future but in terms of what is happening now: ‘Just as you [Gentiles] who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their [the Jews’] disobedience, so they too [the Jews] have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you’ [Gentiles] (NIV). 17

3. “All Israel” refers to believing Jews and Gentiles, which together make up “true Israel” or the church.

[All Israel] consists not of all elect Jews, but of all the elect of God, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin. The key evidence supporting this view is found in the phrase immediately preceding Paul’s reference to ‘all Israel.’ He says that hardness has happened to part of Israel ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in’ (Rom. 11:25 NKJV), and in this manner ‘all Israel’ will be saved’ (v. 26). The ‘fullness of the Gentiles’ refers to the full number of elect people from among the Gentile nations of the world.

But into what do the full number of elect Gentiles come? The answer is unavoidable. Believing Gentiles come into Israel! Is that not exactly the point made by Paul earlier in this chapter? Gentiles have been ‘grafted in among’ the Israel of God (Rom. 11:17). They have become additional branches, joined to the single stock that is none other than Israel. As a consequence, the believing Gentile community has become a ‘fellow sharer’ (synkoinonos) in the rich root of the olive tree that is Israel (Rom. 11:17). In other words, they have become ‘Israelites.’

The same thought becomes a major theme in Paul’s later letter to the Ephesian Christians. Once the Gentiles were ‘separate from Christ,’ excluded from citizenship in Israel” (Eph. 2:12). But now these Gentiles have become ‘heirs together

[synkoinonos—the same term as in Rom. 11:17] with Israel, members together
[syssoma] of one body, and sharers together [symmetocha] in the promise in Christ
Jesus’ (Eph. 3:6).

The full inclusion of the Gentiles into Israel is the other side of the mystery about
which Paul speaks (Rom. 11:25; cf. Eph. 3:6). On the one hand, the mystery is that
God in the sovereign dispensing of his grace has hardened some in Israel and has
saved others. On the other hand, the mystery is that God has incorporated Gentile
believers fully into Israel.

It is in this context that ‘all Israel’ in Romans 11:26 reaches its final definition.
According to Paul, ‘Hardness has happened to part of Israel until the full number
of the Gentiles has come in [to Israel], and in this manner all Israel shall be saved.’
The full number that are the product of God’s electing grace, coming from both
the Jewish and the Gentile communities, will constitute the final Israel of God. ‘All
Israel,’ then, consists of the entire body of God’s elect from among both Jews and
Gentiles. This is the group whom Paul calls ‘the Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16,
where he insists that Christians must walk according to the rule that no distinction
is to be made between circumcised and uncircumcised people (v. 15). Here Paul
clearly uses the term Israel to refer to elect Jews and elect Gentiles as together
constituting the Israel of God. If he said otherwise, he would be countermanding
his own ‘rule’ for life that no distinction be made between circumcised and
uncircumcised people with respect to their possession of the blessings of
redemption.18

15. After reading the positions above on the meaning of “all Israel,” which
do you agree with the most? Why?

18 O. Palmer Robertson, The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow


Piper, John. "Definitions and Observations Concerning the Second Coming of Christ." Online article at the Desiring God website.

In this lesson we will examine the second of the four main eschatological views: amillennialism. Stated briefly, amillennialists believe that there will be no future millennial kingdom after the return of Christ. Instead, they believe the thousand years of Revelation 20 describe the age in which we now live, the time between Christ’s first and second comings. Kim Riddlebarger writes:

> Amillennialists hold that the promises made to Israel, David, and Abraham in the Old Testament are fulfilled by Jesus Christ and his church during this present age. The millennium is the period of time between the two advents of our Lord with the thousand years of Revelation 20 being symbolic of the entire interadvental age. At the first advent of Jesus Christ, Satan was bound by Christ’s victory over him at Calvary and the empty tomb. The effects of this victory continued because of the presence of the kingdom of God via the preaching of the gospel and as evidenced by Jesus’ miracles. Through the spread of the gospel, Satan is no longer free to deceive the nations. Christ is presently reigning in heaven during the entire period between Christ’s first and second coming. At the end of the millennial age, Satan is released, a great apostasy breaks out, the general resurrection occurs, Jesus Christ returns in final judgment for all people, and he establishes a new heaven and earth.¹⁹

To understand this millennial position in greater detail, we will examine in this lesson amillennialism’s history, chief claims, and common criticisms. In addition, we will consider the identity of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:
▷ explain the basic tenets of amillennialism.
▷ identify key objections to this millennial viewpoint.
▷ suggest potential responses to those objections.
▷ discuss the identity of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Amillennialism: The view that there will be no literal thousand-year bodily reign of Christ on earth prior to the final judgment and the eternal state; on this view, scriptural references to the millennium in Revelation 20 actually describe the present church age.

Antichrist: The “man of lawlessness” who will appear prior to the second coming of Christ and will cause great suffering and persecution, only to be destroyed by Jesus. The term is also used to describe other figures who embody such an opposition to Christ and are precursors of the final antichrist.\(^\text{20}\)

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DAY 1

WHAT IS AMILLENNIALISM AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Following the premillennialism of the early centuries of the church, several prominent theologians began advocating an alternative interpretation of Revelation 20. Gregg Allison explains:

*By the fifth century, premillennialism had given way to another eschatological framework known as amillennialism. Several developments contributed to the demise of the former view. One was its emphasis on the luxurious material blessings that awaited believers in the millennium. Eusebius labeled this notion 'strange' and considered it 'legendary.' A second reason was the change in relationship between the church and the state, put into motion by the emperor Constantine and his legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire early in the fourth century. Another stemmed from attempts to predict precisely the time of Christ’s return and the beginning of the millennium. An extreme example of this was the movement known as Montanism, which stirred up hope in the imminent second coming of Christ and the descent of the ‘New Jerusalem’ to Phrygia, the movement’s hometown. Such fanaticism soured some Christians on premillennial eschatology.*

A notable early advocate of amillennial thinking was Augustine (354-430 AD). In his book, The City of God, he explains his understanding of the millennium:

*Now the Lord Jesus Christ himself says, ‘No one can get into the house of a strong man and carry off his property, without first tying up the strong man’ [Matt 12:29]. By the ‘strong man’ he intends us to understand the Devil, because the Devil had the power to take the human race into captivity. The ‘property’ that Christ was to carry off represents those whom the Devil held in his possession; but they were to become Christ’s faithful followers. It was to tie up this ‘strong man’ that the*

angel, in the apostle’s vision in the Apocalypse [John’s vision in Revelation 20], was ‘descending from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the abyss and a chain.’ And ‘he seized the dragon,’ he says, ‘that serpent of old, whose other names are the Devil, and Satan, and he chained him up for a thousand years.’ That means that he put a check and a bridle on his power to lead astray and to hold in possession those who were to be set free.

Now the thousand years, as it seems to me, can be interpreted in two ways. It may indicate that this event happens in the last thousand years, that is, in the sixth millennium, the sixth day, as it were, of which the latter stretches are now passing, and a Sabbath is to follow that has no evening, the rest, that is to say, of the saints, which has no end. Thus our author used the term ‘a thousand years’ to denote the last part of this millennium – or ‘day’ – which remained before the end of the world, employing the figure of speech by which the whole stands for the part. Alternatively, he may have intended the thousand years to stand for the whole period of this world’s history, signifying the entirety of time by a perfect number. For, of course, the number 1,000 is the cube of 10, since 10 multiplied by 10 is 100, a square but plane figure; but to give height to the figure and make it solid 100 is again multiplied by 10, and we get 1,000. Moreover, it seems that 100 is sometimes used to stand for totality; for example, the Lord promised anyone who left all his possessions and followed him that he would ‘receive a hundredfold in this world’ [Matt 19:29], and we may say that the Apostle is explaining this when he speaks of ‘seeming to have nothing, and yet possessing everything’ [2 Cor 6:10] because at an earlier time it has been said that ‘the entire world is included in the wealth of a man of faith’ [Prov 17:6, LXX]. If this is so, how much more does 1,000 represent totality, being the square of 10 converted into a solid figure! Hence when we read in the psalm, ‘He has always remembered his covenant, the word which he gave to a thousand generations’ [Ps 105:8], there is no better interpretation of those words than by taking ‘a thousand generations’ as signifying ‘all generations.’ (City of God, 20.7)

1. Describe the two interpretations of the thousand years that Augustine mentions. In either case, how does Augustine’s understanding of the millennium differ from Irenaeus’s in the previous lesson?

REQUIRED READING

*The Millennial Maze*, 42-52
- “Millenarian Thought in the Early Church” (partial section)
- “Millenarian Thought in the Middle Ages”
- “Millennial Thinking and the Reformation”

2. From your reading, briefly summarize the trajectory of millennial thinking beginning with Augustine and extending through the Reformation. Note key figures and developments.

Having considered the historical development of the amillennial position, let’s examine its central claims.

REQUIRED READING

*The Millennial Maze*, 149-52
- “The Main Features of Amillennialism”
3. From your reading, list and briefly describe the main events on the amillennial timeline. Try to order this list chronologically.

Using the list of events you just made, try to place those events on the following timeline. When you’re finished, compare this timeline with your historic premillennialism timeline to see important differences.

**Timeline: Amillennialism**

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**DAY 2**

**BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT**

In this section we’ll look at the biblical arguments amillennialists use to support their position. Before considering the texts themselves, however, let’s reflect on the theological method that underlies amillennialism. As you’ll remember from the previous lesson, “theological method” refers to a person’s assumptions about such things as Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

The following excerpts are provided to help you think through how an amillennialist might approach the four topics just mentioned. There will be overlap among the four categories; don’t let this discourage you. The goal of this exercise is not to come away with irrefutable categories for thinking about amillennialism, but instead to gain a reasonable understanding of the amillennial mindset.
Scripture

Seven Foundational Principles

1. Jesus Christ and his Church are the focal and terminating point of all prophecy.

2. Whereas the OT saw the consummation of God’s redemptive purposes in one act, the NT authors portray it as coming in two phases or acts.

3. Jesus is himself the inspired interpreter of the OT. His identity, life, and mission provide the framework within which we are to read and approach the OT.

4. …[E]vents [described in the OT] are often separated by significant intervals of time. This has often been called prophetic foreshortening.

5. …[H]uman history reflects a tension between what was accomplished at the first advent of Christ and what awaits consummation at the second…. Hence there is a tension between what has “Already” been fulfilled (or at least partially inaugurated) and what has “Not Yet” been consummated.

6. “Prophecy can only depict the future in terms which make sense to its present. It clothes the purpose of God in the hopes and fears of its contemporaries” (Richard Bauckham).

7. Any and every prophetic utterance must be interpreted in the light of the entire canon, with the understanding that the New Testament provides decisive hermeneutical guidance for the interpretation of Old Testament utterances and expectations.²³

Tradition

In point of fact it is the amillennial position that has been the predominant eschatological view of Christianity since the days of Augustine. It is the position held by the vast majority of Reformed and Lutheran theologians, set forth in all the Reformed and Lutheran confessions….

First given systematic expression by St. Augustine in his famous City of God, amillennialism developed a distinctive Reformed emphasis in the work of Geerhardus Vos through the ‘biblical-theological’ approach. Because amillennialism has its roots deep in historic Christianity, when it comes to

comparing amillennialism with dispensationalism, clearly the burden of proof lies with dispensationalists to prove their case. Evangelicals often assume the opposite. It should also be noted that all major thinkers in Christian history have held something akin to the amillennial position (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin). This does not mean that amillennialism is true simply because it has historical support within Catholic Christianity and historic Protestantism. Nevertheless, this is an impressive point, which is often not considered.24

Reason

Regardless of how far they go in identifying symbolic figures, many interpreters still are captivated by the principle of 'literal if possible.' Such a principle may seem safe, and indeed it works well as a first approximation for historical narratives and NT letters. But with respect to Revelation and other instances of apocalyptic literature it constantly inhibits interpreters in practice from doing justice to the pervasively visionary character of the discourses. Instead of accepting the visionary, symbolic medium as a natural form, they constantly fight its own inner integrity by requiring explicit proofs of symbolism for each separate, individual vision….

