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God's Judgment: How It Works Part 2

By

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“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” John 5:22-30

In previous parts of our study about God's Judgment we saw how God the Father has given all judgmental authority to Jesus Christ – Who is the *Son of God, Son of Man, and Son of David*.

We have seen that Jesus Christ will judge the world – including the nations, Israel, and His Church. If you have not read the first five parts of this study, we invite you to do that now for the Scriptural background to Christ as Judge.

Questions About Future Judgment

The timing and location of those future judgments are often questions among people who discuss such things. We know Jesus Christ will judge the nations, Israel and His Church at a future time, but when will He do that and where?

Let's begin by answering the question about **when**.

When?

God's people have asked this question for thousands of years. When will God judge the wicked? When will God give relief to those who belong to Him? Many of the requests in the Bible had a short view within the lifetime of the person making the request (e.g. God judging enemies by defeating them in battle, God judging the wickedness of those causing problems for His people), many of the requests had a much longer view in mind. When will God execute His final judgment of the wicked and bring perfect peace to the world?

“Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.” Psalm 96:11-13

“For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the Lord, They shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Psalm 37:9-11

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 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 of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. ‘The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. ‘And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.” Isaiah 11:1-10

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, And her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying. ‘No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; They shall not plant and another eat; For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, Nor bring forth children for trouble; For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, And their offspring with them. ‘It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,’ Says the Lord.” Isaiah 65:17-25

God announced His final judgment to Satan in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15), but didn't say *when* that would happen. Jesus died on the Cross and triumphed over Satan almost 2,000 years ago (Colossians 2:14-15), but the final judgment is yet to come (Revelation 20:10). God promised to create “new heavens and a new earth,” but He did not say *when* that would happen.

Jesus' Disciples Ask When

Jesus often spoke about a future time when He would judge the world and His disciples asked when He would do that?

“Now 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?’” Matthew 24:3

Jesus answered their question by listing several things that would happen **prior** to His coming and the end of the age. He began by warning them to “take heed that no one deceives you.” That warning is important for us today because there are so many people trying to deceive God’s people about the Lord’s second coming.

- Many will come in Jesus’ name, saying “I am the Christ” and will deceive many
- You will hear wars and rumors of wars – “See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”
- Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom
- There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places – “All these are the beginning of sorrows”
- Followers of Jesus will be delivered up to tribulation and killed – “you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.
- Many people will be offended and will betray and hate one another
- Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many

- Lawlessness will abound and the love of many will grow cold
- The person who endures to the end will be saved
- The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations – “then the end will come.”
- People will see the ‘abomination of desolation’ the prophet Daniel spoke of “standing in the holy place”
- People in Judea should flee to the mountains when they see that
- People in the field should not go back to their house to get things
- It will be a difficult time for women who are pregnant and nursing
- People should pray that their flight would not be in winter or on the Sabbath
- The tribulation will be greater than any time since the beginning of the world
- No one would be saved unless those days were shortened – “but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened”
- Do not believe anyone who says “Look, here is the Christ!”
- False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, “if possible, even the elect”
- Do not believe people when they say, “Look, He is in the desert” or “Look, He is in the inner rooms”
- The coming of the Son of Man will be “as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west”
- Wherever the carcass is, “there the eagles will be gathered together”
- The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light immediately after the tribulation of those days
- The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken

- “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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”
- The Son of Man will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, “and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”

As to the question of when all of this would happen, Jesus said this to His disciples –

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” Matthew 24:32-35

This is awesome! Jesus knew what was going to happen and what God's people could look for as signs of His coming and the end of the age. So, did Jesus give His disciples the exact day and hour when it would happen?

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son

of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Matthew 24:36-44

Much has been made about why Jesus knew about His coming and the end of the age in such great detail but didn't know the day and hour it would happen. Maybe He isn't God since He didn't know? I find that ridiculous to believe based on all that we know about Jesus from the Scriptures.

I don't think it's a great mystery. God in His infinite wisdom determined that the Son of God would not reveal the exact hour or day. It is part of God's eternal plan that His people would live by and walk by faith in what God says.

Kingdom Timing

Jesus answered His disciples' question about the timing of when Jesus would install His long-promised Kingdom. After walking the disciples through specifics about what would precede His coming, Jesus told them three parables:

- The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants – “the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
Matthew 24:50-51
- The Wise and Foolish Virgins – “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”
Matthew 5:13
- The Talents – “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
Matthew 25:29-30

Let's look at each of the parables in all of the Gospel references to see what we can learn about Christ's return.

The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 24:45-51

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.’ Then Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?’ And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will

make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." Luke 12:35-48

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ‘And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose 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, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. ‘Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ‘Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” Matthew 5:1-13

The Talents

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ‘So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ ‘Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ ‘But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Matthew 25:14-30

"Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' 'And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' 'Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him,

'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' 'And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') 'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.'" Luke 19:11-27

What do we learn from these parables about **when** Jesus will return?

- Jesus will come on a day when many will not be looking for him. Some will think Jesus has delayed His coming at the very time He returns.
- Jesus' coming will be unannounced and quick.
- Jesus will bring His reward for those who are ready. For those who are not ready or did not invest their lives in the service of the Lord, they will suffer great loss.
- Jesus will shut the door of entrance to those who are not ready when He comes. They will not be able to enter at a later time. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth among those who are not ready when Jesus returns.

You may be thinking that these parables don't answer the basic question of **when** Jesus will come again — the exact year, month and day. There is a reason for that. Jesus will reward those who are **always ready** for Him to return.

That's not to say we have no way of knowing when His return is close. Jesus gave His disciples many things to look for as signs that His return was near.

