

A photograph of a lion and a young child sitting on a grassy field filled with yellow daisies. The lion is on the left, looking towards the child on the right. The child is wearing a grey flat cap and a striped shirt, and is gesturing with their hands. The background is a soft-focus field of daisies under a bright sky.

THE MILLENNIUM KINGDOM

if, when and why?

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

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INTRODUCTION

During the history of Christianity different opinions have been held concerning the glorious future Kingdom of God spoken of throughout the entire Bible. With the passing of time these views were given names. They are commonly referred to as *A-Millennialism*, *Post-Millennialism*, and *Pre-Millennialism*.

These three main interpretations on the subject centre around whether the related biblical passages are to be interpreted in a spiritual sense, as opposed to being interpreted literally, and around whether any literal interpretation will be *before* or *after* the Second Advent.

The prefix *a* means *no*, and so states there will be no literal reign of Messiah on Earth in the future. The prefix *post* means *after*. So according to this view, Christ will return to Earth after the Millennium Kingdom of Messiah on Earth. Last, the prefix *pre* means *before*, and so states that Christ will return to Earth before the Millennium Reign commences.

The word *millennium* comes from the Latin term for one thousand, which is *mile*. The Greek word is *chilia* and explains why belief in the Millennium Reign of the Messiah on Earth is sometimes known as *chiliasm*.

The general public uses the term millennium to mean the thousand years starting in A.D. 2000, namely the calendar millennium. So do not confuse this with the biblical Millennium we are speaking of, mentioned most specifically in the Book of Revelation and described in other prophetic Books of the Bible.

In the following chapters we will give you a more full introduction to each of these views, showing the one which we favour and which we believe is more consistent when interpreting biblical prophecy. However, before our discussion, I should underline that our goal is not to defend *every* aspect of the view we favour, but only that which we consider more accurate in reference to the *nature* and *time* of God's prophesied Kingdom.

POST - MILLENNIALISM

Post-Millennialism accepts the idea of a literal reign of Christ on Earth, but not all Post-Millennialists view this as a thousand-year duration. Some see the thousand years in the Book of Revelation as only a symbolic reference. But what distinguishes this view from Pre-Millennialism is that it precedes the Second Advent.

In general adherents to this interpretation believe that the world will get better and better through the spread of the Gospel and that this will be the Millennium Age.

They teach that the work of the Gospel will enter into times of unprecedented success, so that the will of Christ is done and His rule established on Earth as it is in Heaven. Then, after the Millennium, Messiah Jesus will come and take all believers to Heaven and condemn those who have rejected Him.

Post-Millennialism teaches that all this is done through human efforts, such as man's expanding knowledge and his increasing ability to exercise dominion over the Earth, as opposed to the supernatural intervention of Christ at His Second Advent.

What can we say about this? While credit must be given for its faith and commitment to preaching the Gospel in today's world, the Post-Millennium View runs counter to the plain biblical teaching that prior to the return of Christ there will be great persecution, deception and apostasy.

Another objection some have raised against this view is its tendency to postpone the reign of Christ to some future period prior to the Second Advent. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is already King and Ruler of the Universe, and although His rule is not yet complete on Earth, the progress and victory of the Church over the centuries prove it has already begun.

Taken to Extremes

There are also a number of so-called Christian movements around today that lean towards Post-Millennialism. For instance, the *Kingdom Now Dominionists* and the *Manifest Sons*.

According to the teaching of the Kingdom Now Dominionists, we are in the Millennium Kingdom right now and the Church has the responsibility to establish it by progressively taking over the world in the name of Christ. Some of the leaders in these movements even suggest the use of violence to accomplish their misguided goals.

Similarly, the Manifest Sons teach that believers must “manifest” themselves as “sons of God” by attaining to sinless perfection and immortality and that once this is achieved the believer has the power to take over the world.

They claim that this world dominion must be accomplished to bring Christ back and that those who refuse to accept this doctrine and do not become “overcomers” will be instantly removed to judgement. This is their interpretation of “*One shall be taken and the other left.*”

A - MILLENNIALISM

As stated, the Greek *a* means *without*. Adherents to this view simply reject the whole idea of a literal reign of Christ on Earth, whether it lasts for a thousand years or a longer time period, and whether before the Second Advent or after. They consider the whole idea as only a symbol and not to be taken literally at all.

