

The Millennium: 1000 Years

Only in Revelation 20 does the Bible mention a 1000 year reign with Christ: “They will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

Revelation is full of word pictures. Over and over again, John uses numbers as symbols. Are the “1000 years” another word picture? Are they literal?

The book is written in 95 AD. The first extrabiblical mention of the 1000 years are upon the death of Papias, in 130 AD, who believed these were literal. The second mention, in a debate from 134 AD, Justin Martyr who believed this was literal, conceded that “many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.”

By 134 AD, not 40 years after Revelation is written, Christians are falling into two opinions: 1) a literal 1000 years vs 2) a symbol. Sometime between 211-253 AD, another opinion surfaces: 3) that Christians will reign on earth 1000 years after the whole world has converted to Christ; priest-kings will rule when “all spheres of life shall be truly Christianized within and outwardly.”

Today, 1) is called Premillennial; Christ returns *pre-*, before, the Millennium. 2) used to call themselves the Symbolic viewpoint, but their detractors called them Amillennial, *no/a-*Millennium. “Amillennial” is not accurate; instead of “no millennium,” amillennials conceive a “realized millennium.” Hence, “the millennial kingdom” symbolizes the Church and “1000 years” are a big number used as a symbol to refer to the quality of Christ’s reign that is not restricted by material temporalities. 3) is called Postmillennial, with Jesus returning *post-*, after, the millennium. Postmillennials often optimistically think that by the Church converting the world, the Church is making “making straight the way” for Jesus’ physical return. Although far from popular today, postmillennialism fueled the missions fervor from 1600-1910.

I think that conservative evangelicals need no help understanding the Premillennial view: we read the Bible literally, 7 days of Creation are 7 days, “The Bible says it, I believe it.”

But what about the Amillennial/Symbolic view? What would be the significance of “1000” as a symbol? Numerology attaches importance to powers of ten, like 10; 100; 1000. E.g, the one who leaves “everything” behind for Jesus receives “a hundredfold,” (Mt 19.29), ie, “everything.” God keeps His covenant 1000 generations (Ps 105.8), ie, to “all” generations. One day is as a thousand years, (Ps 90.4; 2 Pe 3.8) The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle was 1000 cubic cubits, 10 cubits x 10 cubits x 10 cubits. Hear Andrew of Caesarea, Cappadocia, (died 614 AD):

“Listen to the Lord when He tells Sadducees that the righteous will be ‘as the angels in Heaven. Listen to the apostle [Paul, Ro 14.17] who says ‘the kingdom of God is not food and drink.’ **The thousand-year period is that of the preaching of the gospel...It is not necessary to think of these thousand years in terms of a number.** When Song of Songs says, ‘everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver’ and ‘Solomon shall have a thousand and they who keep its fruit two hundred,’ [Songs

8.11-12], **the precise number is not indicated, but the full, complete harvest [is]**...It refers to the preaching of the gospel into all the world and the sowing of the seeds of piety in the world...It signifies that during this time, having been released from the..Law, we have been called to the ‘perfect man,’ to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ.”

Jesus **already** reigns: Ac 2.29-33; 5.30-31; 7.55-56; 17.7; Eph 1.19-22; Col 1.12-13; 2.8-10; 3.1; 1 Tim 6.14-15; Heb 1.8; 8.1; 12.2; 1 Pe 3.21-22; Rev 1.5-6; and also, Jn 18.36.

—John Ray