

# **The Two Kingdoms**

## ***The Kingdom of Heaven part 1***

### **Millennialism**

#### **Millennialism - 3 views**

**This message is the first in a series dealing with the *Kingdom of Heaven*, the *Kingdom of God* and the *Rapture*. I trust you will be blest as we examine these three vital subjects together.**

**We've heard and read a lot about 'end-times'. I imagine that most of you are familiar with the well-worn (but still valid) concepts of the *Rapture*, the *Tribulation*, the *Mark of the Beast* etc.**

**You may or may not agree with the doctrine of the 'Secret Rapture' (so-called) but all of us agree that the Lord will one day return to this earth!**

**But now it can get a little 'woolly'. Do we call the Lord's return to the earth the '*Second Coming*'? Or is the *Rapture* (if it happens at all) the '*Second***

***Coming?*** And if it is, then can we say that the ***Second Coming*** is in two parts?

And in any case, how important is a belief in the Rapture? Many Christians believe it's an unbiblical doctrine (just check out a few of the web-sites or tune into YouTube). Others (and you may be one of these) have given up trying to decide and conclude that it doesn't matter - not important! I've heard it many times: 'I know he's coming - one way or the other - and that's all that matters to me!'

Another hotly-debated question is that of Israel's future. Does she even have one or has that nation been permanently replaced by the church (replacement theology)? And then, assuming that Israel does have a further part to play in God's plans, how does this fit in with the Rapture, Christ's coming to the earth, and the Church itself?

And one more thing! Where does the New Covenant fit into the whole picture? After all, it was promised to the *house of Israel and the house of Judah* (**Jer 31:31**). Did this ever happen? Will it ever happen? Or is ***the house of Israel and the***

*house of Judah* an expression simply now symbolic of the church?

Finally, are the *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Kingdom of God* separate entities or are both expressions referring to the same thing (as many believers seem to think)?

Let's begin!

You've no doubt heard the reign of Christ on earth described as *the Millennium*. There are varying opinions about the nature and timing of the Millennium. So exactly what is it and when does it occur?

To find this out, we need to go to the book of **Revelation** and examine chapters **19** and **20**.

**Revelation chapter 19** is one that describes the tumultuous events that bring the Great Tribulation to a shuddering climax!

There we read the story of how, after seven years of Tribulation, the armies of the Antichrist (effectively representing the nations of the world) will march on Jerusalem in one final, frenzied assault- apparently determined to destroy what is then left of God's people and the Holy City.

**But, unbeknown to Satan, God Himself will have brought the armies of the godless nations together so that He might destroy them!**

**Zechariah 14:2**

**I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it;**

**But just as the battle is raging (a battle we know as *Armageddon*), Christ returns to destroy his enemies. **Zech 14:3-4** describes this event:**

**Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.**

**This Second Coming of Christ is described in **2 Thessalonians 1:7-8** which tells us that Christ will be 'revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.'**

The slaughter that takes place at Armageddon will be horrific: the armies of the Antichrist are defeated and the Beast and false prophet thrown into the lake of fire (**Rev. 19:20-21**).

Events following Christ's climactic victory then unfold in quick succession. And it's now that we come across the first prophetic reference to the 1000-yr rule that ensues.

Firstly **Rev. 20:2** tells us that an angel binds Satan and throws him into the Abyss for 1000 yrs so that he can no longer deceive the nations. Then the saints who will have been martyred during the preceding years of Great Tribulation will be resurrected - brought to life again to rule with Christ for the same period of 1000 yrs.

**Revelation 20:4,**

**And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life (in v. 5 this is described as the *first resurrection*) and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**

This time-frame of a *thousand years* is then repeated four more times throughout the twentieth chapter of **Revelation**. Accordingly, it has become known to us as the *millennium* - a term derived from the combination of two Latin words: *mille* (1000) and *annum* (year).

Hence, millennium = 1000 yrs.

Not the best description! It's really the *Kingdom reign* of Christ which *lasts for a millennium*.

And because this concept of a 1000-yr Messianic rule is derived from the references in **Rev.20**, this becomes our go-to chapter for the *millennium*.

### Three views of the Millennium

Now throughout Church history there have been three major differences of belief concerning the nature and timing of this 1000-yr (millennial) reign of Christ. And you will see that the prefixes given to each view (the 2nd and 3rd at least) are used to depict the timing of Christ's second coming in relation to the millennium).

