

Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

LESSON
THREE

The Coming of the King Faculty Forum



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Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology

Lesson Three: The Coming of the King

Faculty Forum

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Question 1:

How do theologians distinguish between individual and general eschatology?

Dr. Stephen C. Roy

The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek adjective *eschatos*, meaning “last,” and so it’s the study of the last things, the things that will ultimately happen. And theologians have distinguished two broad forms of eschatology. We might call them “individual” eschatology and “general.” Both deal with last things, ultimate outcomes, but in different realms. Individual eschatology asks the question, “what will ultimately happen to me, to you, to any human as an individual?” And it speaks about what happens when this life is done. It speaks of the reality of death, of the intermediate state prior to final resurrection, and of ultimate eternal states, whether eternal blessedness in the new heavens and new earth or eternal conscious punishment in hell... General eschatology also deals with ultimate things, but now it’s not so much the ultimate destiny of individuals. Now, it’s humanity as a whole. It’s human history. It’s the created universe, the cosmos itself. General eschatology says not so much, “what will happen to me?” as, “what will happen to us?” What will happen in history? What will the final outcome of the universe be? And so, it deals with realities like the second coming of Christ. It deals with questions of millennium and rapture, and it deals with those eternal states, again of the new heavens, new earth, or of hell. So, it’s helpful to think in these two categories of individual eschatology and general.

Dr. Jeff Lowman

When we think about eschatology historically, it has been divided into individual and corporate eschatology. Individual eschatology is simply what happens to us at death, what happens to us in the future. It speaks about, often when you deal with individual eschatology, you're dealing with issues concerning the nature of death. You're dealing with issues concerning the intermediate state. You're dealing with the issues of the resurrection body and the nature of the resurrection body, drawing a lot, in that instance, from 1 Corinthians 15. When you talk about general eschatology, corporate eschatology, you're really talking about the second coming of Christ, and you're talking about his return. You're dealing with the basic four millennial views, and you're talking about the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. And so, the majority of the attention is usually placed on general eschatology. And from a more pastoral perspective, there needs to be a greater emphasis on individual eschatology.

Question 2:
Is Jesus coming back?

Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

One of the great questions we face as followers of Jesus is, is he coming back? Has he risen and left, or will he return for us? There's a wonderful scene in John's gospel where Jesus tells the disciples that he's going to the Father's side, where there are many rooms and that he'll prepare rooms for his disciples. And he says to them, "You know where I'm going." And Thomas, ever the realist and pragmatist, says to Jesus, "Well, we *don't* know where you're going. Tell us how to get there." And it's in response to that that Jesus famously says to Thomas in John 14:6,

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6, ESV).

It's a wonderful affirmation of the way to salvation in the *context* of the promise of Jesus' ultimate return, to bring us home to God where we will live eternally with him.

Dr. Matt Carter

You know, the answer to the question, "Is Jesus coming back?" is a very simple answer. The answer is, "Yes." And the reason that I believe that is because Jesus said he was. I think, as Christians we spend a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of our intellectual capacity trying to answer the question, *when* is Jesus coming back? And I think those are important questions to answer. I think eschatology is incredibly important to the church, and it's something we need to pay attention to, but there is something that, probably, we don't spend enough time dealing with, and that is, how should we live in light of the reality and the promise that Jesus said he is coming back? Whether that's soon or whether that's later, over and over again the Bible tells us to get ready. And I think, especially as young people, we have a tendency to think, I've got the rest of my life. I've got 80 years. I've got my whole life to live. The

second coming of Jesus is not something I need to spend any time thinking about or preparing for. But that's quite the opposite of what the Scripture tells us. Over and over again, in Thessalonians and different places throughout Scripture, the apostle Paul calls us to live in light of the second coming of Jesus, to be ready... And so, the answer is yes, he's coming back. We don't know when. We hope it's soon. But our calling as believers is to be ready when he does.

Question 3: **Why is it necessary for Jesus to return?**

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

It might be easy to think that because Christ died on the cross and ascended, because he said, "It is finished" that there's no reason for him to return. First, he said, "I'm coming back," so there's the fact that he said he's coming back, *period*, that we have to reckon with. Now, this other part of it though is, he's coming back as King. He's coming back to reign. And so, this is how God's rule is going to be established on the earth in the end. So, why does he need to come back? He's coming back to rule and to reign and for God's creation to be belonging fully to him in an undisputed fashion.

Rev. George Shamblin

Why is Christ going to come? There are a number of reasons. First of all, because he promised he would. He promised he would come a second time, and we trust the Scriptures. Also, when Jesus comes back, he's going to make all things right. What has been messed up by sin, what has been messed up in the past, Christ will make right by his return. It's a great thing to look forward to in expectation of when Christ will come and when that will happen.

Dr. Riad Kassis (translation)

The church has this glorious reassurance that Jesus is coming back in glory and he will "judge the living and the dead," as we repeat in the Nicene Creed. Without the second coming of Jesus, history loses its meaning. When Jesus comes again, this world will be corrected. We will see justice and love spread again. Evil, sorrow, diseases will disappear as we start living eternal life in the new heavens and new earth.

