

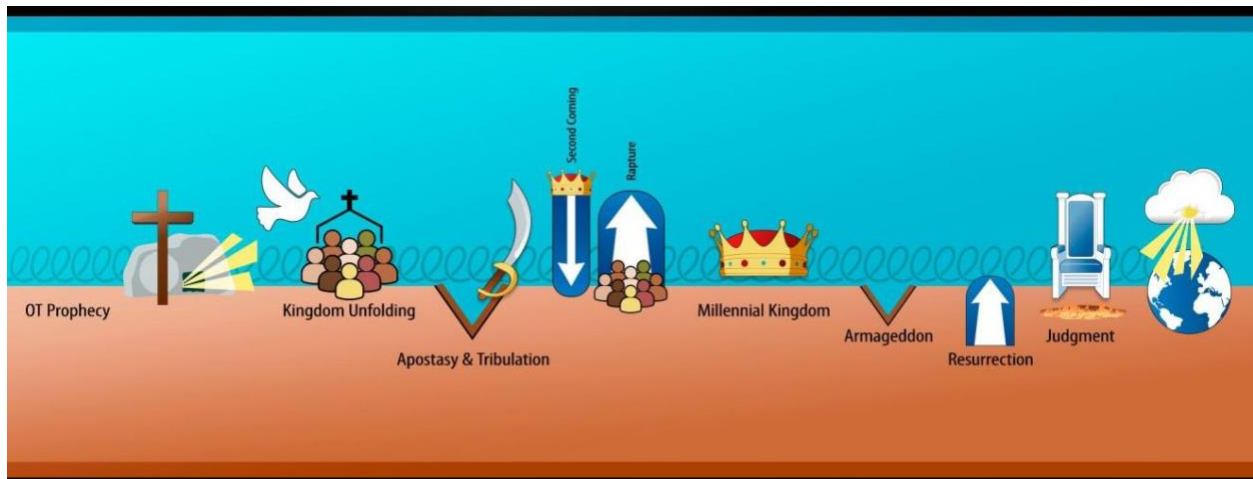
Our Blessed Hope: A Study of Biblical Eschatology

Lesson 4: Historic Premillennialism – Strengths and Weaknesses

I. A Definition

Historic premillennialism draws its name from the fact that many of the early Church Fathers (i.e. Irenaeus [140-203], who as a disciple of Polycarp, who had been an disciple of the apostle of John, Justin Martyr [100-165], and Papias [80-155]), apparently believed and taught that there would be a visible kingdom of God upon the earth, after the return of Christ.

II. Eschatological Calendar:



III. Prominent Adherents

Early Church Fathers such as Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus ...

Contemporary adherents: George Eldon Ladd, Millard Erickson, Craig Blomberg, Jim Hamilton, Carl Henry, Robert Mounce, Grant Osborne, and John Piper.

IV. Basic Tenets

A. Old Testament Prophecy

“Historic Premillennialists believe that the New Testament writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret Old Testament prophecies in ways that more fully explain God’s intention for the original texts than the original human writers or readers may have understood.”

Chapell, Bryan. *Are We Living in the Last Days?* (pp. 99-100).

Example: Hosea 11:12 → Matthew 2:15

Old Testament prophets must be interpreted in light of their fulfillment in the person and mission of JESUS. This sometimes involves REINTERPRETATION. And sometimes the fulfillment is different than we would expect from the Old Testament. (Ex: Psalm 110:1-2 → Acts 2:30-36)

NEW Testament must give FINAL word in eschatology.

B. The Church and Israel

“Because they perceive God’s plan for extending his grace as unfolding across Scripture, Historic Premillennialists don’t believe God has two separate and nonoverlapping programs for Israel and the church.

God has never deviated from his original plan. He has had a determined purpose since the beginning of the world—to display his glory in the grace that’s first claimed by faith through Israel and then to expand the provision of that grace to all who will receive his redemption (Acts 15:15–17; Rom. 1:16).

