

The Millennial Kingdom

Revelation 20:1-15

Introduction

To begin with, there is the general terminology of the millennium or millennial kingdom. The word comes directly from the Latin word for 1000, *millenium*, which was used in the Latin Vulgate translation to translate the Greek word for 1000, *chilia*. So, in some obscure or older writings you may see a reference to chiliasm which is just an archaic way of saying millennialism. Usually, it was used to describe those who held what we would today call a premillennial view. Our passage today is the only place in the Bible that refers directly to a 1000 year millennial kingdom. There are primarily four different views on what is happening in *Revelation 20:1-15*. Even though I am going to be preaching from the perspective of one specific view it would be thoughtless of me if I did not at least review the others. I will lead with the three others and then review the one we are taking before looking directly at the passage. The first three fall under the theological framework of Reformed Theology and the fourth under the theological framework of Dispensational Theology. So, this first part may seem a bit more like a theological lesson than a sermon, but bear with me.

First in our group from Reformed Theology is postmillennialism. Postmillennial is a combination of the prefix post-, meaning after, and millennial such that this view holds that Jesus will return physically to the Earth after the millennium. This view believes that Satan was defeated and bound by Jesus' work on the cross, resurrection, and ascension so that he would no longer be able to deceive the gentile nations about the truth of the Gospel. Since then, the Gospel will steadily spread to every tongue, tribe, and nation on the Earth and grow in effect and influence ushering in a golden age of peace and Christian influence on the Earth during which Jesus will reign through the Church and Christians that have died and been spiritually resurrected in Heaven will reign with him. The 1000 years is interpreted as a literal time from the start of the golden age or as symbolic of "the fullness of time," such that the time will be complete after the Gospel has spread to every tribe, tongue, and nation on the Earth and all those who have been called by God have come to Him. **At the end of the millennium Jesus will return to defeat evil, judge the world, and usher in the new heavens and earth.**

Postmillennialism was mentioned as early as Tychonius in the 4th century. It was not very prevalent until the 16th century when it was held by most of the Puritans, but not all of them. Most notable among them would have been Jonathan Edwards. More modern proponents of this view include Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, Douglas Wilson, Kenneth Gentry, and R.C. Sproul.

Second in our group of Reformed Theology views is amillennialism. Amillennial is a combination of the prefix a-, which is a negation, and millennial such that this word would be translated literally no millennium. As a result, most people who hold this view do not like the term because they actually do believe in the millennium and that we are currently living in it. It is similar to postmillennialism in how it views the binding of Satan and the spread of the Gospel but instead of an expected golden age believes that evil will continue to grow and the Church will continue to experience increasing persecution until Jesus returns. During this time Jesus

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reigns from Heaven, and those Christians who have died and been spiritually resurrected in Heaven will reign with Him. The millennium encompasses all the time from Jesus' ascension to his return and the 1000 years is interpreted symbolically as "the fullness of time" in the same way that premillennialism understands that concept. **At the end of the millennium Jesus will return to defeat evil, judge the world, and usher in the new heavens and earth.**

Amillennialism was held by early church fathers such as Eusebius in the 3rd and 4th centuries and was developed into the main teaching of the church by Augustine during the 4th century. It is the original reformed position held by most of the reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. More modern proponents of this view include Charles Hodge, Sam Storms, Sinclair Ferguson, and R.C. Sproul.

Third in the group of Reformed Theology views is historic premillennialism. Again, premillennial is a combination of the prefix pre-, meaning before, and millennial such that this view holds that Jesus will return to Earth before the millennium. He will establish His millennial kingdom and reign on the earth for 1000 years which is taken by most as a literal time and by some as symbolic for a long period of time. Historic premillennialism believes that in the earthly millennial kingdom Old Testament and New Testament saints together comprise one people of God united in Jesus who is the true Israel of God and inheritor of all the covenant promises. **At the end of the millennium Jesus will defeat evil, judge the world, and usher in the new heavens and earth.** Historic premillennialism has perhaps the earliest known record in the history of the church as it is attributed to the early church father Papias whose life spanned the end of the 1st century and beginning of the 2nd. Church tradition tells us that Papias was a disciple of Polycarp, another church father of the same period, who was a disciple of John. Some more modern proponents of this view include Charles Spurgeon, Wayne Grudem, John Piper, Albert Mohler, and R.C. Sproul.