Question 4: **Is Jesus going to return physically or only spiritually?**

Dr. Douglas Moo

Christians have a lot of debates about what's going to happen in the future, and we can understand why. The Scripture is not always extremely clear on these things. It uses symbols to talk about some of these things, so it's natural that we have some differences here. But one of the things that Christians all, I think, need to be agreed about is that Jesus is returning again and returning physically in his body. One of the

points that we have to understand here is that having become incarnate, having taken on a human body, Jesus is always going to live in that body. There's really no such thing as the presence of Jesus apart from his body existence now. So, when he returns, I think Scripture's pretty clear in that he is returning in his physical body to earth to take those who love him to be with him forever, as 1 Thessalonians 4 puts it.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

One of the things, of course, in the church of Jesus Christ that continually is asked is, is Jesus coming again? The answer is, "Yes." And then when he comes again, is this a spiritual return or does it include the physical testimony of his glorified body... Jesus went to the cross and in his body bore our sins, and then that body was put in the grave but did not suffer corruption. On the third day he bodily arose. He was seen. He made clear to everyone this is a *bodily* resurrection — Here, you can touch me; you can feel me. Here, I'll sit down and eat. And he said, "You got anything to eat?" And they gave him some broiled fish... They're able to see him; they realize him... He bodily — basically conducts a forty-day seminar with his disciples to prepare them. He ascends to heaven, and then the angels say, "Why do you stand here gazing? This same Jesus whom you have seen taken up will return in like manner." Well, how is he taken up? A bodily ascension... How will he return? He was taken up in the clouds. He will come back in the clouds. And how will he come back? As you've seen him go up. That is a bodily return of Christ.

Rev. Vernon Pierre

Will Jesus return only physically or spiritually? The very simple answer to that is what we see in Acts 1:11. The disciples are watching Jesus physically leave them, ascend into the sky. And two angels appear, and then the angels tell them, "Why are you standing there looking at heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." And so, that means the same way Jesus left is the same way he'll return. He'll return in physical form in the same way that he left.

Question 5:

How visibly noticeable will the second coming be?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

You read the texts that describe Christ's second coming, and they are *cosmic* in nature. Everybody realizes, and everybody knows what exactly is happening. So, what we probably have then is not just Jesus coming on a couple clouds... What we have then, is we have, really, his coming being full and cataclysmic, and it really gets back to the nature of what is heaven and what is earth, and how do these two relate, because the New Testament talks in terms of presence — the word there for "coming" is not coming, the word there is "presence" — that when Christ returns, we're really seeing his presence all around us. It's just that this is giving way to that. It's a ripping, it's a... This dimension is giving way to that dimension so that everybody realizes, wow, this is what it's really... This is what reality really is. It's an invasion. It's an

invasion of the heavenly reality into *this* reality, and *this* gives way to *that*. That's what Christ's coming is probably going to be like.

Dr. Sanders L. Willson

The second coming is going to be very loud and very bright... Every eye is going to see. It's going to be our final coming out party where no longer are we incognito; no longer are we under wraps. Our true identity as the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ is going to be revealed. So, just as he's revealed and the lid is taken off and Jesus is revealed, so shall our identity be fully revealed. So, it's going to be some spectacular moment when he returns.

Question 6:

What does Scripture tell us about the timing of Jesus' return?

Rev. Larry Cockrell

The Scripture tells us regarding the timing of Jesus' return that it will be sudden. Scripture teaches that it will be like a thief breaking into a home, what have you. But saying that, we go on to learn that even though it will be like that, we do not know exactly when that time will be. Even Christ would tell his disciples that he did not know it, that the Father alone was the one who knew when that time would be. And obviously that time would be at his appointed time. And so, when that time is, we do not know, but we are charged with being faithful men and women of the Scriptures, living as it becometh the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that when that day does come, then we would be prepared and ready to be received by him.

Dr. Paul Gardner

The timing of Jesus' return has always been a much-debated question. We have had sectarian groups all the way through history where a prophet has got up and said, "I know Christ is coming at this time," or "I know Christ is coming at this time," and lo and behold, given that we're still here, we know he hasn't come yet. The Bible is interesting in what it does tell us and what it doesn't tell us. It certainly tells us Christ will return, and every eye shall see, and at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. The whole world will know clearly when Christ returns in glory. But it doesn't give us a time. It does say that this will be imminent, but what does imminent mean in the purposes of God? We don't know. It's designed to keep us on our toes. Christ may come today. He may come "like a thief in the night" is one of Jesus' own pictures of this. But we don't know. We have to live as people who are always ready of it. One of the interesting things is that the apostle Peter says that that delay before Christ comes is so that more people can come to faith, and I think to see it in that way is one of the great things. Clearly, when there is a persecuted church today all around the world, we long that Christ would come and would put all that to an end, would bring this world of suffering to an end. But on the other hand, when we look at the people out there who don't yet know and love the Lord and who will stand under his judgment when he does return, we long for a delay, because we would like to see more people come to faith. So, Christians live with that tension — I want the Lord to

come, I want the suffering to end, I don't want any more persecution and martyrs for the faith, and yet, I want some more time because we want to proclaim this great gospel of Christ to the world.

