

Part three

The Journey Continues

Just to refresh your memory, we're taking a bird's eye view of the Christians journey of understanding as it relates to Eschatology. This story is one with a happy ending, where all believers rejoice in the presence of the King in the New Jerusalem forever and ever. Unlike most stories though, it also had a happy middle, and a happy beginning. The path is traveled with brothers and sisters in Christ who encourage and help one another no matter which trail they are on. This journey itself is only possible because the gloriously tragic event of **the cross** makes their hope and joy complete in the one who died to save them.

If anyone is a follower of Jesus Christ, then he or she will one day be in his presence, blameless, and with great joy.

Now we rejoin our hikers on the way to the City of God, traveling one of two main trails they chose at the beginning of the journey. The first stop is a very important one because it reveals the character and nature of the trail from that point forward.

Rejoining our brothers and sisters on Covenantal Crest, we find a wide and well-traveled path. It's surrounded by mature trees and a comforting feeling that people have walked this trail for hundreds of years.

Signs along the way speak of those who came before, and the long history of _____ to the gospel that set them apart from a world of wickedness and a church of corruption. Heroes have walked this road. Men and women of renown. Giants who still roam the earth today like theological dinosaurs. Their writings still shake the ground they tread.

Many who walk this trail do so out of _____, others because it seems to be _____ today, and some for no other reason than _____, because their father did, and his father before him, all the way back to the homeland of Germany, or Holland, or Switzerland. It's hard not to be a little bit proud from time to time. The legacy of this trail is long and honorable. In fact, the older ones who are mature often have to keep the younger in check lest they hurt their siblings while they wrestle.

This group is led along the way to a large and impressive stone archway that has the word _____ etched into it. This ancient landmark, clothed in moss and ivy, gives you the impression it's been here for a very long time. It's been on this trail since the very first Easter, or Pentecost at the latest. For those on Covenantal Crest, the Millennium, a _____ reality fulfilled in _____ and the _____, will continue, uninterrupted until King Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead. This is why most take issue with being labeled _____ because they are not denying a Millennium at all, but rather understanding it to be a heavenly reality, with spiritual benefits for believers on earth.

To the side of the arch is a sign with a text of Scripture that explains this in detail. The text is Revelation 20:1-10, and it is explained like this. ¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven (this is _____), holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain (this is a symbol of supernatural power). ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years (removing him from influencing mankind directly), ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while (exactly how long is a mystery). ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge (through human government) was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God (symbolic of faithfulness), and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands (meaning the mark of worldliness). They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (not literally, but now in heaven with Jesus). ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection (or regeneration through Christ). ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years (through Christ). ⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison (where he is now) ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog (symbolic of evil), to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And

they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city (Spiritual Zion, vs literal Jerusalem), but fire came down from heaven and consumed them (figuratively), ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Feeling well equipped with this understanding of the Millennium, and a renewed energy to make the best of the present situation, they press on. It helps to know that Jesus Christ is reigning in heaven with the believers who went on before them, and that Satan is powerless to do anything that could harm them. In the end Jesus wins, and all that matters right now is holding fast to the gospel, and seeing Christ and his church in all of redemptive history. This is how to view the world through the lens of our **Amillennial** siblings in Christ.

Over on Stewardship Skyway we join our friends on a trail bursting with _____ . The path has been cleared of any dangerous obstacles like protruding roots or rocks a hiker might trip over. The group moves quickly because the path is so straight, and the traveler is not weighed down with heavy guidebooks. Simplicity rules the day. What you see is what you get. You don't need a sign pointing to a tree that says "tree". Just like their siblings on the other trail, most grew up in homes where this was explained as the only true path, and that godly guides had very carefully studied the map. They were experts, and therefore the conclusions could be trusted.

The prevailing sense of _____ makes this group a bit prone to dismiss the rumblings underfoot made by the dinosaurs, considering them antiquated, and instead focus on the abundance of hummingbirds that are so dazzling and colorful. Each one brings news from a few miles ahead and tells them exactly what will happen next. It's thrilling, and fill some of the hikers with such excited anticipation that they aren't much fun as traveling companions. They have it all figured out and can tell you exactly how many steps to the next bend in the road. They must constantly be told that we don't know for sure what's next, and that wisdom would withhold making too many conclusions until we see it for ourselves.

This group also reaches their next destination, but for them it's not an arch, but rather a fork in the road. In the middle is a sign with the same text, but each traveler must interpret it for himself and choose a path that makes the most sense to him.

After carefully examination, two groups form. The first group, small but vocal, concludes that, like their siblings on the other trail, the Millennium is now, but with a twist. They conclude that it's their job to make the world a _____ representation of the _____ Kingdom in heaven. **The goal is to make the world suitable for the King.**

The first group, the one convinced we will accomplish the goals of the Millennium through the ministry of the church, interprets the passage like this.

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven (gospel evangelists), holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain (spiritual authority from Christ). ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years (symbolic language for the restraining effect of the gospel), ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended (symbolic of the time between the great commission and the inauguration of the eternal state). After that he must be released for a little while (a final apostasy or rebellion of sorts). ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge (through human government) was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God (perhaps literally, as missionaries), and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands (association with pagan governments). They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (a golden age of Christianity). ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection (the reign of the church). ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. ⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison (a brief challenge to global Christianity) ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog (symbolic of pagan nations), to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad

plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city (representing the seat of power in the Christian world; America maybe?), but fire came down from heaven and consumed them (in a military victory),¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The most optimistic and patriotic of the group chose this path. “Onward Christians Soldiers” they sang as they marched along, “Glory, glory, Hallelujah!” and “Lead On, O King Eternal” followed. These are marching songs of the _____.

The vast majority on Stewardship Skyway wish these brothers well, but cannot in good conscience join them on the Postmillennial trail. It just doesn't seem to fit with their understanding of the Bible, so looking back at the text, they conclude it means something very different.

To be continued...

Summary and Review:

On **Covenantal Crest** the vast majority of the group pass happily under the Millennial arch, convinced that the Millennium is a _____ reality in heaven, and that the next destination, just over the horizon, will be the Second Coming of Christ, when everything will be made right. The words of Revelation 20 are clearly to be understood in a spiritual way, symbolizing the present battle between for the forced of good and evil. Christ is on his throne, and reigning _____. Satan is bound, and awaiting his final judgement.

On Stewardship Skyway the whole team agrees that this present age cannot really be the Millennium as God intended it to be. Something drastic must change on earth to fulfill the meaning of the text. For this group, it's clear that Christ intends to reign _____ and demonstrate his glory to the nations. As far as Satan being bound, one cannot reasonably suggest he is anything but the roaring roaring lion the Bible says he is.

Questions:

What passage of Scripture must we understand in order to explain the different approaches to the Millennium?

Can you name at least two Old Testament passages that talk about the Millennium? How would someone with an **Amillennial** hermeneutic interpret them, and how would that differ from someone with a **Postmillennial** understanding?

How would someone with an Amillennial hermeneutic view the establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948? Would that be an indication that the Lord is returning soon? If so, why?

How would someone with a Postmillennial hermeneutic view the spread of the gospel among unreached people? Would that be a sign that the Lord is returning soon? If so, why?