

Eschatology, Session 8: Amillennialism & Postmillennialism; 8/12/2025

-Preview of study and calendar.

Session 8: Millennial Issues Part 2; 8/13/25

- Amillennial: now/not yet
- Postmillennial: hope of the nations

Session 9: Final Things; 8/20/25

- The Resurrection of the Dead
- The Great White Throne Judgement
- The Judgement Seat of Christ
- The New Heavens and New Earth

Review:

What are the motive and hermeneutics behind premillennialism?

Is premill optimistic or pessimistic?

What does premill do with church history?

Amillennialism is a theological view within Christian eschatology that interprets the "thousand years" mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6 as a **symbolic period** representing the current church age, rather than a literal future 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. The term comes from Latin "mille" (thousand) and "annus" (year), with the prefix "a-" indicating "no" or "not," meaning amillennialists do not believe in a literal millennial kingdom.

Key Points of Amillennialism:

1. Symbolic Millennium: The "thousand years" is understood as the **present** period between Christ's first coming (His incarnation, death, and resurrection) and His second coming. It's **not** a literal 1,000 years but a figurative representation of the entire church age.
2. Christ's Reign Now: Amillennialists believe Christ is **currently** reigning spiritually in heaven and in the hearts of believers, binding Satan's power (Revelation 20:2) to limit his influence over the spread of the gospel.
3. Satan's Binding: The binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is seen as partial, preventing him from deceiving the nations to the extent that the gospel cannot spread. This does not mean Satan is powerless, but his influence is **restrained** during this age.

4. **Single** Climactic Return: Amillennialism holds that Christ's second coming will be a single event at the end of the age, followed immediately by the final judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of the new heaven and new earth. There is no intervening earthly millennial kingdom.
5. No Literal Earthly Kingdom: Unlike premillennialism (which expects a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth) or postmillennialism (which expects a golden age of Christian dominance before Christ's return), amillennialism **denies** a distinct future earthly reign, emphasizing the eternal state after the second coming.

Theological Implications:

- Focus on the **Present**: Amillennialists emphasize the church's role in spreading the gospel and living out Christ's kingdom now, rather than waiting for a future political or physical reign.
- Continuity of Scripture: This view often sees the Old Testament promises to Israel (e.g., a restored kingdom) as fulfilled spiritually in the church, which is considered the "new Israel."
- Eschatological **Simplicity**: Amillennialism avoids complex timelines of end-time events, focusing on a straightforward sequence: the current age, Christ's return, final judgment, and eternity.

Historical Context:

- Amillennialism has roots in early church fathers like Augustine of Hippo, who shaped much of its framework in his work *City of God*. It became a **dominant** view in Roman Catholicism and many Protestant traditions, including Reformed, Lutheran, and some Anglican churches.
- It contrasts with premillennialism (common in evangelical and dispensationalist circles) and postmillennialism (held by some Reformed and Puritan groups).

Biblical Basis:

- Revelation 20:1-6: Interpreted symbolically, with the "thousand years" as the church age.
- John 5:28-29: Suggests a **single** resurrection and judgment for all at Christ's return.
- 2 Peter 3:10-13: Describes the sudden coming of the new heaven and new earth, with **no mention** of an intervening millennium.
- Ephesians 1:20-22: Christ's current **reign** at God's right hand.

Strengths and Criticisms:

- Strengths: Provides a simpler eschatological framework, avoids speculative timelines, and emphasizes **spiritual** realities over physical or political expectations.
- Criticisms: Critics (especially premillennialists) argue it overly spiritualizes Revelation 20 and Old Testament prophecies, potentially neglecting a literal fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

Historical Figures:

1. **Augustine of Hippo (354–430):** (Contested by Gentry)

- **Contribution:** Often considered the father of amillennialism, Augustine articulated it in *City of God* (Book 20). He interpreted the millennium as the present church age, with Christ reigning spiritually and Satan bound to limit his deception.
- **Impact:** His views became foundational for Roman Catholic and later Protestant eschatology, shaping Western Christianity's understanding of Revelation 20.

2. Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339) (Contested by Gentry)

- **Contribution:** Early church historian who leaned toward a non-literal interpretation of the millennium, emphasizing Christ's spiritual reign. His writings (*Ecclesiastical History*) reflect a proto-amillennial perspective.
- **Impact:** Influenced early Christian thought, aligning with a symbolic reading of apocalyptic texts.

3. Jerome (347–420):

- **Contribution:** Translator of the Latin Vulgate, Jerome supported a spiritual interpretation of the millennium, aligning with Augustine's views.
- **Impact:** His work reinforced amillennialism in the early church's biblical scholarship.

Reformation and Post-Reformation Figures:

4. John Calvin (1509–1564): (Contested by Gentry)

- **Contribution:** The Reformed theologian implicitly supported amillennialism by rejecting chiliasm (literal millennialism) and emphasizing Christ's current spiritual reign. His commentaries (e.g., on Revelation) avoid a literal 1,000-year kingdom.
- **Impact:** Shaped Reformed theology's eschatological framework, which often leaned amillennial.

5. Martin Luther (1483–1546):

- **Contribution:** While less explicit than Calvin, Luther's focus on the present kingdom of God and rejection of speculative end-time scenarios aligned with amillennialism.
- **Impact:** Influenced Lutheran theology, which often adopted amillennial views.

Modern Theologians:

6. Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949):

- **Contribution:** Dutch-American Reformed theologian who developed biblical theology and defended amillennialism in works like *The Pauline Eschatology*. He emphasized the symbolic nature of Revelation 20 and the present reign of Christ.
- **Impact:** Influential in Reformed seminaries, particularly Westminster Theological Seminary.

7. **Louis Berkhof (1873–1957):**

- **Contribution:** Reformed systematic theologian whose *Systematic Theology* clearly articulates amillennialism, presenting the millennium as the church age and Christ's return as a single climactic event.
- **Impact:** His work remains a standard in Reformed theology education.

8. **Herman Bavinck (1854–1921):**

- **Contribution:** Dutch Reformed theologian who, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, supported amillennialism, viewing the millennium as the spiritual reign of Christ through the church.
- **Impact:** Shaped Dutch Reformed theology and its eschatological perspective.

9. **G.K. Beale (1949–):**

- **Contribution:** Contemporary New Testament scholar and amillennialist, known for his commentary on Revelation (*The Book of Revelation*, 1999), which interprets the millennium symbolically as the church age.
- **Impact:** Influential in evangelical and Reformed circles for rigorous biblical exegesis.

Contemporary Figures:

10. **Kim Riddlebarger (1954–):**

- **Contribution:** Pastor and author of *A Case for Amillennialism* (2003), a key modern defense of the view. He argues for a symbolic millennium and a single return of Christ.
- **Impact:** Popularized amillennialism among laypeople and pastors in Reformed traditions.

11. **Cornelis P. Venema:**

- **Contribution:** Theologian and author of *The Promise of the Future*, which defends amillennialism, emphasizing the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom and the symbolic interpretation of Revelation.
- **Impact:** Influential in Reformed seminaries and churches.

12. **Anthony A. Hoekema (1913–1988):**

- **Contribution:** Reformed theologian whose book *The Bible and the Future* (1979) provides a comprehensive amillennial framework, addressing eschatological texts and themes.
- **Impact:** Widely read in evangelical and Reformed circles for its clarity and biblical grounding.