The three views are as follows:

## 1. Amillennialism - no millennium

This group of believers (known as *amillennialists*) hold that there is *no* literal reign of Christ on earth at all! This view is known as amillennialism because the Latin prefix a- means *not* or *no*. We see the use of this prefix in words such as: *atypical* (not typical), *amoral* (having no moral code) and *amorphous* (having no defined shape).

Therefore *amillennialism = no millennium*

The *amillennialists* believe that the term: *1000 yrs* is not describing a literal number of years but is merely symbolic of a *long period of time* in which Christ is reigning in heaven and on earth through the Church. They derive this metaphorical use of the number *1000* from passages such as [Psalm 50:10](#) and [2 Pet.3:8](#).

The *amillennialist* believes that the events depicted in Revelation have, for the most part, already transpired (many of them around 70AD) including the binding of Satan which, according to this view, took place on the cross (i.e his ability to deceive the nations was negated).

**So - according to this belief - the Millennium comprises a spiritual kingdom which is in force *right now* (Col.1:13) - and will be up to the time Jesus Christ comes back to earth.**

**Upon his return, the Lord will then:**

- \* raise the dead (righteous and unrighteous)**
- \* judge all mankind**
- \* bring in the new heavens and the new earth**

**Is this view a viable interpretation?**

**Well, consider this. In philosophy there is a principle maintained in the aetiology (causation) of events (particularly used in the area of medicine) known as *Occam's razor*. This principle states that in explaining something, no more assumptions should be made than are necessary!**

**Here's how it works. We've all heard the debate about the origin of life on this planet. It's difficult to explain how life came into being and so, to avoid the problem, there are those who propose the theory that life was introduced to earth by aliens from another planet!**

**Now is this in any way helping to solve the riddle? Of course not, because you're still facing the same**

**problem: you would have to then similarly explain how life began on *another* planet. And in addition to this, you're complicating matters even further by having to validate your proposition with the added assumption that earth has been visited by alien beings! You haven't got closer to an explanation - you've moved even further away.**

**Occam's razor would demand that you go with the simplest, most straightforward explanation *that makes sense*. If there is life on this planet, then, in the absence of any compelling evidence to the contrary, the soundest assumption is that life *began on this planet!* The fact that you can't explain how it did so, does not invalidate its reality!**

**Hence the amillennialist interpretation of this area of prophecy most decidedly violates Occam's razor. To understand how it does so, we must be aware of the significant difference between *exegesis* and *eisegesis* in our interpretation of Scripture.**

**Exegesis - from two Greek words: *ex* (*out of*) and *hegemlisthai* (*to guide, lead*).**

***Exegesis* is then a critical approach whereby a person gives an explanation of a text that arises from the information communicated *in that text!* Context and comparison with other scriptures may certainly aid in the interpretation but essentially the reader is allowing the text to speak for itself!**

***Eisegesis* - from *eis* (*into*) and *hegemlisthai* (*guide, lead*)**

**By contrast, *eisegesis* is the reading of one's own agenda, ideas and presuppositions into the text! A presupposition is one of the most difficult things to avoid unless one is coming to an area for the very first time. Therefore two people can interpret a text in two diametrically opposing ways depending on personal background, experience, past teaching etc.**

**The problem with the amillennialist view is that it's an interpretation that is, for the most part, *eisegetical!* The *a priori* assumption that no further kingdom exists other than the spiritual Kingdom of God (or that God has a special plan for Israel), flies consistently in the face of, not one or two, but literally hundreds of verses that speak**

about a future for Israel and a literal Messianic kingdom on the earth.

In the face of texts which, on plain reading, contradict this position, what does the amillennialist do?: he cannot accept the plain statements of Scripture, but is forced to spiritualise every reference to a *literal* Kingdom on earth. The land of Israel becomes the heavenly places, Israel becomes the church, Jerusalem becomes a purely heavenly city and as far as the intricate details of the kingdom (eg [Isa.60](#)) - well, I personally have never heard any sort of rational explanation from the amillennialist!

Rampant and consistent eisegesis of this sort flies in the face of any sort of worthwhile hermeneutics. Forget Occam's razor! It forms an argument of pure convenience where the desire becomes the parent of the thought. If the interpretation of a verse flies in the face of the rest of scripture, the solution is simple: change the meaning of the rest of Scripture - then it will all hang together!

Now we come to the second view of the millennium: Postmillennialism.

