



# LOOKING AHEAD

## What the Bible tells us about the future (eschatology)

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### PART 5: THE MILLENNIUM

# 1000

The term "Millennium" refers to the term "thousand years," seen six times in Revelation 20:2-7 and is one of the most debated issues in eschatology. The term "millennium" is from the Latin *mille*, meaning "thousand," and *annum*, meaning "year." The millennium is a thousand-year period.

The "thousand years" refers to the kingdom reign of Jesus with his saints, Rev. 20:6. The debate centers on the meaning of the "thousand years" mentioned six times in Revelation 20:2-7. Some seek to interpret the "thousand years" in an allegorical manner. Others prefer a more literal (grammatical-historical) method of interpretation.

Following are four views of the Millennium:

#### A. The Amillennial View

- Millennium: There is no literal millennium on earth after the Second Coming of Jesus. The Kingdom is present now in the church age and will exist in the future. Also called "realized millennialism."
- Tribulation: The Tribulation is being experienced in this present age. There is no seven-year Tribulation period.
- Rapture of the church: There is no rapture of believers. When Jesus returns there will be a general resurrection of both believers and unbelievers.
- Second Coming of Jesus: It will be a single event, not two.
- Israel and the church: The church is the new Israel. There is no distinction between Israel and the church.
- Proponents: This view is held by Reformed theologians and the Roman Catholic church.

#### B. The Postmillennial View

- Millennium: The present age blends into the Millennium because of the progress of the gospel and resulting improving conditions in the world.
- Tribulation: The Tribulation is experienced in this present age. There is no "seven-year Tribulation Period."
- Rapture of the church: The Rapture and the Second Coming are a single event. There is no distinction between the two.
- Second Coming of Jesus: The Rapture and the Second Coming are a single event. There is no distinction between the two. The Second Coming takes place after the

Millennium.

- Israel and the church: The church is the new Israel. There is no distinction between Israel and the church.
- Proponents: Augustine, Christian Reconstructionists. This view lost many of its proponents after WWII when the world was seen as getting worse, not better.

### C. The Premillennial (Historic) View

- Millennium: The Millennium is both present and future. Jesus is reigning as King in heaven. The Millennium is not necessarily 1,000 years.
- Tribulation: There will be a future seven-year Tribulation period. Historic-Premillennialists hold to a post-tribulation view: the church goes through the future Tribulation.
- Rapture of the church: The Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation.
- Second Coming of Jesus: The Rapture and the Second Coming occur simultaneously when Jesus returns to reign on earth.
- Israel and the church: There is some distinction between Israel and the church. The church is now seen as "Spiritual Israel," a term sometimes used to suggest concepts related to replacement theology, in which the promises directed toward Israel are now given to the church instead.
- Proponents: This view was the dominant view in the first three centuries of the Christian church. Some noted modern theologians also hold this view.

### D. The Premillennial (Futuristic) View<sup>1</sup>

- Millennium: At the Second Coming, Jesus inaugurates a 1,000-year Millennium on earth.
- Tribulation: There will be a seven-year Tribulation Period preceded by the Rapture of the church.
- Rapture of the church: The Rapture of the church will take place before the Tribulation Period. The church will not go through the Tribulation.
- Second Coming of Jesus: The Second Coming will occur in two phases. First, At the Rapture of the church when Jesus comes for his saints, and second, at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus comes with his saints.
- Israel and the church: There is a consistent distinction between Israel and the church throughout history. God has a program for each. Futuristic premillennialists do not hold to replacement theology.
- Proponents: This seems to be the dominant view of many modern theologians today. Robert G. Clouse<sup>2</sup> affirms that this view is the prevailing view in many evangelical circles today.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

*"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20 NIV)*

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<sup>1</sup> Also called "Dispensational Premillennialism."

<sup>2</sup> Robert G. Clouse, "The Meaning of the Millennium, Four Views" (InterVarsity Press).