

Definitions of Millennial Positions

Agreements and differences

Bible-believing people all agree that at some future time Jesus Christ will appear openly and bodily to the world in the Second Coming and will begin visibly to reign. But they do not all agree on the exact character of all the events preceding and following the Second Coming, nor do they all agree on the order of events. People have held three main positions over the course of church history, namely premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism.

The differences among these positions are complex, involving questions concerning the interpretation of a considerable body of OT prophecy as well as various NT passages. Rev 20:1-10 is only one of the passages involved in the discussion. It just happens to be the case that the names of the positions have been derived from the Latin word “millennium,” meaning 1000 years, because of the mention of a period of 1000 years in Rev 20:2-7.

Premillennialism. Premillennialism argues for the following series of events. (1) The present age continues to be a mixture of good and evil, believers and unbelievers. (2) Christ returns (the Second Coming). Christians living and dead receive resurrection bodies. There is a judgment on the unbelievers who are alive. (3) Christ inaugurates a visible reign over the nations, a time of great peace and prosperity lasting for 1000 years (some think longer). (4) Shortly before the end of this period, Satan instigates a great rebellion (described in Rev 20:7-10). (5) God puts down the rebellion, and there is a final judgment of those alive and of the wicked dead. (6) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

Amillennialism. Amillennialism has the following sequence of events. (1) The present age continues with a mixture of good and evil. (2) Satan instigates a final rebellion near the end of the age. (3) Christ returns (the Second Coming). Christ judges all people, living and dead. Believers receive resurrection bodies, and unbelievers are cast into hell. (4) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

Postmillennialism. Postmillennialism has the following sequence of events. (1) The present age becomes better and better as more people become Christians and the blessing of God is poured out on them. There will come a future age of spiritual prosperity when Christian faith will dominate in this world. (2) Christ returns (the Second Coming). Christ judges all people, living and dead. Believers receive resurrection bodies, and unbelievers are cast into hell. (3) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

Dispensationalist premillennialism. A variation of premillennialism arising the 19th century has the following series of events. (1) The present age continues with a mixture of good and evil. (2) Christ comes to rapture the church. All believers are caught up to heaven and receive resurrection bodies. Unbelievers are left on earth and do not see Christ. (3) Seven years of tribulation begin, during which God’s wrath is poured out on unbelievers and a Jewish remnant converted to faith in Christ bears witness to the truth. (4) At the end of the tribulation Christ appears visibly, unbelievers are cast into hell, and believers living on earth enter a period of 1000 years during which Christ rules over the nations visibly. (5) Satan instigates a rebellion near the end of the period (Rev 20:7-10). (6) God puts down the rebellion and judges all the dead and all the people who lived in the 1000 year period. (7) The eternal reign of God begins (the consummation).

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