

A Futuristic Premillennial Primer

CHRIST'S PROPHETIC PLANS



General Editors

JOHN MACARTHUR
&
RICHARD MAYHUE

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Moody Publishers
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PREFACE

John MacArthur

Imagine this hypothetical dialogue about the millennium between two well-meaning Christians. One proudly announces, “I am ‘Promillennial’—whatever it involves, although we cannot really know for certain, I am for it!” The other responds, “Well, I am ‘Panmillennial’—while prophecy is not that important for Christians to know, I am sure it will all ‘pan out’ in the end.” The first Christian concludes that one cannot know for sure what Scripture says about prophetic issues and the second declares that it is not important to know. Both are sincere, but woefully ignorant that Scripture abounds with information on future things. Biblically minded Christians do not have to settle for such a muddled approach to eschatology.

This *primer* (basic, introductory book) intends to provide a clear and convincing biblical explanation for the interpretive approach to Scripture that results in a knowable *futuristic* view of Christ’s *millennial* reign on earth, the certain validity of God’s promises to future Israel, and the crucial differences between Israel (as a people and a nation) and the NT church. Dispensationalism, a broader term than “Futuristic Premillennialism” (see chart on p.12), distinctively sees a

major contrast between God's past and future dealings with national Israel and His dealings with the church.

Futuristic Premillennialism serves as a more focused term than dispensationalism when addressing prophetic issues. Futuristic Premillennialism stands in contrast to Historic (or Covenant) Premillennialism, which is one of three major prophetic options associated with Covenant theology, along with Amillennialism and Postmillennialism.

Many people do not understand the term "dispensationalism." But, it does not have to be this way. Dispensationalism basically results from:

1. Interpreting Scripture normally just as one would any other piece of literature, resulting in . . .
2. Understanding the restoration promises to Israel in the Old Testament and the events of John's Revelation as future, which necessitates . . .
3. Distinguishing decisively between Israel and the church.

As a result, dispensationalists teach that Israel was the primary focus of God's redemptive plan in one dispensation. The church, consisting of redeemed people including Jews and Gentiles, is the focus in another. All dispensationalists believe at least one dispensation is still future—the one thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, known as the millennium, in which Israel will once again take a central role and during which Jesus Christ will reign on earth from His throne in Jerusalem as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Dispensations are not merely periods of time, but different administrations in the outworking of God's redemptive purpose. It is essential to understand that the way of salvation—by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ—remains the same in each dispensation. God's redemptive plan never changes, but the way He administers it has varied from one dispensation to another. And succeeding generations from Moses' time understood this truth in more detail as God's revelation progressed, especially with the New Testament.

Dispensationalists expect that all of God's future covenant

promises (Abrahamic, Davidic, and New) to Israel will be literally fulfilled—including promises of earthly blessings and an earthly messianic kingdom. God promised Israel that they would possess the Promised Land for an extended time and that their descendants would flourish (Gen. 13:14–17; Ex. 32:13). Scripture foretells that Messiah will rule over the kingdoms on earth for one thousand years from Jerusalem (Zech. 14:9–11; Rev. 20:1–6). Old Testament prophecy explains that all Israel will one day be returned to the Promised Land (Amos 9:14–15), the temple will be rebuilt (Ezek. 40:1–48:35), and the people of Israel will be redeemed (Jer. 23:6; Rom. 11:26–27).

Futuristic Premillennialism results from understanding and applying prophetic Scripture in a way that is most consistent with the normal or literal¹ approach for interpreting Scripture. If one is careful not to presume a certain prophetic outcome before interpreting the Bible and employs a consistent, normal approach to understanding Scripture, then Futuristic Premillennialism will be embraced as God's true prophetic plan of the ages. The chapters that follow define and discuss the biblical approach that leads to Futuristic Premillennialism, starting with why a Christian should study biblical prophecy and concluding with convincing reasons for the certainty of Christ's future, earthly return.

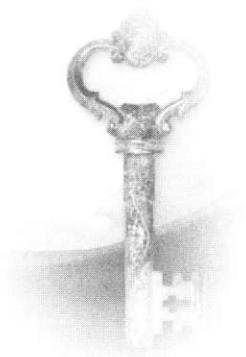
Notes

1. E. R. Craven, ed., "The Revelation of John," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (1874; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 12:98. "The *Literalist* (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great *spiritual* truths are set forth therein; his position is, simply, that the prophecies are to be *normally* interpreted (i.e., according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly literal being regarded as literal, that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded."

Introduction

WHY
STUDY
PROPHECY?

