

The Doctrine of the End Times

WEEK 5: Views on the Millennial Kingdom

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek adjective ἐσχατος (“last”) and refers to the study of “last things” or “end times.”
- More specifically, it refers to the study of biblical prophecy about the future events surrounding the end of the age when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth to bring about the restoration of all things.
- The study of the end times has brought with it much debate on the timing and the means by which biblical prophecy will be fulfilled. Topics such as the timing of the rapture, the understanding of the Millennial Kingdom, Dispensationalism, and Covenant Theology are all connected to eschatology.
- Because of this, we will take time over the next six weeks to unpack some of the major end times issues, as well as the implications of those in how we approach and interpret Scripture.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - o Week 1: Introduction to the Doctrine of the End Times
 - o Week 2: Overview of Covenant Theology
 - o Week 3: Overview of Dispensationalism
 - o Week 4: Implications of Covenant Theology/Dispensationalism
 - o **Week 5: Views on the Millennial Kingdom**
 - o Week 6: Why There Needs to be a Millennial Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

- Having discussed two theological systems that have had a huge impact on the doctrine of the end times, we now turn our attention to likely the most debated topic regarding the end times: the Millennial Kingdom.
- The Millennial Kingdom is the name given to 1,000-year period (hence, Millennial) where Satan is bound, and Christ is ruling and reigning with resurrected believers, as detailed in Revelation 20:1-6.
 - o **The Imprisonment of Satan:**
 - **Revelation 20:1-3** - *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.*

- **The Millennial Reign of Christ:**

- **Revelation 20: 4-6** - *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.*

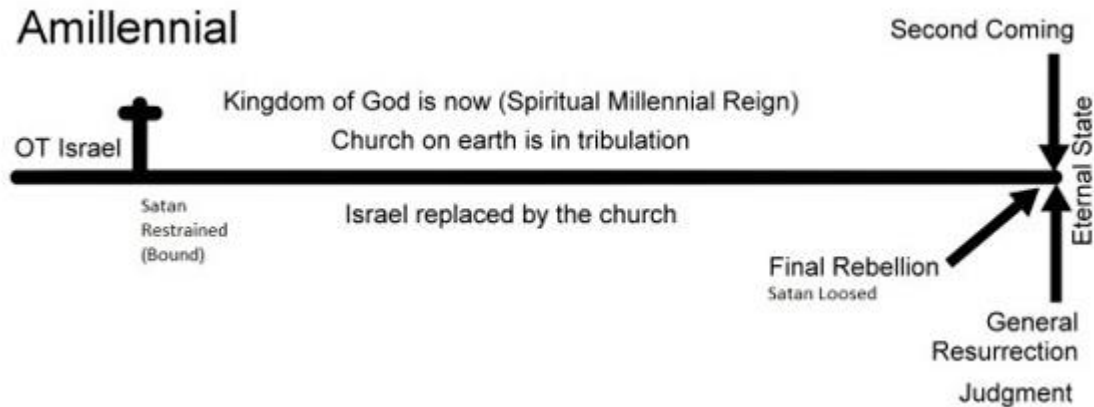
- In approaching this passage, and the concept of the Millennial Kingdom, there are generally two issues regarding interpretation and fulfillment: the *timing* and *nature* of the Millennial Kingdom.
 - Timing: When will it happen (or is it happening now)?
 - Nature: Is it a physical kingdom on earth, or is it a spiritual kingdom?
- Over the next two weeks, we are going to look at the views on the nature and timing of the Millennial Kingdom (amillennialism, postmillennialism, premillennialism) and then look at why Scripture necessitates a literal, 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- While we've discussed the need to study eschatology as a whole, some may wonder why the Millennial Kingdom is so important.
 - In fact, it is often joked that many believers are "pan-millennialists", because they know "it will all just pan out in the end".
- However, the Millennium and the reign of Christ is central to the fulfillment of much of God's promises.
 - It shows how consistent we are in our principles of biblical interpretation
 - It is a testament to the faithfulness of God in keeping His covenants
 - It affects and informs our Christian worldview
- In fact, as we talk through themes of Scripture, while I agree that the glory of God is central purpose of all things, the kingdom of God is at the center of all of God's plans and purposes.
 - It is a thread that exists from Genesis, where God as the Creator and Sovereign of the universe creates man to rule and subdue the earth for God's purposes and glory (Gen 1:26-28), to Revelation, which tells of God and the Lamb on the throne and God's people ruling the new earth (Rev 22:3,5).
- All of this to say: How we view the Millennial Kingdom matters!
- Let's look, now, to the three views on the Millennial Kingdom: Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Premillennialism.

