

Introduction to Eschatology

By: Richard Ortman, 01/25/2024

The Plan:

- Academic Intro/ Overview – All/ General Concepts
- Examination & Dissection of Premill. (most common in present times)
- Advocate for Amill. + Partial Preterist Positions (most common across church history)
 - Examine Postmill. Positions (strong growth in the American context)

Credit Where It's Due:

- Gary Demar
- Douglas Wilson
- Kim Riddlebarger
- Sam Storms
- Cited sources

Defining Eschatology:

“Eschatology” etymology:

- “Eskhatos” = Greek for “last”
- “-logy” = English for “the study of”

Eschatology = “the study of the last”

Eschaton = “the last thing”; the final moment of history, understood by nearly all Christians to be the great white throne judgment

Scope of the Discussion:

Hermeneutics

- Word Translation:
 - Words and their intended meaning matter greatly; many arguments occur because person’s have different notions of the meaning of a particular word. Especially on more nuanced subjects like eschatology, concern for the best translation of underlying words takes on a special significance
 - *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”* - Matt 24:14
 - What is the greek word for “world”?
 - Typically, it’s “kosmos”, like in John 3:16, Matt 5:14, Mark 8:36, Mark 14:9

- However, in Matt. 24:14, it's "*oikoumenē*" (G3625); in particular, see in these verses how the word is used to refer to Rome specifically:
 - "*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.*" - Luke 2:1
 - "*And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).*" - Acts 11:28
 - "*For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*" - Acts 24:5
 - Ultimately, *oikoumenē* more readily refers to the "inhabited earth", especially that of the Roman empire, in and under which the Jews operated; this piece of information carries great weight when interpreting Matt. 24.
- Grammar Basics:
 - Every sentence (verse) has an independent idea it communicates, with a subject, a predicate, etc.; the idea may be ambiguous (semantic ambiguity), requiring clarity from other verses to be rightly understood, but never at the expense of nullifying or negating the basics of grammatical structure to the original verse
 - "I saw her duck" – Did she duck down, or did the writer see her pet duck?
 - Still, in this sentence, there is a subject, "I", and predicate, "saw her duck", and any interpretation cannot seek to reverse this or nullify it
 - "The chicken is ready to eat" – Is the chicken ready to be fed, or ready to be eaten?
 - Again, a definite subject, "The chicken", and predicate, "is ready to eat"
 - This concept will show itself to be important in interpreting passages like Matt. 24, and Romans 11
- Immediate Context:
 - Exegesis must first be grounded to the immediate context, before relevant external texts can be brought to bear on it; it is inappropriate to force fit or manipulate language, in support of a particular framework of interpretation, that clearly violates clarity found in the immediate context
 - Matt 24. & "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." - Matthew 24:34
- Interpreting Scripture with Scripture:
 - Instead of forming arbitrary hypothesis about the potential meaning of difficult Bible verses, we should look for language in God's Word that clearly defines and interprets relationships between words and phrases, like allegories and allusions.
 - Regarding the account of Jesus cursing the fig tree (Mark 11, Matt. 21), Jeremiah 24 can be clearly seen to be a guiding lens of interpretation for a spiritual allegory that it established, which is then used by Jesus in this teaching
 - This principle will be especially instrumental in prophecy interpretation

Concepts involved in eschatology:

