

I. The Scripture

A. Acts 1:6-11

- During Jesus final days on earth, the disciples ask him, “is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”
- Jesus tells them that it is not for them to know God's timeline, but they should instead focus themselves on being a witness of who Jesus is to the entire world.
- Jesus then ascends to heaven, leaving dazed disciples.
- Angels come and promise that Jesus would some day return the same way they saw him go.

B. The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 - 25)

1. The Context (24:1-3)

- Jesus and the disciples were admiring the beauty of the temple in Jerusalem.
- Jesus told them that it would not be long before the temple would be destroyed.
- Later that day, at the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked him when this would happen, and what would be the signs of the end of the age.

2. Matthew 24:4-15

- Jesus warns them not to be misled, for many people will claim to be the Messiah, and there will be many wars, earthquakes and famines.
- Two significant events will happen:
 - The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world. (vs. 14)
 - The Abomination of Desolation will occur in the temple. (vs. 15)

3. Matthew 24:21-31

- This time will be the *Great Tribulation* beyond anything that has or will ever again occur (vs. 21).
- When the Son of Man returns, it will be readily apparent to all (vs. 25-27, 30).
- The return of the Son of Man will take place immediately after the tribulation (vs. 29).
- The return of the Son of Man will gather His elect at this post-tribulation coming (vs. 31).

4. Matthew 24:34-44

- This generation will not pass away until these things take place (vs. 34).
- But no one, not even the Son of Man, knows exactly when it is going to take place (vs. 37)
- He will come when you least expect it (vs. 44).

C. Daniel's 70 Weeks

1. Background

- Daniel realizes that the 70 years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah is about to be accomplished.
- Daniel prays to God, confessing his people's sin, and asking God, "What happens next?"
- God responds by sending Gabriel in a vision, who tells him the future of Israel.

2. Daniel 9:24-26

- The remaining history of Israel lasts 70 weeks (literally seventy sevens), or 490 years.
- The clock starts when the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem is issued (vs. 25). According to Nehemiah 2:1-8, this took place on March 14, 445 BC.
- The streets and walls will be rebuilt during a period of 7 weeks and then 62 weeks.
- At the end of this time, the Messiah shall be cut off (vs. 26).

3. Daniel 9:27

- In the 70th week. Here the prince previously described in Daniel 7, as the growing horn of the beast will make a covenant with Israel.
- But three and a half years into this covenant, a prince will end the temple sacrifices and the abomination of desolation will take place. The abomination of desolation is referred to in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11, and refers to a sacrilegious event taking place within the temple.
- The prince will be destroyed.

D. Isaiah

1. Isaiah 65:17-24

- God will create a new heaven and earth (vs. 17a).
- The old heaven and earth will be forgotten (vs. 17b).
- There will be no more weeping and crying (vs. 18-19).
- There will be no more infant mortality and people will live for a long time (vs. 20).
- It will be a time of great prosperity (vs. 21-23).
- All creation will be in a time of peace (vs. 25)

2. Isaiah 66:15-22

- The Lord will come with judgment (vs. 15-17).
- The Lord will gather all the nations who will see His glory (vs. 18-19).
- The Lord will gather all Israel from among the nations (vs. 20-21).
- The new heaven and earth will endure (vs. 22).
- The offspring of Israel will endure as well (vs. 22).
- All mankind will bow before the Lord (vs. 23).
- Sinners will not die, being as in an unquenched fire (vs. 24).

E. 1 Corinthians 15

1. Background

- Some people in Corinth were teaching that people would not be raised from the dead.
- In this letter to the Corinthians what Paul reminds them what he had taught them about the resurrection. (vs. 1, 12)

2. 1 Corinthians 15:20-24, 51-58

- At the return of Christ, believers, both alive and dead, will receive changed bodies (vs. 51-52).
- Death will then be conquered (vs. 54-55)

F. Thessalonians

1. Background

- Paul wrote two letters to the church in Thessalonica.
- The Thessalonians seem to have some confusion regarding the resurrection and the return of Christ.

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11

- The Lord will descend with a shout and a trumpet.
- The dead will rise first. Then, those alive will be caught up in the clouds with the Lord.
- The day is unknown. The Lord will come like a thief in the night.
- Be sober, paying attention.
- Believers are not destined for wrath.

3. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-15

- It appears that some Thessalonians believed the Second Coming had already taken place.
- Paul assures them that it has not because the signs had not been fulfilled yet:
- Apostasy must come first with the man of lawlessness or the son of destruction (vs. 3).
- He will sit in the temple and set himself up to be God (vs. 4).
- While there is lawlessness now, the lawless one won't come until the restrainer is removed (vs. 7)
- The Lord will kill the man of lawlessness (vs. 8).

G. Revelation

1. Background

- Revelation is a record of a vision the apostle John received while exiled on the island of Patmos.
- The first 3 chapters are messages from Christ to seven churches located in Asia Minor.
- Chapters 4-19 describes a time of tribulation filled with natural disasters and war. The key figure in the midst of this time is a man called "The Beast"

2. Revelation 19:11-16, 19-21

- Jesus returns as a warrior
- He defeats the beast and his followers

3. Revelation 20:1-15

- Satan will be bound for 1,000 years.
- Martyrs will be resurrected and reign with Christ during this time.
- At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan is released and defeated.
- At the end of the 1,000 years everyone else is resurrected and judged.

4. Revelation 21:1-6

- The old heaven and earth will pass away.
- A new heaven and earth will be created.
- God will dwell with men.
- There will be no sorrow or pain.

II. The Time Line

A. The Tribulation & Millennium

Daniel's 70th week discusses "the prince" who will set up the abomination of desolation. Jesus refers to Daniel's prophecy, calling this time the "Great Tribulation." This seems to correlate with Paul's "man of lawlessness" and John's "beast" seems to have similar characteristics to Daniel's prince. This is known as the Great Tribulation. Following the Tribulation comes a time, known as the Millennium, where Christ rules as King.

Most all Christians agree to these facts. When these events take place, however, are of great debate within the Church.

1. Preterist Views

The Preterist view states that the events of the tribulation were fulfilled in AD 70 when Rome destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. Most preterists see the millennium being fulfilled spiritually in the age of the church (see Amillennialism below), while *full* preterists would see all the prophesied events, including the second coming as already fulfilled.

Jesus' comments regarding "the generation not passing away," would suggest the tribulation follows within 40 years of his death.

(Matthew 24:34 NASB) Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Daniel's chronology would seem to indicate the 70th week closely follows the cutting off of the Messiah.

(Daniel 9:26 NASB) Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

However, Jesus indicates that the Second Coming would follow closely behind the tribulation, and that the Second Coming would be obvious to all. Therefore, while there seems to be an immediate fulfillment reflected in the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, there are a number of predicted elements that have not happened yet. This suggests a yet future, more complete fulfillment.

2. Amillennialism

Amillennialists do not believe in a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ with Israel. Because Israel rejected Christ, the church has replaced Israel and is now inheriting the promises of Israel. Therefore, the millennium is being fulfilled symbolically by Christ's reign over the church in this present age. The Tribulation is viewed either as the struggles of the Church throughout history or is seen being fulfilled in the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (see the preterist view).

This is the predominant viewpoint in Christianity. It was first articulated by Augustine, and remains the viewpoint of Roman Catholics and the reformed church.

The viewpoint is largely an outgrowth of Replacement Theology. The New Testament affirms that the kingdom of God was ushered in with Christ's first advent and is continuing through the Church today.

(Luke 17:20-21 NASB) Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

Most scriptures do not show any interval between the coming of the Christ and the judgment, as is necessary in a literal interpretation of the Millennium. Furthermore, the book of Revelation uses many numeric symbols, and the number 1,000 may mean merely “a really long time.”

3. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism believes that the Church will bring about the millennium prior to the return of Christ. As the Church works to accomplish its mission to bring the world to Christ and thereby brings about social justice and peace, the Church will create the millennial reign of Christ, after which Christ will return. The Tribulation is seen to have already been fulfilled either in the destruction of the temple (preterism) or in the struggles of the church throughout history.

This was a popular viewpoint in the early 20th century as the Church was refocused on missionary work and social action, and technology was making impact on eliminating disease. This viewpoint all but died out with two world wars and a great depression.

The scripture does indicate that the kingdom of God will continue to grow and eventually transform the entire world (Matthew 13:31-33), and that the Church will continue to be built and not be overcome by Satan (Matthew 16:18). However, this viewpoint was more developed out of an optimistic view of history and the missionary zeal found early in the last century.

