

Eschatology Basics

When Christians discuss their millennial views, they are speaking of their interpretation of the much debated passage in Revelation 20:1-10.

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

"Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

"When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever."
(NASB)

Dispensational Premillennialism

Definition:

Dispensational premillennialists hold that Christ will come before a seven-year period of intense tribulation to take His church (living and dead) into heaven. After this period of fulfillment of divine wrath, He shall then return to rule from a holy city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) over the earthly nations for one thousand years. After these thousand years, Satan, who was bound up during Christ's earthly reign, will be loosed to deceive the nations, gather an army of the deceived, and take up to battle against the Lord. This battle will end in both the judgment of the wicked and Satan and the entrance into the eternal state of glory by the righteous. This view is called premillennialism because it places the return of Christ before the millennium and it is called dispensational because it is founded in the doctrines of dispensationalism.

Features and Distinctions:

- Favored method of interpretation: strict literal.
- Israel and the church: views church and Israel as two distinct identities with two individual redemptive plans.
- The rapture of the Church: The church is raptured before a seven-year tribulation (the seventieth week of Daniel - Daniel 9:24-27). This tribulational period contains the reign of the AntiChrist.
- Millennium: Christ will return at the end of the great tribulation to institute a thousand-year rule from a holy city (the New Jerusalem). Those who come to believe in Christ during the seventieth week of Daniel (including the 144,000 Jews) and survive will go on

to populate the earth during this time. Those who were raptured or raised previous to the tribulational period will reign with Christ over the millennial population.

- Miscellaneous:
 - Higher degrees of interpreting present-day events in the light of end-times prophecy.
 - The Millennium will see the re-establishment of temple worship and sacrifice as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.
 - From the millennium-ending "white throne" judgment (by which Satan and all unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire) Christ and all saints will proceed into eternal glory.
- Major proponents: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Louis Sperry Chafer, J. Dwight Pentecost, Norman Geisler, Charles Stanley, Chuck Smith, and Chuck Missler.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

A strictly literal hermeneutic is foundational to the dispensational premillennialist viewpoint. Interpreting Scripture in this manner will in fact demand such perspectives unique to dispensationalism as:

- an earthly kingdom of God from which Christ will reign
- a future redemptive plan for national Israel
- a seven year period of great tribulation
- the rejection of prophetic idiom

Dispensational premillennialism holds that a seven-year tribulation (foreseen in Daniel 9:27) will precede a thousand-year period (Revelation 20:1-6) during which time, Christ will reign on the throne of David (Luke 1:32).

Immediately previous to the time of great tribulation, all the dead saints will rise from their graves and all the living members of the church shall be caught up with them to meet Christ in the clouds (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17); this is known as "the rapture." During this time of tribulation, there will be three-and-a-half years of world peace under an AntiChrist figure (Daniel 7:8; Revelation 13:1-8) who will establish a world-church (Revelation 17:1-15), followed by three-and-a-half years of greater suffering (Revelation 6-18). At the end of this period, Christ will return (Matthew 24:27-31; Revelation 19:11-21), judge the world (Ezekiel 20:33-38; Matthew 25:31; Jude 14-15), bind Satan for one thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3), and raise the Old Testament and tribulation saints from the dead (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:4).

At this time, the millennial reign will begin and Christ will reign politically over the earth at this time from His capital in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3). Throughout His reign, there will be no war (Isaiah 2:4) and even the natures of animals will dwell in harmony (Isaiah 11:6-9). At the end of this era of peace, Satan will be released and instigate a colossal (but futile) rebellion against God (Revelation 20:7-9). After this fated battle, Satan and the wicked are cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10), while the righteous proceed into their eternal state in the realm of the new heaven and the new earth Revelation 21:1ff).

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Historical Premillennialism

Definition:

Historical premillennialists place the return of Christ just before the millennium and just after a time of great apostasy and tribulation. After the millennium, Satan will be loosed and Gog and Magog will rise against the kingdom of God; this will be immediately followed by the final judgment. While similar in some respects to the dispensational variety (in that they hold to Christ's return being previous the establishment of a thousand-year earthly reign), historical premillennialism differs in significant ways (notably in their method of interpreting Scripture).

Features and Distinctions:

- Favored method of interpretation: grammatico-historical.
- Israel and the church: The church is the fulfillment of Israel.
- Kingdom of God: present through the Spirit since Pentecost - to be experienced by sight during the millennium after Christ's return.
- The Rapture: The saints, living and dead, shall meet the Lord in the clouds immediately preceding the millennial reign.
- The Millennium: Christ will return to institute a thousand-year reign on earth. The Millennium will see the re-establishment of temple worship and sacrifice as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.
- Major proponents: George Eldon Ladd, Walter Martin, John Warwick Montgomery, and Theodore Zahn.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

The historical premillennialist's view interprets some prophecy in Scripture as having literal fulfillment while others demand a semi-symbolic fulfillment. As a case in point, the seal judgments (Revelation 6) are viewed as having fulfillment in the forces in history (rather than in future powers) by which God works out his redemptive and judicial purposes leading up to the end.

Rather than the belief of an imminent return of Christ, it is held that a number of historical events (e.g., the rise of the Beast and the False Prophet) must take place before Christ's Second Coming. This Second Coming will be accompanied by the resurrection and rapture of the saints (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18); this will inaugurate the millennial reign of Christ. The Jewish nation, while being perfectly able to join the church in the belief of a true faith in Christ, has no distinct redemptive plan as they would in the dispensational perspective. The duration of the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6) is unsure: literal or metaphorical.

