

MILLENNIALISM

Central to and at the very heart of the "Thousand Year Reign of Christ" issue is whether the Scriptures are to be fulfilled literally or merely symbolically.

POSTMILLENNIALISTS: believe that through preaching the Gospel the whole world will be Christianized and brought to submission to the Lord *before* the return of Christ Jesus. Thus the moral, spiritual condition of the world is to gradually get better and better whereupon the Church, having converted mankind, will present the Kingdom to Christ upon His return at the end of the millennium. Then there is to be one resurrection of all the dead followed immediately by one judgment before which all shall appear. The inherent weakness of postmillennialism is that it is based on spiritualizing the meaning of Scripture rather than interpreting it literally. Failing to fit the facts of history, World War II brought about the demise of this system. Mankind was obviously not getting better after 2,000 years of the Gospel message. As amillennialism depends on the same spiritualizing principle of interpretation and viewed the millennium as an inter-advent era preceding the Second Coming, postmillennialist shifted to the amillennial view shortly thereafter.

AMILLENNIALISTS: hold that there will be no literal future millennium or "Thousand Year Reign" on the earth following the Second Coming of Christ. Their view is that all the prophecies concerning the kingdom are being spiritually fulfilled now during this period between the first and second comings through the Church [either by the saints in heaven (e.g., B.B. Warfield) or the Church on earth]. That is, for them the millennial kingdom is here and now. This is the promised Kingdom. They hold that Christ will come after this so-called present millennium. Like the Postmillennialists, they believe there will then be one resurrection of all the dead followed immediately by one judgment before which all shall appear. Amillennialism is the position of the Roman Catholic cult. Amillennialists differ from Postmillennialists in that they, in general, have a more pessimistic view of the course of the world down to the Second Coming of Christ.

PREMILLENNIALISTS: hold that Christ will return to the earth, literally and bodily, *before* the millennial age begins and that He will personally institute an earthly kingdom over which He will reign. During this thousand year kingdom, all of Israel's covenants will be literally fulfilled. After the thousand years, the Son will give this kingdom to the Father and it will then merge with His eternal kingdom. Premillennialists agree with the Amillennialists that during the course of the world down to the second coming of Christ mankind will become more wicked and rebellious toward God and his fellow man. They also believe that: (1) at the Second Coming of Christ there will be a resurrection of the saints only, (2) at His Coming Christ will destroy all the wicked who are alive at that time, (3) the righteous will enter the Millennium to people the earth during that thousand year reign of Christ, (4) the glorified saints of all former ages will join with a restored Israel in ruling the world during the Millennium, and (5) at the close of the Thousand Year Kingdom, the resurrection and final judgment of all the wicked will take place.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY: Premillennialism was the position the early church held with unanimity.¹ It was supplanted through the influence of Origen's allegorizing method of interpretation by Augustinian amillennialism. Becoming the viewpoint of the Roman church, amillennialism continued to dominate until the Protestant Reformation which brought about a return to the literal method of interpretation and thus a return to premillennialism. This was later challenged by the rise of postmillennialism, a system largely attributed to the efforts of Daniel Whitby (1638-1726, a Unitarian who was denounced as a heretic). Postmillennialism came into ascendancy after the time of Whitby and continued until its rapid decline after WW II. This decline brought about the rise of amillennialism which now competes with premillennialism as the method of interpreting the doctrine of the millennium or Thousand Year Kingdom age (see "chiliasm"). The premillennial interpretation was systematized and popularized by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a Plymouth Brethren, but it did not originate with him as is often erroneously reported.

¹ See an extensive list of the early premillennial advocates compiled by George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 3 Vols., (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1952), Vol. I, pp. 482-483; also found in J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 374-377. Among them are Clement of Rome (c.40-100 AD), Barnabas (c.40-100 AD), Hermas (c.40-140 AD), Ignatius (c.50-115 AD), Polycarp (c.70-167 AD), Papias (c.80-163 AD), Justyn Martyr (c.100-168 AD), Melito (c.100-170 AD), Tatian (c.130-190 AD), Irenaeus (c.140-202 AD), Tertullian, (c.150-220 AD), Hippolytus (c.160-240 AD), Cyprian (c.200-258 AD), Methodius (c.250-311 AD), and Lactantius (c.240-330 AD).

Some have concluded that the divine Kingdom of Daniel chapter 2 was established by Christ Jesus during His first coming and that the Kingdom is totally spiritual in nature.

According to this view, the Kingdom consists either of:

1. The Church – by the gradual process of conversion over the centuries, the Kingdom is eventually established through the spreading of the Gospel, i.e., The Church brings in the Kingdom and presents it to the Lord Jesus upon His return. In this scenario, Jesus can not return until the Church completes this task. Everything depends upon the Church.
2. The spiritual rule of Christ in human hearts – there will never be an actual physical Kingdom and throne on the earth.

They also teach that Christ and the Kingdom of God crushed the fourth Gentile kingdom as given in Daniel 2, and they maintain that this fourth kingdom was the ancient Roman Empire – and not a future "Revived Roman Empire".

Doctrinally, these people are known as Amillennialist.

However, such a destruction of the Gentile monarchy system did not occur at the First Advent of our Lord. To the contrary, He was put to death by the sentence of an officer of the Fourth Empire which was then at the zenith of its power.

Furthermore, the Smiting Stone destroys the Gentile world system (all governmental, commercial, and religious aspects) – in its final form – by a sudden, violent, irremediable blow. Then, and not before, does The Stone become a mountain which fills "the whole earth" (Dan.2:35). The Stone must not be identified with the Church for the simple reason that the task of the Church is never said in Scripture to be the destruction of the nations of the earth. Rather, the Church is told to proclaim the Gospel of Christ Jesus (Mat.28:18-20; Mk.16:15-20) and to "occupy" until He returns (Luk.19:13).

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