

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR DAYS?” SERIES

#1: “Five Views of Revelation” (Part 1)

INTRO:

In spite of John’s words in the very first verse of the “revelation” Jesus gave him – “*the things that must soon take place*” – here we are 2,000 years later seeking to apply his apocalyptic words to our day.

I used the word “*apocalyptic*.” You’ve heard it before. What is its meaning? It’s an adjective commonly describing or prophesying the complete destruction of the world.

John’s first and second century readers applied it to their world just as we apply it to ours. The question today is: “Does it apply to their world or ours, or does it apply in some way to both?”

Over the centuries, five distinct views of John’s Revelation have developed, most of them out of an interpretation and placement of the millennium or “*thousand years*” of chapter 20 and the so-called “seven years of tribulation” leading to “the battle of Armageddon.” Hence, their designations are:

1. Historic Premillennialism;
2. Dispensational Premillennialism;
3. Post Millennialism;
4. A-Millennialism;
5. and Preterist.

This morning I’ll give an overview of three – historical premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, and amillennialism.

Some believe the millennium is to be taken literally, and some believe it represents a long period of time. Some believe we are in the millennial era now, and some believe the millennium will begin when Jesus comes in the clouds.

First, let’s get an overview of:

HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM.

Premillennial means that the return of Christ is prior to the millennium. Premillennialists generally are literalists. That is, they believe that the Old Testament foretold the coming of the church and that the age of grace that we are living in now was also predicted in the Old Testament, that an earthly reign of Jesus Christ for 1,000 years (a millennium) will occur after His second coming, and that the rapture of the church will occur after a 7-year tribulation period at the end of the millennium.

Several church fathers, including Ireneaus, Papias, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Hippolytus, favored this view. They taught that the kingdom

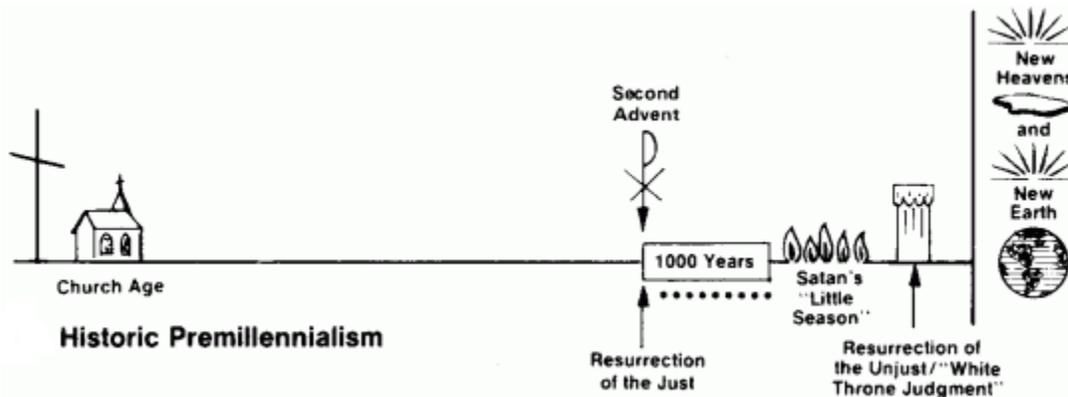
of God would be visibly manifest on earth after the second coming of Jesus. First, however, the Antichrist would appear, and a seven-year period of tribulation would commence. Following that would be the rapture and Jesus' 1,000-year reign, followed by eternity. This appears to be the prevailing belief in the first three centuries or so after Jesus rose from the dead. However, when Rome made Christianity its official religion in the fourth century, amillennialism took over.

Protestantism reverted back to premillennialism—teaching that the tribulation is followed by 1,000 years of Christ's peaceful reign before a climactic battle when the forces of evil are conquered forever.

Historic premillennialists believe that scriptural prophecy, especially the passages in Daniel and Revelation, give the entire history of the church in symbolic form. Thus, they look into the church's past and present to find prophetic fulfillment and to see where they are in God's prophetic timetable. Most historic premillennialists hold that the nation of Israel will undergo a national salvation immediately before the millennium is established, but there will be no national restoration of Israel. Thus, the nation of Israel will not have a special role or function that is distinct from the church.

Proponents of this view that you may know or have heard of were/are: Charles Spurgeon, John Piper, Francis Schaeffer, and Harold Lindsell.

Charted, historical premillennialism looks like this:



Next, we have

DISPENSATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM.

In contrast to historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism has gained popularity among modern evangelicals. Dispensational premillennialists hold that the current church age will end with the rapture of the church, which, along with the appearance of one known as the “Antichrist,” marks the beginning of a seven-year tribulation period on earth. At the end of that period, Christ will return, Satan will be destroyed, and the millennium of peace will begin, in which Christians will reign with

Christ, followed by our eternal life with Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth. Dispensational premillennialists hold that the nation of Israel will be saved and restored to a place of preeminence in the millennium. Thus, Israel will have a special function of service in the millennium that is different from that of the Church.