Richard Mayhue

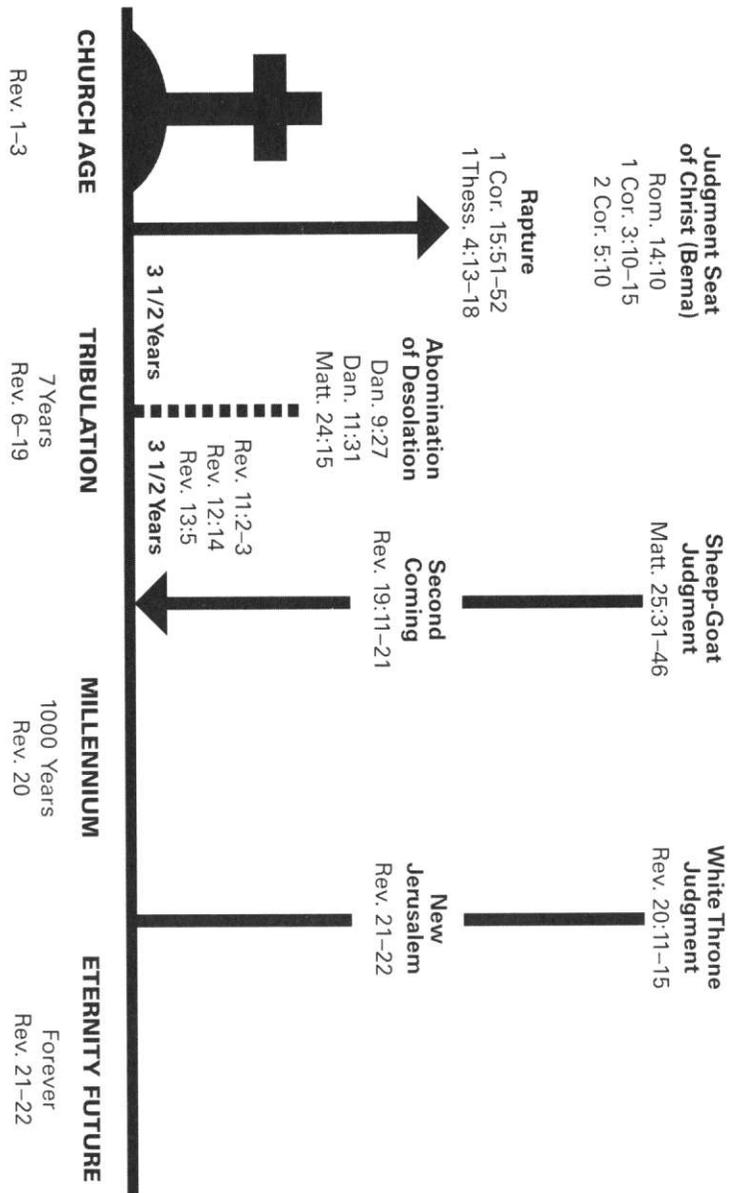


I have heard on more than one occasion, as I am sure that you have also, people who declare with confidence that the study of biblical prophecy is a secondary matter or even optional when contrasted with pursuing supposedly weightier doctrines like that of Christ or of salvation.

Now it is true that a person does not enter into a redemptive relationship with God by believing in any particular prophetic scenario, but rather by placing one's faith in the person, cross work, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-10). Further, a true believer does not necessarily mature in the Christian faith by embracing a certain eschatological scheme (2 Pet. 3:14-18).

However, the Bible does exhort believers to interpret the Bible with precision (2 Tim. 2:15). Scripture teaches that God's Word is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God even promises His blessing on those who know and obey the things of biblical prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7). On the other hand, nowhere does either the Old Testament or New Testament even hint that prophetic portions are exempted from careful, detailed knowing and understanding.

FUTURISTIC PREMILLENNIALISM



Taken from Richard Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Christian Focus, 1999.

Think about this for a moment—who planned, revealed, and then executes God's prophetic intentions? Is it not God alone who planned the end from the beginning (Is. 46:9–11)? Did God reveal in Scripture anything that is so unimportant or trivial that it could be considered optional for Christians (Acts 20:20, 25, 27)? Where in the Bible does one find the slightest hint that prophetic matters should be avoided because they might be controversial or hard to understand?

So let's compare the assertion that the study of biblical prophecy is secondary at best with Scripture in order to discover God's perspective on the matter. Why should Christians study prophetic Scriptures?

Scriptural Content

Scripture teems with prophetic material.¹ Not even one slight indication exists that prophetic materials are to be ignored, be set aside, or be marginalized. Consider the following facts about eschatological information in the Bible, especially Christ's second coming.

- In Scripture, 62 (94 percent) out of 66 books contain predictive information (Ruth, Song of Solomon, Philemon, and 3 John are the exceptions).
- In the Bible, 27 percent (8352) of all verses (31,124) refer to prophetic issues.
- In God's Word, 22 percent (1845) of all prophetic verses (8352) refer to Christ's second coming.
- All nine authors of the NT mention Christ's second coming.
- Next to the subject of faith/salvation, the theme of Christ's second coming is most prominent in the NT.
- Only three out of 27 NT books do not mention Christ's second advent (Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John).
- Of the approximately 333 specific biblical prophecies dealing with Christ's two advents, one-third deal with His first coming and two-thirds deal with His second coming.

