

## **Chapter 5**

### **Four Millennial Views**

The wisest man who ever lived said, "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him" (Proverbs 18:17 NIV). Nowhere is this concept more applicable than in the study of eschatology. It is easy to be confident in our eschatology, until we examine another's view.

Since one of our goals should be to understand the future as a guide for the present, the more accurately we understand the future, the more effective we can be now in our work of preparation. Hopefully the previous chapter has been sufficiently convincing of at least two points: 1) the future can be known, and 2) we should seek to know it. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a basic understanding of the differing views that exist regarding the future. [1]

As we look at these differing views and see the similarities, one has to wonder, "Why all the fuss? Is it just a matter of the exact order of things?" But the real issue is not so much what we believe about the timing of these things, though God certainly has a pattern of times and seasons, but certain doctrines, attitudes, and practices that can spring from, or traditionally go along with the different views. [2] Again, all action (or the lack thereof) is the result of corresponding thoughts or beliefs.

Admittedly, this chapter will only provide a shallow overview. This is a huge topic which can easily move from conversation to controversy. The point should also be made that none of these views disqualifies a person from being a Christian. There are very credible people who have done extensive research in each view and valuable insights can be gained from studying their different perspectives. This is an area where brothers can disagree agreeably and, as we seek to know the future, we should remember it is not fully known by anyone. [3] Therefore, let us humbly seek God's guidance. But having said that, I do not pretend to be neutral. I have a particular view, the Historic Premillennial View, that I believe is most biblical and will seek to explain why.

#### **Four General Views**

For the sake of simplicity, I have broken the different views down into four general groups or "camps." These are:

1. The Amillennial (Amil) View
2. The Postmillennial (Postmil) View
3. The Escape Premillennial View
4. The Historic Premillennial View [4]

The issue of millennial views revolves around the timing of Christ's return as it relates to the thousand-year period (the millennium) spoken of in Revelation Chapter Twenty. [5] We will

see that Historic Premillennialists seem to have more in common with some Postmillennialists than with the Escapist Premillennialists. However, by strict definition of terms, these four views can be divided into two general categories:

1) Premillennialists expect a literal period of 1000 years on this earth which begins with the return of Jesus Christ. During this time, they expect Satan will be bound and Jesus will establish His kingdom and rule the planet. [6] At the end of this period, there will be a final judgment, a new heaven and a new earth.

2) Amillennialists and Postmillennialists spiritualize the 1000-year period and thus view it as a symbolic reference to an indefinite period of time, which started at Christ's first coming, is taking place now and ends with His second coming. [7] This view therefore expects the return of Jesus after the millennial period. First we will briefly look at the Amil and the Postmil views.

### **Amillennial View**

As stated above, in this view there is no literal millennium on earth, thus the prefix "a" in the word Amillennial. The Amillennialist understands the millennium in an allegorical sense and believes it is taking place right now in the heavenly or spiritual realm. The saints who have preceded us are understood to be enjoying the Kingdom of God in heaven. They also understand the Kingdom of God to be on earth now within us, but just needs to be realized by the church. Instead of literal, this is a spiritualized view of the millennium. Some in this camp prefer the term "realized millennium" instead of Amillennial. [8] The end of this age is generally expected to be characterized by the gospel being preached to the ends of the earth, increased tribulation, and the rise of the Antichrist before Christ returns. Christ will return at the end of this spiritualized millennium and then there will be the resurrection of both the just and the unjust being raised at the same time, the judgment, and a new heaven and a new earth.

The idea of having to "realize" that the kingdom is with us now, in my opinion, makes this view a likely place for "kingdom now" theology which has received severe criticism from mainstream Christianity. I disagree with "kingdom now" theology, as I understand it. However, I find that there is no consistent definition. Those who criticize it often use general and sweeping terms that could apply to virtually anyone who disagrees with them. I find that there is an element of truth to the point that the kingdom of God exists now, but it is only a taste of the powers of the age to come as referred to in Hebrews 6:5. The full manifestation of the Kingdom of God can only come to pass when Jesus is bodily present.

### **Postmillennial View**

In the Postmillennial view, much like the Amillennial view, the thousand-year period is also seen as an indefinite period of time taking place now. The difference, though still similar, is that instead of realizing that the kingdom is now, postmillennialists believes the kingdom must be gradually ushered in. In the postmillennial view, the authority Christians have been given to make disciples of the nations will result in increasing influence until all the nations and their civil governments are "christianized," ushering in a golden age operating under biblical law. [9] In this golden age (millennium) sin, poverty, social problems and evil, in general, are not totally

abolished, but held to very negligible levels while the whole world is ruled by Christian principles. Once the Church has established this dominion over the earth, the return of Christ is expected. The resurrection of the just and the unjust (at the same time) will occur; then the judgment, followed by a new heaven and a new earth.

In my opinion, this view becomes a likely place for what has been called dominion theology. Dominionism, a view I also disagree with, has been sharply criticized by many. This is why it was important to carefully define Christian Biblical Dominion in Chapter Four. However, given the previously expressed need for Christian involvement in the political arena, I see a lot of common ground with the political work of many postmillennialists.

