

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal State*

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MAJOR FEATURES OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

An earthly kingdom. The premillennial interpretation of the reign of Christ holds that He will reign on earth for one thousand years after His second advent. This is in contrast to the amillennial view which identifies the millennium with the present church age or the intermediate state, and the postmillennial view which views the kingdom as also in the present age and climaxing with the second advent. If the premillennial interpretation is correct and we can understand the Scriptures relating to this kingdom in their normal literal sense, a panorama is unfolded in both the Old and New Testaments which gives us many details of this reign of Christ on earth. Its general characteristics are unfolded in such passages as Isaiah 2:1–4; Isaiah 11; Psalm 72; Jeremiah 23:5–8; 31:31–40; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 2:44–45; 7:13–14; Micah 4:1–8; 5:2–5; Zechariah 14. The outstanding New Testament passage is Revelation 20.

Christ as supreme Ruler of the millennial kingdom. According to Psalm 2:6, God will fulfill His purpose of setting His Son on the throne over the earth, “Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” As king over all the earth, Christ will fulfill hundreds of prophecies that anticipate such a situation.

The Scriptures present Christ in His first coming as a king (Luke 1:32–33; Matt. 1:1; 21:1–11). It was in His offer to Israel as their king that He was rejected (Mark 15:12–13; Luke 19:14). Even His cross bore the inscription that He was the King of the Jews (Matt. 27:37). When He returns to the earth in His second coming, He obviously will be coming as King (Rev. 19:16) and will fulfill the promise given to David that of his seed would come one who would reign on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:20–37; Isa. 11:1–9; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–26).

The evidence in support of the concept that Christ will reign on earth is so abundant that only by wholesale spiritualization can these passages be construed to mean anything other than their ordinary meaning. The characteristics of the reign of Christ are plainly

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set forth in many passages, such as Isaiah 11, and the New Testament confirms the literal interpretation. The announcement to Mary, for instance, concerning the birth of Christ plainly interprets these prophecies in their literal sense. In Luke 1:32–33 the angel announced the birth to Mary in these words: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” All of the references previously cited in support of the earthly rule of Christ likewise are proof texts for the fact that Christ will reign over the earth. Associated with Him in His reign will be resurrected saints of all ages, some of whom, like David, will have a particular rule (Isa. 55:3–4; Jer. 30:9; 33:15–17; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11). The church likewise will reign with Christ as will also all the tribulation saints who have been martyred (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4–6). Numerous other passages confirm this concept of Christ’s reigning assisted by other rulers, some of whom may be resurrected saints (Isa. 32:1; Ezek. 45:8–9; Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:12–27).

Principal features of the political government of the millennium. It was God’s original intent in creating Adam that he should rule the earth. Due to the fall, this responsibility was transferred to Christ who as the last Adam will accomplish that in which Adam failed.

The rule of Christ on earth will be an absolute one characterized as a rule of a rod of iron with immediate judgment on any who oppose Him. (Psa. 2:9; 72:9–11; Isa. 11:4; Rev. 19:15). A prominent feature of the government will be perfect justice in contrast to the inequities which often exist in political rules today. The meek and the poor will have equity in that day (Isa. 11:3–5) and the wicked are warned of immediate judgment (Ps. 2:10–12).

The political judgment of Christ will be principally directed to those who survive the tribulation and enter the millennium in their natural bodies both of Israel and of the Gentiles. The sheep of Matthew 25:31–46 and the godly remnant of Israel left after the rebels are purged out (Ezek. 20:33–38) will comprise the earthly citizens of the millennium. There is evidence that they will rapidly multiply and before the end of the thousand years will be able to fill the earth with renewed population. These who enter the millennium are also anticipated in the parables of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:30–31) and the good fish of the parable in Matthew 13:49–50. In this political government Israel will have a prominent place, and numerous passages relate to this in the Scripture (Isa. 9:6–7; 12:1–6; Jer. 23:5; Mic. 4:1–8, etc.)¹ Many passages likewise refer to Christ’s rule over the entire earth of which Zechariah 14:9 may be taken as representative.

¹ Cf. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 303–4.

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Gentiles, although in a subordinate role in relation to Israel, will nevertheless be greatly blessed in the millennium and share in the prosperity of the period.

Spiritual characteristics of the millennium. While the millennial kingdom is primarily a political rule, because of the unusual characteristics of the kingdom there is much to foster and promote spiritual life during this period. The amillennial objection to a literal kingdom on the ground that it is primarily moral and spiritual is beside the point. Premillenarians agree that there is much evidence of spiritual blessing and righteousness in this period, and this is derived from the fact that the kingdom is governed by Christ.

The fact that the glorified Christ is in the earthly scene and is visible to those in the millennium is unquestionably an important factor in the spiritual life of the period. As is anticipated in Jeremiah 31:34, everyone will have the evidence before him that Christ is indeed the Son of God and all that the Scriptures claim of Him. Missionary effort will be unnecessary for the knowledge of the Lord will be universal as Isaiah says, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:9). Christ as the world ruler of the millennial kingdom will be the object of worship, and the universal instruction in Biblical truth as well as the many demonstrations of divine power and the abundant ministry of the Holy Spirit will foster a spiritual life on a world-wide scale unprecedented in the history of the world.

