

Old and New Testament **Prophecies of the End Times**

**A 6-week Bible Study Course on what the
Bible says about the important
subject of the End Times**

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Brief Summary of Our Focus

- **There are different belief systems among Christians when it comes to the “end times” and concepts like the rapture and the millennium. In these systems there is a great emphasis on what the Bible says. Christians on differing sides use the Bible a lot.**
- **This brief 6-week study is designed to (1) introduce the main features of so-called amillennial, millennial, and dispensational systems of thought; (2) focus on key OT and NT prophecies of the end times in their biblical context; (3) clarify how and why different conclusions are sometimes drawn from them; (4) highlight the value of the truth and the dangers of error on this subject; and (5) further equip you testify to the truth in love when confronted by end time error.**

Primary Bible sections we hope to read and learn from:

Genesis 12:1-3, 17:7-8

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

Isaiah 9:6-7

Ezekiel 38-39

Amos 9:11-15

Matthew 24

John 5:28-29

1 Thessalonians 4:

Revelation 20

Revelation 21-22

Other Bible references may be added if desired by the class.

OT and NT Prophecies of the End Times

Introduction: This Stuff Is Important

Have you, or a friend or family member, expressed these feelings?

- "I'm worried because I don't know when Jesus is returning to judge us."
- "Today's world makes no sense. It's depressing."
- "This topic is too complicated and I can't understand it."

These comments, with questions, were submitted to the Q & A service on the WELS website:

"I was chatting recently in a Christian chat room and we began talking about the Left Behind series. I have read the first book, but found it conflicted greatly with my beliefs as a WELS Christian. I was very unsure of how to explain Revelation to the other people in that room that were predominantly Pentecostal or Baptist. . . ."

"We are looking for a new church in New Ulm and I am concerned about the WELS teaching on Israel. We will look for a church that supports the nation of Israel. This nation was promised by God to exist in the end times and Jesus will set his throne in Jerusalem for the final 1000-year reign on this earth. That is a promise! We appreciate your work in our community, but"

The comments give us two good reasons why a study of the "end times" and of the nation of Israel in Bible prophecy is important:

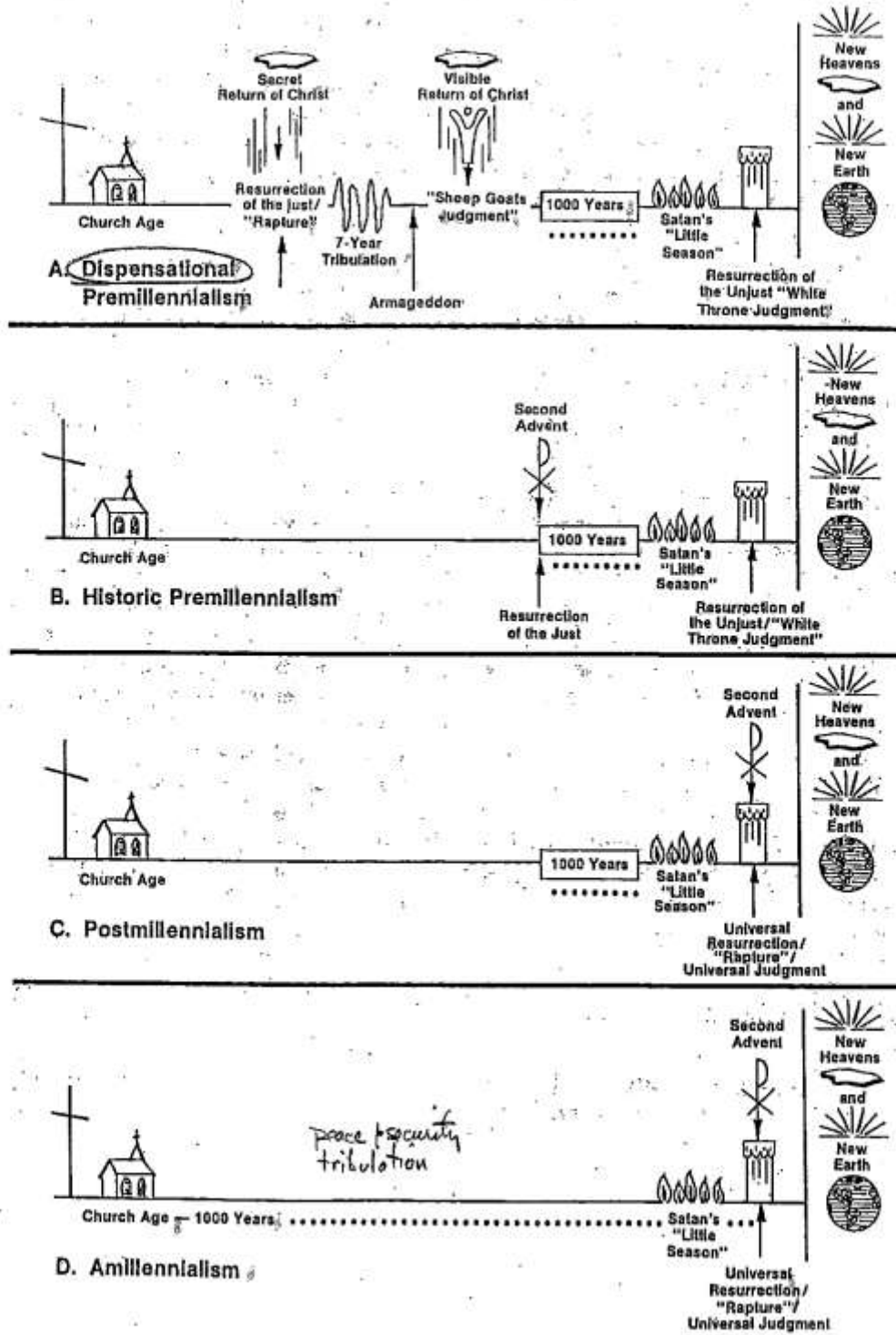
- First of all, there is a pretty good chance we will be confronted with and challenged by beliefs about the future, the end of the world, and the modern nation of Israel that are not a part of our convictions. If we are going to avoid being hopelessly confused, we need to study. Other churches spend a great deal more time stressing "end time" issues than we do, so we probably have some make-up work to do as well.
- Conservative Christians often express appreciation for a lot of things we stand for. Some are clueless about why we believe what we do (or fail to believe what they do). If we want to be able to share helpful information with others, we need to do some homework. And to speak winsomely and confidently, we probably have even more homework to do.