The A–Millennial View of the Second Advent is that it refers to a single but many-sided event. It teaches there are no stages or dispensations of events and resurrections and kingdoms.

This means that when Jesus returns, He will take all believers out, condemn all unbelievers, and Eternity will begin at that very moment. The world as we presently know it will be replaced with a new Heaven and Earth.

A–Millennialism also teaches that the Church is the fulfilment of the Millennium Kingdom, described in both the Old and New Testament, and that Christ presently reigns on Earth through the Church in peace and righteousness. This means that the numerous biblical prophecies related to the earthly Kingdom of the Messiah listed throughout the entire Bible are to be interpreted in a spiritual sense only, and have no literal fulfilment.

Like Post–Millennialism, A–Millennialism sees the Church moving triumphantly and gloriously to victory so that Christ's will is done on Earth as it is done in Heaven.

Half and Half Won't Do!

Before we go on to analyse this interpretation, allow me to underline a very obvious and important rule to follow when attempting to interpret biblical prophecy. It is that the prophetic passages in Scripture should be interpreted in a literal sense unless otherwise indicated or obvious to the reader.

If we do not follow this rule, the right to decide which is literal and which is symbolic lies upon the personal opinion of the interpreter. A-Millennialism not only fails terribly on this point, but interprets some important prophetic passages half and half! One instance where this principle of interpretation is applied is with the following passage of Revelation:

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and **bound him for a thousand years**, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.*

*Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw **the souls** of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God.*

*They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life** and reigned with Christ a thousand years. **The rest of the dead did not come to life** until the thousand years were ended.*

(Revelation 20:1-6)

Some supporters of A–Millennialism teach that chapter twenty of the Book of Revelation is a symbolic reference to the entire age of the Church between the two comings of Christ. So they interpret the binding of Satan in verse two to be a reference to the work of Jesus in His victory over the devil and all the powers of evil.

The coming to life of the saints in verse four is seen as a reference to the New Birth of the people of God – their coming to life in Christ from being dead in trespasses and sins. They are therefore described as reigning in life with Christ in the heavenly places.

However, “*the rest of the dead,*” in verse five, is interpreted to be the physical resurrection of the dead at the end of the age.

Therefore, this interpretation differentiates between the coming to life mentioned in verse four to the coming to life in verse five, the former being symbolic and the latter literal.

Can you see the danger here? By this same principle of interpretation, we could also say the Final Judgement and the New Jerusalem are not literal either!

Unconvincing also in Light of the Facts

We can also say that the A–Millennialist interpretation of Revelation chapter twenty – that Satan is shut up in a sealed pit and unable to deceive the nations anymore – is very unconvincing when we study the events of human history.

While it is certainly true that the Lord Jesus has won a victory over all the powers of darkness and through the Church actually binds the devil so that the Gospel can be preached and the captives set free and delivered, it is equally clear that His total will and authority is not yet complete on Earth. Man’s inhumanity to man over the centuries prove this fact.

PRE - MILLENNIALISM

Pre-Millennialism teaches that there will be a literal one-thousand-year reign of Messiah Jesus on Earth and that it will commence directly *after* His Second Advent. Jesus will set up this Kingdom and reign from the Throne of David out of a rebuilt City of Jerusalem.

As we shall demonstrate, this will be a time when our planet will be restored to its original state before the Fall, when disease and sickness will literally vanish, when sin will be punished immediately, when all wars will cease and when the life span will be greatly increased.

Convincing in Light of the Evidence

There are more prophecies in the Bible about the earthly reign of Messiah than any other theme in prophecy. It is at the very heart of the Bible's overall prophetic message.

Take for example the New Testament. There is absolutely no doubt that the Apostles and early Christians expected Christ to set up a literal Kingdom on Earth. In the very first chapter of the Book of Acts, just before the Messiah ascended into Heaven, the Disciples asked Him, "*Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*"

Jesus did not correct them by saying there would not be an earthly Kingdom. He simply told them it was not for them to know "*the times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority.*"

And let us not dismiss the Lord's prayer – the most commonly recited prayer in Christianity:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

(Matthew 6:9b-11)

For those who would try to spiritualize this prayer, we have certainly not witnessed anything like this in history and neither are we likely to in the future.

