

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Kingdom of God and The Millennium **Selected Passages**

Keywords: Kingdom of God, Eschatology, Millennium, Premillennialism, Amillennialism, Postmillennialism

PowerPoint Presentation included: Yes

Sermon Audio Blurb: Before any honest examination of the Kingdom of God can occur the student must be aware of some of the forces in theology that exert pressure on this subject. Perhaps the greatest are the various ways people view the 1,000 years described in Revelation 20. How are we to understand them? Are they literal, non-literal or a mix of the two? In this sermon we unpack the various positions to make the listener aware of each position while making the argument for a premillennial perspective. In reality this sermon is merely a precursor to a much larger examination on the nature of the Kingdom in light of what the Scripture actually says as opposed to specific systems of theology.

I. Introduction.

- A. We pick back up on our side series on the Kingdom of God.
 - 1. Remember that we saw in Acts 1 that Jesus Christ invested a lot of time instructing the Apostles on this key theme prior to His ascension.
 - 2. By simply reading the first 11 verses of Acts 1 you will easily see that this is something that is at the forefront of both Jesus and these men He is appointing to be His key servants for the birth and expansion of the church.
 - 3. But we also saw that there was still a point of confusion by the Apostles. Not about the nature or identify of the Kingdom. But the timing of it for they knew it was not yet present.
 - 4. But Jesus said that the timing was not their's to worry about; rather, simply obey His instructions and wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- B. Few things create greater confusion than when discussing the idea of the Kingdom of God.
 - 1. This is unfortunate but is a result of several factors that help guide a person to certain conclusions about what the bible teaches.
 - 2. The result is that many books and sermons and arguments have been born out of this topic and the debates that swirl around it.

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3. However Jesus taught much on this to His disciples prior to His ascension.
 - a. To invest that amount of time instructing them tells us that it is proper to expect the idea to permeate their teaching and writing.
 - b. And I will argue that it does. Like a beautiful thread it weaves itself through the New Testament pointing to the great hope of the reign of Jesus Christ.
 4. In addition, the good news of the Kingdom was His message during His incarnation yet without any real explanation of what it was.
 - a. He assumed the readers knew what it was. And I am going to argue that the reason is that the Old Testament is replete with Kingdom references.
 - b. In other words, the entire bible from Genesis to Revelation are oriented around the Kingdom of God.
- C. However, when talking about the Kingdom of God there are unique forces at work that many people are simply unaware of and this creates confusion. Perhaps the greatest challenge is how one approaches what is commonly known as the millennium.
1. Today we will invest some time in a theological sermon that is designed to give a basic explanation of how various groups view this subject.
 2. In doing so I hope to begin to unfold for each of you a much bigger sense of what God is doing in this world and in the lives of entire nations and people groups.

II. Views on the Kingdom of God.

- A. As said in my previous sermon, there are differing views of how and what the Kingdom of God actually is.
1. This is normal even though some may find it frustrating or annoying.
 2. All doctrines have shades of understanding in the minds of people and it is out of this struggle to define and understand that many good things come about.
 3. In debating and discussing and, most importantly, going back to the biblical text to re-examine it the Church as a whole prospers and grows.

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4. Over time there are at least eight different definitions and ideas related to the Kingdom of God. I tell you this so that you begin to realize how large a subject it really is.
5. Not all of them are of any real value for us due to some very poor theology.
 - a. An example of this would be that it is made up of moral laws and ideas that define what living a good life would look like devoid of the need for Jesus Christ.
 - b. Another would be the kingdom seen primarily in social concern and good. This is what you see in very liberal churches where man and God somehow work together to improve mankind as a whole. You see this when people equate “kingdom work” with drilling water wells or creating homeless ministries.
- B. There are some views, however, that you will hear people talk about within the circles of sound, biblical churches. Two of them are the most common. In both views there are two different positions so keep that in mind as we go along.
 1. The first view is that the Kingdom of God is viewed in one way or another as “spiritual” in nature and make-up.
 - a. Very common in many churches and denominations.
 - b. It has several flavors to it and this and it makes explaining it rather hard in the sense the you invariably find someone who does care for the explanation. This is not a seminary class so I am not going to tear apart every nuance.
 - c. I have some simple charts to put up for you to see. You will notice that they all have the word “millennium” in them. This is due to the Revelation 20:1-7 (read), which cannot be ignored. Keep your finger at that passage.
 - (1) At issue is what do we do with the phrase, “a thousand years?” This is where the word “millennium” comes from, which is from the Latin term for 1,000.
 - (2) Vss 4 and 6 are key because they speak of reigning with Christ for 1,000 years.

