

A Myth Turned into Tradition

The Millennial Reign – Here or There?

Introduction

The wonderful world of “tomorrow” has been a perpetual dream of the religious, even long before Christ’s first advent. What that future means has varied among scholars and lay individuals, and Christians versus non-Christians. A millennial reign of Christ on earth has been one hope that began in the early Christian era.

- A majority view among Christians today has concluded that when the Messiah returns, He will restore this planet to a millennial utopia of peace.
- Some believe that it will be a time when the Jewish people are converted, and the wicked will be given another chance. This, according to many evangelicals, would occur after the “church” has been raptured.

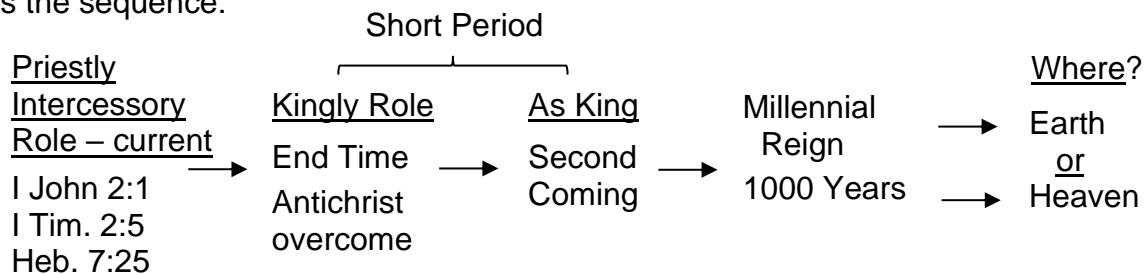
Revelation 20 is the only place in prophecy where the term “*one thousand years*” (*chilia etus* – G) is used. That millennial prophecy includes this description: “*Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given **authority to judge**. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. These had not worshiped the beast or his image and had refused to receive his mark on their forehead or hand. They came to life and **reigned with Christ** for a thousand years*” (Revelation 20:4 – NET).

- **Judgment** and a **kingly reign** with Christ are emphasized. Those who were martyred (fifth seal – Revelation 6:9-11) are alive, obviously resurrected.
- In the previous chapter, Christ’s highly symbolic return to earth via a white horse is depicted. There, a **royal crown** is on His head; and on His clothing and thigh is written, “**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” (Revelation 19:15).
- This recalls a fascinating parable that Christ shared with some of His disciples. It begins: “**When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory**” (Matthew 25:31).
- The 144,000, in heavenly imagery, noted that Christ was “**King of the saints**” (Revelation 15:3 – NKJV). This is after Christ’s second advent.

Christ becomes king before that millennium.

- John is informed that the Lamb’s (Christ’s) eternal victory over the antichrist occurs **when** He is “*King of kings, and Lord of lords*” (Revelation 17:14).
- It appears that Christ **assumes** His kingly role at a point in time just preceding His Second Coming and that millennial reign.

This is the sequence:



That is the Biblical sequence. Though He was granted “all power” just before His ascension (Matthew 28:18), His reign as a king waits. He has been functioning as our mediator, advocate and as our priest! But **where** is that millennial reign that follows His Second Coming?

Dispensational Premillennialism

In the nineteenth century a John N. Darby (1800–1882) was an influential preacher and leader in Britain’s Plymouth Brethren. He translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into German, French, Dutch and English!

- An engaging lecturer, he traveled extensively in Europe and came to the United States five times.
- Darby introduced the concept of (1) the pretribulation rapture of the church, (2) the Jewish people being grafted back into God’s kingdom, (3) pre-millennialism, (4) a literal interpretation of the Scriptures and (5) dispensationalism.

His **pre-millennialism** taught that Christ would come to set up an earthly kingdom before that one thousand years. Darby’s dispensationalism suggested that God’s work and purposes toward mankind were divided historically into seven periods or dispensations. We would now be in the sixth, called the Dispensation of Grace (or “Age of Grace,” frequently called the “Church Age”).

