

Catch-up/Review on Heaven

The Bible teaches that heaven is a place where...

- saints are filled “with joy in [God’s] presence, with eternal pleasures at [his] right hand” (Psalm 16:11).
- saints will offer exquisite worship and praise to their God (Revelation 5:13) and will, in some way, serve and reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12), who reigns side by side with the Father (Revelation 22:1,3).
- marriage will not exist (Luke 20:34-36) since the need for companionship will be filled by a perfect relationship with the Lord and the “great multitude [of saints] that no one could count” (Revelation 7:9).
 - The Bible suggests that saints in heaven will recognize others (1 Thess. 2:19,20) and, though no longer necessary, may enjoy the simple pleasures of eating and drinking together (Luke 22:29,30).
 - They will be in heaven only because God graciously predestined them for heaven (Romans 8:30).
 - As another testimony to God’s superabundant grace, the saints will enjoy “degrees of glory;” God will give extra rewards in proportion to one’s service to Christ on earth (Matthew 25:21,23).
 - One MLC professor explained this as having different-sized buckets that are all filled to overflowing. Someone might have a bigger bucket than we do, but we won’t care about that because OUR bucket is filled!

1. Read **2 Peter 3:10,12-13** and **Revelation 21:1**. It is not perfectly conclusive as to whether the world will be completely annihilated on Judgment Day or will be renovated as part of the new heavens and new earth (pastors might refer to that as an open question). Regardless of which stance you take, what exciting thoughts does the word *new* bring to mind?

2. Look at the words of **Colossians 3:1-2**. In what ways does this passage help Christians through their day-to-day lives?

Lesson Six – Millennialism

(End Times, pages 241-289 and 317-339)

Goals

1. To gain a deeper understanding of the concept of a so-called millennium.
2. To show that millennialism is not biblical and is therefore a danger to immortal souls.

Opening Prayer – Almighty God, your Word alone is truth. Preserve your pure Word among us and allow nothing that we believe, teach, or confess to be contrary to it. Frustrate those who harm immortal souls by their false teachings. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. **Amen.**

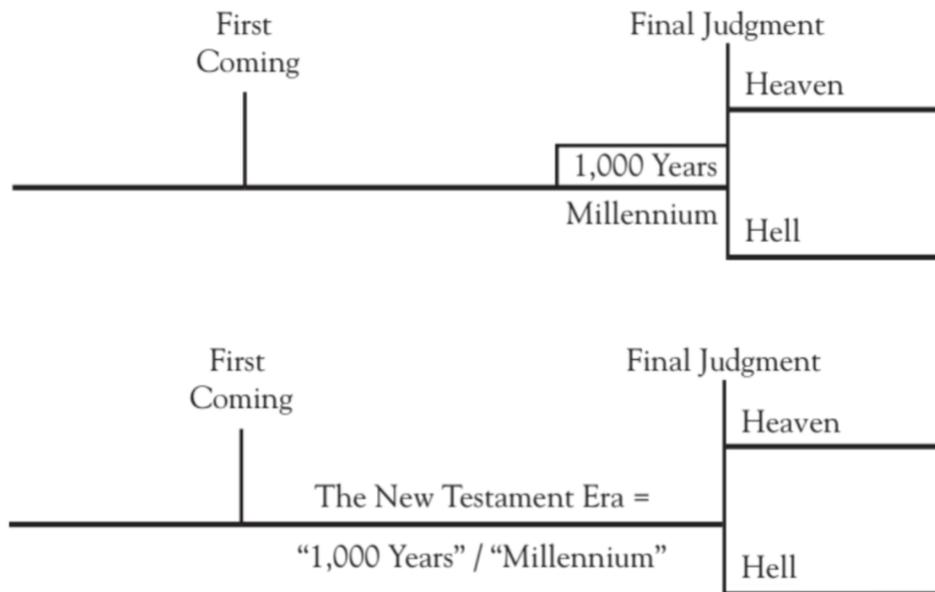
Full disclosure – This lesson is a lot of lecture. That’s the nature of discussing confusing false doctrines and covering a lot of ground.

Introduction

Whenever God’s saving truth is proclaimed, the devil follows close behind with false teachings that are intended to rob people of their salvation. This certainly has been true with the Bible’s teaching of the end times. In this lesson and the next, we will focus on certain heresies within the Christian church regarding the end times. We will begin with the concept of a millennium.

Many Christian teachers claim there will be a semi-utopian 1,000-year period of prosperity on earth right after the New Testament era and right before to the final judgment. This 1,000-year period is called the *millennium*

(from the Latin language in which *mille* means “thousand” and *annus* means “year”). The following timeline shows how millennialists view the end times. Compare this with the scriptural timeline below it.



The Thousand Years – Where does it come from?

The idea of a millennium comes from **Revelation 20**—the only passage in the Bible which mentions a 1,000-year period. So that we can reference the verses (1-3 and 7-12), they are printed here for you from the EHV:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand.² He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, bound him for a thousand years,³ threw him into the abyss, locked it, and set a seal on it, so that he could no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years come to an end. After this he must be released for a short time.