There are exceptions, but the Postmillennialist tends to lean more toward an intellectual approach with an emphasis on civil government, while the Amillennial view tends to lean more toward the mystical. While postmillennialists and amillennialists both view the 1000 year period in a non-literal way, the postmillennial view tends to see the kingdom of God in a more literal way on earth. Dominion theology seems to be defined more consistently, but some critics seem to describe "kingdom now" and "dominion" theology in a way that essentially lumps them into one.

### **Premillennial View in General**

Now we look to Premillennialism, which views the millennium as a literal period of 1000 years during which Christ will rule on this earth. It also recognizes two resurrections: a resurrection of the just at the beginning of the millennium and a resurrection of the unjust at the end of the millennium according to Revelation Chapter 20. The thousand-year period is seen as the period of restoration of all things (see Acts 3:21) where immortal saints will rule the earth with Christ in His Kingdom. Not all people are expected to be Christian during the millennium, but Satan will be bound, unable to deceive the nations. Jesus Christ will rule the earth with a rod of iron, resulting in an age of great peace (see Rev 19:15). Battles to subdue the nations at the beginning of this period are expected as part of Christ's judgment.

Now let's look at the main two views within the premillennialism:

- 1) The Escape Rapture View and
- 2) the Historic View.

Both versions of premillennialism believe that the thousand-year millennium is a literal period of time that begins at Jesus' second coming or shortly thereafter. But the implications of a church that is leaving the planet to escape a tribulation period just prior to Christ's second coming, versus a church that is sticking around, are far reaching and have a very significant part to play in establishing the Kingdom Paradigm. [10]

### **Escape Rapture Premillennial View**

The escape rapture view is part of a broader theology known as dispensationalism. Dispensationalists usually make a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church as two different peoples and expect a "two-stage" second coming of Christ. In the first stage, Christians are expected to be rescued from the earth in the rapture before a period of intense tribulation. During this tribulation, when the Holy Spirit is supposedly removed from the earth, the nation of

Israel is to be saved. Christ is then expected to return to earth with all the saints who were raptured or had previously died, to destroy the Antichrist and set up His Kingdom on earth for a thousand years. After this literal thousand-year period, the second resurrection and a new heaven and a new earth is expected.

### **Historic Premillennial View**

The Historic Premillennial view (also known as the classic view) agrees with the view that Christ will return at the beginning of the thousand-year period (millennium). This period is seen as a literal period when Christ will rule the world as a literal King. However, there is a very important difference. In the Historic view the second coming of Christ happens in one stage, not two, and the Church does not leave the planet at Christ's coming. [11] Those who see the great tribulation as a central issue often refer to the historic view as the "post-trib pre-mill" view.

The Historic Premillennial is the view that was held by the most respected early church fathers and is the view that I believe to be the most accurate. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to making this point.

### **The Millennium: Allegorical vs Literal**

As we begin to sort out these views, let's first consider the two different ways in which the millennium is perceived. As already pointed out, the postmillennial and the amillennial tend to view the millennium in an allegorical or symbolic sense, while premillennialists view it as literal. These two views became an issue as early as the 2nd century, if not sooner. Paul's warning to Timothy regarding Hymenaeus and Philetus, who taught that the resurrection had already taken place, may have been related to this issue.

#### **2 Timothy 2:17-18 (NKJV)**

17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,  
18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

To teach that the resurrection had already taken place must have been a reference to the first resurrection since the final judgment had obviously not taken place. It seems plausible then, that Hymenaeus and Philetus viewed the first resurrection in an allegorical or spiritualized way since they taught that it had already taken place, possibly during water baptism. It would therefore follow that their view of the kingdom of God in the millennium would also be viewed in the same way, not literal.

The literal view of the millennial Kingdom of God on earth is an extension of Israelite thought. The early Christians were all Hebrew/Jewish and did not see themselves as starting a new religion. They saw themselves as fulfilling the scriptures just as Moses and the prophets had taught and continuing on with God's plan. They had a very literal view of things and understood that the kingdom would be restored to Israel and Jesus would rule the world from Jerusalem (see Acts 1:6; Luke 19:11). [12]

As a result they continued celebrating the annual Hebrew feasts and taught that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth as a literal government at the second coming of

the Messiah. Apart from Jesus being the Messiah, the apostles and early church held the same general views as the orthodox Jews. This included the idea of a literal kingdom being restored to Israel by the Messiah as shown by a conversation Justin the Martyr (100 AD-165 AD) had with a Jewish Rabi named Trypho. Trypho asked Justin:

"...do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came?"

