

Review: Three Views on the Millennium

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(summarized by Paul Schlehle)

Postmillennialism

I. Definition

- A. Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in the great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind.
- B. That is, the glorious return occurs after an era of "millennial" conditions.

II. Historical Development of Postmillennialism

- No ancient creed affirms a millennial view.
- A. Ancient Postmillennialism
 - 1. The development of most important doctrines took centuries.
 - 2. Although premillennialism finds slightly earlier development, PM was also anticipated.
- B. Reformation Postmillennialism
 - 1. PM had its greatest growth between the 17th and 19th centuries under Puritan and Reformed influence.
 - 2. **Adherents:**
 - 3. Rutherford, Owen, Warfield, A. Strong, Watts, Sibbes, W. Carey, A. Alexander, Hodge, Machen, Warfield, I. and J. Murray, Boettner, D. Kelly, L. Duncan, H. Morris, the Wesely's and Edwards.
- C. Modern Postmillennialism
 - 1. Generic PM of the 18th and 19th centuries didn't hold that the Jewish people would return to their land as a fulfillment of prophecy (exceptions: Hulse, Murray). They believed the Millennium spans all of the new covenant phase of church history.
 - 2. PM developed bringing in "Christian Reconstructionism", involving "theonomic" ethics.
 - a. Def. – the gradual return to biblical norms of civil justice as a consequence of widespread gospel success through preaching, evangelism, missions, and Christian education.
 - b. Hold strongly to the separation of church and state.
 - c. Often has a preterist (Latin: "gone by") approach.
 - i. Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21) occurred in the generation living when Christ spoke (Matt. 24:34).

- ii. Revelation expects its events to transpire "soon" (Rev. 1:1, 22:7, 12), because in John's day "the time is near" (Rev. 1:3; 22:10).
- iii. The Antichrist was a first-century phenomenon (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).
- iv. Sum: most of the gloom and tragedy happened in the first century during the time of Nero (Rev. 13:5), the 42 month long Jewish war with Rome (Rev. 11:1-2), and the destruction of the temple (Matt. 23:36-24:34).

III. Theological Foundations of Postmillennialism

- A. God's Creational Purpose
 - 1. PM holds that God's love for his creation prompts his concern to bring it back to its original purpose of bringing positive glory to him.
 - 2. The hope-filled expectation is rooted in creational reality.
- B. God's Sovereign Power
- C. God's Blessed Provision

IV. The Redemptive-Historical Flow of Postmillennialism

- A. Creation and Edenic Covenants (Gen. 1-3)
- B. Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2-3; cf. Rom. 4:13)
- C. New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)

V. Exegetical Evidence for Postmillennialism

A. Psalm 2

B. Isaiah 2:2-4

- 1. "The references to the 'mountain', the 'house of the God of Jacob', and 'Zion' refer to the church." (36)
- 2. "'All nations will stream' (Isa. 2:2) into the church to worship the Lord".

C. Matthew 13

- 1. Teaches that the kingdom will explode in numbers on earth.
- 2. The thirty, sixty, and hundredfold refer to the increase of numbers who will be saved.

D. John 12:31-32

- 1. This speaks of a massive conversion of mankind.
- 2. This (along with many other "world" passages in John) assures us of a coming day when the world as a system will be redeemed. Christianity will be the rule, not the exception.

E. Matthew 28:18-20

F. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

G. Revelation 20

- 1. First recognize:
 - a. This is the only place in Scripture giving 1,000 years to the Millennium.
 - b. Revelation is a very figurative book.
- 2. What does the "thousand" mean?
 - a. Symbolic of long-lasting glory (10x10x10... 10 is number of quantitative perfection)

- b. No more symbolic than cattle on thousand hills (Ps. 50:10), a thousand years of our time to God's day (Ps. 90:4), and God's love to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9).
- 3. How is Satan bound?
 - a. Satan's binding grows greater through time in Christian era; not total inactivity.
 - b. So in a sense, he is bound today.

VI. Conclusion

Amillennial Response

1. Postmill is not supported by the WCF.
2. Christ is King now (Eph. 1:22-23)! But based on the postmill view of the nature of Christ's present kingdom, Christ's reign thus far has been a failure.
3. Indeed, there will be a time of universal worship, peace, and prosperity, but this will only come after Christ returns (Heb. 9:28).
4. Jesus nowhere predicts a glorious future on earth before the end of the world. We will experience hardships like our master. When the apostle Paul thinks of this present time, he thinks of suffering as its characteristic mark (Rom. 8:18, John 16:33, Acts 14:22, Rom. 8:36, 2 Cor. 1:5-10, Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 1 Peter 4:12-19).
5. Postmill has no room for persecution, apostasy, and Antichrist in the last days (2 Tim. 3:12-13).
6. Preterist interpretations of the Olivet Discourse, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation must say that the worst days of persecution, apostasy, and Antichrist are past. But, regarding Preterism (1) Nero can't be "the lawless one" whom Jesus will destroy by the splendor of his coming (2 Thess. 2:8) (2) Nero can't be the beast in Rev 19.
7. The NT puts the focus of the believers' hope in the 2nd Coming of Christ (1 Thess. 1:9-10; James 5:7; 2 Peter 3:11-12), not the coming golden age.

