

The Question before Us: What is the CHARACTER of the "Millennium"?

Review

- I. Six Biblical Propositions concerning the Return of Christ:
 1. The Bible speaks of a singular return of Jesus Christ.
 2. The Bible speaks of this singular return of Jesus Christ including the resurrection of both the just and the unjust.
 3. The Bible speaks of this singular return of Jesus Christ ushering in the Day of Judgment in which all shall be judged.
 4. The Bible speaks of this singular return of Christ ushering in the new heavens and the new earth.
 5. The Bible speaks of this singular return of Christ ushering in the eternal state.
 6. The Bible speaks of this singular return taking place after the "1,000 years" of Revelation 20:1-10 (see 2/28, 3/7, & 3/14)
- II. When Does (Did) the "1,000 Years" of Revelation 20 Commence?

The "binding of Satan" and the commencement of the "1,000 years" took place at the completion of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in AD 30 or 33 (Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session).

III. How Do We Understand the Duration of the "1,000 Years"?

The 1,000 years are to be understood symbolically. Ten is the number of fullness. $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$. It represents a long period of time which is equivalent to the complete fullness of God's purpose and timetable. For all intents and purposes it is equal to the NT era minus Satan's little season" right before the end.

IV. How Do We Understand the "Binding of Satan" During this Time?

The binding of Satan is a specific binding that prevents him from deceiving the nations in the same manner that he did in the 01 era. He is still free to harass, to persecute, and to tempt, but not to hold sway over the nations in such a way as to prevent the gospel of Christ from penetrating and prevailing. The binding for 1,000 years is equivalent to the time of the gospel going forth to the ends of the earth during the entire NT era.

V. How then Are We to Understand the Character of this "1,000 Years"?

This leads us to discuss the two positions that hold to Christ's return AFTER the millennium:

1. Post-millennialism
2. A-millennialism

Both of these positions are "post-millennial" in that they agree that Christ's second coming is after the millennium. Hence they have much in common with each other in terms of the overall scheme of understanding redemptive history. Because of this, these two views were not sharply distinguished before the beginning of the 20th century.

The questions which distinguish the two positions boil down to the following:

1. How pervasive and all-encompassing will the success of gospel be before Christ returns?
2. Are we to look for a significant period of history wherein the reign of Christ through His people/church is all but absolute on the earth before Christ comes back?
3. Can we in any way speak of Christ's return being "imminent"?

Post-Millennialism

1. Proponents and Current Day Defense

Historic proponents: John Cotton, Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, Savoy Declaration, Jonathan Edwards, Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, R L Dabney, J.H. Thomwell, W.G.T. Shedd, B.B. Warfield

Current day proponents: Loraine Boettner (d.), John Jefferson Davis, J. Marcellus Kik, Keith Mathison, Iain Murray, Ken Gentry, all theonomic reconstructionists

Current Day Defense/Publications:

Boettner, Loraine. *The Millennium* (Revised Edition), Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1984.

Davis, John Jefferson. *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986.

_____. *The Victory of Christ's Kingdom*, Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996.

Kik, J. Marcellus. *An Eschatology of Victory*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1971.

Mathison, Keith. *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999.

Murray, Iain. *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971.

2. Graphically Represented

3. Three Primary Distinctives of Postmillennialism

1. The progressive triumph of the gospel world-wide
2. The inauguration of a long golden-age before Christ returns
3. The belief that Christ's return is not imminent

4. Alleged Biblical Support - two key passages reiterated

Genesis 12:1-3
Psalm 22:27-28
Psalm 67:1-7

Psalm 72:8-11
Psalm 110:1-2
Isaiah 2:2-4

Isaiah 11:9-12
Daniel 2:31-35, 44
Zechariah 9:9-10

Matthew 28:18-20
Revelation 5:9-10
Revelation 7:9

Matthew 13:31-33 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, "which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

1 Corinthians 15:24-25 Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

5. Proper Qualifications of Postmillennialism

1. Postmillennialism is not liberalism, evolutionary optimism, the social gospel, universalism, perfectionism.
2. Postmillennialism is within the bounds of the Presbyterian and Reformed confessions.

