

The Book of Daniel

Overview of Apocalyptic Prophecy



We will now look at an interesting genre of Biblical literature that appears frequently in Daniel, Apocalyptic Prophecy. The background presented in this lesson will give us a framework for meaningful discussion of Daniel's visions. We will begin by defining the key terms we will use as we go through Daniel and then briefly cover some of the more prominent systems of belief about the end of time. Finally, we will discuss the interpretive principles we will use as we tackle the visions of Daniel in our class.

Key Terms:

Apocalypse – To reveal or uncover. Specifically, it refers to Jewish and Christian literature that **symbolically** discusses the ultimate destruction of evil and triumph of good

Eschatology – The study of the **end times**. It comes from the Greek word, “eschatos” meaning “end”, “last”, or “latter” and “ology”, meaning “the study of”.

Millennium – Refers to a **1,000** year period that is spoken of in Revelation 20:1-10.

Rapture – The sudden **transportation** of living believers into the presence of Christ upon His return

Tribulation – The period of time (some say 7 years) **prior** to the return of Christ

Preterism – The belief that Christ's Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 & Mark 13) and the events of Revelation occurred during the reign of the Roman Empire

- Full Preterism – The belief that Christ's 2nd coming occurred in **70 A.D.** along with the resurrection and final judgment
- Partial Preterism – The same as Full Preterism except they do not believe the **resurrection** and final judgment have occurred

Futurism – A system of interpretation that centers prophetic fulfillment around the **nation of Israel** at some time in the future

Progressive Parallelism – The belief that Revelation is really a **combination** of prophecies of events between the first and second coming of Christ, with increased apocalyptic visions toward the end of time. Some are already fulfilled, some have yet to be fulfilled. This viewpoint combines the interpretative principles of the Preterists and Futurists.

Views on the End:

There are four viewpoints that we will now discuss. Before doing so, I believe it will be helpful to define a common thread that runs through any decent theory about the end of time.

A Common Thread

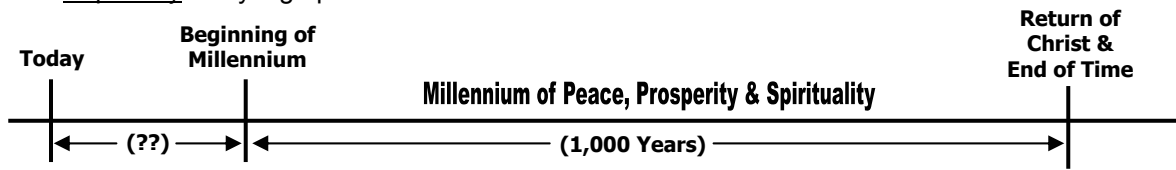
- Christ will return in His glorified body to claim those that have placed their faith in Him
- Upon His return, the righteous will be taken to live with Him forever
- The earth and all the unrighteous that are upon it will be destroyed with fire and brimstone
- God will judge all of mankind
- The righteous will enjoy everlasting life; the wicked will suffer everlasting destruction

Postmillennialism

- Millennium: A literal 1,000 year period in which the world enjoys a time of peace, prosperity, and spirituality brought about by the spread of the gospel over the whole earth
- Christ's Return: Occurs at the end of the millennium
- Kingdom of God: The worldwide kingdom of Christ that triumphs over the world's system in the millennium age

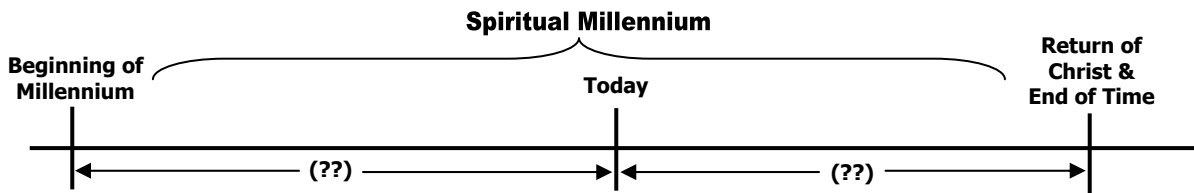
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- Popularity: Very high prior to WWI and WW2. Few hold this belief now.