Some personal questions:

1. Have you recently found yourself talking with someone (a neighbor, co-worker, fellow student, etc.) who began to talk about things like a future rapture, tribulation, or how important the nation of Israel is to the US?
2. How confident are you when talking about these things? Do you get the impression that other people know a lot more about these things than you do?
3. Is there a specific topic that most interests you regarding the End Times? Is there a subject that scares you? Or one that give you special comfort?

from LCMS 1989 Study

Diagrams of Millennial Views



The End Times (Biblical, Amillennial Statement of Belief)

The Old Testament to a large degree dealt with the (physical and ethnic) *nation of Israel* under the Sinai (Mosaic) covenant. Those who were part of the outward nation of Israel (and under the Sinaitic covenant) and also trusted the Savior promises of the Abrahamic covenant were the “Israel within Israel” also called the “remnant” or the “faithful” among the nation. The New Testament shows us that the Mosaic or Sinai covenant arrangement endured until “the fullness of time” when the promised Savior came from that nation. In the New Testament the focus is on the *Christian Church*, which is composed of Jews and Gentiles who are believers. They are known as the “Israel of God” regardless of race or nationality. There is no NT emphasis on the land of Israel (Palestine) or the Jewish people as a separate group or political nation in the last days.

- 1. In the Old Testament God made it clear there were really two kinds of Israel that he was dealing with. One was the external nation, the physical descendants of the patriarchs. The other was the “faithful” among the nation, the “remnant” among the people, including non-Jews.**

Exodus 12:37-38,48-49, The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. . . .³⁸ Many other people went up with them. . . . An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD 's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it.⁴⁹ The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you.

Zeph. 3:12-13, But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD.¹³ The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.”

- 2. The Jewish people (external Israel) to a large degree rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah.**

Jn 1:11-12, He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Acts 2:22-23, Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.²³ . . . and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

- 3. The Gospel was preached to both Jew and Gentile, with Gentiles more generally being brought to faith.**

Acts 13:42-46, As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.” Acts 28:28, “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

- 4. All believers, Jews and Gentiles, are the “Israel” of God (and comparable to the “remnant” of Old Testament Israel). This is the New Testament Church or Christian Church.**

Romans 1:16, 2:28-29, 4:11-12, 9:6-8, I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. . . .²⁸ A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit. . . . [Abraham] is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.¹² And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. . . .⁶ For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. . . .⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. . . .

Ephesians 3:6, This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

- 5. The New Testament Church will enjoy blessings and protection from the Lord (peace, safety, satisfaction, joy) during the New Testament times, and the Old Testament prophets had pictured these blessings in graphic terms about land, food, military security, and social harmony.**

Isa. 11:1-6, A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. . . . The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. Mark 10:28-30, ²⁹ "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. John 14:27, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

- 6. The New Testament Church will also have to endure hardship and persecution or tribulation as God's remnant in the world during the New Testament times, and the Old Testament prophets had pictured these afflictions in graphic terms about land, economic, and social unrest.**

Isa. 7:14-25, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. . . . In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also. . . . in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels, there will be only briars and thorns.

Mt. 24:9-14, you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ Many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

- 7. There is no New Testament emphasis on the physical land of Israel or city of Jerusalem that is parallel to the Old Testament promises. The ultimate and primary emphasis is on the spiritual life of faith before the Last Day and the perfect life of glory in heaven.**

Romans 14:17, The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 11:8-16, ⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. . . . ¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 12:22, ²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

Sometimes it is difficult to say if a certain prophecy primarily points to the New Testament age or to "the new heavens and new earth," our eternal home in the Lord's presence. But it is never right to apply them to a future earthly kingdom on this present earth. In the new heavens and new earth the "Israel of God" or the Church will enjoy the complete fulfillment of all promises God has made to his Old and New Testament people.

The End Times – a Dispensational Premillennial View (Dispensational Statement of Belief , in their own words)

"If you want to know what time it is on God's clock, then look at the nation of Israel, for she shall be the center of attention in the fulfillment of Bible prophecies in these last days. Today we live in an age when the entire focus of the world should be upon a tiny strip of land in the Middle East called Israel. Here is a look at what Bible prophecy says about this nation."

1. Disobedience would lead to the nation of Israel being scattered among all nations.

Deut 28:64 "Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other."
History records this being fulfilled in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman Empire and the remaining Jews were scattered among the nations.

2. No rest for their souls while in exile among the nations

Deut 28:65-66 "Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life."
For nearly 2000 years following the destruction in 70AD, the 'wandering Jew' has lived without a homeland, subject to racial prejudice and torment – from the day they were scattered to the day Hitler devised his "final solution to the Jewish problem."

3. God himself would restore the Jews to the land of Israel from all the nations

Jer 16:14-16 However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.

The nation of Israel is to be restored in their land from the nations in which they were scattered. This prophecy became history in 1948 when the United Nations granted a homeland to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel was reborn!

4. The desolate land of Israel would again blossom and be fruitful in the last days.

Zech 7:14 I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate. Isa 27:6 In the days to come, Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill the world with fruit.
God bought the Jewish people back into their land and he has also blessed the land so that they now export flowers and fruit around the world. Satellite photos show the green pastures of the nation of Israel, in sharp contrast with the surrounding desert lands of the Arab nations.

5. God Himself would defend Israel and cause Israel to be mighty in battle

Zech 12:8 On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them.
God is defending Israel in a battle to come in the last days. The Jews have been greatly outnumbered in key Arab-Israeli wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973. Yet Israel exists. God has seen to that.

6. In the end, all nations shall come against Israel.

Zech 14:2 I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped.

Apart from the USA, Israel has few allies. One day she will have no allies, and all nations shall be gathered against her.

