

Introduction

Millennial Madness

Eschatology is the study of the end-times. Despite the overwhelming biblical data on the subject, there are different errors that Christians have made:

1. **IGNORING THE SUBJECT** – Question: How many sermons have you heard in your lifetime? How many have you heard about the subject of the end times? If the Bible speaks of it, we should study it.
 - One out of every 30 verses in the Bible mentions the subject of Christ's return or the end of time.
 - Over 1,800 references appear in the Old Testament, and seventeen Old Testament books give prominence to this theme.
 - Of the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to the Lord's return.
 - Twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books refer to this great event. Three of the four other books are single-chapter letters written to individuals concerning a particular subject, and the fourth is Galatians, which does imply Christ's coming.
 - For every prophecy on the first coming of Christ, there are eight on Christ's Second Coming.
2. **EMPHASIZING THE WRONG THINGS ABOUT END-TIMES** – Without a doubt, eschatology is central to all of Scripture. It is difficult to over-emphasize the themes of the Kingdom of God and the Day of the Lord and the renewal of the universe. Some, however, have emphasized the wrong things about the end-times – making their interpretation a test of fellowship; building elaborate doctrines around a questionable interpretation; making their interpretation central to understanding the Bible.
3. **IGNORANCE OF OTHER VIEWPOINTS** – Some don't even know that there are other views on the end-times!

What We Agree On

All positions agree on the following:

- The personal, visible return of Jesus Christ.
- The resurrection of believers and unbelievers to judgment
- That believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of their service to the Lord and receive his rewards
- That God will create a new heaven and a new earth
- That the wicked will enter into conscious, eternal punishment, suffering beyond any experience of misery found in this world
- That believers are to be watchful and prepared, anticipating Christ's coming

The Meaning of the Millennium

The word *millennium* means “one thousand years” (from Lat. *millennium*). The term comes from Revelation 20:2-7:

(Revelation 20:2) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:3) He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.
(Revelation 20:4) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:5) (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.
(Revelation 20:6) Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:7) When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison

Five Major Questions to Tackle

1. Is teaching on the millennium intended literally or symbolically?
2. To what do the resurrections of Revelation 20:4-6 refer – spiritual or physical resurrections?
3. Is the millennium future or present?
4. Is there any basis for an optimistic future on earth?
5. Will the church escape the great tribulation?

Four Major Views

1. **Amillennialism (Realized millennialism)** – The view that the millennium is currently happening; that the present church age will continue until the time of Christ’s return.
2. **Postmillennialism** – The view that Christ will return after the millennium.
3. **Dispensational (pretribulational) premillennialism** – The view that Christ will return before the millennium and before the great tribulation.
4. **Classic, simple, or historic (posttribulational) premillennialism** – The view that Christ will come back before the millennium, after the great tribulation.

The Goals of This Class

1. That you will understand the four views
2. That you will make an intelligent decision as to which view you hold

Amillennialism (Realized millennialism)

Amillennialism is the simplest of the four views, teaching that there is no future millennium. The millennium is taking place now. It is the view historically held by Clement, Origen, Augustine, and the reformers. (The Reformers believed that the Beast of Revelation is the papacy.)

CHURCH AGE ⇒	SECOND COMING ⇒	ETERNAL STATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revelation 20:1-6 is now • We are living in the millennium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurrection of believers and unbelievers • Judgment • New heaven, new earth 	

What Amillennialism Teaches:

- The “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is to be taken symbolically. We can’t know the exact duration of the millennium. (Postmillennialists agree with this statement.)
- Christ’s reign during the millennium is not a bodily one on earth, but the heavenly one spoken of in Matthew 28:18: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” This reign is now.
- The millennium is a time in which Satan’s influence is reduced, so that the gospel can be preached to the entire world (Revelation 20:3). That time is now.
- Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years (Revelation 20:6) are Christians who have died and are already reigning with Christ.
- The present church age will continue until the time of Christ’s return, which will bring the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, judgment, and the new heaven and new earth. This will lead to the eternal state.
- Revelation does not teach only about the last period in history. It covers and elaborates the entire history of the church.

