

Eschatology: Or “The End Times”

Part 3: Historic Premillennialism

WHAT IS “HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM?”

- Brief definition
 1. Premillennialism => Christ will return before the millennial kingdom, or 1000 years.
 - a. Christ will return to begin a reign of 1000 years upon the earth in Jerusalem.
 - b. The 1000 years may be taken literally or figuratively.
 2. Historic => It has roots in early Christianity
 - a. Justin Martyr (ca. AD 100-165)
 - b. Irenaeus (ca. AD 130-200)
 - c. Tertullian (ca. AD 160-230)
 3. This view is sometimes referred to as “traditional premillennialism,” “classical,” or “post-tribulational.”
 4. Contemporary authors who espouse this view include Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*) and Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology*).
- Historic Premill’s view of the world and the ringing in of the Millennium:
 1. The world becomes more morally corrupt and antagonistic toward the Church.
 - a. The Church continues to evangelize, but it fails to convert the world.
 - b. Eventually, the Antichrist arises and leads a war against the Church (i.e., Armageddon). The Church suffers persecution. See 2 Thess. 2:1-10 and 1 John 2:18f.
 - c. This is “The Tribulation” (see Matt. 24:21, 29-30).
 2. As the Church is on the brink of destruction, Christ returns and destroys the antichrist and then binds Satan.
 - a. The Church is saved from the clutches of the antichrist.
 - b. Some view this as the time when ethnic Israel will be saved (see Rom. 11:25-29).
 - That all ethnic Israel will be saved is a major tenet in historic premill, based upon Rom. 11:26: “. . . and so all Israel will be saved.”
 - This is not to say, like dispensationalism, that the Jews are still God’s special covenant people who remain as “the apple of his eye.”
 - Historic Premill sees Israel and the church as one people (see Eph. 2-3) and that the Temple and sacrifices have been done away with (see the book of Heb, esp. chapt. 8). [See G. E. Ladd in *The Meaning of the Millennium*.]
 - Also, Premill. affirms that Jews are saved only by believing in Christ. There is no “get out of hell free card” because one is simply a Jew.
 - “So a nondispensational eschatology simply affirms the future salvation of Israel and remains open to God’s future as to the details” (Ladd, 28).
 3. The “first resurrection” then occurs (see Rev. 20:5-6).
 - a. The bodies of the living Saints are transformed and the ones who have already died are given new bodies.
 - b. All the Saints are “raptured” to meet Christ in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17).
 - c. Christ and all the Saints then descend to the earth and Christ sets up his Millennial kingdom.

- The nature of Christ’s Millennial kingdom:
 1. Christ will rule literally and universally from a throne in Jerusalem.
 - a. Christ will rule with “a rod of iron” (see Psa. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).
 - b. The Saints will rule with Christ from Jerusalem (Rev. 20:4; 2:26; 3:21; Luke 19:17,19; 1 Cor. 6:3).
 - c. Satan is bound and rendered powerless (see Rev. 20:1-3).
 2. This does not mean that everyone willingly submits to Christ’s rule. Many have a heart of rebellion. It is a time when most sin and rebellion is removed, but not all.
 - a. See Isa. 65:20; 11:6-11; Psa. 72:8-14; Zech. 14:5-17
 - b. See also Rev. 2:26-27, where the language seems to imply a rule by force over rebellious people—a time in between Christ’s 2nd coming and eternal states.
 3. This also does not mean that Historic Premill does not believe Christ is ruling now. They believe Christ is ruling now from heaven as Postmillennialists and Amillennialists. (See Heb. 1:3; 2:7-8; 10:12-13; Rev. 3:21.)
 4. “The New Testament does not make the reign of Christ one that is limited to Israel in the millennium. It is a spiritual reign in heaven which has already been inaugurated, and its primary purpose is to destroy Christ’s spiritual enemies, the last of which is death” (Ladd, 29).
- Satan will be loosed at the end of the Millennium.
 1. Satan is loosed and gathers unbelievers to attack Christ and his Saints in Jerusalem (Rev. 20:3, 7-9).
 2. Satan, however, is decisively defeated (Rev. 20:9-10).
- Once this has occurred, a “second resurrection” occurs—one for the wicked unbelievers (see Rev. 20:11-15)—and judgment day.

AN ANALYSIS OF “HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM”

- Premill is (in general) committed to a literalist approach to biblical prophecy.
- Premill is committed to a particular view of Revelation: chronological (See esp. Rev. 19:11-20:6).
 1. But is Rev. 19 really about Christ’s destruction of an end time antichrist? Perhaps a better view is that it is really about the destruction of Jerusalem at Christ’s first coming.
 2. Is all of Rev. 20 about Christ’s second coming?
- Premill has two bodily resurrections (but see John 5:28-29).
There are two *kinds* of resurrections, but they are the same event.
- For the Redeemed Saints and Christ to rule in a not-yet fully redeemed world places the saved in an “unnatural” environment.
 1. “A curious situation surely does arise when Christ and the resurrected and translated saints return to earth to set up the millennial kingdom in association with men still in the flesh. That condition, semiheavenly and semiearthly, with Christ reigning—apparently—in Jerusalem, with two radically different types of people (the saints in glorified, resurrected bodies and ordinary mortals still in the flesh mingling freely throughout the world for the long and almost unending period of one thousand years) strikes me as so unreal and impossible that I wonder how anyone can take it seriously” (Lorraine Boettner, *Meaning*, 49).

2. It is also curious that in such an earthly rule of Christ people will relate to him just like he was during his earthly ministry at his first coming. But he is no longer like that—he is glorified! Example: Saul on the road to Damascus. Premillennialists “imagine that men will be in personal contact with him as he reigns from an earthly throne. Apparently they assume that he will be as he was in the days of his humiliation” (Boettner, 50).
 3. There is no hint in Scripture of a “provisional kingdom” in which glorified believers and believers still in the flesh co-mingle. 1 Thess. 4:17 – “. . . and so we shall always be with the Lord.”
- What is the purpose of the Millennium in the Premill view?
 1. Three possibilities:
 - a. It is part of Christ’s rule that he put all his enemies under his feet (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25).
 - But Christ’s enemies have already been placed under his feet (Heb. 2:8)
 - The point of 1 Cor. 15:25 is that death has not been abolished. But it has been conquered!
 - b. so that Christ’s kingdom can be disclosed in history—visibly—because now it is only unseen, spiritually.
 - Why?
 - c. to show that sinfulness is due to men’s hearts, not a bad environment; so God will be vindicated in his final judgment of sinful men
 - This seems more like a pop-psychology argument. Why should we believe this?
 - Historic Premill is still committed to making a distinction between Israel and the church, but this distinction is utterly destroyed (see Eph. 2-3).
 1. In fact, Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43).
 2. 1 Thess. 2:14-16 – “ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”