[Many interpreters advocate] interpreting symbolically except when (1) the symbol is explicitly explained elsewhere in Revelation or (2) when 'the context clearly indicates otherwise.' This recipe rightly appeals to the context of Revelation as the appropriate guide to interpretation. And it rightly maintains that an explicit explanation of a symbol elsewhere or a clear indication from the immediate context are among the ways in which clues to proper interpretation are obtained. But the word 'clearly' biases interpretation in favor of literalism. It produces too narrow a basis for interpretation, since in many cases clues may be present but are nevertheless not so obvious. In some cases Revelation may rely primarily on OT background or loose associations to supply the appropriate meaning for a symbol… Whether such cases are 'clear' or obvious to an interpreter may depend a good deal on whether the interpreter is expecting them on the basis of an overall assessment of the genre of Revelation….

…[L]iterary context plays a decisive role in determining the referents of particular passages…. The recognition of pervasively symbolic, visionary mode of communication in Revelation does not result in abandoning objective meaning or objective referents. It does make the determination of referents a matter of greater

24 Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism, 31–32.
Experience

…[R]egarding world history, amillennialists adopt a position of sober or realistic optimism. Belief in the present rule of Christ, in the presence of God’s kingdom and in the movement of history toward its goal is accompanied by a realistic recognition of the presence of sin in this world and of the growing development of the kingdom of evil. Amillennial eschatology looks for a culmination of apostasy and tribulation in the final emergence of a personal Antichrist before Christ comes again. Amillennialists do not expect to see the perfect society realized during the present age.

Yet, since we know that the victory of Christ over evil was decisive and that Christ is now on the throne, the dominant mood of amillennial eschatology is optimism—Christian optimism. This means that we view no world crisis as totally beyond help and no social trend as absolutely irreversible. It means that we live in hope—a hope that is built on faith and that expresses itself in love.

Amillennial eschatology, therefore, gives us a realistic, yet basically optimistic world-and-life view. It is an eschatology which is exciting, exhilarating and challenging. It is an eschatology which gives us an inspiring vision of the lordship of Christ over history and of the ultimate triumph of his kingdom.26

4. Summarize, according to the excerpts above, what amillennialists typically believe about Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.


The biblical support for amillennialism can be grouped under three headings: (1) the binding of Satan, (2) the two resurrections, and (3) the millennial reign of believers in heaven.

1. The Binding of Satan

In the previous lesson we saw that historic premillennialists assign the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 to a future period. His imprisonment in the pit makes possible the prosperity to be enjoyed during the earthly millennial kingdom. Amillennialists, on the other hand, understand Satan’s binding differently.

Matthew 12:29
29 Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Luke 10:17-18
17 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” 18 And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

John 12:31-33
31 “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Revelation 12:1-12
1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.
7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 8 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 9 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 10 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 11 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Revelation 20:1-3

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.

5. In light of these texts and what you have learned already about amillennialism, when do you think an amillennialist would say the binding of Satan occurs? What limitations are placed on Satan’s power? What is the consequence of his binding for the world?
2. The Two Resurrections

Historic premillennialists believe the two resurrections of Revelation 20 are both physical events. Amillennialists, however, believe that there is another way to read this passage. They argue that the first resurrection refers to the experience of believers at death and is thus a spiritual resurrection.

Revelation 2:8-11

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’”

Revelation 6:9-11

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15

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.
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. 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. 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. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

6. Underline every phrase in these passages that refers to death and resurrection. In light of these texts, how do you think an amillennialist would argue that the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 is spiritual rather than physical?

Greg Beale explains his understanding of Revelation 20:4-6 below. Read this carefully and compare it with the diagram he provides in order to grasp his logic:

It is clear that ‘the second death’ in v 6 [Rev. 20:6] is the spiritual death of the unrighteous, involving conscious, eternal suffering…. On the other hand, the death of the righteous in v 4 (e.g., ‘the souls of those beheaded’) is literal, physical death. Therefore, there is a first death of believers that is physical and different in nature from the second death of unbelievers, which is spiritual. If there are thus two different kinds of deaths, it is plausible that the corresponding resurrections would also differ. The resurrection of believers is spiritual, whereas the resurrection of unbelievers is physical. The passage would then reflect the following chiasm:

first physical death of saints -------------- first spiritual resurrection of saints

second physical resurrection of wicked -------- second spiritual death of wicked
Ironically, the first physical death of saints translates them into the first spiritual resurrection in heaven, whereas the second physical resurrection translates the ungodly into the second spiritual death.\textsuperscript{27}

3. Millennial Reign of Believers in Heaven

If the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 occurred during Christ’s first advent and if the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 is spiritual rather than physical, then the thousand years don’t refer to a future earthly reign of Christ prior to the eternal state. Instead, as amillennialists believe, the millennium refers to the reign of believers with Christ in heaven following their deaths. But why would John describe this experience in terms of “a thousand years”? Compare Revelation 20:4-6 with Revelation 2:8-11.

Revelation 2:8-11
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8} “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
  \item \textsuperscript{9} He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.”
\end{itemize}

Revelation 20:4-6
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{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. \textsuperscript{5} The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. \textsuperscript{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.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{27} G.K. Beale, \textit{The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text} (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1005. Italics original. Note that a chiasm is an inverted set of propositions that follows an ABBA structure. See Mark 2:27 for an example.
7. Since Jesus tells the church in Smyrna that they will suffer for "ten days" (2:10), what do you think an amillennialist would say is the point of reigning with Christ for "a thousand years" if the thousand years aren't intended as a precise time indicator?

Greg Beale explains again:

The events in vv 1-3 and vv 4-6 [of Revelation 20] occur during the same period, which is referred to as '1,000 years.' That this is not a literal chronological number is apparent from: (1) the consistently figurative use of numbers elsewhere in the book, (2) the figurative nature of much of the immediate context ('chain,' 'abyss,' 'dragon,' 'serpent,' 'locked,' 'sealed,' 'beast'), (3) the predominantly figurative tone of the entire book (1:11), (4) the figurative use of '1,000' in the OT, and (5) the use in Jewish and early Christian writings of '1,000' years as a figure for the eternal blessing of the redeemed.

The overall analysis of vv 1-6 supports a figurative meaning. 1,000 is the third power of ten, and, if figurative here, might represent a long era and, at least, would signify an ideal epoch. If the suffering saints endure their brief trials of 'ten days' (2:10), they will receive the reward of a millennial reign. The intensifying of ten to a thousand together with the lengthening of days to years might suggest that present momentary affliction results in greater glory even in the intermediate state prior to eternal glory.

**REQUIRED READING**

The Millennial Maze, 153-65

- “The Biblical Basis of Amillennialism”

28 Beale, Revelation, 995.
EVALUATING AMILLENNIALISM

Now that we've examined the arguments used to support amillennialism, we are in a position to evaluate their persuasiveness. Use the following questions to help you think through your response to this millennial view.

8. What do you feel is the strongest argument in favor of amillennialism? What do you feel is its greatest weakness? Explain.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 165-73

9. From your reading, make a list of common objections to amillennialism. Choose the objection you feel is the strongest and interact with it. What makes it a strong objection in your opinion? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?
10. Having identified what you feel is the strongest objection to amillennialism, how do you think an amillennialist would respond to this objection? (If you already disagreed with the objection you selected in question 9, choose another objection from the list and attempt a response.)

DAY 4

This section provides you with an opportunity to review what you have learned about amillennialism, both to consolidate what you have studied and to reflect on the merits of this position.

11. The following chart identifies key issues that distinguish each of the millennial positions. Using this lesson’s content and the reading you’ve done from Grenz, fill out the “Amillennialism” column to the best of your ability. In addition, fill out the “Historic Premillennialism” column using your answers from the previous lesson.

12. Having studied amillennialism, do you find it to be a compelling position? Why or why not? If you want to suspend judgment until you’ve examined the other views, explain any hesitancies or questions about amillennialism that you have.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Historic Premillennialism</th>
<th>Premillennialism</th>
<th>Postmillennialism</th>
<th>Dispensational Premillennialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there continuity or discontinuity between this age and the millennium?</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td>Discontinuity (this age on earth, millennium in heaven)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium of Revelation 20 literal or metaphorical?</td>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>Metaphorical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium future, past, or present?</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium an earthly or heavenly reign of Christ?</td>
<td>Earthly (Christ on earth)</td>
<td>Heavenly (Christ in heaven)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Revelation 20 follow Revelation 19 chronologically?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the resurrections of Revelation 20 physical, spiritual, or both?</td>
<td>Physical (believers then unbelievers)</td>
<td>Both (first is spiritual, second is physical)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there continuity or discontinuity between Israel and the church?</td>
<td>Both continuity and discontinuity</td>
<td>Continuity (although difference of opinion on Romans 11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about Scripture?</td>
<td>Inspired, authoritative</td>
<td>Inspired, authoritative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about tradition?</td>
<td>Literal hermeneutic</td>
<td>“Already” and “not yet”</td>
<td>NT interprets OT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about reason?</td>
<td>Doctrinal statements</td>
<td>Values historical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about experience?</td>
<td>Common sense realism, “plain sense” of Scripture</td>
<td>Importance of genre, greater tolerance for subtlety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on world events as fulfillment of prophecy</td>
<td>Realistic optimism, Attraction to simplified chronology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAY 5

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS IN 2 THESSALONIANS 2

In discussions of eschatology, the antichrist often appears as a figure surrounded by mystery and confusion. Who is this figure? Is it a person or an institution? If a person, will we be able to recognize him when he comes on the scene? Is he already alive? R.C. Sproul explains:

> Perhaps there is no greater mystery associated with the New Testament record than the identity of the antichrist. The very mention of the word conjures up diabolical creatures such as "Rosemary’s Baby,"30 or of a human being of such unrestrained wickedness that the very mention of his name evokes terror. Futurists in eschatology regularly announce the latest candidate for the position of the antichrist. Jeane Dixon30 predicted that we will see the antichrist in our generation because he has already been born."

One of the biblical texts that informs our conclusions about the antichrist is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Three questions in particular have exercised the minds of interpreters:

- Who is the man of lawlessness? (2:3, 8-9)
- Who or what is the restrainer? (2:6-7)
- What does the “temple of God” refer to? (2:4)

Before considering how others have answered these questions, read through 2 Thessalonians 2 on your own and make observations about these issues. You may also wish to consult the broader context of 1-2 Thessalonians as well as any cross-references your Bible provides.

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29 Rosemary’s Baby is a 1968 horror film in which Rosemary Woodhouse, played by Mia Farrow, gives birth to Satan’s child.

30 Jeane Dixon (1904-1997) was a popular American psychic.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 3 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 4 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 5 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 6 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 7 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

13. In the space below, record your observations from reading 2 Thessalonians 2. Who is the man of lawlessness? Who or what is restraining him? What does the “temple of God” refer to? If you are unsure of your answers to these questions, write down what it is that confuses you.

In his book The Man of Sin, Kim Riddlebarger lays out common answers to these interpretive questions in the following chart:32

32 Adapted, with slight stylistic modifications, from Kim Riddlebarger, The Man of
Contemporary Interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity of Man of Sin</th>
<th>Identity of the Restrainer</th>
<th>Paul's Reference to the Temple of God (2:4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preterism (prophecy is already fulfilled)</td>
<td>Nero or succession of Roman emperors</td>
<td>The Jewish commonwealth or the Roman Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historicism (prophecy refers to the papacy)</td>
<td>The current pope or the papacy as an office</td>
<td>The preaching of the gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispensationalism (the prophecy is yet future)</td>
<td>Future Antichrist</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Amillennialism (the prophecy is future)</td>
<td>Future Antichrist</td>
<td>The angel of Revelation, the providence of God, or the preaching of the gospel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below is Riddlebarger’s explanation of the options for each question.

