

Doctrine of the Millennium Reign of Christ

1. This doctrine is not taught anywhere else in the New Testament, but was a prevalent concept among the early church, especially from those who were influenced by Jewish sources.
2. The origin of this doctrine is found in Jewish expectations about a coming Messianic Age.
3. The general belief was that the kingdom of the Messiah would last forever
 - *Daniel 7:14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*
4. After 100 BC there came a change. It was felt that the present world system was so evil that it would have to be destroyed. The Messiah would have a limited reign before the final consummation. Some said that the reign would last 40 years. Others argued for 100, 600, 1000, and even 7,000 years. *2 Esdras* is very definite. My Son the Messiah shall be revealed, together with those who are with him, and shall rejoice the survivors for four hundred years (7:28, 29).
5. The most common view was that the reign of the Messiah would be for 1000 years, corresponding to creation.
 - *Psalms 90:4 For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.*
 - *2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*
6. The Jews conceived of the reign of the Messiah in very materialistic terms. Israel would rule over the nations. Jerusalem would be the capital of the world. There would be no more diseases or untimely death. The earth would produce abundantly (*2 Baruch* 29:5, 6). Women would have no pain in childbirth.
7. It is not surprising that the early church would be influenced by Jewish expectations. It is not surprising to find a widespread belief of a millennium reign of Christ along materialistic Jewish expectations.
8. The church divided into two camps. Those who embraced the Jewish belief, and those who did not.
9. Among the church fathers that embraced the Jewish concept was Justin Martyr (b. 100 AD- 163 [or 167]).

10. For Justin Martyr it was an essential part of orthodox belief, although he agreed that there were good Christians who did not accept it. 'I and others, who are right-minded Christians at all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be build adorned and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and other declare' (*Dialogue With Trypho*).
11. Irenaeus also held firmly to a belief in a millennium upon the earth [b. 130 AD-?] (*Against Heresies* 5:32).
12. One of his reasons was the conviction that, since the saints and the martyrs had suffered upon earth, it was only just that upon earth they should reap the rewards of their fidelity.
13. Tertullian also insisted upon the coming of a millennium (BC160 AD - ?) as did Papias (second century).
14. Papias, the second century collector of so much material upon the Gospels, insisted that Jesus taught the doctrine of the Millennium, and he hands down as the words of Jesus a passage which foretells the wondrous fertility of the earth which is to come:

"The days will come in which vines shall grow each having ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand branches, and on each branch against ten thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand clusters, and on each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when pressed shall yield five and twenty measures of wine. And when any of the saints shall have taken hold of one of their clusters, another shall cry, I am a better cluster; take me, bless the Lord through me. Likewise also a grain of wheat shall produce ten thousand heads, and every head shall have ten thousand grains, and every grain then thousand pounds of fine flour, bright and clean, and the other fruits, seeds and the grass, shall produce in similar proportions, and all the animals, using these fruits which are products of the soil, shall become in their turn peaceable and harmonious, obedient to man in all subjection."

15. Despite these men of faith and influence other men of equal stature, who lived at the same time dismissed the Jewish concept that had infiltrated the church. Men such as Eusebius (c. 263-340). Eusebius almost contemptuously dismisses Papias's report. 'I suppose he got those ideas,' he said, 'through a misunderstanding of the apostolic records, not perceiving that the things said by them were said mystically in figures. For he seems to have been of very limited understanding' (*Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History* 3:38).
16. Why did people reject early on the idea of a physical Millennial reign? Dr. Barclay explains. '*One of the things which brought discredit upon Millenarianism was the fact that it undoubtedly lent itself to a materialistic interpretation in which it offered physical as much as spiritual pleasures. Eusebius tells how the great scholar Dionysius had in Egypt to deal with a certain much-respected bishop called Nepos who taught a 'millennium of bodily luxury upon this earth'* (*The Ecclesiastical History* 7:24). Cerinthus, a heretic, deliberately taught a millennium of '*delights of the belly and sexual passion, eating and drinking and marrying*' (*Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History* 3:28).

17. Origen (AD 185-251 or 254 died) also rejected the idea of a Millennium. Origen rebuked those who looked for bodily pleasure in the Millennium. *“The saints will eat, but it will be the bread of life; they will drink, but it will be the cup of wisdom.”* (*De Principiis* 2.11.2, 3).
18. St. Jerome also opposed the Millennium (347-420). Jerome spoke contemptuously of *‘these half-Jews who look for a Jerusalem of gold and precious stones from heaven, and a future kingdom of a thousand years, in which all nations shall serve Israel’* (*Commentary on Isaiah* 60:1).
19. Augustine (b. November 13, 354 AD-August 430) is credited with striking the deathblow to the Millennial teaching of the early church. At one time he had embraced the concept but saw in the scriptures the value of focusing on spiritual blessings. H.B. Swete summarizes the position of St. Augustine. ‘He had learned to see in the captivity of Satan nothing else than the binding of the strong man by the stronger than he which the Lord had foretold (Mark 3:27; Luke 11:22); in the thousand years, the whole interval between the First Advent and the last conflict; in the reign of the saints, the entire course of the kingdom of heaven; in the judgment given to them, the binding and loosing of sinners; in the first resurrection, the spiritual share in the Resurrection of Christ which belongs to the baptized’ (Augustine: *The City Of God* 20:7). Augustine spiritualized the whole idea of the Millennium.
- *Mark 3:27 No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.*
 - *Luke 11:22 But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*
20. The influence of Augustine in this area is reflected in the fact that for the most part the church is silent as to Millennial expectations until the Jewish dreams took root in England and spread to America. A critical year in this discussion is 1830. From that year on to the present hour the Jewish millennial expectations have taken deep root in the church. But as it was in the first centuries, so it is today. Millennial expectations are widespread, but not universal.
21. Once more the material has found favor over the spiritual. Once more the Jewish hopes of Israel to be glorious among the nations is being articulated. Once more it is being denied that Jesus is a king, yet is in fact the King of kings. Once more preparation is encouraged to rebuild a third Temple to house the glory of God and to reinstate animal sacrifices. If Satan cannot tarnish the church of her essential glory, he can promote the giving of her glory away by demeaning her self-image, or by suggesting Israel is really the favorite of God.