

Sunday Morning Compass

May 21, May 28, June 4, and June 11

June 4. Session Three:

Historical Premillennialism & Post-millennialism

Leftover business from last week...

- The seven overall questions.



Historical Premillennialism

What is historic premillennialism?

Historic premillennialism (HPM) is the belief that Christians will remain on the earth during the great tribulation. This tribulation will purify the churches by rooting out false believers, and the second coming of Christ will precede the millennium. HPM believes that the church has replaced the nation of Israel as God's covenant people. Also known as "Covenant Premillennialism," HPM treats a 1000-year millennium as a literal future event.

Many early church fathers, though not all, seemed to envision an earthly millennium. During the first centuries of Christian faith, the church's theologians anticipated not only the physical reign of Jesus Christ following a time of testing, but also the restoration of all creation to its original goodness in a millennial kingdom. HPM began to fade as later church fathers focused on the spiritual aspects of Christ's reign and downplayed the idea of an earthly millennium.

However, though PM appeared in the available writings of the early church, it is evident that other views (primarily amillennialism) existed side by side. The premillennial beliefs of the early church fathers, however, are quite different from the dominant form of modern-day premillennialism, namely dispensational premillennialism.

What do historic premillennialists emphasize?

HPMs try to balance symbolic and literal interpretations of Revelation, emphasizing both what the book meant to first-century readers and how it might apply for people's lives today.

According to historic premillennialists...

- God's promises of land and blessings to Abraham and his offspring were conditional and based on their obedience. Israel's persistent disobedience violated God's covenant with them.
- God has maintained a covenant of grace throughout the Old and New Testaments with all who trusted in him. These believers, embodied today in the Church, are the true Israel (see Rom 9:6-8; Gal 6:16).
- Most references to "Israel" in Revelation refer symbolically to the Church.

What Scriptures seem to support historic premillennialism?

- The revealing of the Antichrist precedes Christ's return (2 Thess 2:34).
- The tribulation will root out false members from the churches (Rev 2:22-23).
- The saints are on earth during the tribulation (Rev 13:7).
- God's promises to Abraham and his offspring were conditional (Gen 22:18; 1 Chr 33:8; Is 1:19-20; Jer 7:6-7).
- The New Testament frequently uses "Israel" and "the twelve tribes" to refer to Christians (Matt 19:28, 29; Rom 9:6-8).

When has historic premillennialism been popular?

HPM (and/or parts of it) seems to have been one of the earliest views of the end-times among Christians who lived just after the apostles.

Prominent historic premillennialists include:

Many early church fathers seemed to embrace historic HPM, it's difficult always to sort out how they used the terms "Millennium (or thousand year reign)" and tribulation (i.e. literally or figuratively), and they did not hold to the dispensational view of a rapture. One other difficulty: Proponents of a particular view tend to "cherry pick" church fathers' quotes to support their viewpoint.

Modern supporters include scholars such as David Dockery, John Warwick Montgomery, George R. Beasley-Murray, Robert Gundry, and George E. Ladd.

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Post-millennialism

What is postmillennialism?

Postmillennialism (PM) is the belief that the second coming of Christ will occur after the millennium. The millennial reign described in Rev 20:1-6 represents a long, indefinite period when most of the world will submit to Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. During this time, Satan will have no power over the earth, and evil regimes will collapse (Rev 19:19-20:3). A period of great tribulation may precede the millennium.

Some charismatic Christians embrace "Dominion PM." This teaches that, through the contemporary charismatic movement, God has been binding Satan. When the church recognizes the fullness of its power through the Holy Spirit, the church will establish God's kingdom on earth, have dominion over it, and usher in the golden age of the millennium.

What do postmillennialists emphasize?

Postmillennialists (PMs) place great confidence in the preaching of the Gospel; they contend that the Gospel will eventually spread in such a way that nearly everyone in the world will turn to Jesus Christ. One Scripture cited in favor of this view is Mark 3:27. PMs believe that this golden age is described in such Scriptures as Psalm 2:8, Is 2:2-4, Jer 31:34, Dan 2:35, and Micah 4:1-4. PMs tend to emphasize the power of the gospel to transform societies and individual lives.

According to postmillennialists...

- During the millennium, Christ will rule the earth through his Spirit and through his Church; He will not, however, be physically present on the earth.
- The resurrection depicted in Rev 20:4 represents the spiritual regeneration of people who trust Jesus Christ.
- The second coming of Christ, the final conflict between good and evil, the defeat of Satan, the physical resurrection of all people, and the final judgment will occur together, immediately after the millennium (Rev 20:7-15).

Which Scriptures seem to support postmillennialism?

- Every ethnic group will receive the Gospel before the second coming (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10).
- The first resurrection (Rev 20:4) could refer to the spiritual resurrection (the regeneration or new birth) of persons who trust Christ (Rom 11:13-15; Eph 2:1-4).
- The second coming of Christ and the resurrection of all people, saved and unsaved, will occur at the same time (Dan 12:2-3; John 5:28-29).

When has postmillennialism been popular?

The earliest writer who was clearly PM was Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202), although some historians believe that earlier church leaders count Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria as PMs.

Augustine of Hippo is sometimes said to be PM in his views. Like other Christians of his day, Augustine had for a while anticipated that Christ would establish an earthly millennial kingdom after his return. While he acknowledged a literal millennium as a possible interpretation, he preferred a broader view of the “thousand years”—a term for marking an indefinite period of time between the first advent, when Christ’s kingdom was established, and his second advent. He saw the millennial kingdom as being primarily the reign of Christ in the hearts of the faithful, even during tribulation, a position perhaps more closely associated with amillennialism.

During the 1800s, PM increased in popularity. Some Christians even believed that the increased work of missionaries throughout the world represented the beginning of the millennium.

During the early 1900s, a world war and an economic depression raised questions in many people’s minds about whether the world was actually becoming a better place, and PM diminished in popularity.

Prominent postmillennialists include:

Famous preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and Charles Haddon Spurgeon, as well as such theologians as B. B. Warfield, Augustus H. Strong, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, Loraine Boettner, and R. C. Sproul, are said to be PMs. However....

Lorraine Boettner described postmillennialism as “that view of the 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 end of a long period of righteousness and peace, commonly called ‘the Millennium.’”