Arguments for Amillennialism

1. Only one passage (Revelation 20:1-6) appears to teach a future earthly millennial reign of Christ, and that passage is obscure. It is unwise to base a major doctrine of Scripture on one passage of uncertain interpretation.
2. Neither Jesus nor Paul taught about the millennium. The millennium is not mentioned in the Bible outside of Revelation.
3. Scripture only teaches one resurrection, in which both believers and unbelievers will be raised, not two resurrections – John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Daniel 12:2. (The premillennial view requires two separate resurrections, separated by a thousand years.)
4. A number of Scriptures teach that Satan is presently being restrained – Matthew 12:28-29; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 12
5. Revelation is a symbolic book. The “thousand years” or Revelation 20 signifies the idea of perfection or completeness, representing the completeness of Christ’s victory over Satan, and the perfect joy of the redeemed in heaven.
6. Scripture seems to indicate that all the major events to come (resurrection of believers and unbelievers, final judgment, establishment of new heaven and earth, eternal state) will happen at once (Matthew 24-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:10).

Responses to Amillennialism

1. Even though only one passage teaches a future earthly millennium, the Bible only has to say something once in order for it to be true and something we must believe.
2. Some other passages appear to teach about a time that sounds like the millennium (Psalm 72:8-14; Isaiah 11:2-9; 65:20; Zechariah 14:6-21; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).
3. Revelation 20:4-6 clearly teaches that there are two resurrections, not just one. It teaches a first resurrection, and then that the rest of the dead will come to life at the end of a thousand years. These resurrections both appear to be physical resurrections. The passages amillennialists claim to support the view that there is only one resurrection do not exclude the idea of two resurrections. In fact, John 5:28-29 hints at the idea of two resurrections.
4. The imagery of throwing Satan into a pit and shutting it and sealing it over (Revelation 20:2-3) suggests more than the binding mentioned in the other passages. Satan still obviously has influence on the earth. He “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8; see also Acts 5:3; 1 Corinthians 10:20; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 4:3; 5:19).
5. While Revelation is a symbolic book, we do not have enough evidence to conclude that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is symbolic.
6. Revelation 20 appears to teach that not all major events will take place at once. There will be two resurrections and two judgments.

Postmillennialism

"There will come a time when in this world holiness shall be more general, and more eminent, than ever it hath been since Adam fell in paradise. —*Thomas Brooks, The Crown and Glory of Christianity (1662)*

CHURCH AGE ⇒	MILLENNIUM ⇒	SECOND COMING ⇒	ETERNAL STATE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A larger proportion of the world becomes Christian • Society functions more according to God's standards • An age of peace and righteousness comes to earth, for a long time (not necessarily 1,000 years) • God's will is done on earth, as it is in heaven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurrection of believers and unbelievers • Judgment • New heaven, new earth 	

A Short History of Postmillennialism

- Postmillennialism is in one sense the historic position of the church since the days of St. Augustine. (Distinctions were not always made between amillennialism and postmillennialism until later in church history).
- In the fourth century, Christianity had achieved unprecedented political success. The emperor Constantine became a believer in 312 AD. Christianity was granted tolerance within the Roman Empire and essentially became the official religion. The progress of the church throughout the entire world looked sure. The millennium was assumed to have begun.
- After the end of the first millennium of church history, postmillennialists were forced to revise some of their beliefs. The millennium was no longer viewed as a literal one thousand years, but as the whole of church history.
- In periods where the church appeared to be succeeding in its task of world evangelism, postmillennialism has experienced resurgence. For instance, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the church experienced a period of great effectiveness in world missions and progress in social conditions.
- In the twentieth century, postmillennialism has not been a popular view because of world events.

What Postmillennialism Teaches:

- The kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit.
- The world will eventually be Christianized. There will be a golden age of spiritual prosperity, characterized by uplifted social, economic, political, and cultural conditions.
- Not every person will be a Christian, and not all sin will be abolished, but evil will be reduced to negligible proportions. Christian principles will be the rule.
- The return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace, called the millennium.
- The Second Coming of Christ will be followed by the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the introduction of heaven and hell.
- The millennium will not be that different from today, in one sense. People will continue to marry, work, and lead normal lives. Christ will not be physically present on earth. However, the church will be more zealous and influential.
- An example of a postmillennial hymn is “Jesus Shall Reign.”