Dr. Philip Ryken

The Bible is remarkably consistent in what it tells us about the second coming and specifically the timing of the return of Jesus Christ, his glorious, visible return to make all things new. And the Bible consistently tells us that his return will be very sudden and unexpected; just whatever we're doing, whatever work we're doing, whatever relationships we happen to have, Jesus will return just right in the middle of that, and it'll be very unexpected and very sudden. And, the Bible consistently says — and this is true of the apostles who spoke about the second coming of Jesus Christ, and it's also true about the testimony that Jesus himself gave — that his return is coming very soon. It could be at any moment. And there's a sense of constant expectancy that we're encouraged to have for the coming of Jesus Christ. And I think we can draw a practical lesson from that. One is just to be always busy about the Lord's work. Whatever he's given us to do in the world, he wants us to be focused on that until the very moment when Jesus comes again. And I think the other lesson is that we should live with a sense of expectancy and hopefulness. Even today could be the day when Jesus comes again.

Dr. Robert A. Peterson

What is the timing of Jesus' return? I like to teach this by saying we have to be jugglers; we have to keep three balls in the air at the same time ... because there are *imminence* passages — those that teach we should live in the light of Jesus' coming. There are *interval* passages, interval passages, texts that say certain things have to happen before he can come back; and then most importantly there are *ignorance* passages, passages that say no man knows the day or the hour... So, a good pastor, a good theological juggler will keep in the air at the same time: imminence passages — the Lord wants us to love Jesus' appearing, his second coming, and to live in light of that return. Interval passages — he says certain things have to happen before Jesus returns, so we don't set dates and we do plan, the Lord willing, and live our lives, looking for Jesus to return and yet planning and living for him. But most importantly, we have to keep the ignorance ball in the air... The Lord says certain things have to happen before he comes, but most importantly, we do not know that time, so we leave it to the Lord and we get on with the business of loving him and living for him.

Question 7:

What events must occur prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Gary M. Burge

When Jesus taught about his own personal return, it is tied to his understanding of how history will end, and you can read about this in Mark 13, for example. But his understanding was that history is going to come to a great climax... That's my understanding of it, and some Christians disagree about parts, but nevertheless, it

seems as if Jesus understands that history is going to come into a very desperate time. Christians will be persecuted, there will be many wars, there will be tragedy all around us, and the great end of that, sort of the period of sort of crisis, is going to be Jesus' second coming. Now, one thing that Jesus says very clearly, however, is that we are not to predict exactly when that's going to take place. One clear teaching that I think the church needs to hold onto and repeat *repeatedly* is that we will be surprised at his return. So, he wants us to be aware of history, that God is watching history, that God is willing to intervene in history, and his final and climactic intervention in history will be when he stops history at the second coming of Christ, and then he will inaugurate the judgment.

Dr. Lynn Cohick

There are certain biblical passages that seem to indicate things need to happen before Christ returns, and there's a variety of these. Some of them I would suggest are descriptive and they form a pattern of, sort of, the woes that will happen in this pre-messianic period. That's very typical of first century Judaism. You had a strain that we call "apocalyptic" that was thinking about how the present situation would continue to get worse and bad things would happen, kind of birth pangs, if you will, before the messianic kingdom would begin. So, that's one type of aspect of this whole discussion about what needs to happen before Christ returns. Then there's another type of question, if you will, about what needs to happen before Christ returns, and that is statements like, "All the ends of the earth will hear the gospel, and then Christ will come"... I do think that there is an expectation that the church will, through the power of the Holy Spirit, preach the Word, that that's our job. And even the Son does not know exactly when the time will be when the judgment occurs, when that final judgment comes, and/or when Christ returns. So, there is some mystery to all of this. What we can know is that we're called to preach the gospel, and that even as we preach the gospel, we should not be surprised that things seem to be falling apart. Both of those things should happen: we should preach, and things will continue to look bad. We can rest assured that Jesus is coming again and that the Lord has all things in his hands.

Question 8:

How should we interpret passages that predict events that must occur prior to Christ's return?

Dr. D.A. Carson

What shall we do with passages that talk about apparent predictions of things that must take place before Christ returns? The question is really a very difficult one because there were some of those things that took place even within the first decades of the Christian church. For example, in John 21, Jesus predicts that Peter must die a certain kind of martyr's death, so does not that mean that Christ could not have come back before Peter died? I think it does. It becomes an absolute condition. That still could have meant that Christ could have, in theory, come back any time in that first

generation once Peter had died. It's not an open-ended condition, but nevertheless it is a condition. And so, that already warns us, since Christians even then are being told to live in the light of Christ's imminent return, that you can speak of imminence that may not be an any-second imminence. It may be an any-generation imminence, or it might be, "very soon; get ready," even though dear old Peter's got to go first... Jesus predicts that the gospel's got to go worldwide. Well, in one sense it goes worldwide — Roman-world worldwide — in the first century, but that means that you couldn't have expected Jesus to return in A.D. 35. The gospel just simply hadn't extended far enough. So, there are some of these first-century conditions already that teach us, while we're looking forward to Christ's impending return, the notion of imminence is better bound up, not with any-second, but with any-generation, or "very soon," or "be eager for it"... I would argue that many of the predictions, however — "there will be wars and rumors of wars;" "don't be alarmed; the end is not yet," those sorts of things that people often cite as signs — they're often predictions of things that are part of this entire age. They're signs that must take place before the Lord returns; there will be wars and rumors of wars. On the other hand, what century has not seen them? We've just come through the bloodiest war-torn century in the human race, in human history. And there's no particular reason for thinking that the twenty-first century has to be better. So, many of these things that are signs that point to the end, that must take place before the end — the end is not yet, Jesus says regarding wars and rumors of wars — are things that are pretty perennial, they keep coming back again and again and again.

