

## The Millennium

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A brief summary of Chapter 7 in the book entitled,  
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The basics of the “premillennial” views (historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, and new creation millennialism) and the “non-premillennial” views (postmillennialism, amillennialism, and preterism) are discussed below.

### Historic premillennialism

#### Essential beliefs of historic premillennialism

Historic premillennialists look for two clusters of end-times events: (1) The second coming follows a great worsening of persecution of Christians (the “tribulation”); it results in the binding of Satan and initiates Christ’s millennial reign on the earth. During the millennium, glorified saints and unredeemed, natural people (survivors of the “battle of Armageddon” and of Christ’s *parousia*) will co-exist. (2) After the millennium, Satan is freed, which results in a great rebellion against Christ. Christ then destroys all his enemies, carries out the final judgment, and initiates the eternal state (the new heavens and new earth).<sup>1</sup>

#### Biblical bases of historic premillennialism

Historic premillennialists see the events depicted in Revelation 19-20 as being chronologically sequential. Leading historic premillennialist spokesman George Eldon Ladd concludes that, since the same word in Rev 20:4-5 applies both to those of the “*first resurrection*” and to “*the rest of the dead who did not come to life until the thousand years were completed,*” it must mean the same thing in each case, namely, bodily resurrections separated by an intervening thousand years.<sup>2</sup> Some historic premillennialists look to certain OT passages (e.g., Ps 72:8-14; Isa 11:6-11; 65:17-25; Zech 14:5-17) which, if taken literally, seem to suggest a future stage in history that is greater than the present age but still does not see

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<sup>1</sup> Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism,” 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 32-38.

the removal of all sin and death from the earth.

### **Critique of historic premillennialism**

Premillennialist exegesis does not take into account the pattern of recapitulation throughout the book of Revelation or the many indications that Rev 19:11—20:6 are not chronologically sequential but are parallel and recapitulative.

Premillennialist exegesis of Rev 20:4-6 also has not dealt with the verbal indicator (the use of “first” with “resurrection”) that signifies *contrast* of dissimilar things, not sequence of similar things.

Premillennialism faces the serious challenge of being contrary to the overall biblical eschatological structure of the “two ages.” Waldron asks, “Where in the two-age structure can the millennium be placed? Shall it be put in *this age* or in *the age to come*? The fact is that it fits into neither age. Why does it not fit in *this age*? Because the millennium occurs after Christ’s second coming. Why does it not fit in *the age to come*? Because no wicked men in an unresurrected condition remain in that age. When we remember that there is no intermediate period between the two ages and no other period beside the two ages, no place for premillennialism remains.”<sup>3</sup>

Premillennialism’s view of the *parousia* turns the second coming, which is the climax of this age and of history, into an anti-climax. The *parousia* brings with it the resurrection and judgment of all people, the destruction or cleansing of the world and the restoration of creation, the end of “this age,” the beginning of the “age to come,” and the inauguration of God’s perfect and eternal kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

Premillennialism qualifies, downplays, minimizes, or denies every one of those fundamental aspects of the *parousia*. For example, according to Paul, Christ’s final enemy is death. This last enemy is destroyed at the *parousia* of Christ (1 Cor 15:25-26, 50-55). Premillennialism contradicts the essential nature of the *parousia* because it teaches that death is not destroyed until a full thousand years after the *parousia*.

Premillennialism entails the belief that people in natural bodies and resurrected people will co-exist. However, none of the passages that discuss the “two ages” hint at the possibility of glorified and natural people co-existing, and all such passages appear to contradict that idea. Additionally, 1 Cor 15:50 tells us that “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*” Further, according to Rev 19:21, “*everybody else was killed*” when Christ comes again. As Mealy clearly sees, “The sense of these words is as plain as it is consistent with the pattern leading up to them: no one on earth survives the confrontation with the returning Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, no unglorified human beings remain to enter an earthly millennial kingdom.

