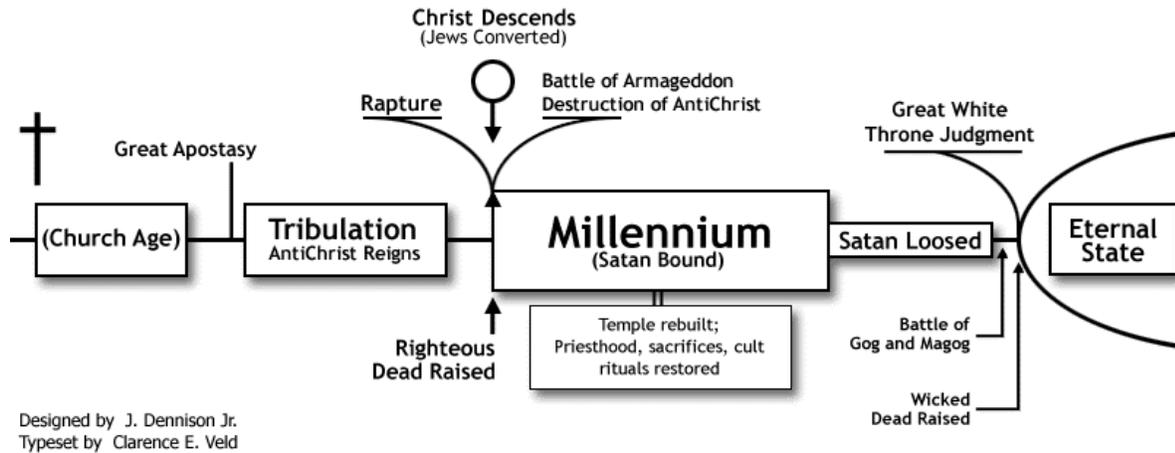


What Are The Difference In The Millennial Views?

Historical Premillennialism:¹



Historical Premillennialism

Books written by Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and other Premillennialist, assume that their philosophy about the return of Christ has always been the doctrine of the historical Church. Walvoord makes the following statement regarding the historical nature of premillennialism: "The testimony of history unites in one river of evidence that the theology of the Old and New Testament and the theology of the early church was not only premillennial, but that its premillennialism was practically undisputed except by heretics and skeptics until the time of Augustine. The coming of Christ as the prelude for the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness on earth in fulfillment of the Old Testament kingdom prophecies was the almost uniform expectation both of the Jews at the time of the incarnation and of the early church. This is essential premillennialism however it may differ in its details from its modern counterpart."²

Walvoord's statement about the differences between historical premillennialism and its modern counterparts is the key which will unveil the true concept of the early church's views on the return of Christ. History reveals that the views of the early church on the second coming of the Lord differ vastly from the views of modern Dispensational Premillennialism. Vos indicates that the point of departure lies in the "parousia" (the presence or second return of Christ). "The substance of the matter is that Chiliasm divides the eschatological future following upon the parousia into two distinct stages, the one of a temporary provisional, the other of an eternal, absolute character. The old traditional view of orthodox theology, and the current interpretation of Paul know of no such dualism in the eschatological prospect;

¹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/hispre.html>

² John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, Zondervan, 1973, p. 113-114

they make the eternal state, strictly so called, begin with the return of the Lord."³ In effect, Vos is stating that the early church viewed the chiliad as a time that would begin with the coming of Christ, which would usher in the eternal state of man, not a kingdom upon the earth.

The early church endured great persecutions, and the book of Revelation was written to comfort those early saints. Its message was that through Christ victory would come, even if Satan won a few battles. Their hope, then, was focused upon the victorious return of Christ and His victory over their present enemies. They believed that His coming, the parousia, would initiate the beginning of a new age of peace. The writings of the early saints during the first three centuries was towards this hope: the promised return of the victorious Christ. Some have interpreted these writings to imply a millennial period upon the earth, yet the majority of these writing are not specific on this point.