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.

You know, Jesus gave a teaching that we often call the Olivet, or eschatological, Discourse. It's preserved in Mark 13 and has parallels in Matthew and Luke that contains teachings that are very difficult and teachings that have been controverted to this day as to what exactly it means. So, Jesus is sitting with his disciples across the temple. They remark about the beauty of the temple, and Jesus surprises them by saying, "Do you see these stones? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on each other." Then he proceeds to give a scenario as to what the future holds, a scenario, which would seem to entail certain signs preceding the coming of the kingdom, preceding his return, at least as the Olivet Discourse has been traditionally understood. I believe that what's happening in Mark 13 is Jesus is talking about two separate things. In the first place he's talking about the destruction of the temple. That's patently clear because he says, "Listen, not one stone will be left on top of each other"... So, he's much preoccupied with the temple, but then on another level, he's looking forward beyond that mountain ridge to his eventual return. And so, this is very complicated because scholars differ from each other as to when he's talking about the destruction of the temple and when he's talking about the second coming, and I don't need to stipulate which is which right now, but I will say this, that the two events in some ways are very coordinated, because the temple is, in some sense, creation in miniature. The Jews always knew that, that the temple was a picture of creation. Jesus is talking about a two-step process. God is going to judge this temple, which he does in 70 A.D., so Jesus was right on that score. And then Jesus says, well, just wait; a new creation is going to come out of judgment as well.

Now, there's a lot of talk about, you know, what's going to happen and certain signs. Here's what we have to do when we're reading a text like Mark 13. We have to understand what's going on. Jesus is drawing on Old Testament vocabulary, Old Testament images and symbols, very familiar to Jews who were steeped in Old Testament Scriptures... Here's, I think, the point for Jesus. Jesus says this tribulation has already started in my ministry. It started with John the Baptist, it's going to continue under me, and you, my disciples, are going to face this very thing. You will be dragged in front of the synagogues — which we see happening very soon. The disciples will enter into this tribulation. In fact, the way I read it, the whole church age is marked by tribulation. What this means is we, as Christians, should expect to suffer many of the things that Mark 13 is talking about, and this will continue on until he comes. Jesus says it so we're not surprised, so we don't think it's an ongoing party. For Christians who read the Scripture and then read their newspaper and say, "Okay, I think it's happening anytime soon," I don't think that's what Jesus is about. I don't think Scripture ever really invites us to read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other as if to draw correlations. What the Scripture wants us to do is obey, and once we get squared away as to what these symbols really mean, we'll get the picture: to obey despite the tribulation that's happening.

Dr. Riad Kassis (translation)

There are many passages in the Bible that talk about the end times and how there will be famine, plagues, earthquakes, and natural disasters. People interpret these passages to mean that when these things happen, Jesus is coming back, but the biblical truth tells us that the end times started at Jesus' incarnation. All these events happen in preparation for his second coming, but we are already living in the end times, and we must persevere and serve Jesus and live according to his commandments. So, in the present time, we look forward to his glorious return.

Question 9:

Can demonic and human opposition hinder God's plans for the last days?

Dr. Grant R. Osborne

Satan and the unbelievers are trying with everything they have to hinder God in the last days. Revelation 12:12 says it very clearly. It says, "Woe to you on earth because the Devil has gone down to you filled with wrath because he knows his time is short." Satan knows that he has already lost. He may be insane but he's not stupid, and he knows that it is over, but he is given this short time to cause as much, in a sense, mischief as he can. And so, Satan is spending all of his time trying to hinder God's plan, and Satan is fighting harder and harder as the time grows nearer. And that's one of the reasons why so many of us feel like Christ is going to return soon, because it seems like Satan's opposition is getting worse and worse and worse. But, he can hinder nothing from God's plan. God is absolutely sovereign, and Satan and all the

powers of evil can do nothing to stop God's will. And it's very clear — the Bible says it all the way through the New Testament — God knows the time. The time is unalterable. Every step of it will occur exactly as God has ordained, including — and this is an important aspect from the book of Revelation — namely that Satan is trying his best to oppose all that God can do, but God is in charge, and Satan can only do what God allows. There's one verb all the way through the book of Revelation, called, it is "given." And what it means is everything, even the dragon and the Antichrist do, they do only because God has given them permission to do it. God is in absolute charge.

Dr. Vernon Pierre

Oftentimes, I think we can think of human opposition, and particularly demonic opposition, as almost this equivalent power against God, and this war, this chess match, and we're hoping that God wins. The Bible doesn't describe it that way at all. In fact, the Bible seems to go overboard in describing how easily God wins, that Jesus appears on a white horse and speaks, and armies fall. It's really emphasizing the fact that God's plan will succeed, and in human opposition, demonic opposition is really judgment upon themselves. It's their rejection of the King, of King Jesus, of God reigning in the world. And so we have no need to worry that God will not be able to accomplish the things that he intends to accomplish. God's plan will succeed. His word will not return to him void, and his word is that Jesus will reign, and his people will live with him forever. And we can have great confidence in that.