Arguments for Postmillennialism

1. The Great Commission leads us to expect that the gospel eventually spread to the entire world. Since Christ has all power in heaven and earth, and promises to be with us until the fulfillment of the commission, we should expect that the gospel will successfully spread to the entire world (Matthew 28:18-20).
2. Jesus gave several parables, which appear to teach the growth of the kingdom until it fills the world with its influence (Matthew 13:31-33).
3. Many verses speak of God redeeming the world (Psalms 47, 72, and 100; Isaiah 45:22-25; Zechariah 9:10; Hosea 2:23; Revelation 7:9-10).
4. Angels and saints are described in Scripture as being *hosts, myriads, an innumerable multitude, ten thousand times ten thousand* (e.g. Luke 2:13; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 5:11). Such language is never used to describe the lost. Heaven is described as being *the next world, a great kingdom, a country, a city*, whereas hell is pictured as being a comparatively small place: *a prison, a lake, a pit* (Luke 20:35; Matthew 5:3; Hebrews 11:16; 1 Peter 3:19; Revelation 19:20; 21:1, 8-16).
5. Historically speaking, the world is becoming increasingly Christian. Even when the church is persecuted and oppressed, it is still growing. The Bible is available, in whole or in part, in the native tongue of 98% of the people of the world.
6. Social conditions are improving. There is less slavery, polygamy, oppression of women and children, and poverty. Medical care has improved. Despite temporary setbacks, progress can be seen in almost every area of life.

Responses to Postmillennialism

1. While the Great Commission speaks of Christ's authority, it does not imply that Christ will use that authority to convert the entire world. It is simply another way of saying that Jesus, as God, is all-powerful.
2. While these parables teach that God's kingdom will gradually grow from something very small to something very large, it does not tell us the extent to which it will grow. For instance, the parable of the leaven does not tell us how much of the loaf contained leaven.
3. Biblical data seems to indicate a great wickedness and a cooling off of the faith of many before Christ's return (Matthew 24-25 – especially 24:21-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:1-5). Further, the Bible never teaches an earthly reign of Christ without his physical presence.
4. The Bible teaches that relatively few will believe (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 18:8).
5. We have seen a decline in evangelistic and missionary success. In parts of the world, the percentage of practicing Christians is very small. Entire countries are closed to Christianity.
6. The world is not becoming a better place. We see unprecedented levels of drug abuse, marital infidelity, pornography, homosexuality, rebellion against authority, superstition, materialism, greed, and falsehood.
7. In addition, many passages teach that Christ could return at any time and that we must be ready (Matthew 24:42-44; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 22:20). This would seem to contradict the idea of a long period of time required for the millennium on earth preceding his return.
8. Postmillennialists do not agree on the subject of the two resurrections of Revelation 20.

Premillennialism

PREMILLENNIALISM – The belief that Jesus Christ will physically return again to earth before the millennium begins.

There are two major premillennial views:

- **Historic Premillennialism** – Otherwise known as simple premil; one-stage premil; classic premil; or post-tribulational premil. This position teaches that Jesus Christ will return after a period called the Great Tribulation. This was the majority view of the early church (up to about 250 AD).
- **Dispensational Premillennialism** – Otherwise known as dispensationalism; two-stage premil; pre-tribulational premil. This position teaches that the church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation. This view has become popular since the 1830s, and is closely associated with American fundamentalism.

While it appears that the only difference between the two views is one over the timing of the Rapture, these two views differ greatly in their understanding of redemptive history. They are two very separate views, not to be confused.

What Historic and Dispensational Premillennialism Hold in Common

Both positions believe:

- There will be an earthly reign of Jesus Christ for approximately one thousand years. Some understand the thousand years to represent a substantial but indefinite period of time. This reign will be personal and bodily. Believers will reign with Christ for this period.
- Prior to the millennium, there will be a period of turmoil, persecution, and suffering called the Great Tribulation. The world will be at its worst.
- The millennium will not begin gradually. It will begin with a cataclysmic event.
- The millennium will be a time of world peace and harmony. Nature will be freed from its curse.
- There will be two literal physical resurrections.
- Israel will have some special significance in the millennium.