⁷ When the thousand years come to an end, Satan will be released from his prison.⁸ He will go out to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. They are as numerous as the sand of the sea.⁹ They came up over the broad expanse of the earth, and they surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.¹⁰ And the Devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are. There they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.¹² I also saw the dead, great and small, standing in front of the throne, and books were opened. Another book was also opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged by the things written in the books, according to what they had done.

All Scripture must be read and interpreted within the context of Scripture. The above passage, then, must be interpreted within the context of the Bible and of Revelation, a book full of unusual visions and images that are not intended by God to be interpreted literally. In Revelation, God chose to use figurative language.

1. Underline the words or phrases in the above passage that make it clear God is using figurative language.
 - a. What light does this shed on the “thousand years”?

How should we interpret the “thousand years,” if not literally? You might recall that numbers can carry special meaning (3, 4, 12). 10 tends to be a number of fullness. So, 10x10x10 is super-completeness. In Psalm 50:10, it says that the cattle “on a thousand hills” belong to the Lord. This does not mean that the animals on hill 1,001 don’t belong to God. Rather, “a thousand” symbolizes all of the hills. In Revelation 20, when God says that

Satan will be bound for “a thousand years,” we understand that Satan will be restrained for a God-ordained, complete, and indefinitely long period of time.

Because the only reference in the entire Bible to a 1,000-year period is in Revelation, a book filled with symbolism, we interpret it in light of the simple and clear passages found in the rest of Scripture, many of which we have read previously. The interpretation that fits with the rest of Scripture is to understand the thousand years figuratively as the complete, God-ordained, and indefinitely long period of the New Testament era. The “thousand years” symbolize the time between the first and second comings of Christ, when Satan’s power was destroyed by Christ’s death and resurrection, and Satan is “bound” in his soul-destroying by the power of the gospel’s proclamation. As we have seen in a previous lesson, and as Revelation 20 indicates, Satan will be set free for a short time at the end of the New Testament era and then quickly destroyed at Christ’s second coming.

What questions and comments do you have?

Millennialists lean heavily on Old Testament prophecies to support their idea that the millennium will be a period of blessing, prosperity, and holiness under the kingship of a descendant of David. It will be a period, they claim, when Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and Gentiles will literally enter into a restored nation of Israel.

2. Compare **Amos 9:11-15** with **Acts 15:13-18**.

Amos 9:11-15

¹¹ *In that day I will raise up the fallen shelter of David. I will repair the broken parts of its walls, and I will raise up its ruins. I will rebuild it as in days of old,*
¹² *so that they will possess what remains of Edom, that is, all the nations who are called by my name, declares the Lord, who is doing this.*
¹³ *Look, days are coming, declares the Lord, when the plowman will catch up with the reaper, and the one who tramples grapes will catch up with the one sowing the seed. The mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will wave with grain.*
¹⁴ *I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they will rebuild the desolate cities and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they will make gardens and eat their fruit.*
¹⁵ *I will plant them in their soil, and they will never again be uprooted from the soil that I have given to them, says the Lord your God.*

Acts 15:13-18

After they finished speaking, James responded, “Gentlemen, brothers, listen to me.”¹⁴ Simon has reported how God for the first time has visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.¹⁵ The words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ *After these things I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,*
¹⁷ *so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord— even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does these things.*

a. What would literally have to happen from Amos if this prophecy were to be taken literally?

b. From Acts, in what way do we know Amos’ words have been fulfilled and are being fulfilled?

3. In what ways would the millennialist view of Old Testament prophecy rob Christians of comfort?

4. Recall what the Bible says about the suddenness and unexpectedness of the arrival of Judgment Day. Why is this (at least currently) a non-issue for millennialists?
 - a. What are the consequences of such a stance?

Postmillennialism

There are several types of millennialism and a diversity of positions on the subject. One type of millennialism is postmillennialism, which believes that, prior to Christ's second coming, the following will happen:

- The world will be gradually Christianized
- Evil will be reduced to negligible proportions
- Righteousness and peace will flourish
- Material prosperity will increase.

Postmillennialists are optimists and are socially and politically active because they want to help bring about this golden age of heaven on earth.

They also contend that most if not all of the terrible events that Jesus spoke of in **Matthew 24** were already fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Therefore, Christians today have no reason to expect hardship as they await Judgment Day. Rather, they will see improvement in the world's condition. For the sake of time, we won't read the full chapter, but we will look at some of the sections from Jesus' discourse:

v. 1-3 - *As Jesus left the temple and was walking away, his disciples came up to him to call his attention to the temple buildings. ² Then he replied to them, "Do you see all of these things? Amen I tell you: Not one stone here will be left on another that will not be thrown down."³ While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?"*

- Notice that the disciples ask two questions—one about the destruction of the temple and one about the end of the world.

v. 4-14 include the "signs of the times" that we've read previously (famines, earthquakes, wars and rumors of war, lawlessness will increase, love of many will grow cold, etc.)

