

The MILLENNIUM

“the thousand year reign of Christ”

Key question

How do various Christian groups view the millennial kingdom of God?

Key text

Revelation 20:4

“. . . and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

Key Definition

The Millennium

The millennium refers to the 1000 year period of the earthly reign of Christ in fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, Palestinian, and New Covenants made with the nation Israel.

Introduction

1. The **Abrahamic covenant** promised a land to Abraham’s seed.
 - a. The promise that Abraham would father a great nation was both a personal and a national promise. Gen.15:18-21
 - b. The promise to that nation of specific land as an inheritance was clear. Gen.12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:7-8, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:13-14; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24.
 - c. The promise seems to be unconditional.
2. The **Palestinian covenant** promised a land (Palestine) to a people (Israel).
 - a. **Gen.15:18** define the boundaries of the land promised Israel through Abraham.
 - b. **Num.34:1-12** make it clear that Israel inherited and occupied that land for a period of time.
 - c. **Deut.30:1-10** makes it clear that Israel will one day again occupy this land but only after she repents (while in her present dispersion) and returns to the Lord, (**Jer.29:10-**

14). She will then be restored to the land and as a converted nation. She will see the judgment of her oppressors and great prosperity.

Deut.30 “¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, ² **and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today,** ³ **then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.** ⁴ Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. ⁵ He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. ⁷ The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. ⁸ You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today.”

- d. **Jer.16:15** "But, the LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers."
 - e. **Amos 9:14-15** "And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God."
 - f. Paul writes in Romans 11:25-26 that all of Israel will be converted. Acts 15:14-16 tells us that the "*tabernacle of David*" will be rebuilt. We read in Hebrews 8:8-10 that God plans to make a "*new covenant*" with the house of Israel.
3. The **Davidic covenant** promised a Kingdom to a people (Israel).
 - a. **II Sam.7:12-16** suggests that David would have a son who would succeed him and establish his kingdom (vs.12) forever (vs.16).
 - b. Many passages in the Old Testament suggest that this kingdom would be a future reality. Jer.23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17; 20-21; Ezek.37:24-25; Dan.7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 8:11; Zech.14:4-9; Ps. 2; 18; 20-21; 45; 72; 89; 101;132; 144.
 4. When **John the Baptist and Jesus** spoke of the coming kingdom, they seemed to have in mind the promise made to David. Lk.1:31-33
 5. **Paul** seems to clearly believe that the same Israel that has rejected her Messiah and his Kingdom will one day repent and receive the blessings that were promised her. **Rom.11**

“¹² Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ¹³ But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will {their} acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ And if the first piece {of dough} be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too.”

Jew	Gentile	Jew
Israel chosen	Gentiles grafted in	Israel grafted back
Israel set aside	"Fullness of Gentiles"	The end of time

6. **Rom.11** seems to support the view that God's dealing with Israel is in some way distinct from His dealing with the church and that it is not yet finished. **I Cor.10:32** "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;"

Israel	Church age <i>Jewish remnant & Gentiles</i>	Israel
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7. The Scripture speaks of "**the Day of the Lord**" as a future time of judgment of Israel (Amos 5:18) and the nations (Obadiah 15) with repentance and blessings to follow (Zeph.3:9-20). In the NT the phrase is linked to the time of Christ's second coming (I Cor.1:8, 5:5; Phil.1:6,10, 2:16; II Thess.2:2). Could it be that this time coincides with the restoration of Israel spoken of in Rom.11?