- Many will come in Jesus' name, saying "I am the Christ" and will deceive many
- You will hear wars and rumors of wars – "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."
- Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom
- There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places – "All these are the beginning of sorrows"
- Followers of Jesus will be delivered up to tribulation and killed – "you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."
- Many people will be offended and will betray and hate one another
- Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many
- Lawlessness will abound and the love of many will grow cold
- The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations – "then the end will come."
- People will see the 'abomination of desolation' the prophet Daniel spoke of "standing in the holy place"

- False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, “if possible, even the elect”

But that still doesn't give us a specific year, day and hour when Jesus will return. Is there any way we can even get close to an educated guess? I do believe there's a way we can make an educated guess of when the time of Christ's return is very close.

Questions About Future Judgment

The timing and location of those future judgments are often questions among people who discuss such things. We know Jesus Christ will judge the nations, Israel and His Church at a future time, but when will He do that and where?

We began answering the question about **when** in the last two studies. Let's continue by seeing what is meant by the words "thousand years" found in Revelation 20 –

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they

shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 20:1-15

The Messianic Millennial Reign

The Hebrew word for 'thousand' is *'ă-lā-ṗîm* (אֶלְפַיִם). The Greek word for 'thousand' is *chilia* (χίλια). The Hebrew word is not used in the Old Testament to describe the period of time that Messiah will reign, even though Jesus, angels and prophets were clear that Messiah would have a physical Messianic rule on earth.

When Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she would conceive in her womb and bring forth a Son and call His name Jesus, the angel added this prophecy –

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:32-33

In one of His first sermons, Jesus said that the meek are *blessed*, “for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5) Jesus told His disciples that “when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28) Luke records Jesus as saying, “And I bestow on you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:29-30) When answering His disciples’ question about the sign of His coming and the end of the age, Jesus said,

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” (Matthew 25:31)

After the resurrection, the Lord's disciples asked Him if He would restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. Their question came from an understanding that Jesus would establish a physical Kingdom.

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:68

Here is what two angels said to the Lord's disciples while they watched Jesus ascend from earth to Heaven –

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Acts 1:9-11

The disciples saw Jesus 'physically' ascend to Heaven from earth and the angels said He would "come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." That means Jesus will 'physically' descend from Heaven to earth.

In Zechariah 14 we see the prophecy of the coming 'Day of the Lord' where God will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. Notice the 'physical' description of how and 'where' the Lord will fight "in the day of battle."

"Then the Lord will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south." Zechariah 14:3-4

According to Zechariah's prophecy the Lord will descend from Heaven to stand on the Mount of Olives "which faces Jerusalem on the east." The Lord's 'feet' will stand on the mountain.

In Acts 1 we see that following Jesus' ascension the disciples "returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey" (Acts 1:12).

That fits well with what Luke (the author of Acts) wrote in his Gospel account –

“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.” Luke 24:51-53

The Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke written to the same person (Theophilus). We would expect the two to fit together well and they do. The Mount of Olives faces Jerusalem on the east and Bethany is located nearby on the southeast slope of Mount Olivet. The distance would also fit into the description of “a Sabbath day’s journey.”

In what might be viewed as an undesigned coincidence, Luke used two descriptions of the same location for where Jesus ascended to Heaven from earth. Both serve as confirmations of Zechariah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah standing on the Mount of Olives on the “day of the Lord.” We know ‘where’ Jesus will return to earth to take His ‘stand’ in His battle with the nations gathered in opposition to Israel.

What happens after Jesus returns to the earth to “go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle”? Jesus will begin His earthly reign. Here are some of the highlights from Zechariah 14 of what follows the Lord’s defeat of the nations:

- Living waters will flow from Jerusalem
- The Lord will be King over all the earth
- All the land from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem will be turned into a plain
- Jerusalem will be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses
- Jerusalem will be safely inhabited
- The wealth of all the nations surrounding Israel will be gathered together in great abundance
- Everyone who is left of all the nations which come against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles
- Whichever of the families of the earth that do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King will not receive rain from God
- God will send a plague on Egypt and any other nation that does not come to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles

Zechariah's prophecy makes it clear that the Lord's reign as King will be on earth with Jerusalem as His capital city. The nations of the earth will be expected to make a physical journey every year to Jerusalem to worship the King and keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Any nation that does not obey the King will receive no rain from God and any other plague God determines to use as discipline to bring the nations into obedience. That is a reminder of what John wrote about Jesus' return to earth to "strike the nations" –

“And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.” Revelation 19:15

The prophecies of the Old and New Testament prophets tell the same story. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, will rule and reign on earth from the City of Jerusalem and He will rule the nations with a rod of iron.

In one of the Apostle Peter's early sermons, he told a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem –

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:19-21

The “restoration of all things” is what God spoke to the Jews by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. We don't have time to share all those prophecies in this brief article, but here are several to consider –

- Psalm 2
- Psalm 72
- Isaiah 2
- Isaiah 9
- Isaiah 11
- Isaiah 24

- Isaiah 25
- Isaiah 49
- Isaiah 62
- Isaiah 65
- Jeremiah 23
- Jeremiah 30
- Jeremiah 33
- Ezekiel 34
- Zechariah 8
- Zechariah 9
- Zechariah 14
- Micah 4
- Hosea 3

The Millennium

The Greek word for millennium (*chilia*) is used several times in Revelation 20.

Here are the highlights from Revelation 20 –

- Satan will be bound and cast into a bottomless pit for a thousand years
- Satan not be allowed to deceive the nations until the thousand years are finished
- The souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands, lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years
- Those souls will be part of the first resurrection and will be priests of God and Christ and reign with Him for a thousand years
- The rest of the dead won't live again until the thousand years are finished
- Satan will be released from his prison at the end of the thousand years and will go out to deceive the nations and gather them together to battle against Christ

The battle will not go well for Satan and the people he will lead to fight against Christ and the souls who reigned with the Lord for a thousand years. Fire will come down from God out of Heaven and devour them. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and be tormented day and night forever and ever.

