

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

56.2 What Is the Millennium?

Part II

Introduction:

Christian people understand the Biblical doctrine of the millennium in different ways. It is not the purpose of this study to designate a particular millennial position as being the correct one. Rather, it is to define the various views held by evangelicals who are in agreement concerning the authority of Scripture, the visible and personal return of Christ, and the fact that He is the Savior of all those who trust Him and the only hope of the world.

Differences of opinion arise in the area of Scriptural interpretation, details having to do with Christ's visible and personal return, and in the exact way in which He is the hope of the world. Inasmuch as such differences have to do with **interpretation**, not **inspiration** and **details, not facts**, it seems both reasonable and charitable to me that all evangelicals adopt and hold a position in an attitude which binds them together rather than which separates them. It is a "blessed hope" not a divisive one we study and should never become a reason for judging another believer's orthodoxy or spirituality. Hope Church is one of many local congregations which enjoy fellowship as evangelicals while recognizing and anticipating the possibility of difference of opinion regarding the prophetic word. These differences allow freedom of thought on Scriptural grounds, but do not divide God's people.

I. Definition:

The doctrine of the millennium (Latin: mille = thousand, annus = year; thus "one thousand years") refers to the thousand year reign of Jesus Christ and the restoration of the nation Israel.

II. Problem:

Are the Old Testament passages which describe a future restoration of the nation Israel (esp. Isaiah 24:21-27,13; Jeremiah 23:3-8; Ezekiel 36:22-37,28 and Ezekiel chapters 40 - 48; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Zephaniah 3:8-20 and Zechariah chapters 12-14) and the repeated reference in Revelation 20 to a thousand year

reign of Christ to be interpreted in a literal or spiritual sense? In other words, do they describe an actual restoration of national Israel and to the physical return of Christ to earth, or are they to be taken symbolically as having to do with the Church as the New Israel and to Christ's reign in and through His church?

III. Positions:

1. **Historic Premillennialism:** This view holds to a literal interpretation of prophecy and that Christ will return before the millennium but after a period of tribulation. Prior to Christ's return the Antichrist will gather followers to create great tribulation through which the church will pass.
2. **Premillennial - Pretribulationism (Dispensationalism):** Asserts that Christ will return before the Millennium and before a Tribulation. The view holds to a literal interpretation of Scripture teaching that there will be an actual restoration of the nation Israel and a physical reign of Christ upon the earth after His return. This position is also known as "chiliasm." It is based on the belief that all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Jews must be literally fulfilled.
3. **Amillennialism:** This theological position asserts that references concerning the restoration of Israel and the reign of Christ are interpreted spiritually to apply to the Church, the New Israel, and to Christ's reign in and through His Church.
4. **Postmillennialism:** The teaching is that a literal millennium of a thousand year duration will **precede** the coming again of Christ. The Kingdom of God is viewed as a growth resulting from divinely directed development in human affairs. Christ in conquering the world through the agency of His Church will create a golden age on earth **before** He returns for His own.

IV. Strengths And Weaknesses:

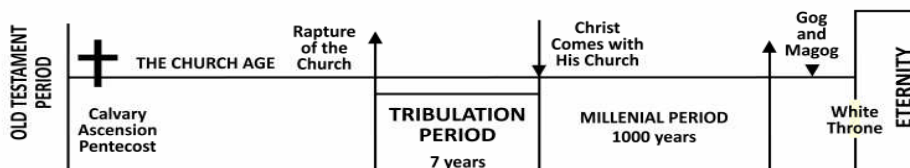
A study of this kind should be objective in its approach. Each position has its basic reasoning behind it, its strengths and weaknesses. It should be pointed out that weaknesses do not necessarily negate the value of a position, but they are considerations which must be kept in mind when adopting a view. With this in mind, a seeker is encouraged to search the Scriptures and find for one self what the Scripture has to say about the millennium. (Acts 17:11; 1 John 2:27)