- Covenant Theology
 - Description: "... a conceptual overview and interpretive framework for understanding the overall structure of the Bible. It uses the theological concept of a covenant as an organizing principle for Christian theology" – Wikipedia, "Covenant Theology"
 - How does this relate to eschatology?
 - The varying branches of covenant theology carry with them varying doctrinal assertions about topics that are central to God's relationship to His people, like His law and His covenants; one's perspective on such topics can have far reaching implications as to how these many passages of scripture are to be understood and interpreted in relation to God's plan for his people, and how they are to see their role in history.
 - *Example: Antinomianism ("against law")* – doctrine regarding God's law as revealed through Moses, and how Christian's are to view themselves and their neighbors in relation to it; one's perspective on the use of the law in both churches and society has drastic implications on the function of institutions, how they will participate in history, and the overall intention of God in ordaining institutions to contribute towards the accomplishment of the Great Commission.
 - *Example: Supersessionism (replacement or fulfillment theology)* – a doctrine regarding the term "Israel" and "Jew", and who it applies to, and how it is defined through God's covenants; regarding eschatology, one's doctrinal position on this determines how they will see both old and new testament scriptures applied and interpreted, both regarding timeline (preterist, historic, futurist) and to whom (semites, the Church, etc.)
 - *Example: Covenant Administration (baptism)* – one's view on how persons are added to God's covenant body has large scale implications on how the institutions that God has ordained (family, church, & state) are to function, and therefore how they will contribute to completing the great commission and realizing the eschaton.
 - Named branches of covenant theology:
 - Westminster Covenant Theology (Presbyterians)
 - 1689 Federalism (1689 Baptists)
 - Dispensationalism
 - Continuation of national Israel (anti-supersessionism)
 - New Covenant Theology
 - Antinomianism regarding Mosaic Law
 - Progressive Covenantalism
 - *Note: We don't want to get lost in the weeds going through all these varying branches right now, but it is important to at least know they exist. When we're dealing with differing views on eschatology, many differences arise out of the fact that persons are working from a different covenant framework, which creates a large bias towards interpreting scripture through the framework in an attempt to harmonize the scriptures with the framework. "Covenant theology" is a very macro area of theology, causing Bible teachers to carry implications of their framework far and wide into their interpretations of scripture; teachers have come to believe that the framework they hold to governs how the entire Bible is to be approached, and therefore seek to harmonize everything within the system. Over the course of our*

study, there will be times when we can stop and see clearly how a particular branch of covenant theology as influenced the teacher's interpretation of a text. We should of course ask the question then: is it good theology to allow our framework to govern our exegesis?

- Prophecy Interpretation & Apocalypse Imagery
 - Literalistic vs Literal [1]
 - Literalistic: "... generates an unlettered, ultimately *illiterate* reading—one that is incapable of recognizing less obvious uses of language such as metaphor, satire, and so forth."
 - Literal: "... attends to what authors are doing in tending to their words in a certain way."
 - The Ditch: "Interpreters err either when ... they "literalize" discourse that is intended to be taken figuratively [i.e his literalistic interpreter]."
 - Regarding the latter:
 - *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."* - Matt. 24:29
 - A "literalist" interpretation of this looks out at the night sky, sees that the stars are still there, the moon is still giving its light, and the sun just went down recently, so this verse must not have been fulfilled yet.
 - A literal interpretation sees that the author, recording Jesus Himself, understands this language to be apocalyptic imagery, which was used previously by the prophet Isaiah, to describe God's destruction of civil kingdoms. Jesus literally means what is said communicated by the apocalyptic imagery, that there will be civil unrest and upheaval, but He is clearly not intending to communicate that stars will literally fall from the night sky.
 - *"The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw... I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones... For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light."*- Isaiah 13:1,3,10
 - *"All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. 5 For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom, upon the people I have devoted to destruction."* - Isaiah 34:4-5
 - Allegory & Allusion
 - Allegory: a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.
 - "Textually warranted"
 - Example: Cursed fig fruit (Mark 11 & Matt. 21, & Jeremiah 24), & most of Jesus' parables
 - Unwarranted Allegory
 - May be beautiful and seem fitting, but it's not the clear intention of the author

