

Our purpose in our study this morning is to understand what Christ has said about Himself in this Christocentric book, The Revelation, not to advocate any millennial interpretation. (an appendix to the sermon is provided presenting the various views.) We will present what we believe are basic truths that any view must hold. We begin with the Seven Churches to set a background for the I am's of Christ.

These churches were definitely historical entities to which John was instructed to write. The most basic interpretive approach is to understand the letters as reflecting realistic, concrete circumstances existent in these churches. Consequently, the primary application is to the respective congregations and the problems they faced in the last half of the first century.

See the pastoral encouragement the Great Shepherd gives His sheep whom He has told will suffer persecution through the ages.

Forget about being left behind, apocalyptic battles, who is the antichrist and a host of other things. Let's look at the heart of what this book is about by seeing what Christ says about himself.

Try to imagine yourself as a second generation Christian in Asia Minor [modern Turkey] and you are a member of a local church in Ephesus, or Smyrna, or Pergamos, or Thyatira, or Sardis, or Philadelphia, or Laodicea.

Jesus was crucified over 65 years ago and you are living under one of the most oppressive and cruel despots that the world has ever known. The emperor is Domitian and his favorite sport is to torture Christians in the most dreadful ways.

Public games are devised around ways to use Christians in brutal fights to the death and with vicious beasts to rip and tear them to death. Instead of oil lanterns Christians are covered with tar and burned.

The Book of Hebrews, which was written during the second generation of Christianity and about 25 years before the Book of Revelation, describes some forms of

persecution that believers suffered.

35 Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Hebrews 11:35-40:

But here you are under threat of torture and death and a messenger brings a letter from the Apostle John to your church. We thought surely that the Apostle John was dead by now. Here you are under a real threat of persecution and the apostles are all gone except for John and he is in exile on Patmos and he can't preach comfort to us in person.

The writings of the apostles are scattered about in letters being circulated among the local churches and you only have a few parts, certainly not a leather-bound volume with chapters and verses and notes in the margin. There aren't even any commentaries at "LifeWay" yet.

Paul and Peter and James and Luke preached that the Lord was going to return and the Lord Himself said we would suffer persecution and that we must "endure to the end" if we are truly saved. [Matthew 10:22]

You live in Asia Minor and you have family members who have already been captured and killed by the soldiers of the Roman Empire and you are probably going to suffer soon.

In the face of persecution how do you keep your hope of Christ alive?

In God's own time the Apostle John is given a vision of the risen Lord. Write to the churches John, and give them the message of victory. As we look at a few verses of what John thru Scripture says about Christ, they will introduce us to a number of things that Christ says about Himself in this great series of Christological statements all

"1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, 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, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-- 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." Revelation 1:1-7, NAS95.

I don't believe that John's contemporaries had much difficulty with understanding what he was writing about. These things were to SHOW them what would soon take place. They had already heard or known of the persecutions that could come from Jesus and the Apostles teaching. This was good news to any believer that all the promises that are in Christ for us are yes as Paul wrote:

"20 For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us." 2 Corinthians 1:20, NAS95.

In verse 5, Christ is called the faithful witness: this is synonymous with the Amen of Rev. 3:14.

"14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this." Revelation 3:14, NAS95.

He is also the firstborn of the dead: the first resurrected man. Lazarus was resuscitated. He would die again. John is stating crucial doctrine that has been fundamental to the church, even as Paul wrote in 1 Cor.15. and as Peter would say:

"we are born again to a living hope." "3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a

living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," 1 Peter 1:3, NAS95.

The resurrection is a pledge of our being with Christ for all eternity if we are His.

As the ruler of the kings of the earth: He is sovereign ruler over all other rulers. King of kings and Lord of Lords

The one who loves and redeems: Because of his love and through the blood of Christ, He has brought His people out from the bondage of their sin. Speaking to an audience of Jews and Gentiles, for the Jews this could ring true as a deliverance idea - Moses having been the first deliverer only in a physical sense but Christ is the true and ultimate deliverer of His true people spiritually. Gentiles would also have understood allusions to these things in Apostolic teaching because the Redemptive History as they understood it came from OT teaching. Luke 24:27, reveals the Christ that the apostles would have taught the Gentiles as well as what they witnessed personally.