1. **Who is the Man of Lawlessness?**

   There are a number of attempts made by Christian interpreters to identify the Man of Lawlessness. Those who hold to a preterist interpretation of New Testament eschatology believe that Paul is making a reference to Nero or to the succession.


33 Preterism is the belief that some or all of the New Testament prophecies about the future have already been fulfilled. Partial preterists believe some prophecies have been fulfilled whereas full preterists believe all prophecies have been fulfilled. Full preterism is a heretical doctrine as it denies a future resurrection and the bodily return of Christ. Partial preterism, on the other hand, is a legitimate evangelical option held by many postmillennialists and some amillennialists. We will interact with preterism more in the next lesson.
of Roman emperors, which ties this passage to the events of AD 70.\footnote{In AD 70 the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Roman armies. More on this in the next lesson as well.} Still other preterists identify this act of sacrilege as the Jewish high priest continuing to offer sacrifices in the temple after Christ had died on the cross to do away with such sacrifices. If preterists are correct, Paul’s prophecy has already been fulfilled.

So-called historicists are of one mind about Paul’s meaning. The Man of Lawlessness is either the current pope (at the time they were writing), or the papacy as an office. According to Iain Murray, at that time it was the ‘unanimous belief that the Papal system is both the ‘man of sin’ and the Babylonian whore of which Scripture forewarns (2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 19). In the conviction of sixteenth century Protestants, Rome was the great Anti-Christ, and so firmly did this belief become established that it was not until the nineteenth century that it was seriously questioned by evangelicals.’

The dispensationalists, on the other hand, believe the Man of Sin to be an eschatological (end-times) figure who performs his despicable act in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem at some point after making a seven-year peace treaty with Israel (see Dan. 9:24-27). Since the Jerusalem temple is not currently standing, it must be rebuilt. This explains why dispensationalists are so eagerly awaiting the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, since that will, supposedly, serve as a critical sign that the coming of the Lord is drawing near.

There are also futurists (nondispensationalists) who see the Man of Sin as an eschatological (end-times) figure, who is in some sense a Nero redivivus.\footnote{Nero was a Roman emperor who reigned from 54-68 AD and sponsored an official persecution of Christians in 64 AD. Though he committed suicide, speculation arose over whether he was truly dead. This speculation spawned what has become known as the Nero redivivus (“renewed, regenerated”) myth, which claimed that Nero would return and avenge himself on his enemies. Some have wondered if John had this myth in mind when he wrote of a beast whose mortal wound was healed (Rev 13:3) and who “was and is not” (Rev 17:11). In the current context, the phrase “in some sense a Nero redivivus” means that some believe the man of lawlessness will embody the anti-Christian characteristics of Nero and, in this way, will function as a kind of reincarnation of the ancient tyrant. (See discussion in Riddlebarger, The Man of Sin, 93-95.)} This
includes some of the church fathers and historical premillenarians such as George Ladd, who does not see in this prophecy a specific fulfillment. Ladd believes that Paul is describing a pattern of events (of which the Roman Empire is the archetype) in which various states and governments will repeatedly become the persecutor of God’s people. The state will take divine rights and prerogatives unto itself, manifest in the act of worship of the state or its leader. There are still others (including a number of Reformed amillenarians) who believe Paul’s words will remain mysterious by and large until this man is revealed at the time of the end, when believers will understand that to which Paul is referring because they have been forewarned by this prophecy.36

2. Who or what is the Restrainer?

A second set of questions centers around the identity of the mysterious ‘restrainer’ who holds back the power of lawlessness, which was already at work when Paul wrote this letter. Preterists believe the restrainer to be the second Jewish commonwealth or the Roman Empire itself….

According to historicists, the restrainer is the preaching of the gospel that has kept the Roman Catholic Church from overcoming those who have rejected the errors of Rome. The dispensationalists believe the restrainer to be the Holy Spirit, who is subsequently removed when the seven-year tribulation begins. According to a number of Reformed amillenarians, the restrainer is somehow tied to the angel of Revelation 20:1-10. Still other Reformed amillenarians hold that the restrainer is the general providence or power of God that holds back the power of lawlessness until the end.37

3. What does the “Temple of God” refer to?

Since this Man of Lawlessness ‘sets himself up in God’s temple’ (2 Thess. 2:4), an act that implies the exercise of great authority, and then proclaims himself to be God, many take this to mean that Paul is speaking of the Jerusalem temple. As we have seen, preterists tie this to events associated with the Jewish rejection of the gospel and the desecration of the Jewish temple in AD 70, while many futurists see this as a prophecy of a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem at the time of the end.


37 Ibid, 121.
Historicists...argue that the reference to the temple is a reference to the church. This identification explains why historicists identified the Man of Sin with the papacy.\textsuperscript{38}

14. After reading about the various interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 2, which do you agree with the most? Why?

15. Paul teaches that the “mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2:7). What do you think he means? Compare this statement with John’s comments in his first letter (see below). How should this affect the way we live our lives now, even though we may differ over the identity of the antichrist?

1 John 2:18-22
\textit{Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 127. Riddlebarger represents the Reformed amillennial view, which agrees with historicists that the “temple of God” refers to the church but believes that the man of lawlessness is a future figure rather than the pope or the papacy (127-28).
One, and you all have knowledge. 21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

1 John 4:1-3

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Postmillennialism

Introduction

In this lesson we come to postmillennialism, the third of our millennial views. Postmillennialism believes that the millennial age of Revelation 20 will be experienced on this earth as an era of prosperity and gospel increase after which Jesus will return. In other words, things will keep getting better. In his book, *Heaven Misplaced*, Doug Wilson writes:

*Most Christians believe in one way or another that the history of our planet is going to go from bad to worse, accelerating as we get near the end…. The view advanced in this book is almost precisely the reverse. This book is an introduction to historical optimism. This is the view that the gospel will continue to grow and flourish throughout the world, more and more individuals will be converted, the nations will stream to Christ, and the Great Commission will finally be successfully completed. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. When that happens, generation after generation will love and serve the Lord faithfully. And then the end will come.*

In order to understand postmillennialism better, we will examine its history, the arguments and texts used to support it, and survey common objections against this viewpoint. We will then finish by studying Matthew 24, a crucial chapter in forming our understanding of the last days.39

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

▷ describe the central ideas of postmillennialism.
▷ note common objections to this millennial position.
▷ discuss potential responses to those objections.
▷ articulate a preliminary understanding of the timing of events in Matthew 24.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Postmillennialism: The view that Christ will return to the earth after the millennium. In this view, the millennium is an age of peace and righteousness on the earth, brought about by the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church.

Preterism: Preterism (from Latin praeteritum, “the thing that is past”) thinks that the fulfillment of most of Revelation’s visions already occurred in the distant past, during the early years of the Christian church.
WHAT IS POSTMILLENNIALISM AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

As a distinct system, postmillennialism began to gain prominence in the 17th century. Gregg Allison writes:

*Beginning in the modern period, a third eschatological view arose and rivaled amillennialism and premillennialism for consideration. Daniel Whitby and Jonathan Edwards developed postmillennialism: Christ will return to judge the world after the millennium. Actually, the seventeenth-century Puritans—for example, Thomas Brightman, John Cotton, and John Owen—had earlier embraced something similar to this position with their doctrine of the ‘latter-glory.’ At the end of history, the kingdom of God will come in power, people everywhere will convert to Christ, governments worldwide will support the church, and Christianity will be characterized by purity in faith and practice. After this period of prosperity, Christ will return. This hopeful view came to a crashing end in England with the turbulent political situation. But it found fertile ground in New England.*

To gain a sense of how Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) thought about eschatology, read the following selections from his 1748 work *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth*:

*It is evident from the Scripture, that there is yet remaining a great advancement of the interest of religion and the kingdom of Christ in this world, by an abundant outpouring of the Spirit of God, far greater and more extensive than ever yet has been…. It is often foretold and signified, in a great variety of strong expressions, that there should a time come, when all nations, through the whole habitable world, should embrace the true religion, and be brought into the church of God….*

*...God has appointed Christ to be the heir of the world in his kingdom of grace, and

to possess and reign over all nations, through the propagation of his gospel, and the power of his Spirit communicating the blessings of it….

I question whether it be possible to find out a more strong expression, to signify an absolute universality of the knowledge of the true religion through the habitable world, than that in Isaiah 11:9. “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.” Which is as much as to say, as there is no place in the vast ocean where there is not water, so there shall be no part of the world of mankind where there is not the knowledge of the Lord; as there is no part of the wide bed or cavity possessed by the sea, but what is covered with water, so there shall be no part of the habitable world, that shall not be covered by the light of the gospel, and possessed by the true religion…. It seems evident, that the time will come, when there will not be one nation remaining in the world, which shall not embrace the true religion, in that God has expressly revealed, that no one such nation shall be left standing on the earth (Isaiah 60:12)….  

And thus it is meet, that the last kingdom which shall take place on earth, should be the kingdom of God’s own Son and heir, whose right it is to rule and reign; and that whatever revolutions and confusions there may be in the world, for a long time, the cause of truth, the righteous cause, should finally prevail, and God’s holy people should at last inherit the earth, and reign on earth; and that the world should continue in tumults and great revolutions, following one another, from age to age, the world being as it were in travail, till truth and holiness are brought forth; that all things should be shaken, till that comes which is true and right, and agreeable to the mind of God, which cannot be shaken; and that the wisdom of the ruler of the world should be manifested in the bringing all things ultimately to so good an issue. The world is made for the Son of God; his kingdom is the end of all changes, that come to pass in the state of the world of mankind; all are only to prepare the way for this; ‘tis fit therefore that the last kingdom on earth should be his.

1. Briefly describe Edwards’s view of the future. Where and when does he believe the “great advancement of the interest of religion” will occur?
2. From your reading, summarize the trajectory of millennial thinking in England and America following the Reformation on the European continent. Note key figures and developments.

Although postmillennialism has appeared in liberal Christian and secular varieties, our aim in this lesson is to consider a postmillennialism that centers its hope on the success of the gospel message. What does this position teach about the future of the world?

3. From your reading, list and briefly describe the main events on the postmillennial timeline. Try to order this list chronologically.
Using the list of events you just made, try to place those events on the following timeline. When you're finished, compare this timeline with your timelines from the last two lessons to see important differences.

Timeline: Postmillennialism

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**Day 2**

**BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT**

Before looking at the biblical support for the postmillennial position, let's take some time to consider the theological method underlying this viewpoint. Again, "theological method" refers to a person's assumptions about such things as Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The following excerpts suggest how a postmillennialist might approach these issues. Keep in mind, as before, that these categories – especially Scripture and reason – may bleed into one another.

**Scripture**

[Answering the question, "What are some of the features of postmillennialism?"]

We have already talked about preterism: Many of the prophecies of the Bible which premillennialists consider unfulfilled, postmillennialists believe have already been fulfilled. This includes Old and New Testaments both. We determine what has been fulfilled by the teaching of the New Testament. Psalm 2 provides a good example. It is repeatedly quoted and applied in the New Testament. We are taught the meaning of these prophecies with a divine commentary.

Another feature of postmillennialism is that of covenantalism: There are many Old Testament prophecies which prophesy a coming golden age for the earth. Postmillennialism is not based upon a particular view of Revelation 20 alone; it is
a hope that is grounded in the Old Testament, which finds fulfillment in the arrival of the kingdom of God in the New Testament."

The Word of God is not spoken into the Void. The Bible is the Word of the self-revealing triune God, who thereby reveals Himself to man. The Bible is not the Word of God suspended in the sky. It is the Word of God to man. Thus we have the three elements necessary to communication—the speaker is God, the message is the Word, the recipient is man. And man, in order to hear, must have a hermeneutic, given to him by God. As Jesus said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' (Matt. 11:15). Logocentric discourse is therefore inescapable—God, in giving us language, has seen to it.

So our pattern should be that of allowing the New Testament to provide commentary on what passages in the Old Testament mean. We must be hermeneutical disciples. For the apostles not only teach us about Jesus; they also teach us about Deuteronomy.

