

PREMILLENNIALISM

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PREMILLENNIALISM

There are three main interpretations of the millennium and they are amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism. According to New Ungers Bible Dictionary, amillennialism is defined as follows

Advocates of this view maintain that no Millennium is to be looked for except that which, it is claimed, is in progress now in this gospel age. This theological interpretation spiritualizes or, rather, gives a mystical meaning to the vast kingdom promises in the OT.¹

Postmillennialism as defined by the New Unger's Bible Dictionary

This interpretation maintains that present gospel agencies will root evils until Christ will have a spiritual reign over the earth...then the second advent of Christ will initiate judgment and bring to an end the present order.²

I believe that the premillennial interpretation is the most Biblical and represents the teachings of scripture more accurately than the other views. Post & amillennial are confused on their eschatological interpretations primary because of their refusal to interpret the scriptures literally. A literal interpretation is the only way to go, and once utilized will the reader see that premillennialism is the only viable interpretation of the millennial views. Many of the early church fathers like Papias, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Justin Matyr were advocates of

¹ Merill F. Unger, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 731.

² Unger, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 731.

premillennial eschatology³ and so should anyone who reads the Bible in its entire context. Premillennialists believe in a distinction between Israel and the church, believe that the end of the church age and the second coming of Christ will be preceded by many signs, after of which Christ will judge the people of the earth, and then return and reign with his saints for a 1,000 years.⁴ Premillennialism has support all over the Bible and many passages very clearly refute amillennial and postmillennial argumentations.

The Bible makes a distinction between Israel and the Church. Many amillennialists think that the church and Israel are the same. Amillennial get into trouble by misinterpreting Rom 9:6 & Gal 6:16. In Romans 9:6 Paul is not speaking of a distinction between Israel and the church or between Gentiles and Jews. The context is speaking of unbelieving and believing Jews and does not incorporate gentiles or the church.⁵ Gentile Christians are not Israelites. Gal 6:15-16 is another passage that amillennial use to argue their case for a “spiritual Israel.” It is noted that everywhere else in the scriptures the term Israel is applied only to those that have been born into the natural line of Abraham, and never to Gentiles.⁶ An amillennial scholar, Kim Riddlebarger, said

This important distinction between a broader and a narrower Israel can be seen in this opening section of Paul’s three-chapter discussion of the future role of Israel. He made a distinction between those who are Jews by birth (biological children of Abraham through the line of Issac and Jacob), and those who are jews by virtue of faith in Christ (children of the promise). Therefore, “true Israel” stands over against ethnic Israel, who,

³ Gary Reimer, “Premillennialism.” Class Lecture, Bob Jones University, February 2009

⁴ Unger, *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 731.

⁵ Charles L. Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1954), 147.

⁶ John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay: Dunham Publishing, 1959), 169.

while biological descendents of Abraham, are not true children of Abraham. Paul put it this way in verses 7-8: “Nor because they are his descendents are they all Abraham’s children...It is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring⁷

Riddlebarger argues that “true Israel” is the same body that is chosen by grace mentioned in Romans 11:5 which says “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (ESV). He then goes on to argue that ethnic or national Israel is mentioned in verse 26 of the same chapter and that all Israel will be saved.⁸ A major flaw of the amillennial interpretation is their hermeneutics, which results in their arguments making no sense. The term Israel must be defined in a clearer sense. Israel is a word that is used in scripture in multiple forms. A brief look at the Nave’s Topical Bible I discovered multiple forms of the word “Israel” used throughout the scriptures. The first usage of the word came when Jacob and God wrestled (Gen 32). Scripture also uses the word to refer to the descendants of Jacob. And finally, scripture uses the word to refer to those believers whom are the natural descendants of Abraham.⁹ In Gen 17:7-8 God makes a covenant with Abraham & his descendents. Then God says in verse 8 “The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendents after you, and I will be their God” (NIV). All throughout the OT is this covenant with Abraham remembered. 1 Chr 16:15-18, Psa 105:8-11, & Mic 7:20 all speak of the covenant that God made with Abraham which would be given to a thousand generations. God’s promise to Abraham was for all the families of the earth that would accept the promise.

⁷ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 185.

⁸ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 185.

⁹ Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, 147.

The promise was fulfilled in a spiritual way with Christ's coming but it has not yet been fulfilled in a physical way and this is why a literal millennium must happen for this promise to finally be fulfilled.¹⁰ Those that argue that Israel has no future and no hope irritate me; as such, a view is not based on Biblical exegesis. Israel has a future and a hope. God desperately wants to save Israel, but she must turn from her ways. Crucial is it to understand and differentiate between Israel and the Church for a bad interpretation will lead one to an amillennial belief system. Most who read the Bible literally can differentiate between Israel and the Church. Allegorizing the scriptures has no place in true exegesis.

