

# The Future of the Kingdom

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*“For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”  
(Isaiah 11:9).*

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**M**atthew 28:18 underscores a basic biblical truth: Christ is Lord over heaven and earth. This includes His Lordship over the future. Christ, sitting on the throne of God, is actively directing the affairs of history toward His purposed end. Unfortunately, many Christians are embracing unbiblical ideas about the future. Popular and fanciful eschatological (study of last things) beliefs crowd the bookshelves of many Christian bookstores. It can be easily determined to what extent Christians have abandoned the truth of Christ’s Lordship by investigating their beliefs about eschatology, particularly their views on the millennium.

Ideas have consequences. We need to make sure that our ideas are based upon Scriptural truth, not popular opinion. Eschatology is a significant matter and it sometimes deeply stirs the emotions. It is imperative that Christians approach this subject sanely and rationally, for some very important issues are at stake:

- Is the kingdom of God in the future?
- Is the kingdom of God now?
- Is the kingdom of God other worldly?
- What impact can we expect the kingdom of God to have in history; that is, in time and on earth?
- Considering our view of the future, how should we then live?

There are three major millennial views. We will look first at the view called premillennialism. This view states “that Christ will return ‘before the millennium’ in order to resurrect the saints (the ‘first resurrection’), establish a military rule from Jerusalem over the rebellious nations (after the battle of Armageddon), and usher in a thousand year period of material peace and prosperity; at the end of this period the nations (still in natural bodies) will rebel and make war against Christ and the resurrected saints (the battle of Gog and Magog), who will be saved by fire from heaven, followed by the second resurrection - now of unbelievers - and the final judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

Some premillennialists hold to what is called a dispensational version that adds three more features: (a) the literal approach to biblical interpretation, (b) the dichotomy between Israel and the Church, and (c) the pre-tribulation rapture of the saints. Some reject point (c) and believe in a post-tribulation rapture of the saints.

The author believes this position is at odds with Scripture for the following reasons. First, the claim that this position holds to a literal interpretation of the Bible is, to put it kindly, simply a ruse - a self-contragulatory slogan. It is obvious that the Bible speaks in figures of speech and metaphors. For

# The Future of the Kingdom

example, those who hold this position believe that the Beast of Revelation 13 is the revived Roman Empire. This is not literal! There are both literal and figurative aspects to Scripture and all three eschatological views use them.

Second, the dichotomy proposed between Israel and the Church does not hold up to biblical analysis, because, in the New Testament, the Church is called Israel. In Matthew 21:41-43, the kingdom of God is taken away from Israel and given to a nation, the Church, that produces the fruit thereof. In Galatians 6:16, the Apostle Paul called believers in Galatia, both Jew and Gentile, the Israel of God. Other New Testament passages proclaim that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:9, Ephesians 2-3). The Old Testament promises made to Israel are fulfilled in the Church - Amos 9:11-12 is fulfilled in Acts 15:16-18, II Samuel 7:12f is fulfilled in Acts 2:30, and Jeremiah 31:31-34 is fulfilled in Hebrews 8:8-12. The titles applied to Israel in Old Testament are applied to the Church in the New Testament - I Peter 2:9-10 (see Exodus 19:5-6 and Hosea 1:10; 2:23), Galatians 3:6-29 (the seed of Abraham is Christ and those who believe in Him), and Romans 2:28-29 (the true circumcision is of the heart, cut by the Spirit of God). There is unity, not dichotomy, between the Old Covenant people and the New Covenant people. In Hebrews 3:1-7, both Moses and Christ were faithful over *one* house. In Romans 11:17-18, there is *one* Olive Tree and branches are related to it by faith.

Third, a rebuttal of the pre-tribulation rapture of the saints (Note: the counter-argument of the entire premillennial scheme can also be included in this analysis) can be established by what theologians call the *unity of the eschatological complex*. That is, the events at the end of time all take place at around the same time.

The Bible speaks of one resurrection of mankind at the end of time. Acts 24:15 speaks of the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. John 5:28-29 speaks of an hour that is coming when "all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, those who did the good to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil to a resurrection of judgment." Note that this passage reveals that the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked occur *at the same time* (the same hour). Contrary to premillennial tenets, there is no 1,000 (post-tribulation) or 1,007 (pre-tribulation) year interval in-between. Matthew 25:31-46 speaks of a general judgment (separation) of all mankind into sheep and goat nations. The sheep are rewarded with life and the goats suffer eternal punishment. II Thessalonians 1:7-10 says that Christ's return (with His angels and in flaming fire) will bring judgment on those afflicting God's people and, at the same time, relief for God's people and their glorification. I Thessalonians 4:13-17 speaks of the saints being resurrected with a glorious shout and sound of the trumpet. This is the end. John 6:39-44 speaks of resurrection day as the *last* day. I Corinthians 15:22-28 speaks of Christ's coming at the end. In Revelation 20:7-9, the end of the millennium occurs at the return of Jesus (v. 9) when fire comes down from heaven (compare with II Thessalonians 1:7-10 - a significant parallel passage). Hence, Christ's return is *after* the millennium; that is, postmillennial. God then judges all mankind sending them to their eternal destination (Revelation 20:10-15).