- Hosea 11:1-2 & Matthew 2:13-15
 - Old covenant Israel going into Egypt and being rescued typified Christ, who is stated to be the actual fulfillment of this language
 - The prior thing referenced actually happened; national Israel went into Egypt and was rescued. Yet, the New Testament clarifies that this was simply symbolic of what was to occur to Jesus, who is Israel, and His parents
- John 2:18-21 & 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
 - Jesus presents Himself and His disciples as the true temple; the physical temple of old covenant Jerusalem was a type of shadow of what was to be in Christ
- Old testament Sabbath laws “typified” Christ, and are now fulfilled in Him (Col. 2:16-18)
 - Exodus 20:8-11
 - *“These are a shadow of the things to come”*
 - The law truly exists, and as Jesus said, “not one jot or tittle” will pass from it, so it is in force down to our day; yet, we are told in the New Testament that physical observance of this law only typified Christ as a shadow of Him, and is now “fulfilled” in Him (Matt. 5:17), as the object which the laws pointed to. Since we are in Christ by the Spirit, Sabbath rest is perpetually fulfilled in us; the law is not abrogated, but rather perpetually fulfilled (Hebrews 4)
 - We can get lost in the weeds on this; but, it was worthwhile to note
- Christocentric & Christotelic
 - Christocentric: Old Testament is read from a Christian viewpoint
 - Jesus: “all scripture points to me”
 - John 5:39-40
 - Protoevangelium
 - Genesis 3:15
 - Gospel preached before hand
 - Galatians 3:8 & Genesis 22:18
 - New Testament interprets the Old
 - Jesus & family in Egypt – Matthew 2:13-15
 - Sabbath Law
 - Christotelic: Old Testament is read largely independent of the New Testament; same God, but not intending to reveal specifics or point to Jesus directly
 - Claims to interpret through a historic context - Genesis 1:26
- Sentiment Distinctive:
 - Optimistic
 - Matthew 16:18, Matthew 9:37-38, Matthew 13:8, Psalm 110:1, John 12:31-32, Matthew 12:28-29, Matthew 28:18, Revelation 1:5, Psalm 2, Jeremiah 51:19-23, Isaiah 2:1-5, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 11:6-9, Psalm 22:27-28, Habakkuk 2:14, James 4:7
 - Pessimistic
 - 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 1 Timothy 4:1-5, Hebrews 10:34, Matthew 10:18, Matthew 5:10-12*, Rev. 13:5-10, 16-18*, Matthew 24:15-28*, James 1:2*
- Others to be expounded upon later: “Kingdom” theology, Church militant & triumphant. “Ages” in the New Testament

Four Views of Prophecy from Doug Wilson [5]:

- Futurist: “When the vision of Revelation was first given, the fulfillment of it was to be found in John’s future, but because it hasn’t happened yet (per their interpretation), those events must also be in our future”
 - Examples: The “beast” mentioned in Revelation is the European Union, which will become a revived version of the Roman empire
 - Example: the “beast” is a future leader of a yet future one world order who reigns through the IMF, WEF, WHO, UN, etc.
- Historicist: “Believes that fulfillment was all in John’s future, but that fulfillment began almost immediately, and has continued to do so, down through Church history.”
 - Example: Many of the reformers thought that the Pope/ Catholic Church of Rome were the beasts mentioned in Romans 13
 - Example: 1572, thousands of Christians slaughtered in St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre & persecutions mentioned in Rev 13:5-10
- Idealist (Spiritual/ Allegorized): “Reads the book of Revelation as something of a gigantic sky parable – no one single fulfillment, but rather multiple fulfillments, all of them illustrated by the conflict described throughout the book”
 - Example: “In Revelation 11, two witnesses are raised to life again, and this strikes consternation among those who witness it” ... The idealist would interpret this like: “Down through Church history, the World appears to have utterly defeated the Church – but then God vindicates His people, and the enemies of God are completely thrown by it”
- Preterist: “This is the view that most things prophesied in Revelation were in John’s immediate future, and which were therefore fulfilled in our distant past – back in the first century.”
 - Partial vs Full
 - Partial Preterist: Sees many new testament prophecies as fulfilled in the first century when the temple was destroyed in Jerusalem
 - Rev. 17:9-10 & Rev. 13
 - Seven mountains
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_hills_of_Rome
 - Seven kings
 - Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), Tiberius (14–37 CE), Caligula (37–41 CE), Claudius (41–54 CE), Nero (54–68 CE), Galba (68–69 CE), Otho (January–April 69 CE)
 - Full Preterist: The view that all Bible prophecy is completely fulfilled, including all descriptions of a future judgement
 - **Heresy**
 - “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:10

The Two Camps of Eschatology

All centered around: When does Christ Return?

