

## LESSON 7 – AN EARLY CHURCH DOCTRINE FORGOTTEN?



### **Reading Assignment:**

Bible Reading: Acts 1; Revelation 20  
Text Reading: Chapter 11,12,13

### **A CURRENT TREND**

It is never surprising to see how certain concepts cycle within Christianity. In the United States, there has been a resurgence of a view of the Millennium which many thought had died following World War I and World War II. That view is that a literal Millennium or Kingdom of God will be established “through human efforts, such as man’s expanding knowledge, his new discoveries and inventions, his increasing ability to exercise dominion over nature, and the expanding influence of the Church.”<sup>4</sup> Based upon this concept, it has been termed, Dominion Theology.

In light of the New Age movement, it is easy to understand how such resurgence is possible. With its emphasis upon man, combined with the evolutionary concepts, a vast majority is ready to believe that man can bring in the Millennium.

Before we consider what prompts beliefs apart from a dispensational view of the Millennium, it is important to understand what the term Millennium means, what are the three views of the Millennium, and what was the view held by the early church, the church which was still under the teaching and influence of the apostles and their students.

### **MILLENNIUM**

#### **STOP, READ, AND WRITE:**

First read Revelation 20:1-7 then write out Revelation 20:6:

In the original Greek the “thousand years” is *chilioi*. The Latin equivalent consists of two Latin words, *mille* [1000] and *annum* [year] and is the basis of the English word, Millennium. Today the word, millennium, refers to the 1000 year period referred to by John in Revelation 20. Notice that at the end of verse 4 and 6 there is a clear reference to a “reign,” hence a kingdom is suggested. A thorough study of the references here and throughout the Scriptures equates this period of time with the Kingdom of God. In Daniel 2 and 7 we find several references to a coming Kingdom of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Showers, Renald. *There Really Is a Difference*. [Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990], 114.

**STOP, READ, AND ANSWER:**

Read Daniel 2 and 7 - Answer:

In Daniel 7, how many beasts did Daniel list? \_\_\_\_\_

From where did they come up? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was given a kingdom in verses 13-15? \_\_\_\_\_

Who gave him this kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there any people to serve under his rule? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What makes this kingdom unique? \_\_\_\_\_

**THE KINGDOM CONCEPT**

Compare your answers with the definition of a kingdom given below. Do you think that Daniel speaking of a kingdom?

**DEFINITION:**

A Kingdom requires one ruling with proper authority over a realm with subjects.

That is:

1. A ruler with appropriate authority
2. A realm with subjects to be ruled
3. The actual exercise of that rule

Having defined a kingdom and determined that God indicates that He will give His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, a kingdom, we must next consider where the realm is and when it will the actual exercise of rule occur.

It is at this point that well meaning Christians disagree. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the differences were not significant. However, in the last 50 years the differences in views have led to major divisions in churches that have affected the outreach, missions, and growth of churches throughout the world. This is clearly seen in the United Kingdom and is now beginning to be significant in Canada and the United States.

In order to understand why the differing views of the Millennium have a practical effect upon the local churches today, we first must understand what are the three prime views.

**THREE PRIME VIEWS**

From your textbook reading list the three views:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Each of these views is distinguished by the prefix in front of the term, *millennial*. List the prefixes and tell what the prefix means based upon your text.

pre – \_\_\_\_\_

a – \_\_\_\_\_

post – \_\_\_\_\_

Based upon these prefixes and the definition of millennium, we can determine the three conflicting views of the Millennium.

- **Premillennialism:** Christ will return to earth before the Millennium or Kingdom of God
- **Amillennialism:** There is no literal, political Kingdom of God upon this earth
- **Postmillennialism:** Christ will return to this earth after the Millennium or Kingdom of God

Before we examine the history of these views and the view held by the early church, let us analyse the three views related to what we saw in Daniel 7.

## **DANIEL 7**

Recall that a kingdom must have a ruler with given authority, a realm with people to rule, and must actually exercise that rule.

### STOP AND READ:

Read pages 113-114 of your text

For each of the views fill in the following blanks based upon Daniel 7. If you cannot find support from that passage, suggest other Scriptural support:

<b>PREMILLENNIALISM</b>		
Authority giving power		Daniel 7:13
Ruler		Daniel 7:13
Realm		Daniel 7:17, 23,
Ruled		Daniel 7:14

<b>AMILLENNIALISM</b>		
Authority giving power	God	-----
Ruler		Matthew 28:18
Realm		Romans 14:17
Ruled	Christians	-----

<b>POSTMILLENNIALISM</b>		
Authority giving power	God	-----
Ruler		Matthew 28:18, 20
Realm		-----
Ruled		-----

It should be noted that we have asked you to only consider the three views in light of the Daniel 7 passage. Thus, this analysis holds only for that passage.

