

Interpreting Biblical Prophecy

**A Seminar – Part 1
Presented by Tim Hegg**



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Table of Contents

Interpreting Biblical Prophecy

Interpreting Biblical Prophecy: Some Essentials	5
Specific Hermeneutical Questions in regard to Prophecy	9
Three Types of Prophecy/Apocalyptic Genre	12
The Fulfillment of Prophecy	14
Warnings About False Prophets & Teachers	15

Understanding Various Methods of Interpreting Prophecy

Allegory, Prophecy, and the Emerging Church	17
The Ekklesia Yeshua Promised to Build.	19
Eschatological Methods	21
Amillennialism	24
Post-Millennialism	26
Historic Premillennialism	28
Dispensational Pre-Millennialism.	29

Interpreting Biblical Prophecy

Some Essentials

Methods for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy

- Biblical Hermeneutics – the starting point
 - defining the Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic
 - how it applies to Prophetic texts
 - the importance of keeping the “big picture” in mind
 - competing hermeneutical systems
- Specific Hermeneutical principles for interpreting Prophecy
 - the purpose of Prophecy
 - using the past to describe the future
 - understanding the Apocalyptic genre

Applying these Methods to Specific Texts

- Sections from Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew, Revelation
- Application to our own lives of faith in Yeshua

Our Goal in This Seminar

- to gain insight into how biblical Prophecy works
- to gain insight and understanding of how to utilize a proper hermeneutic when interpreting biblical Prophecy
- to gain a better understanding of some of the primary Prophetic texts in the Bible

What You Can Expect to Get From this Seminar

- a better understanding of how to interpret biblical Prophecy
- some insights into various prophetic passages of Scripture
- a challenge to grow in your faith and love for God

What You Will NOT Get in this Seminar

- answers to all of your questions about biblical Prophecy
- a “time-chart” of future events
- “hidden secrets” that have never before been known

General Overview

- I. Methods for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy
 - A. Biblical Hermeneutics – the starting point
 - 1. defining the Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic
 - 2. how it applies to Prophetic texts
 - 3. the importance of keeping the “big picture” in mind
 - 4. competing hermeneutical systems
 - B. Specific Hermeneutical principles for interpreting Prophecy
 - 1. the purpose of Prophecy
 - 2. using the past to describe the future
 - 3. important safeguards when interpreting Prophecy
- II. Survey of the Methods used in the History of Prophetic Interpretation
 - A. The Preterist perspective
 - B. The Historicist perspective
 - C. The Futurist perspective
 - D. The Idealist perspective
- III. Survey of Interpretive Methods for Prophecy
 - A. Amillennialism
 - B. Post-Millennialism
 - C. Pre-Millennialism
 - D. Historic Pre-Millennialism
 - E. Dispensational Pre-Millennialism
- IV. Studying the Book of Daniel
 - A. To demonstrate principles of interpreting prophetic texts
 - B. To understand the prophecy of Daniel
 - 1. Daniel is foundational for the study of Revelation
 - 2. Daniel is one of the biblical books written in an apocalyptic style

Interpreting Biblical Prophecy: Some Essentials

- I. Our hermeneutic will determine the outcome of our study on prophecy.
 - A. The Historical–Grammatical Hermeneutic
 - 1. the goal: to establish the author’s meaning
 - 2. the method:
 - a. words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, context carry the author’s meaning
 - b. words gain their meaning from:
 - 1) textual context: grammar, syntax, genre
 - 2) historical context: stage of the language, current events
 - 3) cultural context: idioms, colloquialisms, etc.
 - B. Textual Context: grammar, syntax, genre
 - 1. Genre – the type of literature being studied

Narrative:

Gen 40:13 – “within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office;”

Gen 40:19 – “within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree”

Ex 30:12 – “When you lift up the heads of the sons of Israel....”

[here, “lift up the heads” = “take a census”]

Poetry:

Psalm 3:3 “But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head.”

Apocalyptic:

Zechariah 1:21 I said, “What are these coming to do?” And he said, “These are the horns which have scattered Judah so that no man lifts up his head;

2. Words do not have meaning; Meaning has words!

- Just because different biblical texts use the same words does not necessarily mean they are talking about the same thing.
- The context must determine the meaning of the words in that context and not visa versa

C. Historical Context: current & past events

- Historical events (especially those contemporary with the author) will govern the author’s choice of words, phrases, etc.
- Since the biblical authors proceed on the premise that God is in control of all events in our world, historical events may be foreshadows of coming events.
- This brings up the issue of typology: how do we determine what constitutes a “type” or “foreshadow” and what does not?
 - Do other Scriptures reference it as a type?
 - Are there corresponding terms and/or allusions in the Scriptures that tie the pre-type with its corresponding anti-type?
 - To be a valid type, there must be some valid indication of such in the Scriptures themselves.

D. Examples of Type & Anti-Type: explicit & implicit

- Adam as a type of Yeshua - explicit

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (Rom 5:14)

- Isaac as a type of Yeshua - implicit

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

E. Characteristics of Typology in the Scriptures (taken from Kaiser & Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 104)

- A type must concern itself not with words but with historical facts such as historical persons, events, or institutions.
- A type must show evidence of divine designation in the text.
- A type must show agreement of fundamental principles, patterns, and structures rather than parallels in details.
- A type usually focuses on God’s direction of history.

F. Examples of mistaken types

- Rahab’s scarlet thread is not a type pointing to Yeshua’s death.
- Moses’ smiting the rock does not foreshadow Yeshua’s being beat-

en at His crucifixion.

3. Israel's exile to Babylon for 70 years does not parallel the tribulation that comes upon the world in the last days.

G. Interpreting Type & Anti-Type

1. seek to find the primary factors that connect the type with its anti-type. E.g., Adam and Yeshua as 1st & "last Adam"
 - a. Adam's disobedience resulted in death for his people
 - b. Yeshua's obedience resulted in life for His people
 - c. Primary factor: both Adam and Yeshua are representatives of their people, and their actions directly affect the people they represent.
2. Not every detail of the type will find a correspondence in the anti-type.
 - a. Adam was created; Yeshua was not created
 - b. Adam tried to hide from God; Yeshua is one with God

H. Cultural Context: culture affects language

1. Example: "horn" (קֶרֶן) in Hebrew can refer to the physical horn of an animal, but "horn" is also a symbol for strength or for power.
 - 1) Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation." (1Sam 2:1)
 - 2) It is easy to see, then, how "horn" can be used in prophetic contexts to symbolize the power of a "ruler" or a "king" (as in Dan 7, etc.)
- a. Example: "The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle." (Dan 7:4). Strange combinations of animals were commonly used to portray primary characteristics of a ruler or king: lion = strength to kill; eagle = ruler of the sky

I. The Promise of the Messiah & the Consummation of all things in Him is the central theme of the Bible and thus of Prophecy as well.