That event leads directly to Christ judging the dead, small and great, according to their works. Death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire and anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

The next event following Christ's judgment will be the new heaven and earth – “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1) – followed by the New Jerusalem “descending out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:10). Those who enter the new Heaven and new earth will reign with Christ “forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

It would appear from Revelation 20 that the ‘thousand years’ is the last event to occur before what is known as the Great White Throne Judgment of Christ and the establishment of the everlasting Kingdom of God in the world to come.

Primary Views About The Millennium

You won't find the word 'millennium' in the Bible. The word comes from the root Latin word '*mille*' – 'a thousand'. The word 'millennium' combines the words '*mille*' and '*annus*' (annual) to mean 'a thousand years' – millennium.

However, the words 'millennium' and 'millennial' have been used by Christians for centuries to describe the thousand-year period we just read about in Revelation 20. Here are three primary views about that thousand years –

1. Pre-Millennialism
2. Post-Millennialism
3. Amillennialism

Pre-Millennialism

Christ will come "in the air" to take (rapture) His Church (living and dead) to Heaven before** He begins His judgment on the people living on earth at the time. That period will last seven years, then Christ will return to earth to establish His one-thousand-year reign.

[** There are three primary views of when the rapture will occur: Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation, Post-Tribulation. We will look at those views later in this series.]

Post-Millennialism

The 'millennium' is an era and not a literal period of time. Christ will reign over the earth through the gradual strengthening of the Gospel. Once the world has become more Christian, Christ will return to the earth to reward Christians and judge the wicked.

Amillennialism

The reign of Christ began with His resurrection from the dead. That's when He won the victory over Satan and the curse of sin and death. Christ is reigning now at the right hand of the Father. Christ will return to the earth when this present age has ended and will reward Christians and judge the wicked.

We now want to look at an extremely important aspect of how to interpret the Book of Revelation to make sure we understand the Holy Spirit's purpose for inspiring John to write it.

Christ's Millennial Reign

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented

day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:1-15

Here's a quick reminder about the biblical concept of Christ's Millennial Reign:

The Hebrew word for 'thousand' is *'ālāpīm* (אַלְפִים). The Greek word for 'thousand' is *chilia* (χίλια). The Hebrew word is not used in the Old Testament to describe the period of time that Messiah will reign, but the Greek word is used in Revelation multiple times.

Here are the highlights –

- Satan will be bound and cast into a bottomless pit for a thousand years
- Satan not be allowed to deceive the nations until the thousand years are finished
- The souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years
- Those souls will be part of the first resurrection and will be priests of God and Christ and reign with Him for a thousand years
- The rest of the dead won't live again until the thousand years are finished
- Satan will be released from his prison at the end of the thousand years and will go out to deceive the nations and gather them together to battle against Christ

The next event we see in Revelation is that fire will come down from God out of Heaven and devour those who will surround the camp of the saints and the 'beloved city' (Jerusalem). Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet were also cast. "And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Once God has dealt with the Satan and the nations gathered against the saints in Jerusalem, we read this in Revelation 21:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

Literal or Allegorical?

Many Christians view Revelation as primarily literal. They interpret the thousand-year reign of Christ in Revelation as a *literal* event that will happen. Other Christians interpret the thousand-year reign of Christ as *allegorical*. They interpret the thousand-year reign of Christ in Revelation 20 as spiritual symbolism.

Allegorical means – “of, relating to, or having the characteristics of allegory; having hidden spiritual meaning that transcends the literal sense of a sacred text.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Literal means – “Taking words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or exaggeration.” (Oxford Dictionary)

So, is there any difference in interpreting Revelation literally or allegorically? Yes, a big difference!

A literal interpretation of Revelation means the reader understands the author's use of words and phrases as literal unless presented in a way intended to be taken symbolically. One of many examples in the New Testament is John 10:9 –

“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

Jesus is God in the flesh – not a literal door. The context shows that Jesus was using the word *door* as an allegory. The context followed an exchange Jesus had with some pharisees about physical and spiritual blindness. Jesus told them that anyone who did not enter the sheepfold “by the door,” but climbs up some other way is “a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the way is the shepherd of the sheep” (John 10:1-2). It was in that context that Jesus said, “I am the door.” It’s clear from usage and context that the word door referred to a spiritual aspect. That’s how literal interpretation approaches text and context.

An allegorical interpretation of Revelation means the reader understands the author’s use of words and phrases as allegory. The reader would view the words and symbols “spiritually” rather than literally. We might say that someone who interprets Scripture allegorically is “spiritualizing” the text.

One of the challenges of interpreting Revelation allegorically is what parts of it, if any, are to be understood literally.

- Was John the Apostle literally on the island of Patmos or was he an allegory?
- Was Jesus Christ literally with John on the island of Patmos or was He an allegory?
- Did Jesus dictate letters to seven literal churches or were the letters and churches allegories?

If we use an allegorical interpretive approach to Revelation, or any portion of Scripture for that matter, how do we know if anything was meant to be taken literally?

Was the story of Jesus' birth to a virgin literal or allegorical? Was the story of Jesus' death on the Cross literal or allegorical? Was the story of Jesus' resurrection literal or allegorical? Did the Holy Spirit come to the Church at Pentecost literally or should we understand that as allegory? Were Peter and Paul literal apostles of Christ or were they allegories?

If we interpret portions of Old and New Testament writings as allegorical, how can we know if anything in the Bible really happened? Many Christians believe the first 11 chapters of Genesis are allegorical as if it didn't really happen in history. Some spiritualize Israel's slavery in Egypt and exodus from Egypt as if it didn't really happen in history.