Premillennial Response

1. That PM are optimists and PrM are pessimists is a stereotype.
2. Where is the progress after two-thousand years?
3. Throughout biblical theology, the eschatological kingdom comes in fullness through the Day of the Lord; the NT, the 2nd Coming is the coming day of the Lord.
4. It's unclear exactly how long the millennium is.
5. Psalm 2 and Isaiah 2 fit awkwardly in the postmill system.
6. The kingdom parables don't say anything of the gradual development of the kingdom, only the contrast from the beginning of the kingdom (inaugurated by Christ at ascension) and the end. The wheat and weeds shows a mixture of believers and unbelievers; this is contra postmill. The parable of the soils teaches that perhaps only a fourth of those who hear will accept.
7. Acts 1:6 opposes postmill system because there is no future for Israel, even though they ask: "at this time will you restore the kingdom to Israel?"

8. Rev. 20:1-6 should be interpreted in a literary, grammatical, contextual manner. The angel in 20:1 can't be Christ; in Rev. he's the Lamb or the Son of Man. Binding is not an increasing phenomenon.

Amillennialism

I. Christ: the theme of OT prophecy

- A. Intro: What is in the OT contained is in the NT explained. What is in the OT concealed is in the NT revealed. The following five items are types pointing to Christ.
- B. The True Israel
1. True Israel is Christ. All believers (OT and NT) are the Israel of God. Believers get in on the blessings promised to Israel.
 2. Hebrews 8 and 10 is tough for pre-mill because it says in Jeremiah 31:31-34 that the new covenant is better through Christ and is in force now bringing blessings on Jews and Gentiles. But dispensies say that this has yet to be fulfilled, but only in the Millennium because the passage speaks of the house of Israel.
- C. Canaan, the Land of Promise - Amill interprets prophecies regarding restoration of the earth not as the millennium but as the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1).
- D. The Holy City of Jerusalem
- E. The Kingdom of David - The promise to Abe regarding land forever cannot be fulfilled on this sinful earth, so the promise of a Davidic ruler cannot be fulfilled on this sinful earth.
- F. The Temple of God

II. The Second Coming of Christ: The Grand Finale of Redemptive History

- A. The OT doesn't teach a future millennial kingdom of Christ. The OT speaks of the Messiah's everlasting kingdom and its everlasting blessings. The NT rules out earthly kingdom because all of the following events will happen concurrently: Christ's second coming, resurrection of just and unjust, judgment of all, the end, the new heaven and earth, inauguration of the final kingdom, and the eternal state.
- B. John 5:28-29, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Romans 8:17-21, 2 Peter 3:3-14, 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, and Acts 24:1 speaks of one resurrection.

III. Two Passages considered crucial for millennialists

- A. Romans 11
1. Premill and amill appeal to this passage for support. Ladd says one of the two passages that can't be avoided in support of premill is Romans 11:26. But, per Strimple, that Paul predicts in Romans 11 a future mass conversion of ethnic Israel prior to Christ's return does not, by itself, prove premill. This interp is presented by premill, post mill and even some amill (?). BUT, a future conversion of Israel on a grand scale does not "require an earthly millennial reign of Christ, for the conversion of Israel could just as easily prepare for the inauguration of the eternal state as for an earthly golden age" (Grenz).

2. This passage says nothing about the return of the Jews to the promised land or about a millennial kingdom in which Christ will reign from his throne in Jerusalem. That Israel would be blessed does not mean that the whole nation will be blessed. The true Israel consists of the children of promise, the elect of grace (9:1-5). The rejection of Israel is not total; some elect Jews will be saved. This is the one big point of Romans 9-11.
- B. Revelation 20:1-10
1. Nothing in this passage connects it to OT prophecies of a coming era of national glory for Israel.
 2. The order of visions in Revelation is not necessarily the order of fulfillment. Rev. 20 isn't necessarily in chronological order.
 3. The two visions in Rev. 20 (1-3 and 7-10) are separate. Satan is bound and Satan is released.
 4. How is Satan bound? It is a figurative representation of Christ's victory over Satan. At the cross, but not absolutely. There are many passages indicating this (Matt. 12:28-29, John 12:31, Col. 2:15, Heb. 2:14-15, and Jude 6).
 5. Rev. 20 is a broad panorama of the gospel age. "One thousand" is symbolic.

Postmill Response - When Israel is given over to divine hardening (which amill embraces), then there *is* a distinction between Jew and Gentile (which amill denies).

