

Eschatology, Session 3: Prophecy Part 2; 7/7/2025

Current Issues: 2007 Shepherd's Conference talk by McArthur:

https://www.versebyverse.com/uploads/1/0/1/0/101034580/why_every_calvinist_should_be_a_premillennialist.pdf https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_Azt6Ls-_b5ETIVGGfVvPk05oBaA9NRI

-Preview of study and calendar.

Session 3: Role of Prophecy Part 2; 7/9/25

- Hermeneutics and types of language: apocalyptic, analogical and symbolic.
- Literal Interpretation not sufficient, grammatical historical and Christocentric preferred.
- Multiple fulfillments

Session 4: Last Days According to Jesus; 7/16/25

- Jesus predicted what would be done "soon" or "quickly."
- Individual gospel accounts; examining them individually.

Session 5: Partial Preterism; 7/23/25

-Most of what is considered future things was already fulfilled in 70AD with the destruction of the temple and associated siege and aftermath.

*lay out evidence for the historical case from Josephus and others

-The exception is the bodily return of Christ and final judgement (the next thing on the eschatological calendar other than the continuing and expanding reign of Christ among the nations [postmill]).

Session 6: The Case for the Early Dating of Revelation; 7/30/25

- Evidence
- Purpose: Divorce of Israel

Session 7: Millennial Issues Part 1 (Rev 20); 8/6/25

- Premillennial (dispensationalism) and Historic
 - *all tribulation and rapture issues/questions are a subset of this
 - *Late Great Planet Earth and other nonsense
 - *Israel and American Politics

Session 8: Millennial Issues Part 2; 8/13/25

- Amillennial: now/not yet
- Postmillennial: hope of the nations

Session 9: Final Things; 8/20/25

- The Resurrection of the Dead
- The Great White Throne Judgement
- The Judgement Seat of Christ
- The New Heavens and New Earth

TODAY:

Review:

Why is prophecy important when we are talking about eschatology?

What are the two primary kinds of prophetic language/literature?

Which one comprises about ¾ of the Biblical examples?

Why is this fact important?

I. Why hermeneutics is important: How we understand and interpret prophecy determines **what we believe** will happen in the future.

II. Definition of Hermeneutics:

Louis Berkhof, a prominent Reformed theologian, defines **hermeneutics** in his influential work *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1950) as the science and art of interpreting the Bible to determine its intended meaning. Specifically, Berkhof describes hermeneutics as:

"The science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation, with a view to determining the meaning of the biblical writers." ... **or how to interpret the Bible.**

III. The Bible should determine how to interpret itself:¹

2 Cor 1:20 "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes. Therefore, also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."

-how many of God's promises are "yes"? -All of them

-How are all of God's promises "yes"? -In Christ

-How many of God's promises are not "yes" in Christ? -None of them

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adqBOd0KOVl>

Luke 24:27 “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Heb 1:1-2: “God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days spoke to us in *His* Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds,”

One story, **one** plan, **one** people. Covenant theology in a nutshell. The Bible is an intertwined and self-reflexive dialectic that not only gives us the conclusion but also the **methodology** for understanding it.

Christocentric, Spirit empowered, methodology, to the glory of the Father.

IV. Key Points of Berkhof’s Definition and Approach

1. Scientific and Systematic:

- Berkhof views hermeneutics as a disciplined study, involving clear principles to guide interpreters in understanding the Bible **accurately**.
- It seeks to uncover the author’s original intent by analyzing the text’s language, grammar, historical context, and literary form.

2. Reformed Theological Framework:

- As a Reformed theologian, Berkhof roots his hermeneutics in the principles of *sola scriptura* (Scripture as the ultimate authority) and the Bible’s divine inspiration.
- He emphasizes the unity of Scripture, interpreting individual passages in light of the whole Bible (*analogia scripturae*), with a focus on the redemptive-historical narrative centered on Christ.

3. Grammatical-Historical Method:

- Berkhof advocates for the **grammatical-historical method**, which involves:
 - **Grammatical Analysis:** Studying the text in its **original languages** (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) to understand vocabulary, syntax, and literary style.
 - **Historical Context:** Examining the cultural, social, and historical circumstances of the text’s composition to grasp its meaning for the original audience.
- Example: Interpreting Paul’s epistles requires understanding 1st-century Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts alongside Greek grammar.