6. Positive Contributions of Postmillennialism

1. There is agreement with the "Six Biblical Propositions" at the beginning of this lesson.
2. There is the desire to take the entire Bible seriously, authoritatively and literally.
3. There is the acknowledgment that the kingdom of Christ only grows supernaturally through the proclamation of the gospel.
4. There is a healthy antidote to the prevailing pessimism within the 21st century western evangelical church. The gospel is the POWER of God unto salvation!
5. There is an honest reading of the last 2,000 years of church history as the gradual expansion and triumph of the gospel of Christ.

7. Biblical and Theological Challenges to Postmillennialism

1. There is a failure to appreciate that the gospel of Christ always provokes two responses - one of reception, and one of opposition. "The preaching of the gospel and the advance of the kingdom always call forth a counter gospel, a reaction of unbelief and opposition" (Venema, 355).
2. There is the failure to appreciate that tribulation, cross-bearing, and persecution will characterize the entirety of this age (John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12, etc.).
3. There is a subtle shifting of the believer's focus away from the "blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" to the advancement of the kingdom in the here and now. I recognize that this may be a false dichotomy in some ways. But if Christ's return is placed so far into the distant future that it really has no practical bearing on the here and now, then it is hard to see how this emphasis in the NT can really intersect with the life of the believer in the post-mil scheme.
4. Many of the passages attempting to support postmillennialism are better understood as being fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth after Christ returns.

8. Helpful Critiques of Postmillennialism

Hoekema, Anthony. *The Bible and the Future*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979. (Pages 175-180)

Venema, Cornelis. *The Promise of the Future*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000. (Pages 219-244; 340-362)

Amillennialism

1. Proponents and Current Day Defense

Historic proponents (anachronistically): Augustine, the Western and Eastern Church since the 5th century, Martin Luther (and the Lutheran Church), John Calvin, the Continental Reformed church.

Current day proponents (post 1900): Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, Gerhardus Vos, William Cox, Louis Berkof, Anthony Hoekema, Cornelis Venema, Cornelius Van Til, Dennis Johnson, Jay Adams, Gregory Beale, William Hendriksen, Herman Hoeksema, Vern Poythress, Herman Ridderbos, G.C. Berkouwer, Robert Strimple

Current Day Defense/Publications:

Beale, Gregory. *The Book of Revelation* (New International Greek Testament Commentary), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Cox, William. *Amillennialism Today*, Philipsburg: P&R, 1971.

Hendriksen, William. *More than Conquerors*.

Hoekema, Anthony. *The Bible and the Future*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.

Poythress, Vern. *The Returning King*, Philipsburg: P&R.

Venema, Cornelis. *The Promise of the Future*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000.

2. Graphically Represented

3. Four Primary Distinctives of Amillennialism

A. The progressive triumph of the gospel world-wide (as defined by Revelation 5:9-10). Hence, Amillennialism is optimistic.

B. The ongoing conflict with the kingdom of Satan (as seen in Revelation 12-20; John 16:33; Acts 14:21-22; 2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43; Ephesians 6:12-13; 1 Peter 5:8-10). Hence the optimism of Amillennialism is a "tempered optimism."

C. The belief that Christ's return is imminent (as defined by "any generation") - This brings unspeakable comfort to Christ's suffering church and is the great focal point of the Bible's teaching for the believer. Think of Romans 8:18-ff; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 10:36-38; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; etc. Hence, Amillennialism teaches us to live daily in light of Christ's return and to always be ready.

D. The belief that the passages that speak of Christ's universal sway over all the earth find their partial fulfillment in this age, but their ultimate fulfillment in the "new heavens and new earth" (as seen in Revelation 20-21; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Romans 8:22-23). Hence, passages like Isaiah 2, Isaiah 11, Isaiah 65, Isaiah 66, Ezekiel 37:24-28, Zechariah 9, and Zechariah 14 are to be understood as finding their ultimate fulfillment in the "age to come," not in some sort of "millennial" period of prosperity and peace in the NT era.

4. The Best Critique of the Amillennial Position from a Postmillennial Point of View

Mathison, Keith. *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999.
(pages 163-194)