



**What does the Bible say about the future? An awful lot! This is a look at what's ahead for the world.**

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# **THE RETURN OF CHRIST**

**A Look at Biblical Prophecy**

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## INTRODUCTION

Why is so much of the Bible given over to prophecy? The answer in a word is hope. Without hope, people become despondent and despair of life itself. While there is much in life to enjoy and look forward to, there is also much that is evil, sad, and discouraging. The Bible tells us this life is not all there is. God has a plan that he is moving the world toward. Knowing this plan should bring joy and hope to believers and be an encouragement for unbelievers to consider seriously the claims of Christ. The 'blessed hope' (Titus 2:13) of the Christian centres around the coming of Jesus Christ. Let's look at three phases of Jesus' coming, his coming for the church, his coming in judgment and his coming to rule.

## CHRIST REWARDING

God is at heart a generous rewarder (Hebrews 11:6). Soon believers will experience his generosity face to face. How so? Well, any day now the Lord Jesus is going to return for his people. He will then resurrect, reward, and wed them.

### **The Rapture**

The Rapture is the first phase of the Second Coming of Christ. It refers to the resurrection of the church saints when Christ comes back for them (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). This event could happen at any time (the Doctrine of Imminence).

When compared to the second coming, note the following differences:

<b>Rapture</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Coming</b>
<i>Meeting them in the air (1 Thes 4:17)</i>	Taking them to the earth (Zechariah 14:4; Rev 19:11f)
<i>Taking believers to heaven (John 14:3)</i>	Bringing believers back to earth (Rev 19:14)
<i>Coming for His saints (2 Thes 2:1)</i>	Coming with His saints (Jude 14)
<i>Only believers see Him (1 Thes 4:17)</i>	All people see Him (Rev 1:7)
<i>No signs precede it (1 Thes 5:1-3)</i>	Many signs precede it (Matt 24:3-30)
<i>The Tribulation begins (2 Thes 1:6-9)</i>	The Millennium begins (Rev 20:1-7)

(Geisler, Systematic Theology, 4:623)

The Rapture marks the end of God's working with the church on earth. The events which follow on earth after the rapture show God once more working with/on the nation of Israel to fulfil his covenant promises to them.

# The Judgement Seat

## What is it?

Every believer will one day stand before the Lord Jesus to be rewarded (or otherwise) for the works done post-conversion (1 Corinthians 3:14-15 and 2 Corinthians 5). This is not about salvation, but rather is an analysis of our service for Christ.

## When is it? - After the Rapture

- Reward is associated with the resurrection (Luke 14:14)
- The bride is already rewarded when it returns with Jesus (Rev 19:8)
- Reward is associated with 'that day', the day Jesus comes for his own (1 Cor 4:5; 2 Tim 4:8; Rev 22:12)

## What Are the Rewards?

Scripture references 5 crowns that will be given as rewards. Perhaps there is overlap here and perhaps there are more, but there are at least the following:



An incorruptible crown, for those who run the Christian race well (1 Corinthians 9:25).



A crown of rejoicing for those who have helped others come to faith or grow in their faith (1 Thessalonians 2:19)



A crown of life for those who endure trials well (James 1:12).



A crown of righteousness for those who love (and therefore work and pray) for Jesus's return (2 Timothy 4:8).



A crown of glory for Elders who serve well (1 Peter 5:4).

Revelation 4:10 indicates that these crowns will be given for the glory of God. Perhaps rewards refer to the capacity to be able to reflect the glory of God throughout eternity.

### To Suffer Loss

The Apostle Paul warned that believers whose works don't pass the test will 'suffer loss' at the judgment seat. This loss does not refer to salvation, as that is guaranteed (1 Corinthians 3:15). Yet Scripture is not clear on what exactly this 'loss' entails. It would seem akin to the 'disqualification' Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:25. Perhaps, depending on the severity of the 'loss', it means some believers won't reign with Christ in the millennium (2 Timothy 2:12) and/or won't dwell in the New Jerusalem during the eternal state (Revelation 21:24).

## **The Marriage Supper**

The N.T. often refers to the church as the bride of Christ (e.g., 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-33). At the rapture, Christ appears as the bridegroom to take his bride to himself.

The marriage supper is announced in Revelation 19:7 before Jesus returns to earth. It would seem then that the marriage has

taken place in heaven sometime between the Rapture and the Return.

The marriage supper, to which people are invited in Revelation 19:7, takes place after Jesus' return, on earth, during the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28-29; Luke 22:16-18 and 29-30).