The goal of this study is to compare the views with God's descriptions of the world empires of Daniel 7. Amillennialists would quickly point out that such an analysis ignores other Scripture passages and concepts, such as a single future resurrection for saved and unsaved people. Upon future study of Amillennialism, you will find that the timing of resurrection[s] is very important. You can find out more about this subject in other Internet Bible Institute Courses.

**STOP AND RE-READ**

The paragraphs defining Amillennialism and Postmillennialism [page 114] of your text.

After you have filled in the table, were you able to find any passages that support a kingdom definition for the either the spiritual kingdom [amillennialism] or the conquering of the earth by Christians [postmillennialism]. If you found any, please put them in the blanks in the table and submit them with your homework.

We will leave it to a later lesson to consider the concept of the Kingdom of God in greater depth.

Having considered the three definitions of Millennialism, we will not study the view held by the early church.

### ***THE EARLY CHURCH'S VIEW***

**STOP AND REREAD:**

Text – pages 115-126 and based upon that reading, fill-in the following table:

<b>EARLY CHURCH FATHER'S VIEW OF THE MILLENNIUM</b>			
<i>Source</i>	<i>Prime concept supporting Premillennial</i>	<i>Time written or author lived.</i>	<i>Who taught him or where did he write</i>
Papias	Establishment of kingdom on earth		
Epistle of Barnabas	1000 years of rest		
Justin Martyr	1000 years in Jerusalem		-----
Irenaeus	Righteous dead to be resurrected and rule with Christ on earth		
Tertullian	Kingdom promised upon the earth		-----
Lactantius	Justice to reign upon earth for 1000 years. Righteous to be resurrected and rule with Christ upon the earth.		-----

Do you agree with the Dr. Showers that the early church leaders believed in premillennialism?

In addition to the amillennialists quoted by Dr. Showers as agreeing that the early church was premillennial, Whitby, generally held to be the founder of the postmillennial position said:

The doctrine of the Millennium, or the reign of saints on earth for a thousand years, is now rejected by all Roman Catholics, and by the greatest part of Protestants; and yet it passed among **the best Christians, for two hundred and fifty years**, for a tradition apostolical; and, as such, is delivered by many Father so that the second and third century, who speak of it as the tradition of our Lord and His apostles, and of all the ancients who lived before them; who tell us the very words in which it was delivered, the Scriptures which were then so interpreted; and say that it was held by all Christians that were exactly orthodox.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pentecost, Dwight 373.

## ***RELEVANCE TO THE MODERN CHURCH***

This study may seem an interesting study of early church history and an awareness of varying views of millennialism, but one often asks of what value is it to the modern church and the need to reach the world with the Gospel?

The Director of the Internet Bible Institute has written a paper that is the result of a study of the decline of churches in the United Kingdom. This analysis is available on the Internet Bible Institute's website Library, entitled "The Cycle of Decline: Why Churches and Assemblies are Dwindling."

The consequences of which millennial view one holds, does have significant influence on Gospel outreach, mission programs, and church growth. We offer one 20<sup>th</sup> Century historical example to get you, as the student, to start thinking of the practical and vital need to understand the premillennial view of the Kingdom of God.

## ***WHY ARE SO MANY CHURCHES INEFFECTIVE?***

In 1857 a great revival began in New York, crossing the ocean to Ballymena, Northern Ireland. As a result of the revival, "Bible Reading" meetings, [men reading portions of the Bible without comment] sprang up throughout the country. As people heard the Word, they found answers to life's questions. As people found answers in the Bible, they desired more serious Bible study. As a result, the Bible conference movement came into being in order to satisfy this hunger for the Word.

The earliest and most famous was the annual Niagara [Ontario] Conference. It was here that Christian Fundamentalism had its birth. Its teaching emphasis was upon the essential or fundamental doctrines of the Bible. Niagara generated vision and direction for large numbers of Christians and produced the following results:

- The Bible conference movement of the 1920's, 30's, 40's
- New Christian Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries
- The concept of chronological or contextual Bible study [expository preaching]
- Extensive prophetic premillennial teaching
- Support for great works of evangelism and missions
- The Niagara Creed of 1878

Sadly, within forty year, by 1897 the conference had lost its vision, answers, and effectiveness. People, sensing this, quietly just quit attending.