Premillennial

Chiliasm; from Greek “*khiliasmos*”, meaning 1000

Two differing branches: Historic & Dispensational

- Beliefs In Common:
 - Teaches a millennial kingdom after the 2nd coming of Christ, prior to final judgment
 - Teaches a period of tribulation prior Jesus’ return
 - Justified differently with scripture between the positions
 - Futurist view of Revelation

Historic (Covenantal) Premillennialism:

- Approx. Duration of Prevalence: 2nd century – 3rd century, 20th – 21st century
 - Has regained some popularity in the modernity (G.E. Ladd)
 - It’s the closest to the time of the Apostles; doesn’t that mean it’s correct?
- Notable Theologians & Teachers: Justin Martyr, Tertullian*, Irenaeus, Papias, Hippolytus, George Eldon Ladd, John Montgomery
 - Called “historic” because many early Church writers (“patristics”) taught it
 - Many of these teachers also taught infant baptism; simply because they were near to the Apostles in time, doesn’t make them right by default
- Distinct Beliefs [8]:
 - Christocentric interpretation of Old Testament; i.e. interpreted in light of N.T.
 - The Church was in the “fore-vision” of old testament prophecy
 - Present age of “grace” was predicted by the Old Testament
 - Supersessionism
 - Church & Jews are apart of the same spiritual group, now revealed through the Church
 - Posttribulational rapture: the Church is only removed after tribulation
 - Tribulation is informed by Revelation & discussion of the beast, etc.

Dispensational Premillennialism:

- Approx. Duration of Prevalence: 19th century – 21st century
- Notable Theologians & Teachers: John Nelson Darby, Charles Ryrie, John MacArthur, Ray Comfort, David Jeremiah, Francis Schaeffer, John Piper, Albert Mohler (SBC), Dwight L. Moody
 - Dallas Theological Seminary is a modern think-tank for the doctrine (Ryrie)
 - Sam Storms
- Popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible
- Distinct Beliefs:

- ** Divides history into periods of time (“epochs”); typically 7, with us being in the 6th and the 7th being the millennial age **
 - Innocence, Conscience, Human or Civil Gov., Promise or Patriarchal Rule, Law, Grace, Millennial Kingdom
- Sharp distinction between old covenant Israel/ Jews & the Church
 - Two people groups God is dealing with separately
 - Teaches the “Church” is hardly, if at all, in view by the old testament prophets
 - Age of “grace” not predicted by the Old Testament
 - “Great Parenthesis”
 - Current age of grace is the result of the Jews rejecting the Kingdom
 - History: Israel----->(Church)---->[Millennial Kingdom]---->Heaven
- Christotelic interpretation of Old Testament
 - Tries to work new testament prophecies into the old (Dan. 9)
 - Interpret Daniel 9:27 as informing prophecies in Revelation about the beast’s reign, resulting in the 7 years of tribulation
- Pretribulational view is most common: the Church is removed prior to 7 years of tribulation
- Generally pessimistic regarding Church’s success and impact in the World
 - John MacArthur: “We lose down here!” [11]

Postmillennial

3-ish Valid Flavors; 1 Secularized nonsense view

- All believe that Christ returns after the millennium
- “Post-”, as a timing distinctive regarding the millennium, refers to the fact that Christ will return after the millennium discussed in Revelation 20
 - As a secondary meaning, it also carries a specific belief about the future state of the Church, and more generally, societies of Earth
 - The term “Amillennial” is simply a sub-distinction of the “post-” classification
 - Not only will Christ return after the millennium in Rev 20, but it has already begun
 - “a-” is simply a clarified categorization of “post-”
 - This categorization is also associated with a secondary meaning that the final state of the Church/ Earth is not specifically qualified by scripture
- In recent times, “post-” is used primarily in reference to its secondary meaning; the belief that scripture teaches “success” regarding the future state of the Earth and the mission of the Church; not simply a categorization of when Christ will return in relation to the millennium of Rev. 20
 - Technically, one of the primary modern camp’s that calls itself “Postmillennial” is actually also amillennial in their beliefs, but retains the title “post-” to distinguish their belief about the future state of Earth prior to Christ’s return
- R.C. Sproul – undecided; definitely doesn’t support dispensational premill [12]

Postmillennial Futurist (Puritan Postmillennialism):

- Regarding “post-” usage, believe that:
 - The millennium in Rev 20 has yet to begin; some future event will usher it in, such as the mass saving of the ethnic Jews