7. God Himself will return and fight for Israel against the attacking nations.

Zech 14:3-4 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You may have heard of this battle to come. It's called the battle of Armageddon because of the location where the nations assemble themselves before attacking.

8. The nation of Israel will finally [maybe] recognize that Jesus was the Messiah, whom they crucified!

Zech 12:9-10 On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

Even though the Bible predicted that the Messiah would die, and have His feet and hands pierced, the nation of Israel has, for the last 2000 years, hardened their heart and not believed that Jesus was their Messiah. At the time of the end, they will again look to the one whom they pierced.

9. God will judge the nations depending upon their treatment of the Jewish people.

Joel 1:1-2 In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.

Today we live in an age where we hear all the time about a “Middle-East peace process”. It essentially comes down to “Israel, give up more of your land and we won't send as many suicide bombers into your cities”. It seems everyone wants a slice of Jerusalem for themselves. For this, and the world's repeated and continual abysmal treatment of the Jewish people, the judgment of God will come.

Genesis 12:1-3; 17:7-8

Genesis 12:1-3, 17:7-8 (God's Promises to Abraham and his Seed)

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you . . . I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Is this an end-time prophecy? In what way?

What are key words that need to be defined and understood?

Helpful passages:

Exodus 21:5-6, But if the servant declares, "I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free," then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life [literally "forever"].

Psalms 73:1, Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

Luke 3:8, Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Romans 9:6-8, It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. . . It is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Galatians 3:16, The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

What dispensationalists say: [This is the “fourth dispensation” extending from Abraham to the giving of the Law at Sinai] “God made an unconditional promise to the physical nation of Israel (ethnic Israel) to inherit a specific territory forever. There is a blessing on those people and nations who bless Abraham’s descendants. And a curse rests on those who persecute them . . . God’s giving the land of Palestine to Israel, a truth here announced for the first time, is repeated in nearly 150 passages in the O.T. and even incorporated into the Decalog (Ex 20:12). The covenant is everlasting.”

What amillennialists say: Yes, this is an unconditional promise to Abraham and his “seed” or descendants that culminated in the Messiah. The promise is repeated often in the O.T. but is directed to the believers within the nation of Israel, while those “uncircumcised in heart” are repeatedly told they have forfeited the blessings. “Forever” has the idea of “perpetual” or “for a long time” as well as “eternal” depending on the context. Ultimately, to whom is the promise given? “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). In and through Christ all believers inherit the promises. “It is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Romans 9:8). This is the N.T. church, believers – Jew and Gentile.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 (The “Palestinian Covenant” made with Israel concerning its land)
When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations,² and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today,³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.⁴ Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.⁵ He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.⁶ The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.⁷ The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you.⁸ You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today.⁹ Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers,¹⁰ if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Can we really say that these threats – and promises – have already been fulfilled? Or must they lie somewhere in the future?

Can you identify any New Testament promise that emphasizes how the land of Palestine is the inheritance of God’s people? Is this significant?

Helpful Passages:

Psalm 105:42-45, For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham.

He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy; he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for—that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws. Praise the LORD.

Romans 10:6-8, But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)⁷ or “Who will descend into the deep?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim. [Citing Dt. 30:11-14]

Hebrews 11:8-16, By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God . . .¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

What dispensationalists say: [This is the so-called “Palestinian Covenant”] “It is important to see that the nation has never as yet taken the land under the Abrahamic Covenant, nor has it ever possessed the whole land. . . In the twentieth century the exiled people were restored to their homeland. . . The full gathering will occur at the second coming of Christ.”

What amillennialists say: It is important to note that several OT passages declare that the nation did possess the land as promised to Abraham (See Joshua 21:43-45; 1 Kings 4:20-21; Psalm 105:42-45; Nehemiah 9:7-8). Nehemiah saw the return from the Babylonian exile as fulfillment of the promise (Nehemiah 1:8-11) and the NT never hints of any yet-to-be fulfilled promise regarding the earthly land. Rather the NT stressed that Abraham and his true children (believers) looked beyond the temporary promises to the eternal ones, as in Hebrews 11:8-16. We also note that the verses that come immediately after this section – Deuteronomy 30:11-14 – is used by Paul in Romans 10:6-10, not with reference to any promise of land on earth, but with specific focus on the gospel promise of Christ’s righteousness received through faith. There is simply no need or clear reason to envision a fulfillment in an imagined visible millennial kingdom on earth.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 9:6-7 (Promise of the Messianic King and His Kingdom)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

What does it mean, that Jesus “will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom”?

How would you describe the nature of the Messiah’s rule as well as its duration?

Helpful Passages:

Ephesians 1:18-22, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

John 18:36, Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

What dispensationalists say: This is a Messianic promise and tells us he will be come as a baby who is born to be a ruler. “David’s throne” is an expression as definite, historically, as “Caesar’s throne” and does not allow any “spiritualizing”. The promise of this passage was not fulfilled at the time of Christ’s first coming to earth. The everlasting rule of Messiah awaits the second coming of Christ. This kingdom will be on earth and is to follow divine judgment upon the Gentile world powers. He will defeat the Antichrist who is invading Israel.

What amillennialists say: This is a Messianic promise reminding God’s people he comes as the “son of David” who will rule over God’s people in justice and righteousness forever. The NT identifies this rule as Christ’s rule over God’s people, the church, which has begun prior to his second coming (Luke 1:31-33; Ephesians 1:18-23) and will continue in glory after the resurrection and judgment on the Last Day (1 Corinthians 15:50-56). There is no NT mention of a separate Jewish kingdom or rule of Christ over only Jewish people – but there is repeated mention of his rule over spiritual Israel, that is, believers (Romans 9:6-8). It is also helpful to note that Isaiah 9:1-2, part of this whole prophecy, is cited in Matthew 4:15-16 as fulfilled at Christ’s *first* coming.

