



### **Week Three: The Millennial Maze**

While the early church did not have eschatology so well-defined, up to the time of Augustine the post-apostolic church leaders for the most part believed and taught a literal 1000 year reign on earth based on Revelation 20. Augustine in the AD 400s began to dislike the idea of an earthly kingdom and so promoted the idea that all the promises to Israel in the Old Testament are spiritual, not earthly, and that Revelation 20 spoke of the church age, not a future earthly kingdom. This view was basically received by the Reformers, who did very little study of eschatology, followed by the writers of the Westminster Confession and other church confessions. Premillennialism today is not novel, as some charge, but actually goes back to the understanding of the early church. There have been preachers and leaders, such as Charles Spurgeon and J. C. Ryle, who did believe in a premillennial return of Christ, although they should not be considered “Dispensational Premillennialists.” Here are the major millennial positions historically and among Bible believing theologians today.

**PREMILLENNIALISM** – based on Revelation 20:1-6. Christ will rule on earth for 1000 years. Historic Premillennialism – Holds to a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth, but without giving Israel its proper place. It applies Old Testament prophecies to the church.

Futuristic or Dispensational Premillennialism –

- Christ will return and set up His kingdom. The church will not bring in the kingdom through the gospel.
- Two major resurrections: 1) before the 1000 years begins and 2) at the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ. (Based on Revelation 20:4-6, contra Augustine’s view).
- A literal 1000 year reign on this earth with Christ as the supreme Ruler/King. Satan will be bound, the Edenic curse will be lifted, and peace and righteousness will fill the earth.
- Established suddenly after all human kingdoms have come to an end. See Daniel 2 and 7.
- This is when God will fulfill all His covenant promises to Israel – e.g., Isaiah 65:19-25.
- Dispensationalism emphasizes a consistently literal or normal grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

Objections:

- 1000 years are only mentioned in one passage, Revelation 20.
- Picking and choosing literal interpretations.
- Earthly reign of Christ not necessary
- Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world.
- Israel is given too prominent a place in God’s future plans.

## AMILLENNIALISM

Literally “no 1000 years”, Amillennialism was popularized by Augustine (354 – 430 AD). Origen (182-254) had developed the spiritualizing and allegorizing method of interpretation earlier. Augustine did not like the idea of carnal pleasures such as eating, marrying, etc., in a millennial kingdom, so he began to teach that the church inherited all the blessings promised to Israel and that they are spiritual, not earthly. His views are presented in his work “The City of God.”

- The 1000 years of Revelation 20 apply to the entire church age, ending with Christ’s return, a general resurrection, final judgment, and the eternal state.
- Satan was bound by Christ at His first coming and is no longer deceiving the nations.
- The first resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 is the new birth; the second resurrection in the passage refers to the physical resurrection at the second coming of Christ.

*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(regenerated) 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 (regeneration). Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection (regeneration); 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. Revelation 20:4-6*

- The world will grow worse until Christ returns (contra Post-Millennialism)
- The second coming of Christ will take place in a single event.
- The church age will end with a general resurrection and judgment.
- After the general resurrection and judgment the eternal state will begin.

## POSTMILLENNIALISM

Literally “after the 1000 years”. Some Puritans came to this position, but it was popularized by Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), an Anglican minister who taught “the world would be converted by the gospel, the Jews restored to the Holy Land, and the papacy and the Muslims defeated. This would lead to the thousand-year period of peace, righteousness, and happiness on earth. At the close of the millennium Christ would return and the last judgment be conducted.” (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology). Postmillennialism gained popularity through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of the Great Awakening (Jonathan Edwards) and growth of democracies and freedom around the world. World Wars 1 & 2 pretty much silenced Post-Millennialism until the recent rebirth of this position, especially among some groups within the Reformed resurgence. Modern Postmillennialism is based on covenant theology and therefore sees no final distinction between Israel and the Church in God’s covenant of grace.

Article by Kenneth Gentry at Reformationonline.com – “As noted above the revival of postmillennialism has gained wider recognition and more visible standing. The recent Zondervan publication of Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond (1999) included my distinctly Reconstructionistic brand of postmillennialism in this broad market publication February 1,

2001. A flood of postmillennial books in the late 1980s and 1990s has inundated the evangelical landscape, including: John J. Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom* (1986), David Chilton's *Paradise Restored* (1987), North's *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990), Gary DeMar's *Last Days Madness* (1991), my *He Shall Have Dominion* (1992), Alexander McLeod's *Governor of the Nations* (rep. 1993), Andrew Sandlin's *Postmillennial Primer* (1997), Keith Mathison's *Postmillennialism* (1999), and Bahnsen's *Victory in Jesus* (1999). A recent noteworthy "convert" to postmillennialism is R. C. Sproul, who invited me to speak on postmillennialism and preterism at his 1999 National Conference in Orlando."

- The Church will progressively bring in a golden age on earth after which Christ returns to earth.
- The 1000 years is symbolic of a golden age of a long period of spiritual prosperity.
- Christ rules in this present kingdom through the hearts of believers.
- The world will get better as the gospel of Christ spreads.
- There will be an explosion of evil at the end of the millennial age.
- Take many Old Testament prophecies literally, but do not apply them to national Israel.
- Some recent Postmillennialists believe the Mosaic law is still operative today and must be applied to all nations.
- Some recent Postmillennialists are also preterists (literally "past"), in that they believe the second coming took place in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem. Therefore the prophecies of the second coming in Revelation have already taken place. They date the book of Revelation before AD 70. The traditional date of Revelation is about AD 95.