This brings us to our fourth and final view, dispensational premillennialism. Dispensational premillennialism, like historic premillennialism, believes that Jesus will return to Earth prior to the millennium. Unlike Reformed Theology, Dispensational Theology creates a distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church as two different peoples of God and different means God is using to work in the world at specific times. Dispensational premillennialism believes that Jesus will return and finally establish His kingdom on Earth **primarily** as a reestablishment of the nation of Israel in fulfillment of the covenant promises specifically regarding possession of the land and a king on David's throne. He will reign over this kingdom from Jerusalem finally giving the kingdom of Israel the world prominence promised to it by God. Most dispensational premillennialists believe in a literal 1000 year kingdom. **At the end of the millennium Jesus will defeat evil, judge the world, and usher in the new heavens and earth.** Some facets of Dispensational Theology trace themselves back further in history, but it did not really exist as an organized theological system prior to the work of John Nelson Darby in 19th century America. It was further boosted by the work of C. I. Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible which he produced. Others such as Charles Ryrie, John Feinberg, and Dwight Pentecost were also influential in developing dispensational thought. Some modern

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proponents of this view include Warren Wiersbe, Charles Stanley, Chuck Swindoll, Billy Graham, and John MacArthur.

Well, that may seem like it took a while, but those are really just short reviews of each view. Believe me, there is a wealth of information out there if you want to look for it. I will include some links with my notes which contain the graphics that have been up here, and that will all be uploaded to the church website. As I was going through those views, you may have noticed the repetition of some names in the different views presented. The most obvious might be R.C. Sproul who at one time or another held each view! In fact, some of those who hold views in the camp of Reformed Theology were at one time proponents of dispensational premillennialism. There are many solid biblical scholars and theologians who all come to different views on this. I think this is a good indication to us that this is something in biblical interpretation that is not clear and is hard to understand. We should hold our views loosely and not criticize others for whatever view they hold. There is nothing about any of these views that prevents us from working with each other to advance the Gospel of Jesus and reach our community with the message of salvation. You will also notice that in every single one of these views the ending is the same. **After the millennium Jesus will defeat evil, judge the world, and usher in the new heavens and earth.** That truth remains unchanged regardless of what view you hold.

When approaching this passage, I did not want to get so bogged down in the “future” that I neglected the “now.” The apocalyptic genre of writing was common in Jewish life beginning in the period of the exile. It is found in Old Testament books such as Daniel and Ezekiel, among others, as well as writings outside of the Bible in what is called the Apocrypha. Different parts of the New Testament such as Jesus’ Olivet Discourse contain apocalyptic language, but Revelation is the largest example of it. Most apocalyptic writing occurred during times of upheaval and persecution and was intended to bring comfort to the readers. It did that by creating an almost hyperbolic picture of a seemingly unstoppable march of evil which is ultimately defeated by God. With that in mind, let’s focus today on what our passage is trying to communicate to us. We are picking up right after Jesus has returned with the armies of Heaven, utterly defeated the beast and the armies of the nations, and thrown the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire.

The binding of Satan Vs 1-3

Revelation 20 begins with John seeing another angel coming down from Heaven. This one is holding the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. The angel seizes the devil who is pictured here as the dragon, binds him with the chain, and throws him into the pit, sealing it shut over him. Now God has the power to incapacitate the devil with just a word and doesn’t need chains and pits to stop him, so this is symbolic language to demonstrate the way Satan is rendered completely ineffective by God. The point of this is to prevent Satan from deceiving the nations as they live on the earth under the rule of Jesus. Satan deceived Eve in the garden of Eden (*2 Corinthians 11:3*) and is called the father of lies (*John 8:44*). We have seen elsewhere in

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Revelation that the devil is said to be the deceiver of the whole world (*Revelation 12:9*) and that his forces use deception to lead people astray (*Revelation 13:14, 16:14*) Now that he is bound, he will not be around to stir them up to rebellion with lies and deceit. He will be hindered in this manner for 1000 years after which he will be released for a short time.