- In his thesis, the latter began with Pentecost and will end with the pre-millennial rapture of the church.
- The seventh dispensation is the “Millennial Kingdom of Christ” on earth, while the raptured saints are in heaven.

In addition, Darby made a distinction between Israel (Abraham’s physical descendants) and the church (New Testament believers) and their covenant promises.¹

Historically, his ideas were not part of mainline Christian beliefs. The Protestant Reformation had previously sought to reestablish the fundamental apostolic understanding of prophecy that had morphed in the Roman and Constantinople religious centers. Darby’s new beliefs, however, were slow to be accepted. But, at the turn of the twentieth century, they exploded into an exciting belief system in Europe and then America.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/seven-dispensations.html>
<https://www.gotquestions.org/premillennialism.html>

- In the United States, C. I. Scofield (1843–1921) was enamored so much by Darby's views that he developed an annotated Bible that popularized futurism and dispensationalism for fundamentalist Christians.
- Many Bible training centers, such as the Dallas Theological Seminary, adopted these views.

Today, a large segment of Christians is in Darby's camp, with a keen focus on Israel, the secret rapture, and a millennial reign of Christ on planet earth.

Can these complex beliefs stand Biblical scrutiny?

A Biblical Sequence

Within Daniel and Revelation there are many sequential storylines. They, in turn, are interspersed with "commentary inserts" that emphasize a needed point or are "by-the-way" segments of information.

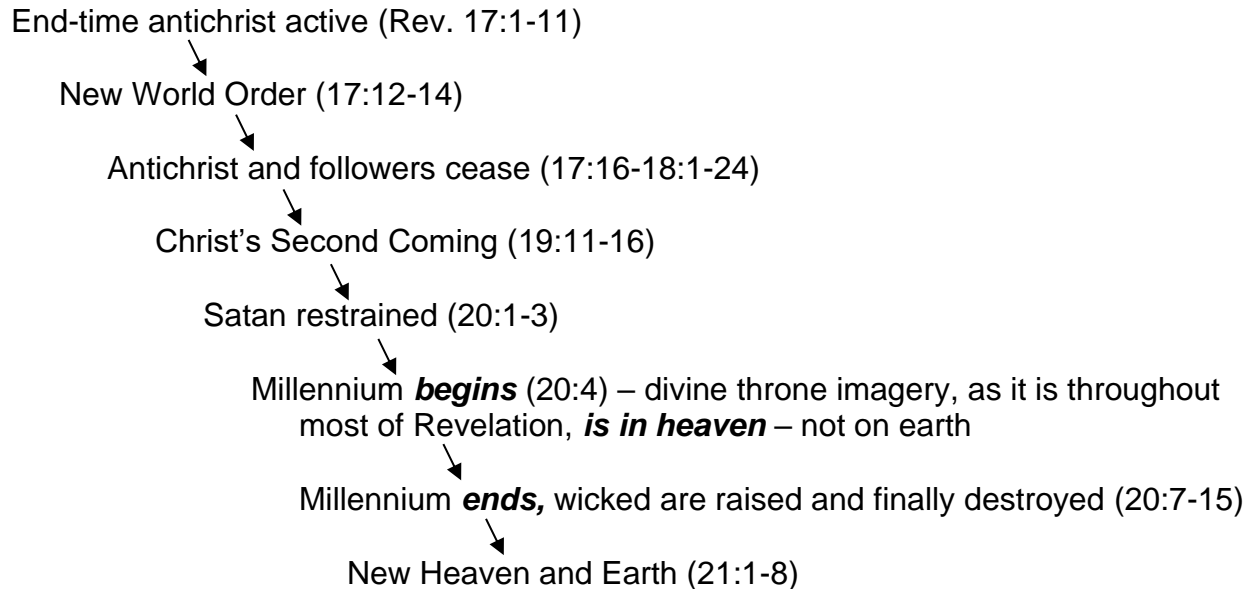
- Revelation 16:17 ends one of those storylines with its associated events when Christ says, "***It is done,***" (vss 18-21; cf. Revelation 6:12-17, 18:21-24).
- Chapters 17 and 18 follow with commentary on what led up to ***that final period of time***. It is also when and how Babylon (the harlot woman, symbolically representing an apostate church) comes to her end.