Scriptural Commands and Commendations

Throughout the Bible, God commands and commends the thorough study of all Scripture. This theme appears in the teaching of Christ, the preaching of the apostles, plus the writings of Paul and Peter.

Matthew 28:19–20

“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.”

Acts 2:42

“They were continually devoting themselves to *the apostles' teaching* and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Acts 5:20

“Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple *the whole message of this Life.*”

Acts 20:27

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you *the whole purpose of God.*”

2 Timothy 2:15

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *accurately handling the word of truth.*”

1 Peter 1:10–11

“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 person or time the Spirit of Christ within

them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." (All emphases added.)

Scriptural Consequences

The life benefits and spiritual blessings from knowing and obeying prophetic Scripture enriches every committed Christian. The following ten positive outcomes representatively illustrate how and why the Bible extols studying biblical prophecy.

- Fulfilled prophecy proves that the Bible is true and inspires confidence in Scripture (Acts 13:32–35 with 42–44).
- The study of prophecy promotes obedience and provides the gateway to God's blessing (Rev. 1:3; 22:7).
- Prophetic material equips the saints to refute those who mock the Christian hope (2 Pet. 3:1–13).
- Prophecy provides answers to theological questions that are found nowhere else, such as the relationship between the resurrection and the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–18).
- Prophecy gives motivation for holy living today (1 Thess. 5:6–9; Titus 2:11–14; 2 Pet. 3:11–13).
- Prophetic expectation purifies (1 John 3:2–3).
- Prophecy provides a biblical basis for prayer (cf. Dan. 9:1–19 with Jer. 25:11–12).
- Prophecy is a source of hope, comfort, and encouragement for the Christian (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11; Titus 2:13).
- The study of prophecy encourages patient endurance in the midst of suffering and trials (James 5:7–11).
- Prophecy assures that unjust persecution of the righteous will be avenged by God (2 Thess. 1:5–10).

Scriptural Confidence

What will be the ultimate fruit from studying God's Word, including those portions explaining Christ's second coming? The prophet

Isaiah crafted the answer with these infallible words given originally to Israel, but which continue to be true today.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Is. 55:10–11)

Notes

1. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973). Pages 674–75 provide extensive biblical statistics.

58. Craig A. Blasing, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 14 n. 3.
59. Belcher relates six main characteristics of non-lordship theology: (1) the call to salvation and the call to discipleship are distinct; (2) the believer has the choice to produce or not produce fruit in his life; (3) lack of spiritual fruit is no sign a person is lost; (4) repentance is not a condition of salvation; (5) the concept of lordship is not a condition of salvation but should follow the experience of salvation by faith; and (6) those who possess true saving faith can live in habitual sin or even apostatize from the faith. Richard P. Belcher, *A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 22–23.
60. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 293.
61. *Ibid.*, 292.
62. Chafer said, "The error of imposing Christ's Lordship upon the unsaved is disastrous. . . ." Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 3:385.
63. Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension*, 2d ed. (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1992); *Absolutely Free!* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1989).
64. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 16 n. 7.
65. Saucy refers to the "error of non-lordship salvation." Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 15–16 n. 8; See MacArthur, *Faith Works*.
66. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 294–95.
67. R. C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology: Understanding the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 99.
68. John Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 69.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*, 70.
71. Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 5:98.
72. See John A. Martin, "Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 248–63.
73. *Ibid.*, 249 n. 2.
74. Hank Hanegraaff, *Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says about the End Times and Why It Matters Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xx–xxii.
75. Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers?* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 136–37.

Chapter Three

WHY FUTURISTIC PREMILLENNIALISM?

Richard Mayhue



During my childhood years, I loved the challenge of jigsaw puzzles. Early on, a basic strategy emerged that usually led to successfully completing the puzzle. First, I found the most obvious, most determinative pieces for the puzzle that would guide all my further efforts. This involved identifying the four unique corner pieces. Second, I located the next most obvious pieces, which turned out to be the few with one straight edge—the border pieces. With these two steps complete, the jigsaw puzzle picture took on a basic shape and design to which the multitude of remaining pieces conformed and could not change.

The same approach works well in solving the millennial-view puzzle. Four basic views prevail today: Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, Historic Premillennialism, and Futuristic Premillennialism. I intend to define each of the four perspectives, and then explain which one is biblically preferable and why.

The terms "millennium" and "millennialism" come from the Latin word *mille*, meaning "one thousand." Biblically, they point to the Greek phrase *chilia etē*, "one thousand years," which appears six times

in Revelation (20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The prefix "post" in Postmillennialism refers to Christ's second coming after the millennium, which on this view refers to the kingdom of the church age. The prefix "a" in Amillennialism indicates that there is no millennium on earth before or after Christ's second coming. Both of the "pre" positions (Historic Premillennialism and Futuristic Premillennialism) believe that there is a millennial period on earth that is preceded by Christ's second coming.