Question 10:

What is your view on the rapture? Will the church be taken from this world prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Danny Akin

The timing of the rapture is a question that also is much debated among faithful Bible-believing Christians. Personally, I do hold to what is called a pretribulational rapture, which is the view that God will rapture out believers before the beginning of what is known as "the great tribulation," or Daniel's "seventieth week," or "the day of the Lord." People ask me why I believe this, and there are several reasons. And again, I want to be clear. I hold this view, but I hold it tentatively, humbly. I have too many good friends that love the Word of God but take a different view than I do. My primary reason is the doctrine of immanency. The Bible tells us in Titus 2 to look for the blessed hope. We're to be anticipating his coming at any moment at any time... So, immanency is one reason that I believe that a pretribulational rapture is the best view to hold. But also 1 Thessalonians 4, 5. In 4:13-18, he discusses the rapture. In 5:1-11, he follows with a discussion of the day of the Lord. Why does he cover the rapture before the day of the Lord? Well, I think the answer is because the rapture occurs before the day of the Lord. Furthermore, in 5:9 he tells the Thessalonians that they're not destined for wrath and in the context, I think the best understanding is he's talking about the wrath of the day of the Lord. So, you put those things together, and

again, though I hold it humbly and tentatively, I think that the understanding that the believers are raptured out before the tribulation has the best evidence from Scripture.

Vincent Bacote, Ph.D.

In response to the question about, is the church going to be raptured, my response is to say that only in the sense that there is a meeting of the one who returns, but in that meeting of the one who returns, that's the one who is returning. In other words, there is no going away somewhere for seven years, in my view. The language that we see in 1 Thessalonians is language that, if you're in that context, when you hear the idea about a trumpet and someone returning, this was like a general, for example, returning after the end of a great battle, and the citizens come out to greet him, but they greet the victor who's returning to the city, not to take them away from the city. So, they come out, they meet him, and then they all process in like a parade or something. So, similarly, when Christ returns, to meet him is to greet the One that is coming to return, coming to reign, not to take us away. So, my position would be to say the church isn't raptured in the way that a lot of people think, but that we meet Christ in some way, and then the end of history begins.

Question 11:

Why do you believe that Scripture predicts a future revival for Israel prior to Christ's return?

Dr. Danny Akin

The question of Israel's destiny is a much debated question, and I've got good friends that take different positions. But when I look at the Bible, it seems to me that God made an unconditional covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 and to David in 2 Samuel 7 that there will be a Davidic king who has roots in Abraham who will sit upon a throne and reign forever and ever... I think Romans 11 is crucial because there Paul is dealing with the Jewish question, and he tells us that God has not set aside his promises to his people and, in fact, we should look forward to a day when all Israel is going to be saved. Zechariah 12:10, I think, is very crucial here because there we have a promise that God says there's coming also a day at the end when — speaking of the nation of Israel — they will look upon him whom they pierced and they will weep as for an only son. So, when you put all of that together, I think it's clear, number one, God has not set aside his promises to the Hebrew people; number two, we indeed can anticipate and look forward to a great ingathering of Jewish people who will come to recognize that Jesus is indeed their promised Messiah. They will repent and put their faith in him, and indeed they too will be a part of the large family of God that we know as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the church of the Lord Jesus.

Dr. Keith Mathison

Regarding the restoration of Israel, there is some debate on that among Reformed Christians and others. Among the Reformed Christians, the debate largely centers on the interpretation of Romans 11:25-26, the passage where Paul says, "All Israel will

be saved”... Some Reformed theologians have argued that this means, that “all Israel” there means all believers, Gentile and Jews. Others argue that “all Israel” there means all Jews throughout the entire present age. That view is associated with people like O. Palmer Robertson and others. Charles Hodge, John Murray, and so forth, have argued that “all Israel” there refers to the nation of Israel and that, yes, at the end of time, near the second coming, just before, that national Israel as a covenant whole, not every individual, will be restored, in the sense that they will turn to the Messiah, believe in Christ, and national Israel at that point will become true Israel. Dispensationalists have a slight variation on this view where they argue that the restoration of Israel involves the restoration of the nation of Israel to a position of promise during the earthly millennium following Christ’s second coming, with Christ sitting of the Davidic throne... My own view of the interpretation of Romans 11 regarding Israel is that Paul has a two-part answer in chapter 11, and in the first part of chapter 11, he’s saying that there is a remnant of Jews being saved throughout this entire present age and, therefore, that alone would indicate that the promises of God have not failed. But I do think he adds something in the second part of Romans 11, from verses 11 forward, and that is that near the second coming of Christ there will be a restoration of the nation of Israel, restoration of Israel to their Messiah and to faith in Christ.

Question 12:

Why do you believe that Scripture does not predict a future revival for Israel prior to Christ’s return?

