

Ominous Signs of the End

The Olivet Discourse is found in the first three gospel accounts. It is central to the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a basic understanding of it is essential to the Christian's walk. Jesus has been dealing in Mark 11 and 12 with the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Here He teaches His own disciples about the end of all things. In verses 1-13, He addresses this present age; in verses 14-23, He addresses the great tribulation at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD; in verses 24-37, He addresses the end of this age when Jesus Christ returns in glory.

Mark 13:1-13

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” ² And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

⁹ “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

As in the case with those who opposed Him, Jesus also here refuses to answer His disciples' questions precisely as they are asked. He actually answers questions that are more important than the ones asked. The disciples ask "when," but Jesus answers "what"; the reason is that "what" is far more important to know and believe than is "when." Jesus teaches us here that we must live our lives in light of the things to come. We don't need to know WHEN they are going to happen, but rather THAT they are going to happen. When we know that they are going to happen, we live holy, purposeful, and joyful lives. In order for us to embrace the truth about this world's future, we must be disabused of some false hopes and false fears which deceive and discourage us. This is precisely what Jesus does in this text.

1. We must not be deceived by false hopes (vv. 1-8)

We can carelessly be led astray by false religious traditions (vv. 1-4), false messiahs (vv. 5,6), or false alarms (vv. 7,8). The disciples were overly impressed with the manmade Temple. Jesus taught them that their gorgeous Temple was going to be completely destroyed one day soon as an act of God's judgment upon Israel's unfaithfulness. We must be careful also not to be led astray by presumption or by cynicism regarding the "delay" in Christ's promised return (See II Peter 3:3-10). In the attached charts, we can see four biblically-based perspectives on the end times and four different hermeneutical frameworks for interpreting biblical apocalyptic literature. Each of these paradigms disagree with the others in certain aspects of biblical eschatology, but notice that they all agree upon the most important element: Christ is returning soon—visibly, personally, gloriously—to judge and to save.

2. We must not be deterred by false fears (vv. 9-13)

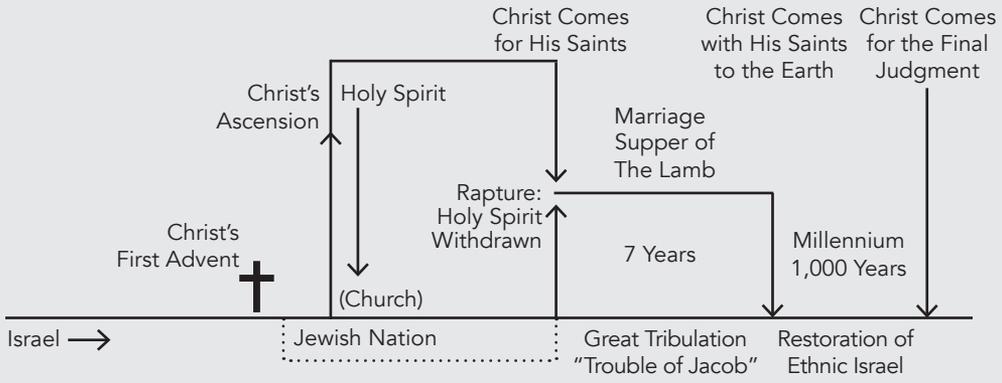
Jesus' main concern is not to give us data to help us calculate what year we should expect His return, but rather to teach us that our mission of testifying to His grace in the gospel must be carried out amidst all the turmoil and tribulation of this present age. We must not fear persecution from religious leaders and institutions (v. 9a) or civil governments and magistrates (vv. 9b-11), nor the betrayal of close friends and family members (v. 12), nor the hatred of the whole world (v. 13a), nor the return of Christ! (v. 13b). If, as Christians, we are anxious or fearful about His return, we can be sure that our view of the end times is unbiblical, for the Scriptures teach that His return brings unspeakable joy for His people.

Discussion Questions

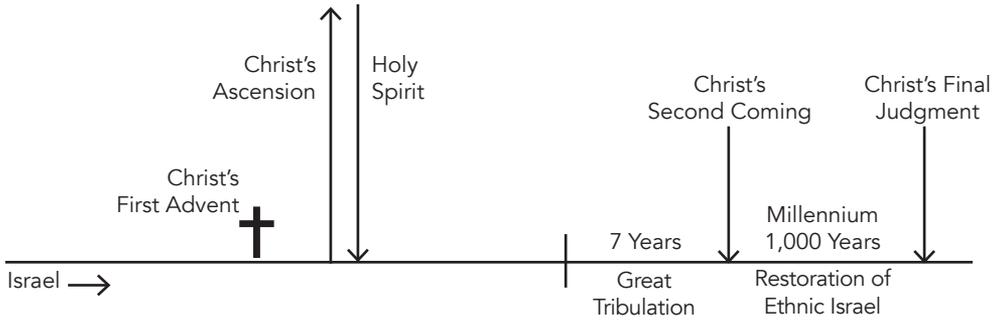
1. Why are study and knowledge of the end times essential to the Christian walk? (You might also look at Ps. 73:12-22; II Cor. 4:16-18; Col. 3:1-6; I Thess. 4:13-18; I John 3:1-3)
2. What false hopes do people today most often embrace, which keep them from focusing upon the imminent return of Christ?
3. What do you need to do to "be on your guard" against the modern-day distractions, diversions, and discouragements to your mission? What is your mission?
4. Have you ever experienced the phenomenon described in verse 11? Describe your experience.
5. Have you experienced what Jesus teaches in verses 12-13? Describe your experience.
6. How can we know that we shall endure to the end and be saved?

