

Amillennialism

- A. Historical development of the view
 1. By the 5th C, amillennialism replaced historic premillennialism as the majority view and remained so for more than a millennium.
 2. This came about because of the emphasis by Clement and Origen of Alexandria on the spiritual rather than literal interpretation of prophecy. Tyconius is the first record we have of an amillennial view, but it is the argument of Augustine in his work *The City of God* that secures this position as the dominant view.
 3. Moreover, though the Protestant reformers challenged the whole of Catholicism and Martin Luther went so far as to call the Pope the Antichrist, they did not challenge the prevailing amillennial eschatology
 4. It has remained a prominent, though likely not the majority view, to the present.
- B. Details of view
 1. No millennium in the sense of other views, but rather it symbolically represents the church age (now).
 2. Satan was bound through Christ's death and resurrection, especially in the sense that he is unable to hold the Gentiles in ignorance or gather a worldwide coalition against the church
 3. Rev 20:1-2—binding of Satan occurred during Jesus' earthly ministry. He spoke of binding the strong man in order that he may plunder his house (Matt 12:29) and said that the spirit of God was at that time present in power to triumph over demonic forces. Jesus also speaks of the breaking of Satan's power in Luke 10:18 (I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven). Verse 3 provides the context—the binding is so that Satan should deceive the nations no more, and this binding is evidenced by the rapid spread of the gospel to gentiles
 4. Rev 20:4—John sees saints in heaven, not on earth. The martyrs, called souls, are reigning in heaven with Christ for a thousand years, that is, the church age.
 5. Rev 20:5—first resurrection refers to going to heaven to be with the Lord; rest of the dead did not come until after 1000 years means that they do not come into God's presence for judgment until the end of the thousand years. In this way, come to life in both verses means come into presence of God (alternately, some see it as resurrection of Christ and believer's participation in Christ's resurrection through union with Christ)
 6. Jesus is not physically present, but the gospel now advances by the Spirit's power through the church's witness, but always amid opposition and suffering; Jesus' reign is the heavenly reign he spoke of in Matt 28:18 (all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me)
 7. 1000 years vision is meant to prepare the church for a long era of witness and suffering between the binding and destruction of Satan
 8. Like postmillennialism, Christ will return after the epoch symbolized as 1000 years, and OT prophecies and Revelation's visions are ordinarily to be understood as symbolizing the blessings and trials of the NT church
 9. After this church age, Christ will come and banish sin and the curse and usher in new heavens and new earth (Rev 21; 2 Pet 3:13)

10. When Christ returns, both believers and unbelievers will be raised and stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) but for believers it will determine reward in heaven and for unbelievers it is eternal condemnation
 11. View Rev 19:17-21 and 20:9-10 as complementary perspectives on the same last battle at the end of 1000 years
 12. Simplest view in that all end time events happen at once, immediately after Christ's return
- C. Assessment (strengths/weaknesses)
1. Strengths:
 - a. Only one passage, Rev 20:1-10, speaks of a future earthly millennial reign, and that passage is obscure. It is unwise to base such a major doctrine on one passage of uncertain and widely disputed interpretation
 - b. Scripture teaches only one resurrection, when both believers and unbelievers will be raised, not two (believers at millennium and unbelievers after)
 - i. John 5:28-29
 - ii. Acts 24:15
 - iii. Dan 12:2
 - c. Answers difficult questions that premillennialism must face
 - i. How can glorified believers and sinners live on earth together. It is difficult to imagine and/or accept
 - ii. If Christ comes in glory to reign on the earth, then how could people still persist in sin?
 - iii. No convincing purpose for a millennium. Why delay eternal state?
 - d. Either the majority view or at least a prominent one in the past 1650 years of church history
 2. Proposed Weaknesses
 - a. Problems with view of Rev 20
 - i. Binding of Satan here is much more extensive than in Matt 12 and Luke 10; here it is said that he is buried in bottomless pit and it is sealed over him; seems to suggest a total removal of influence from the earth
 - ii. Deceiving the nations no more—though there is less deception than there was before Christ, we will must deal with Rev 12:9 that says Satan is the one who deceives the whole world and Rev 18:23 where Babylon deceived all the nations before its judgment comes
 - iii. Viewing souls as in heaven is problematic because the souls “come to life,” which could refer to the resurrection, and the angel is said to be coming down from heaven in v. 1, suggesting the scene is on earth
 - iv. The word resurrection (*anastasis*) always elsewhere refers to a bodily resurrection, but amillennialism requires a spiritual sense
 - v. Vv. 5-6 speak of the first resurrection, which naturally implies a second. The passages amillennialists use to speak of only one resurrection do not exclude two

resurrections, they simply do not specify if there is one or more. Moreover, John 5 speaks of resurrection to life and resurrection to judgment, which could be viewed as a hint at two resurrections.

- b. Premillennialism has plausible (and perhaps convincing) responses to amillennial challenges.
 - i. The Bible only needs to say something once in order to be true and authoritative. That it is unclear, premillennialists don't see it as unclear at all, because they take a more literal approach. OT speaks of period far greater than the present age but still falls short of eternal state (Psa 72:8-14; Isa 11:2-9; Isa 65:20; Zech 14:6-21; 1 Cor 15:24; Rev 2:27; Rev 12:5; Rev 19:15)
 - ii. Glorified believers and sinners living together may seem weird, but Jesus lived for 40 days on earth with a glorified body, so there is a precedent for it.
 - iii. Though it would seem difficult for there to be rebellion against Jesus while he reigns on earth, we see open rebellion in the face of the Son by Satan, Judas, and the Pharisees who see Jesus' miracles.
 - iv. There are likely innumerable purposes for the millennium. One would be to show the "outworking of God's good purposes in the structure of society, especially the structures of the family and civil government" (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1121).

D. Notable supporters of this view: Augustine of Hippo, most of the major Reformation theologians, J.I. Packer, G.K. Beale