1. Notice how Revelation begins: "The revelation of Yeshua Messiah,



The winged lion
at the Gate of Xerxes
at Persepolis,
the capital of the
Persian Empire

which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place...."

- a. "revelation of Yeshua Messiah" (ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) can be understood two ways (objective or subjective gen.)
 - 1) the revelation about Yeshua Messiah (objective)
 - 2) the revelation from Yeshua Messiah (subjective)
- b. we will miss the main message of Revelation unless we see that its central theme is the fulfillment of all things in Yeshua our Messiah!

2. Eph 1:9–10 "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him [Yeshua] with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Messiah, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

3. Thus, the most essential aspect of prophecy is that it points us to how God will bring all things to His appointed purpose in His Son, Yeshua.

4. The Promise theme begins in Gen 3:15 and ends in Rev 22:20–21

- a. Gen 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."
- b. Rev 22:20–21, "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Yeshua. The grace of the Lord Yeshua be with all. Amen."

5. All prophecy in the Bible must therefore be studied with this central theme in mind.

II. Summary: When seeking to interpret prophetic passages of the Scriptures, we use the same hermeneutic as applied to all other texts of Scripture: the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

- A. goal: to determine the author's meaning and intention
- B. method: to decipher the words, sentences, paragraphs, and context by understanding the author's words in line with
 1. grammar, syntax, style, genre = Grammatical
 2. culture, history = Historical
- C. Words gain their meaning from their context.
- D. Scripture itself will identify types & anti-types:
 1. explicit
 2. implicit

Specific Hermeneutical Question in regard to Prophecy

I. Did the Prophets understand the prophecies they wrote?

- A. A common position is that in some cases, the prophets did not understand what they were writing:

Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it. (Dan 8:27)

As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time." (Dan 12:8–9)

- B. Look at the wider context, which gives the interpretation
1. v. 19 – “I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation....”
 2. v. 20 – ram = Media and Persia
 3. v. 21 – shaggy goat = Greece / Alexander + 4 generals
 4. v. 23 – insolent king = Antiochus Epiphanes (1Mac 1:10f)
- C. Daniel understood the vision so well that it made him sick for days!
- D. “... keep the vision secret” (v. 26) requires that he knew it. Hebrew סתם also means “to seal up,” thus, to write the vision and guard it as divinely inspired revelation.
- E. “no one to explain it” (v. 27) וְאִין מְבִין means that no one understood *when* or *how* the vision would be fulfilled in the course of history.
- F. “What will be the outcome?” מָה אַחֲרֵית אֵלָהּ, literally “what will be after these?” Daniel’s question (which receives no answer), is what will happen after the events described in the previous visions.
- G. “concealed and sealed” סְתָמִים וְחֻתָּמִים = “kept and sealed” This gives the sense of “certainty,” not “hiddenness”
- H. Note the use of חתם in Is 8:16 – “Bind up the testimony, seal the Torah among my disciples.”
- II. Summary: Did the Prophets Understand the Prophecies They Wrote?
- A. A common position is that in some cases, the prophets did not understand what they were writing:
 - B. But we have seen that prophecies used to support this position *were generally understood* by the prophet writing them.
 - C. What the prophet may not have known or understood was the *exact time and circumstances* that would bring the prophecy to fulfillment.
 - D. Note 1Pet 1:10–12 in this regard:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what time and what kind of time the Spirit of Messiah within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look. (1Pet 1:10–12)

1. They sought to know when & the circumstances
2. They knew that the prophecies did not pertain to them
3. They knew that the prophecies pertained to us!

- III. Did the Prophets use short-range predictions as the basis for validating longer-range predictions which awaited many years for their fulfillment?
- A. Consider 1Kings 13:1–5

Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. He cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, “O altar, altar, thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by

name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.” Then he gave a sign the same day, saying, “This is the sign which the LORD has spoken, ‘Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.’” Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, “Seize him.” But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. (1Ki 13:1-5)

1. prophecy against the altar of Jeroboam
2. prophecy of the birth of Josiah
3. Jeroboam’s hand withers
4. altar split apart
5. Josiah born nearly 300 years later

B. Daniel 11:29–31, cp. Matt 24:15ff

At the appointed time he will return and come into the South, but this last time it will not turn out the way it did before. For ships of Kittim will come against him; therefore he will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. (Dan 11:29–31)

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) ... For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. (Matt 24:15, 21)

1. Prophecy of Antiochus Epiphanes setting up an idol in the Temple in 167 BCE (cf. 1Macc 1.54, etc.)
2. Prophecy by Yeshua of a future desecration of the Temple, cf. Matt 24:15–21; 2Thess 2:3–4

IV. Were there true prophecies that were not fulfilled?

A. Destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 26:7–14; 29:17–20)

For thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army. He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you. The blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground. Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water. So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. I will make you a bare

rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek 26:7–14)

Now in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare. But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it." Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. And he will carry off her wealth and capture her spoil and seize her plunder; and it will be wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed, because they acted for Me," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek 29:17–20)

- B. Nebuchadnezzar did conquer the mainland city of Tyre after a long siege (in the 570s BCE).
- C. The change of pronouns in the original prophecy indicates a sequence in its fulfillment.
- D. 200 years later after Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great totally conquered Tyre, scrapped the remains of the conquered city, and threw the rubble into the sea to build a causeway to the island to which Tyrians had escaped during Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of the mainland city.