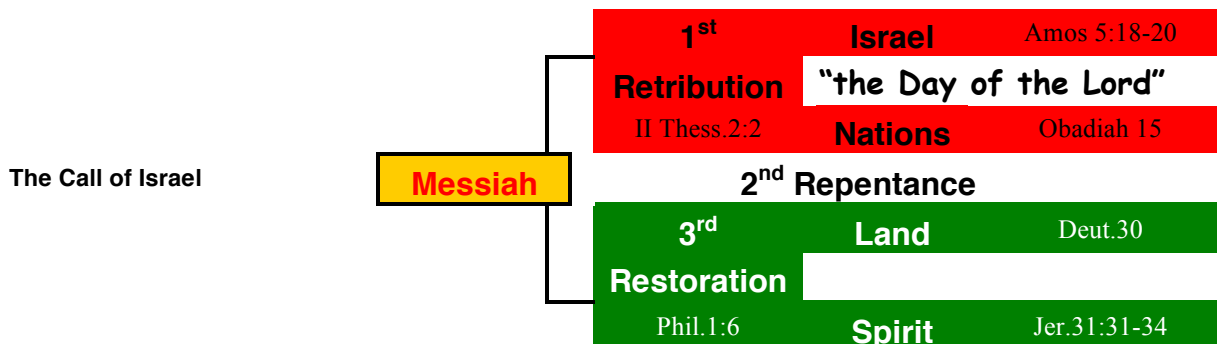


Moses	1 st Advent	2 nd Advent
Israel	Church age	Israel

"The Day of the Lord"

8. The restoration of Jews to the land of Palestine is a part of God's promise to the nation Israel and is to come **after** Israel's spiritual renewal. **Deut.30:**

"¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, ² and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, ³ **then** the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you."



9. **Matt.24-25** (and the Epistles) speak of a period of “**tribulation**” that will come before Christ’s return and a period of **judgment** that will follow His return. Luke’s version of Jesus’ words (Lk.21:24) has the second coming of Christ following the “fulfillment of the time of the Gentiles.” Does this reference Paul’s “fullness of the Gentiles” in Rom.11:25? Mark speaks of the gathering of the Diaspora. Does this reference the OT promise of Israel’s restoration?

Matthew 24-25

<i>Beginning of birth pangs</i>	<i>Great Tribulation</i>	<i>Coming of Christ</i>	<i>Parables</i>	<i>Final Judgment</i>
24:4-14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • False Christs, • Wars & rumors of wars • Famine & earthquake • Believers hated • Conflict within the church • False prophets • Many will be misled • Lawlessness • Love will grow cold • World evangelism 	24:15-28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desecration • Tribulation • False signs <p>“Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot, by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Lk.21:24</p>	24:29-31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cosmic signs • Christ is seen • Trumpet sounds • Elect gathered <p>“will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth, to the farthest end of heaven.” Mk.13:27</p>	24:32-25:42 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fig Tree • Servants • Virgins • Talents 	25:31-46

II Thessalonians, II Peter, and Revelation

<i>Beginning of birth pangs</i>	<i>Great Tribulation</i>	<i>Coming of Christ</i>		<i>Final Judgment</i>
I Thess.5:1-11 Rev.6-7 SEALS (Antichrist)	II Thess.2:1-12 Rev.8-18 TRUMPETS (wrath on all) BOWLS (wrath on nations)	I Thess.4:13-18 Rev.19 II Pet.3:3-13		II Pet.3:3-13



10. In Rev.20 we read of a thousand year (millennial) reign of Messiah.

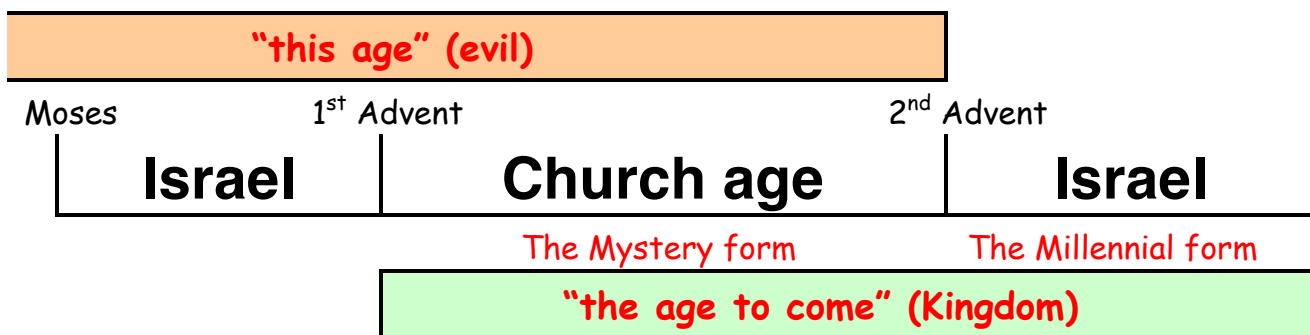
“4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I {saw} the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first

resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

- a. This text is the only clear reference to “a thousand year” reign of Christ.
- b. The two resurrections seem to represent two spiritual conditions rather than two kinds of resurrection.
- c. Is this “thousand year” period the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel? It seems to fit.



