

Millennial Musings

A Definite Doctrine Based on an Indefinite Plural

If you haven't already read "The False Prophet" and "Chiasms & Bifids," I certainly suggest you do so before reading this study because both contain foundational information upon which this letter is built.

As the end approaches, things are going to deteriorate in a hurry. If we are to walk in truth, we must guard ourselves against interpreting Scripture to fit our preconceived notions, for "The Lord takes no delight in fools" (Ecc 5:4). The Bible is not "oral traditions" or "stories" as liberals theologians would have us believe. It is a historic and sometimes prophetic account of God's dealings with man throughout the ages, written down by men in their stated historic settings. Most of the Bible is written in plain language. The poetic books, the gospels, and the epistles are primarily literal and should be accepted verbatim.

But God's plan as recorded in Scripture embraces many writing styles: prose as well as poetry, some literal, some figurative. Some is written in a nonliteral way (in figurative language) to achieve an effect beyond the range of ordinary language. So how can we know when a passage of Scripture should be literally or figuratively understood? The Bible itself tells us. Most figurative passages contain sign posts that tell us they are figurative, figurative signpost words like: "I was in the spirit" or "the kingdom of Heaven is "like," or "like unto," or "as" a wedding feast, a mustard seed, a pearl of great price, a king going to a far country or a sower going forth to sow. Now the kingdom of Heaven is not really a wedding feast, a king in a far country, a mustard seed, a pearl, or a sower; it is only figuratively likened unto one! I said all that to get to this:

Figurative language must be interpreted figuratively. Only a small portion of the Bible is figurative, but interpreting figurative passages figuratively is of major importance to us because every end-time prophecy in the Bible is figurative in nature.

Revelation is a prophetic vision and as such it is primarily figurative, but since part of the 20th Chapter of Revelation appears to be literal, in 1640 a Dutch Reformed theologian, Jean de Labadie, concluded that Jesus would return to rule over the earthly kingdoms of men for 1000 years at the end of the Christian Era. This "millennium," as it is called, would then be followed by a second Armageddon (Rev 20:8), after which would come the great white throne of judgment. Jean de Labadie's premillennial theory fit perfectly with the Lacunza, Darby, Macdonald, Scofield eschatological scheme of things, so the futurists added premillennialism to their body of doctrine. However, the Reformers of de Labadie's day were not so easily fooled. They saw de Labadie's view as erroneous and excommunicated him from the Dutch Reform Church. Here is why:

The only support in the whole Bible for a pre-millennial view is Revelation 2:20 and it only works there if we interpret Revelation 2:20 literally in a book most serious eschatologists understand to be figurative. Even to arrive at his view, de Labadie had to ignore two universally accepted rules of Bible interpretation:

Reason #1. No scripture should be interpreted apart from its context. As already stated, most of

Revelation is figurative and there is no textual reason to interpret chapter 20 differently than its context.

Reason #2. The Greek word for 1000 is "chilias." The Greek word translated thousand in Rev 20 is "chilioi", an indefinite plural. As an indefinite plural, "chilioi" could mean one thousand, but it could also mean many thousands. Point being: it appears the premillennials are basing a definite end-time doctrine on an indefinite plural. Even though the translation of chilioi as "a thousand" is not incorrect, if we insist on it meaning just one thousand, the intended sense of the passage could be lost.

A figurative interpretation of Rev 20 is not as wild as one might think. Most of the Church considered Rev 20 to be figurative until de Labadie came along. Since it is scripturally provable that the saints reign with Christ in His spiritual kingdom, right this instant, and that we have done so throughout the Christian Era (Eph 1:3, 1Pe 2:9, Rev 1:6, Rev 5:10), then this "thousand" year reign of Christ could actually be a pictorial representation of the whole Christian Era.

Ruling with the Lord

Besides the last trumpet itself, there are other verses that call the premillennial view into question. According to premillennialism, when Jesus returns for His thousand-year reign, He will rule from Jerusalem in all power and glory. During that thousand years, we (the believers of all time) will presumably be ruling with Him in our new glorified and sinless bodies. At the end of the thousand years, Satan is somehow supposed to deceive the rulers (now sinless us in our glorified bodies) for a short season. If that were to be the case, we would again be in sin, which would result in our again being separated from the Lord. That is contrary to 1Th 4:17, which clearly states:

1TH 4:17 "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall ever be with the Lord." Saints will never again be separated from the Lord!