Because our subject is historical optimism, we will be looking at places which deal with this subject, but the process involved should govern all our studies. Allow the New Testament to teach you the Old Testament. The Bible teaches Bible."

**Tradition**

[E]schatology is extremely deep and involved, intertwining itself with the very essence of Christianity itself. Because of this the antiquity of an eschatological system, as such, is not absolutely essential to its orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the eschatological factors in Scripture cannot have been without some apparent impact upon the nascent development of early Christendom’s perception of history’s flow. An eschatology lacking any historical rooting in antiquity is rightly suspect.

Much popular literature leaves the impression that postmillennial thought is a


recent novelty. In this chapter I show that postmillennialism has ample historical precedent in the early centuries of the Christian church. Indeed, it has been the framework of some of the church’s best-known thinkers. The crucial element of postmillennialism – the presence of a biblically informed, historically relevant, and ultimately optimistic temporal hope – is clearly present in antiquity.

Furthermore, the postmillennial position appears in more recent centuries among noted and devout defenders of the faith. Postmillennialism is not a fringe eschatology. It particularly influences the development of the Reformed faith..... This is due to Reformed theology’s strong conception of God’s absolute sovereignty and the first-century coming of Christ’s kingdom.  

**Reason**

Once again, the word hermeneutic refers to the art, science and methodology of interpretation when approaching the text of the Bible. There are different hermeneutical schools of thought; we shall only consider the three options here that affect our discussion of eschatology.

**The allegorical method:** An allegorist is one who says that the text is the body, but the allegorical meaning underneath the text is the soul. This type of thinking became popular in the early centuries of Christianity in an attempt to escape from the plain reading of the Old Testament. Following the Jewish thinker Philo, who had the same motivation, the church slowly drifted away from a sober handling of the text. Under the influence of this kind of thinking, the text simply becomes clay in the hands of the interpreter, and is no longer obeyed as though it were the authoritative Word of God. The authoritative word is “spiritualized” away.

**The literal method:** According to proponents of this school of thought, a text should be taken at face value unless it results in manifest absurdity. This is the method strongly advocated in dispensationalism. Defined this way, it is hard to dispute, but a further question must be asked. Absurd to whom? By what standard do we seek to interpret a particular text? In search of an answer to this question, we have to consider another hermeneutical approach, which I have called the natural school.

**The natural method:** In this school of thought, the various texts themselves determine how they are to be interpreted. In other words, how does the text itself

Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion*, 108-09.
present itself to be interpreted? Some examples are listed below in which the text may require a different method of interpretation.

Didactic: In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul plainly sets forth, in plain Greek prose, the content of the gospel which God had entrusted to Him. The book of Romans should be interpreted in much the same way this primer should be.

Poetry: In the Psalms, an afflicted man eats ashes for food and mixes tears in his drink (102:9). This should not be read in the same way that the book of Romans is read. It is figurative poetry.

Figures of Speech: For example, Jesus uses a very common figure of speech in the Last Supper – metaphor – when He says that the bread was His body and the wine His blood. Those who take Him 'literally' here (and there are millions of them) have missed His entire point.

Historical: Luke begins his gospel by avowing that he had personally gotten his facts from eyewitnesses. He presents his gospel as sober history; those who take the Bible as the Word of God must take it as sober history.

Symbolic/Typological: In our study of eschatology, this category is most important because many of the prophecies of Scripture come to us in symbolic form. When a symbolic passage is interpreted symbolically or typologically, this is not allegorization or spiritualizing.

Experience

Most Christians believe in one way or another that the history of our planet is going from bad to worse, accelerating as we get near the end. At the same time, all Christians believe that after human history is over, and the day of resurrection is past, our experience will be one glory replaced by a greater glory, one after the other, world without end. No Christian is pessimistic about final glory. But most Christians are pessimistic about the course of history prior to the Second Coming of Christ. In this view, the world is God’s Vietnam, and the return of Christ consists of the few lucky ones helicoptered off of a roof during the fall of Saigon. When we get out of here, then there will be good times—but not before.

The view advanced in this book is almost precisely the reverse. This book is an introduction to historical optimism. This is the view that the gospel will continue to grow and flourish throughout the world, more and more individuals will be converted, the nations will stream to Christ, and the Great Commission will finally be successfully completed. When that happens, generation after generation will love and serve the Lord faithfully. And then the end will come....

[Tolkien] was once asked whether he believed that Middle Earth was real. His reply was, 'One hopes.' Even a work of fiction, if it is compelling enough, can awaken a deep desire for it to have been true. So here is my proposal. There are many Christians who believe that the future of our world (prior to the Second Coming) is bleak indeed. I am asking them to read this little book as though it were a work of fiction. Just for a short while, I am asking for that willing suspension of disbelief. And if that request is granted, then I believe that a striking feature of this kind of historical optimism will become plain. Every Christian can agree on one thing at least. Wouldn't it be glorious if this really were true?

4. Summarize, according to the excerpts above, what postmillennialists typically believe about Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

As we turn now to examine the biblical support for postmillennialism, we will organize the evidence under two headings: (1) Old Testament promises and (2) Christ’s universal authority.

45  Wilson, Heaven Misplaced, 9–11. Italics original.
1. Old Testament Promises

Like premillennialists, postmillennialists attach special significance to Old Testament depictions of a coming age of prosperity. However, whereas premillennialists locate this age after the return of Christ, postmillennialists believe it comes before his return.

Isaiah 2:2-4

it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 11:6-10

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
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.

Romans 15:8-9, 12
8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” 10 And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” 11 And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” 12 And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”

5. Read the Isaiah texts in light of Romans 15:8-12. What text is Paul quoting in verse 12? Who is the “root of Jesse”? How do you think a postmillennialist would use this as evidence for a golden era of prosperity in this age?

Doug Wilson comments on Isaiah 11:6-10:

Now this language is admittedly over the top. It is so over the top that most Christians just relegate it to some time after the Lord comes again. That is the only
way they can see that a fulfillment could ever be possible.

But there is a slight problem with this view. The glorious language, the too-good-to-be-true language is in the first half of this passage: predatory beasts become herbivores, and little kids are playing with the cobras. This has to be after the resurrection, right? This has to be after the close of history, doesn’t it? No – because verse 10, the one that begins with the words, ‘And in that day,’ is quoted by the apostle Paul in Romans 15, justifying his mission to the Gentiles two thousand years ago…. The great apostle Paul is appealing to Isaiah as a justification for his preaching to the Gentiles. And since then, we have had two thousand years of the Lord’s government and peace increasing.

2. Christ’s Universal Authority

Another set of important texts for postmillennialists deals with the present reign of Christ over the nations.

Psalm 2:7-9

7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Psalm 110:1

1 The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “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.”

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the
resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

6. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 15:24-27. How long must Jesus reign? When does this reign take place? If the last enemy to be defeated is death, what does this imply about the success of Jesus’ reign before that time? (Remember to think like a postmillennialist as you answer these questions!)

Doug Wilson comments again on 1 Corinthians 15:25-26:

In the common assumption shared by many Christians, at the Lord’s return the first enemy to be destroyed is death. But the apostle here [in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26] says that it is the last enemy to be destroyed. The Lord will rule from heaven, progressively subduing all His enemies through the power of the gospel, brought to the nations by His Church. And then, when it would be easy to believe that it just couldn’t get any better, the Lord will come and deliver the kingdom to His Father, and God will be all in all. 47

47 Wilson, Heaven Misplaced, 15.
REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 72-83
- “The Biblical Basis of Evangelical Postmillennialism”
- “Reconstructionism”

7. From your reading, explain how postmillennialists understand the events of Revelation 19 and 20.
EVALUATING POSTMILLENNIALISM

As we turn now from understanding what postmillennialism teaches to evaluating its claims, use the following questions to help you process your response to this position.

8. What do you feel is the strongest argument in favor of postmillennialism? What do you feel is its greatest weakness? Explain.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 83-89
• “The Critique of Postmillennialism” and “Conclusion”

9. From your reading, make a list of common objections to postmillennialism. Choose the objection you feel is the strongest and interact with it. What makes it a strong objection in your opinion? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?

10. Having identified what you feel is the strongest objection to postmillennialism, how do you think a postmillennialist would respond to this objection? (If you already disagreed with the objection you selected in question 9, choose another objection from the list and attempt a response.)
DAY 4

REVIEW AND REFLECTION

This section provides you with an opportunity to review what you have learned about postmillennialism, both to consolidate what you have studied and to reflect on the merits of this position.

11. The following chart identifies key issues that distinguish each of the millennial positions. Using this lesson’s content and the reading you’ve done from Grenz, fill out the “Postmillennialism” column to the best of your ability. In addition, fill out the “Historic Premillennialism” and “Amillennialism” columns using your answers from the previous lesson.

12. Having studied postmillennialism, do you find it to be a compelling position? Why or why not? If you want to suspend judgment until you’ve examined all the views, explain any hesitancies or questions about postmillennialism that you have.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Historic Premillennialism</th>
<th>Premillennialism</th>
<th>Postmillennialism</th>
<th>Dispensational Premillennialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there continuity or discontinuity between this age and the millennium?</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium of Revelation 20 literal or metaphorical?</td>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>Metaphorical</td>
<td>Literal or metaphorical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium future, past, or present?</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present or future (before Second Coming)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the millennium an earthly or heavenly reign of Christ?</td>
<td>Earthly (Christ on earth)</td>
<td>Heavenly (Christ in heaven)</td>
<td>Earthly (Christ in heaven)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does Revelation 20 follow Revelation 19 chronologically?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the resurrections of Revelation 20 physical, spiritual, or both?</td>
<td>Physical (believers then unbelievers)</td>
<td>Both (first is spiritual, second is physical)</td>
<td>Both (first is spiritual, second is physical)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there continuity or discontinuity between Israel and the church?</td>
<td>Both continuity and discontinuity</td>
<td>Continuity (although difference of opinion on Romans 11)</td>
<td>Continuity (although difference of opinion on Romans 11)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>What are the assumptions about Scripture?</td>
<td>Inspired, authoritative Literal hermeneutic NT interprets OT</td>
<td>Inspired, authoritative “Already” and “not yet” NT interprets OT</td>
<td>Inspired, authoritative Preterism NT interprets OT</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about tradition?</td>
<td>Doctrinal statements create a kind of tradition</td>
<td>Values historical precedent, Reformed / Lutheran confessions</td>
<td>Values historical precedent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about reason?</td>
<td>Common sense realism, “plain sense” of Scripture</td>
<td>Importance of genre, greater tolerance for subtlety</td>
<td>Importance of genre, Negative reaction to strong literalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the assumptions about experience?</td>
<td>Focus on world events as fulfillment of prophecy</td>
<td>Realistic optimism Attraction to simplified chronology</td>
<td>Historical optimism Hopeful prospects for cultural engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAY 5

THE GREAT TRIBULATION IN MATTHEW 24

Matthew 24 – often called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus is teaching from the Mount of Olives – is full of perplexing imagery. Earthquakes, fig trees, stars dropping out of the sky, Jesus playing a trumpet on top of a cloud…what does it all mean? In this section, we will attempt an answer by examining two important issues that bear upon our understanding of Matthew 24: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and (2) the meaning of Matthew 24:34: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

To begin, read through Matthew 24 and make your own observations about Jesus’ teaching. You may also want to look at the broader context of the book of Matthew as well as parallel accounts of Jesus’ message in Mark 13 and Luke 21.

Matthew 24:1-51

1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” 4 And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 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. 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. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. 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 believe it. 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. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

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. 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. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be
grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 47 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know 51 and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13. In the space below, record your observations from reading Matthew 24. What do the disciples ask Jesus at the beginning of the chapter? What specific prophecies does Jesus make? What do you think he means by “this generation” (Matt 24:34). If you are unsure of your answers to any of these questions, write down what it is that confuses you.
1. The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

At the beginning of Matthew 24, the disciples are marveling at the beauty of the Jerusalem temple. Jesus, having just condemned the unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23, responds, “Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (24:2). These words were fulfilled in 70 A.D. when a Roman army destroyed the city of Jerusalem along with its temple. Much of our information about this event comes from Josephus, a Jewish historian (A.D. 37-c.100), who describes the destruction of Jerusalem in a book entitled The Wars of the Jews. R.C. Sproul summarizes Josephus’s account:

In book 5 [of The Wars of the Jews] Josephus provides a vivid description of Jerusalem at the time of the war, giving such details as the size of the walls and the towers. He carefully describes the temple itself and the size of the stones Herod had used in its construction. Some of the stones were forty-five cubits long, five cubits high, and six cubits wide....