The reign of Jesus and the saints Vs 4, 6

After this John sees thrones with those who have been given authority to judge seated on them. This is interesting because there are multiple thrones not just one. The messianic expectation was for a messiah to return and rule on David's throne so why are there more than one. This question is answered for us in different places in the New Testament. In *Matthew 19:28* and the parallel passage in *Luke 22:28-30* we see that the disciples are told that when Jesus sits on his throne, they will sit on 12 thrones of their own with him. Elsewhere we are told that all believers will judge the world (*1 Corinthians 6:2*) and that all who endure in faith will reign with Jesus (*2 Timothy 2:11-12*). When Jesus returns to defeat the beast (chapter 19), bind Satan, and establish his millennial kingdom on Earth he will bring with him the raptured Church, and the millennial kingdom will be populated by resurrected Old and New Testament saints, resurrected tribulation believers who were martyred, and believers who survived the tribulation. All of the resurrected believers will reign with Jesus during the millennial kingdom. In this, especially with the martyrs, we see the completion of that apocalyptic picture of those seemingly overcome by a victorious evil power becoming the true overcomers as they reign in the millennial kingdom. Jesus will be in ultimate authority over the earth during the time of the millennial kingdom and will reign from Jerusalem over all the nations of the world. It will be a time of profound peace and order. For those who are alive but do not have faith in Jesus this will be the closest thing to Heaven and the new creation they will ever experience, but as we will see that's still not enough to turn them to Jesus.

The first resurrection and the second death Vs 5-6

Now we kind of have this aside in the passage where we get an interjection of sorts about the blessedness that comes with the first resurrection. At this point in the millennial kingdom all those who have at some point placed their faith in Jesus will be alive. The wicked dead, however, will still be just that, dead. The second resurrection will come later and will consist of only the lost. *Acts 24:14-15* tells us that both the just and unjust will be resurrected. Additionally, both *Daniel 12:2* and *John 5:28-29* tell us that some will be resurrected to life and some to judgment. The idea that the lost will not be resurrected to judgment but simply cease to exist or be annihilated is false. This passage tells us that those who experience the first resurrection, the resurrection to life, will not experience the second death which is defined in verses 14 and 15 as the lake of fire. We can conclude that since a difference between the first and second resurrections is emphasized then those who are resurrected to judgment in the second resurrection will experience the second death. This second death is such a horrible eternal punishment that John makes special note of it here as a specific blessing for the saints

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that looks beyond the temporary state of the millennial kingdom to the eternal state to come (*1 Corinthians 15:51-54*).

The loosing of Satan and his ultimate defeat Vs 7-10

Well, back in verse 3 John told us this was coming. When the 1000 years end Satan will be released and, he will immediately get back to his normal activity of deceiving the nations. There are somehow still unbelievers on the earth and quite a few of them as we are told they are as numerous as the sand of the sea. Gog and Magog are mentioned only here and in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 which describe the great battle at the end of the tribulation. (Magog is mentioned as the proper name of one of the descendants of Japheth, the son of Noah in *Genesis 10:2* and *1 Chronicles 1:5*.) In the sense that Gog and Magog is used here, it is an apocalyptic way of describing all the nations of the earth allied together for the purpose of making war against Jesus. Satan has deceived the kings of the nations of the earth once more and convinced them to march against Jesus' kingdom. They surround the seat of his kingdom, the beloved city Jerusalem (*Jeremiah 3:17*), but God intervenes. He sends down fire from heaven to completely consume the armies of the nations and throws Satan into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet.