By this redemption His people are made a kingdom of priests so fulfilling Ex.19:6

" and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." Exodus 19:6, NAS95.

This never could have occurred under the Old Covenant. Also the concept of God as Father is practically unknown in Old Covenant terms but it is a key concept under the New Covenant as revealed by Christ. Yet in the Revelation, the Father is not referred to as such for Christ's own but to stress the unique relationship that Christ has with the Father.

All He spoke of Himself is true. He was faithful as a witness to the will and truth of the Father in His life. Remember, "I am the way the truth and the life."

Beginning with vs 8, we have more I Am sayings of Christ in this Christological book.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" There is no stronger statement of the deity of Jesus Christ found anywhere in the New Testament. This is the first of seven such declarations

about Jesus Christ in the Book of Revelation pointing to the fullness and perfection of the divine name. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet indicating that not only is Jesus the beginning and the end, he is also everything in between. This Alpha and the Omega is the Lord God who is now testifying through this vision. Jesus is the one who was, who is, and who is to come. He is the Almighty.

We want to see this declaration against the background of several important Old Testament texts. In Exodus 3:14 God reveals his divine name, I AM. In Isaiah 48:12, the Lord declares, "I am he; I am the first and the last." Throughout this section of Isaiah's prophecy, YHWH demonstrates his superiority over the idols of the nations, a point which would not be lost to John's readers suffering persecution at the hands of a pagan empire known for calling its political ruler (Caesar) a deity, the very height of human idolatry. In this context, we can see John's declaration as a statement that Jesus is God and that he will come again to establish in its fullness that kingdom of which Israel's prophets had spoken and which Jesus inaugurated at his first coming. Jesus will crush all idols and those who worship them.

I am Alpha and Omega is emphasizing that Jesus is the beginning and the end of Redemptive History. The real purpose of history is redemptive in nature. Christ is the priority of all Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. We could say that the purpose of Scripture is to glorify God and Scripture's priority is Jesus Christ. It is really His-story.

This is what it says in Isaiah 41:4:

"4 "Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.'" Isaiah 41:4, NAS95.

I always live-have lived through all the past, and will live through all which is to come- and therefore I can accomplish all my promises, and execute all my purposes.

Brethren, as we understand the full weight of these words, I Am, we need to learn how to rest in these great promise of our Christ- He does what He does because of

who He is.

The Almighty: He has created all things and holds all things together, the Sovereign from first to last who holds control over all things from the past, the present and the future.

vs. 12-16 -we see a visionary image that is reflecting OT imagery as well from Daniel and Ezekiel. Only the picture as Daniel and Ezekiel saw it is now fulfilled. Jesus is identified as the one these images or pictures spoke of.

In light of Christ they can now be understood.

He is the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9 and the powerful angel of Daniel 10:5-6.

He is the glory of heaven and therefore shares the likeness of God.

As a son of man v. 13, we can refer to Dan. 7:13

"13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him." Daniel 7:13, NAS95.

The kingdom of the world is given to Him. He represents God and his people.

The living One - v18: the first and the last came and died and rose again. As the living one He holds power over death and the realm of the dead and is the only one who can offer life, true life and eternal life.

Next we go to Rev. 2:23:

Re 2:23* 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

Or I am the omniscient God; who will be known by inflicting punishment on the unrighteousness; when their hidden things of darkness will be brought to light, and exposed by him; and they shall receive the righteous reward of their evil practices, which they have covered over with deceptive pretences of religion and holiness, and a zeal for God and his glory, when they only wanted to have their own desires fulfilled by

gratifying their lusts, and securing their worldly interests, and amassing riches and honors to themselves.