In book 6 Josephus rehearses the horrors that had befallen the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege under Titus. Josephus describes a woman who, in the midst of the famine caused by the siege, took her baby who had been sucking at her breast and killed it. She then roasted her own child, ate half of its body, and offered the rest to bystanders. They expressed their utter contempt for her actions and left the scene in a spirit of trembling.

Josephus then describes the Romans burning the temple and placing Jerusalem under the ban: ‘While the holy house was on fire, every thing was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction....’

Josephus concluded his narrative of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem with this summary: ‘Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand; as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand, the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation [with the citizens of Jerusalem], but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army, which, at the very first, occasioned so great a straitness among them that there came a pestilential
destruction upon them, and soon afterward such a famine, as destroyed them more suddenly. 48

Sam Storms reflects on this event and its relationship to Matthew 24:

Aside from the book of Revelation, there is hardly a more important section of Scripture on the subject of biblical eschatology than Matthew 24, the famous Olivet Discourse delivered by Jesus to his disciples shortly before his betrayal by Judas. Many Christians simply assume that Jesus is describing the end of human history and his second advent. But could it be that Jesus was actually describing, in response to his disciples’ question, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Or perhaps Jesus was describing both the events of 70 A.D. and the end of human history. 49

14. Have you ever heard of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.? If so, have you heard anyone argue that this event fulfills Jesus’s prophecy – in part or in whole – in Matthew 24? What do you think? If you disagree, why? If you agree, how much of the text do you think refers to this past event and how much refers to the future?

48  Sproul, Last Days According to Jesus, 120-21, 127.

49  Sam Storms, “Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse – Part I,” n.p. [cited 15 November 2012]. Online: http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/matthew-24-and-the-olivet-discourse-part-i/. The text has been slightly modified for clarity, including italics where the original had bolded type. (This resource is dated 4/27/2007-should that be noted?)
2. The Meaning of “This Generation” in Matthew 24:34

Preterists – who, as we have seen, believe that most of the prophecies of Scripture have already been fulfilled – claim that much of Matthew 24 envisions the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. rather than the return of Christ at the end of history. In part, this argument is based on a literal interpretation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:34: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

Doug Wilson writes:

Using a ‘literal’ means of interpretation, how are we to understand Jesus’ words in verse 34: ‘Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place’? Let us take His words at face value—all those things which He mentioned prior to verse 34 would occur within a generation (i.e., within about forty years). This would bring us to the culminating events of A.D. 70, when the Romans leveled Jerusalem.

But…how is this possible? When we read about some of those things mentioned prior to verse 34, and then go outside and look at the sky, we see that they appear not to have taken place. Scoffers have frequently seized on this point, thinking that Christ was obviously wrong about when the end of the world would be. But the problem is that He was not talking about the end of the world at all. He was not asked about the end of the space/time continuum. He was asked about the destruction of Jerusalem, and He answered the question. He was speaking about the end of the age of Israel….

Regarding the cataclysmic events of Matthew 24:29-31, Wilson explains:

This is the passage that confuses many. How could these events be speaking of the first century?…. At first glance it does look like the end of the world, but the verse is a quotation from Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4. How is it used there? In the original passages, the imagery referred to the destruction of Babylon (13:1) and it meant the same thing for Edom (34:5). We should therefore assume that Jesus is talking about the same kind of thing when He quotes those passages. He is prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He is saying to Jerusalem, ‘Your lights are going to go out. Your sun is going down.’

50 Wilson, Heaven Misplaced, 102.
Someone might argue that Jesus was quoting Isaiah but using his words to a very different purpose. This is not likely. Everywhere there is similar ‘collapsing solar system’ imagery in the Old Testament (see Ezek. 32:7; Amos 8:9; and Joel 2:28-32), the reference is always to the same thing—the destruction of nations and cities. There is no scriptural reason to handle such passages differently when they are quoted in the New Testament, especially when they are quoted in response to a question about when Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. Everywhere the Bible uses this kind of language, it is applied to the judgment of God falling on a particular nation or city—Babylon, Edom, Egypt, the northern kingdom of Israel. There is no scriptural reason to think it is any different in Matthew 24.

Futurists, on the other hand, believe that much of Matthew 24 refers to the Second Coming of Christ. Though they would admit that 70 A.D. is partially in view, they see it as a small feature of Christ’s prophecy. How then could Christ say that “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt 24:34)?

Larry Pettegrew canvasses the options:

What does it mean...that ‘this generation’ would not pass away until all these things take place (24:34)? Some pretribulationists have suggested that ‘generation’ in this passage means ‘race,’ or ‘nation,’ or ‘family.’ Thus the Lord would be saying that the nation of Israel would not pass away until all of the things spoken of in the Olivet Discourse are fulfilled. Though this is a true statement, this interpretation is based on an unusual meaning for ‘generation’.... Moreover, the ‘until’ is a problem, for it would imply that the nation of Israel would pass away after the second coming, and Scripture certainly does not teach this.

Some good Bible teachers have argued that ‘this generation’ is used in a negative sense, a pejorative sense, meaning ‘wicked generation.’ This interpretation is based on the way ‘generation’ is often used throughout the Gospels—the wicked generation that refused the Kingship of Christ. According to this view, Christ, in effect, is setting the record straight with His disciples who believed in the immediate arrival of the Kingdom inhabited only by the righteous. Instead, says Christ, the wicked will be here until after the tribulation and second coming. In addition, Jesus may be making the point that the wicked will receive the judgments of the tribulation.

51 Wilson, Heaven Misplaced, 105.
This view may be correct. It is certainly true that the wicked will be on earth until after the tribulation and second coming. Its weakness is that it is questionable that 'this generation' is used enough in a pejorative sense to become a technical term for wicked people.

The best interpretation of 'this generation' is that the generation who sees the events of the great tribulation will not pass away before the second coming occurs. The disciples had asked for a sign of the second coming (24:3). Jesus replies that the sign of the second coming will be the events of the great tribulation. Therefore, the generation that sees the events of the tribulation will know that the second coming is drawing near. Darrell Bock explains, '[O]nce the beginning of the end arrives with the cosmic signs..., the Son of Man will return before that generation passes away.... It is arguing that the end will occur within one generation; the same group that sees the start of the end will see its end.'

15. After reading the positions above on the meaning of “this generation” in Matthew 24:34, which do you agree with the most? Why?

Dispensational Premillennialism

INTRODUCTION

In his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsey writes:

*Someday, a day that only God knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air. Without benefit of science, space suits, or interplanetary rockets, there will be those who will be transported into a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend. Earth and all its thrills, excitement, and pleasures will be nothing in contrast to this great event.*

Known commonly as the “rapture,” Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins depict the widespread consequences of this event in their best-selling *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days*:

*Thousands were dead in plane crashes and car pileups. Emergency crews were trying to clear expressways and runways, all the while grieving over loved ones and coworkers who had disappeared. One report said that so many cabbies had disappeared from the cab corral at O’Hare that volunteers were brought in to move the cars that had been left running with the former drivers’ clothes still on the seats.*

Both of these books are popular-level manifestations of dispensational premillennialism, the last of our four millennial views. In this lesson, we will

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examine this position in greater detail, studying its history, its distinctive elements, and its common criticisms. Finally, we will conclude by interacting with Daniel 9:24-27, a central passage in the dispensational framework.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:
- summarize the central claims of dispensational premillennialism
- recognize common objections to this viewpoint
- suggest possible responses to these objections
- navigate the complexities of Daniel 9:24-27 with greater skill

**PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS**

**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.

**Dispensational Premillennialism**: Another term for “pretribulational premillennialism.” The term “dispensational” is used because most proponents of this view wish to maintain a clear distinction between the church and Israel, with whom God deals under different arrangements, or “dispensations.”

**Pretribulational Rapture**: The “taking up” of believers into heaven secretly during Christ’s first return prior to the great tribulation.

**Pretribulational Premillennialism**: The view that Christ will return secretly before the great tribulation to call believers to himself, and then again after the tribulation to reign on earth for 1,000 years.\(^5\)

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DAY 1

WHAT IS DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Dispensational premillennialism is the youngest of our four millennial positions, though proponents would argue that aspects of the position were present in the early church. Greg Allison writes:

> Historic premillennialism...was challenged by a new premillennial viewpoint in the nineteenth century, resulting in a division among premillennialists. John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren were the originators of dispensational premillennialism. A key distinguishing element in this was its insistence that the church has not replaced Israel as the people of God; rather, the two are distinct groups, each with its own history, destiny, and hope. Another essential belief was that the church would be caught up with Christ—an event called the 'rapture' of the church—and removed to heaven immediately before the period of seven years of the great tribulation. Indeed, Darby cleanly separated the church—which was not present in the Old Testament, came into existence at Pentecost, would experience the rapture, and was promised heavenly blessings—from the remnant of Jewish saints—which was prophesied in the Old Testament, would go through the great tribulation, would be present at Christ's return, and was promised earthly blessings in the Promised Land. According to Darby, 'two great subjects present themselves to us in Scripture: the church, that sovereign grace that gives us a place along with Christ himself in glory and blessing; and God's government of the world, of which Israel forms the center and the immediate sphere.'

This complete separation between the Jewish people and the church had great

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56 For the sake of simplicity, dispensational premillennialism will be referred to as "dispensationalism" throughout the rest of this lesson. Dispensationalism, as a system, incorporates more than the millennial question, but it will serve our purposes to use the term as shorthand for an otherwise cumbersome label.
ramifications for Darby in terms of the proper hope of both groups. The church’s hope is for the rapture: ‘The thing it has to expect for itself is not—though sure of that also—Christ’s appearing, but her being taken up where he is [1 Thess. 4:16-17]. We go to meet Christ in the air. Nothing clearer, then, than that we are to go up to meet him, and not await his coming to earth.’ Darby was emphatic on two points concerning the rapture. First, ‘as to the time of this rapture, no one, of course, knows it.’ Second, the rapture will occur before the time of the great tribulation. Citing Revelation 3:10 and 12:10–12, Darby explained that they ‘show our exemption from the tribulation predicted, a position in which the world will find itself, and in a special manner the Jewish people restored to their land.’ Clearly, this distinction between the Jewish remnant and the church dictated a complete separation between the two at the end of history. Accordingly, the church will be raptured so as to receive its heavenly blessings, and the Jewish remnant will experience the period of the tribulation, giving way to its earthly blessings.57

Dispensationalism was popularized by the American C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) in the notes of his Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909. Scofield described redemptive history through the lens of seven “dispensations,” which he defined as “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.” It is important to see that dispensations do not represent various avenues of salvation. Instead, they are “different ways God administers His rule in this world.” Each dispensation presents mankind (or a subset of mankind) with a test of obedience. Their response to this test is met with either reward or punishment.

Scofield identified seven dispensations: (1) Innocence, (2) Conscience, (3) Human Government, (4) Promise, (5) Law, (6) Grace, and (7) Kingdom. Study his description of each below.

**Innocence (Gen. 1:28)**
Man was created in innocence, placed in a perfect environment, subjected to an absolutely simple test, and warned of the consequence of disobedience. The woman fell through pride; the man, deliberately (1 Tim. 2:14). God restored His sinning creatures, but the dispensation of innocence ended in the judgment of the Expulsion (Gen. 3:24).