Premill Response

1. Israel is never used of the church per se despite the application of Israel typology to the church in some passages. In Galatians 6:16, Israel of God is Jewish Christians. This fits the true use of "Israel" in Romans 9-11.
2. Amill admits that "[true] Israel is referring to believing Jews as a subset of ethnic Israel, not a mixture of Jew and Gentile. So, Paul is consistent, and as premill holds, ethnic Israel has two parts: the elect and the hardened. The nation as a whole does not receive blessing because there are so many that are hardened. But this will be reversed! All Israel is national Israel as a whole. Right now, part is converted, but we look to the day when ethnic Israel as a whole will be converted.
3. Amill says the simple pattern of Second Coming events rules out multi-stage fulfillment. But Exodus 3:17 does this when it put out of Egypt and into the land side by side, even though 40 years separates it. Why can't the kingdom have three stages (inaugural, millennial, and final)? If the hour in John 5:28-29 can be extended over 2,000 years, why can't a thousand years split the two resurrections?
4. You can't skip Rev. 20:1-3 to determine what will happen with the devil at the 2nd coming. This does not speak of the binding of the devil at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Amill like to ignore Rev. 5:10.

Premillennialism

I. Brief definition of premillennialism

- A. After Jesus comes, he will establish and rule over a kingdom on this earth for a millennium. When Jesus comes, he will raise the dead in two stages. First, he will raise some to participate

with Christ in the millennial kingdom. After the Millennium, He will raise the rest of the dead and institute the Final Judgment. Then will come the final and eternal destinies of the saved and lost.

- B. Within premill is a debate over the Rapture. We see this in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. The question is: is the rapture distinct from or a temporal phase of the 2nd Coming. Only pretrib and midtrib make a distinction. They affirm two stages of the one second coming.

II. Two Models of Eternal Life

A. The Spiritual Vision Model

1. The final state is in heaven. The saved will exist in nonearthly, spiritual places as spiritual beings and engaged in spiritual activity.
2. There will be no developmental growth, change or decay. Eternal life is a state of knowing God. Eternal life is the beatific vision—an unbroken contemplation of God.

B. The New Creation Model

1. Eternal life is similar to the present earthly life except for the absence of sin and death. Eternal life will be embodied on earth. Isaiah 25, 65, and 66 and Revelation 21 and Romans 8 shows that the new creation model expects the earth to be renewed and made everlasting. The nonhuman aspect will be greatly blessed beyond that of the Garden of Eden.

III. Hermeneutics and the Two Models in Christian Thought

- A. The spiritual vision model was most common from 3rd century to modern period. This has set the pattern for today's preunderstanding about heaven.
- B. Spiritual Interpretation to Christian Worldview—The Spiritual Vision Model of Eternal Life in Classical Christian Thought
- C. Millennial Possibilities in a Spiritual Vision Eschatology
- D. The Reformation Challenge and the Possibility of New Creation Eschatology
- E. The Reemergence of Premillennialism in Post-Reformation Protestantism
 1. Revelation began to be translated literally in Protestant Christianity. They could either believe that the millennium had passed and they were living in Rev. 20:7-10 (Reformers view) or that the Millennium had not yet come.
 2. If people believed in a future Millennium, they could go with premill or postmill.

IV. Varieties of Premill

A. Dispensational Premillennialism

1. Also called classic disp, it was developed by John Darby in Brethren circles and became predominant form of premill in America. Espoused by Scofield and Lewis Sperry Chafer. Sought to resolve the tensions between new creation and spiritual vision models by affirming two coexisting eternal realms of salvation, one heavenly (heaven) and one earthly (thousand year earthly millennium).
2. They have an emphasis on the pretrib rapture. After some time, Ryrie and Walvoord favored the spiritual vision model saying that all Christians would share an eternal destiny spiritual in nature. Others like McClain and Pentecost believed that eternity for all the redeemed of all dispensations would be on the new earth in a new creation experience of final salvation (still segregated as Israel vs. church).

3. From this developed progressive dispensationalism (like Bock, Blaising and Saucy).
 4. Takes a strictly literal approach to the days and months numbered in Daniel and Revelation (e.g. 1260 days, 42 months).
- B. Historic Premill
1. Some premill distinguished themselves from dispies by calling themselves historic premill (like Ladd).
 2. Both HP and dispies embrace a millennial kingdom in which Satan is bound after the coming of Christ and a partial resurrection of the dead but prior to final judgment.
- V. **The Millennial Kingdom and New Creation Eschatology** (Blaising argues for holistic premill, progressive disp [?])
- A. The Eschatological Kingdom in the Old and New Theology
1. The OT teaches that a future kingdom that God will set up on this earth and will have an everlasting duration (Dan. 2:34-35, 44; Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-8). It will be a complete replacement of present conditions on earth with a new worldwide order.
 2. Daniel's future kingdom on earth (introduced in Daniel 2) is re-presented in Daniel 7:12-14, 27. Also see Isaiah 2 and 11. God promised to bless Abraham's descendants and their inheritance (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 22:15-18; 2 Sam. 7:8-16; 1 Chron. 17:7-15; Ps. 89; 110; 132).
- B. The Coming of the Eschatological Kingdom
- C. The Millennial Phase of This Eschatological Kingdom?
- VI. **Premill in the Book of Revelation**
- A. Heavenly Court and Its Judgment
- B. Apocalyptic Narrative
- C. Revelation 20:1-10 Within 19:11-21:8
- D. The Crux Interpretum: Revelation 20:4-6
- VII. Conclusion