He also shows His impartial justice, in giving every one according to his work, that just holding to the name of Christian should be no protection, their churches should be no sanctuaries for sin and sinners.

Rev 21:5:

Re 21:5* And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

This which is not the renovation of persons at conversion, when a new heart and spirit are given, and men are made new creatures in Christ; this is the work of the Spirit, and which is done daily, and is not peculiar to any particular period of time.

This is not another New Covenant, there is only one and that is Christ Himself. This is not a new way for that is Christ Himself. This is the making of the new heaven, and the new earth, which Christ ascribes to himself and of his forming his church anew, making it a new Jerusalem, bringing new glories upon his people, both in soul and body, and so presenting them to himself a glorious church; and of the new administration of his kingdom in a very singular and glorious manner; so that it is completed with a new people, a new habitation, and a new manner of ruling over them; all which is his own doing, and is wonderful and certain, therefore a "behold" is prefixed to it; see Isa 43:19. The Jews had a saying, that the holy blessed God will make ten things new in the future state, or world to come and Revelation certainly confirms this.

The first is, he will enlighten the world; (See Re 21:11,23) the second is, he will bring living water out of Jerusalem; (see Re 21:6) the third is, he will make trees to bring forth their fruit every month; (see Re 22:2) and the fourth is, all the waste places shall be built, even Sodom and Gomorrha; the fifth is, Jerusalem shall be built with sapphire stone; (see Re 21:19) the sixth is, the cow and the bear shall feed; the seventh is, a covenant shall be made between Israel, and the beasts, fowls, and creeping things; the

eighth is, there shall be no more weeping and howling in the world; the ninth is, there shall be no more death in the world; the tenth is, there shall no more be sighing, and groaning, and sorrow in the world; see Re 21:4.

Re 21:6* Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

The end of all things is come; it is all over with the first heaven and earth; these are no more, and the new heaven and earth are finished: there seems to be an allusion to the old creation, he spoke, and it was done, Ps 33:9. The whole election of grace is completed; every individual vessel of mercy is called by grace; all the saints are brought with Christ, and their bodies raised, and living saints changed, and all together are as a bride prepared for her husband; and the nuptials are now solemnized; all the promises and prophecies relating to the glorious state of the church are now fulfilled; the mystery of God, spoken by his servants, is finished; the kingdom of Christ is complete, and all other kingdoms are destroyed; the day of redemption is come; the salvation of the saints is perfect; what was finished on the cross, by way of impetration, is now done as to application; all are saved with an everlasting salvation.

I am Alpha and Omega, reiterated here as in 1:8, speaks of the beginning and the end; which are expressive of the primacy, perfection, and eternity of Christ; of his being the sum and substance, the first cause and last end of all things, relating both to the old and new world, to things temporal and spiritual.

For the thirsty he gives of the fountain of the water of life freely; he that is thirsty is one that is so not in a natural, much less in a sinful, but in a spiritual sense; who having thirsted after Christ, and salvation by him; after pardon of sin, and a justifying righteousness; after communion with Christ, and conformity to him, and a greater degree of knowledge of him; and seeking the glories of his kingdom, and the blessedness of a future state: to these Christ promises to give such large measures of grace and glory, and in such abundance, as will continue to refresh and delight, and as may be compared to a fountain of living water, namely, for refreshment, abundance,

and continuance; and all this he will give "freely", without money, and without price; for as pardon, and righteousness, and the whole of salvation, are all of free grace, so are all the enjoyments of the kingdom state, the riches, honors, and glories of it, and eternal life itself; also plentifully, and in great abundance.

Re 22:16* "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Jesus final I am says that John, A Jewish disciple who understood the greatness of the prophetic fulfillment that is mentioned here, will testify in this book that Jesus is the promised descendant of the kingly line of David, He is the Messiah. In His incarnation HE fulfilled all the kingdom promises given to God's people and as such becomes the king of one new people for all of eternity.

These names give us a wonderful Christology and a Christocentric view of this book of Scripture.