Three Types of Prophecy

- I. Prophecies Unconditionally Fulfilled
 - A. The obligation for fulfillment rests entirely upon God's actions.
 - B. Examples: Noahic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Davidic covenant, New covenant
- II. Prophecies Conditionally Fulfilled
 - A. The prophecy contains an "if" or "unless" component (either explicit or implicit)
 - B. Examples: Lev 26; Deut 28; Jonah 3:4, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."
- III. Prophecies Sequentially Fulfilled
 - A. The prophecy is fulfilled by a sequence of historical events, all of which may not be stated.
 - B. Example: Nebuchadnezzar & conquest of Tyre

The Apocalyptic Genre

- I. Apocalyptic genre in the Scriptures
 - A. prophetic imagery given to describe God's final triumph over evil and the restoration of all things
 - B. Dan 7–12; Zech 1–6; Matt 24–25; Revelation
- II. Characteristics

- A. announced by angels, visions, supernatural imagery
 - B. often incorporates other-world symbolic imagery
 - 1. four-headed beasts
 - 2. seas of blood
 - 3. frog-like spirits
 - C. such imagery is given to firmly imprint the message in the minds of the hearers
 - D. this imagery often has some connection to the cultural context of the author
- III. Interpreting Symbols in Apocalyptic texts
- A. Sometimes the symbols are explained in the context
 - 1. statue = 5 kingdoms, Dan 2
 - 2. great dragon = Satan, Rev 12
 - B. Sometimes the symbols used in the Apocalyptic sections of the Apostolic Scriptures are borrowed from the Tanach. Examples from Revelation:
 - 1. tree of life (2:7, 22:2) – Gen 2:9; 3:24
 - 2. living creatures (4:7–9) – Ezek 1:5–14
 - 3. four horsemen (6:1–8) – Zech 1:8–11
 - C. Often such symbols are left unexplained in the context
 - 1. there may be hints in the immediate context
 - 2. there may be some connection to the writer’s background or culture

Seven Major Events that Form Prophetic Motifs

Creation	New Heavens & Earth Is 65:17; 2Pet 3:13
Life in Paradise	Restoration of Fallen World Rev 2:7; 22:1–2
Flood	Coming Judgment Matt 24:37–39; 2Pet 3:3–7
Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah	God's Method of Judgment Is 1:9–10; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:49–53; Jude 7; Rev 14:10–11; 19:20
Egyptian Bondage	Divine Chastening for Disobedience Hos 8:13, 9:3, 6; 11:5, Amos 4:10–11
The Exodus	Restoration of God's People Is 11:12ff; 12:2 (Song of Moses); Jer 23:7–8; Zech 10:10–11
Wilderness Wanderings	Presence of God with His People Is 4:5–6; 35:6–7; 43:19; Haggai 2:20–23

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

- I. Prophecy is not forecasting the future but the divine miracle of knowledge disclosed by God to His people through His prophets and apostles about what would take place in the future.
- II. Prophecy is not an “educated guess” but a clear and precise description of events already planned out by God in His sovereign, providential control over the universe.
 - A. True prophecy is unique to God because He alone controls the future.
 - B. “new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you” (Is 41:22–23)
 - C. Yeshua disclosed things to His disciples “ahead of time” (Matt 24:25)
 - D. “I am telling you now before it happens” (Jn 13:19)
- III. Therefore, historical fulfillment is the ultimate interpreter of prophecy. When the Prophecy comes to pass, only then are we certain that we have the correct interpretation.
- IV. The fulfillment of Prophecy vindicates the great “I Am,” not which human interpreter is right and which one is wrong.
- V. Biblical Prophecy, then, should be viewed as a unified whole.
 - A. not “multiple fulfillments”
 - B. each event is a “filling up” of the Prophetic revelation
 - C. understanding מלא/קום and πληρώω – “fulfill” in Hebrew & Greek

Fulfillment = Filling up
the prophetic word



Warnings About False Prophets & Teachers

I. Don't believe everything everyone says about the future!

II. Distinguishing true from false prophets:

A. Deut 13:1ff – Accuracy of a prophetic prediction is not enough. True prophecy is given to engender obedience in God's people.

1 If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. 5 "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

B. Deut 18:20–22 – Inaccuracy of a prophetic prediction proves a false prophet. A false prophet is never again to be believed because true prophetic utterance comes from God, and God does not lie.

20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'

22 When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

C. Matt 7:15–20 – False prophets & teachers may look like genuine sheep (they are well disguised). Look for righteous fruit in their lives.

15 Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

III. The character of false prophets & teachers

A. immoral lifestyle: "Like Sodom...like Gomorrah" (Jer 23:13–14)

B. crowd pleasers: "peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14)

C. they make sensational claims to gain a following:

"Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths." (Mic 3:5)

- D. they teach their own ideas as though they were from God:
“Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them...” (Jer 23:32–36)

**Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream,
but let him who has my word
speak my word faithfully.
What has straw in common with wheat?
declares the LORD.**