The impetus of this theology can be found in the hope for a better world. Their view of Revelation was that Christ would intervene, at the right moment, and bring about a change in world events. "... the essential apocalyptic message remained as the book taught the living hope of the immediate direct intervention of God to reverse history and to overcome evil with good. Such an outlook brought great comfort to believers who suffered from persecution by the forces of Imperial Rome. Expressed in a form that has been called historic premillennialism, this hope seems to have been the prevailing eschatology during the first three centuries of the Christian era, and is found in the works of Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Methodius, Commodianus, and Lactantius."⁴

Walvoord and other writers for premillennial views refer to statements made by Justin Martyr as proof that the early church believed in a millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. "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, as 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 there after the general and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place."⁵ Terry shows that this statement is contrary to the scriptures: "The old Chiliastic ideas of a restoration of all Israel at Jerusalem, and of Christ and his glorified saints literally sitting on thrones and reigning in visible material glory on the earth, are without warrant in this Scripture (**Rev. 20:1-7**). Nothing is here said about Jerusalem, or the Jews, or the Gentiles."⁶

There were opponents to this doctrine. From the pen of Paul until Augustine there were those who resisted the false doctrine of Chiliasm. It was not until a radical change in external circumstances and

³Geerhardus Vos, Op. cit., p. 228

⁴ Walter A. Elwell, Editor, Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology, Baker, p. 714).

⁵ M. Terry, a quote from Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 484

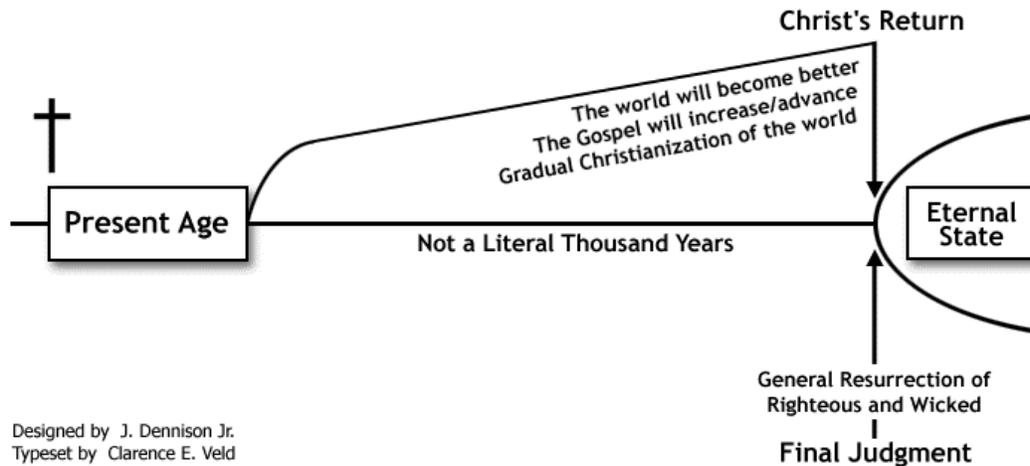
⁶ibid, p. 485

attitudes occurred that the doctrine of Chiliasm was finally consider a full heresy. This change occurred when Rome accepted Christianity. McClintock and Strong have an extensive statement regarding this change of attitude.

“Notwithstanding the extensive spreading of the millenarian tenet, it would be a rash inference to assume that it was universal, or accepted as the creed of the Church. On this point Neander has good observations (Ch. Hist., Torrey's transl., i. 651). The first decided opponent of whom we have a knowledge was Caius, the Roman presbyter, about the year 200. The crass from in which Chiliasm entered into the heresy of Montanism contributed materially to the strengthening of the antagonism to millenarian views. The Alexandrian school opposed them with energy, particularly Origen, with whose peculiar opinions it was inconsistent. ... It was still common, however, in the time of Jerome, who himself was one of its opponents. But gradually the tenet which has so widely prevailed became obnoxious and proscribed. One great reason of this remarkable change of sentiments is to be found in the altered condition and prospects of the Church. Christians at first yearned for the reappearance of the Lord. Moreover, it was impossible for them to raise their faith and hopes so high as to expect the conquest of the Roman empire by the moral power of the cross, independently of the personal and supernatural interposition of Christ. But as the Gospel make progress, the possibility and probability of a peaceful victory of the Christian cause over all its adversaries, by the might of truth and of the Spirit, gained a lodgment in the convictions of good men.”⁷