4. Theological Interpretation:

- Berkhof stresses that hermeneutics must account for the Bible's divine authorship, meaning the interpreter considers the theological purpose and unity of Scripture.
- He supports a **Christocentric** approach, where Old and New Testament texts are seen as pointing to Christ's redemptive work, though he avoids excessive allegory.

5. Practical Application:

- Hermeneutics, is not just academic but aims to apply biblical truths to faith and practice, guided by the Holy Spirit's illumination.

Berkhof's Distinctives Compared to Other Approaches

- **Vs. German Biblical Criticism:** Unlike German historical-critical methods (e.g., source or form criticism), which may question the Bible's unity or divine inspiration, Berkhof's hermeneutics assumes the Bible's inerrancy and coherence, aligning with Reformed theology.
- **Vs. Premillennial Dispensationalism:** Berkhof **rejects** the strict literalism of dispensationalism, which emphasizes distinct dispensations and a literal Israel-church distinction. Instead, he sees **continuity** between the Testaments, with the church fulfilling God's promises to Israel.

V. An Analysis of Methodology, compared and contrasted:

Reformed hermeneutics and premillennial dispensationalism are two distinct approaches to biblical interpretation, each shaped by different theological assumptions, historical contexts, and interpretive principles. While both are rooted in a **high view** of Scripture, they differ significantly in their methods, theological frameworks, and application to key biblical themes like eschatology, covenant theology, and the relationship between Israel and the church. Below is a concise comparison of their differences, building on the understanding of Reformed hermeneutics provided earlier.

1. Theological **Framework**

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**
 - Rooted in the theology of the **Protestant Reformation** (e.g., Calvin, Luther) and articulated in confessions like the Westminster Confession of Faith.
 - Emphasizes **covenant theology**, viewing Scripture through the lens of God's covenants (e.g., Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace). The Bible is seen as a unified narrative of redemption centered on Christ.
 - Sees **continuity** between the Old and New Testaments, with the church as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (spiritual Israel).

- Typically **amillennial** or **postmillennial** in eschatology, interpreting apocalyptic texts (e.g., Revelation 20) symbolically or as describing the present church age rather than a literal future millennium.

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- Developed in the 19th century by John Nelson Darby and popularized through the **Scofield** Reference Bible.
- Organized around **dispensational theology**, dividing biblical history into **distinct** periods (dispensations) where God interacts with humanity in different ways (e.g., Law, Grace, Kingdom).
- Emphasizes a sharp **distinction** between Israel and the church, viewing God's promises to Israel as distinct and still to be fulfilled literally in a future earthly kingdom.
- **Premillennial** in eschatology, expecting a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth after His second coming, often tied to a future restoration of national Israel.

2. Interpretive Approach

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**

- Relies on the **grammatical-historical method**, seeking the author's intended meaning through analysis of language, grammar, and historical context.
- Interprets texts in light of the broader biblical narrative, using the principle of *analogia scripturae* (Scripture **interprets** Scripture).
- Allows for figurative or symbolic readings of prophetic texts, especially in apocalyptic literature (e.g., Daniel, Revelation), based on genre and context.
- Emphasizes a **Christocentric** approach, seeing Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, types, and prophecies.
- Example: The promise of the land to Abraham (Genesis 12) is seen as ultimately fulfilled in the spiritual reality of the new creation or the church, **not** necessarily literal land in modern Israel.

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- Also uses a grammatical-historical method but applies a **strict literalism** (sometimes called "literal hermeneutic") to all texts, especially prophecies, unless the text explicitly demands otherwise.
- Interprets Old Testament prophecies about Israel as applying literally to national Israel, not the church, preserving distinct roles for each in God's plan.

- Avoids spiritualizing or allegorizing prophetic texts, expecting **literal** fulfillment of promises (e.g., a rebuilt temple, a restored Jewish nation).
- Example: The same promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 is interpreted as a literal, future restoration of the land to ethnic Israel during the millennial kingdom.

3. View of Israel and the Church

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**

- Views the church as the continuation or fulfillment of Israel, with God's covenant promises (e.g., to Abraham) applying to all believers (Jew and Gentile) in Christ (Galatians 3:28–29).
- Old Testament Israel is a **type** or foreshadowing of the church, and the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16) includes all who trust in Christ.
- Prophecies about Israel's restoration are often interpreted spiritually, as fulfilled in the church or the new heavens and new earth.

