

the REVELATION of JESUS CHRIST

Session 23 - Understanding the Millennium

The Millennium - An Inheritance Gained

As we come to Revelation chapter 20, we are introduced to one of the most controversial subjects in holy writ, but why? Scripture has much to say about the kingdom of God expressed on earth and as Jesus taught us to pray, we proclaim “thy kingdom come”. The word come is used in an active present sense which means that we pray with the expectation of its occurrence. This is in conjunction with His will being done on earth (as in heaven) as well. Believers continue to pray the Lords prayer even now, but how many are actually taking it literally – eagerly looking for both the Kingdom and will of God to be carried out on earth to the extent that it is in heaven?

Revelation 20 only actually reveals a few details of the kingdom on earth such as it’s duration of 1,000 years, Satan bound in the Abyss and the first resurrection ruling with Christ. But promises of this earthly kingdom are no mystery in scripture. As we stated in the introduction to Revelation for every time the first advent of Christ is detailed the second is mentioned 8 times. Out of 330 Messianic prophecies only 109 were fulfilled in the first advent. The second coming is second only to the subject of faith in scripture and 1 out of every 25 verses in the NT alone mention it. There are 21 different recordings of Christ mentioning His second coming in the gospels and we are told to be ready for it over 50 times in the NT.

Various Millennial Views

Although there are many views of the Millennium, we can basically categorize them to be included in three main groups; Amillennialism, Post Millennialism and Pre Millennialism.

AMILLENNIALISM

This view would not support a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. The reign of Christ has already begun in the hearts of the church and is therefore present spiritually. They see Satan as bound even though they believe that sin and evil will increase. They do not see a rapture event rather they believe that when one becomes a believer, they are resurrected spiritually and call this the first resurrection. When Jesus returns He will bring about the end of this current created order and the Great White Throne judgement will take place; the second resurrection. All prophecies concerning the kingdom are therefore “spiritualized” and seen as allegory not to be taken literally, only generally. Historically this view found it’s primary initial support with Augustine (354-430) who like Origen was willing to allegorize prophetic text. The Reformers primarily focused on Soteriology without really continuing to examine the other flawed doctrines of Catholic teaching.

POSTMILLENNIALISM

This view would also not support a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. The kingdom of Christ is viewed as already present and He reigns through His church. Unlike Amillennialism and Premillennialism, Post Millennialism believes that the spread of the gospel will lead to a gradual “Christianization” of the world which will bring about a golden age of peace and harmony prior to the second coming. Christ will return to the earth for His own and to then judge the unbelievers only after this golden age has been realized. This view also sees conversion as the first resurrection and the Great White Throne judgement as the second resurrection. The 20th and now 21st century have brought many fatal blows to this view yet it is on the rise again in various forms such as Liberation Theology, Kingdom Theology (Reconstructionism) and Theonomy. Both amillennialism and post millennialism deny any future for national Israel as part of God’s unfolding plan. Certain texts or phrases are extracted from New Testament passages to support the idea that the true Israel is made up of Jew and Gentile and all current and future prophecies are meant to be for both Jew and Gentile within the church.

There is a wide range of variation within both amillennialism and post millennialism. This is due primarily to the arbitrary nature of allegorizing scripture and not following a strict literal hermeneutic. However, the standard set by the details prophesied and fulfilled in the first advent of Christ, demonstrate that we must continue to use a strict, literal interpretation of prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled. That brings us to the third major view; premillennialism.

PREMILLENNIALISM

While premillennialist will allow for figures of speech and allegory, they do so only where the text allows it and otherwise stick to a strict, literal hermeneutic when studying prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. The only real debate within this view is when the rapture of the church will take place. Premillennialism holds the view that there will be a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ physically on this earth in His future kingdom. They hold the view that the majority of the promises given to national Israel pertaining to the kingdom are yet to be fulfilled and that it is through their partial hardening that the church was born. But their national rebellion will ultimately be reversed through the tribulation period that the Lord brings about. Satan, powers and principalities continue to influence the wickedness of man which will steadily increase and then climax in a final seven year period, but then they will be bound for the duration of the millennial kingdom. The gospel will continue to be spread even through this time and the return of Christ will result in the judgement of the nations and of Israel. Only the redeemed, both natural and resurrected, will enter the kingdom age and reign with Christ. The first resurrection includes all of the redeemed of the church, Old Testament saints and tribulation saints who died for the sake of Christ. The second resurrection (that leads unto death) will take place at the end of the millennium when the Great White Throne judgement takes place.

Session 23 - Revelation 20:1-6

Revelation provides the frame work in which all of the prophetic details pertaining to the kingdom expressed on earth will be fulfilled particularly in Christ. Jesus calls the kingdom the "regeneration":

"Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Matt 19:27-28 (NASB)

Peter speaks of both advents of Christ in his sermon to the Sanhedrin in Acts:

"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."