Ezekiel 38 – 39

Ezekiel 38-39, (The Lord brings fierce enemies and deliverance against Israel).
The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshek and Tubal; prophesy against him and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal . . . Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you . . . You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. In days to come, Gog, I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me when I am proved holy through you before their eyes . . . On that day I will give Gog a burial place in Israel, in the valley of those who travel east of the Sea. It will block the way of travelers, because Gog and all his hordes will be buried there. So it will be called the Valley of Hamon Gog . . . Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Picturing these events in your mind, how would you describe the event?

Is there anything in the text that indicates a literal – or figurative – meaning?

Helpful passages:

John 16:33, I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

1 Peter 4:12-19, Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed . . . If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Revelation 19:11-21, I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. . . He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is

the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." . . . On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

What dispensationalists say: The destruction of the Antichrist and his armies in the Armageddon campaign (Rev. 19:17-21) is here described. Gog is a prophetic name for the Antichrist. The triumph and restoration of the nation of Israel described here will take place after Christ's second coming, whether before, during, or after the Tribulation period.

What amillennialists say: [*Edward J. Young, regarding Ezekiel 38-39 (Commentary on Ezekiel, pp. 246-247, abridged)*]: When the latter days have come and Israel is again established in her land, when (to use other words) the promised Messiah has appeared and the dwelling of God is among men and the incarnate Son of God has brought us peace through his cross, then ferocious enemies will appear to attempt to destroy Christ's people. But God is God and he will destroy the enemies of his people.

But how is Ezekiel to present these truths? Surely not through New Testament language, for he was an Old Testament prophet. He therefore spoke as an Old Testament prophet and used the thought-forms of his day as vehicles for his truths. He employed imagery for this purpose. How better could he convey the truth of widespread and fierce opposition to the church than to employ the names of contemporary nations known to him, as symbols to represent a great alliance of evil armies? He does precisely that. He uses the figure of a great confederacy of nations of his day that seeks to destroy God's people "on the mountains of Israel." This unholy horde represents the allied forces of those who would oppose the Lord and his redeemed people. They will be ingloriously defeated, however.

Which, however, are the nations Ezekiel uses for his imagery? The answer to this question is difficult. Not all the nations can be identified with certainty and there is serious disagreement among devout Bible students as to the proper identification. But these nations serve merely as symbols to portray the power and might of enemies of God and his people.

The prophecy therefore does not refer to any one particular historical event, nor was it intended to do so. To treat it as though it were mere history written in advance is to betray an ignorance of its true nature. On the other hand, how rich and comforting is this prophecy when properly understood. It reveals clearly to us Christians how strong the opposition is that would overthrow us. But the greatness of our foes only serves to reveal to us again how much greater our God is. "Their rock is not as our Rock" (Dt 32:31).

Amos 9:11-15

Amos 9:11-15 (The restoration of David's dynasty and the wellbeing of Israel)

In that day

*I will restore David's fallen shelter— I will repair its broken walls
and restore its ruins—and will rebuild it as it used to be,
so that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that bear my name,
declares the LORD, who will do these things.*

The days are coming," declares the LORD,

*when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one
treading grapes.*

*New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills,
and I will bring my people Israel back from exile.*

They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.

*They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
they will make gardens and eat their fruit.*

*I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted
from the land I have given them, says the LORD your God.*

Do you recognize this kind of language – language of peace, prosperity, and security – as a fairly common language of Old Testament prophets? Can you mention other examples?

Can you see how millennialists (including dispensationalists) draw their teachings from passages like this one?

What would or should lead us to reject a literal or literalistic understanding of the prophecy?

Helpful passages:

Acts 15:13-19, When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.

¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ " 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,

¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,

even all the Gentiles who bear my name,

says the Lord, who does these things' — ¹⁸ things known from long ago.

¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."

What dispensationalists say: The Lord will rebuild the tabernacle of David and bring back all the remnant of Israel that were scattered among the nations. They will never leave the land again. Peace and prosperity will prevail. The fulfillment of this clear promise obviously lies in the future, when Christ returns to earth to usher in his millennial kingdom.

What amillennialists say: [*Paul E. Eickmann, regarding Amos 9:13-15, in the Peoples Bible Volume, Hosea, Joel, Amos, pp. 269ff.*]:

This prophecy includes three features of the coming days: 1) superabundant harvests; 2) the return of the exiles to their cities, vineyards and gardens; and 3) the everlasting occupation of the land by God's people Israel. . . . What do these words mean? The Lord did bring a remnant of Judah back from captivity in Babylon. Yet the returning Jews enjoyed nothing like the prosperity described in these verses. Neither did they remain in their land forever. . . .

We will find the clue to the understanding of these promises in the New Testament. When the Lord says, "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent," we have seen that he points forward to the coming of David's Son, the Messiah. These verses which begin "The days are coming" are a further description of the New Testament era.

Jesus in the New Testament teaches us that he does not reign over his people on earth as a glorious king in a visible earthly kingdom. He reigns by the gospel in the hearts of those brought to faith by his Word. . . . In Amos's words the Lord is not promising his people earthly houses, abundant grain, and a surplus of wine, but the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. *The prophets picture the future blessings of Christ's reign – the blessings of salvation – in terms of the past blessings enjoyed by the people of Israel in the land of Canaan – houses, grain, fruit and wine.*

The Christian should read Amos 9:13-15 with the understanding firmly in mind that the prophet is describing the blessings we have in the kingdom of Christ. We enjoy God's gifts in abundance beyond imagination: forgiveness of sins, the status of sons and daughters in his family, comfort in every trouble, confidence to pray, the joy of worship, the privilege of serving him, assurance that he will keep us in faith, help against temptation, victory over death, everlasting life.

The Lord promised the blessings of his kingdom to the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel. But the descendants of Israel who receive the blessing are not just the people who have the physical blood of Father Abraham in their veins. Abraham believed the Lord's promises, and "those who believe are children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7), whether or not they are his physical descendants. Paul shows in the New Testament that "those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, the man of faith" (Galatians 3:9). All believers, Jews and Gentiles, are the true Israel of God. . . .