Four Views of the Millennium

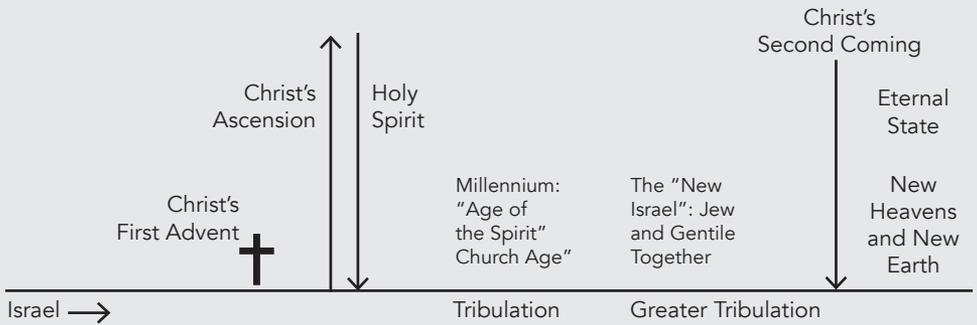
Pre Tribulational Premillennialism



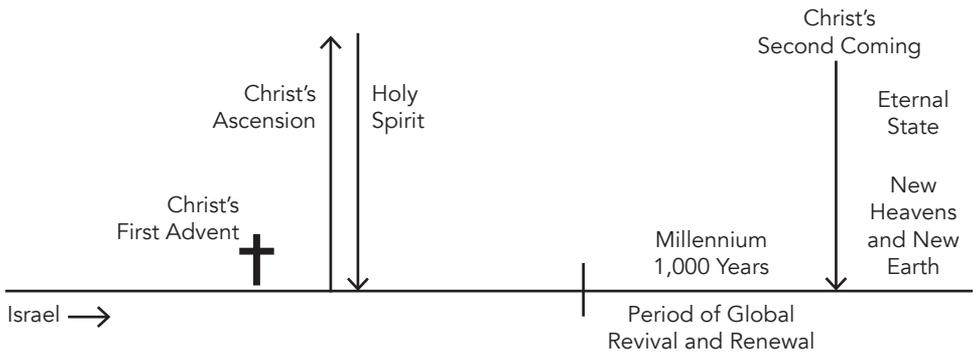
Post Tribulational (Historical) Premillennialism



Amillennialism



Post Millennialism



We all agree:

- The Bible is true.
- Jesus Christ is coming back—personally, visibly, and gloriously.
- We must wait expectantly, watchfully, and prayerfully.
- Every human will be resurrected.
- Every human will be judged.
- Believers will inherit new heavens and new earth.

The Four Historic Interpretive Frameworks for Revelation and Olivet Discourse

	Preterist	Historicist	Futurist	Idealist
Typical View	A contemporary history, esp. the destruction of Jerusalem	A prophetic survey of church history	A prophecy regarding the end of this age	A philosophy of history with some allusions to historical events
Structure and Outline of Revelation Chapters 4-19	4-11: the church's struggle against Judaism, ending with destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70; 12-19: the church's struggle with paganism, ending with fall of Rome, 476; 20-22: triumph of the church	1 day = 1 year, as in Ezekiel 4:4-6; 4-7; Breaking seven seals = barbarian invasion of Rome; 8-11 Trumpets = foreign invasions of empire ending with fall of Constantinople (1453); 12-13 Beasts = aspects of Papacy; 14-16 Bowls of wrath = Judgment on the papacy; 17-19 Fall of Roman Church	Structure given in Rev. 1:19; 1: "the things which you have seen;" 2-3: "the things which are;" 4-22: "the things which shall be;" 4-5: Rapture of church; 6-19: 7 yr. Tribulation; 20: millennium; 21-22: eternal state	Progressive parallelism over the entire Christian era. Seven recapitulating spans of history: 4:1-8:1; 8:2-11:19; 12:1-14:20; 15:1-16:21; 17:1-19:10; 19:11-21; 20:1-22:21
Typical View of Millennium	Postmillennial	Amillennial, Postmillennial, or Historic Premillennial (Post-tribulational)	Dispensational, Premillennial (pre-tribulational)	Amillennial
Advocates	Hugo Grotius, Milton Terry, David Chilton	Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley	Hal Lindsey, Tim Lahaye, Charles Ryrie	William Hendriksen, Leon Morris
Strengths	Immediate relevance to first readers; answers Rev. 1:1, 19; 22:10; consistent with events of A.D. 70; consistent with Mk. 13, Mt. 24; Lk. 21; God's "coming" consistent with O.T.; optimistic view of history	Relevant to church age (esp. in the West); chronologically continuous; consistent with Gibbon's <i>Decline and Fall of Roman Empire</i>	Structure from Rev. 1:19; faith in supernatural foretelling; global application; accounts for sequence in Daniel; literal interpretation of scriptures, esp. promise/fulfillment of O.T.	Sensitive to genre; consistent with rest of N.T.; relevant to all generations of all places; accounts for several structural hints in the text
Weaknesses	Heavily dependent on pre-70 A.D. dating; localized in scope; time bound in relevance; open to anti-supernaturalism	Exegesis driven by European anti-Catholic ideology; exegesis too mathematical and mechanical; disagreements among exegetes; exegesis always climaxes in present generation of interpreter	"newspaper exegesis;" inconsistency w/literalism; insensitivity to genre; irrelevance of Rev. chps. 4-20 to church; pessimistic view of history, inciting fear of future	Questionable dealing of Rev. 1:1; questionable dealing of Rev. 1:19; progressive parallelism forced on Rev. ch. 20; open to anti-supernaturalism