The Great White Throne and the final judgment Vs 11-15

When we get to verse 11 John's vision shifts to yet another throne. This throne is known as The Great White Throne from its description here, and the judgement is referred to as The Great White Throne Judgment. God is seated on this throne, and the earth and sky flee from his presence. This is the destruction of the present creation as alluded to in *Revelation 6:14 and 16:20*. It is also described in *Hebrews 12:26-27* as the removal of the creation to prepare the way for the new creation. Additionally, *2 Peter 3:7 and 10* tells us that there is an element of judgment associated with the destruction. Immediately prior to this judgment, the second resurrection takes place. All the unbelieving dead everywhere will be resurrected at this time. From the earth to the depths of the sea, every unbeliever will be brought before the Great White Throne to be judged. This is the judgment Paul mentions in *Romans 2:5* where he says to the wicked, "you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." Books with the deeds of everyone will be opened and each life examined, but most importantly the Book of Life will be open. The Book of Life is a record of everyone who has ever believed in Jesus. If a person's name is not found in that book they will be judged and cast into the lake of fire with the beast, false prophet, and Satan.

Application

As I said earlier, Revelation is an apocalyptic work. Like other apocalyptic writings, it is often pessimistic in its view of the current situation but optimistic in its understanding that God will be victorious, his perfect justice will prevail, and all wrongs will be righted. The point of apocalyptic writing is to demonstrate that to the readers so that, understanding it, they will side

