

# The Millennial Syndrome

By

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If the search for omens and signs of the future were any indication of true faith, ours would be the most Christian generation of all history. But Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign” (Mt. 16:4).

The popular doctrine of a “future millennial reign” over the present world affords endless opportunities to take daily events and label them as signs of millennial fulfillment. Satiated with sensational international crisis, the public eagerly clutches at every announcement in hopes that this it is!—that this latest event will herald a new day and tend the tension, the frustration, the failure and uncertainty. Such believers live for the future, and miss the joy and victory of the present reign of Christ.

Scripture presents this world as a field of labor with the harvest at the coming of Christ and the end of the world. The Christian understands that the field is infested with thorns and choked with tares sown by the enemy, the devil. He must labor against difficulties, fight against enemies, feel the pain of weariness and tension and know the sorrow of failure because the world continues on in the way of Satan (I John 5:19). But he rejoices because he labor is not in vain in the Lord. He rejoices in each victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. He thinks not to receive his reward here, but looks to the end of the world and the day of harvest when all the enemies will be slain by the King and the faithful may live in “a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:13). To the Christian the future means eternity and glory in the world to come.

The Millennialist focuses his attention on a period in between, a time soon to begin, but not yet; a time of peace and prosperity, but still bound by the limitations of this present world under the curse which came at the sin of Adam. He looks for a problem-free age of life in the present evil world. Though the sinners and rebels still thrive, it will be made tolerable by the physical presence of Jesus and the blessings of material rewards—all the things you always wanted but were denied. He looks to the future, but not far enough to the life of glory Christ promised—new life in a new creation free of unbelievers. The ardent millennialist lives on the edge of his seat, eagerly scanning the news to see if some new event might fit into his list of things supposed to happen near or at the expected millennium. The list includes the mark of the beast, the appearance of antichrist, the “great tribulation,” a new temple in Jerusalem, and the war of Armageddon, to name just a few. He rejects or overlooks the interpretation placed upon these prophecies by the apostles, which indicates that they have already been fulfilled. Much of the religious world is occupied with seeking for signs that these things are about to be fulfilled in our day.

The evasive hope of one-world peace underlies much of the social pressure against which the Christian faith struggles today. What is the source of our financial and national woes? Is it not the ambitious conspiracy of men who wish to give us a new and peaceful world by taking over our lives and remolding them to fit their dreams? They, too, look for a millennium, one which they think can be created by their own political and

social processes. Well-meaning but drastically deluded church members think to please God by aiding them in their plan because they think it is God's purpose to bring total peace and unity into this present world, the same promises made by international socialists. To bring about a world where all carnal desires may be satisfied and where there is no struggle against existing sin is Satan's aim, not God's.

**A Stumbling Block.** The preaching of an earthly kingdom of carnal satisfaction is the very opposite of the gospel Christ and the apostles preached. Christ presented man's need as that which cannot be met by material things. While He healed, fed a few people, and taught us to share with the person who comes to us in need, He refused to encourage any seeking after the goods of the world. He offered no political solutions to world problems and denounced ambition for worldly equality and plenty. Instead, He challenged man to deny self, to give up worldly satisfaction, even to the forfeiting of goods, homes, loved ones, and life itself in order to gain life in the next world. He warned, "If any man come after me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brother and sister, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Christ certainly was not discouraging proper family relationships nor saying it is wrong to own a home or other things; but He was telling us that no one can follow Him who has his interest and mind focused on either people or things, all which are temporal and must come to an end in this world.

He said that one must even hate his own life also, which means that he must be ready to die and even prefer to die rather than to lose his fellowship with Christ and the hope of immortality. This is what it means to love the Lord with all of one's life. The ultimate purpose of God is to have man in His own image in a new creation; that is, in a new earth—not this present one, but one "wherein dwells righteousness"—which will take the place of the present world that is said to be evil, under a curse and is to be destroyed at Christ's coming (Gal. 1:4, Rom. 8:20, II Peter 3:7–13).