Following that is an anthem of praise that apostasy and its evil have been destroyed (Revelation 19:1-5). Then, in a continuing sequence:

1. Dramatic events that surround the Second Coming are presented (Revelation 19:6-21; cf. Revelation 1:7).
2. Then, the restraint and detention of Satan occur (Revelation 20:1-3). He will be let loose later for a short period of time (vs. 7).
3. The millennium follows (Revelation 20:4-6), with the imagery of judicial proceedings related to heavenly thrones. In 14 places in John's Revelation, throne(s) are alluded to and ***all are located in heaven***. This is the apocalyptic imagery that was begun in Revelation 1:4 related to God's throne. The only allusions to any other thrones are those of Satan (2:13) and of the beast (13:2, 16:11).
4. At the end of the millennium, the wicked are resurrected and, along with Satan, cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-15).
5. Then the wonders of a new heaven and a new earth are portrayed (Revelation 21:1-8).

Graphically:

How Redemptive History Comes to an End



The late J. F. Walvoord, a dispensationalist and professor at the Dallas Theological Seminary, explained that the millennium is given ***its significance exclusively from the Old Testament***. In a review of his beliefs: “The promises to Abraham, the promises to David, the promises to Israel of future possession of the land, and the promises to Jeremiah that Israel would continue as long as the sun and moon endure (Jer. 31:35, 36) combine to provide a symphony of prophetic truth which is the grand prelude to the millennial reign of Christ.’ According to dispensational literalism, the scores of prophecies concerning a peaceful Davidic kingdom on earth ‘demand’ the restoration of the theocratic kingdom to the Jewish nation in Palestine. However, this Jewish form of millennial kingdom, called chiliasm, includes also the rebuilding of the Temple and the literal reinstatement of the Old Testament ritual of bloody sacrifices as prescribed in Leviticus and in Ezekiel 40-46. Dispensationalists who insist on the restoration of the Temple sacrifices explain them as being ‘commemorative, not typical. They are retrospective then, not prospective, as of old.’”²

- But Walvoord admits that the book of Hebrews is “a major obstacle” to this understanding.
- Hebrews insists that the first advent of Christ abolished the sacrificial system in order to establish the period of grace (Hebrews 10:9).
- As Christ ushered in the new covenant, ***everything*** related to the old disappeared (Hebrews 8:13).³

There are many assumptions about who are on those Revelation 20 thrones, reigning with Christ during that millennium. Contextually, the suggestion is that they are the saints of all

² <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1982/09/the-one-thousand-years-of-revelation-20>

³ *Ibid.*

ages (including those who have been raised at that first resurrection when Christ ascended – Matthew 27:52-53).⁴

At Christ's Coming – Kingdom on Earth or Back to Heaven?

Before Jesus died, He told the disciples:

*“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. **In my Father's house are many mansions:** if it were not so, I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place for you.** And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also**” (John 14:1-3).*

Jesus is preparing the disciples for His going away (at His ascension) – but for their benefit, He assured them that He would go and prepare a place *for them* where His Father resided.

Two days before this He had promised that dramatic return to the earth to get them (Matthew 24:27-31).

Those “*mansions*” means “dwelling places” in the Greek. The “*Father's house*” refers to heaven (Psalm 33:13-14, Isaiah 63:15). Then He promises to return, “*to take you to be with me.*”

- Christ is influencing their minds toward the splendor of the future in God's kingdom.
- Paul notes: “... *they* [the ancient patriarchs] *desire a **better country**, that is, an **heavenly**: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city*” (Hebrews 11:16) – not on this earth.

Regarding when Jesus ascended, Paul also notes: “*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but **into heaven itself**, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hebrews 9:24).