The millennium will be a period which will feature personal righteousness as well as national righteousness in keeping with Solomon's prediction: "In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, till the moon be no more." (Ps. 72:7). The righteous rule of Christ Himself is described in specific terms in Isaiah 11:3–5. The absence of war and universal peace (Ps. 72:7; Isa. 2:4) will provide the context in which spiritual life will flourish. The praise of the Lord and the joy which will attend the blessings of that period are described in Isaiah 12:3–4 and Isaiah 61:3–7. In addition to the presence of Christ the power of the Spirit will tend to foster and promote a deep spiritual life (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel. 2:28–29).

Although difference of opinion has existed concerning the exposition of Ezekiel 40:1–46:24, which describes temple worship and sacrifices in the millennial scene, whether this should be interpreted literally as many premillenarians do or symbolically, in either case it supports the concept of a deep spiritual life in the millennial kingdom.² Taken as a whole the millennial kingdom will be characterized by righteousness, joy, and peace on a world-wide scale similar to that which was enjoyed by the early church.

² For further discussion see Walvoord, *ibid.*, pp. 309–15.

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Economic, social, and physical aspects of the millennium. Many prophecies combine to give other aspects of the millennial kingdom. Because of the righteous rule of Christ and the efficient political government, there will be justice for individuals and peace among nations. Physical and financial prosperity will characterize the period as the curse laid upon the earth because of Adam's sin seems to be lifted (Isa. 35:1–2; cf. Isa. 30:23–24; 35:7). Poverty and lack of necessary physical things will be reduced to a minimum in an era of prosperity such as the world has never known (Jer. 31:12; Ezek. 34:25–27; Joel. 2:21–27; Amos 9:13–14).

The blessings of the millennium will even extend to the human body. Indications are that disease will be at a minimum and physical health the normal situation (Isa. 29:18; 33:24; 35:5–6; 61:1–3; 65:20). The world population which will be small at the beginning of the millennium due to devastating judgments of the tribulation and purging judgments of the second coming of Christ will be supplanted by a rapidly growing population. Multiplied births will characterize both Israel and the Gentiles (Isa. 30:19–20; Ezek. 47:22).

Important changes will also occur on the face of the earth at the beginning of the millennium such as the division of the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:3–8). Jerusalem is seemingly elevated to a high plateau (Zech. 14:10) and the rest of the land will be depressed.³ These changes in typography are related also to the division of the land pictured in Ezekiel 48:1–27; 45:4–19.⁴

The multiplied details of every aspect of life relating to the millennium makes untenable the efforts to spiritualize all these Scriptures and make them conform to the present age. The description of this period is so graphically different in all of its aspects that it demands a literal fulfillment in the period following the second coming of Christ. The millennial kingdom will be the crowning work of Christ prior to the eternal state.

THE CLOSE OF THE MILLENNIUM

The thousand-year reign of Christ will close, according to Revelation 20:7–9, with a rebellion against Christ as God and King. This will be occasioned by the loosing of Satan who has been bound throughout the millennial kingdom and who upon his release immediately prompts many on earth to rebel against Christ. Those who are deceived in this way have been born during the millennium and, while forced by circumstance to make an outward profession of faith in Christ, nevertheless reveal their true state of unbelief as soon as opportunity arises. Those who rebel, led by Satan, encompass the city of Jerusalem in an attempt to take it by force and according to Revelation 20:7–9 are

³ Charles Feinberg, *God Remembers*, pp. 257–58.

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, "The Temple Vision of Ezekiel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105:427–28, October, 1948.

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destroyed by fire which comes from heaven. With the destruction of the army, Satan himself is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10) where the beast and the false prophet were cast a thousand years before. The millennial kingdom, the most ideal state imaginable for man apart from the eternal state itself, thus closes with another graphic demonstration of the wickedness of the human heart even under such ideal circumstances and forever shuts the mouths of any who would question God's justice in judging the world.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

The vivid description of the final judgment of the dead follows in Revelation 20:11–15. The implication of this passage is that the judgment concerns itself only with the wicked dead although this is not stated explicitly. The great white throne is pictured as being in space, and both earth and heaven flee away and apparently are dissolved. Before this throne, the dead are brought, raised from the dead, and then are judged by their works. Whoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. While there has been some debate as to the exact character of the book of life, there can be little question that at this point the absence of their names in the book of life is a clear indication that they are not saved. On this basis they are cast into the lake of fire to join Satan and the beast and the false prophet. The tragic fact of this judgment is that none of these cast into the lake of fire needed to have this destiny. Christ had died for every one of them, and their passage into this place of unending torment is a judgment which God Himself, although unwilling that any should perish, is forced to exact by His own justice and their failure to appropriate the grace of God.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

Revelation 21–22 presents the glorious picture of the eternal state following the millennial kingdom. In Revelation 21:1–8, the introductory passage states the main features of this period. The old heaven and earth have been dissolved and a new heaven and a new earth created in which circumstances are radically different than in our present earth as indicated by the cryptic statement “the sea is no more.” The new heaven and the new earth are seen as the resting place of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven and is described as a bride adorned for her husband. In this new blessed estate God will be in fellowship with His people and present in the world, sorrow will be no more, evil and unbelief will be excluded, and all will be able to partake freely of the blessings which God will shower upon them.