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- Maintains a clear **distinction** between Israel and the church, viewing them as separate entities in God's redemptive plan.
- Believes God's promises to Israel (e.g., land, kingdom, Davidic throne) remain **unfulfilled** and will be realized literally in a future millennial kingdom.
- Often expects a **future** role for national Israel, including a mass conversion of Jews (Romans 11) and a restored temple during the millennium.

4. Eschatology

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**

- Typically **amillennial** (no literal millennium; Revelation 20 describes the present church age) or **postmillennial** (Christ returns after a period of Christian influence on earth).
- Interprets apocalyptic texts like Revelation and Daniel symbolically or typologically, emphasizing spiritual realities over literal events.
- The second coming of Christ is seen as the final event, ushering in the eternal state (new heavens and new earth), not a temporary earthly kingdom.

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- **Premillennial**, expecting Christ to return before a **literal** 1,000-year reign on earth (Revelation 20).
- Often includes a **pretribulational rapture**, where the church is taken to heaven before a seven-year tribulation, followed by Christ's return to establish the millennial kingdom.

- Interprets prophecies (e.g., Ezekiel 40–48, Daniel 9) as describing literal **future** events, such as a rebuilt temple and restored Israel.

5. Application to Scripture

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**

- Example: In interpreting Ezekiel's vision of the temple (Ezekiel 40–48), a Reformed hermeneut might see it as a **symbolic** depiction of God's presence among His people, fulfilled in Christ and the church.
- Emphasizes **continuity** between Testaments, applying Old Testament promises to the church as the covenant people of God.
- Focuses on theological unity and practical application for Christian living and worship.

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- Example: The same Ezekiel passage would be interpreted as a blueprint for a **literal** future temple in Jerusalem during the millennium, tied to Israel's restoration.
- Emphasizes distinctions between dispensations, with different roles for Israel and the church, and a focus on future prophetic fulfillment.
- Often prioritizes eschatological events and timelines in interpretation. Fosters fear.

6. Historical and Cultural Context

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**

- Emerged during the Reformation (16th century) and was refined by theologians like Calvin, Beza, and later Bavinck and Vos.
- Engages selectively with historical-critical methods (e.g., from German biblical criticism) but subordinates them to theological commitments like divine inspiration.
- Common in Reformed denominations (e.g., Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed).

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- Originated in the 19th century with Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, gaining traction in evangelical circles, especially in North America. Popularized by the Scofield Ref Bible.
- Less influenced by German biblical criticism, rejecting methods like source criticism that question traditional authorship or unity of Scripture.
- Common in fundamentalist and evangelical churches, especially in **Baptist** and non-denominational circles. Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) & SWBTS.

Strengths and Criticisms

- **Reformed Hermeneutics:**

- **Strengths:** Offers a unified view of Scripture, emphasizing **Christ** as the center of redemptive history. Balances historical analysis with theological depth.
- **Criticisms:** Critics (including dispensationalists) argue it spiritualizes prophecies too much, potentially diminishing the distinct role of Israel.

- **Premillennial Dispensationalism:**

- **Strengths:** Maintains a consistent **literal** approach, appealing to those who value clear prophetic timelines and Israel's unique role.
- **Criticisms:** Reformed scholars critique its fragmentation of Scripture into dispensations, arguing it undermines the Bible's theological unity and **overemphasizes** literalism.

Example Comparison

- **Text:** Revelation 20:1–6 (the millennium).
 - **Reformed:** Interprets the 1,000 years symbolically, representing the current church age where Christ reigns spiritually, binding Satan through the gospel's spread. The "first resurrection" may be spiritual (conversion or believers' union with Christ).
 - **Dispensational:** Interprets the 1,000 years as a literal future kingdom on earth, with Christ reigning physically in Jerusalem, Israel restored, and Satan bound. The "first resurrection" is a literal bodily resurrection of believers before the millennium.

Summary:

1. Hermeneutics is the **science** of interpreting the Bible.
2. It is important because methodology determines **outcomes**. How we do what we do dictates what happens. If we just have a literal hermeneutic across the board without understanding that all Scripture and especially prophecy requires a Christocentric model, we end up with strange beliefs about the future (rapture, mark of the beast, Armageddon, tribulation, etc.)
3. The reformed method is superior to the dispy approach because it better accounts for the Bible as a **whole** and is not manipulated by current events. Wholistic understanding versus wooden literalism masked as the only option conservatism.