## 2. Postmillennialism - *after* the millennium

The postmillennialist believes that Christ returns in person *after* he has ruled spiritually for 1000 years through the Church. Hence the name given to this belief: *post (after) millennium (1000 yrs)*.

*Postmillennianism* was the dominant view throughout Protestantism during the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries AD and it has experienced a resurgence today as the truth of the Rapture is increasingly denied.

Specifically, the *postmillennialist* believes that during this Church age (before Christ's return) there will be a *golden age* (a 1000-yr period of time) when the Church will triumph here on the earth through the spreading of the gospel to every nation - converting them to Christ! This will be a time when - as prophesied:

.... the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.  
(Habakkuk 2:14)

After this so-called *golden age*, the social, moral, political and spiritual transformation of human society, brought about by Christ ruling through a triumphant church, will have prepared the world for the ultimate return of the Lord in person!

**Much of the remainder is then (according to this view) inevitably the same as Amillennialism:**

- \* a general resurrection**
- \* a general judgement**
- \* the ushering in of the eternal state**

**A lot of songs we sing today are distinctly postmillennial in nature; songs such as: *Let your kingdom come; Build your kingdom here; Hosanna (Hillsong)* etc, etc.**

**Is there a kingdom right now? Absolutely!  
([1 Thess.2:12](#); [Col.1:13](#);) . But we would all agree that it's a *heavenly* kingdom - one we know of as the *Kingdom of God!* The problem is that many contemporary songs suggest that we, the Church, are right now involved in bringing 'the kingdom' to fruition here on the earth – therefore a kingdom preceding the return of Christ. Just one example can be seen in the song : 'Build Your kingdom here':**

**'Heal our streets and land  
Set Your church on fire  
Win this nation back  
Change the atmosphere**

**Build your kingdom here**

.....

**We are Your church**

**And we pray revive**

**This earth....."**

**These are wonderful sentiments expressed earnestly by many who love the Lord and fervently desire the triumph of the gospel and his glory!**

**So what's wrong here? Well, The real problem is that, according to the Bible, it's just not going to happen this way - at least not in the Church age!**

**Remember what Christ said to his disciples in [John 15:19-20](#)?**

**If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.**

**And again in [John 18:36](#)**

**Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."**

The sad fact is that, because of man's depravity, the preaching of the cross is:  
**a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23).**

And no matter what view is taken of the timing of Christ's return (including the Rapture) the Scriptures leave no doubt as to the state of the world when Christ *does* return. The question is asked in **Luke 18:8**,  
**.... when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?**

Even a cursory reading of **Zechariah 12-14; Matt.24; 2 Thess.1** and **Rev. 6:15-17** makes it quite clear that this world will be *nowhere near* ready to receive Christ at his second coming.**(2 Tim.3:13;Matt,24:4-14)**. In fact, the Bible clearly states that the only way the nations of this world will be dealt with is through *judgment*. And this will take place *on Christ's return!*

### **Revelation 19:15**

**Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter."**

When Christ rules the nations, it won't be through the gospel, which is **the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16-17)** but it will instead be with an iron rod! He returns in order to put things right - as the judge.

Listen again to the words of **2 Thessalonians 1:7-8** ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. [8] He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Now we come to the third major view of the millennium:

### **3. Premillennialism - before the millennium**

According to this third major view, Christ returns to this earth *before* the setting up of a millennial kingdom. The Latin prefix *pre* means *before*, therefore this understanding of Scripture is known as: *premillennialism*.

*Premillennialism* (also often referred to as *historic premillennialism* or *chiliasm*) was a belief woven throughout early church and was the general view up until the council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Believers in the early church were often known as *chiliasts*.

Thereafter, premillennialism was suppressed but in the 19th Century it made a resounding comeback in a form known as *dispensationalism* - or *dispensational premillennialism*.

As was the case in the Reformation (justification by faith etc). it was time for the truth about the last days to be emphasised and, in particular, the truths of the Rapture and the (ultimate) distinction between the Church (the present heavenly body) and the (earthly) nation of Israel.

This distinction between Israel and the Church is an aspect of what we know as *dispensationalism* and so a belief that the Church will be removed some years prior to Christ's coming to the earth (and the uniqueness of the Church in God's plan) is today known as *dispensational premillennialism*.

So - to recap:

Amillennialism - *no* literal reign on earth - everything symbolic.

Postmillennialism

Christ returns *after* a thousand years of the world turning to Him.

**Premillennialism: Christ comes back to earth *before* setting up his millennial Kingdom on the earth.**