

Millennium Teachings

Question: Could you please try in a very simple way to give an explanation of the whole millennium teaching, as we believe it is recorded for us in the Bible? I can never remember how we are to view it. Thanks.

Answer: In evangelical Christianity there are three views regarding the millennium. I will briefly describe each view, and then focus on the view which represents the official position of our denomination.

- 1) **The Pre-Millennial position.** This is a view espoused by a large majority of evangelical Christians in North America. The term “Pre-Millennialist” is used to describe the view of those who believe that Christ will return to earth to establish a literal 1000 year reign (referred to as the millennium), and that He will do so in Jerusalem. (His return would also usher in the restoration of Israel as a theocracy.) The prefix “pre” (which means “before”) indicates that those who adhere to this view believe that Christ’s return will come before this millennium, and that the final judgment of all men will come at the end of this millennium. The proponents of the pre-mil view therefore separate the return of Christ and His final judgment by a period of a thousand years. Many who adhere to the “pre-mil” position, also believe that Christ’s return to establish His one-thousand-year reign upon earth will be preceded by a seven-year period of tribulation. This period will supposedly be initiated by the rapture of the saints, who will suddenly disappear from the earth to be with Christ, where they supposedly will celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb. After this seven-year celebration, Christ would then return to usher in the millennium. These seven years will supposedly be a time of great tribulation on earth during which sinners will still be saved. This view has been greatly popularized by the widely used Scofield Reference Bible—a Bible which promotes the dispensational view of history. According to this view, the millennium represents the final of the seven dispensations of history.
- 2) **The Post-Millennial position.** This view is espoused by a considerable segment of the Reformed community, and was also popular among the Puritans. The prefix “post” (which means “after”) indicates that those who adhere to this view believe that Christ will return after the millennium, and thus they do not separate the return of Christ and the final judgment. They also do not necessarily believe that this millennium will be a literal 1000-year period. What they do believe, however, is there is a time yet to come during which Christ will demonstrate His power upon earth in an extraordinary fashion. In other words, the “post-mil” people believe that a time of extraordinary spiritual prosperity is coming during which the church of Jesus Christ will flourish as never before. It will be a time when the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth—a time when Christ truly shall have dominion over land and earth, and when earth’s remotest region shall His empire be. And thus the “post-mil” people believe in a world-wide reign

of the Lord Jesus Christ as has never been witnessed before in human history. This reign would, however, be a spiritual reign executed by Christ as He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and not a physical, political reign headquartered in Jerusalem as the “pre-mil” people would have us believe. It would be at the end of this extra-ordinary period of world-wide spiritual prosperity, designated by the “post-mil” people as the millennium (which could last more or less than a literal 1000 years), that Satan would be loosed for a short season, and that Christ would then subsequently return upon the clouds and execute the final judgment.

- 3) **The A-Millennial position.** This term is somewhat of a misnomer, for it gives the impression that they who adhere to this position do not believe in a millennium at all. This is, however, not the case! What it does mean is that the “a-mil” people reject the notion that we must anticipate a future millennium—an expectation which both the “pre-mil” and “post-mil” position have in common. The “a-mil” position is that we are presently in the millennium, and that this world-wide spiritual reign of Christ was initiated at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and will come to a conclusion when Christ returns on the clouds of heaven to execute the final judgment. In other words, the “a-mil” people believe that the number 1000 in Revelation 20:2-7 is a symbolical number—as is true for all the numbers in this last book of Scripture. The “a-mil” position maintains that the day of Pentecost marks the beginning of the period during which Satan is bound. Prior to that day Satan had free reign among the nations of the world. Israel was the only speck upon the globe where the light of divine revelation was shining. The rest of the Gentile world dwelt in utter spiritual darkness. Satan was unopposed in his reign among these nations. However, from the day of Pentecost on forward, Christ begins to conquer the world through the preaching of the gospel. Wherever that gospel came, Satan had to yield, for he was now bound by the exalted Christ to whom all power in heaven and earth had been given. Ever since then Christ has been riding on the white horse of the gospel, going forth conquering and to conquer. Until this day Satan must yield wherever the gospel comes, and Christ is *presently* having dominion over land and sea, and will not return until the gospel will have been preached to all the nations of the world—something that, as a result of the modern mass media, is happening at an accelerating rate. The “a-mil” people believe that the number 1000 symbolizes a period in which Christ fully (the # 10) accomplishes the sovereign purpose of a triune (the # 3) God ($1000 = 10^3$). We are presently living in that period. In other words, the “a-mil” people believe that the exalted Christ is already reigning, and that His present reign upon earth will set the stage for the final step of His exaltation, when He will usher in the glorious and everlasting future of a new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell.

