

Eschatology- Evangelical Positions on the Return of Christ—Millennial Positions

Summary The Positions taken by evangelical believers on the return of Christ are basically three: **Premillennialism, Postmillennialism and Amillennialism**. The name of each position flows from how they treat the term “thousand years” in Revelation 20: 1- 7 and how the Coming of Christ relates to it.

The Essentials of Premillennialism

Thumbnail sketch—The coming of Christ is before the millennium.

Varieties of Premillennialism: That of the early church, Dispensational Premillennialism; Progressive Premillennialism; Historical Premillennialism.

Expanded understanding:

The millennium is that period of time between the two resurrections mentioned in Revelation 20: 4-5. The two “coming to life’s” are the **bodily resurrections** of (1) the dead believers in Christ (made righteous by faith in Jesus, and His death burial and resurrection for our sins) coming to life and (2) the resurrection of the rest of mankind: the unbelievers. Christ’s return comes just before this so His Return is premillennial.

Christ comes back to this earth *visibly*, as He said in Acts 1:11, before the thousand years described in Revelation 20:1-7 begins. **He brings on the earthly millennium.**

To prepare the way for it, Christ, the Messiah comes in a historical judging of the nations, then under the authority of the Antichrist, a world ruler who opposes God, His Christ, and His people.

So there is **a sequential chronology** as Jesus Christ, the Rider on the white horse in Rev. 19:11 ff comes from heaven to earth. We know the Rider is Christ because He is called “Faithful and True”, His apocalyptic description, given in 19:12-16 matches that given in chapter 1. , Furthermore His Name is the Word of God, the armies of Heaven follow Him, Out of His mouth comes the double edged sword with which to strike down the nations (vs 15), and on His Robe and on His thigh are written King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The victory of that battle includes the casting of the beast and his false prophet into the lake of burning sulfur.

But **Satan**, also known as the dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil is not yet thrown into that lake at that time. He is **bound and cast into the Abyss for a thousand years** to keep him from deceiving the nations during the millennial reign of Christ and His saints.

The millennium is characterized by the righteous reign of Christ and His saints centered in Jerusalem. The rule is with a “rod of iron” in which evil is not permitted to express itself. Righteous rule of Christ and His saints prevails. The condition of nature is also transformed (see OT passages like Isaiah 65), human life spans are increased, ... The as yet unfulfilled earthly promises-prophecies to Israel are fulfilled.

The close of the millennium occurs as Satan is released to go out and deceive the nations into trying to destroy God’s people again. There follows the resurrection of the dead and the Great White Throne judgment of the wicked (Rev. 20:11-15).

The hermeneutic is basically literal: the normal sense of the words from the meaning of words, in their given context, in harmony with the whole context of Scripture.

Essentials of POSTMILLENNIALISM

Thumbnail sketch—Christ returns *after* the millennium.

Varieties of Postmillennialism: Basic Postmillennialism in which evangelism and discipleship involves individuals; Theonomic Postmillennialism in which, not only are individuals are evangelized, but the nations as government entities are also disciplined - sometimes in more forceful ways expressed in its degrees of dominion theology. Includes infrastructures as city councils , county, national and international governments.

Expanded understanding:

The “**thousand years** of Rev. 20:1-7” are to be **interpreted figuratively**. The Great Tribulation described in the Gospels and Revelation is viewed as Preterist, i.e. already past.

This clears the way for the steady progress of the Gospel. The tribulation period would have been fully completed by about AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. The Millennium is taken to be either as (1) the whole of church history between the first and second comings (advents) of Christ OR the period that slowly dawns when the density of conversions throughout the earth is such that righteousness prevails more and more. This is brought about by the Church as it evangelizes the world empowered by the Holy Spirit spreading the Gospel and as it disciplines the nations.

There may be “bumps” along the way but the trend is upward, victorious, optimistic. Satan was either bound at the time of Christ, or is being bound by the power of the Gospel throughout the centuries.

Many postmillennials hold we are **in the millennium right now**. At the completion of the “millennium” Christ returns, followed by a general judgment of all → eternal kingdom.

The hermeneutic is basically--

Augustine is claimed for the roots of this view in the 5th century after Rome was sacked by Alaric, the Visigoth. While things were improving in the world, this view began to flourish. Popularized by Daniel Whitby (1703), a Unitarian commentator. WWI & WWII virtually wiped it out. Culver doesn't even address this view in 1948-54.

Essentials of AMILLENNIALISM

Thumbnail sketch: there is no visible earthly millennium.

The “**a**” (Greek- alpha) is like the “**a**” in atheist (no god) or in the term anomaly (place or condition that works as if there was no given law there) . So, no millennium

on earth. There might be in heaven, or the millennium could be taken as Christ's rule in the hearts of believers.

Expanded view: The belief that there is no discernable earthly millennium. That the “came to life’s/resurrections” in Rev. 20 were two different kinds of “coming to life”: the first – is spiritual (rebirth), and the second—physical: an actual resurrection from the dead of all: the just and the unjust. ... The judgment of all people follows this bodily resurrection and the eternal destiny of each is declared by God and carried out . (See John 5:25, 29 “come to life”). There is no over-all trend on earth of godliness or ungodliness. Basically as evil increases, so does God’s grace, so the net effect is that neither visibly prevails.