The idea of an earthly kingdom under Messiah was a Jewish tradition developed out of their refusal to accept the prophecies of Christ bringing salvation to all the nations. They hoped for a kingdom limited to their race, after the order of the kingdom of David and thought that when Messiah came He would throw out the Romans, enlarge the borders of Judea to encompass the territory held by Solomon, and give them prosperity and power over their enemies. They sought to make Christ an earthly King, but He refused (John 6:15). They then crucified Him, affirming, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

It was only after the apostle Peter set forth the fact that the prophecy of one sitting on David's throne was fulfilled by Christ, and that the pouring forth of the holy Spirit was proof of it (Acts 2:29–33) that they cried out on the Day of Pentecost, "What must we do?" No such earnest desire was ever expressed as long as they held hopes of an earthly rule by Messiah. The same alternative exists today. The person who lives in hopes, ever so zealously, for the day when peace reigns on the present earth, where man may live in full satisfaction of his carnal desires in this life—that person can hardly obey the word of Jesus given by Paul: "...seek the things that are above where Christ is...set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For you died and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1–3). Therefore the world seeks to confuse the issue, to distort the meaning of the kingdom and present false hopes to the

ignorant and to keep as many in the dark as possible. For this reason the preaching of false prophetic signs is popular with the world, but the presentation of the cross and its true meaning is as despised as ever.

**Christian Duty.** What of the Christian's present duty toward his neighbor? No one argues against this duty, leastwise this writer. Certainly the person with his heart set on pleasing God cannot be indifferent to the cry of the fatherless child or the plea of the hungry and naked. It is just this fact, that the saint has his heart set on spiritual and eternal things rather than earthly, that enables him to turn loose of his hard-earned money to give to the church for the preaching of the gospel and to give alms for the needy. But such charity, giving to the needy who asks, has nothing to do with the welfare state, the robbing of the industrious to ease the way of the slothful and the destruction of just government by the foolish cries of the so-called underprivileged.

The man with his heart set on the true kingdom, which is not of this world, is quite willing to forego the satisfaction of power and pleasure, which the world's possessions seem to guarantee, that the might help a fellow man. On the contrary, the panting after an earthly Utopia paves the way for all kinds of pressure groups trying to bring it about where they each may get their fair share. Their number is legion, more than anyone knows.

**Christ's Rule.** Is there not, then, a millennium? None is mentioned in scripture, although there is mention in Revelation a reign of one thousand years. "Millennium" is derived from two Latin words, mille, meaning thousand and annum, meaning year; hence literally a thousand years. (By-the-way, the thousand years mentioned in Revelation is written in the plural, "thousands." Thousands of what? Thousands of years! It is man that puts the "a" before it, and translates it as a thousand years, singular.)—But in Revelation twenty, in any case, the language is figurative or spiritual and not natural: Satan is bound with a "chain," saints sit on thrones, Satan is a dragon, or a serpent, and the saints are all in one camp! The term "thousands" is also used figuratively. It denotes vastness and in some cases the total of whatever it is applied to (Deut. 1:10–11); Psa. 50:10). "The cattle on a thousand hills" are said to belong to the Lord, but so are all the cattle upon every hill! A thousand hills simply represents all the hills. "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years" (II Peter 3:9). All the years of time are as only a day to the Lord. The thousands of years of Revelation refers to the entire time of Christ's present reign; that is, from the day He ascended to heaven to begin His rule over heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18) until the day He returns, destroys His enemies in judgment, and returns the Kingdom to the Father (I Cor. 15:28).

The thousands-of-years reign in Revelation tells us that as Christians in this world of tribulation and opposition we are, nevertheless, victorious. The victory is not physical nor political, as viewed from a carnal viewpoint, but the kind of victory mentioned by John: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4). Such a victory may be enjoyed even when we are suffering from physical losses, from illness or oppression. Even the Christian who is bed-ridden and denied the blessing of health may still be reigning with Christ in the spiritual sense. This is why Paul says that we are "made to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

According to Paul the present world travails and groans in pain and will do so until the coming of Christ and the transformation of all God's sons into His own likeness. It is the Christian's privilege and glory to be part of Christ's kingdom, to suffer with Him now, but to be glorified with Him when He comes (Rom 8:22, 17). The apostle rites that we are not to be looking for signs of the fulfillment of carnal desires but rather that we should be "looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before He endured the cross, despising shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).

The Psalmist wrote of Christ, "Rule thou in the midst of your enemies" (Psa. 110:2). Indeed he rules today in the face of tremendous opposition and wicked enemies who grow more bitter and vicious every day.

Paul explained that "the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink (things of an earthly kingdom) but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). John instructs us to "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (I John 2:15).

Paul, divinely inspired, expressed the purpose of a Christian, "...in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal" (Titus 1:2).

The search for signs is a sickness, the Millennial Syndrome. It is cured when we renounce men's traditions and believe that Christ is the fulfillment of the prophets and is now King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

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