As strange as it may sound to you, there are people who identify as Christians who believe parts of the life of Jesus are an allegory. How do we defend the historicity of Jesus' life if we believe some or all of the stories about Jesus are allegorical?

How we interpret Revelation, literally or allegorically, will greatly impact our view of how God's judgment works.

We move now to four primary views about the timing of Christ's judgment in Revelation.

Christ's Judgment – Timing

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” REVELATION 20:11-15

Idealist View

The Idealist View of Revelation is also known as the Spiritual View. It uses the allegorical method of interpreting Revelation.

This viewpoint, made popular by Church fathers Origen and Augustine, sees the imagery in Revelation as symbols of the ongoing struggle between good and evil, God and Satan. God and good are victorious in the end. The symbols are tied to spiritual themes rather than historical events.

Preterist View

The Preterist View is based on the meaning of the Latin word *preter*, which means 'past.' A Preterist believes that Christ's prophecies in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21) were fulfilled when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. A Preterist believes the Apostle John wrote Revelation prior to 70 AD and that the seven churches of Asia Minor (chapters 1-3) described spiritual conditions in those churches prior to 70 AD. Chapters 4-22 describe the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD.

There are two types of Preterists. A 'full Preterist' believes all prophecies in Revelation were fulfilled in 70 AD and that we are currently living in the 'new heavens and new earth.' A 'partial Preterist' believes most of the prophecies in Revelation were fulfilled in 70 AD, but that chapters 20-22 point to future events.

Historicist View

The Historicist View is that Revelation is symbolic of the course of history from when John wrote the Book to the end of the age. Imagery in Revelation corresponds to historical events in the history of Europe, including popes and kings and wars. For example, chapters 4-7 symbolize the fall of the Roman Empire and chapters 8-10 symbolize the invasion of the Roman Empire by various foreign enemies. Protestant Historicists believe some of the middle chapters of Revelation show God's judgment on the Catholic Church. Some Historicists believe the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 represent seven periods in the history of the Church.

Futurist View

The Futurist View is that the Olivet Discourse and Revelation chapters 4-22 are future events. A Futurist sees Revelation 1:19 as the guide to interpretation –

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”

- the things which you have seen — Revelation chapter 1
- the things which are — Revelation chapters 2-3
- the things which will take place after this — Revelation 4-19

Futurists interpret Revelation ‘literally’ rather than allegorically (symbolically). They also interpret Old Testament prophecies concerning future times literally and see many of them being fulfilled in Revelation 4-22. God’s judgments are literal and will be poured out on the world in the future.

‘Literal’ interpretation explains meaning based on the normal and customary usage of original languages. Another way of viewing the literal or plain view is — text and context. What is the plain view of the text in its context? That is literal interpretation according to the laws of the language. Literalists believe that figurative and symbolic language that is clearly and plainly meant by the writer as figures and symbols should be interpreted in the way the writer intended. When Jesus said of Himself as the “door of the sheep” (John 10:7), it’s obvious from the text and context that Jesus was

not saying He was a literal door made of wood, stone or metal. He used the term 'door' as a metaphor to the fact that He is the 'way' or 'entrance' to salvation. Also, the word 'sheep' was not describing people as literal members of the animal family known as 'sheep.' Jesus used the word 'sheep' to describe how people are 'like' sheep in many of their characteristics.

Literalists point to early Apostolic and Church fathers as teaching the literal viewpoint of the Olivet Discourse and Revelation (e.g. millennial kingdom, future resurrection and judgment).

My View

Because I came into Christianity from atheism, I did not have a particular view concerning Revelation. I had only recently come to believe that God existed and that the Bible was credible, so what to believe concerning the interpretation of the Book of Revelation was wide open to me.

I heard all four views (Idealist, Preterist, Historicist, Futurist) preached, taught and debated during my early years as a Christian. I read books written by leaders of all four views and asked questions of people who were representative of each view. I attended Bible College and did more studying about the subject there. I appreciate that many great Bible teachers have disagreed about the timing of Christ's judgment. However, after looking at all the evidence, I came to believe that the Futurist View best represented the clear and plain process of studying the Bible 'text and context'.

We move now to the first of three primary views about the thousand-year reign of Christ – known as the Millennium.

Amillennialism

The first view about the thousand-year reign of Christ we'll look at is known as *Amillennialism*. The word – *amillennialism* – tells us something about their belief system. The prefix “a” means “no” or “not.” *Amillennialism* means ‘no millennium.’

Amillennialists believe that the reign of Christ began with His resurrection from the dead. That's when He won the victory over Satan and the curse of sin and death. Christ is reigning now at the right hand of the Father. The thousand-year reign mentioned in Revelation 20 is symbolic of the Church Age. The Church is experiencing the Millennium in this present age. Christ will return to the earth when this present age has ended and will reward Christians and judge the wicked.

It's important to look for a moment at Church history to see when this view of the millennium began and why.

“From the 4th century on, the belief in the millennium declined. There were several reasons for this decline. (1) The persecutions against the church drew to an end with the conversion of Constantine, and the church saw a new day of peace dawning. (2) There was a change in biblical interpretation, from the literal hermeneutic to the allegorical method. The predictions of the millennial kingdom were spiritualized. (3) Many began to interpret the binding of Satan and the resurrection and reign of saints (Rev. 20:1-4) as the personal victory of believers over Satan. In that sense, believers are, in this present life, reigning with

Christ.” LECTURES IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, HENRY CLARENCE THIESSEN, EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1949, P 362

A Donatist theologian by the name of Tyconius lived during the end of the 4th century AD and early part of the 5th century. He wrote *Seven Rules of Interpretation* along with a commentary of Revelation. His view on Revelation was amillennial. He took the figure ‘thousand years’ in Revelation 20 to be symbolic.

