

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

56.1 What Is the Millennium?

Part I

Scripture: Revelation 20:2-7

The object of this study is to better understand the Biblical teaching about the millennium and the various theological interpretations concerning it.

The word “millennium” is derived from two Latin words, mille, meaning thousand, and annum, signifying year. The term has to do with the period of a thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20:2-7. It is often prefixed with the letters Post-, A-, or Pre, depending upon the particular view held or being explained. There is another word which we should be familiar with dealing with millennial studies. It is the word “chiliasm.” It is from the Greek, **chilias**. It means thousand, and it was for this reason early Christians were called **Chiliasmists**. This is the word which is used in Revelation 20 and other passages. II Peter 3:8 is an example of this word's usage.

Revelation 20:2-7 reveals certain characteristics of the millennium. **(1)** Satan will be bound and incarcerated in a bottomless pit according to verses 2 and 3. **(2)** Judgment was given to those who sat upon thrones. John saw the souls of them who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, who had not worshipped the beast, nor who had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands. These groups lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This truth is given in verse 4. **(3)** According to verse 5, the first resurrection precedes the millennium. **(4)** In verse 6 we learn that those who take part in the first resurrection are blessed, and that the second death has no power over those who take part in the first resurrection. **(5)** Those who take part in the second resurrection lived not again until the thousand years are finished (verse 5). **(6)** When the thousand years are expired, Satan will be loosed out of his prison (verse 7). **(7)** Satan will inspire Gog and Magog who will attract a great following.

This passage has perplexed Bible students through the centuries and given rise to various interpretations. We are able to speak of four systems of thought which profess to present the meaning of this passage and related verses. They are:

Historic Premillennialism, Dispensational Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism.

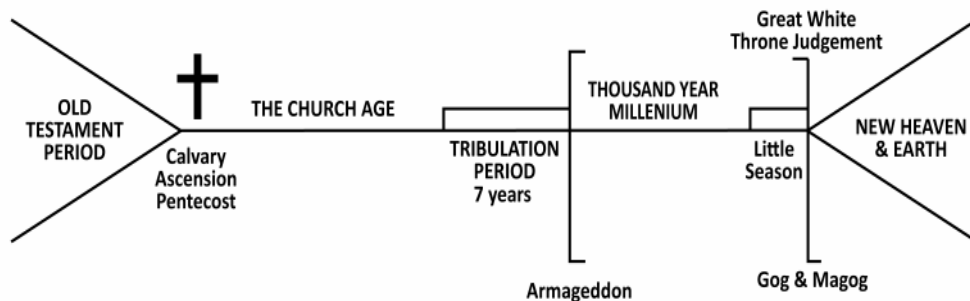
It must at once be pointed out that each view is consistent with evangelical teaching and is based upon the same primary suppositions. "Each holds that the Scriptures are the word Of God and authoritative. Each holds to the same general concept of the death of Christ as a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and as the only ground for the salvation of souls. Each holds that there will be a future, visible, personal Coming of Christ. Each holds that every individual is to receive a resurrection body, that all are to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that the righteous are to be rewarded in heaven, and that the wicked are to be punished in hell. Each of the systems is, therefore, evangelical and each has many able and sincere men which hold to it." (**The Millennium**; Lorraine Boettner, p. 3)

Sooner or later the question of interpretation has to arise. How is it possible for men of equal devotion to Christ and belief in the integrity of Scripture differ so greatly in their eschatology? The question is answered by saying it is not a matter of disloyalty or of less ability on the part of some to perceive at all. It is primarily the distinctive approach one employs in the interpretation of Scripture. We have already spoken about the two basic convictions which are held. The literalist interpretation seeks to understand the meaning of words according to their customary and literal meaning wherever possible. On the other hand, the allegorist interpreter emphasizes a secondary, more spiritual and profound meaning to the words before him. It would seem to me that prophetic language in the Bible is a combination of these. It is both literal and figurative.

I. HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM:

1. This theological position holds to a literal interpretation of prophecy wherever possible.
2. Historic premillennialism believes that Christ will return before the Millennium but after a Tribulation. Preceding the second coming of Christ the Antichrist will gather his followers to persecute the church of Christ, creating a period of great tribulation. The church will go through the Tribulation. (Daniel 2:34-35, 44; Revelation 19:15, 19, 16:16)
3. The Tribulation period will end with the kings of the earth, under the leadership of Satan, gathering at Armageddon to do battle against the Lord.

4. After the Tribulation Christ will come, rapture His church, and establish His Millennial Kingdom. It will be a universal theocracy and an era of peace.
5. During the Millennium, many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Jews will be fulfilled. Satan will be bound for a thousand years and will not deceive the nations. (Revelation 20:1-21; Isaiah 11:6-9, 24:21, 22, 27:1, 35:1-10; Amos 9:13-15)
6. At the end of the Millennium Satan is loosed and there is a revival of evil. Gog and Magog will be destroyed by Christ. Eternity will be ushered in.
7. The second resurrection, that of the wicked dead, will not take place until after the millennium when they will be judged at the great white throne. (Revelation 20:5, 11-15)
8. This view believes the Church was definitely seen in the Old Testament and that it is the fulfillment of God's plan. The believing Gentile of the New Testament is counted as the spiritual seed of Abraham. (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7, 14, 28, 29) However, the church does not absorb the promises given to Israel nationally. Israel was not completely cast off by God. (Romans 11:25) The nation Israel will be regathered and restored to the land of Palestine. (Jeremiah 32:37, 44; Isaiah 11:12; Hosea 3:4-5; Micah 4:6-8) It will not be a divided nation, Israel and Judah will be reunited. (Isaiah 11:13; Jeremiah 3:18, 50:4) The land will be divided among the ten tribes. (Ezekiel 47:13-23, 48) Israel will be the chief of nations. (Isaiah 14:1-2, 60:1-22, 61:5, 66:12, Zechariah 8:23)
9. Shown in chart form, historic premillennialism may be illustrated as follows:



10. This view is relatively simple. It has one Second Coming and Judgment. It does not place as great an emphasis on Israel as Dispensational Premillennialism does.

11. Scholars who hold this view are A. Reese, **The Approaching Advent Of Christ** (1937); Dean Alford, **The Greek Testament** (1874); Dr. George Ladd of Fuller Seminary; **Crucial Questions About The Kingdom Of God**; Dr. E. B. Elliott, **Horae Apocalypticae**; and Dr. Howard Ferrin.
12. This view suffers the following disadvantages: **(1)** If the church goes through the tribulation, it does not seem that the coming of Christ could be imminent, ie. momentary. **(2)** Historic Premillennialism does not give much significance to the millennium. It does not feel that the millennium will be distinctively Jewish.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
March 27, 1977