Postmillennialism is a theological view within Christian eschatology that interprets the "thousand years" of Revelation 20:1-6 as a future period of Christian **dominance** and spiritual prosperity on earth before Christ's second coming. The prefix "post-" indicates that Christ will return *after* this millennial age. It holds that the gospel will gradually

transform the world, leading to a "golden age" of righteousness, peace, and societal flourishing, driven by the church's influence. **Christ will put His enemies under His feet "1Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Ps 8:6"**

Key Points of Postmillennialism:

1. **Optimistic** View of History: Postmillennialists believe the gospel will progressively spread, leading to a significant Christianization of society. This includes moral, cultural, and spiritual improvement, with many nations embracing Christian values.
2. Symbolic or Long Millennium: The "thousand years" is often seen as a long, indefinite period (not necessarily a literal 1,000 years) during which the church's influence grows, and Satan's power is restrained (Revelation 20:2-3).
3. Christ's Reign Through the Church: Christ reigns spiritually through His church during this period, with the Holy Spirit empowering believers to **advance** God's kingdom. This is not a physical reign of Christ on earth but a triumph of Christian principles.
4. Second Coming After the Millennium: Christ returns at the end of this golden age to judge the living and the dead, ushering in the final resurrection and the new heaven and new earth.
5. Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecies: Postmillennialists often see Old Testament **promises** of a restored Israel or global blessing (e.g., Isaiah 11:9, Psalm 22:27) as fulfilled through the church's global influence during the millennium.

Theological Implications:

- Active Role of the Church: Postmillennialism emphasizes the church's responsibility to evangelize, disciple nations, and influence culture, expecting tangible **success** in these efforts.
- **Hopeful** Eschatology: It fosters an optimistic outlook, anticipating progress and victory for the gospel, in contrast to the more pessimistic views of decline in some other eschatologies.
- Spiritual and Cultural **Transformation**: The focus is on transforming society through preaching, teaching, and living out Christian values, potentially affecting laws, education, and institutions.

Historical Context:

- Postmillennialism was prominent during periods of evangelical optimism, such as the Puritan era and the 18th-19th century missionary movements.
- It has been less common in the 20th and 21st centuries, overshadowed by premillennialism (especially dispensationalism) and amillennialism, but it retains influence in some Reformed and Reconstructionist circles.
- It contrasts with amillennialism (which sees the millennium as the current church age with no distinct golden age) and premillennialism (which expects Christ's return *before* a literal 1,000-year earthly reign).

Biblical Basis:

- Revelation 20:1-6: The binding of Satan and the reign of saints are seen as a future period of gospel **triumph**.
- Matthew 28:18-20: The Great Commission implies the discipling of **nations**, suggesting global Christian influence.
- Isaiah 2:2-4, 11:9: Prophecies of universal peace and knowledge of God are seen as fulfilled in the millennial age.
- Psalm 22:27, 72:8-11: God's **dominion** extends over all nations, pointing to a time of widespread worship.

Strengths and Criticisms:

- Strengths: Encourages active Christian **engagement** with culture, optimism about the gospel's power, and a hopeful view of God's plan for history.
- Criticisms: Critics argue it may **underestimate** the persistence of sin and evil (e.g., Matthew 24:12), overinterpret symbolic texts literally, or place too much confidence in human efforts to usher in the kingdom. Premillennialists, in particular, challenge its view of a future earthly reign without Christ's physical presence.

Historical Figures:

1. Jonathan **Edwards** (1703–1758):

- **Contribution:** American Puritan theologian and revivalist, often called the "father of modern postmillennialism." In works like *A History of the Work of Redemption*, he envisioned a future era of widespread gospel success and societal renewal before Christ's return.
- **Impact:** His optimistic eschatology fueled the Great Awakening and missionary zeal, influencing evangelical postmillennialism.

2. John Owen (1616–1683):

- **Contribution:** English Puritan theologian who, in sermons and writings like *The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth*, expressed hope for a future period of Christian dominance, interpreting biblical prophecies as pointing to global gospel triumph.
- **Impact:** Influenced Puritan and Reformed optimism about the church's role in history.

3. Isaac Watts (1674–1748):

- **Contribution:** English hymn-writer and theologian who embraced postmillennial views, expecting a future age of spiritual prosperity. His hymns, like "Jesus Shall Reign," reflect this hope for Christ's kingdom expanding globally.
- **Impact:** Popularized postmillennialism through accessible hymns and writings.

