

Bible Survey - Apocalypse 1.3 - Views on Eschatology, Millennialism & the Rapture

Opinion Paper - Introduction and Purpose:

Christian lay-leadership, for the most part, has a limited understanding of the theological issues that affect and often divide the church. As a shepherd who has completed a seminary education, I have access to a greater understanding and a personal responsibility to teach God's Word in a clear, gracious, and compelling manner. Reasonably correct theology is an important factor for the church to function as God intended. Though I don't believe any theology is completely perfect, and we all have some variations based upon what God has done in our life and what He has revealed to us. None the less, a good theology well understood and defensible provides the authoritative basis for a proper ordering of our thoughts and our lives in relation to God. More importantly, it focuses our love and service in our individual and corporate calling in fulfilling the Great Commandment (to love God and others), and the Great Commission (to evangelize and disciple). To this end, it is also important to understand what the Scripture makes reasonably clear about the Eschaton or the end times, and what it leaves tantalizingly vague. The rule for Christian shepherds should be "where there is clarity, teach with certainty. Where there is vagueness, teach with grace and sensitivity."¹ In other words, respect what God revealed in Scripture, and do not teach as absolute those things the Scripture leaves open to discussion. The purpose of this paper is to present a brief discussion of my understanding and belief of Eschatology, and what I have determined to be the most probable understanding of Scripture. There are two aspects of eschatology – individual and world, and three aspects of millennial eschatology – Amillennial, Postmillennial, and Premillennial. I will attempt to review some thoughts regarding these lines of theology, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each position, and make the case for what I believe to be the soundest conclusions derived from Scripture.

Brief Background:

Eschatology is the theological study of the end of days or the end times, and is "Traditionally defined as the doctrine of the 'last things' in relation either to human individuals (comprising death, resurrection, judgment, and the afterlife) or to the world [the absolute end of the world].² Put another way, Eschatology is "the study of the last things. Eschatology deals with the end of the world and includes the second Coming of Christ, the resurrection, judgment, the millennium, and the new heavens and new earth. It also deals with the last things for the individual: physical death, the intermediate state of a person between death and the final resurrection, and the final state (heaven or hell).³ Individual eschatology is what happens at a person's death prior to the return of Messiah, and involves judgment and attendant reward or punishment. World eschatology is how history

¹ From class notes on Theology 3, Western Seminary San Jose, Winter term, Professor Dr. Gary Tuck.

² Bruce, FF; Scott, JJ Jr. "Eschatology" article from Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter Ewell, Editor. Baker Academic, 2001.

³ Sawyer, James, M.; The Survivor's Guide to Theology. Zondervan, 2006.

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comes to a close with the destruction of the present world order, and the dawning of the new age when a new heaven and a new earth are created as an inheritance for Messiah's redeemed people. King and Kingdom are the primary conceptual perspectives presented in Scripture under the unity of the Trinity – with God being the King of all, Jesus being the King of creation, and the Spirit permeating and holding everything together.

In our class sessions we discussed that though there are a number of actions that take place in the end of history, the Eschaton is better understood as “one unfolding event” rather than “a series of independent events.” The conflict revealed in world eschatology is pitched in creation between the forces of rebellion against God's rule led by Satan, and the forces committed to the Kingdom of God led by Messiah. This conflict plays out in the past, present, and future of this age, with the result already assured by the Triumph of Messiah over sin and death at the cross. Though eschatology courses throughout Scripture especially in the prophetic writings, the most specific content is found in the apocalyptic writings first of Daniel and later in John's Revelation where end time themes raised in Scripture are more fully expressed and developed. We will now take a look at individual and world eschatology.