V. General Description and Criticisms of the Millennial Positions:

A. Premillennial-Pretribulationism:

1. Premillenarians hold to a literal interpretation of Scripture where possible.
2. Christ will come **before** a millennium and **before** a tribulation, note double prefix.
3. This view is also known as Dispensational Premillennialism. Scriptural time is divided into seven dispensations or periods during which specific revelation is given and man responds in obedience or disobedience to God.
4. The Church Age is a “mystery” or parenthetical dispensation unseen in Old Testament prophecy except as it lies between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel.
5. Christ came preaching “the gospel of the kingdom.” When this offer to restore national Israel was rejected, Christ began to preach “the gospel of the grace of God.” Thus, the reestablishment of the Jewish kingdom was postponed until His second advent or coming.
6. All the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Jews will be literally fulfilled with the Jews. This is the basic presupposition of the interpretation.
7. The Premillennial order of events are as follows:
 - a. At Pentecost the Church was born and the Jews temporarily set aside.
 - b. At the end of the “mystery” dispensation, Christ will come. This is known as the “rapture,” Christ’s coming **for the saints**.
 - c. After the Church has been removed, the events of the last week of Daniel’s ninth chapter will take place. There will be the **Time of Jacob’s Trouble** and **The Great Tribulation**. The program with Israel will resume during this period.
 - d. After the Tribulation, **Christ will return with His saints**. This is known as the “revelation” or more specifically, His second coming.

- e. Upon Christ's second coming the Antichrist will be defeated, Satan will be bound, and Christ will begin His thousand year reign from Jerusalem.
 - f. The restored Jewish nation will enjoy all material blessings promised them in the Old Testament. (**Universal peace**: Isaiah 2:4, 43, 66:12; Micah 4:3-5; Zechariah 9:10; Psalms 85:8; Habakkuk 2:14; **Universal theocracy**: Samuel 7:16; **Restoration of nature**: Isaiah 11:6-9, 35:1-10; Amos 9:13-15; **False religion destroyed**: Isaiah 45:22-25; Zechariah 13:2; **Absence of death**: Isaiah 65:17-23)
 - g. At the end of the millennium Christ will return to Heaven with His saints. Gog and Magog will let loose with evil. Christ will return to destroy them. The wicked dead will be raised to face the White Throne of Judgment. (Revelation 20:5, 11-15) The old heaven and earth will be refashioned by fire. (II Peter 3:10; Revelation 20:11, 21:1) Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father. God will be all in all for all eternity. (I Corinthians 15:24, 28)
8. Shown in chart form, Premillennial – Pretribulationism appears as follows:



9. Those who hold this view are the contributing editors of the Scofield Reference Bible, the new and revised edition of 1967 under the editorship of E. Schuyler English. Others are the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary, the faculty of Miami Bible Institute, and the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
10. General Criticisms of Premillennialism are the following:
- a. It is essentially a Jewish doctrine, relatively new in the Christian Church.
 - b. Dispensationalism arose with the Brethren Movement in England. (1830)

- c. It has never been included in any of the great Creeds of the Church and was not held to any extent by the early Church.
 - d. The Gospels and the Epistles fail to mention explicitly such a millennium.
 - e. There are problems regarding the nature of the Millennium as presented in Scripture which are beyond comprehension and must be interpreted symbolically.
 - f. When asserting that the Church was unseen in the prophecy of the Old Testament, that the Church is only a parenthesis and not the actual goal of God's plan, the unity of Scripture is affected.
11. General Arguments Supporting Premillennialism are as follows:
- a. The need to interpret Scripture according to the natural sense. A proper rule is that a passage must be taken literally, i.e., its message accepted as having definite reference even though it may employ symbols and figures of speech in the expression, unless there is good reason to believe otherwise from the context or from New Testament usage. (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2)
 - b. The crass literal terminology of many of the Old Testament kingdom passages and Psalms. (Ezekiel 40-48; Isaiah 24-27; Jeremiah 23:3,8; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Zephaniah 3:8-20, and Zechariah 12-14)
 - c. The Book of Daniel in the visions of Chapters 2 and 7 indicates that Christ's kingdom in its regal sense will only be set up after the world empires have arisen and come to an end. The picture here is one of demolition, not interpenetration; replacement, not coexistence, of obliteration not conversion.
 - d. The Old Testament seems to contain a few hints regarding a time interval and two resurrections at the end. See Isaiah 24:21-25 and Daniel 12:2. In the Daniel verses a possible distinction can be made between the resurrection of the just and unjust in the use of **rabbim** and **kal**.
 - e. The coming millennial kingdom is hinted at in the teaching of Jesus and Paul. See Luke 17:22ff, 19:11-27; Acts 1:6-8; Romans 11:25-27.

- f.** The major didactic passage on the temporal distinctions of the Millennium is Revelation 20 which clearly teaches a thousand year period between the resurrections. It is difficult to assign the binding of Satan to any period within the present epoch.
- g.** The doctrine of the Millennium was a part of the early Church theology, at least in the second century. Admittedly, it was not universal in the Church, but especially so in North Africa and Asia Minor.
- h.** The fact and continuance of the Jewish nation is a pragmatic evidence of God's continued interest in Israel. The nationhood fits perfectly into the premillennial position. It is practical evidence God is not finished with Israel.

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