

Pre-Millennial, Post-Millennial, Amillennial Views and Supersessionism

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There are three major views describing the relationship between the Second Advent of Christ and the millennium: (1) Premillennial (2) Postmillennial (3) Amillennial.

The term “premillennialism” derives its meaning from the belief that the Second Advent of Christ will be premillennial or in other words, that it will be *before* the millennium. The English term is made up of the following Latin elements: *pre* means “before,” *mille* means “thousand,” and *annus* means “years” in relation to Christ’s Second Advent. Thus, “premillennialism” means that Christ will return to the earth “before the thousand years.”

The corresponding Greek expression in Revelation 20:4-7, *chilia ete*, gives rise to the term “chiliasm,” properly a synonym for “millennialism.” The term “chiliasm” has been superseded by the designation “premillennialism.”

“Premillennialism” is a system of doctrine that is based upon a literal interpretation of Scripture and prophecy. Dispensational “premillennialism” contends that Christ will return to earth, literally and bodily, *before* the millennial age begins and that, by His presence, He will establish His kingdom, over which, He will reign. The kingdom will continue for a thousand years, after which the Son will give the kingdom to the Father when it will merge with His eternal kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

“Premillennialism” was the earliest of the three millennial systems to arise but fell out of favor during the Middle Ages but was revived by the Puritans in the seventeenth century and is the viewpoint of a majority of those who are conservative in their approach to biblical interpretation. The “premillennial” view is the biblical view and therefore, correct view since it is consistent with the prophecies that the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled literally during His First Advent and reflects a normal, literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

The chronology of events recorded in Revelation 19:11-20:7 reveal quite clearly that Christ’s Second Advent will take place before His millennial reign.

“Postmillennialism” teaches that Christ’s kingdom is now being extended throughout the world through the preaching of the gospel and that a majority of people will be converted to Christ resulting in a consequent Christianization of the current world’s society. This flies in the face of what the Scripture teaches that there will be a growing and increased animosity by the world to Christians and Christ and the Bible just preceding Christ’s return at His Second Advent.

The “post-millennial view,” which is popular among covenant theologians of the post-Reformation period, contends, that through the preaching of the Gospel the entire world will be Christianized and brought to submission to the Gospel *before* the return of Christ.

“Post-millennialism” contends that Christ will return *after* the millennium. This view believes that the current age in which we live is the millennium and that through spiritual means there will be a progressive growth of righteousness, prosperity and development in every sphere of life as a growing majority of Christians eventually subdue the world for Christ. Then after Christianity has dominated for a long time, which they call the church’s glorious reign of victory, Christ will return. World War II brought about the demise of this system of theology.

Those who hold this view believe in a literal Second Advent and millennium. This view is based on the figurative interpretation of prophecy, which leads to subjective rather than objective interpretations. Unlike the

Scriptures, this view does not make a distinction between Israel and the church and does not have God fulfilling the promises contained in the four unconditional covenants to Israel but rather ascribes these promises as being fulfilled through the church. This view is incorrect since the chronology of prophetic events recorded Revelation 19:11-20:3 make clear that the Second Advent of Christ precedes the establishment of His millennial kingdom.

The “amillennial” view holds that there will be no literal millennium on the earth following the Second Advent of Christ and the church is fulfilling all the prophecies concerning Israel and the kingdom. This view teaches that from the ascension of Christ in the first century until His Second Advent (they don’t believe in the rapture), both good and evil will increase in the world as God’s kingdom parallels Satan’s kingdom. The destructiveness of this view is that it denies a literal reign of Christ upon the earth and contends that Satan was bound at the First Advent. This view contends that the present church age between the first and second advents is the fulfillment of the millennium and of course, this does not fit the facts of human history.

In our study of the millennium, we have noted that the Scriptures teach that the millennium will be spiritual in character and that there will be perfect economic, social and political conditions during the millennium. At no time in human history in the past have we seen these conditions taken place nor at the present time in human history have we seen them taking place.

Some who hold this view believe like Augustine that the millennium is being fulfilled on the earth and others like Warfield say it is being fulfilled in heaven. This view was not around during the first century and came about as a result of opposition to premillennial literalism because Christ had yet to come back to the earth to establish His reign.