AMILLENNIALISM

- Definition: Amillennialism (“a” meaning *no*) holds that there is no future millennial reign of Christ on the earth.
 - o It’s development started with Origen (AD 154-254), who popularized the allegorical approach to interpreting Scripture, and was systematized by Augustine around the middle of the 4th century.
- Though they would not hold to a literal, earthly reign of Christ, they believe the Millennium exists in this age as a spiritual kingdom.



1. The Main Beliefs of Amillennialism

- **The Millennial Kingdom Exists Between the Two Comings of Christ**
 - Amillennialists claim that the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 was inaugurated at the cross and is being fulfilled spiritually in the present age— between the two comings of Christ—as He rules over His church, in the hearts of His people, or with the saints in heaven.
 - o **Rev 20:4** - *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.*
 - o The “thousand years” would equate to, simply, a long period of time, but not a literal 1,000-years, and Rev 20:1-6 represent the present, not the future.
 - This would also necessitate that the tribulation is present currently, in the sense that believers face tribulation from the world.
 - The conflict between good and evil will intensify toward the end of the millennial reign of Christ, and the increasing persecution will culminate in the appearance of the antichrist and the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the present age.

- One of the foundational arguments for this view of redemptive history is the use of the terms “this age” and “the age to come” in the New Testament, leading to a Two-Age model to develop an eschatological framework.
 - Many passages use these terms together (cf. Luke 18:30, 20:34-35; Eph 1:21):
 - **Matthew 12:32** - *Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.*
 - **Mark 10:30** - *but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.*
 - Amillennialists will look at these passages as describing two distinct ages of redemptive history: our current age, and the age after Christ’s return.
 - Though the kingdom is present in this age, the age to come is what believers to forward to in anticipation of the Lord’s return and ushering in of the eternal state.
 - Because Revelation 20 is “unclear”, this two-age model becomes the interpretive grid through which they interpret these passages.
- **Satan was Bound at Christ’s First Coming**
 - During the thousand years—which is understood as a symbolic reference to a long indefinite period of time—Satan’s activities are restricted so that the Gospel can go forth to the nations, but he is still active and influential on earth.
 - **Rev 20:1-3** - *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.*
- **Resurrections and Judgment**
 - Regarding the first resurrection referenced in Revelation 20, that consists of a spiritual resurrection, not a physical (i.e. the new birth of the believer)
 - It would recognize those in heaven with Christ now as the ones ruling and reigning in a spiritual kingdom.
 - When Christ returns, there will be a physical resurrection and judgment of both believers and unbelievers, after which both will be ushered into the eternal state, the former into the new heavens and earth and the latter into the lake of fire.
- Consistent in all of these are an understanding that the church has replaced Israel, covenant fulfillment regarding the reign of Christ is happening now, and there is no future for the nation of Israel.

2. The Weaknesses of Amillennialism

▪ Inconsistent Hermeneutical Approach

- While many Amillennialists would claim to hold to a grammatical, historical hermeneutic, their interpretation of prophetic passages, most notably in Revelation 20, demands an allegorical approach rather than literal.
- Additionally, it is argued that the two-age model of redemptive history should function as “the interpretive grid through which amillennialists should understand the biblical concept of future history.”¹
- This leads to a system driving our exegesis, and in the case of Revelation, there is even inconsistency of their hermeneutic within prophetic texts.
 - Regarding the resurrections in Revelation 20, the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection, while the second is a physical, yet they are both the same word.
 - Also, if the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection representing new birth in Christ, how can these be believers who have died for their faith?
- This also requires a distorted relationship of Revelation 19-20
 - Amillennialists view Revelation 19:11-21 happening at the return of Christ, and in the context, describing the same event as Revelation 20:7-10.
 - Therefore, Revelation 20:1-6 do not exist chronologically between these passages, but describe a time in the past (as of its writing).