Postmillennialism teaches that the kingdom of God is currently being advanced with increasing triumph in the world through gospel preaching and the ministry of the church. Christ now rules over this "golden age" of undetermined length from heaven and will return to earth at the end—thus a Postmillennial return. The church is considered to be spiritual Israel, having inherited the promises made to Abraham and David, which were abrogated for Israel because of their national disobedience. Therefore, there will be no future for a national Israel with any biblical significance. When Christ returns at the end of the millennium, then the rapture, second advent, general resurrection, and judgment all take place in rapid sequence, and finally comes the eternal state.

Amillennialism teaches that the church is now spiritual Israel, having inherited God's promises to Abraham and David that were forfeited by Israel because of continued disobedience. Christ rules over this spiritual kingdom from heaven, and the redemptive work of Christ continues on earth, but without the optimism of Postmillennialism. There is no expectation of a restored national Israel that will have prophetic significance. The affairs of earth will deteriorate until Christ intervenes at His second coming. All of the end-time events—for example, the rapture, general resurrection, and the judgment—happen in a short span of time as the immediate prelude to eternity future.

Historic Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return to rapture the church, judge living unbelievers, and set up an earthly kingdom (some say it will be one thousand years in length, while others believe one thousand is a symbolic number meaning "a long time"). Christ

now rules over the earth from heaven and in the future will rule over a millennium on earth where little distinction is made between the church and restored national Israel. At the end of the millennium, there is the resurrection of unbelievers and the final judgment, which is followed by the eternal state. This category of Premillennialism generally interprets Revelation 6–18 in a "historic" sense, i.e., that Revelation 6–18 should be interpreted as past events in church history rather than future ones—thus the name "Historic Premillennialism."

Advocates of *Futuristic Premillennialism*, also called Dispensational Premillennialism, use a consistent grammatical-historical approach to both the Old and New Testament Scriptures by which the Bible is interpreted normally throughout, regardless of whether the subject matter is eschatological (future-related) or not. Therefore, God's promises to Abraham and David are viewed in a futuristic sense as anticipating a restored nation of Israel. In this pattern, the rapture comes first (see chapter 4, "Why a Pretribulation Rapture?"), followed by Christ's second coming at the end of the seven-year tribulation period, biblically spoken of as Daniel's seventieth week. After judging the earth and its inhabitants, Christ rules over the earth for one thousand years (the millennium) from His Davidic throne in Jerusalem. At the end of the millennium, Satan rebels one final time but is instantly defeated. Then comes the resurrection and judgment of all unbelievers at the Great White Throne, which is followed by the New Jerusalem and the eternal state. (See chart on p. 12.)

The remainder of this chapter will apply the three rules of conquering jigsaw puzzles to solving the prophetic puzzle. There are four unmistakable corner pieces that connect to four distinct border pieces. These eight pieces correspond to my contention that there are eight defining biblical reasons to champion Futuristic Premillennialism as the actual future plan of God. Then all of the less obvious, detailed-but-not-defining pieces can be worked on, although they will not alter the broad, basic pattern that this chapter outlines. It will not be any one or two reasons that make the case for Futuristic Premillennialism compelling, but rather the combined strength of them all. We might never know or understand every minute detail of God's

prophetic plan, but we can know the basics. The purpose of this primer is to help you be certain about the fundamentals of biblical prophecy.

A Consistent Hermeneutic

Futuristic Premillennialism is distinct because it is the only option out of the four major views that results from (1) dealing with all Scripture inductively, (2) consistently employing the time-tested grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach, (3) engaging all the Scriptures with the principles and skills of unprejudiced exegesis, and (4) not having to shift to a double-meaning hermeneutic when dealing with ecclesiology and eschatology. This is the first “corner piece” to our puzzle.

In other words, Futuristic Premillennialism takes a “normal” or “plain” approach to all the Scriptures, all of the time, which means that Futuristic Premillennialism:

- Takes the biblical text at face value.
- Interprets the biblical text in context.
- Recognizes symbolic language/speech figures and the reality they express.
- Uses clear texts to interpret the unclear/more difficult.
- Allows for the progress of revelation without dramatically altering the meaning of previous revelation.
- Allows for double fulfillment of prophecies (near/far)—for example, two advents of Christ in Isaiah 61—without resorting to double meanings in a primary sense.

Futuristic Premillennialism is more attractive hermeneutically because it alone allows for the greatest consistency in two biblical realms:

- Approaching any book of the Bible with the same general interpretive approach whether it be (1) the unvarnished history of Joshua, (2) the figurative language of Solomon's

Song, or (3) the prophetic books—both major and minor prophets.

- Approaching any topic of systematic theology with the same general interpretive schema rather than switching when one encounters ecclesiology or eschatology as do the other three major options.