He is the eternal God and creator. He is the redeemer of His people and the only one who can secure the blessings of eternal life. His sovereign reign and power are firmly established on the throne of God. He is the fulfillment of every OT picture/type that deals with who and what salvation is. There are many that are not named in this passage of Scripture such as Christ being the temple, the manna, the New Lawgiver, The New Covenant Person of Isaiah 42:6, 49:8, our Sabbath, Passover Lamb or the true Israel. The

The titles in Revelation give us a Christology that is so rich that if there was not much more that we could find, it would be adequate to see the Christ of the Scriptures.

Appndix to sermon

Christ in the Revelation described by the I ams, I will, and I haves

I am

Re 1:8* "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Re 1:17* When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

Re 1:18* and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Re 2:23* 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

Re 21:5* And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

Re 21:6* Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

Re 22:13* "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Re 22:16* "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

I will

Re 2:7* 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

Re 2:10* 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Re 2:16* 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Re 2:17* 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

Re 2:22* 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

Re 2:23* 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

Re 2:26* 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;

Re 2:28* and I will give him the morning star.

Re 3:3* 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Re 3:5* 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Re 3:9* 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

Re 3:12* 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Re 3:16* 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Re 3:20* 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Re 3:21* 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Re 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."

Re 11:3* "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

Re 17:1* Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

Re 17:7* And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

Re 21:6* Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

Re 21:7* "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Re 21:9* Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

I have

Re 1:18* and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Re 2:4* 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Re 2:14* 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

Re 2:20* 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

Re 3:2* 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

Re 3:8* 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Re 3:9* 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

Overview of millennial views

What Is the Millennium in Question?

When Christians discuss their millennial views, they are speaking of their interpretation of the much debated passage in Revelation 20:1-10.

"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 Jesus 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 Christ 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. 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 Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

"When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever." (NASB)

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Why Is This Millennium in Question?

Some see this as a future earthly theocracy by which Christ will rule over the nations for a thousand years. Others see it as a time during which Christ will rule earth from heaven through the life-changing power of the Gospel. Still others look at it in another way. And the multitude of others holds a multitude of other interpretations.

One's final interpretation of the thousand years from Revelation 20 depends more upon certain factors related to a Christian's hermeneutic than the strict text of the ten much debated verses. There are several ways in which orthodox Christians choose to come to Scripture (these are discussed in our FAQ explaining how to interpret Scripture) and depending on which of these methods is used, one's understanding of eschatological issues — and a host of others as well — will experience changes both significant and trivial. And since one interprets Scripture primarily through the filter of his understanding of other passages in the Word, one's millennial view does have an effect (whether great or small) on the way in which he lives his life.

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The Views

Since space is limited, we are unable to treat all the current millennial views, but we do hope to give a brief, but accurate account of the main tenets of the four main existing viewpoints as well as some of the reasons — both Scriptural and interpretive — behind each view. These four main eschatological systems that we shall treat are as follows: dispensational premillennialism, historic premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Please realize that though these views differ significantly on the topic at hand, the Christians who disagree on these matters agree with each other on probably ninety percent of the rest of the Christian life.

Also, in coming to one's own view, there are certain poor arguments from which one should shy away. A couple of these are arguments from history and arguments from the deeds of those who are proponents of a given view. Arguments from history, while having some use, should generally be avoided for the simple fact that not only were the eschatological views of the early church largely undefined, but most of the Second and Third Century church fathers held to some beliefs that would today be considered odd or even unorthodox. Arguments against an idea from the "bad fruit" of that idea's proponents, while a popular form of argumentation, should be left behind; as it happens, every view has had its embarrassing supporters who claim to act from their beliefs but represent something altogether outside of Christianity. Amillennialists are accused because Nazis misapplied some of their beliefs. Postmillennialists are judged

because some over-zealous rebels in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries misused their principles. Premillennialists come under attack because both a) the majority of Christian cults take up their ideas of end-times cataclysm and b) some of those who profess premillennialism get caught up in setting dates for Christ's return. With those cautions noted, we shall examine each of these four views individually.