How did this happen? I can find only one change from the beginning days to the declining days. It was the abandonment of one foundational doctrine, the belief in the

premillennial return of Jesus Christ to rule and reign for 1000 years upon this earth. During the glorious years of the conference “most fundamentalists agreed on a general premillennial scheme of eschatology...” [Beale, 27]. In fact, it was listed as one of the Christian Fundamentals of the faith in the Niagara Creed.

Dr. Beale declares that it was the debate over **this fundamental truth** which “... started the Niagara Conference on the road to decline.”

It began with a simple debate over the relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation. From there the millennium was discarded to prevent disunity. But true unity must be based upon the foundational doctrines of the Bible. I hear it all the time. “We must promote unity, so don’t teach the book of Revelation.” What they are really saying is, “Remove the book [which includes Daniel, the minor prophets, etc.] from our Bibles.”

But the Apostle John warns, “*And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*” [Rev. 22:19]. What book? The book of Revelation!

Paul tells us, “*Henceforth there is laid up for me, a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, ...shall give me at that day: and ...unto all them also that love His appearing*” [2 Tim. 4:8]. This crown is for that minority that holds onto the belief of the rapture and coming of the Lord.

Understanding prophecy is what gives our hearts the desire to reach out with the Gospel throughout the world. It gives purpose to our lives now and for eternity. Further, according to the Bible, it motivates us to holy living [1 John 3:3].

Why are churches dwindling and dying? Because they remove this foundational doctrine for the sake of “unity,” a “unity” which is destroying them spiritually and causing the demise of many churches.

## ***DR. SHOWERS’ REASON FOR DECLINE IN THE EAST***

### **LIST & THINK**

After reading Chapter 12 of the your textbook, list at least five of the seven factors, cited by the author, which contributed to the rejection of the Premillennial view in the east.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**STOP AND THINK**

Based upon these reasons, is a change from premillennialism to amillennialism based upon Scripture or manmade doctrine?

**MODERN TRENDS**

**READ AND ANSWER**

Along with Amillennialism, a modified form of millennialism developed called postmillennialism. This new movement grew out of the optimism felt by world society during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century. This period saw and believed in the idea of a coming Utopian world.

[Using you text]

Who began the postmillennial view and when? \_\_\_\_\_

What was his theological background, i.e., church background? \_\_\_\_\_

What was their view of history? \_\_\_\_\_

While the author indicates that the postmillennial view has declined as a result of World War I and World War II, there has been a significant rebound in recent years within the United States. Reread pages 151-154 of your text.

**STOP AND THINK**

Why do you think that the postmillennial view has seen a revival in many conservative churches in the United States?

**LIST IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**

The developments of the three views of the Millennium. Also, indicate the predominant foundation of the view, i.e., Bible, manmade, cultural influence, other religions, etc.

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**First:** \_\_\_\_\_ Foundation: \_\_\_\_\_

**Second:** \_\_\_\_\_ Foundation: \_\_\_\_\_

**Third:** \_\_\_\_\_ Foundation: \_\_\_\_\_

## **STOP AND THINK**

While precedence in time does not always indicate correct thinking, do you think in the case of premillennialism it might hold significance?

While many are saying the issue of a Millennium is a secondary doctrine or of little significance, it is our hope that this brief study may have challenged that view and helped you to see that it is a major doctrinal issue rather than a secondary doctrine.

## **Bibliography**

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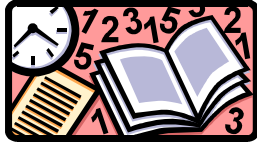
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## Homework

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Briefly write a paragraph on each of the following based upon your text reading, the Bible, and Lesson 6.

**1. Briefly discuss the three requirements of a kingdom.** [20 points]

**2. Briefly define:**

**Premillennialism:**

**Amillennialism:**

**Postmillennialism:**

**3. Using your textbook, list four of the seven reasons given for the decline of premillennialism in the east and discuss them briefly.** [20 points]

**4. Briefly discuss the two major factors for the rejection of premillennialism in the West.** [20 points]

**5. Briefly discuss what view of millennialism you hold and why.** [Your evaluation will be based upon your defence of your position and based upon which position you hold.] [20 points]

I have read \_\_\_\_\_ % of the textbook. I have read \_\_\_\_\_ % of the Scripture Reading

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_