Futuristic Premillennialism is more attractive hermeneutically because it does not involve or require:

- A preunderstanding of alleged biblical covenants (such as redemption, grace, works) made in eternity past for which there is no widely persuasive biblical evidence and which are at best vaguely inferential.
- Allegorical interpretation (a third- and fourth-century AD aberration introduced by Origen and Augustine). Compare Galatians 4:24–31, where Paul employs allegory with apostolic sanction but with clear interpretive meaning used only as an illustration.
- Forced historical interpretations on texts in (1) the major and minor prophets, (2) the Olivet Discourse, and (3) Revelation. For example, Revelation 11:1–2 interpreted as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 rather than a future time in the first half of Daniel's seventieth week.
- A minimization of the typical or analogical use of the Old Testament by the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 2:15/Hos. 11:1 and Matt. 2:14–18/Jer. 31:15).

The final and ultimate feature that makes Futuristic Premillennialism both unique and more attractive than the other options is its conformity to a proven paradigm of how Old Testament prophecies were actually

fulfilled. Such prophecies came to pass in accordance with a normal hermeneutic, as employed by Futuristic Premillennialism. For example:

- Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Old Testament history
 - Genesis 17:6—from Abraham would come kings
 - Daniel 2—world kingdoms
 - Habakkuk—in regard to Babylon and Judah
- Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ's earthly life and ministry
 - Tribe of Judah—Genesis 49:10
 - Born in Bethlehem—Micah 5:2
 - Crucifixion—Psalm 22

Even Covenantalists admit the correctness of the Premillennial outcome, if a consistent, normal hermeneutic is used. For example:

O. T. Allis in *Prophecy and the Church*:¹

"... the Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age."

Floyd E. Hamilton in *The Basis of the Millennial Faith*:²

"Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures."

Loraine Boettner in *The Meaning of the Millennium*:³

"It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations."

Based on what they knew of Old Testament prophetic material, the first-century BC Jewish community was not looking for the first

advent of Christ as presented in the Gospels. Rather, they believed that Messiah's second coming was near and would end Jewish tribulation at the hands of other nations, and establish the Davidic kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12–17) on earth.

The following features summarize their biblical expectations concerning Messiah.⁴

- A season of extreme tribulation would prevail prior to Messiah's arrival.
- In the midst of this upheaval, Elijah would arrive as the forerunner and announcer of Messiah.
- Messiah would then come to earth.
- The nations would rise up against Messiah.
- A coalition of nations would be defeated and destroyed.
- Jerusalem would be reoccupied and rebuilt.
- The Jewish Diaspora would return to Jerusalem.
- Israel would become the capital of the world.
- A time of peace and prosperity would be inaugurated.

Interestingly, this is very similar to what Futuristic Premillennialism expects will happen at the time of Messiah's second arrival. Approaches based on a Covenantal understanding—including Amillennialism, Historic Premillennialism, and Postmillennialism—propose very different outcomes.

Futuristic Premillennialism versus Covenantalism

Consider the question, "Why would a Futuristic Premillennialist and a Covenantalist—both saved and godly people—who agree on about 80 percent of their theological beliefs take such opposite views when dealing with ecclesiology and eschatology?"

- The first reason is the Covenantalist's preunderstanding of the covenant(s) of grace/redemption, which in reality have no biblical basis.

- The second reason is the use of a double-meaning hermeneutic that is required to achieve the appropriate outcomes demanded by a Covenantal preunderstanding.
- The third factor is replacement theology or supercessionism—Israel is replaced by the church, which inherits Israel's spiritual blessings.

Futuristic Premillennialism, on the other hand, comes to the text with no other preunderstanding than a consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic that is employed consistently throughout the Scriptures in all realms of theology.

Let me clarify the point by quoting well-known theologian J. I. Packer.

What is covenant theology? The straightforward, if provocative answer to that question is that it is what is nowadays called a hermeneutic—that is, a way of reading the whole Bible that is itself part of the overall interpretation of the Bible that it undergirds. A successful hermeneutic is a consistent interpretative procedure yielding a consistent understanding of Scripture that in turn confirms the propriety of the procedure itself. . . . Once Christians have got this far, the covenant theology of the Scriptures is something that they can hardly miss.⁵

Dr. Packer has engaged in what logicians call “circular reasoning,” meaning that one begins with an assumption that guarantees he will reach a particular conclusion. If one's hermeneutic is one's theology, then one's theology determines one's hermeneutic; this way of thinking is a logical fallacy that inevitably leads to erroneous and unsound conclusions.

A theology is *not* a hermeneutic. Such thinking undermines proper Bible interpretation. Actually, good hermeneutics (principles of interpreting literature) applied by skillful exegesis (artful applica-

tion of interpretive principles) can lead to a theology, but not the reverse. Unfortunately, Dr. Packer and all who follow his lead have put the proverbial theological cart before the hermeneutical horse.