— Dialogue With Trypho, Chapter LXXX

Justin's replied clearly established his position and belief that there would be a literal 1000 year reign of Christ in a rebuilt Jerusalem at the resurrection:

"I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place...But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.... And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place. Just as our Lord also said,

— Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter LXXX, LXXXI

So, where did the idea of an allegorical or spiritualized millennium come from? Though it may have been an issue earlier, it was openly promoted by the 3rd Century Theologian Origen (185AD-254AD), who grew up in Alexandria and was heavily influenced by the Greek method of allegorical interpretation. [13] He viewed the Kingdom of God as being in heaven and not on earth which would align closely with amillennial thought today.

Another who promoted the idea of a spiritualized millennium was the Roman historian Eusebius (263AD-339AD), the bishop of Caesarea. Like Origen, Eusebius was a strong opponent to the idea of a literal messianic kingdom on this earth. He also embraced the heresy promoted by Arius of Alexandria. The Arian heresy was the belief that God had not always been a Father, and that there was a time when the Son was not.

Eusebius was a contemporary of and enjoyed the favor of the Roman Emperor Constantine, who had proclaimed Christianity to be the state religion of Rome after his conversion to Christianity. Though Constantine and Eusebius disagreed on the Arian issue, they seemed to be in agreement on the idea of a spiritualized or allegorical millennium. After all, why would an emperor, who wanted to rule the world from Rome promote the idea and prepare for a different king to rule the world from Jerusalem? This backdrop reveals a possible motive for why the new state religion of Rome was not compatible with the idea of a literal kingdom of God coming to earth. Constantine's conversion may have had less to do with genuine submission to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and more to do with gaining control over Christianity which had continued to grow, regardless of how much Rome had persecuted it. [14]

This also sheds light on why Constantine, Eusebius, and others had such a hatred for the Jews and why they sought to strip the church of anything that appeared Jewish, which included rejecting the feasts of the Lord, setting up new Christian holidays, and changing the times and seasons for these holidays. They promoted Christianity as a new religion completely separate from the teachings of Judaism. In a letter to the churches, regarding establishing a uniform time to celebrate Easter discussed at the Nicean Counsel, Constantine wrote:

“... it seemed to everyone a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, polluted wretches! having stained their hands... It is fit, therefore, that, rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this rite, [Easter] in a more legitimate order, ... Let us have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews. We have received another method from the Savior. A more lawful and proper course is open to our most holy religion.”<sup>1</sup>

This twisted opinion expressed by Constantine is a direct rejection of the Word of God and reflects the exact opposite of the Apostle Paul’s heart toward the Jews:

**Romans 9:1-5 (NKJV)**

1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,  
2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.  
3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,  
4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;  
5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

It was not the Jews in general who killed Jesus. His disciples and the vast majority of those who followed Him were Jews. Those responsible for killing Him were a few reprobate religious leaders in Israel who had departed from the laws and teachings of Moses. We know that the Law, is a shadow of things to come. By nature, the shadow moves with the object and bears its resemblance. Therefore, to deny the shadow is to deny the object. And, to deny the shadow, those things that teach about the Messiah, is to deny the Messiah. This is what was taking root through the antisemitic teachings of many of the third and fourth century churches, including the council of Nice, which established a uniform date for Easter and denied the biblical pattern for Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits. [14] This is not to say that Christians today who celebrate Easter and know little of the feasts of the Lord have denied Christ. But there is much to learn about Christ by watching His shadow in Jewish practices. What we can see is a root motive behind antisemitism and why many Christians are realizing the need to understand and align with Jewish patterns and principles.

**Summary of the Four Views**

Building a theo-political paradigm that encourages Christians to be involved and take

responsibility in the politics of this world is a central theme of this book. Therefore, I will summarize the four millennial views as they relate to political action. I realize that generalizing always seems to misrepresent someone. Sorry. Nevertheless, I will generally summarize the four general views this way:

*Postmillennial View:* We will establish the Kingdom gradually through preaching the gospel and expanding Christian influence then Jesus Returns. This view tends toward possible political oppression in the name of Christ.

*Amillennial View:* The Kingdom is not literal on earth, it exists now in a heavenly sense; we must realize it. This view tends toward being mystically detached from the politics of this world.

*Escape Premillennial View:* The Kingdom will come to earth after I leave and spend an extended time in heaven. This view tends toward a “Why polish brass on a sinking ship” mentality. It also tends toward being mystically detached from the politics of this world.

*Classic/Historic Premillennial View:* The Kingdom is real now just as Jesus is real, but it is invisible. It will appear as the government of this planet when Jesus appears. We need to understand the Lord’s strategy because we are dynamically engaged with Him in preparing the way for the Kingdom which includes stewardship in the area of civil government.

### **Paradigm Builder**

The literal view of the Kingdom of God ruling the earth for a thousand years with its center in Jerusalem is an extension of Israelite thought. This is one reason why Satan has attempted to exterminate Jews and erase their influence from the planet.

Before reading this chapter, how would you describe your position regarding this concept?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

How would you describe your position regarding this concept after reading this chapter?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

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<sup>1</sup> From a letter by Constantine, Boyle, *A Historical View of the Counsel of Nice*, p. 52, included in the back of *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History*, Baker Book House.