

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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Our Lutheran Augsburg Confession, **Article XVII, Of Christ's Return to Judgment**, states:

"Also they teach that *at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment*, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and devils He will condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils.

They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed."

My friends, the same "Jewish opinions" are being spread to this very day by numerous professed Christians and their churches which insist that American civil government must support the state of Israel with millions of tax dollars and military aid in order to make ready for Jesus Christ's visible return, since they believe He will set-up a kingdom in this world and bring temporal peace and prosperity to all Christians for 1,000 years before Judgment Day. Thus, the questions that will be addressed in this month's Topical Bulletin are: ***What does the Holy Bible teach concerning Christ's second coming? Are we to expect a millennial kingdom of good-times on earth prior to Judgment Day?***

Before looking at what the Holy Scriptures actually teach about Christ's second coming, it will be beneficial to have a more detailed basic overview of what millennialists generally hold since many churches have adopted such beliefs. The following information is taken from the Popular Commentary of the Holy Bible, by Paul E. Kretzmann, New Testament, volume 2, page 650, printed by Concordia Publishing House, (additional clarifications/comments in brackets "[]" mine, m.e.l.):

"Chiliasm, or Millennialism, is that peculiar doctrine which expects an era of temporal bliss on earth, with an earthly kingdom for all believers, Christ being the King, while Satan and all forces of evil are removed from the earth for the time being. All this is supposed to take place before the Day of Judgment and to last for one thousand years according to human reckoning, hence the name Millennialism [from the Latin "mille" thousand, and "annus" year], or Chiliasm [from the Latin "chiliad" meaning 1,000 years], ...spoken of in this chapter [Revelation 20].

The doctrines of Chiliasm have been held by certain enthusiasts [fanatics who generally reject the fact that God works to convert people only through the means of grace – His Word and Sacraments – and instead hold that the Holy Ghost works without means and supplies new revelations directly] almost since the founding of the Church, and there are almost as many different forms of Chiliasm as there are exponents of the theories. For our purposes, however, it will suffice to divide the Chiliasts into two divisions. To the first group belong those Chiliasts that hold the extreme views. They do not believe that the Pope is the Antichrist, but hold that the coming of Antichrist is yet to be expected [usually in some powerful political and religious ruler]. At the end of the time which is allotted to Antichrist, these enthusiasts believe that Christ will come visibly and in glory with all the heavenly hosts, judge Antichrist and his false prophet, and condemn them to the torments of hell. At the same time, so they say, Satan will be taken and bound for a thousand years, to be kept absolutely under lock and key until his release. Thrones will also be placed on earth for the resurrected apostles, who will then pronounce judgment

and decide which of the believers may arise in the first physical resurrection; and those that are found worthy will be raised from the dead and receive spiritual bodies, while the other dead will be obliged to remain in their graves. The believers will then, as priests of God, reign in the world and cause all the people of the earth to acknowledge Christ as Lord. Sin will have lost its power. And the center of this wonderful kingdom will be the land of Canaan with the rebuilt city of Jerusalem, where Christ will reign as visible King. But after a thousand years, so the Chiliasts dream, Satan will be loosed from his prison to summon all the heathen that are still unconverted to fight against Jerusalem. And then, when the danger is at its greatest height, Christ, who meanwhile had returned to heaven, will come hack for the final Judgment. That is the dream of the Chiliasts. [All premillennialists generally hold to such a dream]

Other Millennialists hold modified views along the same lines, not insisting quite so strongly on the material side of the kingdom nor on the physical presence of Christ. They merely dream of a time when the Christian Church and the Christian religion will dominate the world, when the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments will be the laws of the world [with all civil authority bound by those laws], when all men will bow under the Cross of Christ [while other religions will be stifled or fade away or be blended into Christianity], when courts of arbitration will render wars obsolete, and when everything will be peace and harmony." [All postmillennialists generally hold to such a dream]

Bearing the above dreams of the millenialists in mind, we will now consider: ***What does the Holy Bible teach concerning Christ's second coming? Are we to expect a millenial kingdom of good-times on earth prior to Judgment Day?***

Jesus Christ once said to His followers: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."
(John 16:33 KJV)

Comment: Jesus' early followers were to expect tribulation in this world, NOT peaceful coexistence and good-times with earthly joy; rather, only joy of heart in knowing Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:12-13 KJV)

Comment: ALL Christians of all times are to expect tribulation and persecution while living in this world, NOT peaceful coexistence and good-times with earthly joy; rather, only joy of heart in knowing Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Note that things in this world will only grow worse as the end approaches; things will NOT grow better.