However, every Amillennialist, Historic Premillennialist, and Post-millennialist follows this process, knowingly or unknowingly, in part or in whole, when it comes to dealing with the identity of the church (ecclesiology) and the future of Israel (eschatology). When they do not reach their predetermined theological end using normal hermeneutics (which has served them well in all other areas of theology), they change their hermeneutic to yield the predetermined conclusions they began with. This produces a prejudiced approach to interpretation in order to validate a predetermined conclusion. This is an unacceptable, inconsistent, and invalid manner in which to interpret the Bible. Thus, it is rejected in every way and usage by Futuristic Premillennialism. Only a consistent hermeneutic can lead to a God-intended interpretation of the sacred text. For Futuristic Premillennialism, a consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic to interpret all of Scripture is a presupposition, not a predetermined theology.

Futuristic Premillennialism does not require new special rules of interpretation when it comes to prophetic texts. The biblical text is taken at normal face value, in its context, recognizing symbolic language and speech figures, plus the reality that they represent. It allows the interpreter to take the same general approach to the history of Joshua, or the highly figurative images of Solomon's Song, or the prophetic books.

Therefore, unless some clear, uncontested mandate from Scripture changes how one interprets second-coming prophecies (and there is none), then prophetic Scripture should be interpreted consistently throughout the Bible. Only Futuristic Premillennialism does so.

An Impartial Exegesis

The text of Revelation 20:1–10 (see chapter 6, “What about Revelation 20?”) might well be considered the pinnacle of millennial studies. For here one encounters a unique historical period that is

designated as "one thousand years" (20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).

Several important questions require answers in order to interpret this number and this text accurately. First, it needs to be asked if this period of time is yet future or has already been fulfilled? Next, is this period actually one thousand years in length or does the term represent another length of time, say, five thousand years? Finally, how has the "one thousand" of Revelation 20:1–10 been interpreted in the past? The answers to these questions make up our second corner piece.

The Time of Fulfillment

Peculiar events occur during this special segment of time. An angel binds Satan with a great chain (20:1–2). Satan is then incarcerated in the abyss, which is shut and sealed (20:3). Thus, Satan no longer deceives the nations until the one thousand years transpire. The tribulation martyrs are resurrected to reign with Christ (20:4, 6). When the one thousand years end, Satan is released for a short time to once again deceive the nations (20:3, 7–8).

We begin with the question, "Has this already been fulfilled?" Most who hold a form of "Covenant" theology respond affirmatively and point to Christ's victory over Satan at the cross as the starting point. Texts such as Matthew 12:22–29 are employed to bolster the position that Satan is *now* bound in fulfillment of Revelation 20.

While it is true that Christ won the victory at Calvary and Satan's doom was eternally settled, it is not true that Satan has been incapacitated in the manner demanded by the text. Satan still entices men to lie (Acts 5:3). He is blinding the minds of unbelievers to the gospel of the glory of Christ in God (2 Cor. 4:4). He currently disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive the church (2 Cor. 11:2–3, 13–15). The devil hinders ministers of God (1 Thess. 2:18) and roams about the earth to devour its population (1 Pet. 5:8). To any unbiased student of Scripture, Revelation 20 could not refer to the present time in light of these abundant testimonies of Satan's present, frenetic pace.

Therefore, we can conclude that Revelation 20 looks to some future time of special containment. Since it is yet ahead, we ask, "How long will this time last?"

The Length of Time

The bottom line in this discussion asks, "Does *chilia etē* in Revelation 20 really mean a literal one thousand years?" Let's begin the discussion by looking at biblical numbers in general and then narrow the focus to Revelation and "one thousand" in particular.

It is commonly understood as a basic rule of hermeneutics that numbers should be accepted at face value, i.e., conveying a mathematical quantity, unless there is substantial evidence to warrant otherwise. This dictum for interpreting biblical numbers is generally accepted as the proper starting point.

This rule holds true throughout the Bible, including Revelation. A survey of numbers in the Apocalypse supports this. For instance, seven churches and seven angels in Revelation 1 refer to seven literal churches and their messengers. Twelve tribes and twelve apostles refer to actual, historical numbers (21:12, 14). Ten days (2:10), five months (9:5), one-third of mankind (9:15), two witnesses (11:3), forty-two months (11:2), 1260 days (11:3), twelve stars (12:1), ten horns (13:1), two hundred miles (14:20), three demons (16:13), and five fallen kings (17:9–10) all use numbers in their normal sense. Out of the scores of numbers in Revelation, only two (seven spirits in 1:4 and 666 in 13:18) are conclusively used in a symbolic fashion. While this line of reasoning does not prove that "one thousand" in Revelation 20 should be taken normally, it does put the burden of proof on those who disagree with accepting "one thousand" as one thousand.

Not only are numbers in general to be taken normally in Revelation, but more specifically numbers referring to time. In Revelation 4–20 there are at least twenty-five references to measurements of time. Only two of these demand to be understood in something other than a literal sense, and these do not involve actual numbers. The "great day of their wrath" (6:17) would likely exceed twenty-four hours and "the hour of His judgment" (14:7) seemingly extends beyond sixty minutes. There is nothing, however, in the phrase "one thousand years" that suggests a symbolic interpretation.