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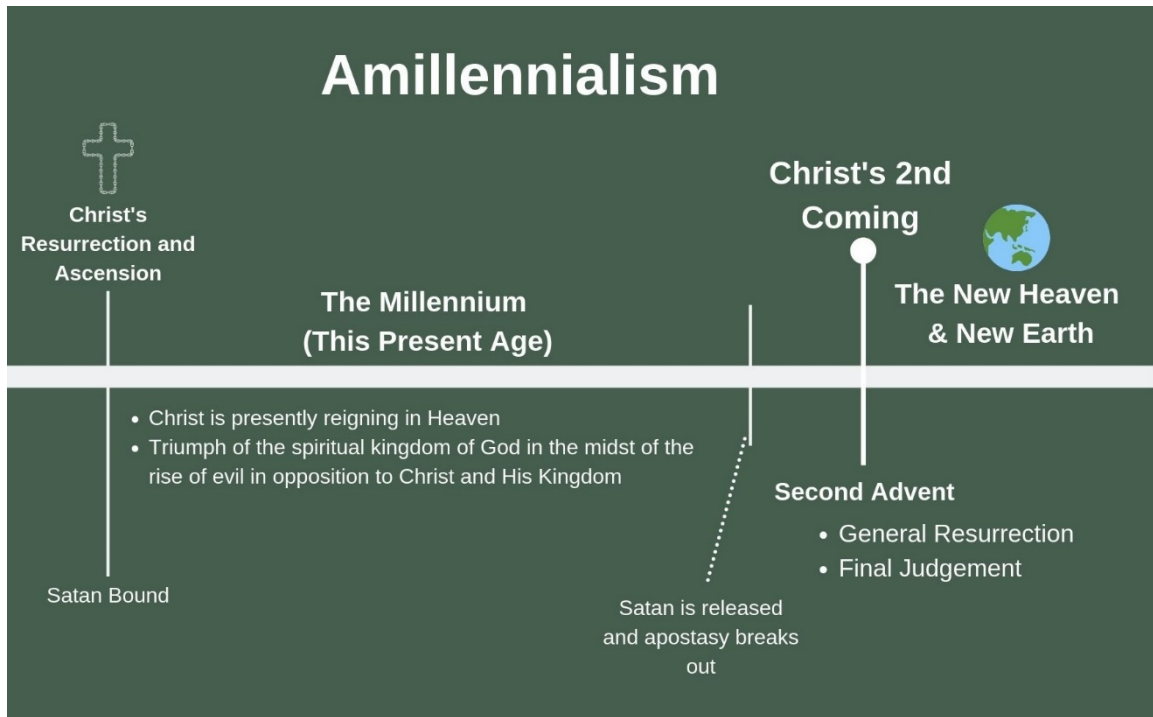
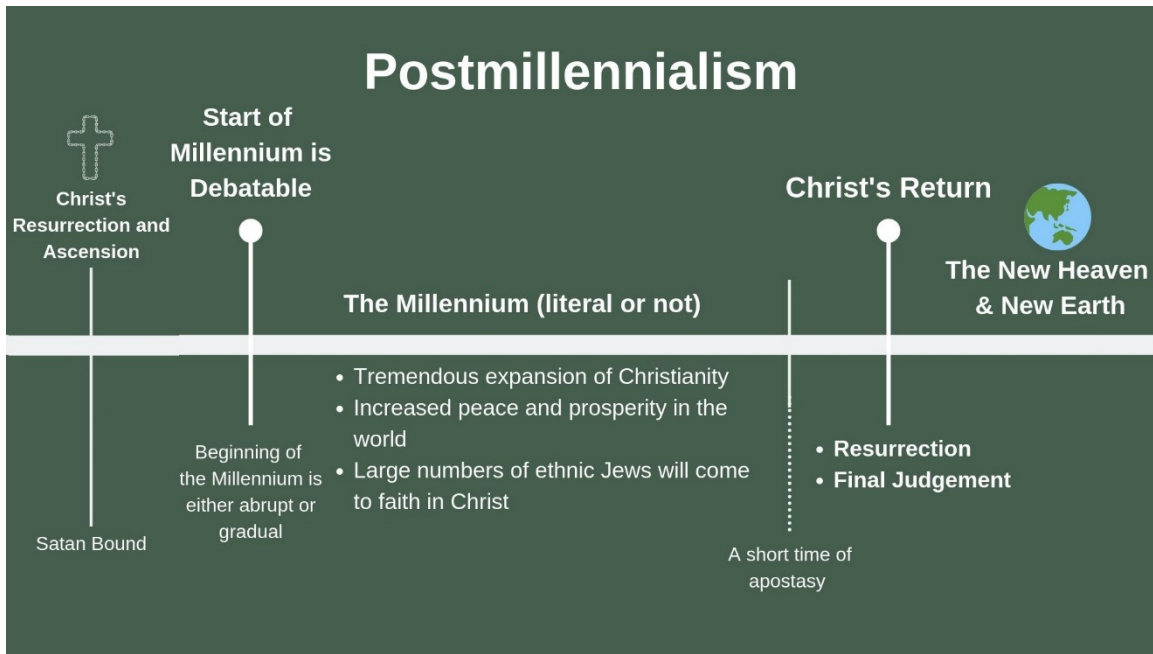
with God and be assured that evil will be judged and good will be vindicated. In light of that assurance, it seeks to elicit faithfulness and obedience in the lives of the readers.

The passage today depicts Jesus' future millennial kingdom and reign on earth, a time of profound peace and goodness. Yet even then, at the end of 1000 years, there will still be people who have not believed in Jesus. This demonstrates to us how sinful and against God the human heart is. How often do we hear people say something like this? "If God would just get rid of the evil and injustice in the world then I would believe in him." Yet when that does happen in the millennial kingdom there are still uncountable numbers of people who will reject Jesus and rebel against him. If you are letting the presence of evil in the world hold you back from believing in Jesus, Revelation is here to tell you that justice will prevail and that God will right all wrongs. Don't let the perceived victory of evil in the here and now cause you to hesitate any longer. Place your faith in Jesus: admit your sins and need for a savior; believe in Jesus, his perfect life, death on the cross for your sins, and resurrection; then commit to following him, especially in light of the victory we are assured will be his.