⁷McClintock and Strong, Cyclopedia Of Biblical, Theological, And Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol.VI, Baker, p. 265

Postmillennialism:⁸



Post-Millennium

This view, which had gained in popularity before the First World War, sees a gradual conversion of humanity through the spread of the Gospel. When the world has been converted, an era of peace will be known, and society purified by the Christian majority. This era of peace is what is foretold in the Old Testament and suggested in the image of the thousand years ("the Millennium"). Some postmillennials do expect an outburst of evil before Jesus returns.

Antithetical to the pre-mil view, the Post-Millennialists adheres to the notion that the thousand years is likely not a literal thousand years, but that the number is used symbolically in the Scriptures to indicate a lengthy period of time. The post-millennial position indicates the present reign and rulership of Christ through the church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. Postmillennialists are divided as to whether the millennial age begins abruptly or gradually. Some understand the millennial age to be entirely future, while most argue for it to begin some time during this present age. Postmillennialists also disagree as to the events that mark the beginning of the millennial age, such as the conversion of Israel (**Romans 9-11**), the binding of Satan (**Rev. 20**), and the defeat of the antichrist.

Although the thousand years is not literal, usually, in the post-mil view, it is a finite length of time in which the presence of God's grace in space and time through the Church gradually overwhelms and minimizes the presence of evil in the world. The predominance of the good culminates and is fulfilled in the second coming of Christ, who puts all things under his feet as a process, as a process of conversion, through the grace that presently exists in the church. This view believes that the Church will be more or less successful in converting the world, after which Christ will return. Some of the Puritans supported this position, indeed even today some Reformed people support it, but it lost considerable ground during the 20th century, which

⁸ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/post.html>

witnessed so many wars and conflicts and also the loss of influence of the Christian gospel. But it is not true to say that no Scriptures exist which could be said to support the position, but they are not abundant.

There is not biblical evidence that the nations of the earth as a whole will become Christianized. “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (**Luke 18:8**).

The Bible teaches that Christ will judge the nations when he returns because of their unbelief and hostility toward his kingdom (**Matt. 25:31, 32; Rev. 19:15; 20:11, 12**).

“Some postmillennialists will argue that the historic position of the church was from the days of St. Augustine.” (**Riddlebarger pg. 29**)

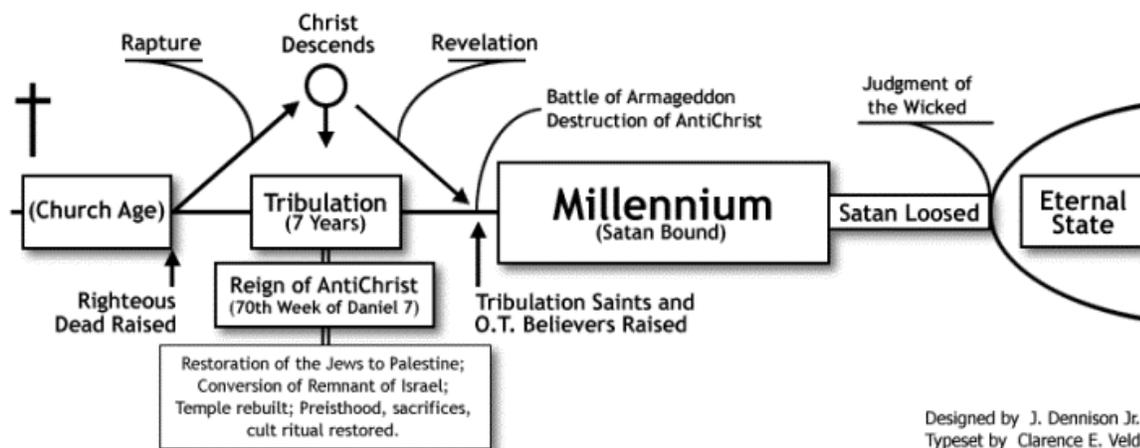
Most contemporary postmillennialists see the millennial age beginning at some point during the present age. The kingdom of God triumphs over the kingdoms of this world, resulting in great economic, political, and cultural prosperity.