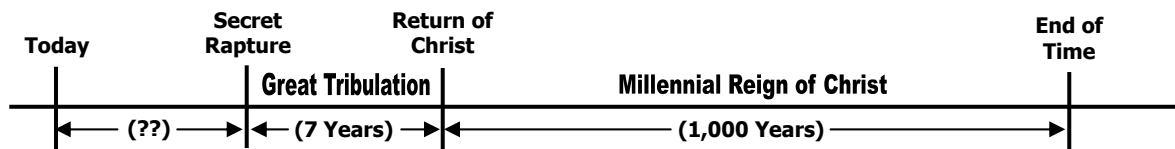
Amillennialism

- Millennium: The 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 are symbolic of the time period between the first and second coming of Christ
- Christ's Return: Occurs at the end of the millennium, after the brief period of Satan's final rebellion
- Kingdom of God: Generally, they believe it refers to the Church established by Jesus Christ
- Popularity: This was the position of the reformation and was held by many popular Christian thinkers (Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther, etc...)



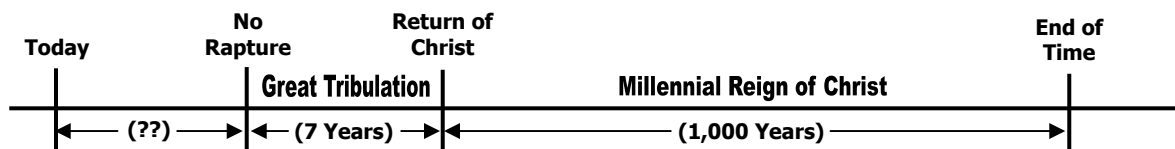
Dispensationalism

- Millennium: A literal 1,000 years that will occur after the rapture of all believers and the Great Tribulation (7 years).
- Christ's Return: He will return in the sky to rapture the living and resurrect the dead who have placed their faith in Him. He will again return seven years later to end the Great Tribulation and establish His kingdom upon the earth and reign for 1,000 years
- Kingdom of God: The earthly kingdom Christ will establish during the Millennium
- Popularity: Very popular right now with the large audience generated by the Left Behind series



Historic Premillennialism

- Millennium: A literal 1,000 years that will occur after the return of Christ.
- Christ's Return: He will return at the end of the current age following a period of great tribulation
- Kingdom of God: The earthly kingdom Christ will establish during the Millennium
- Popularity: Was apparently popular among early church fathers



What accounted for the rise and fall of the popularity of the different belief systems?

Their popularity ebbed and flowed based on the current events of the time. After the rampant persecution of Christians ceased and religious freedom began to gain popularity, the Postmillennial view was popular. However, after the last two World Wars and the reestablishment of Israel, the Premillennial view is popular.

What can we learn from this?

We need to interpret our Bibles based upon Scriptural principles and with the aid of the Holy Spirit rather than our interpretation of current events.

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Interpretive Principles:

When we approach any other Biblical text, we use the literal method for interpreting the passage. However, do we apply these same principles to prophecy, especially apocalyptic prophecy? Some say yes, some say no, and others say sometimes. The answer to this question is very important as we discuss the meaning of the prophecies in Daniel. Let's first briefly discuss the literal method of interpretation.

Literal Method of Interpretation

1. Historical / Cultural Analysis – **considers the historical and cultural context of a passage**
2. Contextual Analysis – **considers the passage in relation to the entire chapter and book**
3. Lexical / Syntactical Analysis – **analyzes the definitions of words and their relationship with each other**
4. Theological Analysis – **compares a text with other passages to maintain Scriptural harmony**

Can these principles be used for apocalyptic prophecy? Clearly, much of this type of prophecy is symbolic in nature and cannot be taken literally. Look at the following excerpt from Revelation.

Revelation 12:1-5 – “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and [to] his throne.”

