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**Five Millennial Views of Revelation**  
**Part 1 - Historic Premillennialism**

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**Introduction**

Just because of the nature of the type of literature, the book of Revelation is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to interpret. In fact, over the centuries, different people have interpreted it in quite different ways. And because very few know much about the book, it remains rather confusing for most people. To top it off, it is also not uncommon for individuals to hear teachings of more than one, and not knowing how to distinguish between them, end up having a very mixed up understanding.

This article is part one of a five part series designed to give an explanation of the five major millennial views – Historic Premillennialism, Dispensational Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Preterism. It is our hope that this explanation will help you become able to clearly distinguish between the various views.

**Definition and Explanation**

Historic Premillennialism is a future focused millennial view that advances the belief that the Millennium referred to in Revelation 20 will consist of a literal thousand year reign by Jesus on earth after His second coming.

It is called Historic Premillennialism because many of the early church fathers, like Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus, held this view. It was the first systematic effort to develop a doctrine of eschatology (end times) using the millennial concept. The technical name often used in academic and theological discussions for Historic Premillennialism is simply “Chiliasm” (from the Greek *chilia*, meaning “thousand”), or more precisely “Historic Chiliasm.” Other labels you may find in scholarly literature include:

- “Post-tribulational Premillennialism” (Post-trib) – because Historic Premillennialists usually consider that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation and will get raptured following it,
- “Classic Premillennialism” – to distinguish it from Dispensational Premillennialism, and
- “Patristic Premillennialism” – since some of the early church fathers held this view.

This approach is primarily based on an interpretation of New Testament prophecy. However, it doesn’t ignore Old Testament passages that are interpreted as pointing toward a future reign of Christ. It teaches that the Church was foreseen in the Old Testament based on prophesies about the coming Messiah. Thus, when Jesus came to earth as the Messiah, He came specifically to die for man’s sin.

Historic Premillennialists see the clearest teaching of its point of view in Revelation 20:1-6. This passage points to what they consider to be Christ’s thousand-year reign following His return. Other NT passages commonly cited include:

- Matthew 24 (Olivet Discourse) - Speaks of the Tribulation and Christ’s return.
- Acts 1:6-7 - Deals with the disciples’ question about the restoration of the kingdom.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - Talks of the resurrection of the Church at Christ’s coming.
- 2 Thessalonians 2 - Speaks of the lawless one who will come before Christ’s return.

These verses form the backbone of the historic premillennial position in which Christ returns immediately before the Millennium. In Historic Premillennialism, our contem-

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porary time frame, since Christ's ascension, is recognized as the present age of grace that will continue until the second coming of Christ.

Historic Premillennialism recognizes a distinction between Israel and the Church, but not the same kind of sharp or absolute distinction found in Dispensational Premillennialism. Both Israel and the Church are considered to be one covenantal people of God, while at the same time Israel remains ethnically Israel. The Church does not replace Israel as the people of God, but a real distinction is maintained that is historical and functional, yet unified within one redemptive people of God. It considers the Church to be the spiritual Israel based on a new covenant. This approach generally believes that there will be a future salvation for Israel, but not as a separate group apart from the Church. Rather than a completely separate covenant, they think in terms of a final ingathering of Jewish people into Christ before or at the Second Coming. That is, they believe that at Christ's return, a large-scale conversion of ethnic Israel will take place based on:

- Romans 11:25-27 – "all Israel will be saved."
- Zechariah 12:10 – Israel looking upon the one they pierced.

### *The Place of Revelation in Historic Premillennialism*

In Historic Premillennialism, the Book of Revelation holds a central but distinctive role in shaping its eschatology. There are several points in particular that reveal Revelation's place in this particular interpretive approach.

1. Historic Premillennialists see Revelation as primarily about Christ's ultimate victory over evil, rather than a timetable of history. They put an emphasis on the literal future fulfillment of particular events such as Christ's visible return and the Millennium. However, it does not

have the systematic rigidity of the dispensational approach.

2. Historic Premillennialists understand Revelation 6 - 19 as describing the Great Tribulation through visions of seals, trumpets, and bowls. They see the book as calling on believers to endure suffering and persecution until Christ's return, which will occur after the Tribulation.