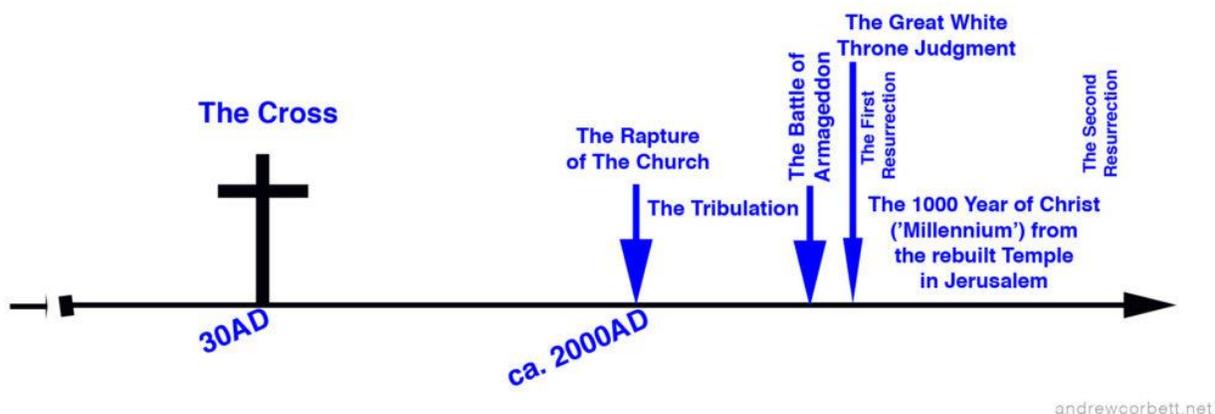
Another difference is that most dispensational premillennialists hold that the millennium is for a literal 1,000 years, while some historic premillennialists assert that the 1,000 years is figurative for a long period of time. Basically, the fundamental difference between historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism consists in the latter's insistence on maintaining a distinction between the nation of Israel and the church. According to dispensationalists, the millennium will be a period of history in which God reverts back to fulfilling His Old Testament promises made to ethnic Israel, after this modern "Church Age" in which we live today is concluded. As such, the millennium will be a state of Jewish dominion over all the world,

The Christians who reign with Christ will all have been given eternal, glorified bodies, and will reign spiritually, while the Jews will own the world physically, and will live, marry, and die (although evincing incredible longevity), just as people have throughout the history of the world. It is only after this thousand-year period, in which God fulfills His promises to ethnic Israel, that Christ will put down a final rebellion and usher in the eternal state with its New Heaven and New Earth.

Proponents of dispensational premillennialism that you may know or have heard of were/are: Charles Feinberg, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and John Hagee.

Charted, dispensational premillennialism looks like this:

THE DISPENSATIONAL TIMELINE OF BIBLE PROPHECY



Next, consider:

AMILLENNIALISM.

Amillennialism is actually misnamed. The 'a' at the beginning means 'no', indicating the proponents of this position believe there will be no millennial reign. But that's not quite accurate. A better title would be something like 'realized millennialism', indicating that we are currently in the millennium.

Amillennialism is not new. Many throughout the history of the church have held it. And by the time of Augustine, it had become the dominant view of the church. It's still the dominant view of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and many Protestants. And it was the view of the reformers, including Calvin and Luther.

Amillennialism understands the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles to be synonymous with the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20:4-6. The kingdom of God is a present-day reality with Christ ruling from heaven. And it's a kingdom populated by all those who have given their lives to the lordship of Jesus.

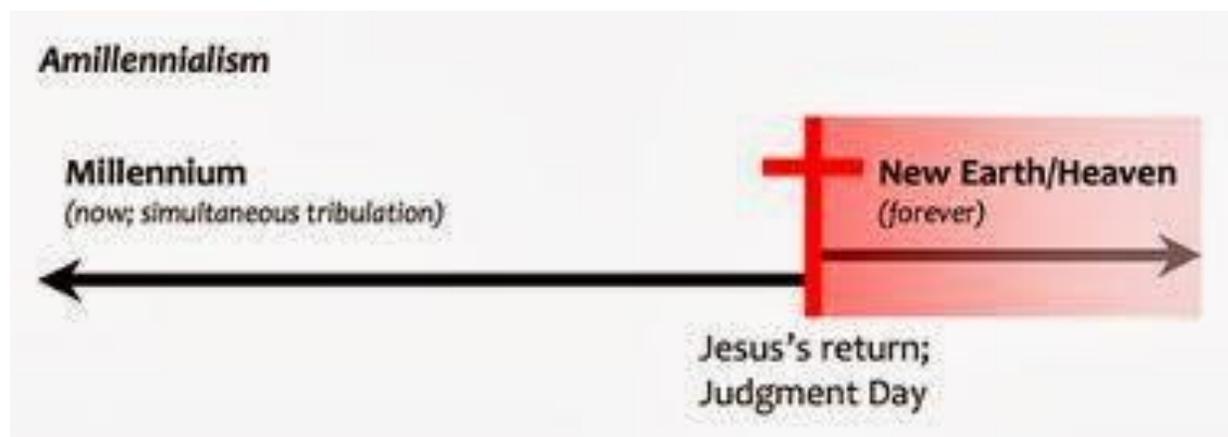
So how do Amillennialists understand these 10 verses in Revelation 20 that talk about Satan's binding, the thousand-year rule of Christ, followed by the release of Satan for a short period? First, they are not understood to be symbolic. They believe they are describing real events. They believe Satan was bound or severely limited by the death and resurrection of Christ and that He is reigning now as king in His kingdom, the church. The millennium of Revelation is the church age, an indefinite period of time, and Satan will be loosed at the end of it for a short period of time, after which Jesus will come, the dead will be raised, and Satan will be destroyed.

However, they do believe that there is much symbolism throughout the book of Revelation to the extent that they are not literalists as are the premillennialists.

And, finally, amillennialists believe that Revelation was written mainly to give encouragement to the church of its day. While it does ultimately point to the end times, it was mainly about what was happening in the first century.

Amillennialists you may know or have heard of were/are: St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Sam Storms, J. I. Packer, Anthony Hoekema, R. C. Sproul and Kim Riddlebarger.

Charted, amillennialism looks like this:



CLOSING:

Next week we'll look at post- millennialism and the view called "preterism."

By the time I finish with next week's session, you're going to be asking what view I take. I'll tell you on February 7, and then I'll tell you why I believe what I believe. By February 14, we'll be looking at the text of the book of Revelation.