▪ Issues With Satan’s Binding in the Present Age

- While Amillennialists hold that Satan’s binding in Revelation 20 is figurative, happening at the time of Christ, and is only restricted to preventing the furtherance of the gospel, the New Testament is clear that he is on the earth and active:
 - **2 Cor 4:4** - *in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
 - **1 Pet 5:8** - *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

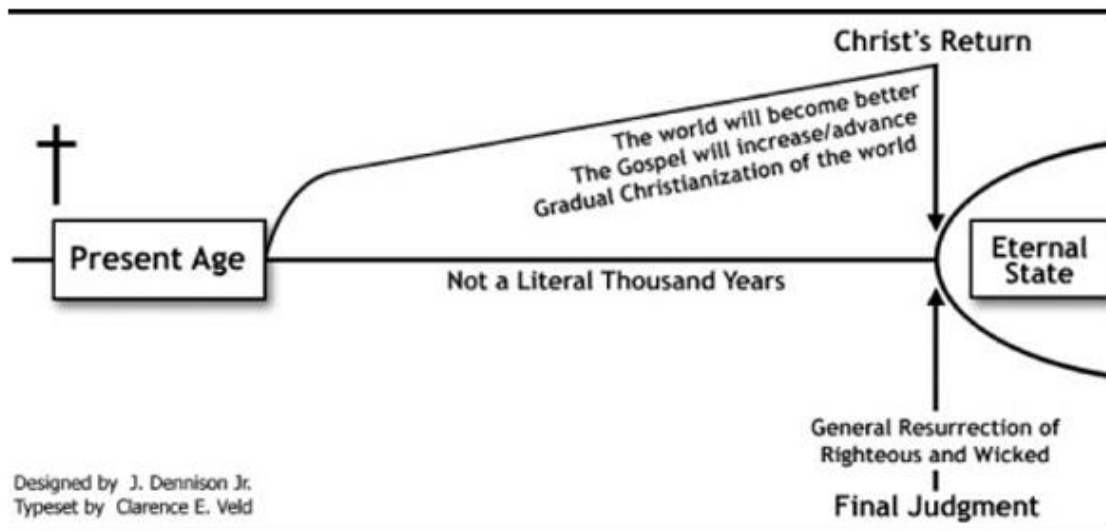
▪ Denies a Future for Israel

- As we have discussed with Covenant Theology, Amillennialists will spiritualize the promises of God to Israel in the Old Testament to see fulfillment within the church through Christ. (Replacement Theology)

¹ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 23.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

- Definition: Postmillennialism (“post” meaning *after*) is the view that Christ will return after the millennium of Revelation 20.
- Says that Christ’s return will occur after the “Millennium”, in which the Millennium is not a literal 1,000-years
- Postmillennialists hold that the preaching of the Gospel will usher in an age of peace, the golden age, or “Millennium”, and Christ will return after that.



1. The Main Beliefs of Postmillennialism

- **The Current Age Progresses into a Spiritualized Millennial Kingdom**
 - Like Amillennialism, Postmillennialism holds that the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 is not a literal, earthly, 1,000-year reign of Christ.
 - What makes Postmillennialists distinct is that they believe that the millennial kingdom will be progressively established in the present age as the Gospel goes forth with increasing success until most of the world is converted to Christ.
 - This time of mass spiritual expansion of God’s kingdom—often referred to as the millennium—is not seen as the entire period of time between the first and second comings of Christ.
 - Instead, it is believed that the present age gradually merges into the millennium in such a way that it is difficult (if not impossible) to discern the exact starting point of this kingdom, much like the changing of one season to another.
 - They would look to the stone in Daniel 2:35 which “*became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*” to represent the kingdom of God growing in the present age as the gospel goes forth.