Hermeneutic- is “spiritual”. By spiritual is meant that the understanding is determined by the NT church. Fulfillment of the OT prophecies may be very different from what the prophets who prophesied them may have understood or could have understood after studying what God gave them to say. Examples are given. The fulfillment of OT prophecies is done by the church which is the New Israel (“replacement theology”)

Augustine is also claimed as an early advocate. Satan is bound while the Gospel is preached. (see unless the strong man is bound...) . Revelation is not chronological, but section after section which is basically, a recapitulation of the whole thing. The kingdom is a present spiritual reality not a distant reality. (Jn 18: 36 “My Kingdom is not of this world...”) The resurrections differ, the second only being physical.

The word, ζαω ἐζήσαν 20: 4-5

Rev. 20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the **souls of those who had been beheaded** because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5** (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

Notice, spiritualizing the first, on the basis of John 5: doesn't work.

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. **25** I tell you the truth, a **time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26** For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. **27** And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

John 5:28 “Do not be amazed at this, for a **time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.**

Millennial views **And their position in the flow of Church History**

The first millennial beliefs of the church as far as we can tell is premillennial. Phillip Schaff, Ante Nicene Fathers p. 19 Ryrie ; Dreams, Visions & Oracles, The Layman's Guide to Biblical Prophecy, (Baker publishing) pp 177-185 "The Millennium in Christian Church History",

Didache c. 100 AD "And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first, the sign of an **outspreading in heaven**; then the sign of the **sound of the trump**; and the third, the **resurrection of the dead; yet not of all.**

Clement of Rome AD 96-97 to the church of Corinth, "Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the scriptures also bear witness, saying "**Speedily will be He come and will not tarry:**" **and the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One for whom ye look.**" (To the Corinthians XXIII)

The Shepherd of Hermas. Written between 140 and 150 AD

You have escaped from **great tribulation** on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt the presence of such a beast. Go therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. FN #7 p. 20 Ryrie, Visions, I, IV, a (Berkhoff, an Amillennialist admits he was pre-mil FN #8 Reformed Dogmatics, p. 270,).

Barnabas, (fm summary in Ryrie, pp. 20-21) "Barnabas believed that the history of this world would be consummated after six thousand years. These six days, as he called them, were to be **concluded by the return of Christ to the earth at which time He would set up His Kingdom on the earth for the seventh day of a thousand years** of sabbath rest. During this time the **temple was to be rebuilt by the servants of God's enemies** and afterward the eighth day would begin the new world. FN #9 Chapter XV. Notice, no room for amillennial eschatology.

Ignatius of Antioch, (dies abt 115 A.D.) references he cites are understood by many writers to be in correspondence with chiliasm, for he refers to the "**last times**" and emphasizes the attitude of expectancy.(Ryrie p. 21 ref Peters, the Theocratic Kingdom, I, 495.)

Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (80-163) described the millennial fertility in superlative language as follows; "The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and in every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine. FN #11

"in another place he declares that **there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead "when the personal reign of Christ will be established on the earth."** FN #12 Fragment IV.

Justin Martyr, (born c 100 A.D.) is an avowed premillennialist. He placed great importance on this hope and regarded the expectation of the earthly perfection of **Christ's kingdom as the keystone of pure doctrine**. He spoke of the Coming of Christ as preceded by the **manifestation of the man of sin who would speak blasphemies against the most high God and who would rule three and a half years**. In his *Dialogue cum Tryphone* he writes:

But I and whoever are on all points right-minded Christians know that **there will be resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and the others declare. . . .**

And, further, a certain man with us, named **John, one of the Apostles of Christ, predicted by a revelation** that was made to him that those who believe in our Christ would spend **a thousand years in Jerusalem, and thereafter the general, or to speak briefly, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place**. FN #13

Irenaeus, (bishop of Lyons -are of today's France,) d. 200 AD., came in contact with **apostolic teaching through his friend Polycarp**. Thus the basis for his chiliastic beliefs is the teaching of the **Apostle John and his disciples**. Intricate detail characterizes his eschatological system. He says:

"But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem ; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who followed him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared that "many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," . . .

The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the **righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead**. " FN #14 pp 12-13

Tertullian. Tertullian (150-225) was undoubtedly a premillenarian also, for he says:

"But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem. FN #15 Against Marcion , III, XXV.

Until Constantine (AD 272-337) becoming emperor, and his change of policy in 330 (?) persecution stopped, Christianity was ok as a belief.

Under the influence of Donatist Tichonius, (millennium from first advent till the return of Christ) and then especially Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in his City of God (AD 413-426) Bk XX, chapters 6-15, → Millennium could be the last 1000 years before the consummation, or the entire period of world history because of 1000 is ten cubed... Culver p. 198 **Daniel and the Latter Days**.

The shift in hermeneutics in church history.

NeoPlatonism--

Origen

Augustine

Key areas of importance

Date of the Writing of Revelation—witness and persecutions in history, Roman Emperors

Apocalyptic--

OT Apocalyptic of Daniel—Importance

They came to life and resurrection Revelation 20: 4-5; John 5: 19-29

Hermeneutics and the flow of history—Literal, NeoPlatonism

Historical positions

The Nature of the Kingdom

Son of Man

Preterism

Eschatos

The Importance of the Seven Churches

Great Tribulation

Antichrist

The Restrainer

The Apostacy

Parousia

Recapitulation and chronological progression

Rapture

Variations in Millennial positions

“soon”

Generation versus race

Daniel and Seventy-Sevens

Effect of the EFCA SOF #9