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- (3) If you take this to mean a long period of undefined time then you will likely see all of this as a spiritual reign. And if you take it how it is written then you see this as a physical reigning of Jesus Christ on earth for a very specific time.
 - (4) My position is that it is an actual, literal and physical reign of Jesus Christ.
 - (5) To reiterate, in light of Revelation 20 we will look at two different views of the Kingdom of God, each of these views having at least two different positions.
- d. The first position is Postmillennialism. (Start slides here)
- (1) It views that the current time is the Kingdom of God and it is a spiritual one with Jesus Christ reigning in heaven.
 - (2) It is God ruling in the hearts of humans as He works in and through the Church.
 - (3) So the Kingdom is already present and even arrives anytime a person places their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. The spread and progress of the gospel during the present age brings in the kingdom of God (millennium).
 - (4) This spread of the gospel will eventually result in a golden era of righteousness before the return of Christ. Some will say it is 1,000 years but most see it as an extended length of time.
 - (5) When Christ returns there will be a general judgment and resurrection followed by the new heavens and new earth. This is why it is called "Post" because Jesus Christ will not return until the end of this golden age, or millennium.
 - (6) With this comes a strong sense of social involvement where you are seeking to exert a Christian influence in all parts of society. This, along with the ever-increasing influence of the gospel will become eventually the over-whelming influence in the world. This is a very long-term viewpoint and very optimistic about the future.
 - (7) Often, but not always, this position sees that right at the end of this golden age there is a sudden increase of apostasy and

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Satanic activity which is then conquered with the return of Jesus Christ and the final judgment.

- e. The second position is Amillennialism.
 - (1) Very popular view within many circles. The “a” simply means that there is no actual millennium in a truly literal sense. The millennium is simply *now*.
 - (2) So it is unlike Postmillennialism which says that the millennium will happen once the gospel over-whelms the world. Amillennialism says that we are in the millennium and Christ is reigning over it from heaven.
 - (3) It agrees with the Postmillennial view that says that the 1,000 years is not to be seen as an actual time, rather it refers to a long, indeterminate length.
 - (4) Like all of these views, there are points of disagreements in the details within the view itself. So some see the millennial blessings as affecting those who are in heaven with Christ right now while others see them also affecting all believers dead and alive.
 - (5) The gospel will continue to spread outward but it will never become the dominant idea or belief and hope in this age. Rather, mankind shall continue to proceed from bad to worse. This will accelerate near the end and after this will come the return of Jesus Christ and the final judgment.
- f. There is a third view that is growing in popularity called preterism but I will not deal with this position as it has no influence in our church.
- g. Both Amillennialism and Postmillennialism have certain things in common that are important to our study in Acts, as well as Matt Miller’s study in Luke.
 - (1) The first is how they interpret the bible in many places—their hermeneutics.
 - (a) This is too complex to discuss in detail in this sermon. But I speak of it because there are many

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who will hold to the amillennial view who have never really studied this subject.

- (b) Understand that for most in these positions that how you read the bible, especially the Old Testament, is through the lens of the cross and Jesus Christ.
 - (c) A key verse is, “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:27) So, until you see Jesus in every passage you don’t really understand it.
 - (d) When you read the prophecies of the Old Testament about the future blessing you should see them as primarily a spiritual blessing rather than a physical one.
- (2) The second is how they view Israel and the Church.
- (a) Without exception these views in one way or another will replace Israel with the Church. You will read of it in many different ways but when you strip it down that is what occurs.
 - (b) Basically, though the Old Testament seems to make Israel to be God’s people, in reality only some of them were. And when Jesus Christ came He was the true Israel of God.
 - (c) Therefore those connected to Him through saving faith are now Israel. And since all Christians are in Jesus Christ we are the true Israel.
 - (d) And therefore all the promises of future blessing for Israel in the Old Testament now become a spiritual blessing for the Church, who are the spiritual people of God.
 - (e) Some see that there is a future blessing for the Jewish people. But essentially all agree that there is no future plan of salvation for the nation of Israel.

