

Eschatology – Postmillennial and Amillennial
Fairfield Christian Reformed Church
May 3, 2020



John Piper
Debate Moderator¹

Jim Hamilton
Premillennial

Doug Wilson
Postmillennial

Sam Storms
Amillennial

The Three Historically held Positions

- Premillennial → Christ returns prior to his thousand-year reign on earth
 - o Hippolytus, Lewis Chafer, John Walvoord, D. Moody, John MacArthur, Thomas Schreiner
- Postmillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs through Christ's kingdom expansion on earth
 - o Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Hodge, B Warfield, NT Wright
- Amillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs in heaven, not on earth
 - o Augustine, John Calvin, Anthony Hoekema, Louis Berkhof, GC Berkhouwer

Case Study²

The book had all the makings of a bestseller. Adventure, drama, action, mystery, even a touch of horror; it was all there. Paul finished reading the final few pages, put the book down, and reflected on the author's dramatized account of the events recorded in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. The author had a gift for bringing the biblical ideas to life.

Kelly, a friend from church, had recommended the book to Paul. She had told him the book was not only an excellent read—it had changed her life. With a new understanding of the way in which the end-times would unravel, Kelly again felt excited to be a Christian. She had explained to him how the book had enabled her to figure out the mysterious symbolism of Revelation. With this understanding, she was now able to see that the end-times scenario was unfolding right before her eyes.

Paul had to admit the book had held his attention from cover to cover. And he too felt a new urgency regarding the end-times. He was especially intrigued by the author's view that Christ would soon come and take Christians out of the world, wage war against his enemies, and then embark on a thousand-year period, which he called the millennium—the period when Christ and his church would rule the world.

Just then, the phone rang. It was Bob, a close friend of Paul's and a member of his Bible study group. The timing was perfect. Bob had majored in biblical studies in college and loved to discuss theological subjects. Paul explained the basic story line of the book and then asked Bob what he thought.

¹ "An Evening in Eschatology." Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis, MN, Sept. 27, 2009.

² Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

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Bob hesitated before finally saying, “Actually Paul, I’ve looked through that book. I’ll agree that it seems to be an exciting book. But to be honest, I think the author’s interpretation of the book of Revelation is way off base, and I’m worried about its impact on people. The author treats the book of Revelation as though it is a snapshot of the future when in fact it is intended to be symbolic. The apostle John wasn’t writing about events that were going to take place in the lives of the people he was writing to. He tells us this at the very beginning of the book. I’m afraid Christians will read this book and waste time trying to interpret current events though this book the same way some people use horoscopes.”

After their conversation, Paul was left with many questions. How should Christians interpret the book of Revelation? Literally or symbolically? Does it speak about events in the first century or about events in the twenty-first century? And what about this idea of the millennium? Will Christ return soon and set up a thousand-year reign on the earth?

Summary of the Postmillennial Position

Doug Wilson: “Postmillennialism is the idea that the Gospel is going to grow and flourish and take over the whole earth; basically the great commission will be successful; all the nations discipled, baptized, taught obedience... on earth in history; the world will be Christianized. Then Jesus will come. All enemies will be subdued, brought under his feet... Christ’s enemies are made a footstool progressively throughout all history, and then he will come and judge the last enemy personally, death. At the conclusion of the Christian eon... Christ will come again and destroy death; the dead will be raised and we are ushered into the eternal state... Satan is bound now with regards to deceiving the nations.”

Discussion Questions, part one

- How does this explain the growing pervasive wickedness of our present world?
- Does this view try to make Rev. 20 fit into everything outside of Rev. 20 rather than harmonize it with the rest?
- Doug Wilson said a couple of times that we must interpret the unclear passages in light of the clear passages. But isn’t Rev. 20 a straight-forward passage?

Summary of the Amillennial Position

Sam Storms: “The millennium is literal, real, vibrant, tangible, but it’s in heaven” where those who died in Christ are now. “Those are the saints described in Rev. 20:4-6 who are reigning with Christ in the intermediate state spanning the duration of the Church age between the two comings of Jesus—that constitutes the millennial reign.”

All amillennialists are postmillennialists with the primary distinction being the reign is in heaven, not on earth. This means the people of God on earth will continue to suffer; however, both the suffering of God’s people and the expansion of the Gospel will reach its culmination in the second coming of Christ, when death dies (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

Discussion Question, part two

- One of this position’s most prominent arguments is rooted in its refutation of the other two positions. Is that enough?
- What danger is there to over-spiritualizing Scripture?