- Remember what we said earlier: this is a reference to things that started happening as soon as Jesus ascended into heaven and, in many cases, since the fall into sin.

v. 15-22 - *Therefore when you see the abomination that causes desolation, that was spoken of through the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ The one on the housetop should not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ The one who is in the field should not return to get his clothes. ¹⁹ How terrible it will be for those who are pregnant or are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in the winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For at that time there will be great distress, unlike any that has happened since the beginning of the world until now, and unlike any that will happen again. ²² If those days were not shortened, nobody would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened.*

5. Is Jesus talking about the destruction of Jerusalem or the Last Day verses 15-22?

v. 29-31, 33-34 - *After the misery of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. And at that time all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. ³¹ He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. ³³ In the same way, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the doors. ³⁴ Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place.*

6. For what reasons would it be difficult for these words to match the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70?

7. Look up **John 16:33**. Explain how the teaching of postmillennialism offers Christians an unrealistic view of life in this world and leaves them unprepared to deal with it.

Permit a timely tangent about American Christianity, politics, and our place in them.

Premillennialism

Another type of millennialism is premillennialism. The prefix *pre-* means “before.” The main feature of premillennialism is that the second coming will take place *before* the millennium and that the final judgment will take place after the millennium. In effect, they claim that there will be two second comings of Christ.

Premillennialists believe that when Jesus returns in his second coming to set up the millennium, he will raise the bodies of dead believers and glorify them to live with him in the millennium. Believers who are alive at the second coming will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord and their bodies will be glorified. Then all believers will live with him in the millennium—a golden age of prosperity, peace, and righteousness, in which Jesus will reign visibly on earth. Unbelievers who are alive at Jesus’ second coming will continue to live with their natural bodies throughout the millennium. At the end of the millennium, Jesus will appear again for the final judgment and there will be a second resurrection in which the bodies of unbelievers will be raised.

They base this belief on **Revelation 20:4-6** - *Then I saw thrones, and those who were sitting on them were given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast and his image, and they did not receive his mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.⁵ (The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years came to an end.) This is the first resurrection.⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them. Instead they will be priests of God and of Christ. And they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Not only do premillennialists take the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 literally but they also find in this chapter their idea of a resurrection of believers prior to the millennium and the subsequent final judgment with a second resurrection. Their focus is on the words “first resurrection.”

The difficult passage above, in keeping with the sound principles of proper Bible interpretation, must be understood in light of the clear passages that deal with the same subject matter. In the above passage, John is writing about believers who die during the so-called millennium and says that they will live and reign with Jesus during this millennium. Since, as we have learned, the “millennium” is the New Testament era, we understand John to say that believers who die during this era go to live with Jesus in heaven during that time. The term “first resurrection,” then, is a fitting term that John uses to refer to the change these believers experience when they die and their souls are raised into the glorified life of heaven. The second resurrection, then, is the bodily resurrection of all the dead on Judgment Day. The “first death” is physical death on earth. The “second death” is the torment of hell. This explanation is in complete harmony with the rest of the Scriptures.

One could also say that the first resurrection takes place when a believer comes to faith and is spiritually risen from the dead (**Romans 6:4** - *We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.*). Either way, the millennialist interpretation does not fit with what the Bible says.

8. While there are a number of issues we could touch on in these paragraphs, look at **John 5:28-29** and comment on the premillennial teaching of two more comings of Christ and two separate resurrections.

Both premillennialists and postmillennialists believe that there will be a widespread and final conversion of the Jewish people before the end comes. They base that belief off of Paul’s words in **Romans 11:25b-27**, which says:

There has been a hardening of part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles has come in.²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

*The Deliverer will come out of Zion;
he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.
²⁷ And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.*

9. Turn to **Romans 9:6,27**. In what way will “all Israel be saved,” as Paul wrote?

10. Not only will all Jews be saved, but most unbelievers who are alive during Jesus’ millennial rule on earth will also be converted and saved, according to the millennialism (both pre- and post-). What effect does that have on things like mission work and personal repentance?

11. In your opinion, what teaching of millennialism poses the biggest threat to a Christian’s life?

What comments and questions do you have?

Summary

The false teaching of millennialism, rampant in the Christian church and even present in Lutheranism, is a device of the devil intended to rob people of salvation. Millennialism, through a misuse of the Scriptures, undermines the Bible’s teachings about the need for repentance, the immanency of judgment day, the importance of mission work, and the unequalled glories of heaven. It leads Christians to focus on an earthly kingdom that will never come. We are grieved by this false teaching. We must speak out against it and pray that God keeps us from it.

During the week

Read Revelation 16:1-21

Next week

We will look at another false teaching about the end times, dispensationalism. If you thought millennialism was wild, you’re in for a treat next week!

Closing Prayer - (CW 293)

**God’s Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way; in death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations. Amen.**