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- (3) The third is how they view Old Testament prophecy in general.
 - (a) This is so tightly connected to how these positions view Israel that I need not expand much more.
 - (b) So usually when they encounter Old Testament prophecy for anything that appears to be future for nation of Israel, it is really being fulfilled either now or in a later point in time but with the Church.
 - (c) In a somewhat recent change, some are now saying that the Old Testament prophecies of a future blessing for Israel are to be found in the New Heavens and Earth.
- (4) The fourth is how they interpret the book of Revelation.
 - (a) There is no clear way that those holding to this position interprets Revelation, which makes it rather hard to summarize.
 - (b) Many will see it as a series of recapitulations or parallels. So it keeps repeating itself several times, each adding more material.
 - (c) So, for many they would read chapter 19 of the coming of Jesus Christ and agree it is just that. But then in chapter 20 where Satan is bound and Jesus reigns it is NOT viewed as taking place after His second coming, but rather, it is recapitulating and going back to the first coming of Jesus and the Church. So the binding of Satan is what happened while Jesus was here during His first advent.
 - (d) What they all agree on is that it is mostly symbolic and not to be taken as literal in any real way. And most certainly that the 1,000 years described in Revelation 20 does not mean 1,000 years.
- h. So these are the two most prominent views regarding the Kingdom of God that primarily see it as a spiritual kingdom.

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2. The second view is that the Kingdom of God is both a spiritual and physical reign of God. This is my position and it is the third position on the millennium. It also has two different positions as well.
 - a. The first called historic premillennialism.
 - (1) This position is very similar in many respects to the other we just heard about. What makes it different is that it takes Revelation 20 literally.
 - (2) However, usually it still takes the Old Testament descriptions of a future blessing to the nation of Israel and apply it to the Church in a spiritual sense.
 - (3) Along with this is the idea that the Church is the new Israel. One theologian I enjoy is James Hamilton, who argues that by choosing the 12 apostles Jesus was essentially reconstituting Israel around Himself.
 - (4) More importantly, it does not see the Kingdom of God as occurring now in the fullest sense; rather it is yet future in the 1,000, or millennial, reign of Jesus Christ.
 - b. The second is called dispensational or futuristic premillennialism.
 - (1) This is my position though I dislike the term dispensational because of how so many react to it. Frankly how people describe this position is so often so twisted that even a dispensationalist cannot agree with it.
 - (2) I am not going to try to explain Dispensationalism here as it is a larger subject than the Kingdom of God. Understand it is a system of theology that explains the purposes of God and the flow of biblical history. Usually its counterpart is what is known as Covenant Theology.
 - (3) Suffice it to say that dispensationalists usually see God working within history in different ways/dispensations. If that doesn't make sense to you then try to see it as God revealing and unfolding His plan and purposes in a progressive manner.

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- (4) The big ones are how God worked in and through Israel and the covenant with Moses as opposed to the Church and the New Covenant.
- (5) This view sees the Kingdom of God as having a spiritual component now (though not always) and a literal component in the future. It views the promise that Christ will sit on the throne of David as a literal event that will happen in the millennium.
- (6) It keeps Israel and the Church as two distinct groups to one degree or another.
- (7) It also sees the many Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah coming, restoring Israel, and ruling from Jerusalem as actual, future events to take place.

C. Key questions that you should work through before you settle.

1. Is the Kingdom of God essentially equivalent to the presence of the Church on earth? Yes means you will not be premillennial.
2. Is the Church now the true or new Israel? If yes then you will not be premillennial.
3. Will the growth of the gospel be such that it will ultimately achieve a worldwide growth the results in it being the norm rather than the exception? Yes means that you will be postmillennial.
4. How do you view the Old Testament? If it is to be interpreted in its own context then you will lean toward a premillennial perspective. If you think it can't be properly understood without the New Testament then you often will be a postmillennial or amillennial.
5. What is your approach to understanding the meaning of a biblical text? If you hold to understanding it in its historical setting and according to normal grammatical rules then you likely will be premillennial.
6. How do you view the book of Revelation? If it is symbolic and little should be understood as it is written and if it is not looking primarily to a yet future time then you will usually be amillennial or postmillennial. If it is seen as primarily yet future and that it should be taken as written, allowing for symbolism where it is obvious, then you will likely be premillennial.

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III. Conclusion.