Individual Eschatology:

Though the end may come at any time, most believers will not necessarily see the end of history as predicted for the world as expected in the Eschaton, but rather will enter eternity at the end of our natural life upon our death... this is individual eschatology. My mother entered eternity two weeks ago, preceded by my father three years earlier. The practical closeness of my parents' entry into eternity has rendered this conceptualization a present necessity rather than a theoretical or academic exercise. The need to speak truth into the lives of friends and relatives grappling with the loss of loved ones and the certainty of death, tends to open ones heart to the hope for eternal life. The reality of pain and suffering in light of eternity is a problem humanity has always had to deal with. We intuitively understand that we will all die, but what happens thereafter is the driving question. Most faiths hold to the notion that at death we then enter into eternity. As proclaimed in Scripture, “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Though a few ancient philosophies held to a notion of the obliteration of the individual at death, this was the exception and not the norm. The Hebrews, Greeks and Romans (as well as many others) all held to a view that after the death of the physical body the spirit would continue in an eternal spiritual afterlife. As the physical life ended, the spiritual life began. The Biblical creation account reveals two necessary truths about humanity: 1) that we were created from common elements of the earth that comprise our physical body that are bound to and must necessarily return to the earth; 2) that we were imbued with the “Breath of God” which is the Spiritual component that God gave us that returns to God at our death.

In addition to this context of physical and spiritual life, at our entrance into eternity at physical death most of the ancients believed in some form of a personal judgment. Ancient afterlife

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conceptions included the Hebrews who believed in “Sheol,” and the Greeks and the Romans who believed in “Hades.” The Hebrews also believed in “Gehenna” the place of judgment and suffering. J. Jeremias stresses the sharp distinction in the NT (as in pre-NT Judaism) between Hades and Gehenna—Hades receiving the ungodly only for the intervening period between death and resurrection, Gehenna being their place of punishment after the last judgment.⁴ It was believed that Sheol or Hades was the place where all the dead would go, and where the individual’s afterlife would be a reflection of what their life had been on earth. If someone had lived a noble, ethical and godly life, then their afterlife would be good. But if they had lived an ignoble, unethical or ungodly life, then their afterlife would be bad. Gehenna (Hell) provided a definite concept of reward for a righteous life and punishment for an unrighteous life. Though the concept had derived from the “Valley of Hinnom” from Canaanite Molech human sacrifice, it was generally recognized as the place of condemnation and suffering (2Chron 28:3, 33:6; 2Kings 23:10; Isaiah 30:33; 66:24). New Testament writers focused this as the place of the eternal punishment (Mat 5:20, 29; 10:28; 23:15; Mark 9:42-47; Luke 12:5; 16:19-31), where the permanence of Gehenna was the final reality the wicked unrepentant would go with no opportunity for forgiveness or a do-over. What was done was done in life, and you either enjoyed the benefit or suffered the consequences for eternity.

Another concept of this Hades afterlife was demonstrated in the movie “Gladiator” starring Russell Crowe. At the end of the movie as Crowe’s character is dying on the Coliseum arena floor he is depicted as moving toward a massive stone wall with a gate that represents the entrance to Hades. As he passes through he enters into a sort of shadowland, and he meets his deceased wife and son. In the movie, the shadowland is shown in the imagery of a monochrome picture format indicative that the richness of earthly life previously represented by color has passed. In this perspective of the afterlife these ancients held to the idea that we would recognize people, but the expressions of joy and pleasure would be muted in absence of the physical body and its senses in the spiritual shadowland.

However, this is not the afterlife that Jesus taught about. Jesus said that He had come to rescue humanity from death and that through faith in Him a joyous eternity and an abundant life awaited in a new and improved eternal physical body. Our new resurrection body would be free of all pain and suffering, and capable of experiencing a new and greatly improved physical and spiritual reality. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16:

“And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died. I can tell you this directly from the Lord...”

⁴ Davies, R.E.; “Gehenna” – article from [Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible](#), PRADIS Bible Software, Merrill C. Tenney, editor.

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Jesus taught that through His atonement there was forgiveness individuals could appropriate by faith. This opened the door for spiritual renewal now in this present life, and complete physical restoration into the afterlife where redeemed humanity would enjoy the life God had originally intended in the Garden before the Fall.