Jeremiah 23:28

Understanding Various Methods of Interpreting Prophecy

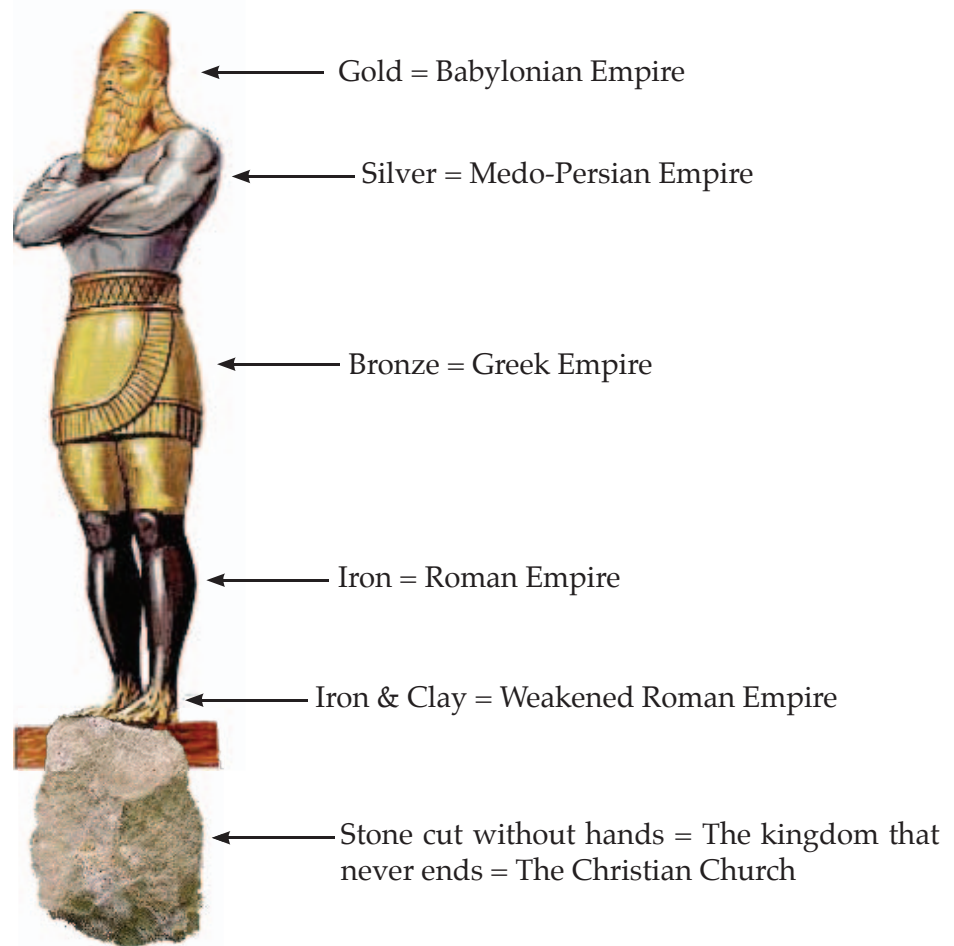
Qumran & Prophetic Exegesis

- I. Many prophetic texts were interpreted in the Dead Sea Scrolls as applying specifically to the Qumran sect
- II. They saw themselves as the subject of a number of prophetic texts:
 - A. Num 24:17–19, “a star shall come forth from Jacob...” is interpreted to be speaking about the Qumran sect itself (1QM 11.6–7)
 - B. In Is 31:8, “Assyria” is interpreted to be the specific enemy of the Qumran sect (1QM 11.11–12)
 - C. “Judah” = Qumran sect; “Menasseh” = Sadducees; “Lion” = Alexander Jannaeus
- III. They used a fluid, allegorical hermeneutic to reinterpret prophecy so that it applied specifically to them.

Allegory, Prophecy & the Emerging Church

- I. The allegorical method of interpretation rests upon the following presuppositions:
 - A. The writers of Scripture did not always know the meaning of what they were writing.
 - B. There exists in the words of Scripture a deeper meaning (*sensus plenior*) which can only be known by those who live after the Scriptures were written.
 - C. God endowed the Christian Church with the ability to find and understand the “deeper sense” because Christians are given the indwelling Spirit Whom those living before Christ did not have.
- II. The Allegorical Method was used by the emerging Christian Church to develop Replacement Theology (also called Supersessionism).
 - A. Definition: Replacement Theology teaches that because Israel rejected Yeshua as Messiah, God abandoned the physical nation of Israel and replaced her with “spiritual Israel,” that is, the Christian Church.
 - B. This resulted in allegorically reinterpreting prophetic texts as applying to the Church rather than to national Israel. For example:
 - 1. The “stone cut without hands” in Dan 2:44 – 45 is the “Kingdom of God” which is interpreted to be the Christian Church. Thus, the Christian Church conquers all other kingdoms and remains forever.

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.” (Daniel 2:44–45)



Note the comments of H. C. Leupold on Daniel 2:44 in which he concludes that the final kingdom is the Kingdom of God, that is, the Christian Church.

“There shall never be a time when the kingdom of God has to bow to the authority of another. It shall, in fact, be a force that will be operative in the overthrow of all the kingdoms that the world produces— “all these kingdoms,” for it “shall crush and bring to an end.” The kingdom of God does that in part by the overthrow of the ancient and entrenched wrongs which are characteristic of all the world powers. Note how the feudal systems, slavery, and caste systems—institutions of the world powers—yield before the Spirit of Christ in His church. To some extent this overthrow is still future, for the final victory of the church coincides with the day of judgment. Then Christ and His saints shall judge and overthrow whatever of sin or wrong remains.” (Leupold, *Commentary on Daniel*, p. 124.)

- I. The allegorical hermeneutic, adopted by the majority of the early Church fathers, gave rise to various methods of interpreting prophetic Scriptures, particularly those found in the Apostolic Scriptures.
- II. The prophecies of the Tanach were interpreted to be speaking about
 - A. the promise of the coming Messiah
 - B. the rise of the Christian Church as the “New Israel”

- III. The prophecies of the Apostolic Scriptures were interpreted to be speaking about
- A. the reign of Messiah in the Christian Church
 - B. the triumph of the Christian Church over all evil
 - C. the return of Messiah, the final judgment, & the eternal vindication of the Church in the world to come (New Heavens & Earth)
- IV. An important and obvious question that confronted the followers of Yeshua following the destruction in 70 CE was this: "How are we to understand the period of time between the ascension of Yeshua and His return?" This question arose from:
- A. The apparent teaching of Yeshua that He would return to set up His kingdom shortly after His ascension: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." (Matt 24:34)
 - B. The apparent teaching of the Apostles that the end was near: "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour." (1Jn 2:18)

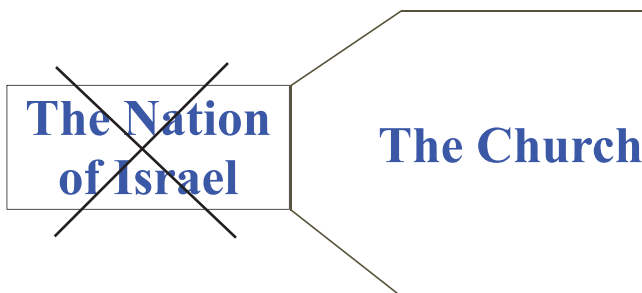
An Essential Issue: How to Define the Ekklesia Yeshua Promised to Build

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My ekklesia; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (Matt 16:18)

Three Possible Answers to this Question:

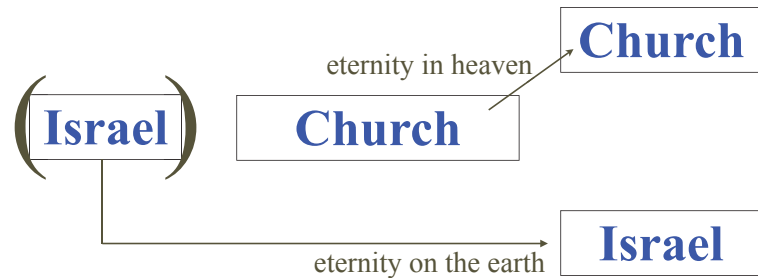
- I. The *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build is something entirely new.
 - A. The Church is eternal; Israel was only temporal.
 - B. God's work is now carried out exclusively in and through the Church.
 - C. Prophecies pertaining to the end-times envision the Church, not Israel (=Replacement Theology)
 - D. Prophecies of regathered and redeemed Israel are allegorically interpreted to pertain to the Church.