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<sup>3</sup> Waldron, “Structural Considerations,” n.p.

<sup>4</sup> See above, chapter 5—The Eschatological Significance of Christ’s Second Coming.

<sup>5</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 91; see also Schnabel, *40 Questions*, 237.

Premillennialism asserts that after Christ returns in all his glory at the *parousia* he will have to crush a final rebellion at the end of the millennium. This is a fatal problem for all forms of premillennialism. Kim Riddlebarger discusses this:

The most serious problem to be faced by all premillennarians is the presence of evil in the millennial age. . . . There simply cannot be people in unresurrected bodies on the earth after our Lord's return, for the wheat has already been separated from the weeds (Matt. 13:37-43), the sheep have already been separated from the goats (Matt. 25:31-46), and the elect have already been gathered from the four corners of the earth by the angelic host (Matt. 24:30-31).<sup>6</sup>

The problem is that premillennialism does not recognize the epoch-changing significance of the *parousia* and the change from "this age" to the "age to come." It does not appreciate that the fundamental transformation of the ages (corporate eschatology) entails a fundamental transformation of people (individual eschatology).

## **Dispensational premillennialism**

### **Essential beliefs of dispensational premillennialism**

Unlike historic premillennialists, dispensationalists believe that neither the tribulation nor the millennium properly concerns the church. Rather, they foresee a seven-year tribulation primarily directed against Israel and hold that the church cannot be present on the earth during the tribulation. Consequently, dispensationalists look for three clusters of end-times events: (1) Christ will come for his church (the "pretribulation rapture") before the tribulation. (2) The second coming will follow the tribulation; it results in the binding of Satan and initiates Christ's millennial reign on the earth. (3) After the millennium, Satan is freed, which results in a great rebellion against Christ. Christ destroys all his enemies, carries out the final judgment, and initiates the eternal state (the new heavens and new earth).

### **Biblical bases of dispensational premillennialism**

Dispensationalists essentially agree with historic premillennialists' interpretation of Revelation 19-20 and those passages that historic premillennialists view as indicating that the millennium is a "hybrid age" that fits into neither this age nor the age to come. However, dispensational premillennialism "is founded principally on interpretation of the Old Testament."<sup>7</sup> The foundational passage for

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<sup>6</sup> Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 86-87.

<sup>7</sup> Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 114.

dispensationalism is Dan 9:24-27. They conceive the “70 weeks” as 490 years; 483 of those years already have taken place; the last seven years will commence with the rapture of the church and the onset of the final, seven-year tribulation.

### **Critique of dispensational premillennialism**

The critique of historic premillennialism also applies to dispensational premillennialism. Further, dispensationalism is subject to several additional criticisms. Dispensationalists think that the purpose of the earthly millennium is to fulfill OT promises to Israel. That idea is without basis. Rev 20:4-6, which discusses the “1000 years,” says nothing about Israel at all. Further, the primacy dispensationalism gives to Israel over the church is contrary to the entire thrust of the biblical story in which the church—Jews and gentiles alike—are heirs to the promises originally given to national Israel (see Romans 9-11; Galatians 3-4; Ephesians 2:11-22).

The problem of dispensationalism is fundamentally a hermeneutical one. It sees the OT as primary and the NT as secondary in biblical interpretation. Thus, dispensationalism essentially rejects the foundational hermeneutical principles of “progressive revelation” and the primacy of the NT in interpreting the OT.