**Conscience (Gen. 3:23)**
By disobedience man came to a personal and experimental knowledge of good

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and evil—of good as obedience, of evil as disobedience to the known will of God. Through that knowledge conscience awoke. Expelled from Eden and placed under the second, or Adamic Covenant, man was responsible to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through sacrifice. The result of this second testing of man is stated in Gen. 6:5, and the dispensation ended in the judgment of the Flood.

**Human Government (Gen. 8:20)**

Under Conscience, as in Innocency, man utterly failed, and the judgment of the Flood marks the end of the second dispensation and the beginning of the third. The declaration of the Noahic Covenant subjects humanity to a new test. Its distinctive feature is the institution, for the first time, of human government—the government of man by man. The highest function of government is the judicial taking of life. All other governmental powers are implied in that. It follows that the third dispensation is distinctively that of human government. Man is responsible to govern the world for God. That responsibility rested upon the whole race, Jew and Gentile, until the failure of Israel under the Palestinian Covenant (Deut. 28:30:1-10) brought the judgment of the Captivities, when 'the times of the Gentiles' (See Lk. 21:24; Rev. 16:14) began, and the government of the world passed exclusively into Gentile hands (Dan. 2:36-45; Lk. 21:24; Acts 25:14-17).

**Promise (Gen. 12:1)**

For Abraham and his descendants it is evident that the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:18, note) made a great change. They became distinctively the heirs of promise. That covenant is wholly gracious and unconditional. The descendants of Abraham had but to abide in their own land to inherit every blessing. In Egypt they lost their blessings, but not their covenant. The Dispensation of Promise ended when Israel rashly accepted the law (Ex. 19:8).

**Law (Ex. 19:8)**

This dispensation extends from Sinai to Calvary—from the Exodus to the Cross. The history of Israel in the wilderness and in the land is one long record of the violation of the law. The testing of the nation by law ended in the judgment of the Captivities, but the dispensation itself ended at the Cross.

**Grace (John 1:17)**

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26; 4:24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of
The immediate result of this testing was the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His crucifixion by Jew and Gentile (Acts 4:27). The predicted end of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church...and the resultant apocalyptic judgments.

Kingdom (or Fullness of Times; Eph. 1:10)
This, the seventh and last of the ordered ages which condition human life on the earth, is identical with the kingdom covenanted to David (2 Sam. 7:8-17; Zech. 12:8...1 Cor. 15:24...), and gathers into itself under Christ all past ‘times’...\(^5\)

1. In your own words, what is a dispensation? For Scofield, what events or people mark the beginning and end of each dispensation?

**REQUIRED READING**

*The Millennial Maze*, 59-63

- “American Millenarianism” (partial section)

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58 C.I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 5, n.5; 10, n.2; 16, n.1; 20, n.1; 94, n.1; 1115, n.2; 1250, n.3. Scripture references updated with Arabic numerals. Italics original.
2. From your reading, summarize the trajectory of millennial thinking in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Note key figures and developments.

Now that we have examined the historical development of the dispensational position, let’s turn now to its claims about the last days.

**REQUIRED READING**

*The Millennial Maze*, 91-100
- “The Main Features of Dispensationalism”

3. From your reading, list and briefly describe the main events on the dispensational timeline. Try to order this list chronologically.
Using the list of events you just made, try to place those events on the following timeline. When you're finished, compare this timeline with your timelines from the last three lessons to see important differences.

**Timeline: Dispensational Premillennialism**

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**DAY 2**

**BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT**

As has been our practice, we begin this section by looking at the theological method underlying dispensationalism. How do proponents of this millennial position think about Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience? Read the selections below with a view toward answering this question.

**Scripture**

Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking. It is sometimes called the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called normal interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated plain interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech. Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning...
of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.\textsuperscript{59}

New revelation cannot mean contradictory revelation. Later revelation on a subject does not make the earlier revelation mean something different. It may add to it or even supersede it, but it does not contradict it. A word or concept cannot mean one thing in the Old Testament and take on opposite meaning in the New Testament. If this were so, the Bible would be filled with contradictions, and God would have to be conceived of as deceiving the Old Testament prophets when He revealed to them a nationalistic kingdom, since He would have known all the time that He would completely reverse the concept in later revelation. The true concept of progressive revelation is like a building—and certainly the superstructure does not replace the foundation.\textsuperscript{60}

Of course, there is everything right about letting the New Testament guide us in our understanding of the Old Testament, but there is everything wrong about imposing the New Testament on the Old.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{Tradition}

\textit{The fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong, unless, of course, it is unscriptural. Nondispensationalists surely know that baptismal regeneration was taught in the early centuries, and yet many of them would not include that error in their theological systems simply because it is historic. After all, the ultimate question is not, Is dispensationalism—or any other teaching—historic? but, Is it scriptural?....}

\textit{The charge of newness was leveled long ago at the doctrine of the Reformers. Calvin answered it with characteristic straightforwardness, and his answer is one that could be used to defend dispensationalism equally well against the same charge:}


\textsuperscript{60} Ryrie, \textit{Dispensationalism}, 95–96.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. 223.
'First, by calling it 'new' they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred Word does not deserve to be accused of novelty.... That it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man's impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God's goodness, its claims to antiquity ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery.  

Reason

Many reasons are given by dispensationalists to support this hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. At least three are worthy of mention at this point.

Philosophically, the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation. Language was given by God for the purpose of being able to communicate with mankind....

If God is the originator of language and if the chief purpose of originating it way to convey His message to humanity, then it must follow that He, being all-wise and all-loving, originated sufficient language to convey all that was in His heart to tell mankind. Furthermore, it must also follow that He would use language and expect people to understand it in its literal, normal, and plain sense. The Scriptures, then, cannot be regarded as an illustration of some special use of language so that in the interpretation of these Scriptures some deeper meaning of the words must be sought. If language is the creation of God for the purpose of conveying His message, then a theist must view that language as sufficient in scope and normative in use to accomplish that purpose for which God originated it.

A second reason why dispensationalists believe in the literal principle is a biblical one: the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ—His birth, His rearing, His ministry, His death, His resurrection—were all fulfilled literally. That argues strongly for the literal method.

A third reason is a logical one. If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost. What check would there be on the variety of interpretations that man's imagination could produce if there were not an objective standard, which the literal principle provides? To try to see meaning other than the normal one would result in as many interpretations as there are people.

62 Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 71.
Experience

Those future events that are important to us are always eagerly anticipated. Watch children during those last few weeks before Christmas. They simply cannot contain their excitement and enthusiasm as they look forward to the moment when they can unwrap those beautiful and mysterious presents. Then there is the young couple who faithfully marks each day off their calendar as they anticipate departing on a luxurious cruise ship for a week of fun in the sun. Although they may not exhibit the raw enthusiasm of children prior to Christmas, the anticipation is just as real. The student who has put in four long years of study shares this same sense of eager anticipation as graduation day approaches.

The same is true for believers in Jesus Christ as they anticipate an upcoming event far more significant than cruises, Christmas presents, or graduation. The apostle Paul encourages believers to look forward to ‘the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus’ (Titus 2:13). We are to be eagerly anticipating the day when the Lord Jesus returns to take us home to be with Himself. That event is commonly referred to as the rapture of the church.

4. Summarize, according to the excerpts above, what dispensationalists typically believe about Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. You may also want to refer back to question four in the historic premillennialism lesson for additional observations.

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63 Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 91–92.

64 Benware, Understanding End Times Prophecy, 157.
The biblical basis for the dispensational position can be organized into two categories: (1) a distinction between Israel and the church and (2) a pretribulational rapture of the church.

### 1. Distinction Between Israel and the Church

Classic dispensationalists draw a sharp division between Israel and the church. This division undergirds many of the events on the dispensational timeline of the last days. Read the following texts to see where dispensationalists find such a separation in Scripture.

**Romans 9:1-6**

1. I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—
2. that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
3. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
4. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.
5. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.
6. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.

**1 Corinthians 10:32**

32. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.

**Ephesians 3:1-6**

1. For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
2. assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you,
3. how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.
4. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,
5. which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
6. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

**Colossians 1:24-27**

24. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,
of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

5. Based on these texts, how do you think a dispensationalist would argue for a distinction between Israel and the church?

All nondispensationalists blur to some extent the distinction between Israel and the church. Such blurring fails to recognize the contrast that is maintained in Scripture between Israel, the Gentiles, and the church. In the New Testament, natural Israel and the Gentiles are contrasted.

Israel is addressed as a nation in contrast to Gentiles after the church was established at Pentecost (Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28). In Paul’s prayer for natural Israel (Rom. 10:1), there is a clear reference to Israel as a national people distinct from and outside the church. He also wrote, ‘Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God’ (1 Cor. 10:32). If the Jewish people were the same group as the church or the Gentiles, then certainly there would be no point in the apostle’s distinction in this passage. In addition, Paul, obviously referring to natural Israel as his ‘kinsmen according to the flesh,’ ascribes to them the covenants and the promises (Rom. 9:3-4). That these words were written after the beginning of the church is proof that the church does not rob Israel of her blessings. The term Israel continues to be used for the natural (not spiritual) descendants of Abraham after the church was instituted, and it is not equated with the church.65

65 Ryrie, Dispensationalism, 148. Italics original.
2. Pretribulational Rapture of the Church

As we saw above, for dispensationalists the distinction between Israel and the church informs many of the events to be expected in the last days. One such event is the pretribulational rapture of the church, a distinctive element of dispensational eschatology. (Remember that historic premillennialists typically affirm a posttribulational rapture.)

John 14:1-3
1 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-53
51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Revelation 3:10
10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.
6. How do you think a dispensationalist would argue for a pretribulational rapture of the church based on these passages? In your answer, reflect on how the rapture of the church might relate to God’s purposes for Israel.

7. According to Grenz, what are the five major arguments that dispensationalists put forward in support of a pretribulational rapture?

REQUIRED READING

_The Millennial Maze_, 100-107
- “The Biblical Basis of Dispensationalism”
DAY 3

EVALUATING DISPENSATIONALISM

In this section you will have an opportunity to evaluate the dispensational position. Use the following questions to help you assess the strength of the arguments you have encountered so far in this lesson.

8. What do you feel is the strongest argument in favor of dispensationalism? What do you feel is its greatest weakness? Explain.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 108-125
• “The Critique of Dispensationalism”
• “Modifications to Dispensationalism” (optional)

9. From your reading, make a list of common objections to dispensationalism. Choose the objection you feel is the strongest and interact with it. What makes it a strong objection in your opinion? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why?
10. Having identified what you feel is the strongest objection to dispensationalism, how do you think a dispensationalist would respond to this objection? (If you already disagreed with the objection you selected in question 9, choose another objection from the list and attempt a response.)

11. The following chart identifies key issues that distinguish each of the millennial positions. Using this lesson’s content and the reading you’ve done from Grenz, fill out the “Dispensationalism” column to the best of your ability. In addition, fill out the “Historic Premillennialism,” “Amillennialism,” and “Postmillennialism” columns using your answers from the previous lesson.

