

## The Millennium - What on earth is it?

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July 25, 2010

I would like to welcome you to Faith Evangelical Free Church. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. This summer we are in a teaching series entitled, “The Mysteries of Heaven.” In previous weeks we looked at some of the big pieces the Bible teaches about what happens after life.



- **New Heavens and New Earth** - We talked about the future existence of a new heaven and earth that are combined together so God’s home is with man forever.
- **Hell** - We talked about the reality of real, conscious, eternal punishment for those who die apart from Christ called, “Hell.”
- **Eternal Rewards** - We talked about how we don’t just have Christ for eternity but in eternity God desires to reward us for how we live for Christ now.
- **Resurrection Bodies** - We looked at the reality of our resurrection bodies and that we will not be like *Casper the Friendly Ghost* but we will have real, tangible, perfect, eternal bodies

These are some of the clear, undisputed pieces about what happens after life. If you have built a puzzle, you know having the pieces is not the problem, it is fitting them together that is the challenge. What makes a puzzle especially difficult is when you think you have all the pieces and when you put them together you realize one is missing. This morning, we are going to put these big

pieces of the end time puzzle together. Just so you don't think this will be easy, we will introduce you to a piece we are missing.

### **How do I put together the eternity puzzle?**

At first, putting the pieces of the puzzle together looks easy. The Bible appears to tell us things will move along until they get really bad and then Christ will return. When he returns, everything happens at once. Everyone gets their indestructible bodies. Jesus judges people to give them either their eternal reward or their just punishment in hell. This earth is renewed. The new heavens and earth are ushered in and we go off into eternity to live happily-ever-after. At least those in heaven live happily-ever-after. There are many passages in the Bible that seem to teach this.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Acts 24:15 (ESV)

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:28–29 (ESV)

This is the simplest way to put these pieces together and it appears to be the most logical. This is a view called Amillennialism. Even though you can't spell it, write it down. Later, I will explain what it means.

### **Amillennialism**



Amillennialism believes everything happens at one. It is neat, clean and pretty simple. The problem is there is a passage in Revelation that confuses what, at first, appears to be a very straightforward answer.

### Revelation 20:1-6

It looks like there is another piece to our puzzle. The Bible says there will be a 1,000 year period before the new heavens and earth are created where this world will experience incredible peace and prosperity because Christ will reign over it and we will reign under Christ and with Christ in our resurrection bodies. This 1,000 year period is often called the Millennium. All millennium means is latin for thousand years. Mille means thousand, annum means years. This is a period on earth that, while not as great as the new heavens and earth, this earth will be much better than it is now. The earth will be much more like it was intended to be. Satan will be bound and will not be able to ruin people and the planet. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released. As you can imagine, after being bound for a thousand years, he is pretty fired up to make

trouble. He will gather together people on earth who have only outwardly submitted to Christ's rule to wage war on Christ and his followers. There will be a decisive battle. Satan will be defeated. Satan will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, the unbelievers will be raised, judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire along with him. Then the New Heavens and Earth will begin.

All of a sudden, instead of everything occurring at once, it looks like God is stretching things out a bit and messing up our neat, simple plans. The clearest teaching of a millennium period on earth with Christ in charge is Revelation 20:1-6. You have to know that since Revelation is an apocalyptic book of the Bible, it uses symbols and signs to get its meaning across so there is debate on what it means. Since Revelation is so hard to understand, understanding the millennium is difficult and it is a monkey wrench for Bible scholars. Some Christians don't know what to do with Revelation 20 so they ignore it and claim there will be no literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Other Christians built their whole understanding of the Bible around the millennium and Revelation 20. What should we do with this new piece that is given to us right before the end of Scripture? Will there be an earthly reign of Christ on this earth with his saints? Let's look at it.

While Revelation 20 is the only explicit teaching about a millennium, there are other passages of Scripture that hint at a two stage inauguration of Christ's kingdom instead of one.

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must

reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 1 Corinthians 15:23–25 (ESV)

When Paul writes about the resurrection body, he divides the in-breaking of God's kingdom into three stages. First was Christ at his resurrection. Then when Christ returns, those who belong to him. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule, authority and power. Remember, *rule, authority and power* is rabbinic language for the different ranks of angels. This is saying Jesus must reign until he conquers Satan and his posse and throws them into the Lake of Fire. So Paul breaks things into two stages, not one. There is the resurrection of believers first, then later in time there is a resurrection of unbelievers.

Not only are there hints of this in the New Testament, there are hints of this in the Old Testament. There are prophecies that need a much better earth to be fulfilled but they could not be fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth.