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

Will either the nation or the majority of ethnic Jews come to believe in Christ before he returns? I don’t think so. I don’t think so. In fact, really, the only text that would allow for that, in my opinion, is Romans 11:25, there, “all Israel will be saved.” Outside of that text, I don’t see a hint of it anywhere else. In fact, in the Old Testament, you don’t have any of the prophets saying that all of Israel will one day be converted. In fact, you have the opposite. They say that the majority of Israel will rebel and then only a remnant will be saved. We have this in Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel; we’ve got it in Daniel. I can’t find one text in the Old Testament that says that the nation of Israel will be *completely* saved. And unless it’s a radical mystery, unless it’s this massive progressive revelation where the Old Testament is absolutely silent on... I just don’t see it in the New Testament. In fact, in Romans 11 there, I think that Romans 11 is very much in keeping with the Old Testament, which is why you have one of the greatest, I should say, one of the largest density of Old Testament quotations and allusions in all the New Testament right in Romans 9–11. Why? Because God’s story continues, it continues. It’s patterned the same way after the Old Testament. So, will the majority of ethnic Jews, the nations of Israel turn once again and embrace the Messiah? No, I don’t think so. I just don’t see any texts that claim that.

Dr. Sanders L. Willson

There's debate about whether Israel will experience a revival shortly before the return of Christ. Some Reformed people who look at Romans 11 see strong suggestions in that direction, and I certainly hope they're correct, because nothing would please me more than any ethnic group turning massively to the Lord before his return, or at any other time for that matter. However, just looking at the text exegetically, and then looking at the relationship between Old and New Testament in general, I personally don't see any particular encouragement toward thinking that Israel will have a massive turning to Christ before his return. I see the text saying something else. It seems to me that, for example, in Romans 9–11, that Paul is using the idea of Israel in two different ways, and it seems clear from the ironic nature of the language of those chapters that he's saying that all *ethnic* Israel is not all *spiritual* Israel — he as much as says that — and, therefore, is free to use the term in two different ways in the same context. So, I would say that it's a little bit of wishful thinking that there is a prophetic indication in the Scriptures that Israel's going to have a massive turning. Now, having said that, Paul gives clear warning in chapter 11 of Romans that we should be aggressively evangelizing the Jewish people, because just because they were rejected because they rejected Christ, it doesn't mean they'll forever reject Christ, nor that he will forever reject them. So, even though they've been cut off out of unbelief in Christ, the Messiah, Paul says they can easily be grafted back in. If you wild Gentiles can be grafted in, certainly he can graft in the natural branch of Israel when they turn back to the Lord. So, I pray for their massive turning to the Lord, but I don't see it as a prophetic biblical promise that that will happen before the return of Christ.

Question 13:

What are some of the millennial views that Christians have held throughout history?

Dr. Simon Vibert

There are various millennial views that speak about the thousand-year rule of Christ, and sometimes they're described as: "premillennium," in other words, there will be a millennial reign of Christ *before* he returns; others speak of "postmillennium," that *after* Christ returns there will be a thousand-year reign, often taken pictorially rather than literally. And then there's the "amillennium," which is the belief that the whole time between Christ's ascension into heaven and his return *is* the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

Dr. Keith Mathison

The church, throughout its history, has held a number of millennial views. Today we tend to define them as postmillennialism, amillennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism. Those are the four common millennial views today. It's actually a little bit anachronistic to try to read those back into early church history and medieval church history. But the church, in the early years of the church

we find variations on premillennialism. We also find, with Augustine, an early form of what might be termed anachronistically “amillennialism.” He held a view of the millennium, based on his view, paralleling human history with the six days of creation, and so for each day there was a thousand years, and he understood that we were in the sixth day, the sixth thousand years. In the Middle Ages, you start to find more historicist views where the book of Revelation describes some part or all of history. One early medieval theologian saw the book of Revelation describing history from the time of creation to the Nicene Creed... Augustinian views prevailed in the Middle Ages. There were millennialist movements among the laity and certain populist views, but Augustine really represents the millennial view of the Middle Ages. At the time of the Reformation ... you start to see more millennial movements. There was one movement that we all have heard of at Münster, where there was a number of men who came and declared that they were bringing in the millennium, and it resulted in mass chaos and death. Throughout the Puritan era, there were a number of millennial views. You had people arguing that the millennium began in the year around 300 with the time of Constantine and ended in the thirteenth century. Some said it ended earlier or later than that. One man, Thomas Brightman, argued that Revelation taught two millenniums, that Revelation 20:1-3 taught a thousand year period that was past, it was a golden age in the early part of the church, and that the Reformation began the second millennium described in verses 4-10. And it’s really... There are a number of variations on these views in the Puritan era that gradually developed into what we see today as amillennialism, postmillennialism and premillennialism.

