



## Eschatology – A Study of the End Times

### Lesson 5: The Views of the Millennium

#### Introduction

As we study eschatology, we are studying the end times or the last things. Eschatology is a study of the last things which includes the rapture, Christ’s future return, the resurrection, the final judgment, as well as the millennium. Living in this fallen world, believers are longing for a time when things will be perfect. We are longing for a time when there will be peace, prosperity and where righteousness will characterize the rulers and citizens. According to Scripture such a time is coming during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ and the eternal state. This is why there is desire in our hearts to pray, “Come Lord Jesus, Come!” But this understanding of the millennium is one of those topics that heavily divide Bible believing Christians. In fact, it is one of the most heavily debated issues concerning eschatology. For most of church history, good Christians have disagreed on it, asking important questions such as, “Will there even be a millennium?” If so, “When will it be?” And “What will it be like?” Since this is such an important topic, in this lesson we are going to consider the major views of the millennium and the case for a premillennial view.

#### Various views of the \_\_\_\_\_

The word “millennium” refers to the one thousand-year period mentioned six times in Revelation 20:1–7. This is the only passage that specifically gives a duration of one thousand years for the millennium. The word “millennium” is not referred to in the Bible. But the name comes from the Latin, *mille*, meaning “thousand,” and, *annum*, referring to “year.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this is why it is called the millennium.

There are various views that have been proposed throughout church history concerning the millennium. There are three primary ones that we will consider, and these views are named in reference to the coming of Christ.

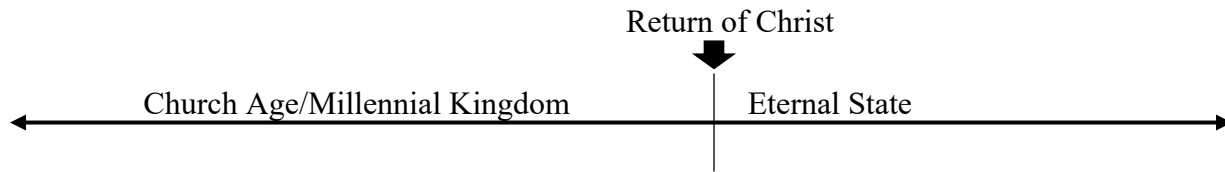
#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_

Amillennialism asserts that the millennium of Revelation 20 is being fulfilled spiritually now between the two comings of Jesus Christ. The term “amillennialism” is somewhat misleading

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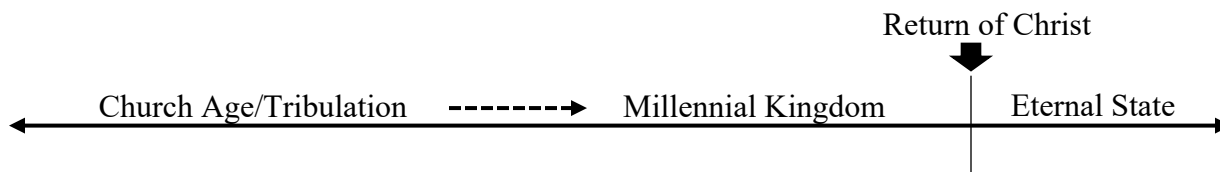
<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Vlach, *Premillennialism: Why There Must Be a Future Earthly Kingdom of Jesus*, (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2015), 12.

since the prefix “a” negates the term.<sup>2</sup> So, that would indicate there is no millennium. However, those who are in this camp do believe in a millennium, and they do believe it is being realized now in the present age, but they do not believe it is a literal one thousand years.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, amillennialists believe there is no future earthly millennial kingdom. Rather, like the postmillennialists, they take it symbolically to mean a long period of time. Furthermore, they do believe Christ is reigning now, but His reign is from heaven with the saints in heaven and will not reign from the earth in a millennial kingdom in the future. They also believe that things are going to get worse before the return of Christ. When Christ does return, it will be to inaugurate the eternal state. In addition, they would say that the tribulation is experienced in this present age.



2. \_\_\_\_\_

Postmillennialism asserts that the second coming of Christ will occur *after* the millennium of Revelation 20. The millennium will be fulfilled between the two comings of Christ as Jesus’ kingdom starts out small and eventually permeates all areas of society (Matt. 13:31–33). The result will be a Christianization of the world through the preaching and acceptance of the gospel (Matt. 28:19–20). They embrace a positive view with respect to the present age, “envisioning a golden age of progress in the church age that affects every dimension of life: economic, social, cultural, and political.”<sup>4</sup> With this view, the millennium will not be a literal thousand years. Instead, they take the one thousand years in Revelation as a symbol to mean a long period of time. Furthermore, it is the church that brings in the millennium and not the Lord Jesus Christ. Also, the reign of Christ is not from an earthly throne. Rather, His rule is a spiritual one through His Spirit and the church.