With this understanding of the abundant life which the prophet promises, we can also see what it means to live in the promised land forever. This everlasting occupation of the land must be understood also as an Old Testament picture of the New Testament future. For God's people to be planted in their own land – really his land – forever, never again to be uprooted, means that they will enjoy everlasting life with the Lord. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst" (Revelation 7:16). Through faith Christians look forward to "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." "We will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Matthew 24:1-14, 29-31, 36-39

Matthew 24 (The Olivet Discourse on the Destruction of Jerusalem and the End of the World. Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

4 Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. . .

Immediately after the distress of those days

‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

³⁰ “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. . .

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

What two events is Jesus talking about? What do they have in common?

What are two distinctly different aspects in these events – and how can our understanding of them help us in the Church Militant?

Helpful Passages:

Large sections of Mark 13, Luke 12, 17, and 21 are parallel sections in the NT.

The following chapter, Matthew 25, offers helpful information and encouragements through the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the Talents (Bags of Gold), and the Sheep and Goats description of the final judgment.

What dispensationalists say: This is information that has to do with the NT Church during the NT age and culminating in Christ's final coming after the Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom. But these verses are not to be applied to the nation of Israel (Jews) since they are covered by special distinct promises made during the Old Testament dispensation.

What amillennialists say: This is information that applies to all mankind as well as the NT Church (composed of believing Jews and Gentiles). The way that Jesus cites several OT parallel sections (e.g., Isa 13:10; 34:4; Eze 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; Zep 1:15) sufficiently shows that he is speaking of the same events as did the OT prophets. Revelation 6:12, 13 and 8:12 also confirm that this is End Time information that is directed to everyone.

John 5:24-29

John 5:24- 29 (Jesus clarifies his authority as Son of God [Deity] and Giver of Life)

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

What two different resurrections is Jesus talking about in these verses?

How many physical resurrections will there be in the future?

Helpful passages:

Daniel 12:1-2, At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.

² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

Matthew 25:31-46, When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. . . .

Hebrews 9:26-28, He [Christ] has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

What dispensationalists say: This probably refers to the “White Throne Judgment” following the millennial kingdom and pertains to mainly Gentiles [and perhaps some Jews]. There is not full agreement about this, however. Some believe that the Scriptures reveal three different judgments to come. The first is the judgment of the sheep and the goats or a judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-36). This takes place after the tribulation period but prior to the millennium; its purpose is to determine who will enter the millennial kingdom. The second is a judgment of believers’ works, often referred to as the “judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). At this judgment, Christians will receive degrees of reward for their works or service to God. The third is the great white throne judgment at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:11-15). This is the judgment of unbelievers in which they are judged according to their works and sentenced to everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

What amillennialists say: It is clear that the bodily resurrection is closely linked to the judgment. It is equally clear that there is only one resurrection and judgment that applies to all mankind, believers and unbelievers. All three of the judgments that dispensationalists envision really speak of the same final judgment, not of three separate judgments. The diversity and lack of consensus among dispensationalists stem from the subjective nature of trying to find multiple resurrections and judgments in the Bible. Repeatedly the Bible speaks of only one judgment for all people, not multiple judgments for various portions of mankind. These verses in John 5 highlight that truth most clearly, just as they confirm the deity and authority of Jesus as the Son of Man.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (Encouragement and Reunion at the Resurrection)

¹³ Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

What was the fear or concern that the believers had?

Is it accurate for us to say that we “believe in the Rapture”?

Helpful passages:

Daniel 12:13, As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53, Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

What dispensationalists say: This rapture is different from any rising at Christ's final coming to earth. It (probably) occurs with a secret rather than public return of Christ. It might be before, during, or after the period of Tribulation {that is, a “pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib” event). It has to do with the Church but not the Jews.

What amillennialists say: There is nothing in the Bible that suggests or requires that this “rapture” is anything other than what happens on the Last Day, at Christ's second (and final) coming. Believers who have been raised from the dead, together with living believers who have been transformed, are now caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. That there will be such a “rapture” the Bible clearly teaches. But we often put the word *rapture* between quotation marks in order to distinguish the amillennial conception of the rapture from the dispensationalist view.

Revelation 20:1-10

Revelation 20 (The Thousand Years and Defeat of enemies of God and God's People)

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They 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 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 are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

What are reasons in the text itself that tell us to take the “thousand years” figuratively?

How does the mention of “the first resurrection” and “second resurrection” match what Jesus said in John 5:24-29?

Helpful Passages:

Matthew 24:12-14, Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

John 5:25-29, Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. . . . “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

What dispensationalists say: The words must be taken literally. So Christ will return (at the end of the great tribulation) to institute a thousand-year rule from Jerusalem. Those who were raptured or raised previously will reign with Christ over the millennial population. During this period Jews will be converted on a large scale. After that comes the great white judgment; Satan and his allies will be cast into the lake of fire.

What amillennialists say: This is apocalyptic literature and, in its context, a figurative description of end time realities. The 1,000 years denote the full, complete, and known-to-God NT age, the time we now live in. The souls of believers live and rule with Jesus and await the resurrection of the body. At the end of the age Jesus will return as Judge of all mankind. Satan and his allies will be condemned and banished from the Lord's presence forever.

Revelation 21 – 22

Revelation 21—22 (The new heaven and new earth, the restoration of paradise in glory)
Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’^u or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. . .

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. . .

What do you see as the main blessings or components of the eternal home for believers?

Why do you think the description of heaven draws on so many Old Testament images of things on earth (Jerusalem, river, tree, throne, etc.)?

Helpful Passages:

2 Peter 3:10-13, But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. . . . That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Hebrews 12:22, But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

What dispensationalists say: We mostly agree with historic Christianity that the references are to the eternal state following the Last Day. But the words need to be taken literally in regard to, for example, the city of Jerusalem, the river, tree, and throne.

What amillennialists say: The promises here given to comfort and encourage us picture the new heaven and new earth, using imagery typical of apocalyptic literature and much of biblical prophecy. What the new heavens and new earth will be like in detail we cannot say, but the absence of all consequences of sin and guilt will make it a paradise restored aside from the precise appearance of the eternal state. The centrality of God

Solid Principles of Bible Interpretation Are So Important!

