

The Millennium

By Dave DeWitt

*Acts 1:6-7, So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring **the kingdom** to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or the seasons [KJV] which the Father has fixed by His own authority."*

Definition

The earthly kingdom of God is God's rule over this physical earth through His Messiah. This is often referred to as the Millennium, by both those who do and do not believe it is a thousand years and by those who do and do not believe we are in that kingdom now. So I shall here refer to it as the **Millennium** to distinguish it from the heavenly kingdom of God.

Thesis

There are two basic camps describing the Millennium. I shall call them the Cultural Camp and the Gospel Camp. Within the Cultural Camp, there are three positions: the Millennium-Now Position, the Progressive- Millennium Position, and the Eternal-Millennium Position. Within the Gospel Camp there are two positions: the Postponed-Millennium Position, and the Future-Millennium Position. So there **are five distinguishable positions** about "Millennialism." I shall here briefly describe these five positions and defend the fifth one, the Future-Millennium Position of the Gospel Camp.

The Cultural Camp

The Cultural Camp is focused on fixing this world, via what is commonly called the "cultural mandate" based on Genesis 1:28—

"God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

They claim this is a mandate for believers to redeem the physical and cultural structures of the world. As Greg Beale (professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary) said, "The *Cultural Mandate* is the first Great Commission." [May 12, 2017, thegospelcoalition.org]

The problem is Genesis 1:28 is not a "cultural mandate." It has nothing to do with culture at all. Genesis 1:28 is a command to subdue and rule over the physical creation of plants and animals. For example, we should manage the wolf and deer population, not kill all the whales, or cut down all the trees without replacing them. But plants and animals do not have culture. There is no "cultural mandate." Noah was never told to improve the culture of the antediluvian people. Abraham was never told to improve the culture of the Canaanites. Moses was never told to improve the culture of the Egyptians. David was never told to improve the culture of the Philistines. Paul was never told to improve the culture of the Greeks or the Romans. For sure, the spread of the Gospel and conversions to Christianity improved the cultures surrounding those conversions (Christians were the first to build hospitals, orphanages, and shelters for the homeless). But no one in the Bible was ever told to focus on improving the world's cultures.

#1. The Cultural Camp, Millennium-Now Position

The Millennium-Now Position is fundamentally and historically the view of the theological camp known as amillennialism. Although this position references Augustine (in the A.D. 400s), it primarily follows the teachings of John Calvin (in the 1500s). Historically, this is the position of the Reformed, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches. [The Roman Catholic Catechism also teaches a Millennium now view (CCC 782, 1807, 2816), but our focus here will be on the Protestant views.] The following description of the Kingdom-Now Position is from the website of Anthony Hoekema:

Contrary to what the name (Amillennialism) implies, AMs *do* believe in a millennium. The millennium, however, is *now*: the present age of the church between the first and second comings of Christ in its entirety *is* the millennium. Therefore, while the AM does *deny* the Premillennial belief in a personal, literal reign of Christ upon the earth for 1,000 years *following* His second coming, he *affirms* that there is a millennium and that Christ rules. However, this messianic reign is not necessarily for a literal 1,000 years and it is wholly spiritual (non-earthly, non-visible) in nature. [Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 235, monergism.com/amillennial-view-kingdom-god (emphasis his)]

Albert Wolters, professor of religion at Redeemer University, Ancaster, Ontario, argues, Mankind, as God’s representatives on earth, carry on where God left off... [leading to] a new heaven and a new earth. [Wolters, *Creation Regained*, pp 41, 48]

Rev. Michael J. Glodo of Reformed Theological Seminary put it this way:

God gave humanity the cultural mandate in the most simple terms so that the world, the creation would be filled with his glory. We see a picture of creation as being something like the construction of a house, sort of like an ancient temple. And when a temple is built, the god who commissioned its building inhabits it. [<http://reformedanswers.org/answer.asp/file/44453>]

To Summarize: The Millennium-Now Position is the (covenant, amillennial, Reformed) idea that “the present age of the church between the first and second comings of Christ in its entirety *is* the millennium.” Therefore, the church’s mission includes a mandate to build the earth into a house of God, like the ancient civilizations would build a house for their gods, and when the house is built, Jesus will come to live in it.

Problems with the Millennium-Now Position

One basic problem is that this position depends on a non-literal or spiritualized method of interpreting Scripture. “Israel” is not Israel, the “Land” is not the Land, the “blessings” for the Jews are not blessings for the Jews. That ignores the basic problem that the Millennium is about Israel, not the church. All the statements of the Old Testament prophets forecasting a future earthly kingdom for Israel must be either ignored (which is what they usually do), or spiritualized into a “cultural mandate” for the church to impose Christian values on the world. This kind of non-literal interpretation is usually applied selectively. For example, they might spiritualize the Millennium, a six-day creation, the role of women, and homosexuality, while taking the plan of salvation literally.