3. Historic Premillennialists believe Revelation 19 portrays Christ's bodily, glorious return as the climactic event that ends the Tribulation. They see the battle scene written about in Revelation 19:11-21 as a literal defeat of an earthly leader called the Antichrist, along with his forces.

4. Historic Premillennialists take Revelation 20 literally. Based on verses 1-6, they believe Satan will be bound, then Christ will reign with the resurrected saints for a literal 1,000 year period on earth before the final judgment and eternal state. This passage is viewed as the clearest scriptural basis in support of premillennialism.

5. Also, in Revelation 20:7-15, they see Satan's last rebellion, the Great White Throne judgment, and the eternal destiny of all people. Then in chapters 21 - 22, they affirm the literal coming of the New Heaven and New Earth where God will dwell with His people forever.

6. Historic Premillennialists typically adopt a futurist reading of Revelation 6 - 22, but not as rigidly as dispensationalists. They see, for instance, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 - 3 as applying to all ages. Also, the visions throughout the book are often understood as symbolic depictions of real future events, while the rich imagery of those visions points to spiritual realities.

### *The Underlying Philosophy of Historic Premillennialism*

One of the important features of Historic Premillennialism has to do with

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the hermeneutical (interpretive) approach of its adherents. It favors a grammatico-historical approach to biblical interpretation in which interpreters seek to discover the original intent of the biblical authors.

Historic Premillennialism also holds to the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible. Based on this belief, adherents are convinced of the future fulfillment of prophecy – especially a literal, visible, glorious, and victorious return of Christ to Earth. That said, as they interpret Scripture, Historic Premillennialists view some prophecies in the book as having a literal fulfillment, while others must be interpreted using a more symbolic approach. This distinction is made based on context and the distinct features of their millennial philosophy.

A second important principle of Historic Premillennialism deals with the identity of Israel and the Church. The dispensational interpretation clearly differentiates the Church and Israel, and proposes that the nation of Israel will have a special place in God's kingdom outside of His plan for the Church. In opposition to that, Historic Premillennialism sees the Church as the fulfillment of Israel, so there is no separate distinction. Here, the Church is, literally, the new Israel. They don't see a need for a pretribulation rapture because the new covenant makes all believers in Jesus the spiritual descendants of Abraham (the true Israel) and, therefore, covenant members of the people of God (Romans 11:1-24; Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:28-29).

A third underlying concept of Historic Premillennialism relates to the Kingdom of God. Historic Premillennialists believe that God's Kingdom was established after Christ's resurrection and ascension, and has been present in this world through the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. So the Kingdom is already a reality, even though not yet fully consummated. They believe this

current spiritual expression of the Kingdom will be replaced by a physical kingdom after Christ's return during the period of the Millennium.

Another key concept of Historic Premillennialism relates to the Rapture. According to this view, the saints (all believers throughout the ages) will meet the Lord in the clouds immediately following the Tribulation and preceding His millennial reign. All will then descend to earth to reign with Him during the Millennium.

A final key principle involves the Millennium itself. Historic Premillennialists believe that during Christ's one thousand year reign on Earth, temple worship and sacrifice will be re-established – not, however, as a means for forgiving sin (as that was taken care of in Christ's death and resurrection), but as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.

## *Historic Premillennialism Storyline*

It is considered that when Christ began His public ministry, the Kingdom of God on earth was demonstrated thorough His ministry but was not yet fully instituted. That did not happen until His ascension into heaven after His death. This view teaches that after His death on the cross, Christ ascended into heaven, and the Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost to be the representative of God's Kingdom on Earth. Thus, during the current age of grace, the Kingdom is present on Earth through the Holy Spirit and will continue in that role until Christ returns and establishes His rule on earth for a literal 1000 years.

During the present era, the progress of life on Earth will continue on in its current trajectory. Later, at God's appointed time, the Antichrist will appear on earth and inaugurate either a seven-year period of tribulation or one for an undefined time period (depending on one's particular interpretive approach). It is believed that this time of

tribulation will occur before Christ's return, so Christians who are alive during that time will experience it along with everyone else on earth.