- John 20:17 reveals that that place is away from planet earth!
- The wording suggests that those mansions are already there. They don't have to be built. They only need to be “made ready” (we don't know what that means).

Some challenge that the term “*Father's house*” can only refer to the earthly temple.⁵ Christ did refer to the earthly temple as His “*Father's house*” (e.g., John 2:15-17). But the Greek word that means God's “*dwelling place*,” as noted in John 14, is distinctly identified as in heaven.

What Happens When He Returns?

A journey to heaven is further substantiated in this series of verses:

⁴ van Bemmelen, Peter M.; JATS, 8/1-2 (1997): 150 – 160.

⁵ Warner, Tim; www.4windsfellowships.net

1. "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.... But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then when Christ comes, those who belong to him" (I Corinthians 15:20, 23 – NET).
 - Christ was "*firstfruits*" of those deceased and later raised.
 - When He returns, all those who had been believers who have passed away will be resurrected and join the living saints.
2. "*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*" (I Thessalonians 4:16-17 – NET).
 - Those saints meet Christ, who has come from heaven, **in the air** to be with Him forever.
 - Those saints are then depicted before or around God's throne (Revelation 7:9, 15; 14:3, 5; 15:2-4; cf. 4:6).

That point in time begins the millennium. It follows the apocalyptic coming of Christ, noted in Revelation 19. There, it also reveals that **when He comes**, the wicked are killed (Revelation 19:17-18; cf. Ezekiel 39:17-20).

- "*And [the wicked] said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb*" (Revelation 6:16).
- "*And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming*" (II Thessalonians 2:8).
- "*In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day*" (II Thessalonians 1:8-10; cf. John 5:28-29; 6:39-44).

Why is there such a conviction that Christ will set up His earthly kingdom, especially in favor of the Jews?

1. It rests simply on ignoring the sequence noted in the structure of Revelation's prophecy.
2. It rests deeply on the promises for Israel in the Old Testament (most of which were conditional) and neglecting what Christ said to the Jewish nation when He was here on earth. Note:
 - "*Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God **shall be taken from you**, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matthew 21:43).
 - "*Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a*

*hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! **Behold, your house is left unto you desolate***" (Matthew 23:36-38).

Denying these thoughts that are directly from Christ has sadly become a Christian "dogma" that drives much of the teaching and preaching in today's Protestant world. That earthly kingdom, however, is established **after** the millennium in the newly created earth.

- The dispensationalist misconception, beginning with Darby, is based on the hermeneutic of **literalism**.
- This way of interpreting the Bible makes a distinction between Israel and the church. For some expositors, it is a growing problem:⁶

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26, 28-29).

God promised Abraham that He would give him and his descendants the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7). It took many years for that to be fulfilled, as God had to give Abraham's descendants time to multiply into a nation. The book of Joshua is the story of Israel receiving the inheritance. First, with the help of the Lord, they overthrew the inhabitants of the land, and then Joshua apportioned it out to the various tribes under God's direction. Joshua, in chapters 13 through 22, tells of the division of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel. Based on Galatians 3:26-28, all Christians will be heirs of the heavenly Canaan, heirs of the promise given to Abraham. Even Abraham himself *"waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10). This makes it clear that the real promise was for a heavenly kingdom.

That will be the actual Old Testament fulfillment, the one that will be eternal. Through Jesus we can obtain title to that kingdom which will never pass away. *"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him"* (Daniel 7:27). What a promise we have through Jesus Christ! That will finally be realized when He returns.

Purpose of that Millennial Reign

When the *"seventh trumpet"* angel blows his instrument (Revelation 11:15-19), the consummation of the heavenly kingdom begins.

*"The seventh angel **sounded his trumpet**, and there were loud voices **in heaven**, which said:*

- *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15 – NIV).

⁶ Bemmelen, *op. cit.*, pp. 156, 160.

- *“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”* (I Thessalonians 4:16-17; cf. I Corinthians 15:52, Isaiah 27:3).