- The millennium will be characterized by exponential success of the Gospel on Earth; A future state of earthly success for the Church, prior to Christ's return
 - Typically qualified as a period of "peace, righteousness, and prosperity"
- Approx. Duration of Prevalence: 16th Century – 21st Century
- Notable Theologians & Teachers: John Own, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry; some writing from early reformers are cited as the origin of this position, though they themselves didn't articulate it at that time
 - *"Our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ whom the Father has appointed King to 'rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth....' And he is so to rule as to smite the whole earth with its iron and brazen strength, with its gold and silver brilliance, shattering it with the rod of his mouth as an earthen vessel, just as the prophets have prophesied concerning the magnificence of his reign."* - Calvin [10]
 - Notice language from Psalm 2, Jeremiah 51,
- Doctrinal Distinctives:
 - Generally agree to a "covenantal" civil sphere
 - Leaders of countries are in "covenant" with God, and with the people they lead
 - Supersessionism – the Church & Israel are part of the same spiritual body
 - A belief that many ethnic jews will begin to believe the Gospel in mass
 - Heavy emphasis on God's saving of the ethnic jews
 - *"Now there came a greater attention to Scripture bearing on the future of the Jews and this matured ultimately into a conviction that the converted Jews would, in God's hand, be instrumental in bringing about a fuller in-gathering of Gentile nations and therefore a future universal golden age of spiritual prosperity."* [9]
 - Sometimes including a belief they'll return to the land they were given
 - Historicist view of Revelation
 - Generally recognize an apostasy occurring prior to the return of Christ (Rev 20)

"Theonomic" Postmillennialism (Christian Reconstructionism):

- Regarding "post-" usage, believe that:
 - The millennium has begun, but is far from its realized state
 - By their Rev 20 interpretation, technically speaking they are also amillennialist
 - Seeing as amillennialism doesn't see a guarantee in scripture regarding the future state of the Church & Earth, this camp has retained the "post-" prefix as an implicit means of distinguishing their beliefs on such matters
 - Like Puritan Postmill, the millennium will be characterized by exponential success of the Gospel on Earth; a future state of earthly success for the Church, prior to Christ's return
 - Typically qualified as a period of "peace, righteousness, and prosperity"
- Approx. Duration of Prevalence: 19th Century – 21st Century
- Notable Theologians/ Teachers: R.J. Rushdoony, Gary North, Ken Gentry, Greg Bahnsen, Joseph Boot
- Doctrinal Distinctives:
 - Partial preterist view of Revelation

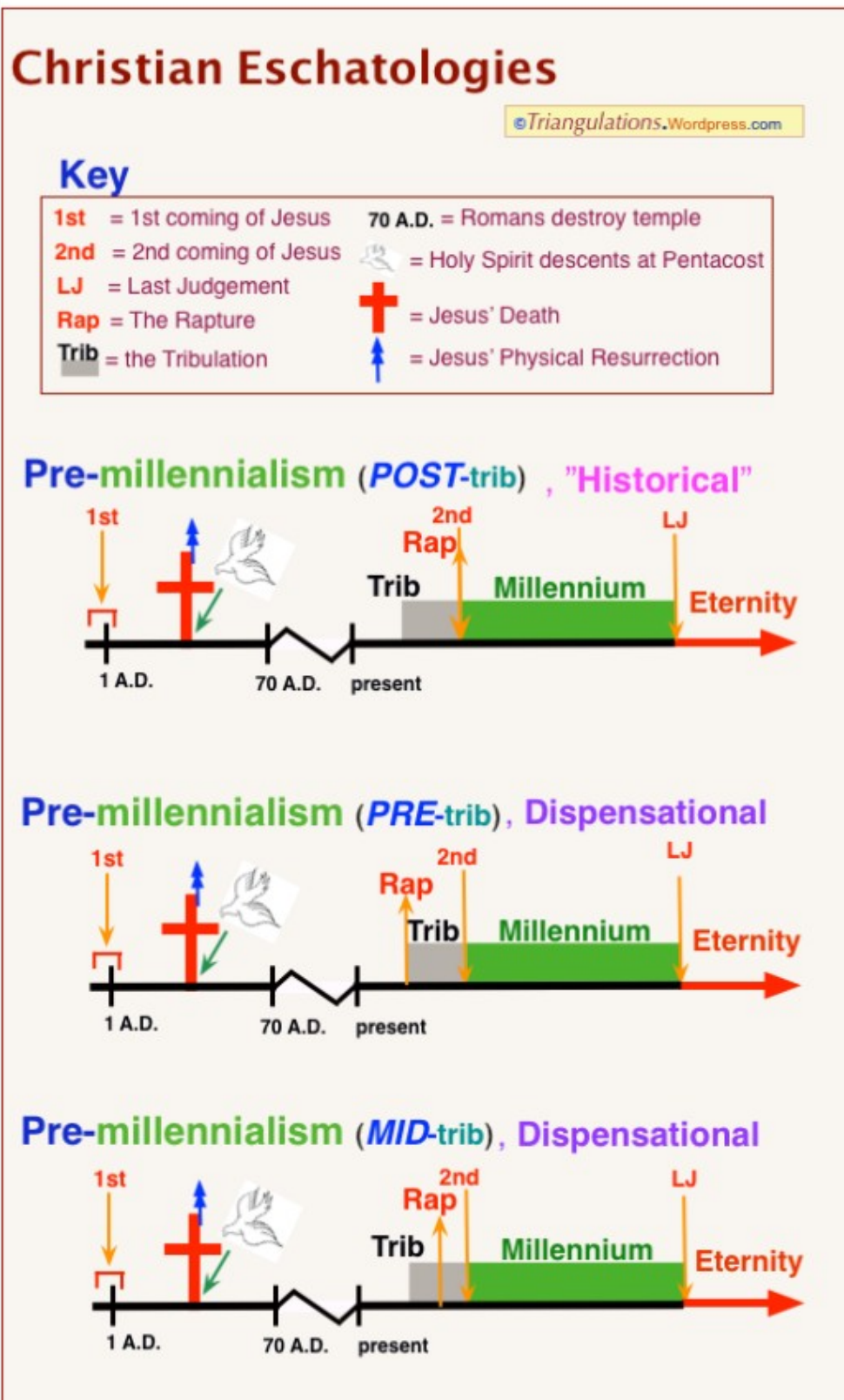
- Homeschooling
- Dominion theology
 - Christians are to still understand themselves to be carrying out the original commission to Adam & Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” to fill the Earth
- Emphasis on cultural change through institutional transformation
 - Through the success of the Church, Christians use and influence institutions of power to promote and enforce Christian principles, especially government, through which the masses are reached for Christ