A second basic problem with the kingdom-now view is that it assumes the kingdom of God is something that requires the assistance of man. They understand the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10) as a directive for the church to bring in the kingdom of God *on earth*. As Albert Wolters said, we are to “carry on where God left off.” [referenced above] But nothing in the Bible suggests that God ever asked humans to build His kingdom for Him or with Him. For example, the phrase *your kingdom come* in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:10) is something we ask God to do, not something He is asking us to do (Matthew 13:31-33).

A third basic problem is that the kingdom of God begins after the Second Coming of Christ (Zechariah 14; Matthew 24; Revelation 19 & 20), which follows a great tribulation period (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-22; Revelation 6–18), where the earth is nearly destroyed. The kingdom of God does not come as a result of the church bringing Christian values to the world.

#2. The Cultural Camp, Progressive-Millennium Position

The Progressive-Millennium Position is very similar to the Millennium-Now Position. The only difference is that the progressive view believes Christ will return to complete the building of His

kingdom, rather than after the kingdom is built. The common description used is the phrase “already-not yet.” This view is common among the charismatics and the progressive dispensationalists. [https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-theology.html]

Charismatics who hold to the “already, not yet” progressive-kingdom view would point to miraculous healings and speaking in tongues as evidence that we are now, already, in the kingdom of God. But, they would say, the fact that people still get sick and die indicates that it is not-yet fully here. The progressive dispensationalists claim Jesus is already on the throne of David, ruling His kingdom, but it is not yet completed. It is being progressively completed, to be finished by Christ at His Second Coming.

To Summarize: The point of the Progressive-Millennium Position is we are already in the kingdom of God on earth, but it is not-yet completed, as it will be completed by Christ as His Second Coming.

Problems with the Progressive-Millennium Position

The Progressive-Millennium Position has the same basic problems as the Millennium-Now Position.

First, they abandon the author’s intended meaning (literal interpretation) to support their view.

Second, they assume man, with God’s help, of course, brings about the kingdom of God. But in the Bible, the Millennium is something God does, not something that requires the help of Christians.

#3. The Cultural Camp, Eternal-Millennium Position

The Eternal-Millennium Position believes Christians do not go to heaven when they die, or they do not end up in heaven eternally. This is a rapidly growing false teaching which fits in nicely with American and European liberal progressivism. It says that when Christians die, their soul dies, sleeps, or is in a temporary holding situation, to be resurrected to a new body which will live on this earth forever. Or as Michael Wittmer put it, “Heaven Is A Place On Earth.” [Zondervan 2004] One of the more influential spokesmen for this new movement is British Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright. Here are a few of his comments.

The point was not for us to “go to heaven,” but for the life of heaven to arrive on earth. Jesus taught his followers to pray: “Thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven.” From as early as the third century, some Christian teachers tried to blend this with types of the Platonic belief, generating the idea of “leaving earth and going to heaven,” which became mainstream by the Middle Ages. But Jesus’ first followers never went that route.

... Studying the New Testament historically, in its own world (as opposed to squashing and chopping it to fit with our own expectations), shows that the first Christians believed not that they would “go to heaven when they died,” but that, in Jesus, God had come to live with them.” ... If the only point is to save souls from the wreck of the world, so they can leave and go to heaven, why bother to make this world a better place? But if God is going to do for the whole creation what he did for Jesus in his resurrection—to bring them back, here on earth—then those who have been rescued by the gospel are called to play a part, right now, in the advance renewal of the world. [TIME.COM/5743505/NEW-TESTAMENT-HEAVEN/ DECEMBER 16, 2019. N. T. Wright, Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, is the author most recently of *Galatians*, 2021. His new book of devotional readings, *On Earth as in Heaven*, is to be published in March 2022 by HarperOne.]

To Summarize: The Eternal-Millennium Position claims that the final state of Christians is eternal life on this earth. Therefore, we should focus on the preservation of this earth.

Problems with the Eternal-Millennium Position

The main problem with this position is that the apostles taught just the opposite of what Wittmer and Wright proclaim about the future of this earth. For example, Peter said “...*the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up*” (2 Peter 3:10). John wrote, “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away...*” (Revelation 21:1).

[Actually, so did the Old Testament prophets, like Zephaniah 1:2, “*I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth,*” declares the Lord.]