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

Principle feature of the new heaven and the new earth is the heavenly Jerusalem described as coming down from God in Revelation 21:2. Details are furnished concerning

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this city, beginning in Revelation 21:9. Difference of opinion has existed as to whether the new Jerusalem thus described refers to the millennial period or the eternal state. Many considerations seem to indicate that the description given here is that of the heavenly Jerusalem after the millennium has concluded. The city is described as it will appear in the eternal state.

It is not impossible, however, that the heavenly Jerusalem was in existence before this period, as it is not said to be created at this time. The new heavens and new earth are said to be created, but the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven. Some believe, therefore, that the heavenly Jerusalem will be a satellite city throughout the millennial reign of Christ and in this city resurrected and translated saints will dwell. By contrast, those in their natural bodies will live on the millennial earth itself. While there is no clear Scripture which supports this concept and it must be held merely as an inference, it would solve a number of problems incident to the relationship of resurrected and translated beings to those still in their natural bodies who will conduct themselves in a normal way on the earth. Undoubtedly if this is the case, those in the heavenly Jerusalem will be able to commute to the millennial earth throughout the thousand-year reign of Christ and participate in its activities.

As presented in Revelation 21:9–22:5, the new Jerusalem is in its place on the new earth in the eternal state. It seems clear from several Scriptures that the New Jerusalem will be the home of the saints of all ages and will include not only the church, but also saved Israelites as well as saved Gentiles of the Old Testament period, tribulation saints, and millennial saints. This may be inferred from the hope of Old Testament saints such as Abraham's anticipation of an eternal city (Heb. 11:10–16) and a few references to the new heaven and the new earth in other Old Testament passages (Isa. 65:17–18; 66:22).

One of the clearest references concerning the saints who will be in the heavenly Jerusalem is found in Hebrews 12:22–24: "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel." In the heavenly city according to this passage are the angels, the church, Jesus Christ as the Mediator, and the spirits of just men made perfect, a reference to other saints. It should be noted that while saints of all ages will be in the heavenly Jerusalem, which city will be the principal feature of the new heavens and the new earth, saints nevertheless retain their corporate identity, that is, Israelites remain Israelites, Gentiles remain Gentiles, the church remains the church, and angels remain angels.

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The New Jerusalem described in detail beginning in Revelation 21:9 is revealed to be a city of indescribable beauty. Commentators differ as to the extent to which this description should be taken literally. There does not seem to be, however, any real reason why the specifications of this city should not be taken in their ordinary sense. Nothing would be more natural than for the saints of the future to live in a place of such beauty as is described here.

In general the city is described as being square surrounded by a round wall with three gates on each of its four sides. The wall is inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel confirming the concept that Israel is included in this city. The foundations of the wall have the names of the twelve apostles which would relate the church to this city. Angels guarding the gates make clear that the holy angels will also participate in the city.

Most graphic dimension is that of the size of the city which measures 1,342 miles on each of its four sides and is a like dimension in height. Some understand that the city is in the form of a cube, others in the form of a pyramid, with other variations which combine these various concepts. The foundations of the city are revealed to be garnished with precious stones, reflecting every color of the rainbow, with the street of the city being transparent gold and the gates of the wall pearls.

The most important feature of the city is the fact that there is no temple in it, for God Himself is going to dwell in the city. Likewise there is no darkness and no need of artificial light, for the glory of the Lamb will illuminate the whole city, and eternity will be one continuous day. In chapter 22 a major feature is a pure river which comes from the throne of God. Also described is the tree of life whose fruit ministers to those who live in the eternal state. The leaves of the tree will be for the health of the Gentiles. This does not imply sickness, but rather the well-being of those who partake of it. The servants of the Lord are pictured serving God in these glorious surroundings and continuing forever to enjoy the presence of the Lord.

It is in this eternal state that the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:24 is fulfilled, when a conquered world is presented to the Godhead by Christ. This must not be construed as ending the role of Christ as King, but rather ending its temporal phase and beginning its eternal characteristics. With the introduction of the eternal state the revelation of Scripture comes to its close and the unending day of the glorious eternal state begins.

With the close of the prophetic narrative, the Biblical revelation of Jesus Christ also comes to its conclusion. In the beginning of eternity, all that was anticipated in the first and second comings of Christ is fulfilled, and Christ is honored as King of kings and Lord of lords. The eternity which stretches beyond the horizon of Scriptural revelation is one of unspeakable bliss for the saints and unending joy in the presence of God. In the center of

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the service and worship of the saints will be Jesus Christ, “the same yesterday, today, and for ever.” To this eternal destiny every believing heart turns in anticipation and joyous expectation.⁵

⁵ Walvoord, J. F. (1966). “The Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal State.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 123, 291–300.