- The millennium will be characterized by spiritual prosperity, universal peace and righteousness, and economic wellbeing.
 - **Mark 10:29-30** - *Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.*
- Although Christ is not physically present on earth during this millennial period, He is believed to be the primary agent and cause of the church's expansion and influence.
 - **Matt 16:18** - *I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*
 - **Matt 28:18-20** - *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*
- According to some postmillennialists, at the end of the millennium there will be a brief period of apostasy and conflict between the church and the forces of evil.
 - This will be followed by the return of Christ and the resurrection and judgment of all mankind, who will then enter the eternal state.
- **Satan was Bound at Christ's First Coming**
 - During the thousand years—which is understood as a symbolic reference to a long indefinite period of time—Satan's activities are restricted so that the Gospel can go forth to the nations, but he is still active and influential on earth.
- **Resurrections and Judgment**
 - Regarding the first resurrection referenced in Revelation 20, that consists of a spiritual resurrection, not a physical (i.e. the new birth of the believer – Christ ruling in the hearts of believers)
 - When Christ returns, there will be a physical resurrection and judgment of both believers and unbelievers, after which both will be ushered into the eternal state, the former into the new heavens and earth and the latter into the lake of fire.

2. The Weaknesses of Postmillennialism

- **Lack of Exegetical Support**
 - Of the three views, Postmillennialism has the least exegetical support.
 - For one, it asserts that Jesus' millennial kingdom and the transformation of all aspects of society occur **before** Jesus' second coming.
 - Paul, writing to the Thessalonian church, reminded them of why they were suffering **in the current age** and when that suffering would be relieved.

- **2 Thess 1:5-8** - *This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*
- As with Amillennialism, Postmillennialism requires a spiritualized hermeneutic as it pertains to prophecy, especially Revelation 20.
 - “Postmillennialists often quote OT texts that speak of the earth being transformed as evidence for their view, but premillennialists also claim the same passages. The issue is not whether the Messiah's kingdom will transform everything—it will. The main issue is when these conditions will occur. What is lacking from postmillennialism is evidence that the earth will be transformed before the return of Jesus and without the physical presence of the Messiah on earth.” (Michael Vlach)
- **Unbiblical View of the Present Age**
 - A Postmillennialist view demands an understanding that the world will be progressively “Christianized” before Christ's return, which merits no biblical evidence.
 - Yes, the gospel is going forth, and yes, the Lord will build His church, but this is seen to happen in spite of the continual persecution and opposition of the world and Satan.
 - **John 15:18-19** - *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.*
 - **Matt 7:13-14** - *Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*
- **Unbiblical Continuity With the Old Testament**
 - Some Postmillennialists hold to “Theonomy”, which is the conviction that the civil law God gave to Israel in the Old Testament ought to be the law of the land in all nations everywhere, therefore saying that Mosaic Law is in effect today.
 - However, Christ fulfilled the law, and believers are no longer under the Mosaic Law in this age, rather, they are under the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:20-21).
 - Additionally, as with Amillennialism, there is an understanding that the church has replaced Israel, and the Old Testament promises find spiritual fulfillment in the church.

- **A Focus on This Age Rather Than the Return of Christ**

- The eschatology of postmillennialism shifts the focus of the believer's hope away from the Second Coming of Christ to the arrival of a millennial kingdom prior to His return.
 - "Whereas the New Testament depicts the church in this present age as a church continually participating in the sufferings of Christ and eagerly awaiting the return of Christ at the end of the age, the postmillennial view encourages an outlook for the future that is focused on an anticipated period of largely undisturbed blessedness"²
- This stands in contrast to the New Testament, which points the suffering and persecuted believer to the Second Coming as a source of comfort and the object of their hope:
 - **1 Pet 1:13** - *Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

PREMILLENNIALISM

- Definition: Premillennialism ("pre" meaning *before*) is the view that Christ will return before the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20 and that He will reign upon the earth in a literal, physical millennial kingdom.