Many of the people, animals, and objects mentioned in this passage are symbolic and cannot be interpreted literally. For example, the dragon is commonly interpreted as Satan (see Revelation 12:9) and the stars are interpreted as angels, one third of which followed Satan and are now known as demons. Who is the woman? Is she the nation of Israel, the virgin Mary, or the church? Interpreting her as the virgin Mary would ascribe greater glory to Mary than the Scripture allows. Regardless of whether you interpret her as Israel or the church, her identity is clearly symbolic, not to be interpreted as a literal woman.

Literal or symbolic?

I believe the answer to this question is that the interpretation can be either literal or symbolic, depending on the circumstances. Let me propose the following rules.

1. Interpret the prophecy literally unless:
 - (a) the passage contains obviously **figurative** language;
 - (b) the New Testament gives **authority** for interpreting them in other than a literal sense
 - (c) a literal interpretation would produce a **contradiction** with the clear teaching contained in the non-symbolic books of the New Testament
2. Clear New Testament passages in **non-symbolic** books are to be the norm for the interpretation of prophecy, rather than obscure or partial revelations contained in the Old Testament

Why give the New Testament precedence over the Old Testament? It isn't that we are placing greater importance on the New Testament, but that we are using the New Testament as the interpretive key to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is incomplete without the New Testament. The clear revelation of Jesus Christ, His teachings, and the teachings of His apostles clarifies the true meaning of the Old Testament. Let's look at an example.

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Example: Acts 15:12-19 – James' speech at the council in Jerusalem

In this passage, James quotes from Amos 9:11-12. Note that it is not a word for word quotation, but rather he gives the sense of the passage. Read Amos 9:11-12 below.

Amos 9:11-12 – "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this."

Let's look at this passage from two different perspectives, a literal fulfillment and a symbolic (spiritual) fulfillment. I'll then ask you to choose one.

A Literal fulfillment:

What would be the literal fulfillment of this passage?

The temple would someday rebuilt to mirror its former glory and the nation of Israel will be restored as a whole. At that time, many the Gentiles will come to know the Lord.

Had a literal fulfillment of this passage occurred at this point in Acts?

No. The temple, though in existence, was just a shadow of its former glory and Israel was under Roman rule.

If James believed in a literal fulfillment of Amos 9:11-12, how does it fit into the context of the passage?

If James were referring to a literal fulfillment of this passage, it would be to point out that God made it clear that he would bring the Gentiles into the fold in the future, so it wasn't surprising that it could also happen during the church age.

A Symbolic fulfillment:

What would be the symbolic fulfillment of this passage? (See John 2:19-22)

Christ's body was the true temple. It was destroyed (crucified) and rebuilt (resurrected). By His death and resurrection, He has reconciled God to man and become the message of the gospel that is to be preached to all men.

Had a symbolic fulfillment of this passage occurred at this point in Acts?

Yes. Christ had already died, rose again, and had returned to the Father.

If James believed in a symbolic fulfillment of Amos 9:11-12, how does it fit into the context of the passage?

If James was referring to a symbolic fulfillment, he was using Amos to refer to their current situation. If the temple referred to in Amos was Christ, then the words of Amos were written to help them understand God's plan and recognize the place of the Gentiles in the early church.

Comparing the Literal and Symbolic Interpretations:

Which interpretation do you feel best fits the context of the passage?

I believe the symbolic interpretation best fits the context because Christ referred to His body as the temple. Also, James' comments seem to make more sense if he had a symbolic interpretation of Amos. Rather than referencing a future event to justify a current event (a bad interpretive practice), he was referencing a passage that specifically addressed their situation.

Keeping in mind that this is just one passage addressing one issue, what end-time system does your interpretation support? (see page 2)

My interpretation of this passage supports an Amillennial system.

Items for Discussion:

What principle(s) of prophetic interpretation does this example address?

Interpret the prophecy literally unless the New Testament gives authority for interpreting them in other than a literal sense. Also, use the New Testament to accurately interpret the Old Testament.