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Dispensational Premillennialism

Definition:

Dispensational premillennialists hold that Christ will come before a seven-year period of intense tribulation to take His church (living and dead) into heaven. After this period of fulfillment of divine wrath, He shall then return to rule from a holy city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) over the earthly nations for one thousand years. After these thousand years, Satan, who was bound up during Christ's earthly reign, will be loosed to deceive the nations, gather an army of the deceived, and take up to battle against the Lord. This battle will end in both the judgment of the wicked and Satan and the entrance into the eternal state of glory by the righteous. This view is called premillennialism because it places the return of Christ before the millennium and it is called dispensational because it is founded in the doctrines of dispensationalism.

Features and Distinctions:

- * Favored method of interpretation: strict literal.
- * Israel and the church: views church and Israel as two distinct identities with two individual redemptive plans.
 - * The rapture of the Church: The church is raptured before a seven-year tribulation (the seventieth week of Daniel - Daniel 9:24-27). This tribulational period contains the reign of the AntiChrist.
 - * Millennium: Christ will return at the end of the great tribulation to institute a thousand-year rule from a holy city (the New Jerusalem). Those who come to believe in Christ during the seventieth week of Daniel (including the 144,000 Jews) and survive will go on to populate the earth during this time. Those who were raptured or raised previous to the tribulational period will reign with Christ over the millennial population.
- * Miscellaneous:
 - o Higher degrees of interpreting present-day events in the light of end-times prophecy.
 - o The Millennium will see the re-establishment of temple worship and sacrifice as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.
 - o From the millennium-ending "white throne" judgment (by which Satan and all unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire) Christ and all saints will proceed into eternal glory.
- * Major proponents: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Louis Sperry Chafer, J. Dwight Pentecost, Norman Geisler, Charles Stanley, Chuck Smith, and Chuck Missler.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

A strictly literal hermeneutic is foundational to the dispensational premillennialist viewpoint. Interpreting Scripture in this manner will in fact demand such perspectives unique to dispensationalism as:

- * an earthly kingdom of God from which Christ will reign
- * a future redemptive plan for national Israel
- * a seven year period of great tribulation
- * the rejection of prophetic idiom

Dispensational premillennialism holds that a seven-year tribulation (foreseen in Daniel 9:27) will precede a thousand-year period (Revelation 20:1-6) during which time, Christ will reign on the throne of David (Luke 1:32).

Immediately previous to the time of great tribulation, all the dead saints will rise from their graves and all the living members of the church shall be caught up with them to meet Christ in the clouds (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17); this is known as "the rapture." During this time of tribulation, there will be three-and-a-half years of world peace under an AntiChrist figure (Daniel 7:8; Revelation 13:1-8) who will establish a world-church (Revelation 17:1-15), followed by three-and-a-half years of greater suffering (/help.htmlRevelation 6-18). At the end of this period, Christ will return (Matthew 24:27-31; Revelation 19:11-21), judge the world (Ezekiel 20:33-38; Matthew 25:31; Jude 14-15), bind Satan for one thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3), and raise the Old Testament and tribulation saints from the dead (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:4).

At this time, the millennial reign will begin and Christ will reign politically over the earth at this time from His capital in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3). Throughout His reign, there will be no war (Isaiah 2:4) and even the natures of animals will dwell in harmony (Isaiah 11:6-9). At the end of this era of peace, Satan will be released and instigate a colossal (but futile) rebellion against God (Revelation 20:7-9). After this fated battle, Satan and the wicked are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10), while the righteous proceed into their eternal state in the realm of the new heaven and the new earth Revelation 21:1ff).

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Historical Premillennialism

Definition:

Historical premillennialists place the return of Christ just before the millennium and just after a time of great apostasy and tribulation. After the millennium, Satan will be loosed and Gog and Magog will rise against the kingdom of God; this will be immediately followed by the final judgment. While similar in some respects to the dispensational variety (in that they hold to Christ's return being previous the establishment of a thousand-year earthly reign), historical premillennialism differs in significant ways (notably in their method of interpreting Scripture).