Israel is a foreshadow of the Church



Traditional Christian Church – Replacement Theology

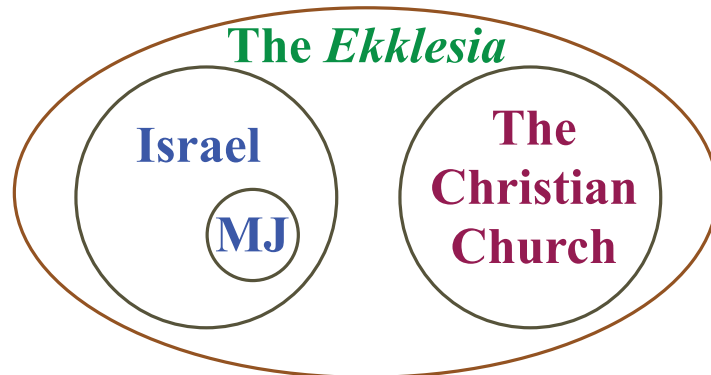
- II. The *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build is new, but only suspends Israel until the end-times (Dispensationalism)
- A. The *ekklesia* begins at Acts 2 and continues until the Rapture
 - B. Jewish people saved during the “Church Age” become part of the Church and leave their place in Israel
 - C. The Church and Israel are always distinct, even in the world to come.
 - D. Prophecies pertaining to Israel do not apply to the Church, and vice versa.



Dispensational Perspective of the *Ekklesia*

- III. The *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build is made up of two distinct and separate entities (this view is called “bi-lateral ecclesiology”)
- A. Israel (represented by the remnant = Messianic Jews)
 - B. The Church (represented by believing Gentiles)
 - C. Most end-times prophecies in the Tanach pertain to Israel

The *Ekklesia* is the body of Messiah comprised of two distinct entities: one Jewish, the other Gentile



Bi-lateral Ecclesiology

- IV. The *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build is the remnant of Israel enlarged by the ingathering of the elect from the nations.
- A. Yeshua promises to continuing to build the remnant of Israel by bringing in the elect of the nations.
 - B. Those gathered from the nations do not form a new assembly (*ekklesia*) but join the *ekklesia* of Israel, which is the remnant or true believers in God and His Messiah.

**The *Ekklesia* is comprised of
the people of God from all ages**



Eschatological Methods

Different interpretations of the book of Revelation have developed four general schools of interpretation in the area of prophecy and eschatology (doctrine of the last things).

I. The Preterist School

- A. Developed in the early 17th Century by a Jesuit friar, Alcazar, to answer the Reformers' identification of "Babylon" (in the book of Revelation) with the Roman Catholic Church.
- B. All biblical prophecy has been fulfilled
- C. Prophecy of a coming tribulation was fulfilled at 70 CE
- D. Final victory already established by Christ
- E. "New heavens and earth" are only symbolic
- F. John's Revelation has no application to the future.
- G. The book of Revelation was divided into two sections:
 - 1. the Church's conflict with Judaism, chs. 1–12
 - 2. the Church's conflict with paganism, chs. 13–19
- H. Partial-Preterists believe in 3 future, prophetic events
 - 1. the return of the Messiah
 - 2. the resurrection
 - 3. the judgment
- I. Strengths of the Preterist view:
 - 1. Emphasizes the historical background of Prophecy
 - 2. Connects John's message with the events taking place within the Roman Empire during the time that he wrote
 - 3. Gives a sane balance for those who might make Revelation a vehicle for all kinds of wild schemes concerning the future

J. Weaknesses of the Preterist view:

1. Ignores the plain sense of Rev 4:1, "... Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."
2. Does not account for the claim of the prophets and the book of Revelation to be a prediction of the future

II. The Historicist School

- A. Views Revelation as a symbolic presentation of the entire course of the history of the Church from the close of the 1st Century to the end of time.
- B. Founded upon the two "end-points" (*termini*) in the book
 1. the day in which John lived (opening of the book)
 2. the establishment of the Holy City (end of the book)
- C. The history presented is continuous, and no point between the two "end-points" can be identified with certainty as making a break in the sequence.
- D. Proponents: Luther, Zwingli, Knox, Bullinger, Sir Isaac Newton, Bickersteth, Elliott, A. B. Simpson, C. H. Spurgeon, Matthew Henry.
- E. Example: the series of trumpets in Rev 8:6–9:21 covers the period from 395 CE – 1453 CE
 1. 1st Trumpet: invasion of the Goths under Alaric
 2. 2nd Trumpet: invasion of Genseric who conquered North Africa
 3. 3rd Trumpet: raid of the Huns under Attila, who devastated central Europe
 4. 4th Trumpet: collapse of the Roman empire under the conquest of Odoacer
 5. 5th Trumpet: locusts = Moslem hordes that poured into the west between the 6th and 8th Centuries
 6. 6th Trumpet: four angels = growth and spread of the Turkish power
- F. Strengths of the Historicist view:
 1. generally seeks to find a literal interpretation of the text of Revelation
 2. generally seeks to take seriously the historical background of Revelation
- G. Weaknesses of the Historicist view:
 1. it does not account for events after the 15th Century. Why would John's Revelation map out specifics only up to the time when the Historicist school first began?
 2. the Historicist view focuses only on the western Roman empire and the growth of the Church there.
 3. the Historicist view must resort to speculative allegory to make the supposed events fit (e.g., "hail and fire" - Rev 8:7 = the Goths because they are from the north)

III. The Futurist School

- A. All of the visions from Rev 4:1 to the end of the book are yet to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the return of the Messiah.
- B. Based upon Rev 1:1, 19; 4:1, which appear to divide the book into two basic sections –

1:1 The Revelation of Yeshua Messiah, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,

1:19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

- C. Thus, the first 3 chapters relate to that which was taking place in John's day (1st Century), while chapters 4:1–22:5 foretell events which would take place after the period in which John lived.
- D. The events described in 4:1–22:5, when viewed from our day, may or may not have taken place yet. But since these events lead up to the final judgment and establishment of the City of God, it is reasonable to view them as still future.
- E. Strengths of the Futurist view
 - 1. generally approaches the text from an Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic
 - 2. recognizes the truly apocalyptic nature of John's Revelation (cp. 16:18)
 - 3. allows for the common prophetic phenomenon by which the prophet foretells far off future events as demonstrated by events in the present or near future
- F. Weaknesses of the Futurist view
 - 1. can neglect the historical background out of which John wrote the Revelation
 - 2. can give rise to strange and speculative interpretations

