

Eschatology: Or “The End Times”

Part 4: Postmillennialism

WHAT IS “HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM?”

- Brief definition
 1. Post – “after”; Millennium – “1000 years”
 2. Christ’s second coming is after the Millennium.
- Loraine Boettner:

“Holds that 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 in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the ‘Millennium’” (Boettner, *The Millennium*, 14).

“Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ’s return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind” (Kenneth Gentry, *The Millennium and Beyond*, 13-14).
- History of the idea:
 1. Charles Hodge (1797-1878); B. B. Warfield (1851-1921)
 2. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) – *The Millennial Harbinger*

AN OVERVIEW OF POSTMILLENNIALISM

- Postmillennialism is an optimistic view of this present world:
 1. The world will eventually be Christianized.
 - a. Postmillennialists emphasize that the success of the gospel is ultimately dependent upon God, not man. Because God is sovereign and all-powerful, he can accomplish this task although it may appear to man as an impossibility.
 - b. God always “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11), and His Word “will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).
 2. God has given the church the responsibility to convert the entire world and the tools to accomplish this:
 - a. The church has the very presence of the risen Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and *lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matt. 28:19-20).
 - b. Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit: “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4b).
 - c. The Father delights in saving sinners: “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (Jn. 3:17); God

- “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).
- d. Christians have the gospel which is very powerful: It is the “power of God” (Rom. 1:16); “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).
 - e. To accomplish the conversion of the world, Christians have the power of prayer in Jesus’ name. Jesus taught his followers to pray specifically that “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt. 6:10).
 - f. The devil has already been defeated; it was done at Christ’s first coming: “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:17).
3. As a consequence:
 - a. Christians can resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9), and Satan is crushed under their feet (Rom. 16:20).
 - b. “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
 4. In the end, the world not only becomes Christianized, but it becomes better economically, socially, culturally, and politically due to being Christianized.
- Scriptural evidence for Postmillennium’s optimistic view of the world being (almost) entirely converted:
 1. Ps. 22:27 – “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD’S And He rules over the nations.”
 2. Ps. 86:9 – “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and they shall glorify Your name.”
 3. Other OT examples: Ps. 2; 102:15; 110; Isa. 2:2-4
 4. Also, Jesus’ parables in the NT (esp. Matt. 13) seem to imply that his kingdom will convert (almost) the entire world: parable of the sower (vv.3-23); parable of the mustard seed and leaven (vv.31-31; 33).
 5. John 12:31-32 – “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”
 - Postmillennium’s view of the Kingdom:
 1. Christ set up his kingdom at his first coming.
 - a. The Kingdom is a heavenly, spiritual kingdom.
 - “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn. 18:36)
 - “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).
 - b. It was inaugurated at the time of Christ’s ministry, death, and resurrection (see Luke 4:43; Matt. 4:17).
 - “But he said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose’” (Lk. 4:43).
 - “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven

is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

2. Christ is ruling now from his heavenly throne over his people the Church.
 - a. Christ told his disciples that the kingdom would come in their lifetime: “And Jesus was saying to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power” (Mk. 9:1).
 - b. Matt. 26:64 – “Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’”
 - c. Heb. 8:1 – “Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”
 - d. Eph. 1:20-22 – “. . . which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.”
- The Binding of Satan:
 1. Christians now go throughout the world conquering for Christ by preaching the gospel. By preaching the gospel, Satan is “bound” (See Matt. 12: 22-32 and compare to Rev. 20:1-3).
 2. Ultimately, most people become Christians because the gospel continually binds Satan (Matt. 13:31-33; 28:18-20).
 3. The Gospel spreads over the entire world (see Zech. 9:10; Num. 14:21; Isa. 49:6; Ps. 2:8; 47:2-8)
 4. Eventually, Satan will be entirely bound and the world will enjoy “Shalom.”
 5. The world at this time is one of peace, progress, and wealth in all aspects of life.
 - a. All things go on as before, but the world is paradise in comparison to the present world.
 - b. Sin will be present, but it will be very limited.
- As Satan is bound and the Gospel spreads, the Millennium continues to be rung in (Rev. 20:4-6).
 1. The Millennium is symbolic for 1000 years.
 2. It is also equated with the church age. The church rules with Christ for 1000 years; this is a spiritual or heavenly rule.
- The “first resurrection” of Rev. 20:4-6 refers to a spiritual resurrection.
 1. See Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 2:13.
 2. Christians are spiritually resurrected and are spiritually enthroned.
 - Eph. 2:4-6 – “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”
 - Col. 1:13 – “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

- Satan is then loosed at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6), evidently to show how bad sin is.
- After Satan is loosed for a little while, Christ will return. Christ thus returns *after* the Millennium.
- Resurrection and final judgment:
 1. There will be one resurrection for both believers and unbelievers and it occurs at Christ's return.
 2. There will be one judgment when all will come before Christ.

AN ANALYSIS POSTMILLENNIALISM

- Positive contributions:
 1. Confidence in the Great Commission
 2. Simple
 3. View of the Millennium and the Church age
 4. View of resurrection and judgment
- Some criticisms
 1. Does the Bible warrant such optimism? See Matt. 7:13-14; 22:14.
 - a. The OT texts referred to are probably best understood to refer to Christ's second coming.
 - b. Matt. 7:13-14 – "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."
 - c. Matt. 22:14 – "For many are called, but few are chosen."
 2. Will almost everyone be saved? The parables of the mustard seed and leaven do not show the *extent* of Kingdom growth (see Matt. 13:31-33).
 3. The Bible appears to indicate that things will get worse: 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9, 13; 2 Pet. 3:1-4. (Compare also with Matt. 13:24-30).
 4. Why must there be a direct connection between spiritual progress and economic, social, and political progress?
 5. Is there any reason to expect Christ's return soon?