1. **Once we get a handle on the basic systems of thought involved, we must turn to the Bible and determine which system of thought really expresses what the Bible teaches when it presents prophecies about the future.** When we study the Bible prophecies, we soon learn the importance and necessity of using solid principles of Bible interpretation.
2. **What we believe and teach regarding the End Times must be fully compatible with other truths frequently and unmistakably revealed in the Bible.** This is a major part of the *Sola Scriptura* principle.
 - a. The main point is simply this: The same Bible that provides us with the vocabulary on end time events also takes the lead in defining those vocabulary terms. And our responsibility is to use the words in the same way that the Bible does rather than attaching a definition that we come up with on our own.
 - b. A helpful saying is this one: “A text without its context becomes a pretext.” Every Bible statement must be read and understood in its immediate context (the words and paragraph and book surrounding it) and in the wider context of the rest of the Bible. That is a challenging task, one that is never to be taken lightly.
3. **When a teaching or idea that can be drawn from a given passage is shown to be in disagreement with more clear passages in the Bible on the same subject, the idea is to be discarded. For example, here are important, clear and unmistakable passages that show Dispensationalism must be wrong:**

On the nature of Christ’s kingdom:

Luke 17:20-21: Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

John 18:36: Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

On the fact that there will one resurrection:

John 5:28-29: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

On the fact that Christ will return a second time:

Hebrews 9:27-28: Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

4. **There are “some things hard to understand” and these often have to do with End Time events. In humility we take note of that and recognize how easy it is for people to get confused.** The apostle Peter, in an “End Times” chapter, wrote: “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:15-16).

How Can I Understand the Bible? (Brief Introduction to Basic Principles of Bible Study)

Note: Books (*large books!*) are written to give and clarify the basic principles of Bible interpretation, and what is here given is just a sampling. The purpose here is to highlight key issues that surface especially in connection with the study of Israel and the End Times.

- Our attitude influences how we read and understand the Bible. In our circles we assume that the Bible is God’s Word to mankind, a revelation of reliable truth communicated through human speech and language by a loving God. We believe the Bible is its own ultimate authority on what it says and what it means.
- We also believe that God communicates his truths to us in love and that the #1 purpose of God’s Word is to reveal Christ and his saving work to us and to bring us to know the central truths of Law and Gospel, the reality of our sinfulness and God’s salvation for us through Jesus.
- We believe that God moved his chosen writers of Scripture to write clearly and simply, although there are “some things that are hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). We also know that God desires his people to “search the Scriptures” and “examine” them diligently to be sure we grasp what it is telling us.
- We assume that the simple, straightforward meaning of words is to be kept in mind in reading God’s Word. We ask, “What is the plain sense of the words as given? What is the *literal* meaning based on the vocabulary, grammar, and kind of literature being used?”
- To understand the words of the Bible in this simple, plain, literal sense, it is important to read the Bible with these basic rules in mind:
 - *Look at the context!* In what setting and with what intent were the words written? Look at the verses that precede and follow. The wider context is also involved: What is the purpose or aim of the entire book we are reading? What kind of literature is this? (Prose or poetry? Historical narrative or predictive prophecy? Teaching prophecy or apocalyptic prophecy? [Apocalypse is characterized by fantastic imagery])
 - *Take the language at face value!* This also includes recognizing figures of speech common in all languages. Picture language, figurative and symbolic use of words and expressions are not to be ignored. And what if it’s not clear whether the Bible is using words in a figurative sense? Check the context immediate and wider context, and make sure that your chosen understanding is 100% compatible with the rest of the Bible.
 - *Interpret one passage in the light of others!* Use the more clear passages (on the same subject, that is, “parallel passages”) to illuminate the less clear. Obscure or difficult passages dare never be allowed to go against the clear and unmistakable passages. Never let any understanding violate the central and often repeated truths (like the person and work of Christ, justification and sanctification, sin and grace).
 - *Especially concerning Old Testament prophecies, let the New Testament explain their meaning.* This is certainly allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture – and is a good way to learn how the earlier messages were understood and meant to be understood in their original setting.

Why We Believe that Dispensationalism is False

1. All forms of dispensationalism run counter to the Bible truth that there will be only *one* resurrection of the dead and *one* more (the second and final) coming of Jesus Christ. These truths, taught in plain, clear, and non-figurative passages, dare not be contradicted. John 5:28, 29 (speaking of the single resurrection of all mankind) and Hebrews 9:26,28 (enumerating the first and second coming of Christ) are sufficient to establish these basic truths. Furthermore, there is nothing in all of Scripture that necessitates a multiplication of resurrections or future comings of the Savior.
2. Dispensationalism is in disagreement with Luke 17:20-21 and John 18:36 regarding the nature of Christ's kingdom, transforming it into a *materialistic* one based *in this world* rather than a ruling activity that is *already present in and among believers* and which will be expressed perfectly in *the new heavens and new earth*, the home of righteousness.
3. The teaching that God has a separate purpose for Israel and the church is in error. There is simply too much NT evidence to show that this idea is false.
4. Dispensational teaching about the postponement of the kingdom [due to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews at Christ's first coming] is not supported by Scripture. This idea is a fabrication that must be challenged on various levels.
5. Dispensational teaching about the parenthesis church is not supported by Scripture. This also must be rejected.
6. There is no biblical basis for the expectation that people will be brought to salvation after Christ returns.
7. The millennium of the dispensationalists is not the millennium described in Revelation 20. They have imposed a teaching on the chapter rather than drawing a teaching from the chapter.
8. This idea teaches believers to anticipate a mere worldly kingdom instead of heaven.
9. This theory is inconsistent, teaching that at the resurrection the saints will be brought to a lower state of existence, downgraded from heaven to earth.
10. There is a lack of consistency among its advocates; conflicting opinions abound, as each advocate abandons his literalism at one point or another. This should tell everyone that the whole thought system is subjective and based on weak principles of interpretation.