“Tyconius and his chief follower Augustine established amillennialism as the reigning eschatological view. Tyconius paved the way for this new understanding by means of his Book of Rules for correctly interpreting the prophecies of Scripture: They will be fulfilled spiritually, not literally as premillennialists imagined. When he applied this method to Revelation 20:1-6, Tyconius focused on a spiritual millennium corresponding to the current church period. Those as pictured as reigning with Christ are believers who overcome sin and live righteously.” SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY/HISTORICAL THEOLOGY BUNDLE, WAYNE GRUDEM AND GREGG ALLISON

“Augustine adopted Tyconius’ interpretation of Revelation 20 and produced the earliest form of amillennial theology. Thus, Augustine, in Book XX of The City of God, was the first to actually spell-out a positive statement of amillennialism, which at the same time produced some incipient principles upon which postmillennialism would later arise.” **THE UNSCRIPTURAL THEOLOGIES OF AMILLENNIALISM AND POSTMILLENNIALISM, THOMAS D. ICE, LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**

“First, Augustine owed a lot to a remarkable African Christian writer named Tyconius, who died around A.D. 400. We know too little about him, but enough to be sure that his writings shaped Augustine’s beliefs.

Second, Augustine increasingly focused on the life of heaven, both now and hereafter. Earthly and historical realities were less and less important to him. True fulfillment lay beyond this world. The idea of a literal Millennium on earth after Christ’s return was, to him, too crass.

Third, Augustine was wrestling with reactions to the sack of the “eternal city” of Rome by the Goths in 410. Too many Christians, in his view, had invested too much spiritual capital in the permanence of the Roman Empire—and hence had been distraught when the city fell. Augustine wanted to cut all secular history down to size. All that mattered was the story of the City of God.

Fourth, Augustine had come to see the whole period between the first coming of Christ and his second coming as a single era—uniform and uninterrupted by any special events initiating new eras in salvation—

history. Thus, he showed remarkably little interest in ‘the Constantinian revolution.’

Augustine believed God’s purposes were always being fulfilled, the gospel was always advancing into ‘the nations at the four corners of the earth.’ The saints who had been spiritually raised to life were always reigning with Christ—and always suffering from demonic hostility.”

AMILLENNIALISM: MILLENNIUM TODAY, CHRISTIAN HISTORY INSTITUTE

Augustine of Hippo lived during the same time period as Tyconius and quoted some of his writings in *De doctrine christina*. Augustine changed his view on the Millennium after becoming disillusioned with the Chiliasts and addressed some of those views in *City of God*, Book XX. Chiliasts believed that Jesus would return to earth to reign physically for a thousand years. Augustine disagreed and believed that the millennium was spiritual in nature, rather than physical and political. Augustine’s amillennial view became dominant in the Church for centuries.

Amillennialists believe we are currently in the ‘millennial’ rule of Christ who rules from Heaven. The one resurrection and judgment will be at the end of history and the beginning of living in eternity.

“A thousand years’ is a figurative, or symbolical, description of the entire age of the new covenant. The number 1,000 is a symbolical number, made up as it is of the number 10. In the Bible, 10 is the number of completeness. The symbolical nature of the thousand year period is in harmony with the symbolical character of the book of Revelation, e.g., the depiction of Satan as a great red dragon (Rev. 12). It is also in harmony with the obviously figurative character of the binding of the spirit, Satan, with a great chain. In addition, Revelation 20 is a vision (‘and I saw,’ vv. 1, 4), not historical observation.

The binding of Satan represents the sovereign control and restraint of the devil by the Lord Jesus that prevents him from deceiving the nations. During the present age, Satan cannot unite the nations under Antichrist. This restraint is related to the ‘withholding’ and ‘letting,’ or restraining, of II Thessalonians 2:6, 7 that assures that the man of sin, ‘that Wicked’ (v. 8), will be revealed in his proper, God-appointed time (v.6).

Throughout this same age, the martyrs – those who were beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus and on account of the Word of God – live and reign in heaven with Christ. The vision of the thrones in Revelation 20:4-6 refers to what theology calls ‘the intermediate state, that is, the life and glory of elect saints at death and until the second coming of Jesus. This is plain.” **A DEFENSE OF (REFORMED) AMILLENNIALISM, PROFESSOR DAVID J. ENGELSMA**

“Advocates of this millennial view maintain that no millennium is to be looked for except that which, it is claimed, is in progress now in this gospel age. This theological interpretation spiritualizes or, rather, gives a mystical meaning to the vast Kingdom promises in the O.T. Zion is construed not to mean Zion but refer to the Christian Church.” UNGER’S BIBLE DICTIONARY, MOODY PRESS, 1957, PP 731-732

Here are some other examples of amillennial views of Revelation –

- 24 elders — 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles symbolize all redeemed
- 144,000 — redeemed on earth protected against God’s wrath
- Great tribulation — persecution faced by Christians in Asia at the end of the 1st century AD and symbolic of tribulation Christians have faced throughout history and continue to face to this day
- 42 months — an indefinite period of pagan desolation
- 2 witnesses — the spread of the Gospel in the 1st century
- Sodom and Egypt — Rome as the seat of the empire
- The Woman — true people of God under the old and new covenants (true Israel)
- 1260 days — an indefinite time
- Sea Beast — Emperor Domitian and personification of the Roman Empire
- 666 — Domitian, imperfection and evil
- Babylon — historical Rome
- Seven Mountains — pagan Rome which was built on seven hills
- Seven Heads — Roman emperors from Augustus to Titus
- Ten Horns — Vassal kings who ruled with Rome’s permission

- One on White Horse — Christ victorious over pagan Rome
- Battle of Armageddon — symbol of power of God's Word over evil
- Binding of Satan — symbol of Christ's resurrection victory of Satan
- Millennium — symbol of time from Christ's first coming to His second coming
- New Jerusalem — God dwelling with His people in the new age after all other end-time events

[Our thanks to *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* for examples.]