Dr. Vern S. Poythress

What are the major views of the millennium? Well, first we must recognize that all believers who believe in the divine authority of Scripture believe that Christ is coming; they hold that when he comes there will be a resurrection from the dead, there will be a judgment. The details are where they differ. There are three major millennial positions historically... Premillennialism says that Christ will return, the earth will be transformed, he will reign physically from his throne, and there will be a long period of time — some say exactly a thousand years — where he’s reigning on earth but there’s still some sin and death in the world. At the end of that time, there will be a new heaven and a new earth and a final judgment. That’s premillennialism. Postmillennialism puts a different order on the events, so this time of prosperity is at the end of the era we’re now in, because the postmillennialists think that by the preaching of the gospel more and more people will eventually become Christians, and the earth will be blessed by God and achieve a prosperity, but again, still some sin and death left. Then Christ returns and you get the new heaven and the new earth. The third position is the amillennial position and that’s saying — it’s the simplest — Christ comes, then new heaven and new earth. There’s also a more recent variant on premillennialism called “dispensational premillennialism” that has a two-stage second coming, but the details of that are complicated.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

I think sometimes we Christians who come from particular traditions, we tend to assume that everybody has always held our view. And I think it's instructive to see what some of the different views have been of Revelation, for example, with reference to the millennium, the thousand-year period in Revelation 20. You have many of the earliest church fathers — Justin Martyr and Papias seem to have believed in a future thousand-year period after the tribulation. They believed that Christians either were in the tribulation or were about to go through it. Some later church fathers believed that Christians were in the millennium. Especially from the time of Constantine onward, Christians believed they were in the millennium. Eusebius talks about how they found some premillennialists who were in error, but unlike other heretics, they were able to be talked out of their erroneous views. And Augustine was a very strong amillennialist, and that view predominated, usually, through the Middle Ages. Luther, Calvin, and many others, also amillennial. Then you had some other people who were premillennial, again, Isaac Newton for one. But throughout the nineteenth century in the United States, one of the dominant views of popular evangelicalism was postmillennialism. That accompanied the Great Awakenings. Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney and others were postmillennial. They believed that we would advance the kingdom of God on earth, and things would get better, and so we would prepare the throne for Jesus and then he would come back. And then around 1830 something arose called “dispensational premillennialism” which said that there would be a future thousand years. Jesus would come back before that, but he would also come back seven years before that to take the church out, which had never been taught before that period in church history. And today we actually have a variety of views among scholars, probably amillennial and premillennial ... but you have a variety of views today, and I think what that tells us most is we can't just say, well, everybody has always held our view. We need to really... We need to recognize that there are Christians that God has used who hold different views than our view.

Question 14:

Why do you hold to a premillennial view of the millennium?

Dr. Douglas Moo

Christians wonder about what the future's going to hold, and one of the issues that they wonder about is, what we sometimes call “the millennium,” or the thousand years. And again, this is a point where Scripture is perhaps not altogether clear. Revelation 20 is the only text in the Bible that actually uses the language of a thousand years, so clearly that's the text that we have to go to first. My reading of that text is that John is giving us a prediction for the future in which there is a resurrection of believers, then a thousand-year period, and then after that a resurrection of unbelievers. I continue to think that's the most natural reading of the passage. So, at this point I still hold to what's called the “premillennial view,” that Christ will return before a millennium is established because of my understanding of that text in Revelation 20. Christ returns and those who belong to him are raised at that time, then

you have this period of time — the thousand years could be a symbolic number, so I'm not going to fight over the exact number of years — but some period of time that we call “the millennium,” after which the rest of the dead will be raised and the judgment of God will take place.

Dr. David W. Chapman

I hold to what I would call and others call the historic premillennial view, which is a, on other terms, it would be termed a post-tribulational premillennial view, which is to say that there will be a time of tribulation that's described in the book of Revelation, that the church undergoes that, and yet then there is a hope, a time when Christ will come back and bring with him a thousand-year reign. The thousand years is not necessarily exact to the day, it may be more of a metaphor for an extended period of time. And during that reign, Christ will reign physically on this earth before there is a final judgment. And the principal reasons that I believe that, well, one is actually from the book of Revelation itself. If one were to read through the book of Revelation sequentially, it's most natural to see that sequence, that there is a tribulation followed by a time of Christ's return, followed by a thousand years, and then followed by another return of Christ that really brings with it a final judgment. I've looked at competing views. One is that there might be a series of cycles in the book of Revelation, and what I found to be difficult with those is none of them have a marker within the text of Revelation itself that is distinct that tells you when a new cycle would begin. So, it seems to me that the most natural way to read the book is to read it all the way through and that that would have been the original effect on the readers. And I think we get a sense that this is the original effect, in part because many of the earliest church fathers that we know, church fathers such as Polycarp, or Justin Martyr, or Irenaeus, seemed to have held a view that is akin to what I'm talking about, where there was going to be a literal thousand-year period of time when Christ is reigning on this earth in a physical form prior to the final judgment.

Dr. D.A. Carson

The most compelling reason to affirm historic premillennialism is a number of Scriptures that do not easily fit into any other pattern. It's as simple as that. Conceptually, the best of amillennialism is very close to the best of historic premillennialism. But passages, not only Revelation 20, but Isaiah 65, which speaks of a time coming when a young man dies at the age of a hundred, and no one will be dying really young, it sounds like a time of great blessing that is shy of resurrection existence in the new heaven and the new earth. And although some of my amillennial friends say that this is a symbol-laden way of talking about those things, yet elsewhere in the book of Isaiah the prophet is quite able to talk about eternal longevity. This still sounds like a peak that is not final peak, and because of this half-dozen or so of really awkward passages — awkward, that is, for any other system, although historic premillennialism is conceptually messy — it, in my view, best handles some of these passages on an exegetical basis.