Why We Believe Dispensationalism is Spiritually Dangerous

1. When someone uses a false or inadequate hermeneutic, the proper understanding of so much of the Bible is put at risk. Misunderstandings invariably multiply.
2. Adherents of millennialism and dispensationalism distort the spiritual nature of God's kingdom and downplay the cross that Christians must bear until the end. A definite kind of "triumphalism" sets in that distorts Christian expectations and goals. (To use Lutheran language, this is a good example of a "theology of glory" rather than a "theology of the cross").
3. In the dispensational system of thought almost invariably some additional time of grace is conceived of beyond the New Testament era. Alternate ways of salvation and "means of grace" are envisioned. This downplays the gospel.
4. Revelation other than Scripture supersedes Scripture, particularly with respect to the so-called secret rapture. Believers are encouraged to base ideas on sources other than Scripture alone.
5. If there would be a kingdom that could be measured precisely and marked by a visible return of Christ, the ability to predict the end of the world would result. This thought is contrary to Scripture and contributes to a false sense of security.

So what can we do about this?

- “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:2-5).
- We can keep the unconditional and universal gospel central in what we say and how we say it, also when dealing with End Time subjects.
- We can perhaps do a better job communicating the message of the immanent return of Jesus Christ to raise the dead, judge the world, and make all things new. We can keep the truth simple and clear as we stress the “expected yet unexpected” and “potentially immediate” nature of this blessed event.
- As in other doctrinal debates and discussions, there is great value in our ability to demonstrate a cheerful contentment with Scripture alone coupled with a joy and eagerness to serve the souls we have contact with. There is no substitute for a God-given conviction that God has revealed the truth to us in love and we are capable and called to speak that truth in love to others. This is a fine antidote to defensiveness, loveless argumentation, sarcasm, or indifference toward those caught in error.
- We’re not recommending a “one-size-fits-all” script to follow in our varied conversations with people on this subject (or other similar ones). But we do see the value is using a kind of “progression of thought.”
 - ✓ Express appreciation for any confession of Christ you hear and of a high view of the Bible and its authority (sincerely, heartily, honestly).
 - ✓ Express special thanks for any apparent agreement on the person of Christ and his atoning work, and focus conversation on justification by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.
 - ✓ Then, on the subject of the End Times, ask: Are you aware of other ways to interpret or understand the pertinent prophecies and the so-called “millennial” passages? Have you considered them?
 - ✓ Then courteously and lovingly share your convictions: I believe your system of thought is in conflict with or is incompatible with some clear, easy-to-understand Bible statements. I believe that much of what you believe in this is based on certain assumptions that are not really drawn from the Bible.
 - ✓ Then you may share concerns: I am concerned about the impact of certain attitudes and expectations fostered by dispensationalism. The center stage given to these ideas while the unconditional gospel gets less attention; the false security given for a second chance or alternate route to God; the “triumphal” attitude that may despise Christian cross-bearing; etc.

- ✓ In general, keep stressing what we do share and how blessed we are to have God’s revelation among us. Try hard to avoid word battles or getting lost in debates over details on numbers, dates, places, and variations in millennial and dispensational teachings. (Unless you are well-versed in these).
- ✓ (To repeat what was said earlier) Commit yourself to demonstrating a cheerful contentment with *sola Scriptura* coupled with a joy and eagerness to serve the souls you have contact with. Express that God-given conviction the Lord has revealed the truth to us in love and we are capable of speaking that truth in love to others. Reject approaches that reflect defensiveness, loveless argumentation, sarcasm, or indifference toward those caught in error.
- ✓ Suggest (and perhaps offer to share) suitable reading material. There are a number of books available for study and comparison. A select bibliography is provided on the next page.
- ✓ Amillennial and high-view-of-Scripture commentators often provide helpful comments in their commentaries on the so-called “millennial” or “dispensational” sections of the Old Testament. (**A small sampling of these has been provided in Appendix 2**) Sharing this kind of information with dispensationalists in a loving and patient way is appropriate.

Brief Glossary of Terms Used in End Time Discussions

Antichrist is a name or title meaning one who is seeking to supplant Christ and oppose Christ. The Bible speaks of many antichrists as well as one in particular who will be preeminent (see 1 John 2:18). In church history the title of Antichrist was also given to the “man of lawlessness” or “son of destruction” described as antichristian in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Most amillennialists in history have identified this enemy of Christ and the gospel as the Roman papacy, while millennialism and dispensationalism increasingly see the Antichrist as a future individual, usually a political and economic figure more than a strictly religious one. (See "Futurism")

Dispensationalism (short term for dispensational premillennialism) is a theological system that divides God's dealings with humanity into (usually) seven distinct "dispensations": Innocence (Gen. 1:28-3:6), Conscience or Moral Responsibility (Gen.4:1-8:14), Human Government (Gen. 8:15-11:32), Promise (Gen. 12:1-Ex. 18:27), The Law (Ex. 19:3-Acts 1:26), The Church (Acts 2:1-Revelation 19), and the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20). A **dispensation** is defined as “a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.” In each of these periods, a distinct revelation of God's will is dominant and tests mankind's (or a portion of mankind's) obedience to God.

Eschatology is a word that means “study of the end times or last things.” The focus in eschatological studies is doctrines about death and its aftermath, especially the human soul in its relation to death, the end of the world, judgment, heaven, and hell.

Futurism is a generic term to denote any eschatological position which holds that the majority of eschatological prophecy is to still be fulfilled in the future. Dispensationalism is futuristic for example, though not all futurists are dispensationalists. Futurism began among Roman Catholics as part of the Counter-Reformation but is now popular among many Protestants too.

Hermeneutics is the term for principles and methods of Bible interpretation. Historically, the most common approaches to Bible interpretation have been the allegorical (which sees symbolic language just about everywhere in the Bible text), literal (which takes the words of the text in their ordinary sense but allows for the use of symbolic and poetic language if other parts of the Bible endorse it), and literalistic (which prefers to take the words of the text as they are given and fails to appreciate picture language symbolic use of words to the degree that literal interpreters do). Amillennialism is basically literal while dispensational and millennial thought is literalistic.

Historicism describes a view of eschatology which considers much of eschatological prophecy as describing events that are unfolding over all of the history of the last couple of millennia. For instance, they consider the Roman Catholic Papacy to be the "Antichrist," or the Beast in Revelation. The antichrist is seen not merely a single individual, it was a system of apostasy and persecution that would hold sway during most of the New Testament era. Historically, the majority of Christians, including Lutherans, viewed prophecies in this way.