Post-Millennialism

The second view about the thousand-year reign of Christ we'll look at is known as *Post-Millennialism*.

Post-Millennialists believe the 'millennium' is an era – a long period of time – not a literal period of time. They believe Christ will reign over the earth through the gradual strengthening of the Gospel message on earth. Once the world has become 'more Christian' (e.g. Christianized), Christ will return to the earth to reward Christians and judge the wicked.

Here are some past and present leaders in the postmillennialist movement and what they've written about it –

"The period is usually called in the Old Testament 'the latter days'. In the prophets of the Old Testament, we often read of things that coming to pass in 'the latter days', and sometimes in 'the last days', surely referring to gospel times. They are called 'the latter days' and 'the last days' because they represent the last period of the series of God's providences on earth, the last period of the great work of redemption, which is, as it were, the sum of God's works of providence, the last dispensation of the covenant of grace on earth.

The whole of this period is sometimes called in Scripture 'the end of the world'. Read the words again of 1 Corinthians 10:11 – 'Now all these

things happened to them as examples; and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.' The apostle, in using this expression 'the end of the ages', means the whole of the gospel day, from the birth of Christ to the Day of Judgement – '... but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' (Hebrews 9:26) This period of time may be called 'the end of the world', for time is used for bringing things to their stated end and purpose. Before this, things were in a kind of preparatory state, but now they are in a finishing state. An end has now come to the former worldly state, which, by degrees, has vanished away, and a spiritual state has begun to be established. In particular, an end was brought to the former state of the Church, which we may call its worldly state, when it was subject to earthly ordinances and the rudiments of the world. The Jewish commonwealth came to an end with the destruction of its city and country. After that, an end was brought to the old pagan Empire in Constantine's time. The next step, yet to come, is the finishing of Satan's visible kingdom in the world with the fall of Antichrist and the calling of the Jews. At last the destruction of the outward frame of the world will come at the conclusion of the Day of Judgement. Heaven and earth began to shake towards dissolution, according to the prophecy of Haggai, before Christ came; so only those things that cannot be shaken will remain. Those things that are to come to an end will terminate, and only those things will remain that are eternal. In the first place, the outward form of Jewish worship came to an end to make way for the establishment of the spiritual worship that

will endure to all eternity – ‘Jesus said to her [the Samaritan woman], ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father ... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him’ (John 4:21,23) Here is one example of the temporary world coming to an end and the eternal world beginning. The outward Temple and city of Jerusalem did come to an end, giving place to the setting up of a spiritual temple and city that will last forever. Another example of the removal of those things that were ready to vanish away, to be overtaken by those things that will remain, is the bringing to an end of the old pagan Empire to make way for the Empire of Christ, which will last to all eternity. After that, at the fall of Antichrist, an end will be put to Satan’s visible kingdom on earth, and the establishing of Christ’s kingdom, which is an eternal kingdom – ‘Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.’ (Daniel 7:27) Here is another example of the ending of the temporary world and the beginning of the eternal one. Then, lastly, the very frame of this corruptible world will come to an end to make way for the Church to dwell in another place, one that will last in eternity.

Because the world is coming to an end by various steps and degrees, the apostle uses the expression not 'the end', but 'the ends of the world' as coming, as though the world has several endings one after another. The gospel dispensation is a finishing state: it is spent in finishing things off that once were in the making, or in abolishing things that had stood before. It is spent, as it were, in summing things up and bringing them to their climax and proper fulfilment. Now, all the old types are fulfilled, and the predictions of all the prophets from the beginning of the world will be fulfilled during this period.

The setting up of the kingdom of Christ is accomplished in four successive events, each one of which is called in Scripture Christ's coming in his kingdom. The first event was Christ's appearance in the wonderful dispensation of providence in the days of the apostles, when he established his kingdom and destroyed her enemies, ending with the destruction of Jerusalem. This is also called Christ's coming in his kingdom – 'Assuredly, I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.' (Matthew 16:28) The second event was what happened at the time of Constantine, with the destruction of the pagan Roman Empire. This may also be represented as Christ's coming, and may be compared with his coming in judgement. (See Revelation 6:9-17) The third event is what will happen at the destruction of the Antichrist. This also is represented as Christ's coming in his kingdom in Daniel chapter 7:2-14, 17-27), and in other places. The fourth event will be and Final

Judgement, which is represented in Scripture by Christ's coming in his kingdom.” **JONATHAN EDWARDS, THE HISTORY OF THE WORK OF REDEMPTION, 1739**

“Some years ago, I edited the eschatological writings of J. Marcellus Kik and published them under the title Eschatology of Victory, perhaps the best title I ever gave a book. The title states the case: postmillennialism is the eschatology of victory. This was the reason for the widespread success of God's Plan For Victory ... For me, there is another (and very personal) advantage in postmillennialism. It takes with total seriousness and a totality of meaning the validity of Romans 8:28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.' My work has not lacked its sometimes ugly and dishonest attacks. To be in the 'winner's circle' makes a great difference in facing these things and ignoring them because the end result is so clear. History, both world history and the personal outcome, is a magnificent success story according to the Bible. We can thus be patient at the rage of the ignorant and of losers.” **ROUSAS JOHN RUSHDOONEY, PREFACE, GOD'S PLAN FOR VICTORY, 1977 & 1997**

