



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Would you please comment on the theory of the millennium with mass conversion of the Jews who will then become the ‘head of the nations’ and not the ‘tail’. These ideas are brought forward as Bible truths on all sides.”

The proof-text for theories regarding the teaching on the millennium is to be found in Revelation 20 vv2-7, but before we comment on these verses we would do well to define the terms we are going to use.

The word ‘millennium’ is of Latin origin (‘mille’ - thousand; ‘annus’ - years) so quite simply it means “thousand years”. Those groups who insist on a *literal* interpretation of *all* scripture, particularly the O.T. scriptures, take the millennium to mean that Christ will return to reign on earth for a thousand years. Perhaps if we briefly define the major facets of the teaching we shall be able to understand a little better.

Amillennialism - this is a term which is used to designate ‘no millennium’. This does not mean that those who *do not* hold to the literal interpretation of Revelation 20 discount the passage entirely; they view it as being *symbolic* and hold that view just as strongly as the literalists hold *their* view. I suppose we could say that in the main, Churches of Christ hold the ‘symbolic’ interpretation of Revelation 20.

Postmillennialism - this theory teaches that the coming of Christ will be *after* a ‘golden age’ of righteousness and peace (‘post’ - after). Therefore, the theory is that the ‘golden age’ or ‘millennium’ is *part of* the Church period in Biblical history. Alexander Campbell expected that the restoration would overthrow sectarianism and usher in the golden age. He produced a paper known as “The Millennial Harbinger”.

Historic Premillennialism - this theory teaches that Christ will come *before* the thousand year reign begins (pre - before). This view has been held in some shape or form since about the second century A.D. hence the word ‘historic’ to distinguish it from more modern theories.

Dispensationalism - this more modern theory is attributed to J. N. Darby and others. The reader will recall that we mentioned some time ago that J. N. Darby joined the Brethren around 1827 and by 1830 he was considered to be the leader of the Plymouth Brethren. He is sometimes referred to as the ‘father of modern dispensationalism’.

The Great Tribulation - this theory describes a period of seven years of unequalled tribulation in the world. Quoted texts are: Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Luke 21:25-26. During this period, God begins to deal with Israel again. The seven years is sub-divided into two periods of 3½ years each. During the first 3½ years the Jews return to Palestine, rebuild the Temple, re-introduce animal

sacrifices, and make a covenant with Antichrist. At the end of the first 3½ years Antichrist breaks the covenant and inflicts terrible persecution on the Jews, and is finally destroyed by Christ at His coming. This heralds the start of Christ's reign on earth, the millennium.

The "rapture" - this refers to the sudden appearing of Christ in the air. He will snatch (or rapture) from the earth the bodies of dead saints, and also those who remain alive. This will take place at the beginning of the tribulation, i.e., Jesus will come to take the saints from the earth *before* the tribulation and return *with them* to take up His millennial reign on earth. Texts cited are 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53.

Pre-Millennialism and the Jews

In order to understand the teaching of premillennialists we must examine the so-called proof texts which they use. Rev. 20:2-7 are the foundation verses. This passage of scripture, say the premillennialists, *must* be interpreted literally, thus a literal interpretation would give us a basis of their teaching. So here it is.

The millennium is the period of time between the resurrection of the just and the unjust; it is also the time of Satan's binding. Then will be ushered in the everlasting kingdom of Christ. There will be a visible return to the earth and the nations will be ruled and judged by Him. The 'just' saints will be raised and will rule *with* Him. This is the start of the millennial reign. At or near the close of the present age, and just before the millennial reign, Israel will be returned to Palestine and all the O.T. prophecies will be fulfilled concerning them (the view is

that the O.T. prophecies *do not* refer to Christ but to the Jews). There will be a national conversion and restoration of the Jews. Jesus will re-occupy the *literal* Davidic throne from which He will reign. After the millennial reign Satan will be loosed and will muster his forces for a great battle (Armageddon) in the Valley of Esdraelon. Satan will then be cast down for the last time. There will then be the Great White Throne judgment and death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire. Such is the view of the premillennialists. It is evident, according to their teaching, that the Kingdom and the Church are *different* entities.

The flaws in this teaching are readily apparent. The book of Revelation opens by the words, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto his servants things which must *shortly come to pass*. (Rev.1:1). How do the literalists answer that one? Much play is made about Jesus being designed as 'King of the Jews'. (Isa. 9:6; Matt. 2:2; 27:11,37). Well, the Bible records that Jesus came to 'the lost sheep of the House of Israel', but it is equally true that the same kind of literalism which is still being insisted on, prevented the Jews from accepting Him when He trod the earth.

Another view held is that God promised David that his throne would be established for ever, "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16. Read also vv 12-17). Furthermore, they point to the promise of Jesus to His disciples, "Verily I say to you, That ye which have followed, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:27-30). It is also stated that the 'regeneration' is a parallel to Acts 3:21 which says concerning Jesus, "Whom the heavens must receive until the times of *restitution of all things*, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began".

At this point we must apply scriptural logic. The 2 Samuel passage tells us that 'the Davidic throne shall be established for ever', so if we are to understand that the Lord reigns on earth on the literal Davidic throne during the millennial period, then the millennium must last for ever, and *that* must be a contradiction in terms. If we can say *when* Christ was on the throne of His glory, then we shall know when the regeneration is, so let us explore this reasoning. After His resurrection, Jesus joined Himself to two men on the road to Emmaus; two despondent men who were more than a little confused. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of understanding, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and *all* the prophets, he expounded unto them in *all* the scriptures the things concerning *himself*" (Luke 24:25-27). Paul wrote to Timothy about the Church being the 'pillar' and 'ground' of the truth, and then went on, "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). This scripture obviously refers to the advent of Christ and salvation through the Gospel, in other words, spiritual re-birth (regeneration - see Titus 3:4-7). At His ascension, He took up His reign on the 'throne of His glory', and the Hebrew tells us *where* that is and *when* He went there, "When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). So Christ, after His death, burial and resurrection went to occupy the throne of His glory; *that* throne is at the right hand of God in heaven; the regeneration is the spiritual re-birth of those who obey the Gospel; they comprise the citizens of the Kingdom over which Christ rules, and that Kingdom is the Church. It follows then that the Apostles are *now* ruling in the regeneration, and will continue to do so until the final consummation of all things, and that is, says Paul, "when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

The reader may be forgiven for thinking, 'If it was the purpose of Jesus to restore the literal throne of David, why did He not offer it? Furthermore, as we have said, the Kingdom is now established in the form of the Church, "Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church". Christ is reigning now. The restoration of the Jews to the rebuilding of the Temple and the offering of animal sacrifices is inconsistent with the *spiritual* teaching of Jesus; it is also against the plain teaching of the Hebrew letter. This letter teaches that the New Covenant is an everlasting one, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the *everlasting covenant*, etc." Furthermore, the student of the Hebrew letter will know that there are repeated warnings against returning to the O.T. pattern.

Well, this answer has only scratched the surface of this important question, but we hope that it will encourage a deeper study of it. I suppose that recent events in the countries in the Middle East will encourage predictions about Biblical prophecies which some say are futuristic and are as yet unfulfilled, but the reader should keep well to the fore of his mind the *real* purpose of the sacrifice of Christ, i.e., the restoration of the soul from sin, and eternal fellowship with the Divine nature. Obey the Gospel, and leave the rest to God.

(All questions please, to Alf Marsden, 377 Billingde Road, Hayfield, Wigan, Lancs.)