Idealism does not suppose a specific set of historical fulfillments for eschatological prophecies, but it is seen as symbolic of "the ongoing struggle between good and evil during the church age until Christ returns." For instance, there is no one figure who becomes "the antichrist," but perhaps this figure in Revelation is an allegory for government oppression of Christianity. Many Lutherans view prophecies in this way, or with a combination of Idealism and Historicism.

Israel is a term that can mean different things to different people. In the Old Testament the reference was to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whom God renamed "Israel" in Genesis 32). God also used the term "Israel" to denote the portion of the nation that trusted the Messianic promises (see Psalm 73:1 and Isaiah 59:20 for examples), giving us "an Israel within Israel." In the New Testament the focus is on the spiritual Israel (believers) who share the Messianic faith of the patriarchs (see Romans 4:16-17, 9:6-8 for examples). To amillennialists, the primary focus remains on the "Israel of God" which is identical with the Christian Church. To millennialists and dispensationalists, however, the main focus is on the physical nation of Israel, the Jews, and the land they occupy in the Middle East.

Millennium is a word from the Latin for "1,000" and usually means "a 1,000 year period of time." This phrase is used in Revelation 20:2-5. For millennialists the term refers to a period of time of exactly 1,000 solar years, and during which Christ is expected to establish a physical, visible kingdom on earth. For amillennialists the 1,000-year phrase is symbolic or picture language to denote a full, complete yet limited period of time and, in the context of Revelation 20, refers to the time between Christ's first and second comings (that is, the New Testament age).

Postmillennialism is a form of millennialism that believes that Jesus will return after the millennium, or the anticipated period of 1,000 years in the future of the world's history. However, many postmillennialists do not hold to a literalistic millennium but understand it to be an indefinite but limited long time prior to Christ's return to earth.

The Rapture is a term most commonly used to describe an event in certain systems of Christian eschatology at which God will take true Christians from earth into heaven before other events associated with the end of the world take place. The main proponent of this concept and interpretation was John Nelson Darby. (The word "rapture" comes from the Latin verb "rapiemur" which means "seized, carried off". It was used in the Latin Vulgate (about 405 A.D.) translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17.) Supporters of this doctrine are most commonly found among fundamentalists and, more recently, Evangelicals. Belief in the rapture is particularly associated with the school of biblical interpretation called dispensationalism, which also anticipates a "secret" or "invisible" return of Christ at the time of the rapture. Amillennialists believe the rapture will take place on the Last Day, when Christ returns to earth the second and final time.

Resurrection is a cherished word among all Christians and normally refers to the bodily resurrection that awaits those who die in faith prior to the Last Day and will be raised when Christ returns in glory. Sometimes the Bible may use this language to refer to the spiritual resurrection of conversion or rebirth ("the first resurrection") along with the physical resurrection at the end of the world (the second resurrection") See John 5:24-29 and Revelation 20:5 as good examples of the concept. Also notice how the Bible speaks of two kinds of death as well – a physical death and then an eternal death of separation from God's presence in body and soul (see Revelation 20:6).

The Tribulation in millennial thought is a specific period of time (7 years) prior to the end of the world during which those still on earth will experience severe testing and hardship. During this short period the future Antichrist is said to be revealed. For amillennialists the tribulation that the Christian Church is to expect and experience extends throughout the New Testament age and will increase in severity right before Christ's second and final coming, but is not identified as a seven-year period.

Additional Comments on “Literal” vs. “Literalistic” Interpretation

Premillennialists and dispensationalists place strong emphasis on literal interpretation and pride themselves on taking Scripture just as it is written. We amillennialists also claim to take the Bible “just as it is written” but remind everyone that it was written with much figurative language that should not be ignored. This causes premillennialists to accuse us of “explaining away” or outright rejecting parts of the Bible by not taking it “literally.”

In these matters a distinction between a “literal” and a “literalistic” approach to the Bible is valuable. It is fairly common, for example, to hear dispensationalists or premillennialists say, “Every prophecy focusing to the first advent of Christ was literally fulfilled to the letter in every detail.” We maintain that is simply not true. We maintain that a great deal of the Bible is given in figurative or symbolical language that by no stretch of the imagination can be taken literally. And if it is taken literally, a distortion in meaning results. We sometimes call this a “literalistic” interpretation rather than a “literal” one. We “spiritualize” statements because we regard this as the only way in which their true meaning can be brought out – and in those cases this is the “literal” interpretation of the text. And we quickly point out that the New Testament regularly does this with many Old Testament promises that were fulfilled in connection with Christ's first coming.

Protestant scholar (not Lutheran) Loraine Boettner has commented on this distinction:

To spiritualize certain prophecies or other statements does not mean that we explain them away. Sometimes their true meaning is to be found only in the unseen spiritual world. Premillennialists often materialize and literalize the prophecies to such an extent that they keep them on an earthly level and miss their true and deeper meaning. That is exactly what the Jews did in their interpretation of Messianic prophecy. They looked for literal fulfillments with an earthly kingdom and a political ruler, and the result was that they missed the redemptive element so completely that when the Messiah came they did not recognize Him but instead rejected and crucified Him. The fearful consequences of literalistic interpretation as it related to the first coming should put us on guard against making the same mistake in regard to the second coming. . . . It soon becomes evident that such startling literalism goes a great deal farther than its advocates are willing, or indeed, able to carry it. . . . Since they cannot go through with the literal interpretation of their own millennial passages it becomes evident that their principle of literal interpretation is basically wrong. . . . To take these descriptions literally is to miss their real beauty and their great spiritual import (*Premillennialism in America*, p. 255).

The difference between a “literal” (good) and “literalistic” (bad) understanding of a Bible text is one that should be kept in mind while working through the various biblical texts involved in our study. We're certainly not talking about differing motives on the part of the interpreters – we assume the universal desire to expound God's Word accurately. But we are definitely talking about differing results and the difference between an appropriate and inappropriate approach to the Bible text.