One of the clearest and best-known Old Testament descriptions of an earthly Messianic reign comes from the Book of Isaiah. The Prophet writes:

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people, no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them, they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat, for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord – and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, but the serpent–

its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain says the Lord.

(Isaiah 65:18-25)

The Prophet Micah gives the picture of a time when there will be no more war and where God's righteous Laws will go out to all the nations from Jerusalem:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and people will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

(Micah 4:1-4)

In the Book of Numbers the Lord says to Moses: "*As truly as I live says the Lord, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.*" This theme is taken up again by the Prophet Habakkuk, where he speaks of a time when "*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*"

In the very last chapter of the Book of Zechariah we are told of a time when "*the Lord will become King over the whole earth,*" and that even the common things of life will be holy, and all advertisements will promote and encourage people to godliness and purity.

The Prophet Isaiah again speaks plainly of a time when the Messiah will rule and reign over the Earth in power and great glory:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

(Isaiah 9:6-8)

This prophecy predicts that the Messiah will one day reign upon the throne of David and will establish His Universal Government over the whole Earth.

This is not to say the reign of Christ on David's throne is an event awaiting future fulfilment. However, for now it is of a heavenly and spiritual nature. From the Throne Room of Heaven itself Jesus says:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

(Revelation 3:7)

Another example comes from the Second Psalm, where the Messiah is referred to as the Kingly Son of God, who is destined to inherit the whole Earth and also to be the instrument for the judgement and overthrow of evil in the world:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord; he said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your

possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

(Psalm 2:7-10)

Can we honestly say that there has ever been such a time in history indicated in the prophecies above? And can we honestly say, in light of the current events, that there is likely to be in the near future, as A–Millennialism and Post–Millennialism teach?

Dear reader, God's will cannot be done on Earth in the same way as it is in Heaven until Christ returns to destroy those who have led the world into the degenerating condition that it is in today, and that it will find itself in as history draws to a close. Evidence for this can be found in numerous biblical passages. Below we will examine just a handful.

Examining the Question of When

The text quoted above from the Book of Isaiah says that a time will come when even the animal kingdom and all of nature will be at peace and live in harmony. The Apostle Paul takes Isaiah's words literally and tells us when this prophecy will be fulfilled. In his Letter to the Romans he writes:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan

inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

(Romans 8:19-24)

Paul says that the restoration of all Creation will follow the bodily resurrection of the sons of God. And Scripture clearly teaches that this will happen at the Second Coming.

Notice also from the Second Psalm quoted above that the *Son* is destined to inherit the whole Earth and to be the instrument for the overthrow of evil in the world

Again, while it is clear that this prophecy is fulfilled in principle through the historic ministry of Jesus at His First Coming, and His continuing ministry through the Church in every age, it is equally clear from observation that the full terms of this prophecy have not yet been realized.

Notice also from chapter fourteen of Zechariah quoted above that these things happen after the Second Advent, when Jesus' "*feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives,*" when "*the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him.*"

Finally, Jesus Himself clearly states that the full realization of His Kingdom comes after His return. In the Gospel of Luke He says:

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

(Luke 21:31)

The phrase "*these things*" speaks of the many signs that must precede the Second Advent, listed in the preceding verses of that same chapter. This is very clear to me. "*The Kingdom,*" which can only be the Millennium, is still to come!

Considering the Question of Why

Some people have rightly asked why Jesus would want to leave Heaven and come back to Earth to live and reign. Many answers of a theological nature have been given in reply to this question, which, for the sake of time and space, we will avoid discussing here. But I would like to close this chapter with what I believe to be probably the most important reason, and which I believe the Gospels hint at. It is that it was always one of Jesus' most fervent desires to taste His Creation with the Cross behind Him!