There will be much apostasy prior to the return of Christ. In the premillennial view the nearing the end of the Church age and the return of Christ for his church (1 Cor 14:51-55; 1 Th 4:13-18) will be preceded by signs of apostasy, worldwide preaching of the gospel, war, famine, and earthquakes.¹¹ Christ himself described this period; "And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Mt 24:11-12, ESV). The day in which we live today is a perfect example of this prophecy being fulfilled. Our day is also loaded with false teachers who teach people what they want to hear. So many teach lies such as "God wants you rich," "God wants you to experience miracles," "All roads lead to Heaven," "There are no absolutes," etc. Consequently, as a result of false teaching so many lack love for God and others because they care only about themselves. I am regularly involved in street evangelism, and its very challenging finding committed evangelists because so many are more concerned

¹⁰ Leon Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 161.

¹¹ Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 169.

with their own affairs than with the great commission of Christ. The apostasy and deception of the masses is happening today like never before and even Jesus himself wondered if he would find faith left on the earth upon his arrival (Lk 18:8). This apostasy was not only predicted by Jesus, but by the apostle Paul (2 Thes 2:3). Rene Pache defines apostasy/rebellion "On the whole, what is this but apostasy? It is the abandoning of faith by those who have known and professed it. Without any exaggeration it can be said that the so-called Christian nations are in full apostasy."¹²

Prior to the return of Christ, there will be a worldwide preaching of the gospel. Jesus said "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14, ESV). The task to preach the gospel to all nations was first issued by Jesus in the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). Today there are missionaries positioned all over the globe, millions of Bible tracts are printed each year, and the printed word of God is being printed in all shapes, sizes and colors. Plus many Internet websites, radio & TV stations and print media present the gospel to millions. There is no doubt that these words of Jesus have been nearly fulfilled. Although many wicked continue to reject God, the door of grace has not closed. God is good full of grace and mercy, and he desires people to turn to him (2 Pet 3:9). He has gifted many, with a passion to reach the lost, but reaching the lost is for all believers (Acts 1:8). How many nations and people groups have not yet heard the gospel? After looking on the Internet, I was not able to find an answer. But the end will come as soon as everyone in the world has a chance to respond to the gospel according to the words of Jesus (Mt 24:14).

¹² Rene Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), 79.

War will be common in the days prior to the return of Christ. Jesus himself said “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...” (Mt 24:6-7a, NIV). Back in Genesis Cain killed Abel, and ever since then wars have increased. There have been many wars throughout history and many have died. Today there are lots of wars and nations war against one another often. This prophecy has been fulfilled. Famines & earthquakes will be common in the days prior to the return of Christ. Jesus said “and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains” (Mt 24:7b-8, ESV). Rene Pache adds “Famine is the necessary compliment of war; we know something about it. Already tens of thousands of workers have suffered idleness and business paralysis.”¹³ Luke’s gospel says there will be “great earthquakes” (Lk 24:11). The world has always had earthquakes, but the scripture says that in the last days, they will intensify and this is exactly what has happened in the last 100 years, as many scientists testify.

There will be much religious persecution in the days prior to the return of Christ. Jesus said “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (Mt 24:9, NIV). There are many Christians in third world countries that face heavy persecution. Christians in these areas are hunted down and killed. Recently someone told me a story of a Muslim girl that gave her life to Jesus and after her father heard that she converted to Christianity, he burned her to death. Many other Christians are being persecuted throughout the world. Christian missionaries face starvation,

¹³ Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, 83.

beatings, beheadings, and such. This prophecy has been fulfilled and Christ's return is near.

After all these signs, the coming of the antichrist (Jer 30:5; Da 9:27) and the tribulation, Christ will return to reign with his saints for one thousand years. When Christ returns it will be to restore his kingdom, glorify it and reign with his saints for a millennium. In the OT the covenants with both Abraham & David did indeed establish that in the future there will be a kingdom in the land of the Israelites that would be ruled by a son from the seed of David. The OT prophets all looked forward to the day that this would be established.¹⁴ Although the millennial reign of this Christ is not explicitly mentioned in the OT, the evidence for a future reign of Christ's kingdom is all over the OT. Much of the Old Testament speaks of a future reign of Christ. Isaiah 24 foresees a day of the Lord, which is a common theme throughout the prophets.¹⁵ Verses 21-23 speak of the Lord bringing great punishment to those that dwell on the earth and later reigning on Mt. Zion with his elders in full glory. Furthermore, Isaiah 25 speaks of the Lord's reign as a great banquet which includes a great feast (Isa 25:6). The Lord will reign over the whole earth starting in that day and his name will be the only name of any importance. Zech 14:16-21 describes the reign and worship of the Lord by all the nations. It will be then that the thousand-year reign of Christ will be inaugurated. This time will be a time like any other experienced on the earth. Isa 11:6-10 gives some detail about this time of peace among human and animals and it will certainly be a time where the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord (Isa 11:9). This will mean that evil will be completely

¹⁴ Jeffrey L. Townsend, *A Case for Premillennialism* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1992), 270.

