

What is the millennium? When does it occur? Will Christians go through the Great Tribulation?

1. **Amillennialism:** There is **no** future millennium.
 - a. Rev. 20:1-10 describes the present age:
 - b. "Thousand years" is simply a figure of speech.
 - c. The present church age will continue until the return of Christ when there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers, and the new heavens and new earth will begin.
 2. **Postmillennialism:** Christ will return **after** ("post-") the millennium.
 - a. The progress of the gospel/growth of the church will increase; a larger proportion of the population will be Christians.
 - b. As a result, there will be significant Christian influences on society.
 - c. Gradually, a "millennial age" of peace and righteousness will occur on the earth, and will last for a long time.
 - d. At the end of this period, Christ's return to earth, believers and unbelievers raised, final judgment, new heaven/earth.
 3. **Premillennialism:** Christ will return **before** ("pre-") the millennium.
 - **Classic or Historic Premillennialism:**
 - a. The present church age will continue until a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth.
 - b. After that tribulation at the end of the church age, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom.
 - c. During this time, Christ will be physically present on earth and will reign as king.
 - d. The believers will receive glorified resurrection bodies, and will reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years.
 - e. Many hold that we will see the new heavens and new earth at this time.
 - f. At the beginning, Satan will be bound/cast into the bottomless pit; he will have no influence on the earth.
 - g. At the end, Satan will be loosed, and with many unbelievers gather for battle against Christ, but will be defeated.
 - h. Christ will raise from the dead unbelievers for final judgment, and believers enter into the eternal state.
 - **Pretribulational (Dispensational) Premillennialism:**
 - a. The church age will continue until suddenly, unexpectedly, and secretly, Christ will return part way to earth, and then will call believers to himself. (1 Th 4:16-17) then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed.
 - b. When that happens, there will be a great tribulation on the earth for seven years.
 - c. During the tribulation, many of the signs that precede Christ's return will be fulfilled.
 - d. The great ingathering of the Jewish people will occur.
 - e. At the end of the tribulation, Christ will come back with his saints to reign on the earth for a thousand years.
 - f. After this millennium: a rebellion, the defeat of Satan, resurrection of unbelievers, final judgment, & the eternal state.
- B. A consideration of the arguments for Amillennialism**
1. Only one obscure passage (Rev. 20:1-6) appears to teach the future earthly millennial reign of Christ.
 2. Scripture only teaches one resurrection, when both believers and unbelievers will be raised. (Jn 5:28-29; Ac 24:15)
 3. The idea of glorified believers and sinners living on earth together is too difficult to accept.
 4. If Christ comes in glory to reign on the earth, then how could people still persist in sin?
 5. There seems to be no convincing purpose for such a millennium.
 6. Scripture seems to indicate that all the major events yet to come before the eternal state will occur at once.
- Responses to the arguments for Amillennialism:
1. "Only one obscure passage":
 - a. The Bible only needs to say something once for it to be true. (i.e. Tower of Babel)
 - b. Premillennialists do not find this passage obscure at all, rather they understand the passage in a straightforward sense.
 - c. Many premillennialists argue that several other passages require belief in a future period greater than the present age, but which falls short of the eternal state.
 - d. The amillennial interpretation of Rev. 20:1-6 has several difficulties:
 2. "Only one resurrection":
 - Hard to accept when Scripture speaks of "the first resurrection"
 - Other passages (Dan 12:2, Acts 24:15) don't specify whether the resurrection of believers and unbelievers will be separated in time, but John 5 hints at the possibility of two. (Jn 5:28-29)
 3. "Glorified believers and sinners together?":
 - This does sound strange, but not impossible for God.
 - Jesus lived with his glorified body for forty days after the resurrection, as did many OT saints. (Mt 27:52-53)
 4. "People persisting in sin in spite of Christ's reigning presence?":
 - Judas lived with Christ for three years and betrayed him.
 - Many Pharisees saw Jesus' miracles—even raising people from the dead!—and still did not believe.
 - Even some disciples in the presence of the glorified Lord Jesus doubted. (Mt 28:16-17)
 - Such persistent unbelief in the presence of Christ is hard to understand, but Satan himself fell.
 5. "No clear purpose":
 - God may have several purposes in mind which may not now be clear to us, but such a millennium would certainly show the outworking of God's good purposes in the structures of society.
 - The millennium will further vindicate God's righteousness.

- It is God's good pleasure to unfold his purposes and reveal more of his glory gradually over time.
6. A final objection: Amillennialism can propose no really satisfying explanation of Revelation 20.