Features and Distinctions:

- * Favored method of interpretation: grammatico-historical.
- * Israel and the church: The church is the fulfillment of Israel.

* Kingdom of God: present through the Spirit since Pentecost - to be experienced by sight during the millennium after Christ's return.

* The Rapture: The saints, living and dead, shall meet the Lord in the clouds immediately preceding the millennial reign.

* The Millennium: Christ will return to institute a thousand-year reign on earth. The Millennium will see the re-establishment of temple worship and sacrifice as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.

* Major proponents: George Eldon Ladd, Walter Martin, John Warwick Montgomery, and Theodore Zahn.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

The historical premillennialist's view interprets some prophecy in Scripture as having literal fulfillment while others demand a semi-symbolic fulfillment. As a case in point, the seal judgments (Revelation 6) are viewed as having fulfillment in the forces in history (rather than in future powers) by which God works out his redemptive and judicial purposes leading up to the end.

Rather than the belief of an imminent return of Christ, it is held that a number of historical events (e.g., the rise of the Beast and the False Prophet) must take place before Christ's Second Coming. This Second Coming will be accompanied by the resurrection and rapture of the saints (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18); this will inaugurate the millennial reign of Christ. The Jewish nation, while being perfectly able to join the church in the belief of a true faith in Christ, has no distinct redemptive plan as they would in the dispensational perspective. The duration of the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6) is unsure: literal or metaphorical.

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Postmillennialism

Definition:

The postmillennialist believes that the millennium is an era (not a literal thousand years) during which Christ will reign over the earth, not from an literal and earthly throne, but through the gradual increase of the Gospel and its power to change lives. After this gradual Christianization of the world, Christ will return and immediately usher the church into their eternal state after judging the wicked. This is called postmillennialism because, by its view, Christ will return after the millennium.

Features and Distinctions:

- * Favored method of interpretation: covenant-historical.
- * Israel and the church: the church is the fulfillment of Israel.
- * Kingdom of God: a spiritual entity experienced on earth through the Christianizing affect of the Gospel.
- * The Millennium: a Golden Age previous to Christ's second advent during which Christ will virtually rule over the whole earth through an unprecedented spread of the Gospel; the large majority of people will be Christian.
- * Miscellaneous:
 - o Higher degrees of interpreting First Century events in the light of prophecy; preterism often goes hand-in-hand with postmillennialism.
 - o Of the several versions of postmillennial eschatology, the reconstructionist's seems to be gaining the most popularity in the world today.
- * Major proponents: Rousas J. Rushdoony, Greg L. Bahnsen, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., David Chilton, and Gary North.

Synopsis:

[View the visual interpretation](#)

There are several different versions of postmillennialism, but one of the views gaining the most popularity, is that of the theonomists. Generally speaking, the postmillennial theonomist viewpoint holds to a partial-preterist interpretation of Revelation and the various judgment prophecies in the Gospels, believing that the majority of those prophecies were fulfilled in 70 A.D. at the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

The postmillennialist sees the millennial kingdom as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would become "a great nation" and that "all peoples on earth would be blessed" through him (Genesis 12:2-3). This holy reign will come about via gradual conversion (rather than premillennialism's cataclysmic Christological advent) through the spread of the Gospel — this incremental progress is drawn from many pictures found throughout Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:22 and Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Postmillennial optimism is also nurtured through many of prophetic psalmody. The Psalms often speak of all nations fearing Him, salvation being known among all nations, the ends of the earth fearing Him, et cetera (e.g., Psalms 2; 22:27; 67:2,7; 102:15; 110:1). Another passage that well feeds this earthly optimism is Isaiah 2:2-3 in which the nations will stream to the righteousness of God.

