

What the Rabbis Said about the Millennium

Edward E. Stevens (2003). Rabbis generally agreed there were three basic eras of God's redemptive work: (1) This World (or age), (2) The Days of the Messiah, and (3) The World (or age) To Come. They did not agree on how long "this world" and "the days of the Messiah" would last, but they all seemed to agree that "the world to come" would last forever. Most rabbis felt that "the days of the Messiah" would either be the Last Days of "this world," or an intermediate period of time between "this age" and the "age to come." There were different opinions about what the Days of the Messiah would be like, and how much good would actually be experienced in those days, versus how much would be reserved for the World to Come. The following quotes from rabbinical sources show that there were some pre-Christian rabbis who taught the idea of a transition period of forty years, and that this transition period was also labeled as a "millennium" or "a thousand years." Therefore, the preterist idea of a forty-year "millennium" has to be considered a possible, if not the probable interpretation of the Rev. 20 millennium text. Here's what several Jewish and Christian scholars have to say about it:

Abraham Cohen (1949). Many Rabbis believed that the period of the Messiah was to be only a transitional stage between this world and the World to Come, and opinions differed on its duration. "How long will the days of the Messiah last?"

R. Akiba [c. 120-140 AD] said, **"Forty years, as long as the Israelites were in the wilderness."**

R. Eliezer (b. Jos) said, "A hundred years." R. Berechya said in the name of R. Dosa, "Six hundred years." R. Judah the Prince said, "Four hundred years, as long as the Israelites were in Egypt." R. Eliezer (b. Hyrcanus) [c. 80-120 AD] said, **"A thousand years."** R. Abbahu said, "Seven thousand years." And the Rabbis generally declared, "Two thousand years." (Tanchuma Ekeb, sect. 7)

Other versions read: R. Eliezer [c. 80-120 AD] said, **"The days of the Messiah will be forty years."** R. Eleazar b. Azariah said, Seventy years. R. Judah the Prince said, Three generations. (Sanh. 99a) R. Eliezer said, **The days of the Messiah will be forty years.** R. Dosa said, Four hundred years. R. Judah the Prince said, Three hundred and sixty-five years. R. Abimi b. Abbahu said, Seven thousand years. R. Judah said in the name of Rab, As long as the world has already lasted. R. Nachman b. Isaac said, As long as from the days of Noah up to the present. (Sanh. 99a) It was taught in the School of Elijah, The world will endure six thousand years — two thousand years in chaos (from Creation to the Revelation at Sinai), two thousand with Torah, and two thousand years will be the days of the Messiah (Sanh. 97a). [emphasis mine, EES, quoted from *Everyman's Talmud*, by Abraham Cohen, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1949. p. 356]

B. F. Westcott (1889). Jewish teachers distinguished a 'present age' (this age) from 'that age' (the age to come). Between 'the present age' of imperfection and conflict and trial and 'the age to come' of the perfect reign of God they placed 'the days of the Messiah,' which they sometimes reckoned in the former, sometimes in the latter, and sometimes distinct from both. They were, however, commonly agreed that the passage from one age to the other would be through a period of intense sorrow and anguish, 'the travail-pains' of the new birth (Mt. 24:8). The apostolic writers, fully conscious of the spiritual crisis through which they were passing speak of their own time as the 'last days' (Acts 2:17; James 5:3; comp. 2 Tim. 3:1); the 'last hour' (1 Jno. 2:18); the 'end of the times' (1 Peter 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3); 'the last time' (Jude 18).

Lohse, TDNT. The idea of the millennium which the divine works out here is to be understood against the backdrop of the Jewish apocalyptic traditions that he adopts and uses. In the expectation of an intermediate Messianic kingdom which shall precede the end and the coming of the reign of God, Eth. En. 91:12f; 93:1-14; Sib., 3, 652-660; 4 Esr. 7:28f; S. Bar. 29:3; 30:1-5; 40:3, two forms of eschatological hope are combined. According to the older view the Messiah will be the end-time king restoring the Davidic monarchy and raising it to new heights. In apocalypics, however, a very different concept of the future age of salvation develops. On this view God's envoy will appear from heaven, the dead will rise again at his coming, and all men must come before his judgment-seat. Later an attempt was made to fuse the older national concept with the universal eschatology by putting the reign of the Messiah-King before the end of the world and the beginning of the new aeon. The earthly Messianic age will be for a limited term and it will be followed by a last assault of the powers of chaos prior to the commencement of the future world (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IX, p. 470).

H. J. Schoeps (1966). [The traditional views concerning the length of the intermediate Messianic kingdom] fix a very short interval for the interim period, namely, forty years (R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus; Bar in Sanh. 99a; R. Aqiba: Midr. Teh. on Ps 90:15; Tanch. Ekeb 7b, Pes. Rabb. 4a). The two Tannaites, commenting on Ps 95:7, derive this time indication from the Messianically understood v. 10 ("forty years I loathed that generation") and from Deut. 8:2 by a parallelization with the forty years in the desert (*Paul*, p. 100).