The idea that we need to know some supposed ancient culture to understand the Bible “historically, in its own world,” says uninspired information outside the Bible governs the meaning of inspired-of-God information. This is a very dangerous hermeneutic. It says people cannot understand their Bible. To assume Christian Bible teachers through the centuries like: Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, Wesley, Edwards, Spurgeon, Moody, Sunday, Graham, Magee, Ryrie, Walvoord, all the Bible churches, all the Baptist churches, all the Pentecostal churches, all the Bible schools and seminaries that were founded studying the Bible were duped by “Platonic belief” is unimaginable.

The Gospel Camp

The Gospel Camp believes that we are not to see ourselves as citizens of this earth. We are only to take care of the earth as we might change the oil in our car. We take care of it because it has utilitarian value, not because it has innate or eternal value. This world will wear out and we will leave it behind. Our focus as Christians is heavenly, not earthly. We should *Go therefore make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19-21) because *our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:20). As with the list of believers in Hebrews 11, we *desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one* (Hebrews 11:16). We believe with the Apostle Paul, *The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom* (2 Timothy 4:18). *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God* (2 Corinthians 5:20).

4. The Gospel Camp, Postponed-Millennium Position

Paul Miles gives this definition of the Postponed-Millennium Position:

“Postponement theology contends that Jesus offered to Israel the literal, earthly, messianic kingdom, which is described in the Old Testament, but since Israel rejected this kingdom offer, Jesus postponed the literal kingdom to a future day.” [From “Kingdom Postponement: A Watershed for the Dispensational Worldview” by Paul Miles presented at the 2021 Conference on Dispensational Hermeneutics]

To Summarize: The Postponed-Millennium Position teaches that the earthly kingdom of God is future because it was rejected when Jesus offered it to the Jews.

Problems with the Postponed-Millennium Position

Although the Bible clearly teaches a future kingdom of God on earth, there are three basic problems with the idea that “Jesus offered to Israel the literal, earthly, messianic kingdom” [Paul Miles, referenced above]:

First, there is the fundamental problem that if Jesus was offering the kingdom to the Jews of His day and they had accepted His offer, we would have a kingdom without the cross. In that case, we would all be lost because there would not be any payment for sin. Their answer to that is Jesus knew they would not accept it. But that makes the offer insincere, and an insincere offer is not actually an offer at all.

Second, when Jesus walked the Land, in the first century A.D., the Jews in the Land were primarily from the tribe of Judah with some Benjamites and Levites, the descendants of those who returned to the Land from Babylon. There were a few Jews from other tribes scattered among them, but the 10 northern tribes were captured by Assyria in 722 B.C., then apparently migrated north to places like Russia and Eastern Europe, where they lived in Jewish ghettos (such as the one depicted in the 1971 musical, “Fiddler On The Roof”). But these 10 tribes did not return with those who came back from Babylon in 400s B.C. Jesus could not offer the Millennial Kingdom to Israel because most of the tribes were not there to accept or

reject it. The kingdom of God comes about on earth, when all 12 tribes of Israel are regathered to the Land (Ezekiel 37:15-28).

Third, the coming of the kingdom of God does not depend on people accepting it. God brings His kingdom to earth, after a great tribulation, with the Second Coming of Christ. It is not something anybody has an option to accept or reject (Zechariah 14:2-9; Matthew 24:21-22, 30-31).

#5. The Gospel Camp, Future-Millennium Position

Revelation 11:15; 12:10, *Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, the **kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ ... Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come.***

The Future-Millennium Position contends that the Millennium is a completely future time when Jesus Christ comes back to reign over the whole earth, physically and personally for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-10). The Millennium comes as part of God's predetermined timing. No part of the Millennium is going on now. No part of it is "already" here. It is not our eternal destiny. It was not offered to Israel by Jesus during His incarnation on earth and postponed because of Jewish rejection.

The Future-Millennium Position contends that the Millennium described in both Old and New Testaments is a specific period which follows a (seven-year) time of extreme tribulation on earth and begins with Christ returning to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4-9). These catastrophic events are precisely and graphically described: by Daniel (in Daniel 2:35, 44-45; 9:20-27), by the "Lord of Hosts" (in Zechariah 9:14-15; and chapter 14), by Jesus (in Matthew 16:27; 24:21ff; 26:64), and by the Apostle John in Revelation 19 (also referred to in Matthew 16:27; 26:64; Revelation 1:7; 20:11-15; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). The time preceding the coming of the kingdom of God on earth is one of a global government under the antichrist which requires a mark of the beast, a global economy, a satanic global government, a satanic global morality, with satanic global politics.

Conclusion

We might ask: Does it seem like we are in a Millennial world, ruled by love, truth, peace, justice, and the Word of God? Does it seem like the Millennium has already begun, just not-yet finished? Does it seem like the earth is our eternal home? Or, does it seem more like the world is moving toward the satanic antichrist global society described as a (seven-year) tribulation which occurs before the Second Coming of Christ, which ushers in the Millennium?