Arguments for Premillennialism

1. A clear and natural reading of Revelation 20:1-6 favors premillennialism. For instance, it suggests that there are two separate physical resurrections separated by a period of one thousand years.
2. Other passages hint at a resurrection of a select group (Luke 14:14; 20:35; 1 Corinthians 15:23; Philippians 3:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16) or a resurrection in two stages (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29).
3. The binding of Satan in Revelation 20:2-3 refers to a greater restriction in his activity than anything we experience today. Therefore, the millennium has not begun.

4. Several passages seem to neither fit the present age or the eternal state (e.g. Psalm 72; Isaiah 11:6-11; 65:20; Zechariah 14:5-17). This seems to suggest that there will be a time in which our redemption will be far greater than the current age, yet a time in which death and sin are still present.
5. Other New Testament passages, besides Revelation 20, suggest a future millennium (1 Corinthians 15:23-25; Revelation 2:26-27).
6. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that Christians (alive or dead) are already reigning with Christ. However, the Bible teaches that believers will reign with Christ and be given authority to reign over the earth (Luke 19:17,19; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21).
7. There are no biblical passages with which premillennialists cannot cope. However, the reference to two resurrections in Revelation 20 gives amillennialists and postmillennialists difficulty.

Responses to Premillennialism

1. The two resurrections of Revelation 20 are not necessarily physical. They could be two different types of resurrections (spiritual and physical) or both spiritual.
2. The Scriptures cited do not demand two separate physical resurrections.
3. Satan is restricted in his activity today (Matthew 12:29; Luke 10:17-18; John 12:31-32).
4. Old Testament prophecies are not always fulfilled in a way that we might expect (e.g. Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1). These prophecies could predict conditions on the new earth.
5. Christ is now reigning at God's right hand (Hebrews 1:3). Revelation 20 is the only passage that speaks of an actual millennium.
6. The idea of a provisional kingdom, in which glorified and mortal men mingle, finds no support in Scripture. It seems odd to think of resurrected saints and ordinary mortals mingling for a thousand years. The purpose of this millennial reign is unclear.
7. Other interpretations exist for Revelation 20 and the other passages cited. The scene appears to take place in heaven, not earth.

Historic Premillennialism

GREAT TRIBULATION ⇒	SECOND COMING ⇒	MILLENNIUM ⇒	ETERNAL STATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Period of great apostasy and rebellion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapture • The resurrection and judgment of believers • Satan bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earthly reign of Christ for substantial period of time (possibly a literal one thousand years) • The resurrection and judgment of unbelievers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

What Historic Premillennialism Teaches

- The present church age will continue until a time of Great Tribulation comes on the earth.
- After the Tribulation, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom. When he comes back, believers will be raised from the dead. Their bodies will be reunited with their spirits. Believers who are alive will receive their resurrection bodies.
- Christ will be physically present on earth during the millennium, and will reign as King over the entire earth, along with the glorified believers. This reign will take place for a thousand years (understood as a literal thousand years to some; others as a substantial but indeterminate time).
- Many, but not all, unbelievers will be saved. There will be peace on the earth, as Satan will be bound during the millennium.
- Israel will find its place within the church. Large numbers from Israel will be converted.
- At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed and will join forces with many unbelievers who appeared to believe, but remained inwardly hostile to Christ. Satan and these unbelievers will rise against Christ, but will be decisively defeated.
- At this point, unbelievers who have died throughout history will be raised and judged.
- After the final judgment, believers will enter into the eternal state.