### **New Creation Millennialism**

A recent variant of premillennialism is that proposed by J. Webb Mealy and adopted by Eckhard J. Schnabel which Mealy calls “new creation millennialism.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Nature and biblical bases of new creation millennialism**

New creation millennialism is based on a detailed exegesis of Rev 19:11-21:8,<sup>9</sup> “Isaiah’s apocalypse” of Isaiah 24-27,<sup>10</sup> and biblical passages dealing with fire and being consumed.<sup>11</sup> According to new creation millennialism, resurrected saints reign on the new earth for 1000 years, beginning at the *parousia* (Rev 20:4-6) while the unbelieving dead are imprisoned with Satan in Hades. Unbelievers are then resurrected and given a “final chance” to turn to Christ but reject the offer, continue in their rebellion, and are judged.<sup>12</sup> Their sentence then is annihilation, not eternal torment.<sup>13</sup>

### **Critique of new creation millennialism**

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<sup>8</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years, The End of the Unrepentant*, “Revelation is One,” *New Creation Millennialism*; see also Schnabel, *40 Questions*, 227-28, 268-69, 275-78, 288-91.

<sup>9</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 59-233.

<sup>10</sup> Mealy, *The End*, 106-18; Mealy, *New Creation*, 107-11.

<sup>11</sup> Mealy, *The End*, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 59-235; see also Schnabel, *40 Questions*, 276-77, 288-90.

<sup>13</sup> Mealy *The End*, 91-93; Mealy, “Revelation is One,” 135-36. Mealy gives a succinct summary of his entire eschatological scheme in *The End*, 195-97.

New creation millennialism endeavors to escape the problem of unresurrected sinners and resurrected saints co-existing in the post-*parousia* millennium. However, its attempted solution to the problem renders Satan's binding in Rev 20:1-3 unnecessary. Sam Storms points out, "According to Revelation 20:3, the purpose of Satan's incarceration is to prevent him from deceiving the nations. But if the nations no longer exist on the earth . . . who could possibly constitute those who are the potential objects of his deceptive lies?"<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Rev 20:8 speaks of Satan being released from the abyss "*to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth.*" Yet new creation millennialism contends that "the nations" are not living human beings "in the four corners of the earth" at all, but are *the dead* who have been incarcerated in the abyss with Satan who come out of the abyss with Satan!<sup>15</sup> Not only does such an idea seem bizarre, but it amounts to equating Hades and the abyss with the earth, the dead with the living, and Satan's accomplices with his victims.

New creation millennialism also does not eliminate the problem of sin and death existing after the *parousia*. Whether during or after the thousand years, the presence of the unredeemed, sin, evil, and death following the *parousia* is contrary to the perfect peace, holiness, and harmony of the new earth.

## **Postmillennialism**

### **Essential beliefs of postmillennialism**

For postmillennialists, the millennial "golden age" will occur *in history*.<sup>16</sup> Christ's second coming will occur after the millennium and will result in the resurrection and rapture, the final judgment, and the initiation of the eternal state.

### **Biblical bases of postmillennialism**

Postmillennialists look to passages which indicate the spread and influence of God's people over all of the earth in history (e.g., Ps 2:8-9; 22:27-28; 86:9-10; Isa 2:1-4; 9:6-7; Dan 2:34-35; Matt 13:31-35; 16:18; Rev 7:9; 21:16, 24).<sup>17</sup>

Postmillennialists see Rev 19:11-21 not as a description of the eschatological second coming, but as the victory of Christ through the church's successful completion of the "Great Commission" in this age. Consequently, postmillennialists generally see Revelation 21-22 as depicting the victorious

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<sup>14</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 447.

<sup>15</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 129-30; Schnabel, *40 Questions*, 227-28, 276.

<sup>16</sup> While some postmillennialists have referred to the "golden age" that will be brought about by the working of the Holy Spirit through the church before the second coming of Christ as the "millennium" (e.g., Boettner, "Postmillennialism," 117), postmillennialist Greg Bahnsen states that "it is more common today for postmillennialists to refer to the whole period, from the first advent to the second, as the millennium." Bahnsen, *Victory*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Kik, *Eschatology*, 16-29; Bahnsen, *Victory*, 54-64, 78-80.

church in history, not the consummate, eternal state.<sup>18</sup>

### **Critique of postmillennialism**

Postmillennialism's teaching of a Christianized "golden age" of righteousness and peace that occurs in "this age" is not consistent with the clear biblical teaching that "this age" is and always will be an evil age. Consequently, postmillennialism undermines the NT's teaching concerning the nature of this age, the warnings of persecution, and the exhortations not to be conformed to the pattern of this age. Further, although the church will grow like a mustard tree and spread like leaven, no passage states or implies the extent to which the kingdom will grow. NT texts such as the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30, 36-42) indicate both the spread of the church and the increase of evil at the same time. And Jesus said, "*The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it*" (Matt 7:14).