12. Having studied dispensationalism, do you find it to be a compelling position? Why or why not? If you aren’t persuaded by dispensationalism, which of the other three views do you prefer?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is there continuity or discontinuity between this age and the millennium?</strong></th>
<th>Historic Premillennialism</th>
<th>Premillennialism</th>
<th>Postmillennialism</th>
<th>Dispensational Premillennialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td>Discontinuity (this age on earth, millennium in heaven)</td>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is the millennium of Revelation 20 literal or metaphorical?</strong></th>
<th>Literal</th>
<th>Metaphorical</th>
<th>Literal or metaphorical</th>
<th>Literal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is the millennium future, past, or present?</strong></th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Present or future (before Second Coming)</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is the millennium an earthly or heavenly reign of Christ?</strong></th>
<th>Earthly (Christ on earth)</th>
<th>Heavenly (Christ in heaven)</th>
<th>Earthly (Christ in heaven)</th>
<th>Earthly (Christ on earth)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Does Revelation 20 follow Revelation 19 chronologically?</strong></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Are the resurrections of Revelation 20 physical, spiritual, or both?</strong></th>
<th>Physical (believers then unbelievers)</th>
<th>Both (first is spiritual, second is physical)</th>
<th>Both (first is spiritual, second is physical)</th>
<th>Physical (believers then unbelievers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is there continuity or discontinuity between Israel and the church?</strong></th>
<th>Both continuity and discontinuity</th>
<th>Continuity (although difference of opinion on Romans 11)</th>
<th>Continuity (although difference of opinion on Romans 11)</th>
<th>Discontinuity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What are the assumptions about Scripture?</strong></th>
<th>Inspired, authoritative Literal hermeneutic NT interprets OT</th>
<th>Inspired, authoritative “Already” and “not yet” NT interprets OT</th>
<th>Inspired, authoritative Preterism NT interprets OT</th>
<th>Inspired, authoritative Literal hermeneutic OT interprets NT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What are the assumptions about tradition?</strong></th>
<th>Doctrinal statements create a kind of tradition</th>
<th>Values historical precedent, Reformed / Lutheran confessions</th>
<th>Values historical precedent</th>
<th>Minimizes the importance of a position’s antiquity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What are the assumptions about reason?</strong></th>
<th>Common sense realism, “plain sense” of Scripture</th>
<th>Importance of genre, greater tolerance for subtlety</th>
<th>Importance of genre, Negative reaction to strong literalism</th>
<th>Common sense realism, “plain sense” of Scripture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What are the assumptions about experience?</strong></th>
<th>Focus on world events as fulfillment of prophecy</th>
<th>Realistic optimism Attraction to simplified chronology</th>
<th>Historical optimism Hopeful prospects for cultural engagement</th>
<th>Focus on world events, prophecy; Rapture as blessed hope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
THE SEVENTY WEEKS IN DANIEL 9:24-27

An important text for the dispensational position is Daniel 9:24-27. Specifically, dispensationalists find support in this text for a seven-year tribulation period at the end of the present age. They identify this period with Daniel's 70th week and place the present church age between the 69th and 70th weeks. Others, however, interpret the text differently, arguing that Daniel's 70th week encompasses the entire period from Christ's death and resurrection to the end of history. We will call this interpretation the covenantal view.

In this section we will examine the arguments for each of these positions. To begin, study Daniel 9:24-27 on your own, making observations and raising questions as you go. To help you situate this passage in its broader context, you should read through all of Daniel 9 in your own Bible.

Daniel 9:24-27

24 “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. 25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. 26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

13. In the space below, record your observations from reading Daniel 9. When do you think the “one week” of verse 27 takes place? Who is the “he” that is mentioned in this verse? Is it the “anointed one” or the “prince who is to come” (v.26)? What is the “strong covenant” in verse 27 and who are the “many” with whom it is made? If you are unsure of your
answers to any of these questions, write down what it is that confuses you.

To understand the dispensational interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27, read the following extended excerpt, paying attention to how this author answers the questions we posed above. As you read, compare this view with the observations and questions that came out of your own study of the biblical text.

Daniel 9 records the concerned prayer of Daniel as he viewed his people Israel in their Babylonian captivity, which was brought about by their idolatry and disregard for the law of God. The nation had experienced defeat, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and captivity in a foreign land. Daniel not only confessed the sins of his people Israel but interceded for them, calling upon God to fulfill His promise to restore Israel back to her land. Although Daniel and other godly people realized that Israel did not deserve blessing and restoration, they knew that God had made certain promises. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted seventy years of captivity, and though that captivity period was almost over there did not seem to be any movement toward restoration. Deeply concerned that God’s promise might not be fulfilled, Daniel prayed. Daniel’s lengthy prayer focused on the two subjects of the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. His prayer again and again shows concern for ‘Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain … Jerusalem and Thy people … Thy desolate sanctuary … Thy city and Thy people’ (vv. 16-19)....

In answer to his prayer on these two matters, the Lord sent the angel Gabriel with a message concerning Israel’s future (vv. 24-27). Gabriel informed Daniel that God was going to have special dealings with Israel for ‘seventy units of seven’ (which because of the context is commonly understood to mean 70 x 7, or 490 years. Daniel was told that this 490-year period would be made up of three distinct divisions. The
first unit of seven sevens (forty-nine years) is the period of time for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (v. 25a); the second unit of sixty-two sevens (434 years) comprises the time from the rebuilding to the coming of the Messiah (v. 25b). This, of course, brings the total to sixty-nine sevens (483 years), leaving one unit of seven (seven years) yet to be discussed in the passage.

After the second division of time but before the final division (of seven years), two key events will transpire: the death of the Messiah, and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem (v. 26). Placing these two events after sixty-nine weeks but before the seventieth week seems to indicate a gap of time. This allows for, but does not require, the Church Age. But since the last week is disconnected from the first sixty-nine weeks the question arises as to when this final week takes place. The answer given is that, when ‘he’ (probably the Antichrist) makes a covenant with Israel, the last week begins. This passage will be discussed further in relationship to the discussion on the tribulation period.

Most important in Daniel 9 is what God says He will accomplish by the time the 490 years have run their course. In verse 24 six goals are given: (1) to finish the transgression; (2) to make an end of sin; (3) to make atonement for iniquity; (4) to bring in everlasting righteousness; (5) to seal up vision and prophecy; and (6) to anoint the most holy (place). We need to remember that all six of these goals are earthly as they relate to Daniel’s people (Israel) and Daniel’s holy city (Jerusalem).

The first three goals were accomplished by Christ’s work on the cross, which dealt with the sin issue fully and completely. However, these goals (which relate to the new covenant) have not been applied to Israel as a nation.

The fourth goal looks at a time when everlasting righteousness will be experienced by national Israel. Israel, as a nation, has not at any time embraced this righteousness that comes from the Lord God. When will such righteousness be experienced by Israel? …. [The author here quotes another source that argues it won’t be experienced until the end of the Great Tribulation and the beginning of the millennial kingdom.] …. 

The fifth goal related to the sealing up of vision and prophecy most likely looks at that time when the glorified Christ is present with his people, fulfilling all prophecies and making visions and prophecies unnecessary.

The sixth goal is to anoint the most holy. The term most holy is frequently used in
the Bible of the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and the Temple and should also be understood in that way here. This anointing is most likely in connection with the great millennial temple spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 40-48). The anointing of this most holy place will probably take place in connection with the second coming of Christ at the very end of the Seventy Weeks.

This significant passage in Daniel clearly states God’s intentions in relation to Israel. The fulfillment of these six goals, while made possible by the work of Christ on the cross, have [sic] not been fulfilled to national Israel. God plans on saving and restoring Israel in the future. There remains just the one week (seven years) for the fulfilling of these goals. It is clear then that the purposes of God for the last week (the Tribulation) are established, and their focus is definitely on Israel and on bringing Israel back to the Lord her God. It is admitted by all that the church of Jesus Christ has been redeemed and therefore does not need to be regenerated and to enter into the new covenant. The first and primary purpose of the Tribulation simply does not involve the church, but it most certainly involves Israel.

This also holds true for the second purpose, that of bringing judgment on evil people and nations for their unbelief and sin. The church is made up of believers, and the sins of the church have been cared for by the Lord Jesus. The church will not be brought into judgment, because the Lord took our judgment on Himself (John 5:24). The church does not need to be punished or purified, having already entered into that wonderful work of propitiation accomplished by the Lord Jesus at Calvary.

The focus of Daniel 9:24-27 is exclusively Jewish. The passage deals only with those matters concerning the Jewish people, not the church. The covenant that is made is made with Israel; it is the Jewish temple that is rebuilt with its accompanying sacrifices; it is the desecration of that temple with the ‘abomination of desolation’; and it is the repentance and blessing of Israel in their land that is in view. Daniel 9:24-27 is the definitive revelation on the purposes of God for this final seven years.

The conclusion is that, since the church does not fit into the declared purposes of God for the Tribulation, the church will not be a part of that period of time. There is simply no need for the church to be present during a time when God focuses so completely on the nation of Israel.”

66 Benware, Understanding End Times Prophecy, 168–71. Italics original.
14. According to the dispensational view, what is the nature and the timing of the 70th week? Do you agree with this view? Why or why not?

Now that you have surveyed the dispensational interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27, read the covenantal view in this passage below. In context, Sam Storms presents his view by answering a series of questions, three of which are included here. His discussion is more technical, so you will need to read carefully. As before, compare what you read with the observations and questions from your own study.

What is the goal or purpose of the 70 weeks?

Daniel 9:24 makes it clear that the goal of the 70 weeks prophecy is six-fold in nature: (1) 'to finish (or, "restrain") the transgression'; (2) 'to make an end of sin' (or, 'to seal up sin'); (3) 'to make atonement for iniquity'; (4) 'to bring in everlasting righteousness'; (5) 'to seal up vision and prophecy'; and (6) 'to anoint the most holy "place"'.

Most are agreed that (3) pertains to the propitiatory sufferings of Jesus. The dispute concerning (1) and (2) focuses more on the time of their fulfillment. Are these statements descriptive of what our Lord already accomplished at his first advent, or do they pertain to what he will achieve at his second advent (particularly, for Israel)? My opinion is that this is a false disjunction. What Jesus fulfilled at his first advent he will consummate at the second. More on this later.

The fourth stated goal, 'to bring in everlasting righteousness,' is a reference either to the justified state of the one who has faith in Christ (Rom. 3:21-22) or to the righteousness of the new heavens and new earth (2 Pt. 3:13). And yet, on further reflection, we discover that this too is a false disjunction. The witness of Scripture is to the interrelation between the redemption of the creature and the cosmos (Rom.
The reconciliation of both man and the material world has, in a sense, already occurred (Col. 1:19-20), and yet both await the consummation at the end of the age (Rom. 8:21).

The fifth purpose, 'to seal up vision and prophecy,' means that 'the period of preparation and type, characterized by the visions which the prophets received and proclaimed, will be sealed up, because its purpose has been completed. It will no longer be needed, since the Messianic age has come, and its work is finished.' Again, should one insist that the ultimate consummation of all prophetic utterance in the second coming of Christ is intended, no objection is forthcoming. One need not conclude, however, that the 70th week is therefore altogether future. If the 70th week of Daniel 9 is the present age, as I intend to argue, one may find the consummation of each goal in the second advent of Christ without conceding the validity of the dispensational scheme.

The sixth purpose, 'to anoint a most holy,' is a reference to the baptism (anointing) of Jesus (cf. Acts 10:38; Luke 4:34,41). There is absolutely no evidence in the OT that the temple was ever anointed (aside from the single reference to Moses’ anointing of the wilderness tabernacle in Lev. 8:10-11).…

What is the meaning of 9:27?

...[I]n view of the parallel construction of vv. 26 and 27, the Messiah of v. 26a [equals] the 'he' of v. 27a, and the 'prince' of v. 26b [equals] the 'one who makes desolate' of v. 27b, i.e., the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D. In addition to this, I conclude that he who, literally, 'causes a covenant to prevail' is Jesus, the Messiah. This he does through the shedding of his blood (cf. Mt. 26:27-29; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8-10).

Finally, to what does Daniel refer when he speaks about Messiah putting 'a stop to sacrifice and grain offering'? There are two possibilities, as I see it. This may be a reference to the sacrifice of Christ whereby he abrogated the Jewish sacrificial system (see Heb. 7:11-12,27; 9:26-28; 10:9; Mt. 27:51; Mark 15:38). Or, more likely still, this is a reference to the cessation of Jewish sacrifices by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 A.D. (see Mt. 23:37-24:2)....

How, then, may we understand the contribution of Daniel's prophecy to the structure and flow of redemptive history?

According to the conclusions reached above, the first half of Daniel's 70th week runs
from the baptism of Jesus to 70 A.D. The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 A.D. is the middle of the week, and the present church age is its latter half. [Meredith] Kline concurs and summarizes as follows:

“When we survey the fulfillment of Gabriel’s prophecy from our vantage point, it appears that the last half of the 70th week is the age of the community of the new covenant, disengaged from the old covenant order with whose closing days its own beginnings overlapped for a generation. In the imagery of the NT Apocalypse, the last half week is the age of the church in the wilderness of the nations for a time, and times, and half a time (Rev. 12:14). Since the 70 weeks are 10 jubilee eras that issue in the last jubilee, the 70th week closes with the angelic trumpeting of the earth’s redemption and the glorious liberty of the children of God. The acceptable year of the Lord which came with Christ will then have fully come.”