Amillennialism:

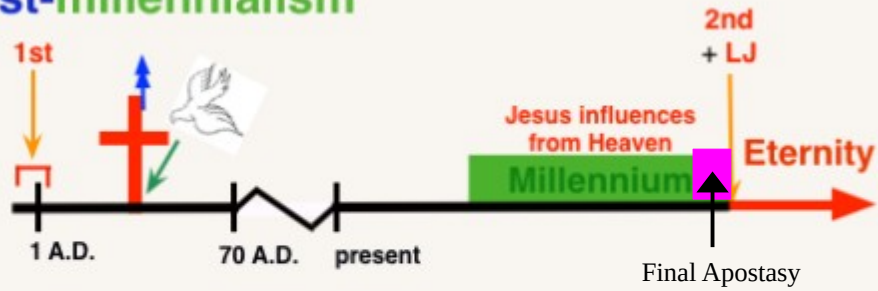
- Characterized by the belief that the millennium discussed in Rev 20 is currently ongoing
 - “1000” years is understood to be allegorical language, along with the rest of the passage
 - Chart [4] – “Aglow” (see figure below)
- Approx. Duration of Prevalence: 4th Century – 21st Century
- Notable Theologians & Teachers: Origen, Tyconius, St. Augustine & Roman Catholic Church, Eastern & Oriental Orthodox Church, Protestant Reformers & Denominations (John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger; Lutheran, Anglican, Methodists), historic Anabaptists (Amish, Old Order & Conservative Mennonites), Sam Storms, Michael Horton, N.T. Wright, J.I. Packer, A.W. Pink
 - Teacher’s who have been qualified as puritan postmillennial, but who were technically amillennial in their teachings: Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, R.L. Dabney [13]
 - Historically, it has strong support; but so does infant baptism. History does not equate to accuracy, though it is not irrelevant either.
- Views of Revelation
 - Idealist
 - Partial preterist
 - Often a blend of the two
 - Typology acknowledged throughout prophetic/ apocalyptic literature
- Optimism vs Pessimism
 - Optimistic amills and theonomic postmills are nearly identical in their sense of hope for the future, save for belief on scriptures teachings about the state of civil society in the future before Christ’s return
 - Origins of amillennialism from the puritan postmill camp were generally optimistic
 - Pessimistic amill emphasizes new testament teachings about suffering and times of difficulty, and therefore less hope for the future outlook of the Church / World

prefix		meaning	examples
a-	<i>also an-</i>	not, without	atheist, anaemic
a-		to, towards	aside, aback
		in the process of, in a particular state	a-hunting, aglow
a-		of	anew
		completely	abashed
ab-	<i>also abs-</i>	away, from	abdicate, abstract

