**Millennium** dkm Feb2024

From very early days Christians have taken differing views with regard to the millennium or 1000 years referred to in Revelation 20. The millennium has been the cause of division and even conflict in the church. Our view on the millennium hinges on two factors.

Firstly, understanding the genre of literature found in this book. Revelation is clearly different from other parts of the Bible (except Daniel and Ezekiel). The introduction of this book states that it is the ‘*apocalypse/revelation of Jesus Christ regarding things that must shortly take place’* (1:1). We call this ‘apocalyptic writing’ because images, symbols and numbers are used to describe spiritual realties. Numbers like 666, 7, 12, and 144,000 have symbolic significance, as most agree. Yet when we come to 1000 many want to read it literally. To be consistent we must understand 1000 symbolically -probably indicating a long period.

Secondly, this book is a series of visions which the Lord gave to John. It is not historical narrative. The visions are about the end of the age and divine judgment. A number of visions come to the same end point, namely God’s judgment upon the wicked (6:17, 11:18, 16:17) - unless we think there are multiple ends to the world. In the second half of Revelation the focus is upon the spiritual enemies of God who deceive human beings or earth dwellers. The leader of these is the dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil (accuser) and Satan (adversary). The others, namely the beast and the false prophet were cast alive into the lake of fire in Revelation 19:20.

What are the different views taken on the millennium? There are three main views with variations in each.

Premillennial- Jesus will return prior to the start of the millennium. When Jesus returns to earth Satan will be bound for a thousand years, Christians will be resurrected and reign with Christ on the earth for literally one thousand years. At the end of this time will be a final rebellion against Christ and then the great white throne judgment (20:11). Dispensationalists hold this position but also say that Israel will be restored, along with sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, which is in Palestine. Some also believe in a secret rapture of saints prior to the seven-year tribulation, all before the millennium. All this has been drawn up along a detailed time line.

Premillennialism is not new. The church fathers, Justin Martyr and Iraeneus, were ‘chialists’ who believed in a literal 1000 years. Augustine opposed this view and premillennialism virtually disappeared until the 17th century. Modern dispensational teaching stems largely from the teaching of Darby and the Schofield Reference Bible in 19th century.

Postmillennial- Jesus will return after (post) the millennium. The millennium, which may be literal or not, occurs towards the end of the church age. It is seen as a time of great blessing, peace, and revival in the church. This thousand years golden period will end with the great apostasy of 2Thessalonians 2:3. Post millennialism is seeing a resurgence in the new Federal Vision theology: ‘We affirm that prior to the second coming of our Lord Jesus, *the earth will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*’. Some look for a large scale conversion of the Jews during this period. Some promote political activism as the way to bring in this glorious age of the church on earth prior to Christ’s return.

Millennial- the millennium is understood symbolically rather than literally. It begins with the death and resurrection of Christ and ends with his return. There is no belief in better times ahead or of a glorious church age before the return of Christ. Amillennial means no millennium but this is not what is actually believed. It is better to refer to this as 'inaugurated millennialism' because the belief is that the millennium coincides with the church age.