Question 15:

Why do you hold to a postmillennial or amillennial view of the millennium?

Dr. Keith Mathison

My own millennial view could possibly be described as a hybrid between amillennialism and postmillennialism. I agree with amillennialists that the millennium described in Revelation 20 is symbolic of the entire present age between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. I agree with some postmillennialists that the progress of the kingdom will have more external manifestations. Now, in disagreement with theonomic postmillennialists, I can't say exactly what that will look like. I'm not as confident about interpreting that as they are. I also would incorporate, as opposed to some amillennialists, a preterist understanding of the book of Revelation and the Olivet Discourse in there, and by that I mean preterism as opposed to futurism or historicism. A futurist interpretation of Revelation sees those prophecies as still awaiting fulfillment for the most part. Historicism understands Revelation as describing the entire history of the church. A preterist approach to Revelation understands the bulk of the prophecies, from chapter 4–19, as primarily relating to first century events and then Revelation 20, 21 and 22 having to do with the millennium and things still in our future. I also understand the Olivet Discourse in a similar way as having to do with events leading up to, and associated with, the destruction of Jerusalem. Both of those are controversial views and I wouldn't live or die on those, but I think there are some strong arguments for that understanding of those passages.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

For me, the most compelling reason to affirm amillennialism stems from the fact that the New Testament authors will either cite or allude to Old Testament texts that talk about the new creation — for example, Isaiah 65, 66 — and what they'll do with that is they will affirm that it is indeed taking place here and now. And those Old Testament texts talk about the new heavens and new earth, and they say it's happening right here and right now, not in the future. I mean, sure, there's going to be a future component to this, but it's happening here and now. In fact, also in the Gospels, you have several passages that talk about Jesus speaking where he says, "in this age and in the age to come." It's not "in this age and then the next age, and then in the age after that." It's not two more ages, it's this age, and in the new heavens and new earth, the physical. So, I think it's fairly clear in my estimation, and I think it boils down to how you understand the Old Testament texts that talk about the new creation, and how they're being fulfilled in the New.

Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

You know, sincere Christians have different views of the millennium, Revelation 20 and so forth. The label I would put on my views are, the traditional term I think is "amillennial," that is to say that there is no literal millennium yet to begin, but rather the church is now living, the world is now living in that thousand-year period.

Obviously I'd understand that number symbolically. It would take a long time to explain why I hold that view, but the short answer would be that I think that Jesus of Nazareth has already fulfilled the promises to Israel in his own person, in his own ministry, and that Jesus himself *is* Israel. He is the people of God, and so the promises of the Old Testament that are given to God's people apply to Jesus in his own ministry and even — if I could say it this way — in his own body, that raised from the dead and having called *twelve* disciples — the number is not accidental — that his followers, both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, are the new Israel of God, living in the last days, living in the new age that has already begun. So, again, my millennial views, or amillennial views, are linked to the understanding that I have of how Jesus fulfills the promises of the Old Testament and now moves history forward from that point.

Question 16:

What are the major points of agreement between all Christians regarding the return of Christ and the millennium?

Dr. Danny Akin

You know, Christians who believe the Bible are all over the map when it comes to eschatology. You've got people that are premill, postmill, amill. You've got people that are pretrib, midtrib, posttrib, partial rapture, prewrath rapture, so they're looking at things radically differently. And yet, all of those who believe the Bible can agree on these things... We all believe that Jesus Christ is coming again historically, visibly and bodily. He is coming to separate believers from unbelievers. Believers will be in his presence forever with glorified bodies, the ravages of sin completely eradicated and done away with. Unbelievers, tragically, will face a final judgment; the Bible calls it the "great white throne" in Revelation 20:11-15. They will be judged for their rejection of Christ and the evil works that they've done and then confined forever in a place called hell, the lake of fire. So, no matter where you are in terms of your eschatological details, all of us agree he's coming again, he'll separate believers from unbelievers, believers will be with him forever in the new heaven and the new earth, unbelievers, tragically, will be separated from him forever in a place called the lake of fire, a place called hell.

Dr. Lai-Chang Kang (translation)

So long as your beliefs are orthodox, so long as you truly believe in trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, we all hold the belief that, as brothers and sisters, even if you don't understand what a millennium is, or if you have just recently come to faith and you don't understand these ideas, you're still in the kingdom of God, because when a person is reborn they are in the kingdom of God. The "millennium" is the thousand years of a kingdom full of joy spoken of in Revelation 20. As far as when and where this kingdom is to appear in man's history or geography, there are different interpretations... But so long as you trust in the Lord, then you have one thing in common, and because of this point of commonality we can say we are

brothers and sisters; we can love one another. We all believe that God's authority will be made clear on earth among men. The timing and place might be a bit different, but it will happen.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Among evangelicals, in their view of the end times, the return of Christ and the millennium, there are various views: premillennialism, postmillennialism, amillennialism. But among those views, the common theme is that Jesus is coming back, and he's coming back to judge the world and to make all things new, and wipe away every tear. The timing of that, the details of that may vary. And there are implications for those differing views, but this common truth that Jesus will return and there will be a judgment day, and Jesus will make all things new again, is the common theme among all those views.

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