An alternate view identifies the Bride as the saints of all ages. The marriage is only announced in Revelation 19:7. Both the marriage and the marriage supper take place during the millennium and the eternal state. This allows for Israel to be part of the bride (see Isaiah 54 and 60-62) and also equates the bride with the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21:2 and 21:9f.

## CHRIST ROARING

Could there be a link between the romanticised view of Jesus in our evangelical culture today and a lack of focus on his return? In today's church, Jesus is very much viewed as kind, gracious and forgiving, and so he is. However, at the same time, there is little emphasis on Jesus' holiness, anger, and judgment. In the Old Testament God is often viewed as the divine warrior (Exodus 15:3; Deuteronomy 5:15; 1 Samuel 17:45; Amos 3:8). In the Gospels, Jesus often rebuked the self-righteous and warned about coming judgment (Matthew 11:20-24; Matthew 23; Mark 9:43; Luke 16:19-31). And in the New Testament, at his second coming Jesus will judge and destroy people (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Jude 14-16; Revelation 19:11-21).

An accurate picture of Jesus from the Scriptures is of a King who is both strong and kind, both holy and gracious, both judicial and forgiving. The second phase of his coming, the tribulation period and second coming, highlights Jesus' holiness, righteousness, and justice.

## **The Tribulation Period**

### The Timing

The Tribulation Period refers to 7 years of judgment that God pours out on earth after the church is raptured. The 7-year time frame is derived from the '70 weeks' prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. In this prophecy, Daniel is told that 70 weeks are determined for his people (the Jews) and the holy city (Jerusalem). Each 'week' refers to a 7-year period. According to that prophecy, the first 69 weeks or 483 years end with the Messiah being cut off. The last week, which begins with the antichrist making a peace treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27), has yet to start and so awaits fulfillment.

The Tribulation is further divided into two 3 ½ year periods, the second of which is referred to as the Great Tribulation due to the increased intensity of Satan's activity and God's judgment (Revelation 11:3; 12:6, 14; 13:5 ).

### The Purpose

The Tribulation Period is primarily designed to bring the nation of Israel to repentance. Only when Israel repents and accepts Jesus as her Messiah can the kingdom come (Zechariah 12:10, Acts

3:19-21; Romans 11:25-27). Thus, this period is referred to as the 'time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7).

Secondarily the Tribulation Period is a judgment on rebellious humanity (Revelation 6-19). The judgments are grounded in God's holiness (Revelation 4-5).

### The Character

Revelation 6-18 describes the events of the Tribulation Period. The three sets of judgments are to be viewed telescopically. These judgments increase in intensity throughout the 7 years. At the midpoint, the anti-Christ sets himself up in God's temple proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This is called the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15). The antichrist will be empowered by the Devil and aided by the False Prophet (the unholy Trinity, Revelation 12-13). The gospel will be proclaimed, many will believe and many of these believers (but not all) will die for the faith. The period will end with the Battle of Armageddon where the nations will gather together to fight against Israel (Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 12:3, 14:2).

### **The Second Coming**

The Second Coming of Christ refers to the time when Jesus will return to earth to destroy his enemies and establish his kingdom. He will come at the end of the Tribulation Period and destroy all the armies gathered against Israel at the battle of Armageddon (Zechariah 14; Revelation 19). That day will see:



- An eerie extended twilight (Zechariah 14:6-7)
- The host of heavenly armies coming with him (Revelation 19, Jude 14-15)
- Jesus' feet touch down on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4)
- The destruction of all who oppose Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9)
- Jesus enter Jerusalem via the Eastern or Golden Gate (Ezekiel 43:4)
- Topographical changes, including streams of water pouring forth from the (rebuilt) temple to cleanse it (Zechariah 14:8)

## CHRIST RULING

God is faithful. Let that truth sink in afresh. God is faithful, he will do what he said he will do. He keeps his word. If he makes a promise he will keep it, period, no exceptions. How do we know? Not only does the Bible say so (e.g., Lamentations 3:21-24), but God has demonstrated his faithfulness throughout human history. Therefore, believers can have absolute confidence in God and his word. The third phase of Jesus' return, the millennial reign and eternal state, highlight God's great faithfulness and glory. It's in this phase that God's promises to Israel and the church are fulfilled.