This next point is very important. Never in the Bible is "year" used with a numerical adjective when it does not refer to the actual period of time that it mathematically represents. Unless evidence to the contrary can be provided, Revelation 20 is not the one exception in the entire Scripture.

Also, the number "one thousand" is not used elsewhere in the Bible with a symbolic sense. Job 9:3; 33:23; Psalms 50:10; 90:4; Ecclesiastes 6:6; 7:28; and 2 Peter 3:8 have been used in support of the idea that one thousand in our text is used symbolically. However, these attempts fail because in each of these texts one thousand is used in its normal sense to make a vivid point.

One thousand and its varied combinations are used frequently in both Testaments. No one questions the literal quantity of five thousand believers (Acts 4:4), twenty-three thousand men killed (1 Cor. 10:8), or seven thousand killed (Rev. 11:13). Likewise, there is no exegetical reason to question the normalcy of one thousand years in Revelation 20.

The Testimony of History

From the post-apostolic era, the church understood the "millennium" of Revelation 20 as a literal one thousand years. Papias, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all gave evidence of this fact in their writings. The church taught nothing else until the fourth century.

When theologians began to go beyond what the Bible taught about the millennium, when they began to make it a period of time that would be more for the enjoyment of man than for the glory of God, some reacted to correct this excess by interpreting this time as something less than an actual historical period. In the fifth century, Augustine popularized the approach that reasoned that the church inherited the blessings promised to Israel and that they are spiritual, not earthly. He taught that Revelation 20 referred to this time.

However, even Augustine understood from Revelation 20 that this period lasted one thousand literal years. So Augustine, called by many the father of Amillennialism, took the one thousand years nor-

mally. Even to this day some non-Premillennialists interpret Revelation 20 to be one thousand actual years in length.

In light of the above discussion, we conclude that the one thousand years of Revelation 20 requires a future fulfillment since a fair-minded appraisal of the text and history determines that it has not yet occurred. Further, a survey of numbers in the Bible and Revelation pointedly demands that the one thousand years be understood in a normal sense. This position receives further substantiation through the early church's interpretation of this text, which aligns with the Futuristic Premillennial view.

God's Unconditional Covenants⁶

God, who is faithful to keep (Deut. 7:9; 1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4) covenants (Rom. 9:4; Gal. 4:24; Eph. 2:12), explicitly made six distinct covenants with promises to Israel: (1) Noahic (Gen. 6:18; 9:8-17); (2) Abrahamic (Gen. 15:1-21; 17:1-22; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-17); (3) Mosaic (Ex. 19-20, 24); (4) Priestly (Num. 25:10-13); (5) Davidic (2 Sam. 7:12-16); and (6) new (Jer. 31:31-34). Five are unconditional, irrevocable, everlasting, and by grace; only the Mosaic covenant was conditional, revocable, temporary, and by works. The Bible never mentions any alleged covenant of grace or of redemption nor does Scripture address a supposed Edenic (also known as covenant of works) or Adamic covenant in the over 280 uses of "covenant" in the Old Testament and over thirty appearances in the New. The Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants speak to the issue of Futuristic Premillennialism, so let's examine them in detail.

Abrahamic Covenant

God made the autonomous, sacred (Luke 1:72) Abrahamic covenant unilaterally (Gen. 15:7-17) with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; Ps. 105:9-10), and it is stated or reaffirmed at least eight times (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-17; 35:10-12). This covenant was everlasting

(Gen. 17:7–8, 13, 19; 1 Chr. 16:15, 17; Pss. 105:8, 10; 111:5, 9; Is. 24:5); irrevocable (Heb. 6:13–18); superior to the Mosaic covenant (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:17); immediately conditional (Gen. 17:14; Lev. 26:43; 2 Kings 13:23; Pss. 74:20; 106:45; Is. 24:5), but ultimately unconditional (Lev. 26:44; Deut. 4:31; Jer. 33:25–26; Ezek. 16:60); whose sign is circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14; Acts 7:8). This covenant promised: 1) Abrahamic descendants ethnically (Gen. 13:15; 15:18; 17:2, 7; 22:17; 26:3; 28:13–14; 35:11–12); 2) Abrahamic descendants redemptively (Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:7, 26–29); 3) the Savior (Gal. 3:16); 4) a nation (Gen. 12:2; 17:4; 35:11); 5) land (Gen. 12:1; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8; 26:3; 28:13; 35:12; Ex. 6:4; Lev. 26:42; Ps. 105:11); 6) personal blessing and protection (Gen. 12:3; 28:15; 35:12; Pss. 105:14–15; 106:44–46); and 7) blessings to the nations (Gen. 12:3; 17:4–6; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 35:11), especially redemption (Ps. 111:9; Rom. 4:16–18; Gal. 3:8).