11. The Kingdom is a puzzle that is best understood as “the age to come” that coexists (in a mystery form) with this present evil until Christ returns.
- a. It is a present reality - Rom.14:17, Matt.12:28; yet it is to follow Christ’s second coming - Matt.25:34, I Cor.15:50.
 - b. It is physical - Matt.13:41,43; Rev.11:15; yet it is spiritual - Lk.17:20-21.
 - c. It is something we have now entered - Matt.21:31, Col.1:13, Lk.16:16; yet it is something we will enter at Christ’s return - Matt.8:11, II Pet.1:11.
 - d. It is at work in the world today - Matt.13; yet it is not of this world - Jn.18:36.
 - e. It is God’s reign - Ps.145:11; yet it is God's realm - Lk.16:16.



12. Christians have recognized that many of the Kingdom promises to Israel in the OT have been applied (in the NT) to the church (Acts 2:17-21 {Joel 2}). Does this mean that the church is the New Israel? It is hard to spiritualize all of the OT promises made to Israel (Deut.30) and apply them to the church.



NOTE: The question is - how are we to understand this reference to “the thousand years” (the millennium)? There are three views.

A. **Amillennialism** (realized millennium)

1. It emphasizes the present reality of the Kingdom as a part of our current experience.
 - a. The book of Revelation is largely fulfilled.
 - b. The great tribulation pictured in Revelation deals with the persecution of believers under Judaism and Rome.
 - c. The preaching of the gospel set up the Kingdom and broke down the Roman empire.
 - d. The millennium is realized now.
 - e. The Kingdom was never intended to be a golden or perfect age.
 - f. The 1000 years of Revelation 20 refer to the “church age.”
2. **Acts 2:34-36** “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet. Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified.”

View #1 Amillennialism	
Statement of View	The Bible predicts a continuous parallel growth of good and evil in the world between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. The kingdom of God is now present in the world through his Word, his Spirit, his church. The position has also been called “realized millennialism.”
Proponents	Oswald Allis, Louis Berkhof, G.Berkouwer, William Hendriksen, Abraham Kuyper, Leon Morris, Anthony Hoekema, other Reformed theologians, and the Roman Catholic Church.
Arguments For	
The conditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant (as well as the other covenants) indicates that fulfillment of it, or the lack of it, is transferred to the church through Jesus Christ (Gen.12:1-3; Rom.10; Gal.3:16).	Many passages show that the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional and was to be literally fulfilled by Israel.
The land promises of the Abrahamic covenant were expanded from Jews to all believers and from the land of Canaan to the new earth.	This position has problems in being hermeneutically consistent in the interpretation of the Scriptures. It spiritualizes passages that can clearly be understood literally.
Prophecy demands a symbolic approach to interpreting the Bible. Therefore, prophetic passages can be understood in the overall framework of God’s outworking of his covenant	The chronology of Revelation 19-20 is continuous and describes events that will occur in the end of the Tribulation and prior to the thousand-year reign of Christ.