What happens next (which is during the millennium) John the revelator notes:

- *“... [1] **the time has come for the dead to be judged**, and [2] **the time has come to give to your servants, the prophets, their reward**, as well as to the saints and to those who revere your name, both small and great, and [3] **the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth**”* (Revelation 11:18 – NET).

When Christ returns, the time has arrived to reward God’s servants, destroy the wicked and judge the dead (Revelation 11:15-18).

Why, if Christ has already separated the sheep and the goats at His coming (Matthew 25:31-33), must those “goats” (the wicked who are all now dead) be judged again?

- This answer is in another wonderful study found in Revelation 4 to 8 – but:
- This millennial period is the final time, before the earth is cleansed by fire, when God’s government is on trial. A “last question” has to be answered: “Was God fair in rejecting the wicked?”
- *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand [symbolic] before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works”* (Revelation 20:12).

“During the thousand years between the first and the second resurrection the judgment of the wicked takes place. The apostle Paul points to this judgment as an event that follows the second advent. ‘Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.’ 1 Corinthians 4:5.... At this time the righteous reign as kings and priests unto God. John in the Revelation says: ‘I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.’ ‘They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.’ Revelation 20:4, 6. It is at this time that, as foretold by Paul, ‘the saints shall judge the world.’ 1 Corinthians 6:2. In union with Christ they judge the wicked, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Bible, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is recorded against their names in the book of death.”⁷

- *“Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge”* (Revelation 20:4a – NET).

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 660.

- This occurs when the saints are called “*priests unto God and of Christ*” (20:6). This parallels the text where all believers will become part of His priesthood (I Peter 2:5-9, II Corinthians 5:17-21).

This priesthood is now noted by John (Revelation 20:6) as functioning in heaven, where God and Christ are present.

Being priests, and even kings (recall the millennial thrones), was part of the eschatological promise given to John (Revelation 1:6). Its phrase “*has made them a kingdom and priests of our God*” there actually implies a future application. The most accurate translation is in the NIV.

- “... and has made us **to be** a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen” (Revelation 1:6 – NIV).

The New Earth vs. the Millennium

As noted, this promise/prophecy is a transition in sequence in Revelation: “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had ceased to exist, and the sea existed no more.... The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son*” (Revelation 21:1, 7 – NET).

We have had this sequence (Revelation 19–21):

1. Second Coming (*parousia*)
2. Death of wicked
3. Millennium
4. Final executive judgment (end of the millennium), wicked destroyed (Revelation 20:7-15)
5. Destruction of earth to occur from a lake of fire (II Peter 3:13)

Then this amazing scene of a new heavens and a new earth. That new creation was predicted by Isaiah (65:17, 66:22). He stated that it would “*endure*,” or be eternal.

- This will be a “new” reality.⁸
- **Then** it says that the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven to that earth (Revelation 21:10).

It is then that God will establish His forever dwelling place among His people (Leviticus 26:11-12, Exodus 29:45, Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 37:27, Zechariah 2:11, 8:8).

- It is then that they will be His people eternally.
- The “*former things have passed away*” (Revelation 21:4).

⁸ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 730.

Note: Dispensationalists describe two distinct prophecies that suggest an earthly kingdom on this existing earth. But there is a timing issue!

1. *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and **it shall stand for ever**”* (Daniel 2:44).

Note that this prophecy does not refer to a millennial reign but to an eternal kingdom.

2. *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that **will never be destroyed**”* (Daniel 7:13-14 – NIV).

Notice, again, that this kingdom does not refer to a millennial reign but to God’s eternal kingdom.

This kingdom that will never be destroyed can occur only after the new heaven and earth are created.

Summary

The **myth** of an earthly millennial reign of Christ, which has become a **traditional belief** with so many Protestants can now be seen as occurring **after** that one thousand years in heaven and following the reality of a new heaven and earth!

“Jesus replied, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my servants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here’ (John 18:36 – NET).

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