“This era of dominion will produce the worldwide transformation of society through the preaching of the gospel and individuals’ widespread positive response to the message of redemption — a continuity of dominion ... Postmillennialists believe that evangelism is the absolute precondition to worldwide, postmillennial, theocratic success ... Thus, postmillennialism seeks the Christianization of the world by the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Evangelism has priority in Christianization.” DR. KENNETH GENTRY, THE NICENE COUNCIL, PP 232, 259

“Postmillennialism maintains that the victorious advance of Christ’s kingdom in this world will take place in terms of the present peaceful and spiritual power of the gospel ... Postmillennialism believes in the gradual growth and success of the kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Church’s preaching of the gospel.” DR. GREG BAHNSEN, VICTORY IN JESUS: THE BRIGHT HOPE OF POSTMILLENNIALISM, COVENANT MEDIA PRESS, 2015, PP 42-43

“First, postmillennialism is that system of eschatology which understands the Messianic kingdom to have been founded upon the earth during the earthly ministry and through the redemptive labors of the Lord Jesus Christ. This establishment of the ‘kingdom of heaven’ was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic expectation. The kingdom which Christ preached and presented was not something other than that expected by the Old Testament saints. In postmillennialism, the

Church becomes the transformed Israel, being called 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).

Second, the fundamental nature of that kingdom is essentially redemptive and spiritual rather than political and corporeal. Although it has implications for the political realm, postmillennialism is not essentially political, competing with temporal nations for governmental rule. Christ rules His kingdom spiritually in and through His people in the world (representation), as well as by His universal providence.

Third, because of the intrinsic power and design of Christ's redemption, His kingdom will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history. This will occur as more and more people are converted to Christ, not by a minority revolt and seizure of political power. '[T]he essential distinctive of postmillennialism is its scripturally derived, sure expectation of gospel prosperity for the church during the present age.'

Fourth, postmillennialism, thus, expects the gradual, developmental expansion of the kingdom of Christ in time and on earth. This expansion will proceed by means of the full-orbed ministry of the Word, fervent and believing prayer, and the consecrated labors of His Spirit-filled people. Christ's personal presence on earth is not needed for the expansion of His kingdom. All of this kingdom expansion will be directed and blessed by the ever-present Christ, Who is now enthroned as King at the right hand of God, ruling and reigning over the earth.

Fifth, postmillennialism confidently anticipates a time in earth history (continuous with the present) in which the very gospel already operative in the world will have won the victory throughout the earth in fulfillment of the Great Commission. 'The thing that distinguishes the biblical postmillennialist, then, from amillennialists and premillennialists is his belief that the Scripture teaches the success of the great commission in this age of the church.' During that time the overwhelming majority of men and nations will be Christianized, righteousness will abound, wars will cease, and prosperity and safety will flourish. Of the postmillennial kingdom at its fullest expression David Brown writes: 'It will be marked by the universal reception of the true religion, and unlimited subjection to the sceptre of Christ.' 'It shall be a time of universal peace.' 'It will be characterised by great temporal prosperity.'" **DR. GARY NORTH, HE SHALL HAVE DOMINION: A POSTMILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY, INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS, 1992, PP 70-72**

There are many more postmillennial leaders we could quote, but the above should give you some sense of what they believe and teach.

Postmillennialism was popular with many Protestants in Europe, England and America in past centuries. However, postmillennialism lost a large part of its following after the Civil War in the United States and after World Wars I & II in Europe, England and other parts of the world. Tens of millions of people died in the wars and aftermath, and many Christians

viewed society as getting worse, not better. Because of that, many Christians moved from postmillennial eschatology to premillennialism.

Pre-Millennialism

Pre-Millennialists believe that Christ will return to earth before setting up His earthly Millennial Kingdom. It is a *literal* view of eschatology (*study of last things* – the final events of world history). Where Christians who hold this view differ is basically on the timing of the *rapture*.

Most Pre-Millennialists believe that Jesus will raise Christians (both alive and deceased) to meet Him “in the air” before setting up His earthly Kingdom. Some Pre-Millennialists believe that will happen before the Tribulation Period (Pre-Trib). Some believe it will happen mid-way into the Tribulation Period (Mid-Trib). Some believe it will happen after the Tribulation Period (Post-Trib) as Christ comes from Heaven to establish His earthly Kingdom. We'll look closely at each of those views during our series.

The Rapture

First, let's look at a central belief of Pre-Millennialists – the *rapture*. The idea of the *rapture* (Latin – *rapturo*) comes from the Apostle Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians. Some church members were confused about how Christ's return and the resurrection would affect their loved ones who had already died. Paul wrote to instruct and comfort them –

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put

on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-58

The words "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 are the English translation of the Greek word ἄρπάζω (*harpazó*). It means "to seize, catch up, snatch away" and is the idea of a sudden and decisive snatching up. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that the catching/snatching up would be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." The words "in a moment" come from the Greek ἐν ἀτόμῳ (*en atomō*) and mean "unable to cut or divide, in an instant, in an indivisible part of time." We get the English word *atom* from the Greek and it was used for something too small to cut or divide. That gives us an idea of the size of something. The size of the *moment* would be so small it could not be divided.

Paul went on to say that the snatching away would be "in the twinkling of an eye." The Greek is ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ (*en rhipē ophthalmou*) and means "any rapid movement, especially of lights or eyes." That gives us an idea of the length of *time* of something.

The twinkle in someone's eyes comes from a light source, which is traveling at 186,282 miles per second. If you are standing close enough to see the twinkle in someone's eyes, you can imagine how fast that would be. The twinkle in someone's eye is believed to be faster than the blink of an eye, which has been measured between 100 and 400 milliseconds ([Harvard Database of Useful Biological Numbers](#)). That's in the range of about a third of a second.