Old Testament saints weren’t fully prepared to receive God’s plan for the nations (e.g., Jon. 3:10–4:4). And their prophets didn’t fully understand the dimensions of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:10–12), but the Holy Spirit inspired them to reveal it in ways that gave proof and foundation to the ministry and mission of the church in the fullness of God’s timing.” (Chapell, 104)

Key text: Romans 9-11

Key points:

- 1) “Israel” (true spiritual Israel) is not IDENTICAL with the physical offspring of Abraham. (9:6-7)
- 2) The true descendants of Abraham, the true Israel, must be determined not by NATURAL physical descent, but by divine election and the promise of God. (9:8)
- 3) The people of God are necessarily not only Jews, but also GENTILES. (9:24-26)
 - a. Paul sees the fulfillment of Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 in the church.
 - b. The salvation of the Gentile Church is the fulfillment of prophecies made to Israel.
- 4) The metaphor of the olive tree indicates God's future saving work for Israel, however:
Natural branches on the cultivated olive tree → Natural branches broken off because of unbelief → Wild branches grafted in → Natural branches yet to be re-grafted into the olive tree.
- 5) Scripture does not speak of HOW Israel will be saved.
 - a. However, they must be saved in the same way as the Church. – by turning in faith to Jesus as their Messiah (11:23)
 - b. The blessings they receive are blessings in Christ, the same as the Church’s.
 - c. The preservation of Israel thru the centuries is a sign that God has not cast them off.
 - d. Perhaps what Paul speaks of in Romans 9-11 will be fulfilled during the Millennium.
 - e. There is no future restored temple. God's redemptive plan will not revert to the age of SHADOWS. (Heb. 10:1; 8:6-7)
- 6) Thus, there are not 2 distinct covenants: The one made by Christ with the Church and a future new covenant to be made with Israel.

C. The Rapture and the Second Coming

There are two great events in God's conquest of the powers of evil. The Incarnation and the Second Coming.

Jesus is now the Lord, enthroned at the right hand of God and reigning in his Kingdom. This lordship and reign is known only to believers. His second coming will mean nothing less than His lordship over all the world. He will come as the heavenly Son of Man and bring His Kingdom to His Saints. He will reign in His Kingdom as the Messianic King.

Historic Premillennialists believe in a rapture. However, they do not believe there will be a SECRET rapture of the church with a second coming of Christ prior to the tribulation that is then followed by another second coming of Christ prior to the millennium.

According to HPM's, the plainest reading of the Bible is that Jesus will "snatch up" or "catch up" his people in the air to accompany his 2nd and final return to earth in power and great glory. This rapture is not secret, but rather is a glorious ANNOUNCEMENT and preparation for the millennial Kingdom in which Christ people will reign with Him for 1000 years.

Key Text: 1 Thess 4:13-18

- 1) Christ's arrival is a dramatic REVEALING.
- 2) Christ's arrival is to defeat the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist.
- 3) At this coming, the dead will be raised and the living will be caught up.
- 4) This coming is the blessed hope of Christians.
- 5) Nowhere does Scripture assert a separation of the rapture of the Church and the revelation of Christ.

D. The Tribulation and the Antichrist

Yes to 'tribulation', but in a different sense ...

The Greek word *thlipsis*, meaning "tribulation," occurs forty-five times in the New Testament.

John 16:33

Acts 14:21-22

"Faithful Christians should expect to experience tribulation. Christians throughout history suffer, are persecuted, and regularly face the difficulties of a fallen and sinful world. For these reasons, Historic Premillennialists see no reason why believers who have always experienced tribulation should be delivered from a "great tribulation" that precedes the second coming." (Chapell, 114)

The 2nd Coming is, however, preceded by a time of some kind of apostasy and suffering (2 Thess 2:3-4)

Purpose of tribulation: To PREPARE the church for the persecutions that inevitably precede Christ's second coming

Key: Tribulation is a way of categorizing the distress of believers in times near and far but is not a specific period (including The "Great Tribulation" of Rev. 7:14).

Re: an Antichrist ...

a "man of lawlessness" will dominate a time of persecution and suffering prior to Christ's final return (see 2 Thess. 2:2-12).