Acts 3:18-21 (NASB)

Paul refers to the kingdom on earth as the summing up of all things:

"He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him"

Eph 1:9-10 (NASB)

There is much more concerning the kingdom in New Testament, but the kingdom debate begins in the Old Testament. There are many passages in the Old Testament that speak of the kingdom on earth. Some of those passages include Deut 30:1-5; 2 Sam 7:12-16; Psa 2:6-12; Isa 2:2-4; 11:1-10; 12:1-6; 24:23; 32:15-20; 35:1-2; 60:10-18; 65:20-22; Jer 3:14-18; 23:5-6; 30:3; 31:35-40; 33:14-18; Eze 34:23-24; 36:16-38; 37:15-28; Dan 2:44-45; Hos 3:4-5; Joel 3:18-21; Amos 9:11-15; Mic 4:1-8; Zeph 3:14-20; and Zech 14:9-11.

The earliest promises concerning the kingdom are given in the covenants God made with Abraham and the nation which would come from him. There are two types of covenants, unilateral (unconditional) and bilateral (conditional). Unilateral covenants take place between two parties but are ultimately upheld by the party that initiated it. Bilateral covenants require that both parties live up to what is required of them in order for the covenant to be maintained. The six covenants in the bible are foundational to all of prophecy and ones method of interpretation of these covenants will determine their entire eschatology.

The six covenants are the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Priestly, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the New Covenant. While we will look at the basic tenants of these six covenants in order to get an

Session 23 - Revelation 20:1-6

overview of how they relate to what has come to pass in history and what has yet to be fulfilled.

The Noahic Covenant

The very first time the word “covenant” shows up is in Genesis 6:18 where God says to Noah “But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark...”. The nature of this covenant is unilateral as indicated by the use of “My covenant”. An examination of this covenant reveals that:

- 1)The seasons will endure (8:22)
- 2)“Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you” (9:9)
- 3)Never again will all flesh be destroyed by means of the flood (9:11)
- 4)The rainbow will be the sign for the covenant as long as the covenant is valid (9:12-17)
- 5)It is presented as an “everlasting covenant” between God and all flesh that is on the earth (9:16).

This is the most general of all of the covenants but in no way is insignificant. There is nothing within the context of Genesis 6-9 that allows for an allegorical interpretation although many do in error with views such as a localized flood. One can hardly explain the geological record with such limitations on the true meaning of plain text. Also God would have violated His covenant many times over with the vast amount of localized floods that are recorded in history. Peter reminds us that there is a time coming when the earth will be destroyed in the same way by fire:

"Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." 2 Pet 3:3-7 (NASB)

The Abrahamic Covenant

The initial establishment of the Abrahamic Covenant is in Genesis 12:1-3 where Yahweh instructed and promised Abram:

- 1) “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you” (12:1);
- 2) “I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing” (12:2);
- 3) “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse”(12:3a);
- 4) “in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3b).

After Abraham came to the land where the Canaanite was “ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.” (12:7). These promises become framed within the context of a covenant in Gen 13:14-17:

Session 23 - Revelation 20:1-6

"The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." "
Gen 13:14-17 (NASB)

There are several new components to this second iteration of the Abrahamic Covenant.

- 1) The covenant includes the land of Canaan given to Abraham and his descendants.
- 2) This land grant to Abraham and his descendants is “forever”!
- 3) Finally Abraham's descendants would be as the sand of the earth.

So between this iteration and the initial promise of blessing to the nations (gospel), the promise of his numerous descendants and the land are now framed within a forever context. Although many will attempt to separate some of these components out of the forever context in order to fit their presuppositions it is not presented in a way that allows for dissection. But this covenant becomes more detailed and ratified by God Himself in a way that demonstrates the unilateral and eternal nature of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15:

"And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." He said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?" So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete". It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite." "
Gen 14:7-21 (NASB)

In his book “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View” Walter Kaiser says of this iteration of the covenant:

“So solemn was this covenant with its gift of the land that Genesis 15:7-21 depicted God alone moving between the halves of the sacrificial animals after sunset as “a smoking furnace and a

Session 23 - Revelation 20:1-6

flaming torch” (v. 17) . . . Thus, He obligated Himself and only Himself to fulfill the terms of this oath. Abraham was not asked or required likewise to obligate himself. The total burden for the delivery of the gift of the land fell on the divine Provider but not on the devotion of the patriarch. As if to underscore the permanence of this arrangement, Genesis 17:7, 13, 19 stress that this was to be “an everlasting covenant.”²⁵ (pg 303)

We must always keep in mind that the Lord is eternal and sees things from the same perspective; outside of time and space. So the Lord can declare “I have given to you” and be faithful to the permanent nature of the promise despite the appearances of the reality of the covenant in history. In his commentary “Did God fulfill every promise?” Gregory Harris states:

“It is likewise essential to observe that the territory described is quite large with a landmass of approximately 300,000 square miles or twelve and one-half times the size of Great Britain and Ireland. This stands in stark contrast to the surprisingly small traditional borders that include a territory that extends only “about 150 miles north to south (going from Dan to Beersheba) and an average of thirty miles east to west from the Mediterranean to the Jordon River Valley)” and significantly falls short of fulfilling the specified boundaries with only a landmass of about 10,000 square miles... the difference between the land promised by God and that actually gained by the Jewish people comes to approximately only one-thirtieth of the designated landmass.” pg 9

We have already said that the Abrahamic Covenant is either all figurative or all literal with no room for dissection. There can also be no loss of any of the components of the promise within its “forever” nature. If Israel had somehow forfeited the blessings promised to them through the covenant; i.e. the land and national aspects then all of the remaining aspects of the covenant would have to be forfeited as well, such as the blessings to all nations (the gospel). Genesis 22:15-18 is the sixth iteration of this covenant.