Dispensational Premillennialism

RAPTURE ⇒	GREAT TRIBULATION ⇒	SECOND COMING ⇒	MILLENNIUM ⇒	ETERNAL STATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secret rapture before Tribulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Period of great apostasy and rebellion • Widespread Jewish salvation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurrection of saints who died in Tribulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satan bound • Resurrection of the lost, judgment 	

What Dispensational Premillennialism Teaches

- The present church age will continue until, suddenly and secretly, Christ returns to the earth to take believers out of the world to heaven.
- After Christ returns to heaven with the believers, a seven-year period of Tribulation will begin. Many signs that will precede Christ's return will take place. Many Jews will return to Christ.
- At the end of the Great Tribulation, Christ will return to earth with his saints to reign on the earth for a thousand years.
- At the end of this millennial period, Satan will be loosed and will lead a rebellion. Satan will be finally defeated. Unbelievers will be resurrected and judged, and the eternal state will begin.
- There is a clear distinction between the church and Israel. The Jewish people remain distinct from the church. All God's promises to Israel remain unconditional and continuing, and are not transferred to the church.
- Biblical prophecies are to be interpreted literally where possible.

Will Christ Return Before or After the Great Tribulation?

Arguments for a Pretribulation Rapture

- The Tribulation is a time for the outpouring of God's wrath. It is not appropriate for Christians to be subjected to God's wrath. Paul promised the Thessalonians that they would not experience the wrath of God (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9).
- Jesus promises in Revelation 3:10, "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." This seems to indicate that the church will be taken out of the world before that hour of trial comes. In fact, nowhere does Scripture speak of the church being present during the Tribulation.
- If Christ returns *after* the Tribulation and defeats all his enemies, then there will not be enough unbelievers left to populate the millennial kingdom.
- The pretrib position allows for Christ to return at any moment (his secret coming), and yet for many signs to be fulfilled before his coming (after the Tribulation). Nothing remains to be fulfilled before the rapture.
- The Tribulation is a part of God's program for Israel (Daniel 9).