(e.g., Rev.20).	
The Old and New Testaments are bound together in unity under the covenant of grace. Israel and the church are not two distinct programs but one unified outworking of God’s purposes and plans.	Scripture does not clearly reveal a covenant of grace. This is a theological term coined to fit into the amillennial scheme of eschatology.
The kingdom of God is central in biblical history. It was central in the Old Testament, in Jesus’ ministry, and in the church and will consummate with Christ’s return. There is no need to call for a kingdom at a later time, for the kingdom has always been.	The position clearly does not see God’s having a place for Israel in the future. Amillennialists have difficulty in explaining Romans 11.
History is moving toward the goal of the total redemption of the universe (Eph.1:10; Col.1:18).	The total redemption of the universe is the goal of all millennial views. This does not specifically support an amillennial view.
Revelation 20:4-6 refers to the reign of souls with Christ in heaven as he reigns by his word and his spirit.	Revelation 20:4-5 clearly refers to a resurrection, yet the amillennialists avoid the issue. Forms of the Greek word ZAO “to live” are used this way for resurrection in John 5:25 and Revelation 2:8.
The New Testament often equates Israel and the church as a unity (Acts 13:32-39; Gal.6:15; I Peter 2:9).	National Israel and the church are treated as distinct in the New Testament (Acts 3:12; 4:8-10; 21:28; Rom.9:3-4; 10:1; 11; Eph.2:12).

Amillennialism

Second coming

Creation

Resurrections
Judgments

Church period = Tribulation and Millennium	New heaven and earth
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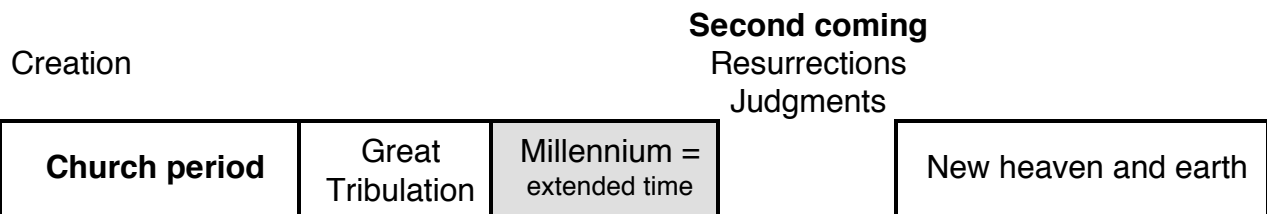
B. Postmillennialism

1. Postmillennialism “emphasizes the present reality of the Kingdom as yet unrealized but possible before Christ’s return. This view places a big emphasis upon the effects of evangelizing the world and subsequent transformation of its social structures. “That view of last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world is eventually to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the “Millennium.” . . . the second coming of Christ will be followed immediately by the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the introduction of heaven and hell in their fullness.” Loraine Boettner, The Millennium P.14
2. Key passages - Ps.47, Matt.24:14 (28:18-20).
3. This was the view of Augustine in the fourth century and is popularized today as “Reconstructionism.” (see **apttoteach.org** theology file #809)

View #2 Postmillennialism	
Statement of View	Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is now extended through teaching, preaching, evangelization, and missionary activities. The world is to be Christianized, and the result will be a long period of peace and prosperity called the Millennium. This will be followed by Christ’s return. This

	position is seemingly gaining more adherents in contemporary circles, such as the Christian Reconstruction Institute for Christian Studies. The leading proponent of traditional postmillennium was Loraine Boettner. See his book <i>The Millennium</i> , (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957).
Proponents	Augustine, Loraine Boettner, A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, W.G.T. Shedd, A.H. Strong, B.B. Warfield, Joachim of Fiore, Daniel Whitby, James Snowden, Christian Reconstructionists
Arguments For	Arguments Against
The rule of the Spirit of God in the heart of the believer is in one sense a millennium (John 14-16).	This view fails to deal adequately with Revelation 20 in formulating and defining its concept of the Millennium.
The universal diffusion of the gospel is promised by Christ (Matt.28:18-20).	The Great Commission does command universal gospel proclamation, but the world is characterized by spiritual decline, not spiritual growth.
Christ's throne is in heaven where he is now reigning and ruling (Ps.47:2; 97:5). The church has the job of proclaiming that truth and seeing people come to faith in him.	Neither of these statements necessitates postmillennialism or preclude a future earthly reign.
Salvation will come to all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues (Rev.7:9-10).	While salvation will come to all nations, this does not mean that all, or nearly all, will be saved. Nor does the New Testament say the Gospel is designed to improve the social conditions in the world.
Christ's parable of the mustard seed shows how the gospel extends and expands slowly but surely until it covers the whole world (Matt.13:31-32).	A majority of saved people on earth does not guarantee the golden age that postmillennialism expects to come.
Many evidences exist showing that where the gospel is preached, social and moral conditions are being greatly improved.	The attitude of idealistic optimism overlooks the passages that reveal the distress and apostasy of the end times (Matt.24:3-14; I Tim.4:1-5; 2 Tim.3:1-7). Also, just as many evidences can be gathered to prove that the condition of the world is declining.
Through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Spirit, the world will be Christianized and Christ will return at the end of a long period of peace commonly called the Millennium.	The use of an allegorical approach to the interpretation of Scripture in Revelation 20 is completely allegorizing the thousand year reign. There is a limited amount of scriptural support for this position.