IV. The Idealist School

- A. Revelation represents the eternal conflict of good and evil which exists in every age.
- B. The symbols in Revelation have no direct connection to historical, social, or political events. They just describe the general conflict of good and evil in the world.
- C. There is no predictive prophecy in Revelation, except for the general prophecy that describes how evil will eventually be overcome by good.
- D. The book of Revelation is therefore interpreted "spiritually," i.e., having to do with the unseen world of good and evil.
- E. Strengths of the Idealist view:
 - 1. emphasizes one aspect of the "big picture." Almost every view of Revelation agrees that the primary purpose is to show how God's goodness triumphs over mankind's wickedness.
 - 2. Idealists (like the Preterists) acknowledge the historical background out of which John wrote Revelation, i.e., the conditions prevailing during Domitian's reign (51–96 CE).
- F. Weaknesses of the Idealist view:
 - 1. denies any predictive aspect of biblical prophecy except in the broadest of terms (good eventually prevails over evil)
 - 2. dismisses the Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic

Revelation 20 & Millennial Views

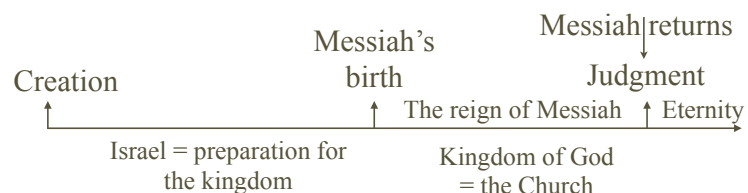
Three different interpretations of Rev 20:1–5 have developed three schools of interpretation in the area of prophecy and eschatology (doctrine of the last things).

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Yeshua and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Messiah for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (Rev 20:1–5)

- I. Overview: These schools of interpretation include
 - A. Amillennialism - Allegorical hermeneutic
 - B. Post-millennialism - Allegorical hermeneutic
 - C. Pre-millennialism - Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic
 1. Historic Pre-millennialism
 2. Dispensational Pre-millennialism
- II. The point of departure is how the millennium (1000 years) is interpreted in Rev 20

Ammillennialism

- I. Amillennialism generally employs the Allegorical method of interpretation. The general tenets of Amillennialism are as follows:
 - A. The name itself means “no millennium,” or more precisely, that the 1000 year reign of Messiah as stated in Rev 20:4 is to be interpreted figuratively as an undefinable long period of time intervening between the appearance of Messiah and the eternal state.
 - B. According to Amillennialism, those within the Church are now experiencing the “millennium” because Messiah is currently reigning (sitting at the right hand of God), expressing His kingly office as head of the Church.

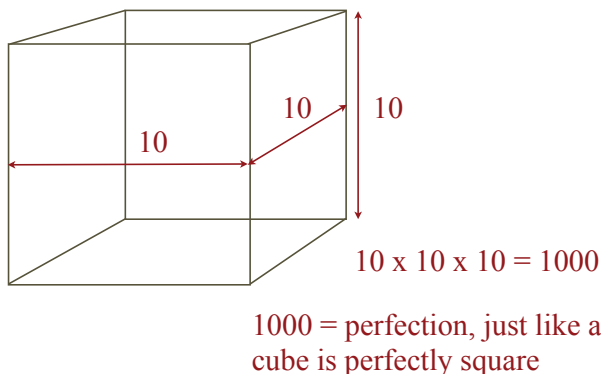


- C. The reign of Christ in the Church is viewed as the ultimate fulfillment of biblical prophecy.
- D. There is not need for a future, renewed Temple, the return of national Israel to the Land, or the physical reign of Messiah upon the earth.
- E. While a rebellion will occur at the end of the age, God's judgment will prove the Church to be victorious and eternity will be ushered in.

- F. Amillennialism became a dominant position within the Christian Church from the 4th Century CE onward.
- G. It can be traced back as far as Augustine (354–430 CE), who used the allegorical method to interpret the 1000 years in Rev 20 as the current reign of Messiah.

Now the thousand years may be understood in two ways, so far as occurs to me: either because these things happen in the sixth thousand of years or sixth millennium (the latter part of which is now passing), as if during the sixth day, which is to be followed by a Sabbath which has no evening, the endless rest of the saints, so that, speaking of a part under the name of the whole, he calls the last part of the millennium — the part, that is, which had yet to expire before the end of the world — a thousand years; or he used the thousand years as an equivalent for the whole duration of this world, employing the number of perfection to mark the fullness of time. For a thousand is the cube of ten. For ten times ten makes a hundred, that is; the square on a plane superficies. But to give this superficies height, and make it a cube, the hundred is again multiplied by ten, which gives a thousand. Besides, if a hundred is sometimes used for totality, as when the Lord said by way of promise to him that left all and followed Him “He shall receive in this world an hundred-fold;” of which the apostle gives, as it were, an explanation when he says, “As having nothing, yet possessing all things,” — for even of old it had been said, The whole world is the wealth of a believer, — with how much greater reason is a thousand put for totality since it is the cube, while the other is only the square? And for the same reason we cannot better interpret the words of the psalm, “He hath been mindful of His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations,” than by understanding it to mean “to all generations.” (Augustine, *The City of God*, xx.7)

- H. Augustine used the illustration of a CUBE to spiritualize the 1000 years in Rev 20:4 to mean “a number representing totality.”



II. Amillennialism: Summary

- A. The “millennium” is the present reign of Messiah over His Church and thus the “kingdom” is now, not future.
- B. Since the coming of Messiah, God’s focus is on the Christian Church and not on the nation of Israel, because the Christian Church has replaced national Israel. Therefore, it is the Church that will fulfill God’s purposes, not the physical nation called Israel.
- C. Since the Church is the true and final “Israel of God,” the prophecies once thought to promise a restoration of the physical people of Israel should now be understood in their “deeper sense” to be speaking about the Christian Church and the manner in which God will bring the fulfillment of all things through the spiritual victories He is bringing to pass through the Church.

III. Theological problems with Amillennialism:

- A. The need to allegorize so many of the prophetic texts of the Tanach gives the strong impression that Amillennialism is not willing to let the Scriptures speak on their own terms.
- B. The regathering of Israel, for instance, is applied by the prophets to the same nation that God brought out of Egypt and later exiled to Assyria and Babylon.