- A. Why is this important? Theology, like ideas, always has consequences.
 - 1. Not always obvious to a person at first. By not thinking about serious subjects we tend to get carried along with whoever is persuasive at the time.
 - 2. You do not arrive at the Kingdom of God as being either primarily spiritual or literal all by yourself. It comes through a decision on how you interpret the bible.
 - 3. And once you land on a certain way to interpret the bible you then move along down a theological road.
 - 4. Issues like what is the Church? What is baptism? What is worldliness? How do we live our lives? What are we to obey? Does the Law still apply to us? Are we to keep the Sabbath? How do we view our children? What part of the bible applies to us? All of it? Some of it?
- B. It ties the bible together.
 - 1. You begin to read the bible better as you see how it is really pushing a single main narrative.
 - 2. It helps you not get bogged down in side stories that are not the actual point of the bible.
 - 3. It helps keep you from making the bible all about you and your life and your personal improvement. Rather, you learn to live under the hand of your Creator and understand how and why.
- C. It enlarges the gospel.
 - 1. If the good news is only that Jesus died and rose again for our sins then the vast majority of the bible is not gospel. It is just a bunch of stories that we have to twist to turn into gospel sounding ideas.
 - 2. But if the Kingdom of God is the gospel then we can understand a key reason why from the beginning of the bible to the end there is this constant drumbeat of God making all things new.
 - 3. Then we can understand the key purpose of the Cross, it is the basis of all things being restored and redeemed. And only those who are rightly related to God through Christ will participate in the Kingdom. So now

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John 3 can make a bit more sense, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3)

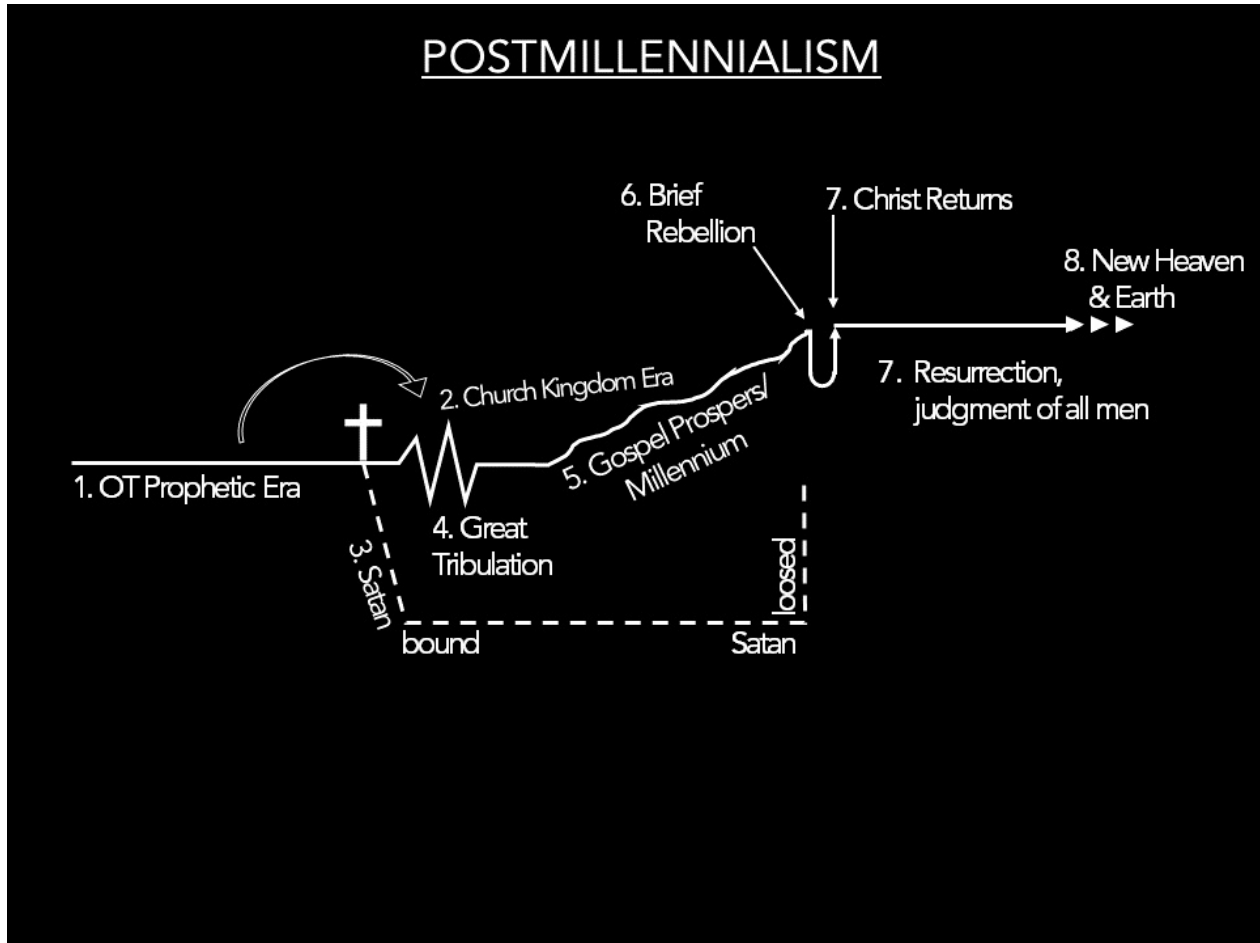
- D. It helps you have meaning to life here and now (ethical eschatology).
 - 1. Colossians 3:1-4.
 - 2. 1 Thessalonians 2:19
 - 3. 1 Timothy 6:14.
 - 4. Titus 2:12-13
- E. We covered a lot here. I recommend you listen to the sermon at least one more time to let some of this sink in.
- F. Next time I plan to show you the aspect known as the universal reign of God. I think it will be a source of much wonder and encouragement.

