

Hark, the Song of Jubilee*James Montgomery (1771–1854)*

Hark, the song of jubilee
 loud as mighty thunders roar,
 or the fullness of the sea
 when it breaks upon the shore;
 Alleluia! for the Lord
 God omnipotent shall reign!
 Alleluia! let the word
 sound from city, hill, and plain.

Alleluia! hark, the sound
 from the depths unto the skies,
 wakes above, beneath, around
 all creation's harmonies;
 see the Victor's banner furled;
 sheathed his sword, he speaks— "Tis done!" —
 and the kingdoms of this world
 are the kingdom of his Son.

He shall reign from pole to pole
 with illimitable sway;
 he shall reign when, like a scroll,
 yonder heav'ns have passed away;
 then the end: beneath his rod
 his last enemy shall fall;
 Alleluia! Christ in God,
 God in Christ, is all in all.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Erecting the Right Fences in the Right Places, Part 11: Premillennialism***Kevin T. Bauder*

In his book *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, Gavin Ortlund lists two specific teachings as third-rank doctrines over which Christians should not divide. The first is the timing and nature of the millennium. Under this heading he also introduces the various views on the timing of the rapture. The second teaching includes the recency of God creating the world and the nature of the days of creation. I propose to devote one essay each to interacting with Ortlund about these topics.

Why does Ortlund believe that the millennium ought to be treated as relatively unimportant? First, he argues that the millennium is only taught in one passage of the Bible (Rev 20), and that passage is difficult to interpret. Second, he suggests that differences over the millennium have fewer practical consequences than differences such as modes of baptism or whether to speak in tongues. Third, he notes that while the Christian church has reached no consensus on the millennium, premillennialism has historically been the minority view, while dispensational premillennialism is a relatively recent development. These reasons, he suggests, should "at least, discourage us from elevating [premillennialism] as a litmus test of orthodoxy" [134].

This last statement simply means that Ortlund doesn't see premillennialism as a fundamental of the faith—but few if any theologians do. I can agree that premillennialism is not a fundamental, but that does not mean (as Ortlund states) that "we should not divide, at any level" over this issue [126]. While premillennialism is not essential to the gospel, it should and does matter to some levels of Christian cooperation. Differences over the millennium might well lead us to limit our fellowship at some levels rather than limiting our message about it.

The reason is straightforward. Premillennialism is not an isolated doctrine. It exerts considerable influence over other doctrines within the system of faith. It carries significant practical implications. Its denial opens the door to serious error, and Christians have regularly gone through that door with disastrous results. Furthermore, premillennialism is directly related to our understanding of the faithfulness of God.



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Ortlund is wrong when he says that premillennialism is taught in only one text of Scripture. Granted, only one text mentions a thousand years, but the duration of the millennium is not the critical point. The crucial question is whether God will have a kingdom on earth that is ruled mediatorially by the Lord Jesus Christ and in which the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants will be exhaustively fulfilled. Thus, one's view of the millennium will largely determine one's view of the present and future status of Israel as a people of God. It will influence one's understanding of which biblical promises and blessings can be claimed by the church. It will affect one's perspective on the integration of Mosaic Law into Christian living. It is both cause and effect of the hermeneutic that one uses when interpreting unfulfilled prophecies—or even in deciding which prophecies are still unfulfilled. It ties directly to one's understanding of concepts like the kingdom of God, the throne of David, the people of God, and the present status of the New Covenant.

The practical effects of premillennialism (or its denial) are just as far-reaching. Premillennialists have regularly been blamed for escapism and a lack of social ethics. They in turn have sometimes charged their opponents with a lack of urgency for missions and evangelism. While both accusations are overblown, it is beyond clear that views of the millennium affect philosophy of ministry. If you doubt this, try to imagine John Hagee and Doug Wilson getting along as pastors in the same church.

Most seriously, the non-premillennial views have regularly opened the door to the heresy of antisemitism. This is not to say that all amillennialists or postmillennialists are antisemites or that no premillennialists are. Nevertheless, replacement theologies (which undergird most non-premillennial eschatologies) have regularly been used to justify the most wickedly anti-Jewish sentiments and actions, while premillennialism resists being turned in that direction. Amillennialism in particular has a long history of legitimating the persecution of Jewish people.

The shape of the millennium does at certain levels even impinge upon the gospel because it affects how we can claim the faithfulness of God. In Romans 8, the apostle Paul gives Christians a wonderful description of the commitments God has made to believers through Christ. The chapter begins with no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and it ends with no separation from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. These glorious promises, however, raise a serious question. Hasn't God made promises before, namely to Israel? And hasn't God failed to keep those promises? Why, then, should we trust God to keep His promises to us?

This question clearly touches the gospel itself. If God can take promises made to Israel and transfer them to the church, then He can just as well take the salvation that He has promised to church saints and transfer it to someone else. Paul's answer, contained in Romans 9–11, is that God will cer-

tainly fulfill His promises to Israel. The only eschatology that satisfactorily answers the question with which Paul grapples in this passage is premillennialism.

In brief, even though premillennialism is not a fundamental of the faith, it cannot be demoted to a third-rank doctrine. It exerts too much influence throughout the system of faith, it affects too many practical areas, its denial opens the door to a grave error that many Christians have actually committed, and it provides the most coherent answer to the question of whether God can be trusted to keep His commitments.

Differences over the millennium do not have to affect every level of Christian fellowship. Even fundamentalists do not claim that they should. Nevertheless, to insist that they should have no effect upon *any* level of fellowship is astonishing. In fact, churches that value the kingdom of God ought to expect significant cohesion among their members in their understanding of the nature and timing of His kingdom. If those churches require a particular millennial view, then they are acting well within their purview as the pillar and ground of the truth.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