In Scripture, Jesus spoke of an afterlife that was different from the monochrome world of Sheol or Hades. Jesus taught that heaven was more vibrant, more alive, more colorful, more compelling, and far more wondrous than the world we now know. It is similar to the transition of the movie the “Wizard of Oz” which went from black and white at the beginning to dazzling color. This is the conception of an afterlife the noted Christian apologist C.S. Lewis wrote about in several of his books... including The Great Divorce, where he described Heaven as being “Too real and alive for the common earthly perceptions of reality... so real that it is actually painful to our old self.”⁵ In the final book of the Chronicles of Narnia series, The Last Battle, the final chapter is titled “Farewell to the Shadowlands,” and Aslan (the allegorical representation of Jesus) joyfully leads His faithful followers into eternity where “the further up and further in [to Heaven] you go, the bigger and greater everything becomes.”⁶ Lewis wrote (and Jesus taught) that while there would certainly be loss in separation from loved ones in the passing from this life, but there would also be incredibly greater gain in the form of a far better reality in Heaven for those who had responded in faith to Jesus’ offer of Gospel grace. At the end of time, Sheol and Hades would give up their living dead for judgment, with the unrepentant and desperately wicked including Satan and his followers consigned to Gehenna, or hell.

In this context, Christians speak of heaven as a place where the “streets are paved with gold,” which causes many non-believers to snicker thinking this notion to be naïve. However, what the Bible authors were speaking to in this picture is an anticipated new reality where the best and most precious we can imagine here and now in this present reality, will in effect be the most common and worthless in heaven. The implication is that heaven will be an amazing place to be with many new joys and wonders that will be discovered there... joys and wonders that would be beyond our wildest dreams and known limitations in this life. For the Christian then, death certainly has the context for sadness of present separation from loved ones (John 11:21-26), but mixed with it is the joy of knowing a new life in an immensely improved reality is dawning. So bringing this home to my musings about my parents, I can say that while I’ll miss my Mom and Dad here and now, I know they have responded to Jesus and I have confidence that I will enjoy a reunion in a more wonderful and limitless life to come. This is the Hope of the New Covenant faith born through Jesus’ death and resurrection. As Jesus was resurrected, so we who hold to faith in Him shall be as well.

World Eschatology:

Jesus said many things about the Eschaton and confirmed His Messianic identity in His

⁵ Lewis, C.S.; The Great Divorce. Macmillan Publishing, 1946.

⁶ Lewis, C.S., The last Battle – Book 7 of the Chronicles of Narnia. Macmillan Publishing, 1956.

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announcement that He was the “Son of Man” referenced in Daniel’s apocalyptic vision. “Son of Man is used 182 times in Scripture, and 81 times in the Gospels. The preponderance of usage in the NT particularly speaks to the authors’ conviction that the promised Jewish Messianic King had come. Jesus consistently used Old Testament allusions in speaking to the Jewish leadership of His day, and His statement that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (Luke 22:37b; 24:44) speaks to His assertion that he was not rewriting the OT, but clarifying it. In the conclusion of their article on eschatology, F.F. Bruce and J.J. Scott, Jr. aptly state:

“Jesus’ use of OT language was creative and cannot be confined to the meaning that language had in its original context. He probably did point forward to His personal coming to earth – not only to manifest His glory but to share glory with His people, raised from the dead by His quickening shout. When the consummation to which His people look forward is described as their “hope of glory,” it is their participation in Jesus’ resurrection glory that is in view; that hope is kept bright within them by His indwelling presence (Col 1:27) and sealed by the Spirit (Eph 1:13-14, 18-21).”⁷

Most Christians await the second coming of Jesus (The Parousia) with great anticipation. This is the hope for which we labor and wait expectantly. However, there is much disagreement about the manner the Parousia will take, the order of the events that will precede it, and what aspects of the Eschaton the church will directly experience. Christian experience is caught between a storied past recorded in Scripture, and a promised future that is expectantly hoped for... but there is as well as a fear of or even preoccupation with how it will end. We are well advised to find a middle ground where the past and the future inform and shape our present. “The tension between the old and the new is emphasized; in fact the phrase ‘already, But not yet’ has become a sort of [evangelical Christian] slogan.... Somewhere between the two extremes of ‘preoccupation with’ and ‘avoidance of’ eschatology, we must take our stance.”⁸ At the forefront of the future we wait expectantly for is the question of how it will unfold. At the heart of the debate is the matter of Millennialism – the 1,000 year period of Jesus’ rule on earth prior to the final destruction and recreation of the cosmos is much discussed and debated. Millennialism shapes how we view the attendant issues of the rapture of the church, the final judgment of humanity and attendant reward or punishment of all created beings.