4. Premillennialism

Premillennialist believe that the millennium is the literal reign of Christ with Israel over all the earth. This is a time of great peace and prosperity for the entire earth, but in particular in Israel. This is distinct from the New Heaven and New Earth, as both believers and unbelievers will live in this new era. The Church will have already been resurrected and will reign with Christ at this time.

This was the viewpoint of the early church. Today it is held by dispensationalists, Baptists, and most evangelicals. This viewpoint is the plainest interpretation of Revelation 20 and matches with much of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the future of the nation of Israel.

B. The Rapture

The term rapture is found only in 1 Thessalonians 4, and for most of the Church is equated with the return of Christ. The debate of the timing of the rapture is only relevant for the premillennialist, as both amillennialism and postmillennialism believe that the Tribulation is already complete

1. Pre-tribulation

Pretribulationists believe that prior to the coming Great Tribulation, Christ will have a *secret* coming, where He gathers His Church and takes them to heaven, leaving only unbelievers to go through the tribulation. This removal of the Church signifies the return to the time of Israel as God's primary focus. Many will be saved during the resurrection, including all of Israel. At the end of the tribulation, Christ returns with His church, raises those who died in Christ during the Tribulation and those who survived the Tribulation will enter the time of the Millennium in non-glorified bodies.

The pretribulationist viewpoint, then, sees three resurrections: 1) the saints raised at the rapture, 2) the saints who died in the tribulation raised at the second coming, and 3) unbelievers raised at the end of the millennium.

There are several scriptures that indicate that believers will not experience the wrath of God (1 Thessalonians 2:10, Revelation 3:10), which is taken to mean the Tribulation. In addition, after Revelation 3, the Church is not mentioned in the book of Revelation. Finally, the millennium is populated by people who do not have glorified bodies (and actually die!). If the rapture takes place at the end of the tribulation and all those who are saved receive glorified bodies, who then populates the earth during the millennium?

2. Mid-Tribulation

This viewpoint is very similar to pre-tribulation viewpoint, except that the rapture is seen to take place 3 ½ years into the Tribulation rather than at the outset. There is a lot of emphasis on the second half of the Tribulation (Daniel 9:27), and there seems to be some significant events take place at the midpoint.

3. Post-Tribulation

Post Tribulationists believe that the rapture and the return of Christ are the same thing. There is no overt indication in scripture of a *secret* return of Christ. One would have to have a preconceived theological system to read-in a pre-tribulation rapture into 1 Thessalonians. This viewpoint has been the longstanding viewpoint of the church, and pre-tribulationism has only developed since the rise of dispensationalism in the late 19th century.

The passages referring to the church of God not facing the wrath of God can just as easily be interpreted to mean the final judgment, or that God will provide divine protection for the church in the midst of the tribulation. Furthermore, Jesus, in Matthew 24 seems to indicate that believers will go through the tribulation.

III. Heaven & Hell

A. What is Hell?

Revelation 20:10-15 state that Satan will be thrown into a lake of fire, along with all those whose names are not found in the book of life. The lake of fire is one of many descriptions of hell. In Matthew 8:12 it is described as a place of darkness. Other places describe it as everlasting torment (Revelation 14:10-11), separation from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9), an unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17) and a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51). Jesus spoke often of hell and referred to the judgment. Hell, therefore is a real place where the wicked are punished following the judgment.

There are many different viewpoints of hell:

- *Annihilation* – People in hell are eventually destroyed and do not dwell there for eternity.
- *Purgatory* – In addition to the wicked who are thrown into hell, saints with unrepentant sin go to a “mini-hell” to pay for their sins prior to entering heaven. This is a Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox view.
- *Metaphorical* – The descriptions of hell are not literal, but merely describe a reality of pain and suffering beyond our ability to comprehend it.

Scripture does teach that hell is a physical place, for the souls of those who have died must be resurrected in order to go there. Whether or not the punishment is physical is debatable. The fact that is a place of unfathomable pain is not.

C.S. Lewis’ states that hell is not a prison where people must pay for their punishment, as much as place where those who have rejected God receive exactly what they desire— existence apart from the presence of God. Those who want God to leave them alone will get exactly that. But what they will find is that life completely alone apart from God is a place of unspeakable torture and pain¹. Lewis, says, in a sense hell is “locked from the inside,” not in the sense that people could get out if they wanted, but that those who reject God are so self-absorbed that they would rather live in hell in their own selfishness than submit to God.