¹⁵ Craig A. Blaising, *Three Views on the Millennium And Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 197.

purged from the face of the earth. Isa 65:17-25 speaks of the glory of the reign of Christ. Verse 17 says “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (NIV).

In the NT, there is evidence of a future kingdom. NT authors do not reinterpret OT prophecies and apply them to the church¹⁶ as what amillennial do. Revelation 20 is the only passage that explicitly speaks of a literal millennium. Amillennialists do not believe in a literal millennium because they believe it to be symbolic. They also deny the clear interpretation of the two resurrections in Rev 20:4-6.¹⁷ In the Biblical interpretation, verses 4-6 speak of two resurrections of both the saints and the wicked. I believe that both resurrections will be bodily. There are several reasons why the resurrections mentioned here cannot be anything but literal in nature. Erickson says “Jesus made it very clear in Mt 10:28 that only God can harm the soul.”¹⁸ God can destroy both the soul and body in Hell and He alone knows of man’s destiny. Amillennialists confuse themselves by their exegesis of Revelation 20. Postmillennialist are also confused by their Revelation 20 interpretation. Postmillennialist Kenneth Gentry believes that the thousand-year millennium of Christ is not that important and he argues that passages that are important need to be addressed more than once to become important.¹⁹ This is a flawed hermeneutic as there are dozens and dozens of important passages in the scriptures that are mentioned only once. For example when studying divorce only Matthew’s gospel contains the exception clause to permit divorce, which is

¹⁶ Townsend, *A Case for Premillennialism*, 270.

¹⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977), 86.

¹⁸ Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 98.

¹⁹ Gentry, *Three views on the Millinium and Beyond*, 51.

absent from the other gospels. Someone using the Bible to argue in favor of divorce being acceptable for any reason uses the same type of exegesis applied by postmillennialists. In Craig Blaising's comments about Gentry's interpretation of Rev 20 Blaising argues that Gentry among other postmillennialists do not interpret the book of Revelation literally, but follow the flawed Augustinian interpretation,²⁰ which according to John Walvoord postmillennial eschatology traces back to him.²¹ The text clearly indicates that the bodily resurrection of Christ will guarantee that dead Christians will be raised and given new bodies.²²

1 Corinthians 15 is another chapter used in defense of premillennialism. Verses 24-25 say, "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (NIV). Edmond Hiebert argues that this passage speaks in defense of a thousand year reign of Christ on the earth.²³ Postmillennialist Keith Mathison argues that the enemies of Christ will be put under his feet before the Last Day, because the victory of Christ's kingdom he argues will occur before his second coming.²⁴ Postmillennialism is incorrect on its exegesis of this passage for various reasons. For one there is nothing in the text here or elsewhere that speaks of a gradual, progressive spread of the kingdom conditions characteristic of the millennium

²⁰ Blaising, *Three views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 80.

²¹ Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 20.

²² Townsend, *A Case for Premillennialism*, 234.

²³ Townsend, *A Case for Premillennialism*, 231.

²⁴ Keith, A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1999), 130.

that will occur prior to the return of Christ.²⁵ Postmillennialists like amillennialists do not interpret the scriptures literally. Amillennialist have a odd interpretation to this passage as well as they believe that the passage speaks of Christ's reign of conquest over his enemies and this is completed when his enemies have been defeated and destroyed.²⁶ However, this again is an improper interpretation, which is not supported by anyone utilizing a historical, grammatical, and literal interpretation.

Premillennialism is the best millennial interpretation of the end times and has the most support from the scriptures. Rev 20 is the clearest passage, but the doctrine has support in 1 Cor 15, Matt 24, Rom 11 among many other places. Verses 24-24 of 1 Cor 15 I believe presents a very clear case in defense of premillennialism. How anyone could read their Bible and go away anything but premillennial is a mystery to me. Utilizing a literal hermeneutic is something that post nor amillennial utilize. But this is the only way to interpret the Bible. Donald Campbell says

For 150 years, the church accepted a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth. Literal interpretation of the thousand years was abandoned not on exegetical grounds but because of the rise of allegorical interpretation and because some taught that, the Millennium was a time of sensual indulgence.²⁷

Clearly, post and amillennial are more concerned about a system, than eschatology.

²⁵ Blaising, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 79.

²⁶ Strimple, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 112.

²⁷ Townsend. *A Case for Premillennialism*, 269.

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