There are three major views of “millennial eschatology” – Amillennial, Postmillennial, and Premillennial. When Jesus returns at His second Coming, we will find out which of these three views is the correct one. In the meantime, we can summarize some of the salient aspects of each view and suggest which may be the stronger based on what Scripture has revealed.

⁷ Bruce, FF; Scott, JJ Jr. “Eschatology” article from Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter Ewell, Editor. Baker Academic, 2001.

⁸ Erickson, Millard J.; Christian Theology. Baker Academic, 1998, page 1159.

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Amillennial:

Typically, Amillennialists take a more symbolic view of apocalyptic literature rather than a literal view. They argue that since much of apocalyptic writings are poetry, hence the imagery they evoke is not necessarily that of a literal understanding, but a more likely figurative reality. Thus, they argue that there is no literal one-thousand year millennium rule of Jesus on earth prior to the end.

“Amillennialists deny that there is a literal millennium, either before or after the return of Jesus Christ. They reject the notion that there are two future resurrections or two stages in the Lord’s return. Once the symbols are recognized for what they are, New Testament eschatology is remarkably simple. In the fullness of time, the Lord will return, the dead will be resurrected, and all will be judged. The complex eschatological schemes of many contemporary evangelicals are at best unnecessarily complex if not misleading.”⁹

In our class sessions we discussed that while the Amillennial argument has the advantage of a simpler approach, it just does not adequately conform to the hermeneutic principle of discerning and rendering the sender’s intended meaning. In class it was posited that Amillennialists set up a “bait and switch” approach in replacing God’s provision of a permanent and enduring covenant with “national Israel” with that of “symbolic Israel” (Jesus). This fails to respect the revealed promises of God in Scripture that were directed to Israel, as a nation of people within a historical time frame. To disavow the nation of Israel as the locus of God’s redemptive efforts is to misinterpret Old Testament prophecy and the Gospel message. God also promised that there would always be a remnant of Israel who would inherit His blessings (2Kings 19:30; Ezra 9:8; Isaiah 10:20; 28:5; 37:32; Jer 50:20; Mic 7:18; Romans 9:27; 11:5). Though the leadership and the majority of the nation commonly went astray, God had always reserved for Himself a remnant that would fulfill His purposes in history including the provision of the emergence of Messiah. Since the Scriptural account provides that God has always reserved a remnant of Israel to bless, there is no reason to presume that God will do anything other than bless and restore a remnant of national Israel, after His final judgment on Israel and creation.

We observed in class that “the over spiritualization of Amillennialists unfortunately relegates all of God’s promises to eternity, and minimizes the importance of the material earth as well as national Israel in the unfolding of God’s Kingdom purposes.” Amillennialists argue that Jesus is King in eternity, and that the temporal world is being ruled today by His saints through the church which has replaced Israel as God’s people. Relative to the Eschaton, they hold that at any time Jesus may return and the end occur, thus there are no necessary antecedents. Because of this, there is no rapture of the saints in denial of 1Thes 4:17, and Revelation 20 which describes a detailed Millennial

⁹ Boyd, Gregory; Eddy, Paul. [Across the Spectrum](#). Baker Academic, 2002. Page 248.

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period that follows the rapture of the saints, the great tribulation, and precedes the final defeat of Satan, and the final judgment. Instead, Amillennialists believe there will be:

“A continuous development of good and evil in the world until the second coming of Christ, when the dead shall be raised and the judgment conducted. Amillennialists believe that the Kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ rules His church [from heaven] through the Word and the Spirit. They feel that the future, glorious, and perfect kingdom refers to the new earth and life in heaven. Thus Revelation 20 is a description of the souls of dead believers reigning with Christ in heaven.”¹⁰

While prophecy and apocalypse in particular are inherently difficult to translate literally, it seems clear to me that this argument is overly simplistic. Further, they make the hermeneutical mistake of eisegesis – of reading into the text their theologically assumed explication, rather than allowing their Biblical exegesis to inform their theology.