# The Millennium

When Jesus returns:

- All his enemies will be defeated (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9),
- Satan will be bound for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-3)
- The Davidic Kingdom will be established, over which Christ will rule with a rod of iron for 1000 years (Psalm 2)
- Believers who survived the Tribulation Period will enter the Millennium and populate the earth (Jeremiah 30:20, Isaiah 65:20, Zechariah 14:16).
- The Old Testament saints together with the martyred Tribulation saints will be resurrected (Daniel 12:2, Revelation 20:4).
- The earth and nature will be renewed (Isaiah 65:17-25)
- The priestly services in the temple will be reinstated (Ezekiel 40-47)
- Israel will be apportioned the land as promised (Ezekiel 48)
- Israel will be an exalted nation among the nations (Isaiah 60-62; Zechariah 8:23)
- Believers will reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 21:4)

This kingdom will be characterized by:

- righteousness (Isaiah 26:2)
- obedience (Matthew 6:10)
- holiness (Zechariah 14:20-21)
- truth (Zechariah 8:3)
- peace (Jeremiah 33:6)
- productivity and prosperity (Joel 2:21-27)
- joy (Isaiah 9:3-4)

- glory (Isaiah 24:23)
  - comfort (Jeremiah 31:23-25)
  - justice (Isaiah 9:7)
  - knowledge (Habakkuk 2:4)
  - instruction (Isaiah 2:2-3)
  - freedom from oppression (Isaiah 14:3-6)
  - unified worship (Zechariah 14:16)
  - the presence of God (Ezekiel 37:27-28)
  - the fulness of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29)
- (adapted from Pentecost, Things To Come, pp.482-490)

At the end of the millennium Satan will be let out. He will deceive many and wage one last war again the Lord. This will quickly be defeated. Satan will then join the False Prophet and the Antichrist in the lake of fire. Unbelievers will be resurrected and judged at the Great White Throne, also to be cast into the Lake of Fire. Here they all will be tormented for eternity (Revelation 20:7-15, see also Matthew 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 14:9-11).

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 reveals that when the end comes and all enemies are subjugated, Jesus will hand over his kingdom to the Father. This does not mean the Davidic Kingdom ceases, but rather it transitions into God's eternal and Universal Kingdom.

## **The New Heavens and Earth**

After Satan is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10) along with all unbelievers at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), God will create a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 22:1). The existing heaven and earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1).

This new earth will be lit by God from the new Jerusalem, a celestial city (Revelation 21:23-24). This city will

- be magnificent in splendour and glory (Revelation 21:2, 11-21)
- have no temple since God and the Lamb are the temple (Revelation 21:22)
- have representation of both Israel and the Church built into it (Revelation 21:12, 14)
- be as big as...
- holy, never to be tainted by sin (Revelation 21:27)
- have a river running through it with the tree of life on each side (Revelation 22:1-2)
- have no curse of sin, pain or sorrow of any kind but rather only that which makes for health and life (Revelation 21:4; 22:3)
- the place from which God and the Lamb rule from their throne (Revelation 22:3)

The new earth will be inhabited by believers, the identity of which is uncertain (Revelation 21:24-26).

## DIFFERENT MILLENNIAL VIEWS

### **Premillennialism**

The view presented in this paper. The church is distinct from Israel and began at Pentecost. After the Rapture of the Church God will once more work with national Israel, preparing them to receive their Messiah (the Tribulation Period) and then fulfilling his

covenant promises to them (the Millennium). There are a number of different resurrections and judgments.

Historic and Progressive dispensationalists believe in an 'already not yet' kingdom in this age. The kingdom has been inaugurated spiritually and awaits a physical fulfilment at Christ's second coming.

## **Amillennialism**

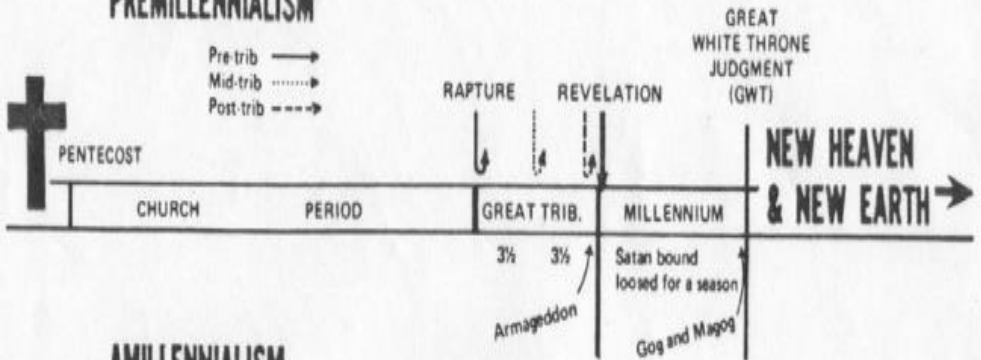
The people of God in the Old Testament were called Israel and in the New, they are called the Church. There is greater continuity between the two than dispensationalists argue. When Jesus came he established his (Davidic) kingdom, a kingdom sustained by the work of the Spirit. At the cross, Satan was bound, limited to some degree in his activities. Jesus currently reigns over his kingdom from heaven. This age is called the last days and will culminate in some form of tribulation before Jesus returns to usher in the new heavens and the new earth. There is only one general resurrection and one judgment.

