

Views of the End Times: POST-MILLENNIALISM & AMILLENNIALISM¹

Post-millennialism

Distinctive Features and Emphases:

- This view claims that the millennium is a period of universal peace and righteousness in this world, which precedes the return of Jesus Christ to earth in judgement.
- Riddlebarger gives 5 essential characteristics:
 1. There will be a tremendous explosion in numerical growth and spiritual vitality through the preaching of the gospel and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 2. During this period Christian influences will spawn increasing peace and economic well-being
 3. Large numbers of ethnic Jews will come to faith in Christ
 4. There will be a short period of apostasy at the end of the age
 5. After this Christ will return bringing with him the resurrection and final judgment
- Debate within post-millennialism
 1. The length of the millennium: literal or figurative
 2. The starting point
 - Does it begin abruptly or gradually?
 - Is it entirely future or has it already begun to gradually emerge?
 - What events that mark the beginning of the millennial age?
- The key difference between amillennial and postmillennial Christians centers upon the starting point, character and length of the millennial age.

Theonomy

- Theonomy is a form of postmillennialism that originated with J. Marcellus Kik, and was reworked into a full ethical system known as "theonomy" or "reconstructionism" by R. J. Rushdoony.
- The church's mission: work to restore a theocracy upon the earth
- The church is the vehicle for advancing the kingdom of God
- Once theocracy is established, this victorious church would be the divine vehicle from which the ever advancing kingdom of God would bind Satan and subdue all evil in the world.
- The emphasis of this view is that it is God who exercises dominion through his church establishing His law as the law of the land.

Leading Proponents

- Postmillennialism was popular among American Evangelicals in the period of unprecedented technological growth between 1870 and 1915.
 - The traumatic events of the 20th century largely served to squash the tremendous optimism regarding the growth of technology and the related optimism about the future of man.
 - Many Reformed theologians of this period are generally considered postmillennial, including the "Old-Princetonians," Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield.
- Theologians in the postmillennial theonomic movement are, the late Greg Bahnsen, Ray Sutton and Gary North along with popular writers include Gary DeMarr and Kenneth Gentry.
- The older form of post-millennialism, as practiced by Reformed theologians such as Hodge and Warfield, has little in common in emphasis with the modern theonomic approach to eschatology
- A good work in this regard would be *The Victory of Christ's Kingdom* by Greg Bahnsen or Keith Mathiason's most recent work on Post-Millennialism.

The last word: Postmillennialism is an optimistic eschatology of the victorious grace of God in subduing evil in the world.

¹ Kim Riddlebarger, books and lectures. Most of this information can be accessed at http://www.fivesolas.com/esc_chrt.htm#chart2 and *A Case for Amillennialism*.

Amillennialism

Distinctive Features and Emphases:

- The "a" millennial (literally meaning "no" millennium) position is the eschatological view of historic Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Christianity.
 - The amillennial position is as well the position of the vast majority of Reformed and Lutheran theologians.
 - Amillennialism should be understood as "present" millennialism or "realized" millennialism, since Reformed eschatology argues for a real, present, though "invisible" non-spatial millennium.
- Amillennialists argue that the promises made to national Israel, David and Abraham, in the OT are fulfilled by Christ and the Church during this period of time between the two advents of our Lord, which is the millennium.
 - The "thousand years" are symbolic of the entire time between the first and second coming of Christ.
 - At the first advent Satan was bound by Christ's victory over him in his cross and resurrection.
 - The effects of this victory continue because of the presence of the kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel.
 - Through the spread of the gospel Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations
 - Christ is presently reigning in heaven during the entire period between the first and second coming
 - At the end of the age Satan is released, a great apostasy will break out followed by the return of Christ, the general resurrection, final judgment and the New Heavens and New Earth.

Leading proponents

- Amillennialism has always been the majority position of the Christian family.
 - It was first articulated by St. Augustine, and has been given a distinctive Reformed emphasis through the work of Geerhardus Vos (the "Biblical-Theological" approach).
 - As the "dispensational" movement captured the hearts and minds of conservative American Evangelicals, amillennialism was equated with "liberalism" or Roman Catholicism.
 - The misguided accusation that Amillennialists interpret prophecy "spiritually" or "not-literally" and thus do not repeat the Bible as the word of God has led to the rejection of amillennialism by many.
 - In addition, amillennialism suffered greatly from the failure of Reformed and Lutheran writers to defend the position against the likes of Dave Hunt, Chuck Missler and Hal Lindsey, who has labeled the position as "demonic and heretical," and the root of modern anti-semitism.
- Leading contemporary theologians include J. I. Packer, Mike Horton, Anthony Hoekema, Kim Riddlebarger, and Sam Storms.
- In addition, all of the Reformers, as well as the Reformed and Lutheran confessional traditions, as a whole, have been amillennial.
- It is important to note that just because there is historical precedent doesn't mean this position is correct, but it simply means that we can't dismiss it as a "new" development.