In critiquing this approach to millennial eschatology, it seems apparent that the text does not support the Amillennial position. Old Testament prophecy though pointing to Messiah, is not inherently Christological. Looking at the process of redemptive history in Scripture, there were always real events that had spiritual impacts leading to a future understanding that was far more complicated and wondrous than what they knew at the earlier time. To over spiritualize all of Scripture as the Amillennialists propose is to minimize the wonder of God’s specific acts of fulfilling prophecy within history. Messiah’s advent, death, and resurrection all occurred in history not in some allegorical conceptualization. The known historical events brought all of redemptive history into sharp focus in the person of Jesus. To have been satisfied with merely a spiritualized interpretation of grace is to miss the point – Jesus entered history at a real time and place and accomplished spiritual redemption. It is most probable that He will return in history at a real time and place and consummate the anticipated redemption of creation. Of the three millennial approaches, I find Amillennialism to be the least satisfactory.

Postmillennialism:

This approach focuses more upon the gospel statements about the Kingdom of God on earth, and holds that the millennium rule of Christ began in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost. Postmillennialists contend that the millennial rule of Christ that began at Pentecost, will extend forward and ever more fruitful until the earth is ultimately claimed for Christ, and only then He will return. They hold and teach that the OT Mosaic Law is still in force instead of having been replaced by Grace. Thus, although they preach of the prominence of Grace, they effectively hold to a “Law + Grace” theology, as opposed to a “Grace only” theology of salvation. In our class sessions, we discussed this concept as “Theonomic (God/Law) Reconstruction – where Old Testament Law is being advanced throughout

¹⁰ Clouse, R.G.; “Views of the Millennium.” Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Walter Elwell, editor. Baker Academic, 2001.

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the entire world, and that the Law will become the world standard rather than Grace.”

A positive outgrowth of this approach to theology is the impetus placed on evangelism and discipleship of all nations stated in the Gospel’s Great Commission. “In contrast to both Premillennial and Amillennial positions, Postmillennialists believe that Christ will return after the Christianization of the entire world.”¹¹ Another aspect of this Christianization is the social reform or redemption of society, which is a popular aspect of the post-modern church movement. These driving priorities place zeal in the need for Christians to evangelize and foment social justice ideals. A negative outgrowth of this approach to theology is the return to legalism as a necessary component of salvation. Paul wrote of the faith dichotomy of Law and Grace in Romans 4:16, declaring that the Law was ineffective in securing salvation whereas Grace was completely effective (Romans 5:20-21).

Postmillennialists take the “Kingdom” parables of Jesus literally at face value, where the mustard seed continues its expansive growth and the yeast continues its pervasive growth (Mat 3:31-33). Optimistic pervasive expansion is thus the key notion of Postmillennialism, with the expectation of the entire world being subjugated to Christ through the preaching and teaching of the kingdom of God advanced by the Church. They expect that there will be no rapture of the Church and no tribulation and persecution of the Church, just slow and continual gospel growth and expansion. They argue:

“Such activity will result in a more godly, peaceful, and prosperous world. The new age will not be essentially different from the present, and it will come about [gradually] as more people are converted to Christ. Evil will not be totally eliminated during the millennium, but it will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is increased. This period will not necessarily be limited to a thousand years... the millennium closes with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment.”¹²

The major problem with this approach is it presumes Christ is acting absentia from heaven with the Church able to effect radical spiritual and social change on sin-cursed earth. Unfortunately, there is really no Scriptural support for this particular approach. There is no question that Grace is the spiritual antidote for sin rather than Law, and that Grace rules in our spiritual life even while sin continues in our physical life. Our developing Christlikeness in the innerman fosters the hope of personal transformation, but the enduring law of sin in the outerman dooms any hope of physical or social transformation (Romans 7:14-25). The inroads the Gospel has made throughout the world have not sufficiently transformed or even curtailed human social behavior. Humanity remains in a fallen state, and we see evidence of this reality throughout history as well as in the evening news. Humanity will not be physically delivered from the effects of sin and society transformed until Christ redeems creation at His second coming. If this past century has shown anything, it has shown the

¹¹ Boyd & Eddy; page 242.