Davidic Covenant

With absolute unconditionality (2 Sam. 7:15; 1 Chr. 17:13; Ps. 89:33–37), God promised David (2 Sam. 7:12–16; 1 Chr. 17:11–14) that a descendant (2 Sam. 7:12, 16; 1 Chr. 17:11, 14) would be enthroned (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; 1 Chr. 17:12, 14) to rule over Israel and the world (2 Sam. 7:12, 16; 1 Chr. 17:11, 14). This Davidic covenant is autonomous and unilateral (2 Sam. 23:5; 2 Chr. 13:5; Ps. 89:3, 28, 34); irrevocable (2 Sam. 7:15; 1 Chr. 17:13; Ps. 89:34; Jer. 33:20–22, 25–26); and everlasting (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; 23:5; 1 Chr. 17:12, 14; 2 Chr. 13:5; 21:7; Ps. 89:28, 36). However, the covenant was immediately conditional (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Kings 2:3–4; Pss. 89:30–32, 39; 132:12) since sinful descendants were disqualified. While the covenant is not explicitly named in the New Testament (cf. Acts 2:30), it appears clear that Jesus Christ is the specific Davidic seed (Matt. 1:1; John 7:42) whom God intends to enthrone (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Luke 1:32; John 18:37) for a future, earthly rule over Israel and the nations (Ps. 110:2; Zech. 14:9; Luke 1:33; Rev. 11:15; 12:5; 19:15–16) during the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:1–10).

New Covenant

The unconditional, unilateral (Ezek. 20:37; 37:26), everlasting (Is. 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26; Heb. 9:15; 13:20), and irrevocable (Is. 54:10; Heb. 7:22) new covenant assumes nullification, due to Israel's sin, of the conditional Old/Mosaic covenant (Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 44:7; Zech. 11:10–11). Originally made with Israel (Jer. 31:31) and containing redemptive blessings of both salvation (Is. 49:8; Jer. 31:34) and prosperity (Is. 49:8; Jer. 32:40ff.; 50:5; Ezek. 34:25; Hos. 2:18ff.), this autonomous covenant later allowed the New Testament church to participate salvifically (cf. Rom. 11:11–32) through Christ, the messenger (Mal. 3:1) and mediator (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) of a better covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) purchased with the blood and death of this unique High Priest (Zech. 9:11; Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15; 10:29; 12:24; 13:20). Old Testament believers anticipated (Heb. 9:15) Christ's life-giving sacrifice (2 Cor. 3:6) involving: (1) grace (Heb. 10:29); (2) peace (Is. 54:10; Ezek. 34:25; 37:26); (3) the Spirit (Is. 59:21); (4) redemption (Is. 49:8; Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:29); (5) removing sin (Jer. 31:34; Rom. 11:27; Heb. 10:17); (6) a new heart (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16); and (7) a new relationship with God (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 16:62; 37:26–27; Heb. 8:10). This covenant pictures Israel's new betrothal to God (Hos. 2:19–20) initiated by the same divine mercy as the Davidic covenant (Is. 55:3).

Israel's Future

Both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were intended to be unconditional in their ultimate effect. Nowhere does Scripture suggest that Israel forsook God's blessings forever and that these blessings have now allegedly been made spiritual and inherited by the church. To say otherwise, in effect, is to misrepresent God's intentions.

The Abrahamic covenant is called an everlasting covenant in which God gave Abraham and his descendants the land of Israel as an everlasting possession (Gen. 17:7–8). God's promise to Abraham is corroborated in 1 Chronicles 16:15–17 and Psalm 105:8–15. By this

covenant, a people and a land are promised for Israel.

The Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:8–16 is called an everlasting covenant in 2 Samuel 23:5; 2 Chronicles 21:7; and Psalm 89:3–4, 19–29, 36. By this covenant, a throne is promised for Israel.

The apostle Paul said it best when speaking about Israel, “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery . . . for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:25, 29). Only Futuristic Premillennialism takes the unconditional nature of God’s eternal covenants and their irreversibility seriously.

God’s Uncompromising Promises

The fourth and final defining corner piece to the prophetic puzzle focuses on God’s undeniable promises to an ancient nation that He would soon severely judge. Israel understood that there would be a time in the future when they as a nation and a people would be restored. Then, the long-awaited Messiah would come and rule from Jerusalem, seated on David’s throne, over Israel and the entire world.

The following Old Testament texts need no explanation as they clearly point to a Futuristic Premillennial hope for Israel.

Jeremiah 24:6–7

For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them up and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.

Jeremiah 31:12

They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they will be radiant over the bounty of the LORD—over the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; and their life will be like a watered garden, and they will never languish again.

Jeremiah 31:40

The whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever.

Ezekiel 34:28–29

They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.

Ezekiel 37:25

They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

Joel 2:26–27

You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; then My people will never be put to shame. Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame.

Joel 3:18–20

And in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim. Egypt will become a waste, and Edom will become a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have

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