I did an experiment many years ago with a video camera and editing equipment. Video at the time I was doing the experiment (more than 25 years ago) was based on 30 frames per second. Looking at the frame measurement of an eye blinking and the twinkle of an eye was so fast that it was almost not noticeable. However, it was seen. The human eye can detect both a blink and even the faster twinkle. The twinkle is similar to what video editors call a *flash frame*. That means one or two of the 30 frames per second was either black or had a piece of video that did not match the other 28 or 29 frames for that second. An experienced editor can identify that a flash frame occurred, but often has to play the video back very slowly to identify the flash frame and fix it.

Paul's saying that being *caught up* "in the twinkling of an eye" means people who were not *caught up* would notice something had happened, but they wouldn't necessarily know what had happened unless they had video to play back and slow down to view. The idea of being "caught up, snatched up, seized up, snatched away" would mean that a living person would disappear from view at an astounding speed. The Latin word

rapturo (rapture) was used to describe that being *caught up* at a speed of the twinkling of an eye.

Change at the Speed of Light

Pre-Millennialists believe that what happens at the rapture is *change*.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ...”

Paul made clear that the change would be physical and not just spiritual –

“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body ... The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have

borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-38, 42-49

It's important to remember that our resurrected body will be *like* the Resurrected Body of Jesus Christ. We will “bear the image of the heavenly *Man*.” Here are some examples of that *image* (likeness) we will *bear* (wear constantly as a habit) from Jesus' interaction with His disciples after His Resurrection –

“Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, ‘Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.’ And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’ So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your

hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, 'Have you any food here?' So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence." LUKE 24:28-43

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" JOHN 20:19-23

"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'" JOHN 20:27

"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself ... Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish

which you have just caught ... Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast.' Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, 'Who are You?'—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these? ... And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.' JOHN 21:1, 9-10, 12-15, 25

"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." ACTS 1:9-11

Jesus' Resurrected Body was both physical and spiritual.

- Jesus' disciples could touch Him and they could eat with Him.
- Jesus' Resurrected Body had "flesh and bones."
- Jesus had a physical body.
- Jesus ate fish and bread with His disciples.

- Jesus' disciples recognized His physical features as the Man they had followed for years.
- Jesus' disciples saw the scars from His death on the Cross which was also powerful evidence that He was their Lord and Savior who died for their sins and rose for their victory over death.
- Jesus could vanish from their sight and appear in the middle of a room without going through a door or window.
- Jesus was *taken up* (ἐπήρθη – *epērhē* .. lifted up) from earth into the air, which is somewhat similar to the snatching up of Christians described in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 – except at a much slower speed. That was probably so the disciples could watch the event unfold before their eyes.

God will change our bodies to be *like* Christ's Resurrected Body. That change will be from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible, and will give us the ability to travel from earth to be with Christ in the air and be with Him forever. Based on what Jesus did after His Resurrection and what we read in the Book of Revelation, it seems that resurrected Christians will also have bodies with "flesh and bones" and will be able to eat food (e.g. Revelation 2:7, 17; 19:9).

It is amazing to me that God will change our bodies and those of deceased Christians to be all of that in a micro-second of time. It would be amazing if God did that for just one person, but billions of Christians will undergo that change from corruptibility to incorruptibility.

This super-rapid change will be the *resurrection* of Christians who have died and the instantaneous physical change of Christians who are alive at the moment of the rapture. Even though the change will be in a moment (*atomō*), in the twinkling of an eye (*rhipe ophthalmou*), the dead in Christ will rise first.

“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. “

This is a true victory for Christians. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 –

“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on

immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

The words *incorruptible* and *incorruption* come from the Greek word φθορὰ (*phthora*) which means "corruption, decay, deterioration, decomposition." What will happen at the rapture will be that φθορὰ (*that which is corrupt*) will put on ἀφθαρσίαν (*that which is incorruptible*) which means "incorruptibility, indestructibility." The words "put on" are the translation of the Greek word ἐνδύσασθαι (*endusasthai*) which means "to clothe or be clothed with, sinking into a garment." We will be immortal and indestructible.

We can look at a verse earlier in 1 Corinthians 15 to see why –

"And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." 1 CORINTHIANS 15:49

The Greek words translated "borne" and "bear" come from φορέω (*phoreó*) which means "to wear or bear constantly as a habit." The basic difference between the two words is grammatical. The word for "we have borne" (ἐφορέσαμεν) is aorist indicative active. The word for "we shall also bear" (φορέσομεν) is future indicative active. Whereas we have borne the image of the *man of dust* (past), we will bear the image of the *heavenly Man* (future).

The word image is εἰκόνα (*eikona*) and means “likeness, mirror-like representation.” It reflects its source. Our source for *corruption* was the man of dust (Adam). We were “like” him in this life. Our source for *incorruption* is the heavenly Man (Christ). We will be “like” Him.

The Apostle John explained our future “likeness” this way –

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” 1 JOHN 3:2

When Jesus is *revealed* (φανερωθῆ – *phanerōthē* .. make visible, make clear make known), we shall be like (ὅμοιοι – *homoioi* .. resemble, similar to, same as, of equal rank) Him, for we shall see (ὁψόμεθα – *opsometha* .. perceive, attend to, look upon, experience) Him as He is.

Pre-Millennialists view these verses as meaning that Jesus Christ will miraculously raise members of His Body (both alive and deceased) from earth to meet Him in the air and be with Him forever. Christians will become *like* Christ as fast as the speed of light. Only God can do something like that – changing and transporting billions of human beings from earth to meet Jesus Christ in the air and be with Him forever. Hallelujah!

Our Next eBook

We will look at the first of three views of Pre-Millennialism in the next part of our special series **“God’s Judgment: How It Works.”**

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