In Historic Premillennialism, Christ's return and the rapture of the Church will occur at the same time and will terminate the time of tribulation. At that point, Christ will descend to Earth from heaven to establish His Kingdom headquartered in Jerusalem and serve as the king of the entire world for one thousand years.

Believers who are already in heaven will descend with Christ and live on Earth in glorified bodies. Believers who are raptured from the Earth will meet Christ in the air and receive glorified bodies at that time (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Then, all believers will descend together with Christ to reign with Him during His thousand-year rule. It is primarily envisioned that they will either live in close proximity to Christ near Jerusalem while also being active across the world helping Him rule, or else be stationed as priests and judges throughout the world ((Matthew 19:28; 1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 20:4-6). As believers will at that point be immortal and have glorified bodies, they will not marry nor have children. This millennial rule will be characterized as a time of peace when all will live under the authority of Christ.

However, before the time of peace under Christ, immediately upon His second coming, the Battle of Armageddon will take place. In that battle, the armies of the Antichrist (often associated with "*the kings of the earth*" in Revelation 16:16) will gather to fight against Christ. This battle will end with the defeat of the Antichrist and his forces. Those who fought against Christ will be judged and destroyed (Revelation 19:19-21). Their destruction is decisive and marks the end of any organized opposition to Christ as His millennial reign begins. Unbelieving survivors who were not part of the Antichrist's armies may remain alive (Revelation 20:7-8), and these people will be the ones who repopulate the earth during the Millennium.

The Historic Premillennial system envisions the necessity of mortal believers who exist during the Millennium in order to marry, have children, and populate the nations (Isaiah 65:20-23). The believers who come to Christ before the Rapture will already have glorified bodies, so will not be able to procreate. There are different theories as to how this might be possible, the most common being that survivors of the Battle of Armageddon who were not combatants may repent and come to faith in Christ. These are among the ones, then, who will marry, have children, and populate the nations.

At that point, Satan will be bound and unable to influence the goings on in the world (Revelation 20:1-3). His binding enables Christ's righteous millennial reign on earth to proceed with minimal spiritual opposition. During that period there will still be people who do not become believers, but they will not have the power to overthrow Christ.

At the end of the millennial period, Satan will be loosed and allowed one last attempt to foment a massive rebellion against Christ (Revelation 20:7-8). In this rebellion, Satan will rally the nations of unbelieving people (Gog and Magog) to battle against Christ. These will rise against the kingdom of God and initiate a brief, final battle where Satan will be permanently conquered.

Christ's second resurrection (the first after His first coming) will immediately follow this final battle. This second resurrection will result in a final judgment of all mankind. At that point, the great white throne will descend to Earth followed by a general resurrection of all people who have ever lived, and everyone will be judged. After that will come the creation of a New Heaven and New Earth.

### ***Historical Premillennialism Timeline***

The historic premillennial timeline is as follows:

1. Christ's death and resurrection.
2. The age of grace from Christ's death until the second coming. The Kingdom was established after Christ's ascension with His reign by the Holy Spirit through believers on Earth.
3. The rise of the Anti-Christ and persecution of the Church inaugurating the Great Tribulation.
4. The return of Christ at the end of the age accompanied by the resurrection of all believers who have died and the simultaneous rapture of all living saints.

5. The Battle of Armageddon where Christ defeats Satan and his allies.
6. The institution of the millennial kingdom where Christ will reign in Jerusalem as king on earth for 1000 years.
7. The loosing of Satan and the final revolt of unbelievers at the end of the Millennium.
8. The resurrection of the wicked and the final judgment.
9. The eternal state in the new heavens and the new earth for all believers.

## Conclusion

We will next, in part 2, deal with Dispensational Premillennialism. Since it is also a premillennial position, many people get it mixed up with Historic Premillennialism, and many end mixing up elements of these two, thus ending up with some hybridized belief – which often creates even more confusion. It is my hope that this deep dive into the various interpretive approaches to understanding the book of Revelation will be a great help in your personal understanding of Scripture and of a biblical worldview.

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