## **Postmillennialism**

The church will be successful in its task of evangelising the world. By doing so it will usher in the millennium. There is no distinction between Israel and the Church as in premillennialism.

# MILLENNIAL VIEWS

## PREMILLENNIALISM



## AMILLENNIALISM



## POSTMILLENNIALISM



## WHY DISPENSATIONALISM?

1. Prophecy regarding the first coming of Jesus was fulfilled literally, why would we expect anything different for prophecy regarding the second coming? This is especially so given that one biblical prophecy often incorporated ‘multiple’ comings of Messiah (Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 61:1-7).
2. God’s covenant promises to Israel have yet to be fulfilled and God always keeps his word. These covenant promises include Israel’s:
  - Regeneration (Jeremiah 31:33-40),
  - Possession of the Promised Land (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:7-21; 17:3-8),
  - Messiah ruling over the earth from David’s throne (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6-7).
3. Israel and the Church are distinct entities.

<b>Difference</b>	<b>Israel</b>	<b>Church</b>
<b>They have different beginnings</b>	Abram (Genesis 12)	The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2 with 11:15, see also Matt 16:8; John 7:37-39 with Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 3:2-6)
<b>They are different communities</b>	Composed of ethnic descendants of Abraham (Romans 11:1-5)	Composed of Jews and Gentiles alike (Ephesians 2:14-22; 3:2-6)
<b>They have different elections</b>	A national, ethnic election, despite unbelief in Messiah (Deuteronomy 7:7-9; Romans 11:28-29)	A corporate, salvific, non-ethnically defined election (Ephesians 1:1-13)

(Adapted from Michael Rydelnik, Evidence For The rapture, Chapter 10)

4. Jesus is not currently sitting on David's throne in heaven. The Davidic Kingdom has not been inaugurated. Jesus is sitting on his Father's throne (Revelation 3:21). He will assume the Davidic throne when he returns to reign over the earth (Matthew 19:28; 25:31). The Davidic throne has always been an earthly throne located in Jerusalem.
5. Dispensationalism is Trinitarian and doxological in its emphasis rather than Christological and redemptive like covenant theology (1 Corinthians 15:24).
6. The dispensational philosophy of history reveals that God is good and humans are sinful, regardless of the conditions God gives humanity to live by. In the Garden of Eden, there was no 'flesh' or 'world', yet man failed. In the O.T. Israel had the written word of God and his presence in the temple, yet they failed. The church has the indwelling Spirit, the antidote to sin's penalty and power thanks to Jesus' cross work, yet it is struggling. In the Millennium the earthly conditions will be pristine, yet humanity will still rebel and fail.
7. Only premillennialism makes sense of the current and future work of Satan. Other millennial positions believe Satan's binding as described in Revelation 20:1-3 happened at the cross. However, currently, Satan is called the 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' (Ephesians 2:2), the ruler of spiritual forces arrayed against believers (Ephesians 6:10-12), he is to be



resisted (James 4:8), and he seeks to devour Christians (1 Peter 5:8), hardly the resume of someone chained and thrown into an Abyss (Revelation 20:1-3)! In addition, Revelation 20:1 clearly continues the narrative of chapter 19. Not only does 20:1 begin with the word 'and,' it also completes the story of the roundup of the unholy Trinity. Revelation 19:20-21 see the Beast and False Prophet captured and thrown into the lake of fire; chapter 20 then narrates the demise of Satan.

8. Only premillennialism allows the second Adam to reign successfully over the same realm where the first Adam failed. Adam and Eve were commanded to rule over the earth as God's vice-regents (Genesis 1:26-28). Where they failed, Jesus will succeed in the Millennium. It seems only fitting that Jesus' success takes place in the same realm as Adam's failure.\*
9. Only premillennialism gives Jesus sufficient time on this earth to display his glory, receive recognition from all nations and subdue all enemies (Zechariah 14:9; Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 19:15, 20:7-10). It seems incongruous that this world will never have a time in its history where due honour and glory are given to its creator and King.\*
10. Only premillennialism has the saints rewarded and vindicated in the same realm in which they served and were persecuted. The saints are promised rule with Christ over the nations (Daniel 7:18, 27; Revelation 2:26-27; 20:4).\*

\* Ideas are taken from Michael Vlach, Premillennialism, Chapter 7

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### Website

<https://www.pre-trib.org/> The Pre-Trib Research Center