I believe that it is the “a-mil” position which is the historic position of the Reformation, and it is therefore also the official position of our denomination. Let

me briefly state why we reject the “pre-mil” and “post-mil” positions as being Scriptural.

1) To hold to the “pre-mil” position requires that one interprets the phrase “one thousand years” in Rev. 20:2-7 as referring to a literal 1000-year period. We believe, however, that such an interpretation violates the fundamental rules of Reformed hermeneutics (the discipline of correctly interpreting the Scriptures). The fundamental rule of Reformed hermeneutics is that the exposition of a given passage of Scripture must harmonize with the Bible book in which it is found, as well as with Scripture in its totality. Such is decidedly not the case with the “pre-mil” exposition of Rev. 20:2-7. For if we must interpret the term “one thousand years” as referring to a literal 1000-year period, then we would expect that all the numbers found in the book of Revelation should be interpreted literally as well. We would quickly discover that this would lead to an exposition of Revelation that would border on the ridiculous. Any sound interpreter of Revelation understands that the numbers in Revelation are symbolical in nature, including the number 1000. When, therefore, we interpret Rev. 20:2-7 within the context of all of Scripture, we cannot possibly arrive at the explanation which the “pre-mil” people attach to this passage. The “pre-mil” people are guilty of taking their exposition of Rev. 20:2-7 and projecting this on all of Scripture, interpreting all that Scripture has to say about the end-time in light of this one passage. Reformed hermeneutics demands that we do the contrary: We must interpret this one passage in light of what all of Scripture has to say. We believe that the “a-mil” position does precisely that. We believe therefore that rather than anticipating the future reign of Christ upon earth, that Christ is **presently** reigning and that we are **presently** in the millennium.

2) We also believe that the “pre-mil” position concerning the seven-year rapture of the church is the result of a faulty exposition of Scripture. The primary passage on which they base this view is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* Let me quickly point out a few things from this text that refutes the common teaching regarding the rapture of the saints.

- “Pre-mil” proponents teach that the rapture will occur suddenly, silently, and without warning. God’s children will suddenly vanish. *This text teaches that the rapture of the saints (their being caught up with Christ in the clouds) will be preceded by Christ’s very visible, audible, and public descent from heaven, stating explicitly that it will be announced by the voice of the archangel and by God’s trump.*
- “Pre-mil” proponents teach that the only thing the world will notice will be the sudden disappearance of people. *The text says that the rapture of the saints will be preceded by the resurrection of those who have died in Christ—undoubtedly a most dramatic event.*
- “Pre-mil” proponents teach that the rapture will last seven years, during which the Christ and His church will celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb. *The text says nothing of the sort! Instead, it says*

*that the raptured saints shall ever be with the Lord. And when Revelation 19:7 states that, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb,” there is nothing in the context that even remotely suggests that this will only last seven years. (By the way, this is the **only** passage in Revelation and in all of Scripture that speaks of the marriage supper of the Lamb!)*

Thus there is no biblical warrant for this rapture-tribulation-marriage-supper-of-the-Lamb teaching.

3) We also believe that there is no biblical warrant whatsoever for the “pre-mil” notion that the return of Christ and the final, “white-throne” judgment are separated by a period of 1000 years. A careful study of all the NT passages regarding Christ’s return and the final judgment reveal that both events are always referred to as happening simultaneously.

4) Though we agree with the “post-mil” proponents that Christ’s millennial reign is a spiritual one, we disagree that this millennial reign is still a future one. We believe that Christ is presently reigning, and that Satan is presently bound—even though there is alarming and mounting evidence that the loosening of Satan has already begun. We believe that there is no scriptural warrant for the notion that the return of Christ will be preceded by a period of unparalleled spiritual prosperity during which Christianity will be the dominant and pervasive religion of the world. On the contrary, we believe that Christ’s second coming will be preceded by the reign of the man of sin, the Antichrist (See 2 Thess. 2), and the church will be slumbering when her Bridegroom returns. Scripture also states explicitly that “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). We do believe that there is a future of unparalleled glory, but that will occur after the final judgment when Christ’s kingdom will fully come in the new heaven and new earth.

I realize that in this answer I have not addressed this subject exhaustively. To anyone who wishes to make a serious study of these matters, I would recommend that you purchase and read the excellent work by Anthony Hoekema, entitled, “The Bible and the Future.” He does an excellent and very fair job of explaining the “pre-mil” and “post-mil” positions, and does a masterful job in explaining that the “a-mil” position is the only biblical and Reformed alternative. A very readable and helpful book! (Another excellent book on the subject is “The Promise of the Future” by Cornelis P. Venema.)

Pastor B. Elshout