Therefore behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when they will no longer say, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.' Then they will live on their own soil." (Jer 23:7–8)

Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the Torah will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war. (Is 2:2–4)

- C. Ezekiel's description of the Temple (Ezek 40–48) is far too precise and detailed to be taken as an allegory for the Christian Church, as Amillennialism interprets it.
- D. Replacement theology, which stands as a basic tenet of Amillennialism, simply cannot be sustained by an honest reading of the Scriptures. Such a theological position brings into question the very faithfulness and trustworthiness of God Himself.

Post-Millennialism

- I. Post-Millennialism derives its name from the belief that the return of Yeshua comes after the 1000 years mentioned in Rev 20:1–5.
- II. Post-millennialism is very much like Amillennialism:
 - A. It uses the allegorical hermeneutic to interpret the prophecies of the Tanach with a "deeper meaning" (*sensus plenior*), finding their fulfillment in the Christian Church.
 - B. It considers the Christian Church to be the "true, spiritual Israel" that replaces the physical people of Israel after their rejection of Yeshua as the Messiah.
- III. The Post-Millennialism position current in our day began in the 18th Century with Daniel Whitby, a Unitarian commentator. A century earlier, a somewhat different form of Post-millennialism was taught by Thomas Brightman (1562–1607).
- IV. Post-Millennialism differs from Amillennialism in these ways:
 - A. Post-Millennialism teaches that an actual millennium (1000 years) and thus the "kingdom" is yet future. During the time of this kingdom, Satan will be inactive (bound).
 - B. The millennium will be characterized by the triumph of the Gospel and Christianity over all wickedness and idolatrous religions

- C. What brings the millennium is the spread of the Gospel to all people throughout the world, by which the masses are converted to the Christian faith. The Christian Church will triumph completely and will fill the earth with its benevolent rule.

Comparison of Amillennialism & Post-Millennialism



V. Post-Millennialism: General Characteristics & History

- A. Post-millennialism became the dominant eschatology among American Protestantism throughout most of the 19th Century.
- B. The idea that the Gospel would eventually triumph over the whole world and Christianity would reign supreme fueled the desire to send missionaries to every part of the world.
- C. From the close of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 to the opening of the 1st World War in 1914, the concept of Christianity conquering the world seemed to be happening.
- D. Christian nations established colonies and protectorates in Africa and Asia, which opened new doors for the Gospel.
- E. New mission societies were established, sending missionaries into the South Sea Islands, China, India, Africa, and other places.
- F. This all led to an optimism that "the kingdom was coming" as preached from Post-millennial pulpits.
- G. Liberalism at the turn of the century, which had invaded the Christian Church, had also espoused Darwin's theory of evolution.
- H. Evolution was applied to social theory as well, so the "Gospel" began to be viewed as the "social gospel," and the liberal wing of the Church began to teach that social change and progress would cause the goodness of mankind to triumph over evil.
- I. Thus, both evangelicals (who remained firm on the biblical definition of the Gospel) and neo-evangelicals (who emphasized social change) believed that the age of righteousness was about to be ushered into existence.
- J. The 1st World War dealt a critical blow to Post-Millennialism, but following the war, the initiation of the League of Nations brought renewed hope for world peace and allowed the Christian Church to hold onto a Post-millennial perspective.
- K. However, the 2nd World War (1939-1945) dashed those hopes, and Post-millennialism was eventually discarded by most of the Church.

VI. Theological problems with Post-Millennialism

- A. the millennium as spoken of by John in Rev 20 envisions Messiah reigning upon the earth.

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Messiah and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Rev 20:6)

- B. Post-millennialism, however, does not have Yeshua returning until after the 1000 years. So it denies the physical reign of Messiah.
- C. The Scriptures, which exhort believers to anticipate and prepare for the return of the Messiah (James 5:7–8; 2Pet 3:12; Rev 16:15), do not fit well with the Post-millennial viewpoint.
- D. The Scriptures describe evil in the world as growing greater and greater as the last days approach (e.g., Matt 24:6ff), not evil being subdued throughout the world by the Gospel. Also, the birthrate of the world shows that the population of the world is not increasingly turning to faith in Yeshua.
- E. Post-millennialism suffers from the same difficulty as does Amillennialism in that it rests upon Replacement theology, a teaching that simply cannot be sustained from an honest reading of the Scriptures.
- F. The restoration of the physical descendants of Jacob to the Land and to faith in Yeshua is a significant aspect of the eternal promises made to Abraham. To deny these promises brings into question God's faithfulness and His trustworthiness.

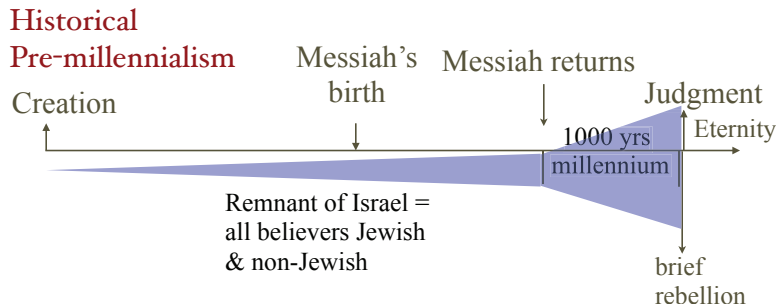
Historic Pre-Millennialism**I. General Description**

- A. Pre-millennialism holds that the Messiah will return before the start of the millennium, and that His return will inaugurate His millennial reign (1000 years) on earth before the last judgment.
- B. As in the previous eschatological perspectives (Amillennialism & Post-millennialism), proponents of Premillennialism have differed in how they understand other prophetic events and the chronology of these events in the last days (eschaton).

II. Other primary tenets of Pre-millennialism are:

- A. An acceptance of the Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic, so that prophetic texts are interpreted literally rather than allegorically.
- B. The belief that the present mission of God's people upon the earth is to preach the Gospel as a witness to the nations, and to gather out of all the nations God's elect.
- C. The understanding that the preaching of the Gospel will not overcome the evil of the world, but that evil will increase until Messiah returns.
- D. The belief that there is a future divine regathering of physical Israel, at which time the physical descendants of Jacob will turn to God in faith and accept Yeshua as the true Messiah.
- E. The belief that in the future millennium the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the priestly service reinstated, though performed as God originally intended, as pointing to the ultimate sacrifice offered in Yeshua's death.