Reconfirmations of the Abrahamic Covenant

There was only one son of promise given to Abraham; Isaac. Isaac had the covenant confirmed to him by God in Gen 26:2-5, 24. Within this reconfirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant was five specific provisions:

- 1) Isaac is to be blessed (26:3a, 24a)
- 2) the land again promised to both Isaac and his seed(26:3b, 4b)
- 3) the seed will be multiplied (26:4a, 4b)
- 4) Gentiles would eventually be blessed through his seed (26: 4c)
- 5) based on the promises given to Abraham (26: 3c, 5, 24c).

The same covenant was confirmed to Jacob, the younger son of Isaac (Gen 28:13-15) and then through Jacob to his twelve sons (Gen 49).

So the Abrahamic Covenant can therefore be broken down into three basic aspects: the land , the seed and the blessing. It is through the subsequent covenants that the aspects are fulfilled. The land aspect is fulfilled through the Land Covenant (sometimes called the Palestinian Covenant). The seed

Session 23 - Revelation 20:1-6

aspect is included in the Davidic Covenant while the blessings promised are covered under the New Covenant.

The Land Covenant

This covenant is found in Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20. At the very start the covenant is marked out as separate from the Mosaic Covenant:

“These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.”
Gen 29:1 (NASB)

Verses 1-10 basically state the provisions of the covenant with verses 5-10 covering the promises to His people, Israel.

“The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. The LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.
Gen 30:5-10 (NASB)

The Land Covenant has eight basic provisions:

- 1) The rebellion of Israel including the scattering of Israel to the nations was prophesied (29:2-30:1)
The remaining provisions speak to Israel's final restoration
- 2) Israel will repent (30:2)
- 3) Messiah will return (30:3)
- 4) Israel will be regathered (30:3-4)
- 5) Israel will possess the promised land (30:5)
- 6) Israel will be regenerated (30:6)
- 7) Her enemies will be judged (30:7)
- 8) Israel will receive full Messianic Kingdom blessing (30:8-10)

The primary thing to note is that God owns the land and He has determined it for Israel. Her obedience is what determines her enjoyment of the land. This covenant is given after the Mosaic Covenant and is a further confirmation of the Abrahamic. It was furthermore confirmed in Ezekiel 16: 1-63 which paints a perfect picture of the unconditional nature of the Land Covenant. God selects her as an outcast infant which He rears to the age of marriage. She then becomes the wife of Jehovah and is

Session 23 - Revelation 20:1-6

adorned with royal garments and jewels. Ezekiel 16 then moves on to depict her harlotry that leads to her eventual scattering. Still even Ezekiel ends with the eventual regathering and remarriage of God to His chosen nation by means of the Land Covenant.

The Davidic Covenant

The first iteration of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 puts an emphasis on Solomon:

“The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.”
2Sam 7:11b-17 (NASB)

In the second iteration of the David Covenant found in 1 Chronicles, the emphasis is placed on the Messiah:

“Moreover, I tell you that the LORD will build a house for you. When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever. According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.”
1 Chr 17:10b-15 (NASB)

As progressive revelation of Gods plan unfolded through history, the way in which the unconditional promises made to Abraham and his descendants would be fulfilled became more and more defined. Here the plan is defined through the David, his house and Dynasty. Seven main provisions can be summarized in from these two passages:

- 1) The promise to David of an eternal house or dynasty (2Sam 7:11b, 16; 1Chron 17:10b)
- 2) Solomon would be seated on Davids throne after him (2Sam 7:12)
- 3) Solomon would build the temple that David so eagerly desired to build (2Sam 7:13a)
- 4) The throne of David and Solomons kingdom would be established forever (2Sam 7:13b, 16)
- 5) Although Solomon would be disciplined for sin, God would not remove His lovingkindness from him (2Sam 7:14-15). The Lord states this while comparing him to Saul whom God did take favor away from as a result of his rebellion. Once again this displays the unconditional nature of Gods covenants. It was Solomons sin that caused the kingdom to split, but it did so after his life.
- 6) Messiah would be a direct descendant of David, established on David’s throne.
- 7) The Messiahs throne and kingdom are to be established forever.

All of the eternal aspects of this covenant, the eternal dynasty, eternal throne, eternal kingdom and eternal descendant are to be fulfilled within the broader promises given to Israel. The Davidic Covenant is further expressed in 2 Sam 23:1-5; Ps 89:1-52; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1; Jer 23: 5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17, 19-26; 19:26; Ezek 37:24-25; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; Luke 1:30-35, 68-70 and Acts 15:14-18.