### **Amillennialism**

#### **Essential beliefs of amillennialism**

Amillennialists look for one cluster of end-time events: the second coming entails a complex of events involving the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous, the judgment of the righteous and the unrighteous, the renewal of the earth and the cosmos, and the inauguration of the eternal state. There will be no thousand year interregnum of Christ between the second coming and the eternal state.

#### **Biblical bases of amillennialism**

Amillennialists view Revelation 20 not as chronologically following the events of Revelation 19 (as premillennialists believe) but as recapitulating those events. In Rev 20:4-6 the "*first resurrection*" does not stand for the first of two bodily resurrections but is our "spiritual" resurrection of new life which is *antithetically contrasted* with the physical resurrection which will occur at the *parousia*. Christ's reign does not begin sometime in a future millennium, but he is reigning now (Acts 2:29-36).

#### **Critique of amillennialism**

Premillennialists contend, in contrast to amillennialists, that Revelation 20 follows chronologically in history from where Revelation 19 left off rather than recapitulating Revelation 19. Further, they see the "two resurrections" of Rev 20:4-6 as two sequential, physical resurrections of the same kind, separated by one thousand years, rather than two different types of "resurrection." The other

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<sup>18</sup> Kik, *Eschatology*, 20-21; Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 157-58.

main objection to amillennialism is that the “binding of Satan” in Rev 20:1-3 implies “a far greater restriction of his activity than anything we know in this present age.”<sup>19</sup>

## Preterism

### Essential beliefs of preterism

There are different varieties of preterism. *Full preterism* “defines Biblical eschatology as the end of the Old Covenant age of Israel—i.e. AD 70—and not ‘historical eschatology’ i.e. the end of time and human history.”<sup>20</sup> Full preterists see “the second advent (including the ‘rapture,’ resurrection, and judgment) as occurring in A.D. 70.”<sup>21</sup> *Partial preterism*, on the other hand, holds that Christ’s ascension and enthronement in heaven represents his *parousia*, which led to his coming (*parousia*) in judgment against Israel in A.D. 70.<sup>22</sup> Partial preterists view the bulk of Bible prophecy, including the “Great Tribulation,” as being related to and fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, partial preterists agree that the “second advent” of Christ will occur at the end of history, accompanied by resurrection, judgment, and the institution of the final state.<sup>24</sup>

### Biblical bases of preterism

Preterism correctly sees OT Israel as a “type” or “shadow” that pointed to and finds its fulfillment in New Covenant realities.<sup>25</sup> Preterists cite the Olivet Discourse where Jesus’ laments over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39) and prophesies the destruction of the temple (Matt 24:1-3). The time indicators (“*this generation*,” Matt 23:36; 24:34), personal references (“you,” “your,” Matt 23:34-36; 24:2, 6, 9, 15, 20, 23, 25, 26, 32-34), obvious references to Jewish circumstances (Matt 24:15-20), and the facts of history (Luke 21:20) all clearly relate the context to the events surrounding the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70. In the book of Revelation, apocalyptic descriptions (e.g., beasts and Babylon the great) are taken as coded descriptions of Rome and Jerusalem. Rev 1:1, 3; 2:16; 3:10, 11; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20 all contain time indicators (e.g., “*the time is near*,” “*I am coming quickly*”) that suggest first-century fulfillment.