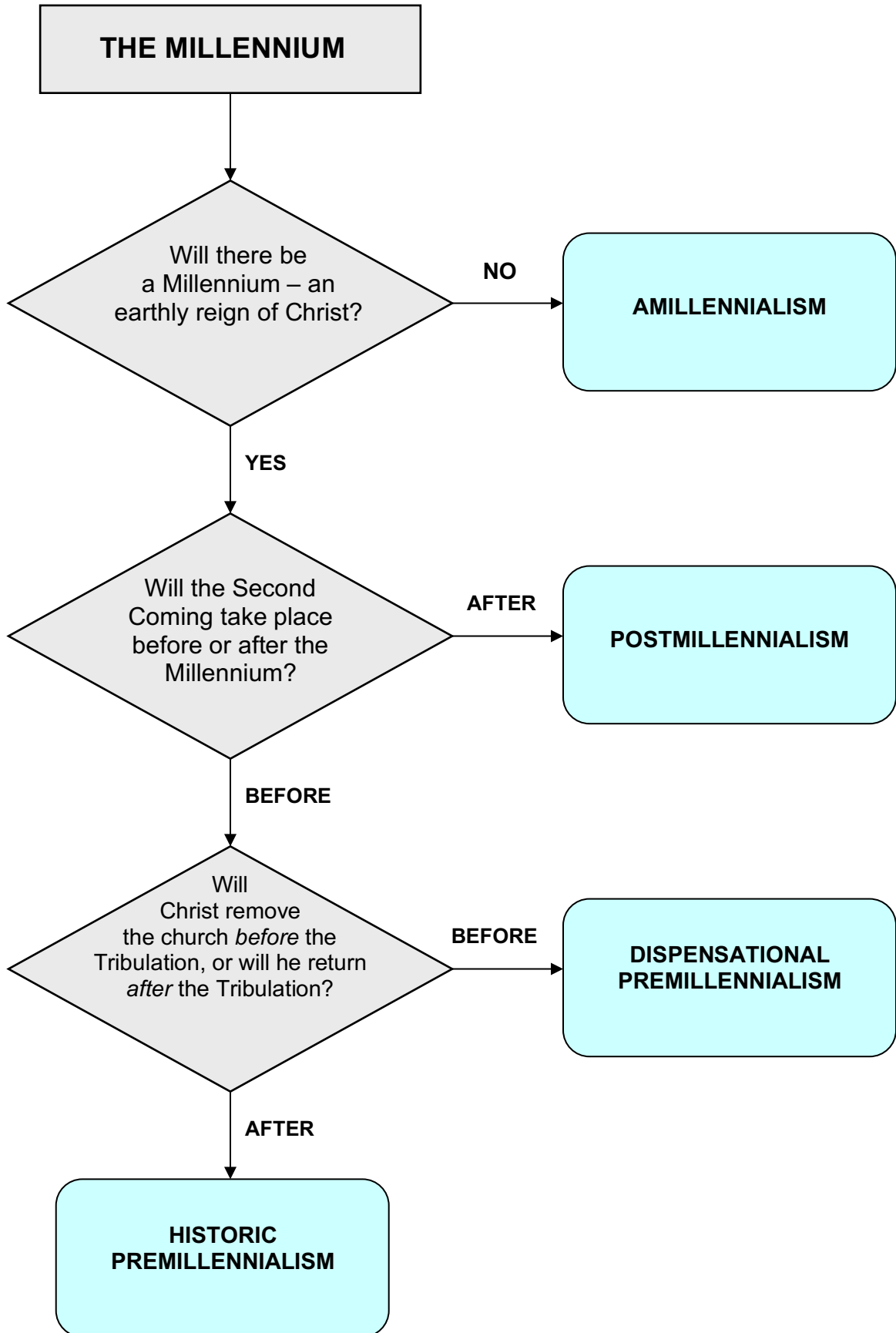
Arguments for a Posttribulation Rapture

- Matthew 24 says the *elect* will be present during the Tribulation. Consistent with the usage of this term throughout Scripture, the *elect* refers to believers.
- Revelation 3:10 does not go so far as to say that the entire church will be taken out of the world before the Tribulation. It is made to one church. It could refer to a time of suffering that took place in the Roman Empire. It promises that God will guard them, but not necessarily remove them from the world.
- There is a distinction between the wrath of God and the Tribulation. The wrath of God comes upon the wicked (John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 6:16-17) but not believers (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). However, believers will experience tribulation (Matthew 24:9; Revelation 7:14). This will not be God's wrath, but the wrath of Satan and unbelievers.
- Tribulation has been the experience of Christ and the church throughout the ages (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). Therefore, it would not be surprising if the church endured the Great Tribulation.
- Many verses, naturally interpreted, seem to indicate that the hope of the church is the return of Christ *after* the Tribulation (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-8; 2:1-12; Revelation 19:1-9).
- Posttribulationism allows that Christ could return at any time. The remaining signs could be fulfilled in a very short period of time.

T H E M I L L E N N I U M

- The New Testament does not support a distinction between Israel and the church. The church is the new Israel (Matthew 21:43; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:17-24; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 2:16; Hebrews 8; 1 Peter 2:4-10).
- If the church is going to be taken out of the world before the Tribulation, one would think that the New Testament would explicitly teach this. Instead, the Bible teaches a public and visible rapture just moments prior to his coming (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- The Tribulation is clearly linked with the Lord's return (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).
- The New Testament does not seem to justify the idea of two separate returns of Christ (once for his church, and seven years later to bring judgment).
- Pretribulation teachings are based on inferences from disputed passages. If Scripture clearly taught the pretribulation position, it should have been discovered before the nineteenth century. Instead, the majority of those in church history have believed that the church would go through the Tribulation.

THE MILLENNIUM



Coming to a Position

Question One: Will there be a Millennium – an earthly reign of Christ?

Arguments for Yes

- A natural reading of Revelation 20 suggests that there will be a literal one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ, with two separate resurrections.
- A number of passages appear to teach about a time that sounds like the millennium (Psalm 72:8-14; Isaiah 11:2-9; 65:20; Zechariah 14:6-21; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

Arguments for No

- Only one passage (Revelation 20:1-6) appears to teach a future earthly millennial reign of Christ, and that passage is obscure. It is unwise to base a major doctrine of Scripture on one passage of uncertain interpretation.
- Neither Jesus nor Paul taught about the millennium. The millennium is not mentioned in the Bible outside of Revelation.
- A number of Scriptures teach that Satan is presently being restrained – Matthew 12:28-29; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 12
- Revelation is a symbolic book. The “thousand years” or Revelation 20 signifies the idea of perfection or completeness, representing the completeness of Christ’s victory over Satan, and the perfect joy of the redeemed in heaven.
- Scripture seems to indicate that all the major events to come (resurrection of believers and unbelievers, final judgment, establishment of new heaven and earth, eternal state) will happen at once (Matthew 24-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:10).