Small Group Questions

- Thinking back to how your group answered the question from last sermon CG questions, "The Kingdom of God is...." how were your answers in relation to this sermon? What perhaps was new or helpful? What raised new questions?
- In looking at the various views of the millennium what, if any, is your background? And how well was that subject taught to you?
- In light of the fact that this subject can be divisive in the minds of many how can this be studied and discussed while maintaining a spirit of Christian unity. Look at Ephesians 4:1-6 as a guide.

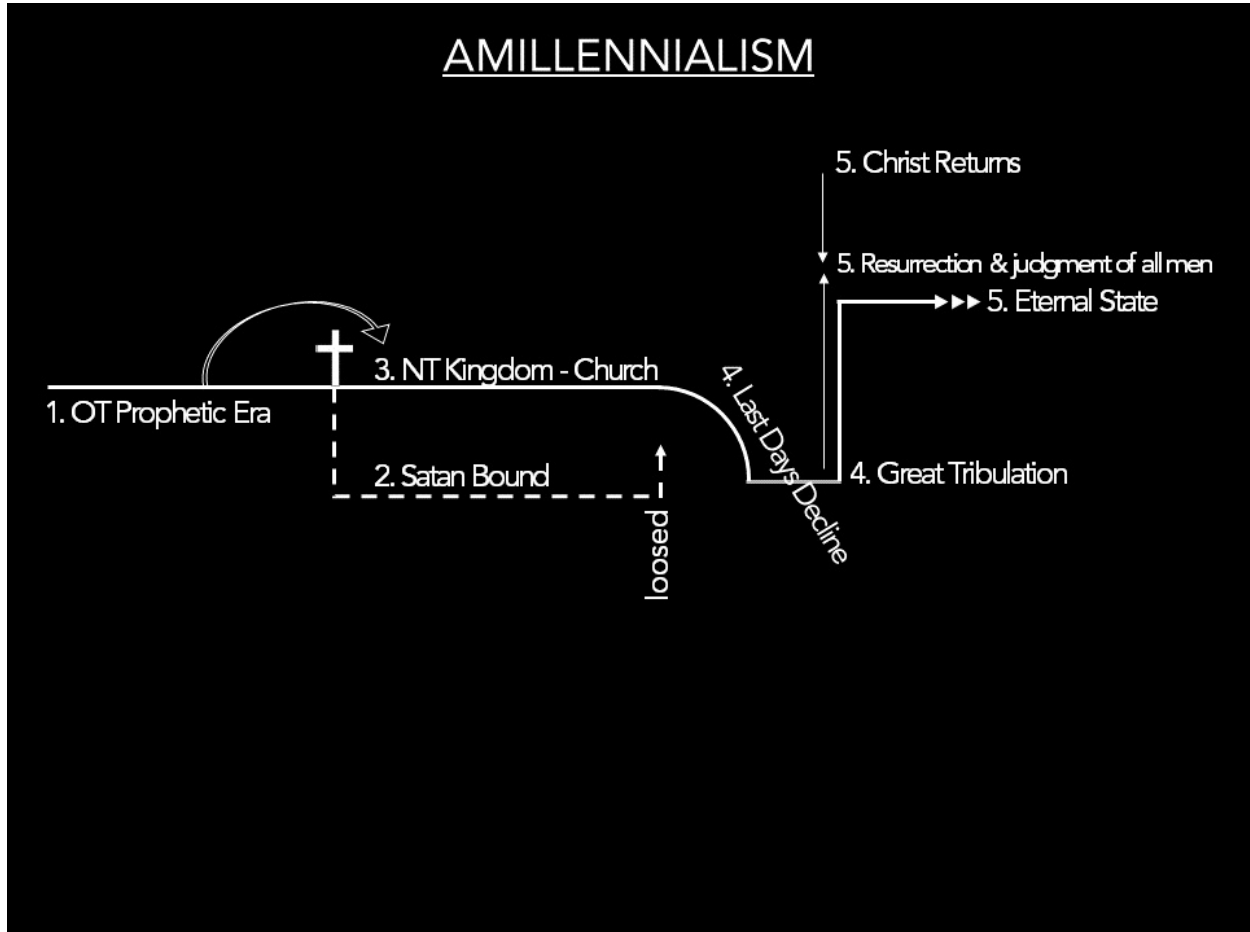
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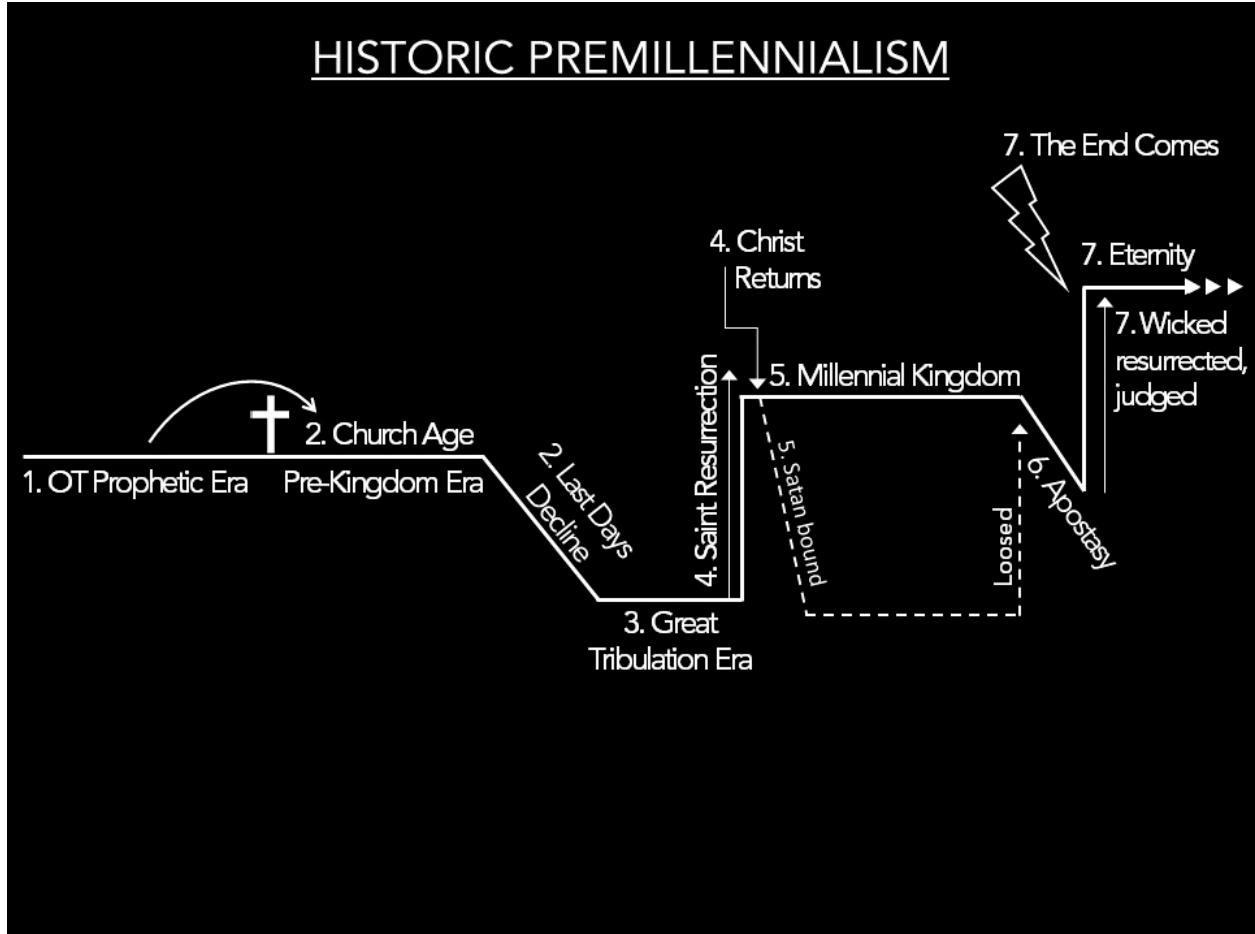
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