### Critique of preterism

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<sup>19</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1130.

<sup>20</sup> Preston, *AD 70*, 3n.6.

<sup>21</sup> Gentry, *Dominion*, 271; see also Preston, *Like Father*, 200; Sproul, *Last Days*, 157.

<sup>22</sup> Chilton, *Vengeance*, 434-35; DeMar, *Last Days*, 157-69.

<sup>23</sup> Sproul, *Last Days*, 157; Kik, *Eschatology*, 112-57; Gentry, “Exposition,” 16-66.

<sup>24</sup> Sproul, *Last Days*, 157; Gentry, *Dominion*, 276-77; Chilton, *Vengeance*, 494, 589; Kik, *Eschatology*, 158.

<sup>25</sup> See Preston, *Like Father*, 114, 203-204, 300-301; Preston, *AD 70*, 10-12.

Preterism is strongest in dealing with the time indicators and the references to the “abomination of desolation” and “great tribulation” in the Olivet Discourse as relating to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Preterism also is strong in recognizing that the entire Old Covenant system, including Israel itself, represented physical, earthly “types” or “shadows” which pointed to future, New Covenant, spiritual realities.<sup>26</sup>

Preterism is weakest in dealing with the passages that deal with the second coming, the resurrection, and the judgment. The idea that the events of AD 70 constituted an eschatological “*parousia*” of Christ is problematic in at least two ways: (1) Such a view teaches multiple “*parousias*” of Jesus, when the NT is clear that there will be only one; and (2) Christ’s “coming” in AD 70 was a local judgment on Jerusalem and his “*parousia*” was invisible, whereas the NT makes clear that the second coming will be visible (Matt 24: 27, 29; Rev 1:7) and will involve judgment of the entire earth.<sup>27</sup> Preterism also cannot account for the fact that the apostolic and post-apostolic fathers, some of whom lived through the events of AD 70, looked to a future second coming.<sup>28</sup>

Preterism holds that “the end of the age” in Matt 24:3 means “the end of the Jewish age [when the Lord came] in judgment to destroy the temple.”<sup>29</sup> However, that view undermines the significance of what Christ accomplished on the *cross*. The cross (which entails the resurrection, ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit), not the events of AD 70, ended the Old Covenant, instituted the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; John 19:30), and ended the efficacy and significance of the temple (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45; John 2:19-22). Second, turning “the end of the age” into “the end of the *Jewish* age” is contrary to the clear NT meaning of “*this age*” versus “*the age to come*,” which find their line of demarcation not in the events of AD 70 but in the yet future second coming of Christ and the consummation of his everlasting kingdom. Another problematic implication of preterism’s redefinition of the “two ages” is that, according to full preterism, the age in which we are now living will last forever.<sup>30</sup> That means that sin and death also will continue to exist forever.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Gal 4:21-31; Col 2:16-17; Heb 8:5; 9:15-10:22; 12:18-24.

<sup>27</sup> See Matt 13:24-30, 36-51; 16:27; 24:42-51; 25:14-30, 31-46; Luke 12:35-48; 17:22-37; 19:12-27; John 5:25-29; Acts 3:19-21; 17:31; Rom 8:17-25; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Thess 1:6-10; 2 Tim 4:1; Jas 5:7-9; 2 Pet 3:3-15; Rev 11:18; 19:11-21; 22:12.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., *1 Clement* 1989: 50:3-4; *2 Clement* 1989: 12:1; 17:4-5; *Did.* 10:5; 16:3-8; *Barn.* 1989: 7:2.

<sup>29</sup> Otto, “Jesus the Preterist,” n.p.; see also Preston, *Like Father*, 52-53, 218; Preston, *AD 70*, 68-77.

<sup>30</sup> Preston, *Like Father*, 54-55, 95; Preston, *AD 70*, 21

<sup>31</sup> Preston, *Like Father*, 262-63, 266; Preston, *AD 70*, 22.



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