Question Two: Will the Second Coming take place before or after the Millennium?

Arguments for After (That the world will experience Millennial conditions before Christ returns)

- The Great Commission leads us to expect that the gospel eventually spread to the entire world. Since Christ has all power in heaven and earth, and promises to be with us until the fulfillment of the commission, we should expect that the gospel will successfully spread to the entire world (Matthew 28:18-20).
- Jesus gave several parables, which appear to teach the growth of the kingdom until it fills the world with its influence (Matthew 13:31-33).
- Many verses speak of God redeeming the world (Psalms 47, 72, and 100; Isaiah 45:22-25; Zechariah 9:10; Hosea 2:23; Revelation 7:9-10).
- Angels and saints are described in Scripture as being *hosts, myriads, an innumerable multitude, ten thousand times ten thousand* (e.g. Luke 2:13; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 5:11). Such language is never used to describe the lost. Heaven is described as being *the next world, a great kingdom, a country, a city*, whereas hell is pictured as being a comparatively small place: *a prison, a lake, a pit* (Luke 20:35; Matthew 5:3; Hebrews 11:16; 1 Peter 3:19; Revelation 19:20; 21:1, 8-16).
- Historically speaking, the world is becoming increasingly Christian. Social conditions are improving.

Arguments for Before (That the Millennium will not begin before Christ returns)

- Biblical data seems to indicate a great wickedness and a cooling off of the faith of many before Christ's return (Matthew 24-25 – especially 24:21-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:1-5). Further, the Bible never teaches an earthly reign of Christ without his physical presence.
- The Bible teaches that relatively few will believe (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 18:8).
- The world is not becoming a better place. We see unprecedented levels of drug abuse, marital infidelity, pornography, homosexuality, rebellion against authority, superstition, materialism, greed, and falsehood.
- Many passages teach that Christ could return at any time and that we must be ready (Matthew 24:42-44; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 22:20). This would seem to contradict the idea of a long period of time required for the millennium on earth preceding his return.
- Postmillennialists do not agree on the subject of the two resurrections of Revelation 20.

Question Three: Will Christ remove the church before the Tribulation, or will he return after the Tribulation?

Arguments for Before (That the church will escape the Tribulation)

- The Tribulation is a time for the outpouring of God’s wrath. It is not appropriate for Christians to be subjected to God’s wrath. Paul promised the Thessalonians that they would not experience the wrath of God (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9).
- Jesus promises in Revelation 3:10, “I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” This seems to indicate that the church will be taken out of the world before that hour of trial comes. In fact, nowhere does Scripture speak of the church being present during the Tribulation.
- If Christ returns *after* the Tribulation and defeats all his enemies, then there will not be enough unbelievers left to populate the millennial kingdom.

Arguments for After (That Christ will return after the Tribulation)

- Matthew 24 says the *elect* will be present during the Tribulation. Consistent with the usage of this term throughout Scripture, the *elect* refers to believers.
- Revelation 3:10 does not go so far as to say that the entire church will be taken out of the world before the Tribulation. It is made to one church. It could refer to a time of suffering that took place in the Roman Empire. It promises that God will guard them, but not necessarily remove them from the world.
- Tribulation has been the experience of Christ and the church throughout the ages (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). Therefore, it would not be surprising if the church endured the Great Tribulation.
- Many verses, naturally interpreted, seem to indicate that the hope of the church is the return of Christ *after* the Tribulation (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-8; 2:1-12; Revelation 19:1-9).
- If the church is going to be taken out of the world before the Tribulation, one would think that the New Testament would explicitly teach this. Instead, the Bible teaches a public and visible rapture just moments prior to his coming (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- The New Testament does not seem to justify the idea of two separate returns of Christ (once for his church, and seven years later to bring judgment), or the idea of a secret return of Christ.
- Pretribulation teachings are based on inferences from disputed passages. If Scripture clearly taught the pretribulation position, it should have been discovered before the nineteenth century. Instead, the majority of those in church history have believed that the church would go through the Tribulation.