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Postmillennialism

Definition:

The postmillennialist believes that the millennium is an era (not a literal thousand years) during which Christ will reign over the earth, not from an literal and earthly throne, but through the gradual increase of the Gospel and its power to change lives. After this gradual Christianization of the world, Christ will return and immediately usher the church into their eternal state after judging the wicked. This is called postmillennialism because, by its view, Christ will return after the millennium.

Features and Distinctions:

- Favored method of interpretation: covenant-historical.
- Israel and the church: the church is the fulfillment of Israel.
- Kingdom of God: a spiritual entity experienced on earth through the Christianizing affect of the Gospel.
- The Millennium: a Golden Age previous to Christ's second advent during which Christ will virtually rule over the whole earth through an unprecedented spread of the Gospel; the large majority of people will be Christian.
- Miscellaneous:
 - Higher degrees of interpreting First Century events in the light of prophecy; preterism often goes hand-in-hand with postmillennialism.
 - Of the several versions of postmillennial eschatology, the reconstructionist's seems to be gaining the most popularity in the world today.
- Major proponents: Rousas J. Rushdoony, Greg L. Bahnsen, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., David Chilton, and Gary North.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

There are several different versions of postmillennialism, but one of the views gaining the most popularity, is that of the theonomists. Generally speaking, the postmillennial theonomist viewpoint holds to a partial-preterist interpretation of Revelation and the various judgment prophecies in the Gospels, believing that the majority of those prophecies were fulfilled in 70 A.D. at the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

The postmillennialist sees the millennial kingdom as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would become "a great nation" and that "all peoples on earth would be blessed" through him (Genesis 12:2-3). This holy reign will come about via gradual conversion (rather than premillennialism's cataclysmic Christological advent) through the spread of the Gospel — this incremental progress is drawn from many pictures found throughout Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:22 and Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Postmillennial optimism is also nurtured through many of prophetic psalmody. The Psalms often speak of all nations fearing Him, salvation being known among all nations, the ends of the earth

fearing Him, et cetera (e.g., Psalms 2; 22:27; 67:2,7; 102:15; 110:1). Another passage that well feeds this earthly optimism is Isaiah 2:2-3 in which the nations will stream to the righteousness of God.

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Amillennialism

(also termed nunc-millennialism or inaugurated millennialism)

Definition:

The amillennialist believes that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated at Christ's resurrection (hence the term "inaugurated millennialism") at which point he gained victory over both Satan and the Curse. Christ is even now reigning (hence the term "nunc-millennialism" — nunc means "now") at the right hand of the Father over His church. After this present age has ended, Christ will return and immediately usher the church into their eternal state after judging the wicked. The term "amillennialism" is actually a misnomer for it implies that Revelation 20:1-6 is ignored; in fact, the amillennialist's hermeneutic interprets it (and in fact, much of apocalyptic literature) non-literally.

Features and Distinctions:

- Favored method of interpretation: redemptive-historical.
- Israel and the church: The church is the eschatological fulfillment of Israel.
- Kingdom of God: a spiritual reality that all Christians partake in and that is seen presently by faith, but will be grasped by sight at the consummation.
- The Rapture: The saints, living and dead, shall meet the Lord in the clouds and immediately proceed to judge the nations with Christ and then follow Him into their eternal state.
- The Millennium: inaugurated with Christ's resurrection. In an "already/not yet" sense, Christ already reigns over all and is already victorious over Satan.
- Miscellaneous:
 - Higher degrees of interpreting prophecy in light of Christ's advent, death, resurrection, and glorification.
 - Relies heavily on a two-age theology.
- Major proponents: Meredith Kline, Richard Gaffin, Robert B. Strimple, Gregory K. Beale, and John Murray.

Synopsis:

View the visual interpretation

Eschatology is the study of the eschaton; the eschaton is equated with "last things." While other views focus on the final days of humankind on earth, amillennialism sees "the last things" as having been initiated at Christ's resurrection and so, being applicable from the earliest days of the Christian church (cf. Acts 2:16-21; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:1-2; and 1 Peter 1:20). The amillennialist perspective sees the whole of God's redemptive revelation as twofold - promise and fulfillment; it also emphasizes that a strict-literal interpretation of Old Testament is not necessarily the most accurate way of determining what the text means.

The amillennial perspective emphasizes that the coming of the Kingdom of God is a two-part event. The first portion dawned at Christ's first advent (John the Baptist proclaimed at this time, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" — Matthew 3:2). At the cross, Christ won final victory over death and Satan. And then He ascended to reign upon the throne of David forever (Luke 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-31). Now because we "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18) — because of this, the amillennialist sees the final things already accomplished, though not yet seen by sight, but by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

An important note is the amillennialist's view of the church in this world: a role of suffering. The Christian will be hated by all, just as was Christ (Matthew 10:22), for a servant is not greater than his master. Seeing this as the church's role on earth — to suffer as did Christ — the amillennialist can hold no hope for an earthly exaltation and longs for the fulfillment of the second stage of the coming of the Kingdom.

This second stage of the amillennial perspective is the final consummation of all the heavenly promises. The Christian will no longer see by faith alone, but by sight. All the shadowy things will pass away and our eternal reign with Christ will begin. The amillennialist, expecting no earthly glory for the church, places all his hope on this heavenly glory.

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Extra Credit:

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