EXTRA-BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

It is an interesting fact that the idea of an earthly Messianic Kingdom after the Second Coming appears in the writings of many early Christian writers. We are told this by numerous historians of the last few centuries. The fact that some of these were liberal theologians, and not in favour of any particular view of the Millennium Reign of Christ, makes their writings a more powerful testimony.

For instance, in an article entitled *Millennium*, in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, theologian and Church historian Professor Adolf Harnack reviews all the Christian writers of the first three centuries and reveals that they all believed the Millennium Reign would come *after* Christ's Second Coming.

Among the Christian writers of the first three centuries, Harnack refers to Justin Martyr, who lived in A.D. 100 to 165. He was told by a disciple of the Apostle John that the Millennium would be after Christ's return. In A.D. 153 he wrote a dialogue with Trypho where he said:

A certain man among us, John by name, one of the Apostles of Christ, in the revelation made to him, prophesied that those who believe in our Christ would reign for a thousand years after their bodily resurrection.

Another Christian writer named Irenaeus listened to presbyters such as Polycarp, who also knew the Apostle John. Writing around 185 A.D., Irenaeus wrote that John claimed to have been told by Jesus that the thousand-year Kingdom on Earth would follow Christ's Parousia. This was also stated by Papias, who was John's disciple and we have his writings preserved by Eusebius.

One other writer by the name of Tertullian, who lived a few years after these, also wrote that the Millennium would follow the return of Christ.

However, this view began to change in the following centuries after Emperor Constantine had made Christianity the state religion. It is said that after this action of Constantine everything was so much better than the previous centuries of persecution that many Christians believed Christ's Kingdom had come on Earth and therefore the Millennium was being brought in before His return.

Augustine was one of the first to suggest this notion in A.D. 413. Later on, the Roman Catholic Church adopted the idea, claiming that in the person of the Pope of Rome, Jesus Christ reigned on Earth and that He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. After that, the popes were addressed as *Lord God the Pope*. It was not until the Reformation that things took a change. The reformers Martin Luther, John Knox and John Calvin all agreed that the Millennium would follow the Second Advent and not precede it. Luther said:

Some say that before the latter days the whole world shall become Christians. This is a falsehood forged by Satan that he might darken sound doctrine. Beware, therefore, of this delusion.

And in writing of the unfitness of the notion of the Kingdom appearing before the King, and of the triumph of the saints before the triumph of the Saviour, Calvin said:

Christ is our Head, whose kingdom and glory have not yet appeared. If the members were to go before the Head, the order of things would be inverted and preposterous, but we shall follow our Prince when He shall come in the glory of His Father and sit upon the throne of His majesty.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE THOUSAND YEARS

In the Book of Revelation the Apostle John tells us some important events of the Millennium Period and after. He writes:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

(Revelation 20:1-4)

Immediately after Jesus returns, Satan will be physically bound and thrown into a bottomless pit until the thousand years are complete. John does not give any details about where the bottomless pit is located. It could be in another dimension or perhaps inside the Earth. His point is that Satan is locked away where he and the powers of darkness can no longer continue their evil efforts at deceiving and destroying mankind.

A popular interpretation is that the Millennium Kingdom on Earth will begin not only with the resurrected saints, but also with those who have survived the Great Tribulation, and these will repopulate the Earth during Christ's reign.

Yet some born during this period will not truly accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Though they submit to His rule during the Millennium, they will not truly surrender their hearts to His Lordship and will be deceived by Satan after he is loosed.

If you think this is inconceivable, remember the first rebellion started in Heaven, when Satan and one third of the angels rebelled against God, and in the Garden of Eden when our first parents followed in his footsteps.

Therefore, Satan is allowed one final deception in order to separate true believers from false ones. John describes it in these terms:

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle, they are as numerous as the sands of the sea.

They marched up over the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

(Revelation 20:7-11)

The first thing the devil will do when he is released from the pit is to muster a rebellion against God's people. But the Lord annihilates them with fire directly from Heaven and casts Satan alive into the Lake of Fire, where he will be tormented forever, together with the Antichrist and the False Prophet. Then follows the Great White Throne Judgement after which Jesus will turn the Kingdom over to the Father to merge with His Eternal Kingdom:

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

(1 Corinthians 15:24-27)