

KEY AREAS IN ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

Bruce A. Ware, Professor of Christian Theology, Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

SESSION TWO: POSTMILLENNIAL, AMILLENNIAL, AND HISTORIC PREMILLENNIAL VIEWS

III. Views of the Millennium

A. Classic Postmillennialism and (Partial) Preterism

1. General Description

- a. Classic Postmillennialism (Jonathan Edwards, B.B. Warfield, A.H. Strong, C. Hodge, L. Boettner, J.J. Davis)

The Kingdom of God is now being spread throughout the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals. As people come to Christ, changed spiritual lives will result in a changed social, economic, political and cultural order. Since more and more people will come to Christ, the world will eventually become Christianized.

- b. (Partial) Preterism (Kenneth Gentry, Douglas Wilson, R. C. Sproul)

This version of postmillennialism holds that the tribulation events described in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-25) and in the Book of Revelation (Rev 6-18) were all fulfilled by and through the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. From that point on, the church has been in the millennial reign of Christ in which one sees a gradual spread of the gospel and Christianization of the world.

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. From Scripture

- 1) Scripture teaches that the saved will outnumber the lost.
- 2) The Kingdom parables of Jesus emphasize its tremendous growth (e.g. mustard seed -- Mt. 13:31-32; leaven --Mt. 13:33).
- 3) Satan is defeated and bound so that the Spirit of God can work without opposition (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 20:2-3).
- 4) For partial preterists, Matt 16:28 is a pivotal text indicating those alive during Christ's ministry will be alive to see his kingdom (millennial kingdom) come in – which fits, then, with a 70 AD date for the end of tribulation and beginning of the millennium.

- b. From History and Society

Advances in technology, advances in missions, advances in people coming to Christ, advances in the quality of life, all indicated the gradual increase of the kingdom.

B. Amillennialism

1. General Description

This view is called “amillennialism” because there is no literal, 1000 year millennium, following Christ's second coming. The terms “realized millennium” and “Idealism” are preferable to most advocates. The millennium is now being fulfilled in this present age between the first and second comings of Christ.

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. Revelation 20:1-6 refers to the binding of Satan and reigning of Christ in this age, an age figuratively referred to as a 1,000 year period. 20:1-3 refers to Satan's being bound in relation to earth, and 20:4-6 speaks of saints reigning with Christ either spiritually now on earth or in heaven in the intermediate state. Revelation 20-22 are seen to compose a separate literary unit and so should not be seen as following the coming of Christ spoken of in 19:11-21, but rather happens simultaneously with the tribulation of Rev 6-19.
- b. At the return of Christ, death is defeated altogether (1 Cor 15:25-26, 55). This rules out the premillennial separation of two resurrections, one at the return of Christ and the other after a supposed future millennium.

C. Historic Premillennialism

1. General Description

This view holds to a literal return of Christ prior to his 1,000 year literal reign over the earth. The church is the spiritual Israel, and hence the OT promises concerning Israel are fulfilled in the church. The nation of Israel will be saved, as is stated in Rom 11:25-26, but this occurs as Jews become part of the church. There is no distinctive future in God's end-time program for national Israel.

2. Main Lines of Support

- a. Chronological progression from Rev 19 to 20. If the narrative story-line of Rev 19 continues into Rev 20, then a premillennial return of Christ is demanded. Christ returns at the end of ch. 19, and the millennium occurs in ch. 20. If ch. 20 continues the story from ch. 19, then the millennium follows the return of Christ. One telling feature is that 19:20, the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. Then in 20:10, the devil is thrown into the lake of fire "where the beast and the false prophet are also" – indicating that the story line has advanced, and ch. 20 follows chronologically after ch. 19.
- b. Rev. 20:1-6 is the single most important text for historic premillennialism. Ladd acknowledges that this is the only NT passage that clearly speaks of the literal 1,000 year period when the returned Christ reigns on earth. Rev. 20:1-6 states clearly that Satan will be bound so as not to deceive the nations – something clearly not the case in this age (e.g., see 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:1-3; 1 John 5:19) – and Christ will reign on earth, physically and literally, for 1,000 years.
- c. The key point in Ladd's interpretation regards the resurrections spoken of in 20:4-5. Ladd rejects Hoekema's attempt to make the 1st resurrection (the "coming to life" in 20:4) as a spiritual one. Clearly the two resurrections or two comings to life are parallel, though they are separated by 1,000 years. But the context clearly calls for a literal bodily resurrection due to the fact that those raised were already believers (so this cannot be a spiritual resurrection) and they were martyred and beheaded and thus killed physically (so their resurrection must be physical)