3. \_\_\_\_\_

Since postmillennialism indicates that Christ will come after the millennium, premillennialism asserts that the second coming of Jesus will take place *before* (*pre-*) the millennial kingdom. Thus, the millennium begins when Christ returns to this present earth and establishes the

<sup>2</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology, Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 380.

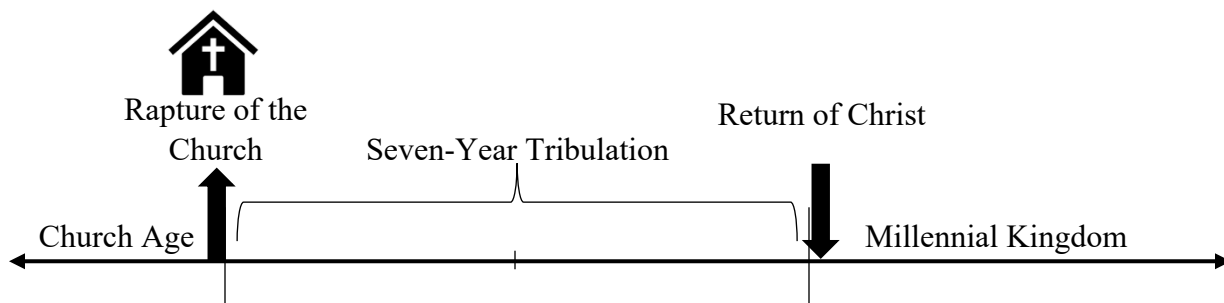
<sup>3</sup> “Some Amillennialist suggest a term such as realized millennialism to indicate that they do not deny a millennium but believe it is fulfilled entirely in the present age.” Enns 380.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

millennial kingdom. The millennium will be for a literal one thousand years, and it will be on earth with Christ reigning as King from the Davidic throne.

There are two variations with the premillennial camp. There is the historic premillennialism, and there is the dispensational/futuristic premillennialism. Both affirm that the millennium kingdom of Christ is future and follows the second coming of Christ. Where they differ is on the rapture of the church and the role that Israel plays in the future. Historic premillennialists would say that the rapture will happen at the second coming of Christ. As a result, the church will go through the seven-year tribulation period. Secondly, they also believe that Israel does not play a special role in the millennium. In historic premillennialism a distinction between Israel and the church is not maintained.<sup>5</sup> To them the church has replaced Israel and the New Testament applies the prophecies of the Old Testament to the New Testament church, and in doing so they identify the church as spiritual Israel.

In contrast, dispensational/futuristic premillennialists believe that Israel will play a key role in the future. Israel, as a restored nation, will play a functional role of leadership and service to other nations during the millennium (Isa 2:2-4). It affirms that all covenant aspects and promises in the Bible will be fulfilled, including the national promises to Israel.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, most dispensational premillennialist holds to a pre-tribulation rapture, where the church will be raptured from the earth and then the seventieth week of Daniel 9 takes place, which is the seven-year tribulation.



### The Case for \_\_\_\_\_

While our brothers and sisters in Christ hold to a different view than premillennialism, we are convinced that premillennialism is true and best supported by Scripture. Some may say that since this is not something that is related to salvation, or a top tier doctrine, then it should not be emphasized because it could promote division. To them we would respond that this is not something that should divide the body of Christ. Just because someone holds to a different view than us on this topic does not make them unbelievers. But that does not mean one cannot have convictions from Scripture. Although it is not related to salvation, we can still teach and emphasize premillennialism because Scripture emphasizes it. No one should say a millennial

<sup>5</sup> Enns, 386.

<sup>6</sup> Vlach, 10.

view is not important or identify as a “pan-mill,” which means it will all pan out in the end. We must search the Scriptures for our beliefs and convictions and take a stand upon those convictions. With that, here are several reasons why premillennialism has strong support from Scripture.

1. The Kingdom \_\_\_\_\_

A few weeks back we considered the kingdom of God as the theme of the Bible. We saw there the kingdom mandate given to man in Genesis 1:26–28. Man was called to rule and reign as God’s vice regent. But Adam, the first man, failed this kingdom task (Gen. 3), but the last Adam will succeed where the first Adam failed. This will happen in the future when Christ returns and establish the millennial kingdom on earth.

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Book of Revelation

One of the major passages concerning the millennium is Revelation 20. This passage is important and when one reads it naturally, we observe a sequence of events that takes place. The chronology of what occurs in Revelation shows that the millennium is still future and specifically follows the second coming of Christ. Most interpreters agree that Revelation 19:11–21 portrays the coming of Christ. Following the coming of Christ, there is the binding of Satan, and then the millennial kingdom established for a thousand years. Each of these visions began with the formula “*kai eidon*,” translated, “*then I saw*,” (Rev. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1). These are chronological markers that indicate progression of events beginning with the tribulation period, followed by the second coming of Jesus, the binding of Satan, a thousand-year reign of Christ, the great white throne Judgment, and finally the eternal state. There is no reason in the context to not see this as a progression of events. Thus, the chronology of the book of Revelation supports a premillennial view.

3. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Satan

A third reason for believing in a future millennium is because Satan has not yet been bound and thrown into the abyss. This event still awaits a future fulfillment. In Revelation 20:1–3, John describes an event where Satan will be bound in the abyss for a literal thousand years with the second coming of Jesus to earth. He indicates that Satan would be bound and thrown into the pit where all of his activities would be totally and completely shut down so that he would not be able to deceive the nations any longer.

Premillennialists believe this binding of Satan has not occurred in history and still awaits future fulfillment, during the millennium. In contrast to the premillennial view, those in the amillennial and postmillennial camp postulate that the binding of Satan has already occurred in connection with the first advent of Christ,<sup>7</sup> and he is presently still bound in the church age.<sup>8</sup> In addition, not only has Satan been bound since the first century, he, according to the two other views, is not totally inactive. They take the binding of Satan in a figurative sense, indicating only limitation

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<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1375.

<sup>8</sup> Church age or present age is the time frame between the two comings of Christ.

and not a complete cessation of his activities. His activities, then, have not ceased but are restricted.

This perspective, however, does not do justice to what is described in Revelation 20:1–3. The language indicates a dramatic incarceration of Satan in a specific location, identified as the abyss.<sup>9</sup> This place is not the final punishment for Satan,<sup>10</sup> but it is a temporary confinement for him. This place should not be spiritualized, as is the approach of the amillennialists and postmillennialists, but should be viewed as a literal imprisonment, where all of his activities are stopped.

In addition, the reasoning that Satan is bound during the present age goes contrary to many New Testament passages. There are passages that show Satan presently being active and involved in deception. His deceiving capabilities are very powerful and clearly seen in the present age; he does not appear to be totally and completely shut down. Paul clearly states that Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they would not believe the gospel of Christ (Matt. 13:19; 2 Cor. 4:3–4). Peter warns the believers in the first century to “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). John in his first epistle states something similar regarding the devil’s authority on earth. He writes, “the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one” (1 John 3:8–10). Other Scriptures also confirm the reality that Satan is not bound but active in this age (Eph. 2:1–3; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:24–26; 1 John 3:8–10). These passages, written by three apostles after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, reveal that Satan is actively involved in worldwide deception throughout the present age. Thus, a normal reading of Revelation 20:1–3 and other Scripture passages do not support a present, partial restriction of Satan in this age. Rather, it points to a future, complete confinement of Satan. Robert Mounce appropriately concludes, “The elaborate measures taken to ensure his [Satan’s] custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities).”<sup>11</sup>

Before closing this point, one additional comment should be made. Although there is disagreement with amillennialists and postmillennialists on how to view the binding of Satan, they are correct in declaring that Satan was defeated on the cross in the first century. Premillennialists are in agreement with this that the power of sin has been accomplished through Christ on the cross. But this did not mean that Satan was completely removed from his place of authority on this earth (1 John 5:19). When Jesus returns as Lord over the earth, as seen in Revelation 19–20, Satan will then be completely stripped of his authority, and he will be fully defeated after the one thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

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<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 889.

<sup>10</sup> After the 1000 years, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 353.

#### 4. The Kingdom \_\_\_\_\_

A fourth case for why premillennialism is the best view is because there are several Old Testament passages that describe a period that is not suitable to fit either the present age or the future eternal state. These passages describe a time that appears to be far greater than what is observed now, but still not to the point of perfection as perceived in the coming eternal state. There appears to be in Scripture an intermediate period on earth, which supports the premillennial view of the thousand-year reign of Christ. This is the intermediate kingdom that we discussed a few weeks prior. An example of this future period is described in Isaiah 65:20 (see also Ps. 72:8–14; Isa. 11; Zech 14:1–19).

#### 5. Church \_\_\_\_\_

A final reason in support of the premillennial view is that premillennialism was the predominate view of the earliest church fathers. The early church fathers were primarily premillennialists. So, those who were closest to the apostolic church were those who looked ahead to a future millennial reign of Christ. The first reference to this perspective was Papias. He believed “that there [would] be a period of a thousand years after the resurrection from the dead when the kingdom of Christ [would] be set up in material form on this earth.”<sup>12</sup> Justin Martyr also expressed a similar sentiment as he wrote, “I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged.”<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus likewise promoted this view, and the early church held his end-times presentation that “Christ will return, Antichrist will be defeated, Christians will be resurrected bodily, these believers will reign with Christ on the earth for one thousand years, unbelievers will be resurrected after the millennium, the final judgment will occur, and God will establish the eternal state of heaven and hell.”<sup>14</sup> As you can see, this premillennial hope was strong in the early church, making a case for it. Although this is not a biblical argument, the reality that those who had a close historical association with the apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation, were premillennialists should be taken into consideration when thinking through eschatology. Obviously, this should not be the only and primary case, but this along with the biblical evidence, makes a strong case for premillennialism.

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<sup>12</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 685.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.