Postmillennialism



C. Premillennialism

1. Emphasizes the future reality of the Kingdom (after Christ's return).
2. I Cor.15:22-24, Dan.12:2, Jn.5:29
3. **Rev. 20:1-9** is taken literally.

4. This was probably the view of the first three centuries of the church.
5. This view is characterized by:
 - a. A very literal view of prophetic texts.
 - b. A distinct place for the nation Israel in history.
 - c. A dramatic manifestation of the Kingdom with Christ being physically present for 1000 years.
 - d. A generally pessimistic view of this present age’s potential for reform.

View #3 Historic Premillennialism (Also called Classical and Nondispensational Premillennialism)	
Statement of View	Premillennialists hold that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs, then followed by a period of peace and righteousness in which Christ will reign on earth in person as King. Historic premillennialists understand the return of Christ and the Rapture as one and the same event. They see unity. Therefore they stand apart from the dispensational premillennialists who sees these as two events separated by the seven-year Tribulation. Premillennialism was the dominant eschatological interpretation in the first three centuries of the Christian church. Early fathers Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others held to this view.
Proponents	George E. Ladd, J. Barton Payne, Alexander Reese, Millard Erickson

Arguments For	Arguments Against
The chronology of Revelation 10-20 shows that immediately following the second coming of Christ the following will occur: the binding of Satan (20:1-3), the first resurrection (20:4-6), and the beginning of the reign of Christ (20:4-7) for a “thousand years.”	The reign of Christ does not begin after the first resurrection for he now reigns at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 1:3).
At the present time, the church is the spiritual Israel. God will return the nation of Israel to her rightful place to fulfill the promises of the kingdom (Rom. 11) in the millennial kingdom. This passage supports the teaching of verse 24: “How much more readily will these, who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?”	While the church benefits spiritually from the promises made to Israel, Israel and the church are never specifically equated. A kingdom composed of both glorified saints and people still in the flesh seems too unreal to be possible.
The Old Testament and Christ predicted a kingdom in which the Anointed One would rule (Ps.2; Matt.25:24).	The kingdom is an overall teaching of the Bible. It now lies in the church (Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:20-21). Christ reigns now in heaven (Heb.1:3; 2:7-8).
As the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the past, so those concerning the future will be too. This is an argument for consistency in hermeneutics.	The interpretation of Revelation 20:1-7 does not necessitate literalism. These verses can be understood symbolically, since the book of Revelation employs many symbols.
The church serves to fulfill some of the promises made to Israel. Christ made this clear after the Jews rejected him (Matt.12:28; Luke 17:20-21).	This view insists that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament prophecies in cases where the New Testament actually is applying a principle found in an Old Testament prophecy (Hos.11:1 in Matt. 2:15; Hos.1:10 & 2:23 in Rom.9:24-26). The understanding of “came to life” (Rev. 20:4) can be