“Amillennialism” is destructive in that it holds to a non-literal view of the millennium and spiritualizes the kingdom prophecies. The implications of this method of interpretation is that it rejects a future for the nation of Israel and of God fulfilling the promises contained in the four unconditional covenants to Israel and makes no distinction between Israel and the church. It is popular today because it is an inclusive system including various types of theology such as liberal Protestant, conservative Protestant and Roman Catholic. Liberal amillennialism denies the doctrines of the resurrection, judgment, the Second Advent, eternal punishment and Roman amillennialism evolved the system of purgatory, limbo whereas conservative amillennialism still holds to literal doctrines of resurrection, judgment and eternal punishment.

All of these Old Testament passages that we have noted in our study of [Daniel 7 and] Obadiah 17 and this doctrine of the remnant which is taught... in both the Old and New Testaments makes clear that Israel does have a future in the plan of God and that the church has in no way replaced Israel permanently. The teaching that the church has replaced Israel is called “replacement theology” or “supersessionism.”

Walter Kaiser writes, “Replacement theology...declared that the Church, Abraham’s spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it has transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of disobedience.”¹

Bruce K. Waltke writes that the New Testament teaches the “hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant.”²

¹ Michael J. Vlach; The Master’s Seminary Journal, volume 20, number 1, page 59

² Michael J. Vlach; The Master’s Seminary Journal, volume 20, number 1, page 59

Replacement theology or a some call it “supersessionism” is based on two major premises: (1) the nation of Israel has somehow completed or forfeited its status as the people of God and will never again possess a unique role or function apart from the church; and (2) the church is now the true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God.

Michael J. Vlach writes, “Supersessionism, then, in the context of Israel and the church, is the view that the New Testament church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God. The result is that the church has become the sole inheritor of God’s covenant blessings originally promised to national Israel in the OT. This rules out a future restoration of the nation Israel with a unique identity, role, and purpose that is distinct in any way from the Christian church.”³

Vlach lists several variations of supersessionism, i.e. replacement theology: (1) punitive or retributive: This emphasizes that God has rejected Israel for her disobedience and punishment by God as the reason for its displacement as the people of God. (2) economic: This view teaches that Israel is replaced by the church because her role in the history of redemption expired with the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the church. (3) structural: This view is a hermeneutical approach and refers to the narrative logic of the standard model whereby it renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God’s works as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways and thus ignores or removes the Hebrew Scriptures of the OT from having a voice.⁴

Therefore, replacement theology or supersessionism contends that the nation of Israel has absolutely no future whatsoever in the plan of God. Now, those who adhere to this view believe there will be a future “salvation” of Israel, but this salvation does not mean a “restoration” of Israel.

The difference between a salvation of Israel and a restoration of that nation is that salvation means simply that many Jews will believe in Christ and be saved while on the other hand restoration involves Israel being replanted in Palestine and given a role and mission to the nations. A restoration of Israel means that the nation will have a role and a place of prominence that is not shared with any other group including the church.

Dispensationalists accept both concepts and believe Israel as a nation will be saved and they also believe Israel will be restored to a place of prominence among the nations. Now, some supersessionists do not believe in either a salvation or restoration of Israel while some believe in a salvation of Israel but do not believe in a restoration of that nation. No supersessionists believe in a restoration of Israel, and this is the major factor that distinguishes them from dispensationalists.

As we can see from our study, the Scriptures make clear that the church is not the “new Israel” since God has never totally abandoned the nation of Israel. In fact, the Word of God repeatedly teaches that God always sets aside a certain number Jews in the nation in every dispensation and every generation of human history, who will exercise faith in Him. Furthermore, in the future as a nation, Israel will accept Jesus Christ as Savior and thus experience a national regeneration and restoration to the land promised to her by God centuries ago. This regeneration and restoration of the nation of Israel will fulfill the four unconditional covenants to Israel. The unconditional promises that God has given to the nation of Israel and her progenitors and patriarchs such Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the nation as a whole, guarantee that there will be a glorious future for Israel. In addition, they guarantee that God always sets aside a remnant in Israel every generation and dispensation in history.

³ The Master’s Seminary Journal, volume 20, number 1, page 60

⁴ The Master’s Seminary Journal, volume 20, number 1, pages 59-64

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