The second major view is called amillennialism. Those who hold this position believe that "on earth before the return of Christ there will be no age of military rule by Christ (contrary to premillennialism) nor an age of great blessing and success for the gospel (contrary to postmillennialism); at Christ's return the general resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous will take

# The Future of the Kingdom

place, followed immediately by the final judgment.”

At the outset, note that there are significant areas of agreement in the chronology of the kingdom between the amillennial and postmillennial positions. Where they disagree is over the *nature* of Christ’s rule during the millennium.

Amillennialists tend to conceive the present reign of Christ as not visible and other-worldly. By saying Christ’s reign is not visible and other-worldly, those who hold this position mean that we are not to expect the Church to attain a highly visible degree of success in earthly life and institutions. They emphasize the reign of Christ in human hearts; that is, the priority of a spiritual walk with God. They tend to exclude the external, visible blessings and judgments as a result of the kingdom being instituted by Christ.

Does Scripture verify this position? It is true that the priorities of the Christian should be internal and spiritual, but is that all there is to Christ’s kingdom? Are we to expect external ramifications? Is the kingdom *merely* and *only* internal?

In Colossians 1:16-20, we see that Christ’s redemption affects *all* things and that Christ is preeminent in *all* things. I Peter 1:15 commands us to be holy in *all* manner of living. I Corinthians 10:31 compels us to do *all* to God’s glory. James 1:27 speaks of the public evidence of pure religion - aid to widows and orphans. From these Scriptures, we see that our obedience to God will make a difference in our daily life-what we wear, what we watch, what we eat, how we raise our family, how we vote, how we treat our neighbors, how we deal with our money, etc.

Concerning the visible and societal impact of Christ’s kingdom, I Corinthians 15:25 states that He must reign until *all* His enemies are subdued under His feet. We are to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on *earth* as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Matthew 28:19 commands us to make disciples, not in the nations, but *of all* the nations.

*How we view the millennium has tremendous consequences on how we view history and how we live now!*

Now for the definition of the third view. Evangelical, Bible-believing postmillennialists believe that “Christ will return ‘after the millennium’; Christ has established His Messianic kingdom on earth, it is growing in numbers, area, and influence by means of the preaching of the gospel and Christian nurture, and it will have visible, worldwide, and blessed success before Christ returns at the general resurrection for final judgment.”

Those who hold this view believe that fallen man cannot improve the world. God’s kingdom is advanced by the preaching of the gospel and by the attending power of the Holy Spirit regenerating and sanctifying those converted (John 3:3-8). Christ established the kingdom of God at His first advent (Mark 1:14; Matthew 12:28; Hebrews 1:5-13, 10:12; I Corinthians 15:20-25). As the kingdom grows, there will be battles, trials, sufferings, persecutions, and tribulations (Revelation 1:9; II Timothy 1:8, 2:12). This suffering is not a suffering unto defeat, but victory. The meek who believe both overcome and inherit the world (I John 5:4; Matthew 5:5; Revelation 2:26-27). The growth of the kingdom depends, not on human wisdom, but upon the supernatural intervention of God (II Corinthians 10:4-5). The kingdom’s origin is from above, not from this world (John 18:36). Christ is now crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9) and He expects all His enemies to be subdued under His feet (Hebrews

# The Future of the Kingdom

10:13). God promised His Christ the uttermost parts of the earth (Psalm 2:8) for the asking. Did Jesus request this? Or did He forget? The kingdom will grow in time and on earth as the parables of the mustard seed and leaven illustrate (Matthew 13:31-33). The gates of Hell are on the defensive (Matthew 16:19, Revelation 20:1-3) as the Church advances the gospel in all the nations (Matthew 28:19). We can expect Christianity, the true religion, to someday engulf the entire world (Malachi 1:11). We can expect all the ends of the earth to turn to the Lord (Psalm 22:27). We can expect all kings to bow before Him, all nations to serve Him (Psalm 72:11). We can expect the nations to stream into the house of the Lord trading their military gear for agricultural implements (Isaiah 2:1-4). We can expect the knowledge of the glory of the Lord to flood the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

A wonderful history lies ahead of us. Therefore, our labor now is not in vain (I Corinthians 15:58). The sovereign and Almighty Lord of glory has promised to bestow His saving grace upon this world in an exceeding, abundant, and blessed fashion. Since He promised this, He certainly is able to do it. "... the zeal of the Lord will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:7).

*In no way does the author of this article impign upon the reader the mistaken notion that one's eschatological views dictate the limits of one's fellowship in the body of Christ. I have wonderful friends who are "occupying until Christ's comes" who are dispensational, premillennial, and amillennial. In issues of eschatology, as in many other doctrinal details, I commend the body of Christ to a charitable spirit, a spirit that does not absolutize doctrinal "ends" as the center.*

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>This and the other definitions are taken from the glossary of the book by Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985). The author is indebted to Dr. Bahnsen for many of the insights in this article.