¹ C.S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. (New York: McMillan, 1962), 122-23.

Hell is a difficult doctrine and at times it seems reprehensible that God would eternally punish those who reject Him. However, God is very tolerant and He will not force anyone to dwell with Him if they don't want to. A God who forces people into relationship with Him would be an oppressive and intolerant God. Instead God gives space for those who oppose Him, honoring their free will choice².

B. What Is Heaven?

Scripture uses the term heaven in many different ways. It can refer merely to the sky. Most often, however, when we think of the term heaven, we are referring to the place where God dwells. Currently God dwells in a spiritual heaven. However, Revelation 21 and Isaiah 65 tell us that after the judgment, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. Indeed, when we think of living in eternity in "heaven" we are not referring to the spiritual place where God currently dwells, but a new physical earth where God dwells.

The new heaven and earth are a restoration of what God intended in the creation of this earth. God does not change his program when humanity falls. Instead he just finds another path to accomplish the same agenda. Namely, God desires to have the image of God dwell with Him on the earth. The new heaven and earth is therefore a restoration of the state that God originally desired in the garden.

(Acts 3:21 NASB) ...heaven must receive (Christ) until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

(Romans 8:19-21 NASB) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.... the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The new heaven and earth therefore is a physical place where we will dwell with physical (albeit glorified) bodies forever. Like Adam and Eve, believers will have the responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28-29). Believers will have responsibility to administer the reign of God on the earth (Matthew 25:14-22, 1 Corinthians 6:3). We will grow and learn and live much as we do now.

God will always have something more to teach man, and man will always have something more to learn from God.

-Irenaeus, AD 130-202³

But what makes this new earth heaven is the presence of God. Just as hell is defined as eternal separation from God, heaven is defined as the eternal union with God. It is not the physical space that matters as much as the relationship we have with God.

To that extent, this present age can exhibit characteristics of heaven and hell even today. Those who reject the presence of God in their lives are experiencing on this current earth are experiencing a small glimpse of hell on earth. Likewise, those who accept the presence of God in their lives, walking in the Spirit are experiencing a small glimpse of heaven on earth (Ephesians 1:13-14).

² Metzger.

³ The Theology Notebook, 146.

IV. Conclusion

1. Don't Get Freaked Out!

Many Christians avoid talk of the end times. This prospect of a Great Tribulation, or the judgment of God is a troublesome teaching that we would just as soon avoid. However, God reveals prophesy to us, not so we will be scared or upset. Instead he gives us knowledge so we will not be misled by those who teach falsely about the coming of Christ.

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

2. Be Encouraged, Stand Firm!

Other Christians love to speculate about the end-times. The best selling Christian books, both fiction and non-fiction, are about eschatology. We love to create charts and diagrams and seek answers to what will happen in the future. But God does not reveal to us everything about the future. But often such talk scares us or causes us much undue concern.

He specifically hides from us the date of His coming and many of the circumstances surrounding His return. God's point in giving us prophesy is not so that we will gain perfect understanding of the future, but so that we will grow in our maturity in the present!

(1 Thessalonians 5:11, 15-17 NIV) Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing... So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

(1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV) Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

3. Be Ready!

To all believers, the doctrine of the Second Coming has a single point. Because we do not know exactly when the end will come, you must be ready. After Jesus teaching on the end times in Matthew 24, he gives two parables in Matthew 25 to illustrate this point.

a. *Parable of The Ten Virgins*

There were 10 virgins awaiting the bridegroom. Five brought sufficient oil to keep their lamps lit all night. Five ran out of oil in their lamps, so they left to purchase more oil. The bridegroom came while the five were gone, and missed the wedding feast. (25:1-13). The point of the parable is:

(Matthew 25:13 NIV) Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

b. *Parable of the Talents*

A master gave three of his slaves 5, 2, and 1 talents before leaving on a journey. The first two doubled their money before the master came back. The servant with 1 talent buried his talent in the ground. The master rewarded the first two, but he threw out the other servant. The point of the parable is this:

(Mat 24:44 NIV) So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

4. In the Meantime, Be His Witness

What does it mean to be ready? It means to be about the mission that God has given us. Rather than speculating about the coming of the kingdom, Christ wants us to be his witnesses on the earth now:

(Acts 1:7-8 NIV) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

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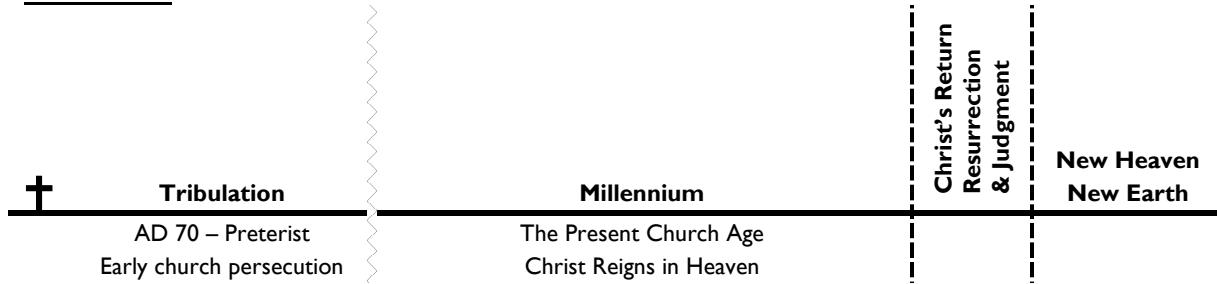
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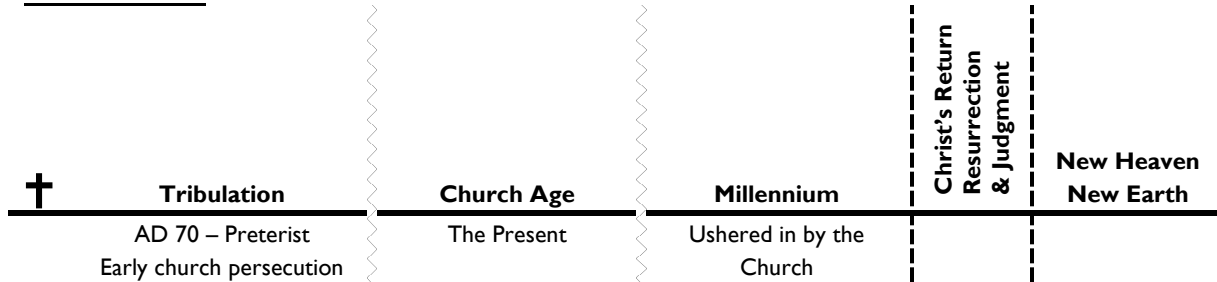
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Timelines

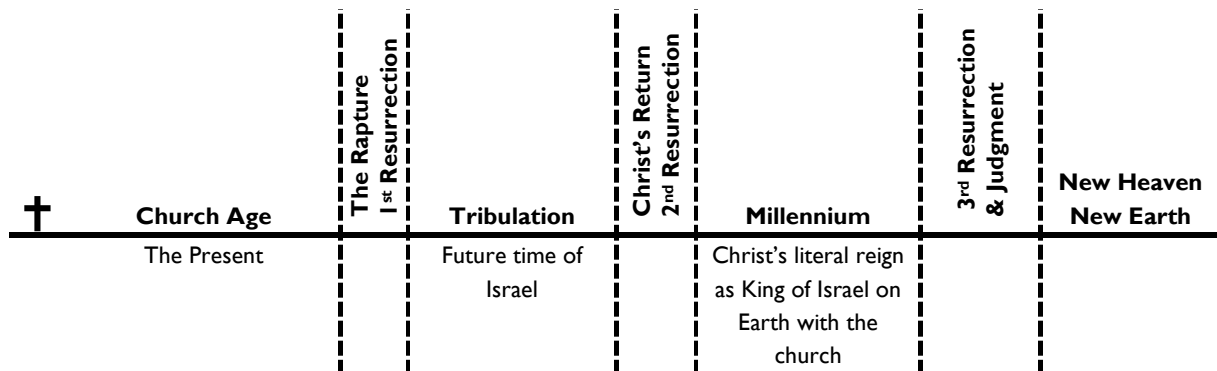
Amillennial



Postmillennial



Pre-Millennial, Pre-Tribulation



Pre-Millennial, Post-Tribulation