If you are a follower of Jesus, let this passage bring you hope and comfort as we look out on a world that often seems to be overrun with evil and under the total control of Satan. God wins, the present order will be destroyed, and evil will be judged. It is hard to live a life of following Jesus in the world today. Persecution runs the gamut between social exclusion to losing your life. Sometimes we let fear control how we live our lives instead of letting truth and hope control how we live our lives. As Peter says in *2 Peter 3:11-13*, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

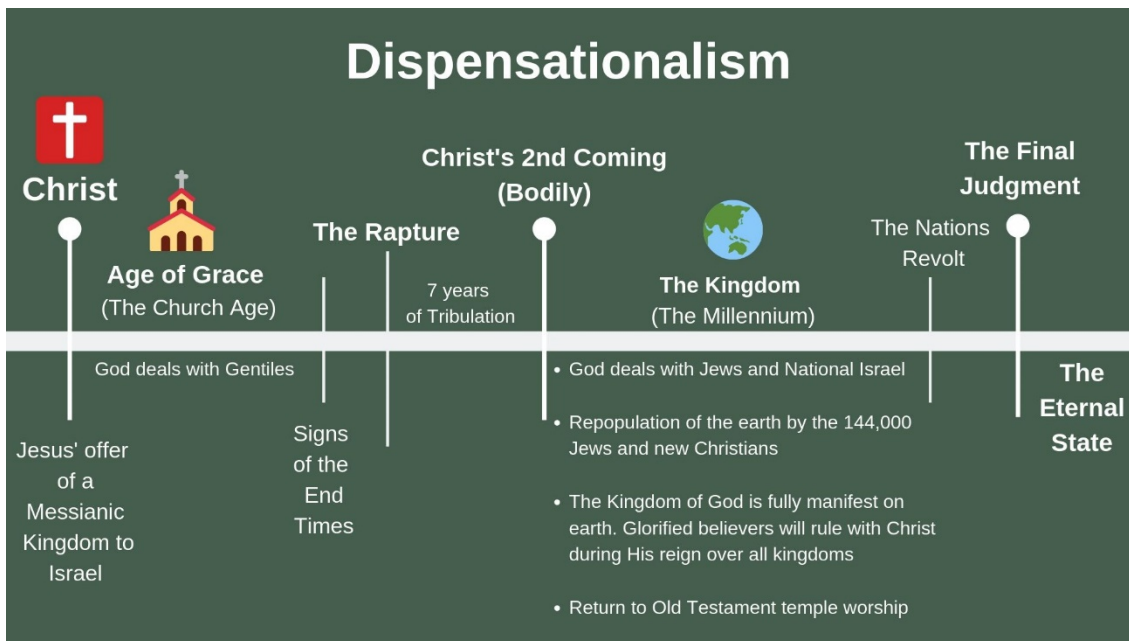
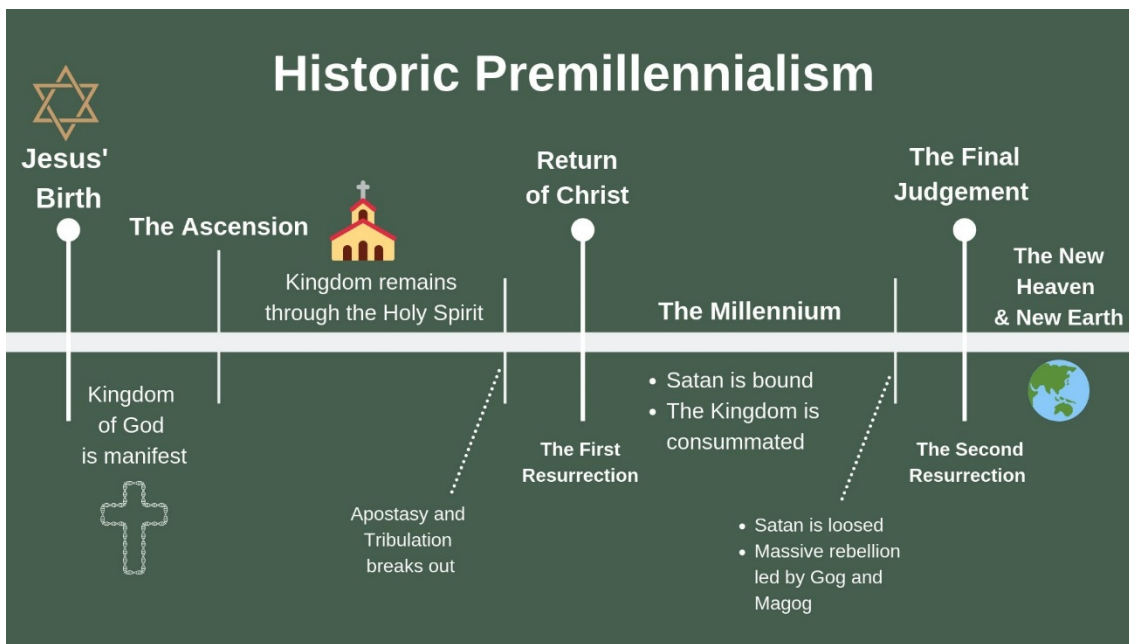
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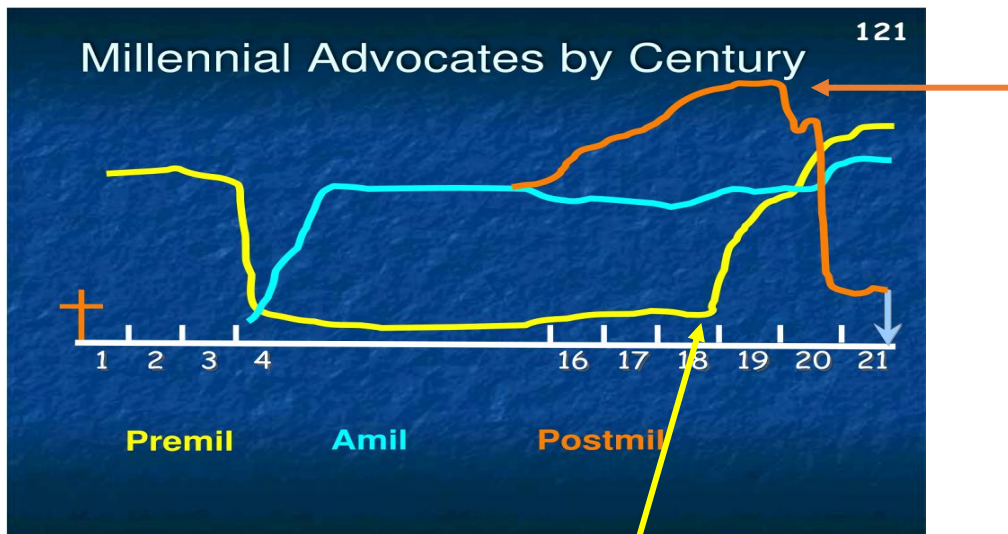
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John Darby and the beginning of Dispensationalism

The first and second world wars had a profound effect on postmillennial views.

Helpful Links

<https://www.reformedreader.org/mchart.htm>

An extensive chart that breaks down the views of the millennial kingdom.

https://d2ttzf2z28f6tb.cloudfront.net/tabletalk/full_issues/tt_2013_december.pdf

The December 2013 issue of Tabletalk Magazine on the topic of The Millennium

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/conferences/orlando-1999-national-conference>

Ligonier national conference from 1999 on The Millennium. Excellent presentations of the different reformed theological views of the millennium.

<https://www.preceptaustin.org/revelation-20-commentary>

Excellent commentary from Precept Austin on Revelation 20 from the dispensational premillennial viewpoint

<https://youtu.be/f4tO1cnH2Ts?si=LweVTpFhJvhDXh0K>

YouTube video of a round table discussion on the millennial views hosted by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

<https://youtu.be/4S0TQ2dXnms?si=4IXthmfawJ8Mfv1o>

YouTube video of a discussion/panel on the three Reformed Theology millennial views hosted by John Piper

<https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/the-dispensational-premillennial-view-of-the-kingdom-of-god>

An excellent nonbiased explanation of Dispensational Premillennialism done by Sam Storms, an amillennialist.