

## The Millennium: A Brief Overview

1. The main Scriptural reference about the Millennium is found in Revelation 20.
  - *Revelation 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. 7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.*
2. The Millennium refers to that period of time which extends for 1,000 years. It is mentioned in respect to the binding of Satan.
3. Two questions must be answered regarding the Millennium.
  - What is its nature?
  - What is its chronological relationship to the kingdom of God and the coming of Christ that consummates His kingdom?
4. Usually the topic of the Millennium comes with a prefix.
  - Premillennial.
  - Amillennium
  - Postmillennium
5. The prefixes have to do with how the millennium is understood and how Christ establishes His final kingdom.
6. One of the immediate problems in discussing the Millennium is that only in Revelation 20 do we find this terminology in a book that is highly imaginative and filled with unusual and difficult symbols.

7. The question must be answered, “What is the form or genre of the Book of Revelation? What rules of interpretation should be brought to it?”
8. One school of thought deals with literalism with respect to prophetic interpretation.
9. Of course the word literalism must itself be interpreted since it can be misleading. The guiding principle at the time of the Reformation was literalism.
10. But a literal interpretation of the Bible is to be tempered by reason and taking into account an author’s style of writing, the various grammatical venues used to express a thought, and the sense in which it was written. That is what it meant to take the Bible literally.
11. At the Diet of Worms, in 1521, Martin Luther was called upon to denounce his previous writings against papal abuses of the Catholic Church. Said Luther,

““Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me.”

12. What Luther was trying to say is this. If a section of the Bible is written as poetry, you interpret the passage as you would poetry. For example. In Psalm 91:4, the psalmist said,
  - *Psalms 91:4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

While God is not a Cosmic Chicken with feathers, that would be a literal view of the text. But God is presented in a tender poetic imagery that comforts the heart.

Again, if a text is written in a didactic (teaching) style, then you interpret the text in a way which is consistent with the manner in which you would interpret didactic literature.

13. In the Bible, a noun remains a noun, a verb a verb, a simile a simile and a metaphor remains a metaphor.
14. In the years following the Reformation a new school of Biblical interpretation arose which, for lack of a better word, can be called a “wooden literalism”.
15. This “wooden literalism” was pressed upon many passages of Scripture without taking into account such concepts as anthropomorphic expressions and anthropopathy expressions.
16. As a result those verses in the Bible that speaks of God’s hand, or eye, or ear, or arm, are taken literally so that in the end God is just like man.
  - The arm of God. *Isaiah 53:1 Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

- The eyes of the Lord. *Psalms 34:15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.*
- The ears of the Lord. *Psalms 18:6 In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.*

17. When the prophet Isaiah wrote that “the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12), that is obviously a way of speaking figuratively. No one expects the fields to grow arms and hands and start clapping. We would not think of interpreting Isaiah 55:12 in such a crass literalistic way.
18. When the student of the Bible comes to prophetic passages, the question arises as to how much is figurative and how much is literal in historical grammatical prose?
19. Hal Lindsey, who portrays himself as a conservative Bible teacher, insists that you have to interpret prophecy literally if you are going to be faithful to the Bible. But then he went on to find Cobra attack helicopters in Scripture as he tried to interpret the locust in Revelation 9:7. *“And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.”*

Hal Lindsey wrote in *There’s A New World Coming, A Prophetic Odyssey* (Santa Ana, California, Vision House, 1973). p. 8:

“How could this first-century man describe the scientific wonders of the latter twentieth century? He had to illustrate them with phenomena of the first century; for instance, a thermonuclear war looked to him like a giant volcanic eruption spewing fire and brimstone... Much of the symbolism John used was the result of a first century man being catapulted in God’s time machine up to the end of the twentieth century, then returned to his own time and commanded to write what he had seen and heard. The only way that John could obey that instruction was to use phenomena with which he was familiar to illustrate the scientific and technical marvels that he predicts. Some writers have chosen to interpret each symbol quite literally. For example, a locust with the face of a man, the teeth of a lion, a breastplate of iron, a tail that can sting, and wings that make the sound of many chariots would have to be specially created by God to look just like that description. I personally tend to think that God might utilize in his judgments some modern devices of man which the Apostle John was at a loss for words to describe nineteen centuries ago! In the case just mentioned, the locusts might symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter. This is just one example of the fast-moving, contemporary, and often deductive manner in which I have chosen to approach the Book of Revelation. I realize I’ll be accused by some of making wild speculations...”

20. In his book, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, Dr. R. C. Sproul summarizes the various positions regarding the Millennium.

- Premillennialism teaches there will be a future, earthly millennial kingdom that will begin when Christ returns to earth before (pre) the millennium is established.

***Special Note.***

There are two distinct forms of premillennialism competing with each other.