“This theory, largely disproved by the progress of history, is no longer popular, but it has enjoyed some resurgence in recent years. Postmillennialism was promulgated by the teaching in England of Daniel Whitby, 1638-1726.” [**Postmillennial: D. Brown, Christ’s Second Coming (1919); L. Boettner, The Millennium (1957)**]

Most preterists are postmillennial, though not all postmillennarians are preterists. Preterists believe the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation describe the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, while some postmillennarians think certain aspects of these prophecies may be yet future.

“Postmillennialism was a widely accepted eschatological position among American evangelicals in the period of unprecedented technological growth between 1870 – 1915. But with the coming of the war to end all wars (War World 1), the Great Depression, and (War World 2). Dispensationalism largely supplanted postmillennialism as an eschatological option for evangelicals.” [**George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)**]

Dispensational Premillennialism View⁹



Dispensational Premillennialism

From the time of Augustine the prevailing view on the return of Christ was amillennial. There were, at times of severe persecutions, those who would arise with a renewed interest in Chiliasm. This was their hope under trying times; however those who usually promoted such doctrines were very radical, thus few adhered to these views. It was not until the early nineteenth century that a new and more forceful advocate of Chiliasm would arise in John N. Darby.

John N. Darby is considered the father of Dispensational Premillennialism. His view on the second advent of Christ is what we know, today, as premillennialism. He divides the scheme of God's redemption into various dispensations, or periods of time during which God tests man in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation from God. Darby believes that each dispensation has its own determinate system of salvation, which allows his future dispensations to possess a different scheme of redemption. His system of premillennialism consist of seven dispensations: innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom.

The distinctly prophetic aspects Darby's Dispensational teaching may be summarized briefly as follows:

1. The millennium is the future period of human history during which Christ will reign personally and visibly with His saints on and over the earth for a thousand years.
2. A visible coming of Christ will precede it.
3. This coming will be in two stages, the rapture and the appearing, with a considerable interval of time between them, in which important events will take place.

⁹ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/dispre.html>

4. The rapture may take place at "any moment," and will certainly precede the great tribulation.
5. The rapture is the "blessed hope" of the Church.
6. The Church is composed of those, and those only, who are saved between Pentecost and the rapture.
7. The Church age is a mystery period (a parenthesis dispensation unknown to prophecy) lying between the 69th and 70th weeks of the prophecy of **Daniel 9**.
8. Between the rapture and the appearing, the events of the last week of the prophecy of **Dan. 9, of Matt. 24, and of Rev. 4-19** are to take place.
9. After the rapture a Jewish remnant will take the place of the Church as God's agent on earth for the conversion of Israel and the Gentiles.

Allis states that the "primary features of this movement were two in number. The one related to the Church. It was the result of the profound dissatisfaction felt at that time by many earnest Christians with the worldliness and temporal security of the Church of England and of many of the dissenting communions in the British Isles. The other had to do with prophecy; it represented a very marked emphasis on the coming of the Lord as a present hope and immediate expectation."¹⁰

Clarence B. Bass points out that the system of Dispensationalism revolves around its principle of interpretation. "The paradox of the system lies precisely at this point: one cannot logically accept the chronology of dispensationalism without also accepting its basic principle of interpretation - that God works under different principles with mankind in different dispensations."¹¹ This system of interpretation permits one to believe that God still favors the Jews and the promises to them under the Old Testament. This is contrary to the teaching of Paul: "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. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (**Gal. 3:28-29**). Bass's book is devoted to the teachings of Darby and a history of Dispensationalism. Bass at one time was a Dispensationalist, but through his study of the scriptures he left that doctrine. His book reflects one of the best sources of information regarding these doctrines.