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Amillennialism

[also termed nunc-millennialism or inaugurated millennialism]

Definition:

The amillennialist believes that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated at Christ's resurrection (hence the term "inaugurated millennialism") at which point he gained victory over both Satan and the Curse. Christ is even now reigning (hence the term "nunc-millennialism" — nunc means "now") at the right hand of the Father over His church. After this present age has ended, Christ will return and immediately usher the church into their eternal state after judging the wicked. The term "amillennialism" is actually a misnomer for it implies that Revelation 20:1-6 is ignored; in fact, the amillennialist's hermeneutic interprets it (and in fact, much of apocalyptic literature) non-literally.

Features and Distinctions:

- * Favored method of interpretation: redemptive-historical.
- * Israel and the church: The church is the eschatological fulfillment of Israel.
- * Kingdom of God: a spiritual reality that all Christians partake in and that is seen presently by faith, but will be grasped by sight at the consummation.
- * The Rapture: The saints, living and dead, shall meet the Lord in the clouds and immediately proceed to judge the nations with Christ and then follow Him into their eternal state.
- * The Millennium: inaugurated with Christ's resurrection. In an "already/not yet" sense, Christ already reigns over all and is already victorious over Satan.
- * Miscellaneous:
 - o Higher degrees of interpreting prophecy in light of Christ's advent, death, resurrection, and glorification.
 - o Relies heavily on a two-age theology.
- * Major proponents: Meredith Kline, Richard Gaffin, Robert B. Strimple, Gregory K. Beale, and John Murray.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

Eschatology is the study of the eschaton; the eschaton is equated with "last things." While other views focus on the final days of humankind on earth, amillennialism sees "the last things" as having been initiated at Christ's resurrection and so, being applicable from the earliest days of the Christian church (cf. Acts 2:16-21; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:1-2; and 1 Peter 1:20). The amillennialist perspective sees the whole of God's redemptive revelation as twofold - promise and fulfillment; it also emphasizes that a strict-literal interpretation of Old Testament is not necessarily the most accurate way of determining what the text means.

The amillennial perspective emphasizes that the coming of the Kingdom of God is a two-part event. The first portion dawned at Christ's first advent (John the Baptist proclaimed at this time, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" — Matthew 3:2). At the cross, Christ won final victory over death and Satan. And then He ascended to reign upon the throne of David forever (Luke 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-31). Now because we "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18) — because of this, the amillennialist sees the final things already accomplished, though not yet seen by sight, but by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

An important note is the amillenialist's view of the church in this world: a role of suffering. The Christian will be hated by all, just as was Christ (Matthew 10:22), for a servant is not greater than his master. Seeing this as the church's role on earth — to suffer as did Christ — the amillenialist can hold no hope for an earthly exaltation and longs for the fulfillment of the second stage of the coming of the Kingdom.

This second stage of the amillennial perspective is the final consummation of all the heavenly promises. The Christian will no longer see by faith alone, but by sight. All the shadowy things will pass away and our eternal reign with Christ will begin. The amillennialist, expecting no earthly glory for the church, places all his hope on this heavenly glory.

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Conclusion

So what should be concluded from all of this? Before coming to a dogmatic millennial perspective, the lone fact that so many well-intentioned and intelligent Christians believe so variously when it comes to Revelation 20 must give us pause. The Book of Revelation itself is probably the most curious and oft-debated piece of the canon. This ought to place us in a position of caution when either accepting or dismissing another's interpretation.

As with any body of Christians, there are members of the Blue Letter Bible team with differing opinions on the matter. However, in light of all the Scriptures on the subject, the Blue Letter Bible feels that the most consistent viewpoint with a literal interpretation of the Bible is dispensational premillennialism. Our ultimate advice is to go to the Bible itself (Acts 17:11). The best way in which to interpret the Word of God is to see what it has to say about itself. And if, in the final analysis, you are yet undecided, do not fear for salvation is not built or broken on Revelation 20, but on the person of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your interest in the Blue Letter Bible and we hope that God will grant you continual blessing in your studies.