No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. Isaiah 65:20 (ESV)

In this prophecy, there is a time when people shall die 100 years old and be considered young. That can't be true of the new heavens and the new earth because people will not die there, but today we die a lot younger than 100. This could only be true of a better earth, an intermediary kingdom.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be

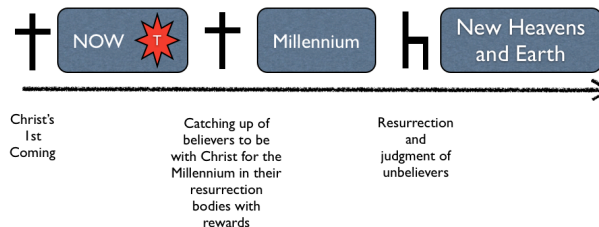
full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6–9 (ESV)

This talks about the peace that will exist in the animal kingdom. The Discovery Channel will have to re-film their whole “Planet Earth” series because the animals won’t kill each other any more! It is hard to picture this in the new heavens and the new earth because it talks about the nursing child playing over the hole of the cobra. In the New Heavens and Earth, there won’t be nursing children because people won’t be having kids. It says at this time *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord*. It sounds like the intermediary kingdom where Christ is reigning on *this* earth.

So it looks like we have a new piece on the puzzle board. It doesn’t look like God will wrap everything up in one decisive moment but there will be an intermediary kingdom of Christ ruling for a thousand years on earth.

### Historic Premillennialism

## Historic Premillennialism



What makes this difficult for many people to swallow is there is only one explicit teaching on this kingdom and it is found in Revelation. That being said, that doesn't mean it is not true. The tower of Babel is only talked about once in Genesis. I don't see anybody claiming they don't believe it was true. There was a somewhat similar situation at the end of the Old Testament era. The entire Old Testament has no explicit teaching that Christ would come twice, once as a suffering servant who would die and rise again to earn our salvation and later as a conquering King. The first and second comings of Christ were only hinted at by the prophets. Christ's first coming as a suffering savior was only hinted at by God. It was only after he came when people looked back and realized how God put things together. If God chose to leave the manner of Christ's first coming a little obscure for us, why could he not choose to leave the manner of his second coming a little obscure.

While Revelation 20 has some things that are figurative in it, other things are clear.

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.  
Revelation 20:5–6 (ESV)

Apparently, there *are* two resurrections. The resurrection of God's kids who will reign with him for a millennium, and then a resurrection of everyone else.

What are we to do with the verses that appear to teach one great resurrection? Lets read them again carefully.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Acts 24:15 (ESV)

Notice these verses technically say everyone will be resurrected. It doesn't say everyone will be resurrected *at the same time*.

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:28–29 (ESV)

The same is true of this verse. At first it looks like it is talking about one hour and one resurrection but as we read the back end of the verse, it talks about two resurrections. One resurrection of life and one resurrection of judgment.

So let me recap. There are some Christians who believe there will be just one general resurrection at the end of time. They are called Amillennialists. That just means they believe in no literal millennium. There is another group of Christians that believe there will be two resurrections. One for God's kids when Christ first returns and they will reign with Christ on planet earth for a thousand years and there will be another resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the millennial period. As God's kids, we will have our resurrection bodies and our rewards and we will rule with Christ and under Christ on this earth during the millennial kingdom, not just in the new heavens and earth.

Where are we at as a denomination on this issue? In the Free church, we are premillennialists. The reason our denomination believes in a literal millennium is that while it is not *as clearly* outlined in the Bible as many other



things are; never-the-less, it is there. We want to conform our beliefs to the Bible, not conform the Bible to our beliefs.

Just so you don't think everything on this topic is too easy, you need to know, there is another option out there for premillennialists. Some premillennialists are historical premillennialists, like I just described, and others are Dispensational premillennialists. The most obvious difference between them is the answer to the question, "Will we be here for the great tribulation?"

### **Dispensational Premillennialists**

What is the great tribulation and will we be there? The expression "great tribulation" comes from Matthew 24:21.

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. Matthew 24:21 (ESV)

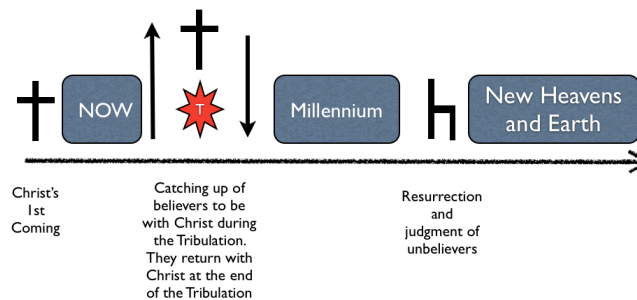
Everyone believes Christ will return *after* the tribulation.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matthew 24:29–30 (ESV)

But in the 1800's, a variety of premillennialism developed that held to an additional return of Christ which they believed would happen before the tribulation to take the church out of the world. John Darby was the man began this belief. He was a prolific writer who wrote 41 books and when he died fifteen-hundred congregations followed his teachings. He did a great job for the gospel in the United Kingdom and ultimately in America. One of his followers was a man named Scofield who wrote the Scofield reference Bible which sold over 3 million

copies. The notes in the Scofield Bible explain Darby's views on how the end times will unfold. Another follower was Charles Ryrie who wrote the Ryrie reference Bible. For those of you who are younger, you may have read the "Left Behind" Series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. They are also followers of Darby's dispensational version of premillennialism. Scofield, Ryrie and Lindsey had a huge influence on American Christianity and through their writing cast the majority of Christians views on how the end-times will unfold.