Days of the Messiah will be forty years

Talmud — Mas. Sanhedrin 99a

“...It has been taught: R. Eliezer said: The **days of the Messiah** will last **forty years**, as it is written, **Forty years** long shall I take hold of **the generation**. ...Another [Baraita] taught: R. Eliezer said: The **days of the Messiah** will be **forty years**. ...R. Hiyya b. Abba said in R. Johanan's name: **All the prophets prophesied [all the good things] only in respect of the Messianic era**; but as for **the world to come** ‘the eye hath not seen, O Lord, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.’ Now, he disagrees with Samuel, who said: **This world** differs from [that of] the **days of the Messiah** only in respect of servitude to [foreign] powers.

Sixth Millennium is the time when the redemption occurs

Soncino Zohar, Bereshith, Section 1, Page 119a

“...R. Simeon discoursed on the verse: And I will remember my covenant with Jacob, etc. (Lev. 26:42). ‘...the passage speaks of the exile of Israel, intimating that the redemption of Israel will come ... in the **sixth millennium**, and ...the God of heaven will visit the daughter of Jacob with a preliminary remembrance ... and there will be a full remembrance ...the **Messiah** will appear in the land of Galilee. ...Then all the nations shall combine together against the daughter of Jacob in order to drive her from **the world**. It is of that time that it is written: “And it is a time of trouble unto Jacob, but out of it he shall be saved” (Jer. 30:7). ... the Holy One will shower on them fire and hail and meteoric stones **until they are all destroyed** ...From that time the **Messiah** will begin to declare himself, ... then “they shall **bring all your brethren** out of all the nations for an offering unto the Lord” (Is. 66:20). The children of Ishmael will at the same time rouse all the peoples of **the world to come** up to **war** against Jerusalem, ... Happy are those who will be left alive at the end of the **sixth millennium** to enter on the Sabbath [the seventh millennium].”

Elijah is forerunner (harbinger) of the Millennium

Midrash Rabbah — Exodus 40:4 — (Ex. 462-465)

...God would renew him [Elijah] in the **millennium** [of which he was to be the harbinger]”

Millennium is time before the Coming of the Lord & True Salvation

Midrash Rabbah — Exodus 32:9 — (Ex. 412)

“...BEHOLD, I SEND AN ANGEL. Wherever the angel appeared, the Shechinah appeared, ...salvation cometh to Israel wherever they cry unto Him... In the **millennium**, likewise, when he [the angel of the Lord] will reveal himself [as the herald announcing the coming of the Lord and of true salvation], salvation will come to Israel, as it says, Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall clear the way before Me (Mal. 3:1).”

First & Second Resurrections in Time of the Messiah before the Seventh Millennium

Soncino Zohar, Shemoth, Section 2, Page 10a

...But over Israel those **tribulations** will come. After that **King Messiah** shall **fight against the whole world**, aided by the Right Hand of the Holy One. ... He will begin “to take hold of the ends of the earth and shake off the wicked”. The Holy Land will be purified, and the Holy One will **raise the dead** there and they shall rise in their hosts in the land of Galilee. At the end of a further **hundred and forty-four years** the **remaining dead of Israel in other lands shall be raised**, ...and be crowned and radiate in perfection until the Sabbath of the Lord arrives to gather souls in the joy of holiness throughout this whole **seventh millennium**. Then the holy spirits of the people of Israel **at the fullness of time** will be invested with new, holy bodies, and be called “**Saints**” [*Tr. note: The above calculation of the Messianic era rests on the supposition that of the seven millenniums of the present aeon, the seventh is to be considered as the Cosmic Sabbath, the sixth as the time of the Messiah, the fifth as the last (Edomitic or Roman) exile.*]

Millennium is when Messiah builds the new temple:

Midrash Rabbah — Exodus 35:5 — (Ex. 432-434)

“...God will accept gifts from all kingdoms in **the time to come** ... in the construction of the tabernacle... in the **millennium** you will find that all nations will bring presents to **the King Messiah**...”

Defeat of Gog & Magog is in the Days of the Messiah

Talmud — Mas. Sanhedrin 94a

Footnote #8 – **Gog and Magog** are, in Jewish eschatology, the tribes who shall lead all nations in a tremendous attack upon Israel; their final defeat ushers in the halcyon [peaceful] **days of the Messiah**, (Ezek. XXXVIII, XXXIX). It is not clear whom the prophet had in mind, the whole passage having the mystic form of apocalyptic prediction. The present passage is remarkable in that it shows that in the opinion of its author no particular nation was intended, but any great heathen power whose **destruction** [in the **sixth millennium**], by the will of God, is to precede the [seventh] millennium.