4. Charles **Hodge** (1797–1878):

- **Contribution:** American Presbyterian theologian at Princeton Seminary whose *Systematic Theology* leaned toward postmillennialism, anticipating a gradual Christianization of society through the gospel's spread.
- **Impact:** Shaped 19th-century American Reformed theology, particularly in Presbyterian circles.

5. **B.B. Warfield (1851–1921):**

- **Contribution:** American Reformed theologian at Princeton who defended postmillennialism in essays like “The Gospel and the Second Coming,” viewing the millennium as a future era of Christian influence before Christ's return.
- **Impact:** Influential in conservative Presbyterian theology, bridging 19th- and 20th-century postmillennial thought.

6. Gentry also includes Origen, Athanasius, Eusebius and many Puritans who were influential for the development of the Westminster Standards.

Modern and Contemporary Figures:

6. **Rousas John Rushdoony (1916–2001):**

- **Contribution:** Founder of Christian Reconstructionism and author of *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. He advocated a theonomic postmillennialism, expecting society to be transformed by biblical law, leading to a Christian-dominated world before Christ's return.
- **Impact:** Influenced the modern Christian Reconstructionist movement and homeschooling communities, though his theonomic views are controversial.

7. **Gary North (1942–2022):**

- **Contribution:** Christian Reconstructionist and economist who wrote extensively on postmillennialism, including *Dominion and Common Grace*. He emphasized cultural and economic transformation through Christian principles.
- **Impact:** Popularized postmillennialism in Reconstructionist circles, advocating for practical applications of biblical law.

8. **Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. (1950–):**

- **Contribution:** Reformed theologian and author of *He Shall Have Dominion* (1992), a key modern defense of postmillennialism. He argues for a gradual gospel triumph based on biblical prophecies like Matthew 28:18-20.
- **Impact:** Influential in contemporary Reformed and Reconstructionist circles, offering scholarly defenses of postmillennialism.

9. **Douglas Wilson (1953–):**

- **Contribution:** Pastor, author, and leader in the Classical Christian education movement. His books, like *Heaven Misplaced*, advocate postmillennialism, emphasizing cultural engagement and optimism about the gospel's global impact.

- **Impact:** Prominent in Reformed and evangelical circles, particularly through his work with the Association of Classical Christian Schools.
10. **Greg L. Bahnsen (1948–1995):**
- **Contribution:** Theologian and apologist who, in works like *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, supported postmillennialism within a Reconstructionist framework, expecting a future Christian society governed by biblical principles.
 - **Impact:** Influenced modern theonomic postmillennialism, particularly in debates over biblical law and eschatology.
11. **R.C. Sproul**

VII. Conclusion

- John Knox’s Scottish Presbyterianism established a glorious version of Christendom yet to be matched. Herman’s [*How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It*](#), documents how Scotland went from one of the poorest nations in the world full of tribalism to the world leader in literacy, standard of living, technology and almost every measurable category. This was due to Knox’s Presbyterianism. It’s been done before. It can be done again.
- That vision was what fueled the settlement of the US as a City on a Hill.
- Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10-11; Is 45:23 “Every knee will bow.”
- 1Cor 15:24-28; Eph 1:22; Ps 8:6 “under His feet.”

Resources for Further Study

- [*Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*](#) (1999) -Overview of positions written by leading adherents.
- Kenneth Gentry, [*Postmillennialism Made Easy*](#)
- Kenneth Gentry, [*He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*](#), 2009
- Kenneth Gentry, [*Book of Revelation Made Easy*](#)
- Kenneth Gentry, [*The Divorce of Israel*](#)
- Kenneth Gentry, [*Before Jerusalem Fell*](#)
- Bruce Gore’s [Apocalypse in Space and Time](#) 63 videos.
- RC Sproul’s [Last Days According to Jesus](#) 12 videos.