¹² Clouse, R.G.; “Views of the Millennium.”

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incredible and barbaric actions humanity is capable of in our modern time of reason and grace, where we continue by inflicting pain and suffering rather than prevailing through peace and equality. There is little to no Scriptural or practical evidence that supports this notion.

Finally, if the Postmillennial position were valid, we would see a consistent expansion of the Gospel and Grace. Gospel faith would be the dominant factor that humanity moves toward. Instead, most evangelicals observe the conflicts of faith camps between secular humanism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., with Christianity losing ground rather than emerging and dominating. This is not the vision of the future Postmillennialists expect. Jesus' conclusion of His parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) is in conflict with the hopeful approach Postmillennialism hold to: "When the Son of Man comes [again], will He find faith on earth?" This does not appear to be a rhetorical question, but one of practical import, and it does not support the Postmillennial position. Of the three Millennial positions, I find the Postmillennial position to be somewhat more acceptable than Amillennialism, but naive and still deficient in its consistency with or explication of the Biblical sources.

Premillennialism:

This final position of Premillennialism is by far the best known and also the most complicated of the three. Personally, I find it to be much more consistent with the Biblical sources, as well as most consistent with the heart of God as I know Him as it affirms His commitment of blessing the remnant of Israel as a component of His steadfast love. One of the outstanding aspects of the Premillennial view is that Jesus remains present with His believers on sin-cursed earth of the first creation. This differs from the Amillennium position where Jesus is present in eternity and the sin curse has been removed from earth (even the casual Christian observer cannot disregard the continued fallen state of humanity and creation); and the Postmillennium position where Jesus is absent from earth in heaven, and we continue to live on sin-cursed earth until Jesus returns and the curse is ended and creation redeemed through the church. Premillennialists understand that we cannot transform ourselves, and Paul concluded the same thing in Romans 7:14-25 where he speaks to the conflict within his nature of inner-man and outer-man. The bottom line is that without Grace, we are lost. There are many deficiencies in our understanding of the end time events and the Millennial Kingdom. Scripture makes certain things clear and others are left purposefully if not tantalizingly vague. Knowing this should cause all believers to tread carefully through these hallowed grounds and deal respectfully with those who believe differently. No theology is perfect, but some are better than others. In my opinion, the more hopeful approaches of Amillennialism and Postmillennialism are more difficult for me as a critical observer to accept.

Premillennialists hold to the spiritual salvation secured at Jesus' first coming, the spiritual empowerment released at Pentecost as promised in OT prophecy, and the future coming of Jesus who will rescue His saints from throughout history in the rapture. They also hold to a seven year tribulation where the unfaithful remainder living on earth will be punished for their faithless

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iniquity, followed by the millennial period where all Christians will be present with Christ on sin-cursed earth, followed by the final judgment and the creation of the new Heaven & earth. The sequence of these events as recorded in Scripture are somewhat more of a spiral rather than a lineal progression, but the text does provide sufficient clarity to anticipate much of how history comes to a close. The Tribulation will be a seven year period of intense struggle and suffering for those remaining on earth at that time. The events occurring within the two “Whitehorse” events (Rev 6:2, 19:11) are directed toward faithless Israel and the Pagan nations. The rider of the Whitehorse is clearly Jesus as Messiah. Those aligned against Messiah for whom the prophecy’s evils are directed represents the final punishment of Israel that has politically aligned themselves with the antichrist for their hope and security. In essence, they have exchanged the Son of Man for a human political leader that promises them protection. Ultimately this false Messiah is revealed as the antichrist.