The rapid growth of Dispensationalism in the United States can be attributed to two books: *Jesus Is Coming* by W. E. Blackstone, and the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Blackstone's book was published in 1878. Many believe that the influence of Darby can be seen throughout this book. However, the greatest impact comes from Scofield's work - *The Scofield Reference Bible*, which was first published in 1909 and revised in 1917. A modern revision of this Bible was completed in 1967. Allis, referring to this Bible, says: "This is the Bible of Dispensationalist, and has probably done as much to popularize the prophetic teachings of Darby and the Brethren as all other agencies put together."¹² Today the books written by Hal Lindsey and John Walvoord typify the present views of Dispensational Premillennialism.

126. Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy And The Church*, The Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., p. 9

127 Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications*, Baker, 1960, p. 19

¹² Oswald T. Allis, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14

About the same time that Darby was developing his doctrine of the dispensations, William Miller was at work in the United States with his own view of premillennialism. Miller believed that the year 1844 was significant in Bible prophecy. In this year the Lord was to return and establish His Kingdom upon the earth. This year came and went, but the Lord had not returned as Miller had predicted. He then returned to his former beliefs, but others took up his mantle with renewed prophetic visions. Today this group is known as Seventh-Day Adventist.

Dispensational Premillennialism- is by far the most widely accepted view among people today who espouse millennial ideas. Since the late 1800's the exponents of this view went beyond typical (historical) premillennialism. The new premillennialism came to the United States about 1875 after thriving in England among the Plymouth Brethren, a religious body originated by J. N. Darby in 1830. Darby named the new dogma Dispensationalism because the theory called for a division of history into dispensations. This is the view that is freely advanced by televangelists, charismatic preachers, self-styled prophets and popular religious authors of today

Pre-Millennium - Radically unlike the other views, pre-Millennialists generally interprets the "thousand years" as a literal period of time which will occur after a culmination of specific, prophetic events in history. These events include multitudinous signs (such as natural disasters, wars, mass deception and apostasy), a specific period of great tribulation, the rise of antichrist, and finally the second coming of Christ. The millennium occurs after all these dramatic, supernatural manifestations of good and evil have been resolved in history through these cataclysmic events.

Many Premillennialists describe the millennium as a specific period of a thousand years, which occurs after the Second Advent, when the saints rule with Christ on the earth, although much of the early church rejected this doctrine (condemned as the heresy of chiliasm, which is Greek for "thousand"). There are variations within the Premillennial perspective regarding the order and meaning of the events, and the existence of a "rapture", whether the righteous dead will resurrect to reign along with the saints during this period or not, and other issues. At the end of the thousand years of peace comes the Final Judgment, and the entrance of the saints into New Jerusalem.

Jesus will return before the millennium, which is seen as a literal 1,000-year period following Christ's return to earth. There are two sub-divisions of this, one of these is 'historic premillennialism' which many claim was the view of the early Church (though there is very little evidence of this.) The other view was a latecomer and is derived from the influence of John Nelson Darby, the Bible interpreter who is more or less credited with splitting the Brethren movement with his somewhat extremist views. This is 'dispensational premillennialism,' this view speaks of the rapture to occur before the Second Coming. With the best will in the world, it is hard to escape the conclusion that much within this view is imposed or read-into the Scriptures. It is interesting too that while a nationalistic 'golden age' to follow the Messiah's coming was a Jewish hope, Jesus instructed his followers to wait for the coming of the Spirit in order to equip them to preach the gospel. (**Acts 1:6-8.**)

Amillennialism View¹³



A-Millennium - Like the post-mil view, the amillennial doctrine does not believe that the thousand years is literal, but unlike the post-mil view, Amillennialists do not believe that the thousand years described in Revelation 20 indicates the rule of Christ on earth. Rather, those who have died in Christ, saved through His righteousness, reign with him in heaven, and finally in perfection after the Resurrection and the final judgment.