Jesus says: "The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Father's, and of the holy angels." (Matthew 10:24-25; Luke 9:23-26 KJV)

Comment: Jesus was mistreated during His visible sojourn in this world and called devil-possessed; so, Jesus' followers – true Christians – are not to expect better treatment during their lifetime in this world. Life in this world is a time under the cross for all true Christians each and every day: ease and good-times are NOT the case nor will such be the case in this world. Christians must cling unashamedly in faith to Christ and His true Holy Word throughout their entire life of persecution in this world, for it is written: "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22 KJV)

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Hebrews 9:27-28 KJV)

Comment: Note well that Christ is visibly coming to earth but ONE MORE TIME! The first time Jesus Christ came to earth in humility to pay for the sins of the whole world with His holy and precious blood that He shed while nailed to the accursed tree of the cross. The second and final time Jesus Christ comes to earth will be in glory to judge the living and the dead, and to usher all believers into eternal salvation according to body and soul, for Holy Writ plainly states: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (Revelation 1:7; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 KJV) Observe that what awaits all true believers is NOT just 1,000 years of good-times on earth; but rather, eternal salvation as they shall forever be with the Lord in the mansions of heaven! Fellow Christians, that's our glorious future!

"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:26-29 KJV)

Comment: Note that the foregoing Scripture passage makes it crystal clear that ALL dead bodies will be raised back to life at the second coming of Jesus Christ, and at that time ALL will be judged and will be sentenced to heaven or hell— no half-way house of purgatory, no 1,000 years of good-times on earth with extra opportunities to repent. It is as the following Bible passage clearly reports: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats

on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matthew 25:31-46 KJV)

Comment: Note again that people will go to one of two places, heaven or hell; life eternal or everlasting punishment. Those with a living faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord – a faith that works by love – will enter into life eternal; those without a living faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord will go way into everlasting punishment, where there are no more chances to repent since hell is the place “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:44 KJV)

The millennialists misinterpret and misapply many Scripture passages in the interest of bolstering their dream, particularly Revelation chapter 20. They fail to realize that Revelation is a prophetic book rich in symbolic imagery, and that clearer passages – such as those we’ve looked at thus far – supply clarity which provides for sound doctrinal conclusions. An entire topical bulletin or more would be required to fully consider Revelation 20 in detail. For the purposes of this topical bulletin and the questions being answered herein we will briefly consider some pertinent points to be observed regarding the first eight verses of Revelation chapter 20, where we read:

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom *is* as the sand of the sea.” (Revelation 20:1-8 KJV)

Comment: There is only one Angel – one Messenger, “the messenger of the covenant” (Malachi 3:1), the uncreated-Angel – that could and has bound Satan, and that is Jesus Christ who declared in Matthew 12:28-29, “if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.” Jesus Christ is infinitely stronger than Satan and has already bound him, thereby restricting Satan as if putting him on a leash like a dog, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself [that is, Jesus] likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrews 2:14-15 KJV) Thus, Satan has been bound and is limited by Christ as to what he can and cannot do; Satan’s destruction is as good as done since Jesus has completed His mission of mercy, our redemption; hence, Satan – the devil – will ultimately be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10 KJV)

Comment: The 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 refer to the entire New Testament era, a definite set period of time known to God which is not to be reckoned according to our calendars, for “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8 KJV)

Comment: Observe also that in Revelation 20 it is stated that souls of beheaded martyrs lived and reigned with Christ for 1,000 years— that’s souls which are in heaven, not men ruling on earth! Thus, the first resurrection refers to the spiritual resurrection by which folks become children of God by faith wrought by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, and that spiritual new life culminates with the Christians’ soul entering the bliss of heaven at the time of temporal death— such is the first resurrection granted by Jesus Christ our Lord as He states in John 5:24-25, where we read: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.” Accordingly, the second death, which is never-ending death in hell according to soul and body, has no power over the believers in Christ, for it is written: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16 KJV)

Comment: The loosening of Satan out of his prison refers to the time just before Jesus’ second coming in glory to judge the quick and the dead, for sin and rebellion against Christ and His Word will be rampant and will climax, which is why Jesus says in Luke 18:8, “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”

*Hence, as Scripture interprets Scripture it is quite evident that we are NOT to expect a millennial kingdom of good-times on earth. Rather, “as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” (Luke 17:26-30 KJV)*

Comment: Jesus Christ will return in glory on the great Last Day, Judgment Day, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (2 Peter 3:10-14; Matthew 13:49-50 KJV)

Concluding comments: Don't be misled by mistaken notions concerning current events, such as America opening its embassy in Jerusalem and officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, for false prophets are proclaiming that event is "proof" that Jesus will soon rule the world from Jerusalem for a thousand years. Rather, let us heed God's Word, which declares: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." (1 Thessalonians 5:2-10 KJV)

Let us therefore daily and sincerely repent of our sins, and let us cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith, for "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 KJV) Let us always be ready for Jesus' glorious return when He shall judge the quick and the dead, for then all believers with their risen, perfected, glorified bodies will dwell with the Lord forever in paradise.

m.e.l.