- ❖ There is the Dispensational form of Premillennialism with its particular scheme of understanding the prophesies of the Bible. This System argues that many promises made to Israel in the Old Testament will be given to the modern state of Israel after the Rapture or Removal of the Church and after a seven year tribulation period. They look for a literal Temple to be built and reinstatement of the sacrificial offerings. The basis for Dispensational Premillennialism is that God has two plans, two people, and two destinies. There is a plan for the church and there is a plan for national Israel and never the two shall meet. There is a redemption plan for Israel and a redemption plan for the church.
- There is the Historic or Classical form of Premillennialism which teaches that Christ will come to earth to rule and reign, bodily and visibly over the nations of the earth, with Israel being exalted among the nations, but there need be no rebuilt temple or reinstated sacrifices.
- The Amillennial position teaches that there will be no literal millennial as that set forth by the premillennialist advocated. Care must be taken with the Amillennial position for the prefix, “a” meaning no-millennial does not exactly represent what is being advocated. A Realized Millennial would be a better term. The concept is embraced that the rule and reign of Christ is a current reality that will extend into the eternal future. The reign of Christ will be made more manifest at the Lord’s Second Advent but even now Jesus Christ is Savior, Priest, Prophet, and King.
- The Post-millennial position teaches that Christ will return after the world is evangelized and the nations are Christianized. This view is the most optimistic view of eschatology for according to its scheme the gospel will prevail in converting the world to Christ and then, after the millennial, the Lord shall return.

21. Returning to the Dispensational view of prophesy there are eight facets that mark its distinctiveness.

- Christ offered the Jews the Kingdom of David in the first century, but the Jews rejected that offer. Therefore, the Kingdom of David was postponed until some time in the future.

***Special Note.***

The Bible teaches just the opposite. The Jews offered Christ the crown but He rejected them. *John 6:15* *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.*

- Because the kingdom of David has been postponed God raised up the church to exist until it is Raptured. Then the prophetic time clock will start ticking again as God gives to Israel seven years of human history which He “owes” them according to Daniel 9. When the Church age ends the Jewish age will resume for seven years and then will come the Millennium.

***Special Note.***

The reason why Dispensational Theological is called that is because the founders and developers of this novel system divided all of Biblical history into seven dispensations. Mr. Scofield defined a dispensation as a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.

- ❖ The Dispensation of Innocency: before the Fall
- ❖ The Dispensation of Conscience: before the Flood
- ❖ The Dispensation of Human Government
- ❖ The Dispensation of Promise: from the calling of Abraham until Mt. Sinai
- ❖ The Dispensation of the Law: from Mt. Sinai to the cross of Christ
- ❖ The Dispensation of Grace: from the cross of Christ to the Second Advent
- ❖ The Dispensation of the Kingdom: the Millennium

***Special Note.***

The Dispensation of Grace or the Church Age is actually a parenthesis in the plan of God. It is sometimes called the Intercalation Age because it has been inserted into the Jewish Age for a time.

Age of the Law (Church Age) + Conclusion of Age of the Law + Millennial

***Special Note.***

American theologian, teacher, and Reformed writer Dr. Loraine Boettner (1901-1990) found danger in this analysis of Biblical history. "These dispensations are regarded not as stages in one single organic development, but as distinct and mutually exclusive, or even as opposed to each other. This practice of dividing the Bible into parts, and setting one part against the others, means for instance, that in the Dispensation of the Law there was no grace, and during the Dispensation of Grace there is no law. The plan of salvation as set forth in the Bible is one organic whole, revealing a marvellous and profound unity. It cannot be split up into contradictory parts, much less into seven mutually exclusive dispensations" (*The Millennium*, Loraine Boettner).



- At this point Christ will call fire down from heaven to judge His enemies. A general resurrection will take place. A final eternal order will be ushered in.

22. In contrast to the Dispensational System is the Historical premillennial position with several distinct points.

- The New Testament Church is the initial phase of Christ's kingdom as foretold by the Old Testament prophets.
- The New Testament Church gains initial victories in history but ultimately fails in her mission, loses influence, becomes corrupted, as worldwide evil grows towards the end of the Church Age.
- The Church will pass through an unprecedented time of travail, known as the great tribulation, that will punctuate the end of history.
- At the end of the Tribulation, Christ will return, rapture His church, resurrect the saints, and conduct the judgment of righteousness in the twinkling of eye.
- Christ will rule with His saints, fight the Battle of Armageddon, and establish a kingdom that He will rule for a thousand years from the city of Jerusalem.
- At the end of the Millennial reign, Satan will be loosed and fight against the kingdom of Christ. God will intervene to rescue Jesus and the saints. This will be followed by the resurrection and judgment of the wicked.

23. The Amillennial position contends for the following.

- The Church Age is the age prophesied in the Old Testament as the New Testament Church becomes the Israel of God.
- Satan is now bound for he was restrained while the gospel was being preached to the world. *Matthew 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. 29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house.*
- Because Christ rules in the hearts of believers, the church will have some influence on the culture, but the culture shall not be wholly transformed.
- Towards the end, the church will know great tribulation as the world grows increasingly evil.
- Christ will return to end history, resurrect and judge the dead, and establish an eternal order. There will be an eternal heaven to enjoy or a renovated earth.

24. The Post Millennial position has several features.

- The Messianic kingdom of Christ was formed on earth during the ministry of Christ in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.
- The Church is Israel.

*Special Note.*

- ❖ The Church is referred to as “the twelve tribes”. *James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*
- ❖ Members of the Church are called the children of Abraham. *Galatians 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*
- ❖ In Christ, Jew and Gentile have a common unity. *Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*
- ❖ The work of Christ at Calvary was for the “church”, the *ekklesia*, the called out ones from Adam to the last person to be saved. *Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*
- The kingdom of God is redemptive and it is spiritual rather than political.
- The kingdom will exercise a transformation in society to the point that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of God. *Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*
- The kingdom will expand without His physical presence though not without His spiritual presence and power. *Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*
- The Great Commission will succeed.

Jude 24-25

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,  
and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,  
25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power,  
both now and ever. Amen.”