If there's a Future Millennium, Who's the Strong Man in it?

Jesus said in Matthew 12:29, "How can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless He first binds the strong man?" When Jesus asked that question, He was in the act of casting out demons. The Lord was plundering Satan's house then and He is still doing so today through the Church. Now Jesus permitted Himself to be bound once, at the Cross, but it will never happen again. When Jesus returns to Jerusalem, He will be ruling in all His power and glory. It will be Jesus' kingdom and He will be the "strong man" in it. Released or not, Satan could only plunder Jesus' kingdom if he could again bind Jesus. Laughable. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God the Father where He remains King of kings and Lord of lords, forever just as Ephesians 1:20-21 declares: "...when He (God the Father) raised Him (Jesus) from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come." That age to come would have to include any future time that Jesus is on Earth, and beyond. No future time of lost power for the Lord. When the Lord returns at the end of this age, He will rule absolutely...and eternally, just as Rev 11:15 states!

It's a Matter of Domain

God gave the Earth to Adam. Adam was made the ruler of the Earth and all that it contained (Gen 1:28). When Adam fell, he delivered his God-given authority into Satan's hands (Luke 4:6). All mankind then became Satan's legal possession. When scripture says "we are bought with a price," that was not just some theoretical acquisition. We were purchased from Satan's kingdom by Jesus' precious blood when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior. By a sovereign act, God the Father then transfers us "out of the domain (or kingdom) of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col 1:13). If you are looking for the kingdom age, there it is, right where the Bible has been saying it was all along. The kingdom of the Lord Jesus has existed ever since Act 2:33-36. At the end of this age, Jesus will indeed return to Earth with His Holy angels and His "holy ones" (in their glorified bodies), all of whom who went to be with Him at the last trumpet (1Co 15:52).

Rev 11:15 "And the seventh angel sounded (the last trumpet) and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.' "

Not for just for a thousand years, but forever!

Two Restorations

As said earlier, insisting on a literal interpretation of a figurative passage may display our orthodoxy before men, but rob us of what the Lord would have us learn from Scripture. The premill interpretation of Isa 11:6-10 is a glaring example of the "literal hermeneutic" carried to the point of absurdity.

The first five verses in Isaiah 11 are full of figurative expressions that must be understood figuratively: "A shoot [or branch] springs from the stem of Jesse . . . a branch from his root will bear fruit . . . He will judge with the rod of His mouth . . . righteousness will be the belt about His loins and faithfulness the belt about his waist," etc., etc.

All those expressions are obviously figurative, and every conservative Bible scholar I know of understand them to be a pictorial description of the Messiah to be born sometime in the future. This prophecy fulfilled during Jesus' life on Earth. Now, the first time the Jews were driven off their land was when Nebuchadnezzar exiled them to Babylon. The restoration after the Babylonian captivity was the FIRST restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land. Now lets skip Isaiah 6-10 for a minute and go on to verse 11. Here we read that the Lord will restore his people to the Holy Land "a second time."

Isa 11:11 "Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the second time with his hand the remnant of His people."

The Jews were dispersed for a second time into the nations thirty-seven years after Jesus was crucified, in 70 A.D., so the second restoration would have to take place after that. And it did. The second restoration took place in the new nation of Israel, established in 1948 A.D.. In that year, after almost 1900 years among the Gentiles, the Jews were restored to the Holy Land . . . for a second time! Now look at the chronology:

Isa 11:1-5 About the coming Messiah 32AD

Isa 11:6-10 About when? ???AD

Isa 11:11 About the 2nd restoration 1948AD

Well, if Isa 11:1-5 is about Jesus' life on Earth, and verse 11 can be positively pinned to 1948, to what time do you suppose the verses in between might refer? Well, because of context, verses 6-10 would have to refer to the time in between Jesus' life on Earth and 1948, wouldn't they? The only contextually sound way to look at Isa 11:6-10 is figuratively, as a picture of the Christian Era.