15. According to the covenantal view, what is the nature and timing of the 70th week? Do you agree with this view? Why or why not?

67 Sam Storms, “Daniel’s 70 Weeks,” 2013 [cited 28 November 2012]. Online: http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/daniels-70-weeks. The text has been slightly modified for clarity and ease of reading, though the substance has remained unchanged. In addition, bolded text has been removed. Italics are original.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Book of Revelation

INTRODUCTION

In this final lesson we will be devoting extended time to pondering the book of Revelation. To begin, we need to address the fear and confusion that many have when approaching this book. For a number of Christians, Revelation seems inaccessible with all its symbolism and sometimes cryptic language. Vern Poythress, however, offers the following encouragement:

*Can you understand the Book of Revelation? Yes, you can. You can summarize its message in one sentence: God rules history and will bring it to its consummation in Christ. Read it with this main point in mind, and you will understand. You will not necessarily understand every detail—neither do I. But it is not necessary to understand every detail in order to profit spiritually.*

*The same is true of all Scripture. Scripture is inexhaustibly rich, so that we never plumb all its depths and mysteries. But the main points are clear, so that we know what to believe and how to act (Prov. 1:1–7; Ps. 19:7–13). 2 Timothy 3:16–17 tells us not only that all Scripture is inspired, but "useful for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." All Scripture, including Revelation, has practical value for exhortation, comfort, and training in righteousness. Paul underlines the point in 2 Timothy 4:1–5 by drawing a contrast between solid teaching of the gospel message and people's desire to have "teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (4:3). God gave us Revelation not to tickle our fancy, but to strengthen our hearts....*

*If Revelation is clear, why do so many people have trouble with it? And why is it so controversial? We have trouble because we approach it from the wrong end. Suppose I start by asking, "what do the bear's feet in Revelation 13:2 stand for?" If I start with a detail, and ignore the big picture, I am asking for trouble. God is at
the center of Revelation (Rev. 4-5). We must start with him and with the contrasts between him and his satanic opponents. If instead we try right away to puzzle out details, it is as if we tried to use a knife by grasping it by the blade instead of the handle. We are starting at the wrong end. Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book. Don't try to puzzle it out. Don't become preoccupied by isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the Beast. Long for the final victory.68

This lesson will provide you with the opportunity to become engrossed in the story of Revelation. Be sure to read with pen in hand and pray for God to give you understanding as you immerse yourself in his word.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:
▷ discuss the central themes of the book of Revelation.
▷ articulate four interpretive approaches to the structure of John's Apocalypse.
▷ explain the differing interpretations of Revelation 20:1-10 and offer his own conclusion.
▷ appreciate the contributions of each millennial position to our understanding of eschatology.

DAY 1

REVELATION 1-6

There are a variety of ways that people understand the book of Revelation. Being aware of the options will help you as you study the book personally. Read the following section from Grenz to acclimate yourself to the main schools of thought.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 175-84
- “The Millennium Debate and Hermeneutics”

1. What are the four main interpretations of the book of Revelation? Briefly summarize each of these. Which interpretation are you most sympathetic toward? Why?

As you read through the book of Revelation over the next few days, pay attention to important themes and messages that you see. Poythress identifies a number of these for our consideration:

God
“Revelation is first of all God-centered. God controls the course of history. God protects his people and punishes rebellion. God will bring his purposes to final,
spectacular realization in the new heaven and the new earth.”

Worship
“The appropriate response to God on the part of his creatures is worship. Scenes of worship occur throughout the book (1:12-20; 4:1-5:14; 7:9-17; 8:3-5; 11:16-19; 12:10-12; 14:1-7; 15:2-8; 16:5-7; 19:1-10; 20:4-6; 21:1-22:5). By showing us the marvel of who God is and what he does, Revelation calls us to respond with awe, godly fear, praise, faith, and obedience. Thus all of Revelation promotes true worship of God.”

The Lamb
“In the realization of God’s purposes the Lamb has the key role (5:1-14). Jesus Christ is presented to us as the Lamb to symbolize his sacrificial death. His deity is shown by the fact that he shares God’s names (the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, 1:8, 17; 21:13), God’s throne (22:1), God’s attributes (1:13-16 compared to Dan. 7:9-10), and his worship (5:13). Only through him, by virtue of his death and resurrection, can God’s plan for history be unraveled (5:1-10). The Lamb mediates God’s judgments in history (6:1; 19:11-21).”

Theophany (God’s appearing)
“Revelation presents its concerns in visionary form. It is fitting, then, that at the thematic center of all the visions stands the vision of God himself. God appears. He appears enthroned in the midst of his heavenly angelic assistants in 4:1-11. He appears when Christ appears in 1:12-16. He appears climactically at the close of this age, at the Second Coming of Christ. The King comes. All the events of this age move forward toward the Second Coming. Revelation contains a dramatic momentum that increases as we near the Great Event.”

Spiritual war
“Revelation goes underneath the surface in its analysis of history in order to show the spiritual forces at work. God and his agents war against Satan and his agents. Humanity is in the middle of this war. One’s allegiance to God or to Satan, and the consequences in life, structure the meaning of history…. By this spiritual perspective Revelation does not eliminate human responsibility and the significance of human action, but rather sets them in their final, cosmic and theistic context. It thus provides a powerful antidote to secularism. And it offers as well a powerful antidote to false religions, by showing us what is at stake. False religion can take the blatant form of non-Christians religions like Hinduism or Islam. Or it can infiltrate Christendom in the form of corruptions of the church—classic Roman Catholicism, modernism, legalism, or nominalism.”
Bipolar contrasts: purity and corruption, beauty and ugliness, truth and deceit.

“The focus on spiritual war alerts us to the polarity between good and evil. To eyes that are morally and religiously sleepy, things look very confused. And indeed, human beings often walk in a kind of moral twilight of mixed motives, where one seldom sees clearly the complex entanglement of good and evil motives in a single attitude or action. Revelation acknowledges that the existing situations are often painfully confused and frustratingly mixed (chapters 2-3). But it does so not to excuse us and permit a lapse into moral complacency, but in order to stir us up to undivided allegiance to God and the Lamb. For this purpose, stark contrasts between purity and corruption, beauty and ugliness, truth and deceit run through the book. The number of ways in which contrasts are depicted are so many dimensions of the total conflict. The difference between God’s ways and Satan’s ways touches on every aspect of life, whether it be purity, singleness of heart, moral action, aesthetic issues (beauty and ugliness), or cognitive issues (truth and error).”

Witness and martyrdom
The theme of witness runs through the book. John “testifies to everything he saw” (1:2). He has “the testimony of Jesus” (1:2). Jesus “is the faithful witness” (1:5) in a special, preeminent sense. Revelation contemplates a situation where Christians are subject to persecution for their faith…. They may be subject even to the death penalty if they maintain their witness faithfully (2:13; 2:10; 13:15). Jesus was martyred because of his faithfulness to God. Christians may face the same fate. But if so, they share also in Christ’s victory over death (1:18). The whole of Revelation can be seen as one great call to faithfulness even to the point of death (2:10).

Reward and punishment
“Faithfulness to Christ makes sense, even if we must pay a price. Revelation points to the fact that God is sovereign and God is just. He metes out punishments on rebels and he gives rewards to his faithful followers. The punishments and rewards include both the preliminary judgments in history, short of the Second Coming, and the final judgments at the Second Coming itself. Even though the saints may look small, weak, and defeated in human eyes, full vindication is coming in God’s own time.”

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REQUIRED READING

Revelation 1-6

2. In the space below, describe how Revelation 1-6 addresses the themes we've identified. You don't need to be exhaustive. Just make observations as you read.

*God:*

*Worship:*

*The Lamb:*

*Theophany:*

*Spiritual War:*

*Bipolar Contrasts:*

*Witness and Martyrdom:*

*Reward and Punishment:*
DAY 2

REVELATION 7-11

Beyond the issue of how one interprets certain biblical texts, the millennial positions we have considered in this course are wrapped up with particular views of the world and of history. To see this, read the following section from Grenz and answer the question below.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 184-95
- “World View and Traditional Millennialism”
- “World View and Twentieth-Century Theologies” (optional)

3. According to Grenz, what theological moods are associated with postmillennialism, premillennialism, and amillennialism? Give a brief description of each of these moods.
REQUIRED READING

Revelation 7-11

4. In the space below, describe how Revelation 7-11 addresses the themes we've identified.

God:

Worship:

The Lamb:

Theophany:

Spiritual War:

Bipolar Contrasts:

Witness and Martyrdom:

Reward and Punishment:
DAY 3

REVELATION 12-17

In Lesson 1 we discussed the “already-not yet” nature of biblical eschatology. In the following reading, Grenz addresses the inauguration of God’s kingdom in the present age and its implications for Christian living.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 197-205
- “Eschatology as Insight in the Present”
- “Eschatology as a Call in the Present”

5. Explain what Grenz means by “eschatology as a call in the present.” What three calls does biblical eschatology give to believers in this life?
REQUIRED READING

Revelation 12-17

6. In the space below, describe how Revelation 12-17 addresses the themes we’ve identified.

God:

Worship:

The Lamb:

Theophany:

Spiritual War:

Bipolar Contrasts:

Witness and Martyrdom:

Reward and Punishment:
DAY 4

REVELATION 18-22

Though the aim of this curriculum has been to help you come to your own prayerful convictions about the nature of the millennium, we want you to remember that even those positions you disagree with can enrich your understanding of biblical teaching. In this final section of The Millennial Maze, Grenz suggests the positive contributions of each of the millennial views.

REQUIRED READING

The Millennial Maze, 205-15
• “Eschatology as Chronology Plus Message”
• “Eschatological Living and the Millennial Debate”

7. According to Grenz, what can each of the four millennial positions teach us?
REQUIRED READING

Revelation 18-22

8. In the space below, describe how Revelation 18-22 addresses the themes we've identified.

God:

Worship:

The Lamb:

Theophany:

Spiritual War:

Bipolar Contrasts:

Witness and Martyrdom:

Reward and Punishment:
DAY 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This last portion of the course provides you with the opportunity to review what you have learned with a view toward writing your final paper. Below are the instructions from the syllabus. May God give you clarity and a deep delight in his sovereignty as you gather your thoughts!

As a final project, students will write a brief paper explaining their current understanding of the relationship between the millennium and the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, they should select one of the four views presented in the course and argue for it. The paper should be three double-spaced pages, to be submitted on the last day of class.

In this assignment, students will:

• introduce their paper with a concise description of each of the four millennial views, paying particular attention to their distinguishing characteristics (½ p.)
• identify which millennial viewpoint they currently favor and discuss several of the strongest supporting biblical texts (1½ pp.)
• include any remaining questions about the course material (½ p.)
• conclude their paper by giving at least one specific example of how studying eschatology has influenced their lives (e.g., marriages, friendships, Bible study, fight against sin, etc.) (½ p.)


Now, the Future: An Introduction to Eschatology attempts to acquaint students with the doctrine of the last things, especially as it concerns the relationship between the millennium and Christ’s Second Coming. Students will study four prominent millennial viewpoints (historic premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism) in an effort to clarify key interpretive issues and arrive at their own conclusions. In addition, students will examine such issues as the relationship between Israel and the church, the role of the Antichrist, the chronology of the Olivet Discourse, and Daniel’s seventy weeks. Finally, students will devote time to considering Revelation 20 and its implications for biblical eschatology. Throughout the course, students will learn by interacting with the biblical text, evaluating both ancient and modern authors, answering study questions, and participating in class discussion. In all of this, our goal is that students who take this course will learn to live wisely in the present age by anticipating Christ’s return with greater joy and understanding.

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