## Dispensational Premillennialism



The main difference between Dispensational premillennialism and Historic premillennialism is that dispensational premillennialism believes there will be a secret return of Christ, just before the great tribulation to remove Christians from the earth called which they call, "The Rapture". As far as I can tell, this secret rapture is not found in the Bible. Why do they believe it is there? They believe that because Christians are not objects of God's wrath and the time of the

tribulation will be a time of God pouring out his wrath, we as Christians will not experience it.

Now for those of you who hold this position, cut me slack, go easy on me and hear me through. We learned in Hebrews 12 that while, as Christians, we are not objects of God's wrath, that doesn't mean we are exempt from suffering. Many times God puts us through suffering to discipline us, to purify us and to mature us. Search the Scriptures, I cannot find anything that tells us there will be a secret rapture of the church to take Christians out of the world before the tribulation. Matthew 24 is pretty clear we will be here for it. The passages Scofield and Ryrie use to support a secret rapture do not say it directly. It is inferred.

I also believe that behind the argument of a pretribulation rapture is a desire to preserve a distinction between God's plan for Israel and the church. Old School dispensational theology believes God has two plans. One for the church and one for Israel. They believe parts of our Bible refer to the church and we should listen to those, other parts refer to Israel and we can ignore those. While not every dispensationalist believes this, that is true of traditional dispensationalists. Traditional dispensationalism believes the church will be taken up into heaven to be with Christ during the tribulation and Israel will endure the tribulation before they enter the millennial kingdom.

I don't see in Scripture that God has a completely separate plan for national Israel and the church. Romans 11 tells us God is not done with national Israel but God doesn't give us many details of what he is up to with national

Israel. I believe Scripture tells us there is one people of God through Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, not two separate people with separate plans.

One of the verses used to support a secret rapture before the tribulation is 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but read it in context and it is hard to find a secret rapture of Christians.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 (ESV)

If this is supposed to be a secret rapture where nobody but the saints know what is going on when everyone wakes up one morning and a quarter of the planet is gone, I find it hard to believe it is secret. It says that when Christ returns for believers there will be a cry of command, the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God. This doesn't sound quiet to me! It seems this talks about Christ returning at the end of the tribulation to set up his kingdom in the millennium.

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 (ESV)

Here we have the last trumpet. That is a loud thing, not a secret thing and this is when we are raised. It looks like a pretty loud and significant event when Christ returns for us and sets up his millennial kingdom after the rapture, not before. Notice that it says when Christ returns it is the last trumpet. It is hard to believe there will be another trumpet seven years later after this.

Now I realize some of you hold to this view. As I said earlier, please cut me grace on this one. There is much more that could be said.

You are probably wondering, which view do I hold? I am a historic premillennialist though I have learned to be pretty humble about it. I read very widely for this message and thought very deeply. I have a great deal of respect for all the positions I mentioned. There is much more to this discussion than you know. What concerns me most on this subject is Christians who hold any of these positions with an arrogance that causes them to look down on the other positions. If you take time to think seriously and read widely on this subject you will see that none of these views on how the pieces of the end-times puzzle fit together is air tight. There is a measure to this whole topic where God leaves a sense of mystery to exactly how things will unfold. If you want to dive in and learn more about this topic here are a few books I suggest you read.

- Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond by Darrell Bock
- The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views by Robert Clouse
- The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options by Stanley Grenz

### **What do I need to remember?**

**Have humility** - The pieces are clear, the way the pieces come together is not as clear. The millennium piece of reigning with Christ on earth is not as clear as the others, but it is there. Be humble about this.

**Christ IS coming again** - Nobody argues about this. No matter what you think on these issues, it is clear we end up in the new creation with Christ.

**Keep the millennium in perspective** - While I am not downing the millennium because it will be a great thing to reign and rule with Christ on planet earth for what may be a literal thousand years, that being said, it is nothing compared to being with Christ for eternity in the new heavens and earth. The Millennium is only an appetizer, the New Creation is the main meal. As I studied this topic, it seems to me there is a disproportionate amount of thought and writing which has gone into the Millennium and not nearly enough into the New Heavens and Earth. That is why we started with the new heavens and earth in this series. That is very clear and that is where we are going.

**How we live now will determine our real life then** - This life is not real life. It is only the life that determines how we will really live. The reward we receive for how we live in this life will be given to us in the Millennium, not just for eternity in the new creation.



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