Amillennialism was not recognized as a distinct position until around the turn of the twentieth century. Until now, Amillennialists called themselves postmillennial because they believed Christ would come back after the millennial age, but they were different from traditional postmillennialists in that they did not believe in an earthly millennial age yet to dawn. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) a Dutch statesman and theologian may have been the first person to use the term "amillennial."

The amillennial position has been the predominant eschatological view of Christianity since the days of Augustine. It is the position held by vast majority of Reformed and Lutheran theologians, set forth in all the Reformed and Lutheran confessions.

Amillennialists hold that the promises made to Israel, David, and Abraham in the Old Testament is fulfilled by Jesus Christ and His church during this present age. The millennium is the period of time between the two advents of our Lord with the thousand years of Revelation 20 being symbolic of the entire interadvental age. At the first advent of Jesus Christ, Satan was bound by Christ's victory over him at Calvary and the empty tomb. The effects of this victory continued because of the presence of the kingdom of God via the preaching of the gospel and as evidenced by Jesus' miracles.

The Amillennial doctrine posits the idea that both good and evil continue to exist in the world until the Resurrection and Final Judgment, as indicated in Christ's parable of the wheat and the tares. The kingdom of God is present in the Church, but is not progressing towards fulfillment.

¹³ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/nunc.html>

Christ rules His church, but He does not reign for any specific period in the world prior to his second advent.

The third view is the one that has probably been held by most Bible-believing Christians of all time. This view recognizes that Revelation is steeped in symbolism and that if one takes a literalist view of **Revelation 20** one comes to a position, which is not in agreement with some things, which Christ said. He said, for instance, that the judgment of all (good and evil) will occur at His return. **Matt 25: 31-34**. Paul too did not appear to see a time lapse. More serious is that while Paul painstakingly outlines so much Christian theology, no concept of a millennium can be found in his writings. (It has been said that just two verses in all of his theological expositions could be a reference to a 'millennium'.) Amillennialists would see Revelation 20 as referring to the age of the Church with the 'binding of Satan' being tied in with those Scriptures which also clearly show a great restriction on the activities of Satan and his demons during the Church age. Think of Jesus' ministry of casting out demons and note such Scriptures as **Luke 10: 17-20, Mark 16: 17 & John 12: 31-32**. Also carefully note **Matt 12: 25-29**. The 'strong man' whom Jesus talks about binding here is Satan and the time setting is Jesus' preaching of the gospel! (His first coming) So this view sees Satan's 'binding' as referring to the fact that he is unable to directly attack and destroy the Church. It is in this sense that he is unable to 'deceive the nations' yet he is able to influence them in other ways.

Because Amillennialism has its roots deep in historic Christianity, when it comes to comparing Amillennialism with Dispensationalism, clearly the burden of proof lies with dispensationalists to prove their case. Evangelicals often assume the opposite. It should also be noted that all major thinkers in Christian history have held something akin to the amillennial position (e.g. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin). This does not mean that Amillennialism is true simply because it has historical support within Catholic Christianity and historic Protestantism.

“Many believers have rejected Amillennialism because they presume it emphasizes interpreting prophecy “spiritually” or “nonliterally.” As with postmillennialism, Amillennialism has suffered greatly from the failure of reformed and Lutheran writers to defend the position against the barbs of popular prophecy writers such as Dave Hunt, Chuck Missler, and Hal Lindsey.”

[Riddlebarger pg 32]

The battles of **Ezekiel 38, 39; Revelation 19:17-21; 20:7-9** all refer to aspects of the eternal battle between truth and error and right and wrong.