

Various Millennial Views

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Introduction

Revelation 20 refers to the millennium, i.e., a period of a thousand years, during which Satan is bound and Christ reigns with the martyred saints (Rev. 20:1-6). How should this language be understood?

In this lesson, we shall examine various millennial views: Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism. Premillennialism affirms that Christ will return before the start of His 1,000 year earthly reign. Postmillennialism asserts that Christ will return at the end of His 1,000 year earthly reign. In contrast, amillennialism advances a symbolic understanding of the 1,000 year reign of Christ.

Premillennialism

Defined

Premillennialism affirms that Christ will return before the start of His 1,000 year earthly reign. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines premillennialism as “the view that Christ’s return will usher in a future millennium of Messianic rule mentioned in Revelation.” This word came into common usage circa 1883, a time of intense speculation about Biblical eschatology.

Premillennialists say that Jesus came to establish an earthly kingdom, but He was unexpectedly rejected. He returned to the Father and, as an afterthought or substitute measure, set up the church instead. Nevertheless, the Lord will establish his millennial kingdom at His Second Coming.

Biblical Critique

Jesus was not surprisingly rejected (Acts 2:22-23; 1 Pet. 1:17-21). The church was not an afterthought (Acts 20:28; Eph. 3:8-11). The “church” and “kingdom” are equivalent (Matt. 16:16-19; Acts 14:21-23). God’s kingdom is spiritual in nature (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:33-36). The kingdom prophecies were fulfilled (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1).

Postmillennialism

Defined

Postmillennialism asserts that Christ will return at the end of His 1,000 year earthly reign. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines postmillennialism as “the theological doctrine that the second coming of Christ will occur after the millennium.” This word came into common usage in 1879, an era when postmillennialism enjoyed greater popularity than it does today. It is often dismissed by its critics as the Christian version of the secular idea of material progress.

Biblical Critique

Postmillennialism has a utopian outlook of humanity (Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Tim. 3:13-15). It has an unrealistic view of the gospel and its acceptance by mankind (Luke 8:4-15; Rom. 1:16-17). It does not address the problem of apostasy (2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). It takes a speculative approach toward Scripture (Rev. 20:1-6). It mistreats symbolic numbers in Revelation (Rev. 1:1; 13:18).

Amillennialism

Defined

In contrast with the aforementioned positions, amillennialism advances a symbolic understanding of the 1,000 year reign of Christ. *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary* defines amillennialism as “In eschatology, the symbolic and non-literal interpretation of the millennium and other related concepts which states that the millennium is not a literal future event, but symbolizes Christ's presence in the church between his first and second advents.”

Amillennialism rejects the theory that Jesus Christ will reign on the physical throne of David in the actual city of Jerusalem for a literal thousand years. Instead, it affirms that the thousand years of Revelation 20, like all other numbers in the Apocalypse, is a symbolic number, and should be understood accordingly. In contrast with the premillennial and postmillennial positions, which affirm that the reign of Christ lies in the future, amillennialists believe that the reign of Christ has already begun, and is a present reality.

Biblical Critique

Jesus Christ is presently reigning from heaven (Acts 2:22-36; Eph. 1:18-23). Jesus Christ established His church/kingdom on the first day of Pentecost following His resurrection (Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-4; 8:4-5, 12; 14:19-23; 20:25-28; etc.). The 1,000 year reign of Christ, described only in Revelation 20:1-6, began with the overthrow of the Roman Empire, and will continue until the end of time. The kingdom is a present reality (Col. 1:13-18; Heb. 12:22-29). Numbers in poetic/apocalyptic sections of Scripture are symbolic (Psa. 50:10-11; 105:8; Hos. 8:11-12; Rev. 18:8; 18:10; 2:10; 20:1-2, 6).

Conclusion

Let us rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:14-15; 2 Pet. 3:14-16). Let us correctly understand apocalyptic language (Matt. 24:15-16; Rev. 13:18). Let us obey the commands of Scripture (Acts 2:37-38, 46-47; Rev. 7:13-17).

Sources:

G. T. Kurian, *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), s.v. "Amillennialism."

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed., (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, c1993, 1966).