The antichrist will be revealed as the person promising Israel protection, and Israel will gladly accept the offer and proclaim their savior their messiah. The first three and a half years of the tribulation will be the antichrist pouring out his wrath on Israel. At the midpoint of the Tribulation, the antichrist will directly confront Israel and the horrors of battle and repression will rage brutally. The second half of the Tribulation will be God’s pouring His wrath out upon faithless humanity. After the wrath of Satan and the wrath of God have been expended, there will be a final confrontation of good and evil culminating in the final battle of Armageddon (Rev 19:11-21). All of the wicked living at that time will be destroyed, and those who come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation will join the Raptured saints from all time in the Millennium. The Millennium will be a time of unsurpassed peace, joy, prosperity and beauty on sin cursed earth. Messiah will demonstrate His superiority over all the nations, faiths, social orders, and especially Satan by bringing about this glorious time on sin-cursed earth. At the end of the Millennium, there will be a final short conflict when Satan is released from his prison and seduces those born during the Millennium that knew of no other time than the millennium, but refuse to submit to Messiah. This final end will be swift, and then the end of times will come with final judgment and the new Heaven and earth.

An area of controversy for Premillennialists is about the timing of the Rapture of the saints. Some hold it will occur before the Tribulation (Pre-Trib), some at the midpoint (Mid-Trib), and some at the end (Post-Trib). The timing of the Tribulation and these final events are not clear by design as God did not intend for us to know precisely these times or events, but instead to walk by faith in expectancy (Mat 24:36; Mark 13:32). We are instructed to remain ready and to be doing that which God entrusted for us to do (Mat 24:44; Luke 12:38-40). At the Rapture, Jesus will come and call His faithful to join Him in the air. This event would be observed by humanity as a witness. However, Jesus the text indicates that Jesus will not stand upon the earth until initiating the Battle of Armageddon in Jerusalem. The timing of the Rapture though uncertain may be made more understandable by ascertaining a possible purpose of the tribulation period. If the Tribulation is only

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for bringing forward the grand conflict between Satanic forces and God's forces, then any of the three could work. While Pre-Trib is the most popular, with God sparing His saints from the coming wrath it seems intuitively obvious that God who did not spare Jesus from harm, nor His saints through history would not necessarily withhold suffering from His people. Most evangelicals hold that suffering is part of the walk of faith to some degree or other. The Mid-Trib position has strengths as it would allow for more people to be exposed to the Gospel through the witness of Christians living through these difficult times. Presuming the Tribulation process has at least two purposes - 1) to bring to a close redemptive history and initiate the millennial period, 2) to provide an opportunity for more people to be saved even at the eleventh hour. In this Mid-Trib approach, the saints would avoid the worst of the Tribulation providing a sort of kinder gentler view of the conclusion. The Mid-Trib approach divides the Tribulation into 2 three & one-half year parts - the first half being the wrath of Satan poured out on Israel, and the second half as the wrath of God poured out on evil and the unrepentant wicked. The Post-Trib position would mean that all the saints living at that time and any coming to faith through their testimony would have to endure the entire brunt of Satan's and God's fury. While not intuitively obvious, it might seem to be best supported by Luke 18:8... "When the Son of Man comes will He find faith on earth?" It would seem apparent that when Jesus returns, faith will have been polarized with the faithful raptured and those who heard the truth but failed to respond left behind as a witness. Personally, I believe the correct reason for the Tribulation is both judgment on faithless national Israel, and providing the opportunity for some even at the eleventh hour to respond to Grace (2Peter 3:9). Presuming this to be true, then the Mid-Trib Rapture in Pre-millennial time frame would make the most sense to me in serving notice to all of creation that the final events are setting up. I would place the Pre-Trib Premillennial position as a close second, and the Post-Trib Premillennial position as the least likely. Having said that, obviously we don't know for sure and all three positions have supporters. Whatever the three positions, it is understood that there will be those living at the time of the Rapture who have heard the Gospel but did not respond. Those in the Pre-Trib and Mid-Trib scenarios will endure the Tribulation and be given the opportunity to respond to Christ and enter the Millennium. That opportunity would not seem available in the Post-Trib position.