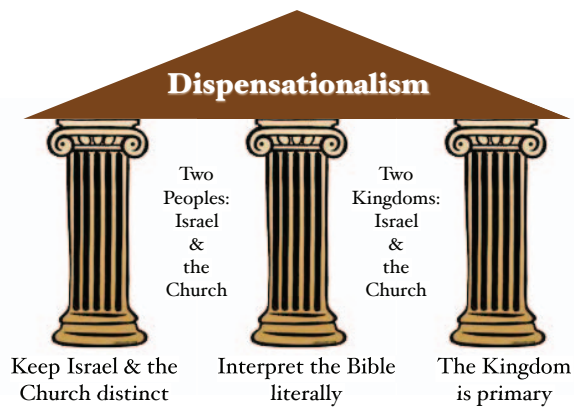
- F. The belief that, though sin continues to be present in the world, the rule of Messiah in His millennial reign will subdue the forces of evil and bring about a cessation of war and an era of peace. This peace will only be interrupted at the end of the millennium when a final rebellion is crushed.



Dispensational Pre-Millennialism

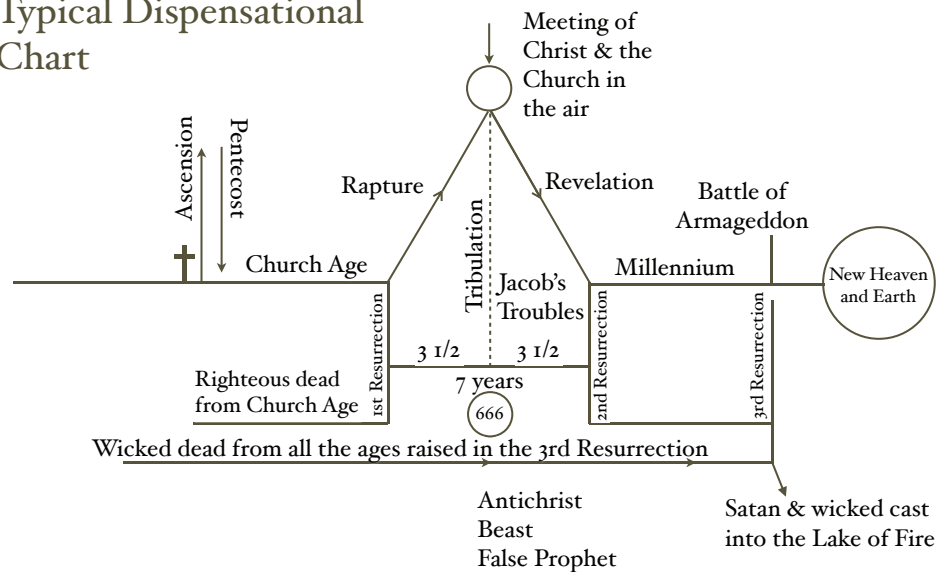
I. Definitions and Distinctives

- A. Dispensationalism is a method of interpretation (hermeneutic) which views the dealings of God with mankind as falling into distinct, well-defined time periods (dispensations).
- B. In each dispensation, God reveals a particular purpose He intends to accomplish in that dispensation, to which men respond either by faith or unbelief.
- C. Dispensationalist themselves are not always in agreement as to the number of dispensations and the exact beginning and end of each dispensation. Generally, dispensationalism divides earth's history into 7 Dispensations:
 1. era of innocence: creation to the fall
 2. era of conscience: Adam to Noah
 3. era of promise: Abraham to Moses
 4. era of law: Moses to Messiah
 5. era of grace: Acts 2 (Shavuot) to the Rapture (Christians are taken out of the world) – also called “the Church age”
 6. era of tribulation: Seven years following the Rapture
 7. era of the millennium: 1000 year reign of Messiah on the earth
- D. Obedience to God (faithfulness) in each era differs depending upon the revelation given in that dispensation.
- E. For instance, God's requirements regarding the “Law” in the dispensation of the Law do not apply in the dispensation of Grace.
- F. All Dispensationalists are Pre-millennial, but not all Pre-millennialists are Dispensationalists. Historic Pre-millennialism does not adhere to dispensationalism.



- II. The primary focus of Dispensationalism is the Kingdom, with salvation being a means by which the Kingdom is realized. The essential pillars of Dispensationalism are:
- III. Because there are two Peoples and two Kingdoms (Israel & the Church), God deals with each in different ways:
- A. Israel = the earthly people
 - B. Church = heavenly people
 - C. Earthly kingdom is for Israel
 - D. Heavenly kingdom is for the Church
 - E. The tribulation is for Israel (thus the Church must be taken out of the world before the tribulation).
 - F. The millennium is for Israel since it takes place upon the earth.
 - G. The new earth is for Israel, the new heaven is for the Church.
 - H. In the era of grace (Church Age), Jewish people become part of the Church. Jewish believers before and after the Church Age belong to Israel.
 1. Thus, all who are saved during the Church Age will dwell forever in heaven
 2. those saved before and after the Church Age will dwell forever upon the earth.

Typical Dispensational Chart



IV. Strengths of Dispensationalism

- A. seeks to take the Scriptures literally
- B. teaches a future for national Israel and therefore stands against Replacement theology
- C. recognizes the importance of emphasizing the Kingdom of God as the fulfillment of God's saving work

V. Weaknesses of Dispensationalism

- A. divides the people of God into two distinct and separate entities (Israel & the Church)
- B. fails to see continuity in the Scriptures and therefore fosters a hermeneutic of discontinuity (OT vs NT)
- C. dismisses the Torah by teaching that it does not apply to the "present dispensation"
- D. forces Scripture to fit into a well-defined eschatological plan (e.g., 3 resurrections)

Conclusion

- I. All of the various methods of interpretation studied have some value to contribute. We do well to recognize, however, that no method will answer all the questions. Biblical prophecy will always contain a measure of mystery that will only be revealed as God brings the history of our world to its ordained conclusion.
- II. If we accept that the Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic is the most trustworthy method of interpretation, then Historical Pre-millennialism offers the most consistent approach to interpreting biblical prophecy.
- III. We must, however, resist the temptation to think that any system of interpreting biblical prophecy will give us answers to all of our questions. We must constantly be reminded that the goal of studying prophecy is:
 - A. to have our faith strengthened in God's sovereign ability to bring about the fulfillment of His plan and purpose
 - B. to strengthen our commitment to live for Him in this present age