Now the premills recognize the figurative elements in Isa 11:1-5: the branch, the root, the fruit, the belt, the breath, and so on. They know this passage teaches that one of Jesse's descendants will be the Messiah. No one really expects a literal branch, with leaves and all, to spring out of the forehead of David's father. It is figurative, and the premill theologians know it, but when they read on a couple of verses, and see a lion eating straw, they say: "Ah, that's gotta be literal, and since it hasn't happened yet, it must be going to take place in the millennium. And there is more support for our premill view." They further pontificate that during the millennium, a "nursing child will really play by the hole of the cobra," and "the leopard will really lie down with the kid," etc., thus doing away with God's natural law. Anything is possible with the Lord, of course, but a literal interpretation of those verses is certainly not their most probable meaning.

Many well-known Bible teachers are famous for accepting figurative interpretations for figurative language they understand, while demanding a literal interpretation for figurative language they don't . . . all the while, heralding their orthodoxy by broadcasting their faith in a "literal hermeneutic." But if the passage in question is figurative, a "literal hermeneutic" will not lead to truth. The literal or figurative nature of a Scripture is not determined by the reader, but by the author, and some Scriptures cannot be recognized as literal or figurative unless the principles of hermeneutics are applied without doctrinal bias. Interestingly enough, many Evangelical groups, including major Evangelical Bible colleges, use the premill view as a litmus test for orthodoxy. One Christian publisher even trumpets proudly that all of its publications are premill, as if a differing view on the millennium were mortal sin. But despite its popularity, the weight of scriptural evidence appears to be against the premill view. It will be interesting to see if the Holy Spirit can quicken the Church to the possibility that it is once again standing dogmatically on false doctrine.

But Is this Truth Important?

Some ask: "Does it really matter what we believe about the millennium? Isn't soul-winning where it's at?" Then making a steeple of their hands they add with eyes cast heavenwards, "Won't we all end up in Heaven together, anyway?" That kind of unctuous platitude just slays me. The idea that any truth is unimportant is of the devil. It ignores the spiritual nature of the Christian's battle and the shrewdness of the enemy. Spiritual warfare is a never-ending battle for truth. As the father of lies, Satan is the author of every false doctrine that gets into the Church. Every false doctrine we believe or teach (no matter how minor it may seem to us) helps the enemy and weakens our witness.

But how can the premill view hurt anyone? In the same way the pre-tribulation rapture myth can

hurt. By rocking the Church to sleep with the sweet lullaby of "Judgment deferred," with the siren song that "hard times may be coming, but they're coming for the lost during the Great Tribulation, while we, the Church (because of our great piety and holiness), will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and later, ruling with Jesus in His wonderful millennial kingdom." That sounds ever so good and it certainly serves the flesh, but nothing could be further from the truth! We were appointed as Jesus' spiritual priests and kings for this present age to despoil the domain of the enemy. Every time a saint leads a sinner to the Lord, he is breaking into Satan's house, and carrying off his goods (Mat 12:29). Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as affirmed by the blood of the martyrs and the prayers of the saints, the enemy was bound throughout this age, "that he might not deceive the nations."

And he didn't. For centuries, the western world recognized Jesus as the Christ and that knowledge changed the world, but not any longer. Now the world is changing the Church by trying to make God acceptable to man, rather than warning man that he must become acceptable to God through the sacrifice of His Son. The world is in the condition it is today because we, the Church, have not done our job. And just as Scripture warned, Satan has been loosed upon us . . . Rev 20:7-8 "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore."

Jesus bound the enemy at the cross (John 12:32) and then gave the Church the keys:

Mat 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

But the lukewarm Laodicean church of our own day has again set Satan free. Look at the spiritual conditions that have enveloped America in the last four decades. We Christians are responsible -- we are Jesus' kings and priests -- and if we really understand we are responsible we get busy serving the Lord so we will "not be ashamed at His coming." If we really believe that "judgment begins at the household of God," then we "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling," in godly fear of those trials "which are coming upon the earth":

Rev 12:11-12 "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time."

However, if we believe judgment is for the other guy after we've been raptured out, or believe judgment is still a thousand years away, ah, that's a different story. Then we can dabble in the materialistic world for a while, repenting when we see Antichrist coming or when the Great Tribulation appears to be on the horizon. Meanwhile, to show our pro-life conservatism, we can protest an abortion clinic or two, join a march of some kind or put a few more dollars in the collection plate.

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