Concluding thoughts of the Millennium are nicely presented by Alan Johnson:

"[The Rev-20:] passage on the Millennium is a constant source of insurmountable difficulty for the exegete. The Millennium itself is one of the most controversial questions of eschatology (the doctrine of the last things). While the OT and later Jewish literature point forward to a time when the kingdom of God will be manifest in the world, nowhere is the time of the reign of the Messiah stated to be a thousand years. My exegesis of the passage leads me to a premillennial interpretation. It should be recognized, however, that there are problems with this view of 20:1-6, just as there are problems with other views of this difficult portion of the book; responsible

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Christian scholars vary in its interpretation according to their [theological] convictions and presuppositions. For the moment the question of the duration of the reign of Christ (which is equal to the duration of the binding of Satan) may be delayed. The main problem concerns whether the reference to a Millennium indicates an earthly historical reign of peace that will manifest itself at the close of this present age or the whole passage symbolizes some present experience of Christians or some future nonhistorical reality. The ancient church down to the time of Augustine (354-430 AD) though not without minor exceptions unquestionably held to the teaching of an earthly, historical reign of peace that was to follow the defeat of Antichrist and the physical resurrection of the saints but precede both the judgment and the new creation. To be sure, there were various positions as to the material nature of the Millennium, but the true conception of the thousand years was a balance between the worldly aspects of the kingdom and its spiritual aspects as a reign with Christ.”¹³

Concluding Thoughts:

As posited in the individual/worldly eschatology portion of this paper, all people will enter eternity either at the end of their natural life, or as a result of the playing out of the end time’s event of the Eschaton. It seems intuitively obvious to me that most of us will likely enter eternity at our natural death before the Parousia. So what happens to those? Do they enter an intermediate Shadowland state as the ancients believed? Or do they enter directly into the Rapture in the air with Jesus? While we don’t know for certain, I believe that Scripture provides a few clues. First, Jesus’ teaching of the “Rich man and Lazarus” had each entering directly into their reward or punishment (Luke 16:19-26), with the added reality of a chasm separating Paradise from Hell. Second, Jesus said to the criminal crucified with Him, “Today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Third, the teaching of Jesus to Martha is also helpful in John 11:23-27:

“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’”

Jesus demonstrated His power of Life over death prior to His resurrection, and spoke to the immediacy of life in spite of death. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul writes to encourage the church:

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

¹³ Johnson, Alan, F; “Millennium” – article from Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, PRADIS Bible Software, Merrill C. Tenney, editor.

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According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord [Parousia], will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep [intermediate state]. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."

In considering the concept of time passage in eternity, C.S. Lewis held to the notion that time and eternity moved to a different rhythm and that there would be some awareness of time in eternity, but not necessarily a lineal concept of time as we now know it. Peter said that time would pass differently in eternity based on God's perception of time:

"With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2Pet 3:8b-13)

My own concept of eschatology holds that I will enter eternity either at my death, or upon the Eschaton in the end of days. I do believe the end of days is coming because the Bible clearly teaches it. I believe the Eschaton is an unfolding integrated event, not merely a series of linked circumstances we can identify. I believe it will come suddenly and unexpectedly. I do not believe that we can either hasten the arrival, or delay the arrival. It will come at the fullness of time according to God's plan. In terms of the Eschaton, I believe that a Premillennial and Mid-tribulation Theology best fits my understanding of the Scripture, but in the final analysis I believe we will all be surprised... some delighted, and others terrified. The Good News of the Gospel is that those sealed in Christ by faith are secure:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.... But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:1-2, 10-11, 16-17)

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Lesson Plan Outline:

1. Individual Eschatology
 - a. The certainty of death
 - b. The certainty of life
 - c. The wonders of the afterlife
2. World Eschatology
 - a. Jesus is the fulfillment of OT/OC prophecy and hope
 - b. The Parousia
 - c. Millennialism
 - i. Amillennial
 - ii. Postmillennial
 - iii. Premillennial
 1. Pre-Tribulation
 2. Mid-Tribulation
 3. Post-Tribulation
3. Concluding Thoughts

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