C. A consideration of the arguments for Postmillennialism

1. The Great Commission leads us to expect the gospel to go forth and result in a largely Christian world.
 2. Parables of the gradual growth of the kingdom indicate it will eventually fill the earth with its influence. Mt 13:31-33)
 3. Postmillennialists argue that the world is becoming more Christian.
- Responses to the arguments for Postmillennialism:
1. "Great Commission":
 - This passage does not necessarily imply Christ will bring about the conversion of the majority of the population.
 2. "Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven":
 - These parables do not tell us the extent to which the kingdom will grow.
 3. "The world is becoming more Christian":
 - The world is also becoming more evil.
 - Even where Bible-believing Christians are large segments of population, nothing like a millennial kingdom occurs.
 4. Several NT Passages seem to give explicit denial to the postmillennial position (Mt 7:13-14; Lk 18:8; 2 Th 2:3-4; 2 Ti 3:1-5, 12-13; 4:3-4; Mt 24:21-30)
 - There have been several attempts to explain this passage as something mainly fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, making most of the celestial elements symbolic and pointing to similar imagery in other passages. (Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9, Isaiah 13:10, 34:4)
 - Ezekiel, Joel, and Amos speak simply of judgments of darkness, not stars falling or the heavens being shaken.
 - Isaiah is set in contexts in which it could be understood as literal predictions of changes prior to final judgment.
 - "They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heavens with power and great glory." (Matt 24:30)
 - Many passages Christ could return soon and that we must be ready for him to return at any time.

D. A consideration of the arguments for Premillennialism

1. Several OT passages fit neither in the present age nor in the eternal state (Is 65:20; Is 11:6-11; Zec 14:5-17)
2. Many NT passages besides Revelation 20 also speak of a future millennium. (Re 2:26-27; 1 Co 15:22-25)
3. Revelation 20 seems to be best understood as referring to a future earthly reign of Christ prior to the future judgment.
 - a. The binding and imprisonment of Satan imply a greater restriction of his activity than what we know now.
 - b. "Came to life" is best taken as a bodily resurrection as the next verse says, "This is the first resurrection."
 - c. Reigning with Christ is something still future—consistent with the rest of the NT. (Lk 19:17; 1 Co 6:3; Re 3:21)
 - Nowhere does Scripture say Christians or believers in the intermediate state are currently reigning with Christ.

E. The time of the Great Tribulation

--Arguments for a pretribulational rapture:

1. Inappropriate for believers to be on the earth during the outpouring of God's wrath.
2. Revelation 3:10 seems to promise that the church will be taken out of the world prior to the hour of trial.
3. If Christ returns after the tribulation and defeats all his enemies, where will the unbelievers come from who populate the millennial kingdom?
4. This view makes possible the belief that Christ could come at any moment.

-- Responses to the arguments for pretribulational rapture:

1. Inconsistent with NT to say that all the suffering during that time is the result of God's wrath. Much due to other factors:
 - "Wickedness is multiplied" (Matt 24:12)
 - The persecution of the church increases.
 - Opposition from Satan greatly increases.
2. Jesus' promise to the Philadelphian believers is not enough to say the entire church will be taken before the tribulation.
3. Christ's defeat of his enemies does not mean he will annihilate all of them. Many will simply surrender without trusting.
4. To say it is unlikely but possible the signs have been fulfilled is also consistent with Christ returning at any time.

-- Arguments for a posttribulational rapture:

1. The NT nowhere clearly says the church will be removed from the earth before the tribulation.
2. The tribulation is clearly linked with the Lord's return in some passages. (Mt 24:31; 1 Th 4:16; 1 Co 15:51-52)
 - a. These seem to be the same trumpet sounding rather than two loud trumpet calls separated by seven years.
 - b. Matt 24 is difficult to understand as referring to Jewish people saved during the tribulation rather than the church.
 - Jesus is addressing his disciples and warning of suffering and persecution to come.
 - It seems likely his disciples are representatives of the church rather than of a future Jewish kingdom.
3. The NT does not seem to justify the idea of two separate returns of Christ.
 - It seems best to conclude that the church will go through the time of tribulation predicted by Jesus.
 - Christians should be prepared to endure suffering.
 - It is frequently God's way to bring his people through suffering to glory. (1 Pe 4:14; Ro 8:17; Heb 2:10; Re 2:10)

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To order CDs, e-mail Jason Van Haselen jvanhaselen@yahoo.com or JT Collins jcollins@veritycp.com. Jason and JT are also available in the sound booth before and after the class.