Charts [6]:

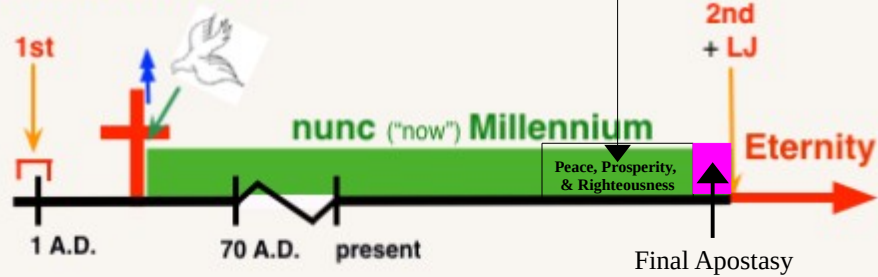


Puritan Post-millennialism



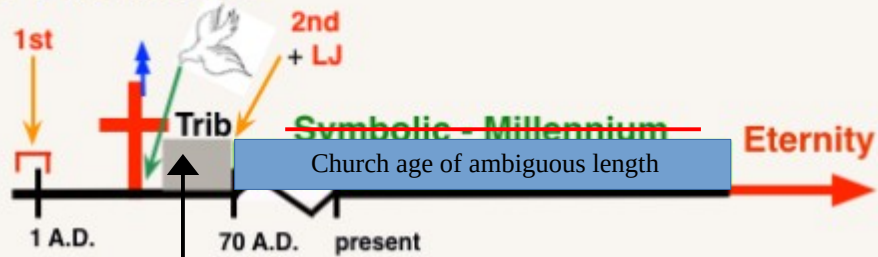
Christian Reconstructionism / Modern Postmill

A-millennialism



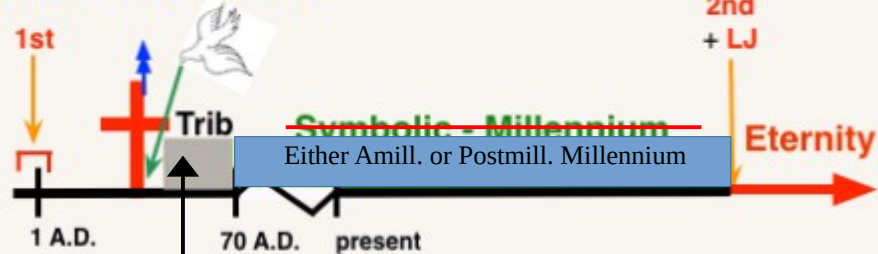
Preterism is a "qualifier" of an eschatology; not an eschatology itself.

Full Preterism



"Trib" NOT= 7 year trib. of premill.

Partial Preterism



"Trib" NOT= 7 year trib. of premill.

- [1] <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/13136/what-is-the-difference-between-a-literal-and-literalistic-interpretation-of>
- [2] <https://www.gotquestions.org/allegorical-interpretation.html>
- [3] <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/jesus-christ/what-did-jesus-mean-when-he-said-sell-your-cloak-and-buy-a-sword.html>
- [4] <https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/prefixes.php>
- [5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys6_Th7rvW0
- [6] <https://triangulations.wordpress.com/2009/11/22/eschatology/>
- [7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Year_of_the_Four_Emperors
- [8] <https://www.gotquestions.org/historic-premillennialism.html>
- [9] <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/postmillennialism-%E2%80%93-its-historical-development>
- [10] <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2019/12/03/reformation-postmillennialism/>
- [11] <https://theperfectliberty.com/evaluating-eschatology-fight-to-lose/>
- [12] <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/r-c-sproul-eschatology.34278/>
- [13] <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/postmillennialism-%E2%80%93-its-historical-development>