We are forewarned of this evil for at least three reasons:

1. So we won't expect Christ's second coming PRIOR to this antichrist (vv. 2-3; cf. Matt. 24:23-26)
2. So we won't be surprised or DECEIVED by the antichrist's opposition to the work of the church under a cloak of godliness (vv. 4-7; cf. Matt. 24:15)
3. So we won't lose HOPE that Christ will ultimately destroy the antichrist (v. 8; cf. Matt. 24:29-31).

George Eldon Ladd: "[Jesus] comes as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. 19:16) to do battle with Antichrist ... He will not win his victory by the use of the military weapons of the world but with his bare word. He will speak and the victory will be his."

E. The Millennial Kingdom

"This passage presents a period of time, designated as a thousand years (hence, *millennium*), during which Satan is bound and cast into the abyss and thus unable to deceive the nations (vv.1-3). At the beginning of this period is a "resurrection" of the faithful (vv.4-5). Following the thousand years is the release of Satan and a final rebellion (vv.7-9), the final destruction of Satan (v.10), and the second resurrection (vv.5-6; 13). These are the basic facts with which we must work.

In the context (19:11ff) our Lord is portrayed as coming to earth in triumphal glory and taking vengeance upon His enemies. That John intends for us to understand this millennium to be following this return seems evident from his repeated use of the chronological *kai* ("and") used throughout (cf. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, etc.). Whatever details and meanings are involved in the symbolism which John employs, the stated order of events is,

1. Return of Christ in victory (19:11-21)
2. Destruction of the evil triumvirate (the beast, the false prophet, and Satan) in which Satan is deposed to the abyss (19:19-20:3)
3. First resurrection (20:4)
4. 1,000 year kingdom (20:4-6)
5. Release of Satan and a final rebellion (20:7-9)
6. Final destruction of Satan, who now is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet have been (20:10)
7. Second resurrection & final judgment (20:11-15)

The entire passage, so it seems at first glance at least, reads as one continuous NARRATIVE.

The WHY of the Millennium ...

F. The New Heaven and Earth

"Historic Premillennialists believe that God will establish a new heaven and earth for the eternal blessing of his people. Believers will experience eternity on an earth made perfect. The world that was marked by corruption, war, disease, trials, and pain will pass away. We will be granted eternal souls and perfected bodies to experience the fullness of God's blessings physically and spiritually on earth." (Chapell, 120)

Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5

V. Strengths

It's a view held by many of the early CHURCH FATHERS.

Historically, it has been a COMMON view.

If Revelation 19-20 are to be taken CHRONOLOGICALLY, this necessarily places the millennial age AFTER Christ's return.

It sees the final culmination of Christ's kingdom as fulfilled by Christians.

It acknowledges the tribulation of persecuted believers in the first century joined by those persecuted throughout the centuries and by believers living through the great tribulation.

VI. Weaknesses

"There are admittedly serious theological problems with a doctrine of a millennium. However, if theology cannot find an answer for all its questions, evangelical theology must be built on the clear teaching of Scripture. Therefore, I am a premillennialist." (George Eldon Ladd)

Scripture nowhere else teaches a thousand-year millennium ...

The OT texts associated with the Millennium by HPM's actually describe the NEW CREATION ...

The view can be argued as ultimately DEFEATIST in regard to the mission of the Church ...

The mixed state of people (immortal saints and ordinary mortals) COEXISTING for 1000 years presents a range of questions ...

WHO are the unglorified people in the millennium if Jesus destroys all his enemies at the end of Revelation 19?

WHY should believers be raised from the dead to live on an earth which is not yet glorified and which is still groaning because of the presence of sin, rebellion and death?

Why a Millennium that seems *almost* glorious?

The nature of the GLORY of Christ revealed makes an earthly rule followed by a rebellion implausible ...

The purpose of God's choice of Israel is argued ...

in Scripture the final resurrection, final judgment, victory over death, arrival of the new creation, and second coming of Christ are part of a TOTAL package.

Next week: *Dispensational Premillennialism* – Strengths and Weaknesses