1. The Main Beliefs of Premillennialism

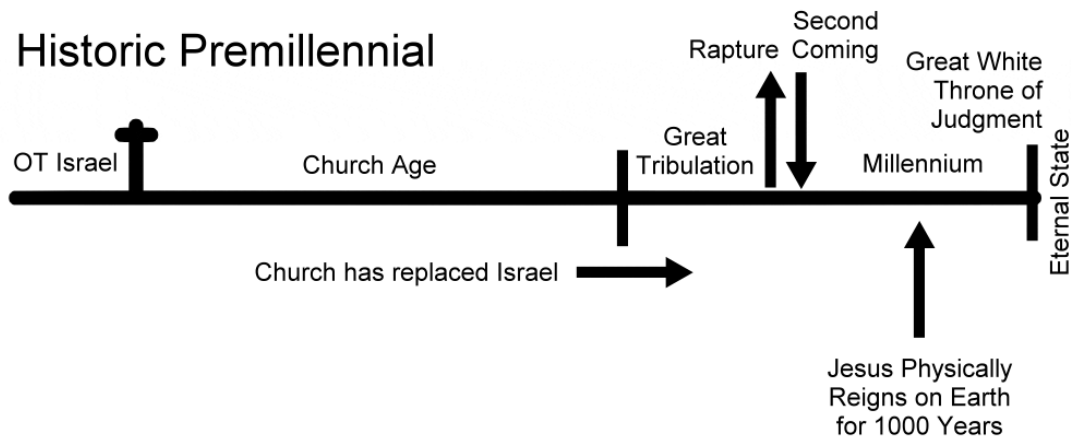
- **The Church Age is Distinct From the Millennial Kingdom**
 - The church age exists as a distinct age (the "present" age stated in the NT), and the Millennial Kingdom serves as an intermediate state between this age and the age to come.
 - The present age will climax with a seven-year period of Tribulation (Rev 6-18) and the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 19), who will then establish His messianic kingdom and reign upon the earth for a thousand-year period known as the millennium (Rev 20).
- **Satan is Not Bound in This Age, But Will Be During the Millennium**
 - At the time of Christ's return, Satan will be confined in the abyss (Rev 20:1-3) and believers will be resurrected to reign with Christ, who will rule upon the earth in peace and righteousness (Rev 20:4-6).
 - At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released from the abyss and will gather an army of unbelievers against Christ, but they will be decisively defeated (Rev 20:7-10).
 - The wicked will be judged, the earth will be destroyed (Rev 20:11-15), and a new heaven and earth will be established forever (Rev 21-22).

² Cornelis Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 355.

2. The Two Forms of Premillennialism

- While Premillennialism, as a whole, understand a literal interpretation of Revelation 19-20, and hold to a physical millennial kingdom of Christ on earth between the second coming and eternal state, there are two distinct types of Premillennialism that exist: **Covenant (Historic) Premillennialism** and **Dispensational Premillennialism**.

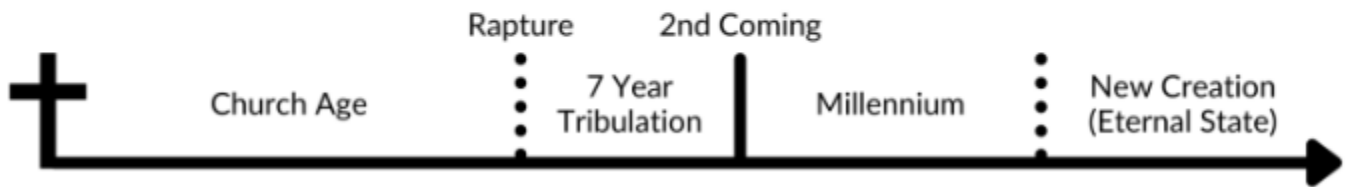
○ Covenant/Historical Premillennialism



- Historic/Covenant Premillennialism generally affirms that the Church receives the fulfillment of the covenant promises made to Israel (i.e., Covenant Theology) and therefore that the nation of Israel plays no distinct role in the future plan of God or millennial reign of Christ.
 - This view is supported, structurally, in Revelation 20:1-6, but does not go to the Old Testament to support the millennial kingdom, and therefore, sees no need to connect Israel to the covenant fulfillment of the Millennial Kingdom.
- It would also not see the purpose of the tribulation as a time of testing and turning of the nation of Israel back to their God. Therefore, most would hold to a post-tribulational rapture.
- **The Weakness of Covenant Premillennialism**
 - As with covenant theology and amillennialism, this view fails to remain consistent in its hermeneutics.
 - While it holds the fulfillment of Revelation 20 as literal, it spiritualizes the Old Testament promises to Israel to be fulfilled in the church.
 - Because of this, it fails to give the nation of Israel its proper place in God's kingdom program.
 - In fact, it fails to understand the purpose of the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