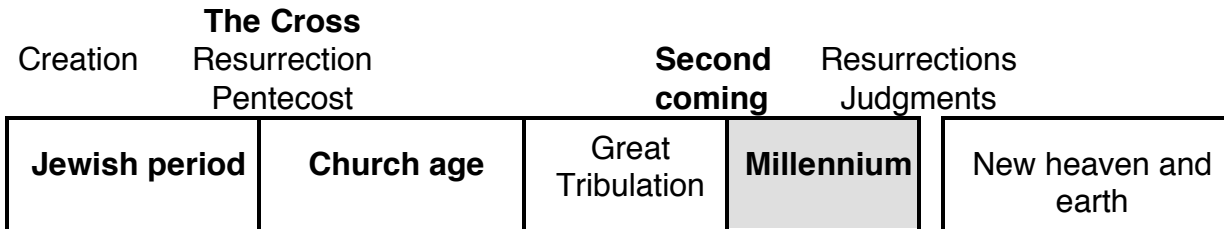
	understood to mean “living,” and not resurrection.
Many of the early church fathers held to this view of eschatology.	It is not easy to place the church fathers definitely into one view of eschatology. Also, doctrine is not determined by a survey of church fathers, but by study of Scripture.
A literal 1000-year earthly reign is referred to in only one passage (Rev.20:1-6) and it is mentioned in apocalyptic literature. The Old Testament cannot be used to supply material on the Millennium.	The Old Testament prophecies provide the basis for New Testament prophecies. The New Testament sets the place and duration of the Millennium (Rev.20:1-6), and the Old Testament gives much of the nature of the Millennium.
Romans 11:26 says that national Israel will be converted.	Many passages in the New Testament dissolve distinctions between Israel and the church (Gal.2; 28-29; 3:7; Eph.2:14-16).
God has made a special place for national Israel in his program.	Israel was chosen as a nation through which the Messiah would come. Since Jesus finished his work, Israel’s unique purpose has been fulfilled.

View #4 Dispensational Premillennialism	
Statement of View	Adherents of this school are represented by those who generally hold to the concept of two-stages in the coming of Christ. He will come for his church (Rapture) and then with his church (revelation). The two events are separated by a seven-year Tribulation. There is a consistent distinction between Israel and the church throughout history.
Proponents	J.N. Darby, C.I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Feinberg, Herman Hoyt, Harry Ironside, Alva McClain, Eric Sauer, Charles Ryrie

Arguments For	Arguments Against
This view maintains a consistent hermeneutic that allows Israel to fulfill promises given to them and the church to fulfill its promise.	Israel fulfilled its land promises once in the conquest (Josh. 21:43, 45). Its purpose of bringing forth the Messiah has also been fulfilled.
The “coming to life” (Rev.20:4-5) being designated as the first resurrection supports this view. This resurrection precedes the millennial reign.	This resurrection is not a bodily-resurrection because only one bodily resurrection occurs. (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). This is a spiritual resurrection.
Scriptures reveal both a universal and a mediatorial kingdom which are two aspects of God’s rule. The mediatorial kingdom is the Millennium, in which Christ will reign on earth.	God’s rule over the creation has always been through a mediator. Thus his mediatorial rule cannot be restricted to the Millennium.
A literal reading of Revelation 19-20 leads to a dispensational premillennial view. Other views must spiritualize the events.	Much of Revelation must be understood symbolically because of its apocalyptic nature.
The Abrahamic covenant will be completely fulfilled in Israel (Gen.12:1-3). Its outworking is seen in the Palestinian, Davidic, and new covenants. The church shares the blessings of the new covenant, but does not fulfill its promises (Ga.3:16).	The promises made to Old Testament Israel were always conditional, based on Israel’s obedience and faithfulness. The new covenant is for the church, not for Israel.
The concept of a literal earthly kingdom teaching in both Old and New Testaments supports this view.	The New Testament, which is the sole authority for the church, replaced the Old Testament and its promises.
The Millennium is possible and necessary because not all of the promises given to Israel have been fulfilled.	Israel’s disobedience negated their promises, which were based on their faithfulness (Jer.18:9-10).
The Old Testament describes the kingdom as a literal on-earth reign of Messiah over the whole world.	The New Testament shows that Christ established a kingdom at his first coming and is now reigning over the

	whole world.
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Premillennialism



Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What are the three views of the millennial kingdom?
- b. What is the Biblical basis for the premillennial view?
- c. What is the strongest Biblical support for the amillennial view?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. Discuss the relative merits of each millennial view from Scripture.
- b. How important are these various views to ones orthodoxy?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. How literally are we to understand the Old Testament covenants?