- Dispensational Premillennialism

Dispensational Premillennialism



- In this model, the rapture of the church stands as the next event in redemptive history and will be followed by a 7-year tribulation.
- Christ returns after the tribulation (Rev 19:11-16), defeats the Antichrist and his forces (19:17-21), binds Satan, and ushers in a 1,000-year millennial reign on earth (20:1-6).
 - Dispensational Premillennialism affirms that Israel will be saved at the end of the present age and restored to her land in fulfillment of the covenant promises of God, and that the nation will have a special function of service in the millennium that is different from that of the Church.
- After the millennium, Satan will be released, there will be one final rebellion, which is ultimately defeated (Rev 20:7-10), there will be a resurrection of all unbelievers for judgment (20:11-15), and the eternal state will be ushered in.
 - Regarding the first and second resurrection in Revelation 20:
 - First resurrection - believers martyred during the tribulation
 - Second resurrection – unbelievers for the Great White Throne judgment
- Of the views presented, dispensational premillennialism is the only to hold a consistent hermeneutic (literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic).

3. The Challenges to Premillennialism³

- The strongest argument against premillennialism comes from the “two-age model” of amillennialism, the eschatological framework established by the references to “this age” and “the age to come” (e.g., Matt 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; 20:34-35; Eph 1:21).
- Amillennialists use the two-age model to argue against the idea of an intermediate kingdom held by premillennialism in three distinct ways:

³ Dr. Matt Waymeyer. Fall 2023. The Expositor’s Seminary, Theology III Class Notes.

- **Argument #1**—Because “the age to come” will immediately follow this present age (Matt 12:32; Eph 1:21), there is no gap of time between the two ages to allow for the intermediate kingdom of premillennialism.
 - **RESPONSE:** The millennium of Revelation 20 is best understood as the initial phase of the age to come, and therefore the biblical references to the two ages do not require an interval of time between them to accommodate an intermediate kingdom
- **Argument #2**—Because the qualities ascribed to “the age to come” are all eternal in nature (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; 20:34–36), the temporal aspects of premillennialism’s intermediate kingdom—such as sin, death, and procreation—render it incompatible with the coming age.
 - **RESPONSE:** The qualities ascribed to the age to come in Scripture are compatible with the millennial kingdom as the first phase of that coming age, and therefore the characteristics of the two ages fail to provide a compelling argument against premillennialism.
- **Argument #3**—Because the Second Coming is the line of demarcation between the two ages—and because it will be accompanied by the resurrection and judgment of all mankind (Dan 12:2; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; Matt 25:31–46; 2 Thess 1:6–10), the destruction and renewal of the cosmos (2 Pet 3:10–13; Rom 8:18–23), and the final victory over sin and death (1 Cor 15:20–28, 50–57; Rom 8:17–23)—there is no gap of time to allow for the intermediate kingdom of premillennialism.
 - **RESPONSE:** The Bible’s description of the dividing line between the two ages fails to prove that the Second Coming immediately introduces the eternal state, and therefore the millennial kingdom can indeed be harmonized with the remainder of the New Testament.
- These systems of thought represent the various views on how the Lord is working in this age and will usher in the coming age.
 - As we have stated throughout this class, we do not dive headlong into a system, but we challenge these by holding them up to Scripture.
 - Because of this, we will dedicate our last class to examining what God’s word says regarding the Millennial Kingdom, and why I believe, exegetically, God’s word supports a literal, 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth.

FURTHER READING:

- *Premillennialism: Why There Must Be a Future Earthly Kingdom of Jesus* by Michael Vlach
- *Amillennialism and the Age to Come: A Premillennial Critique of the Two-Age Model* by Matt Waymeyer
- *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* by Paul Benware
- *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* by Michael Vlach