

Postmillennialism

- A. Historical development of the view
 1. This view is relatively new. Very little of this position is attested prior to the 17th C.
 2. Its roots may come with the “latter-glory” doctrine of John Owen, Thomas Brightman, and other 17th C Puritans.
 3. It was fully developed and popularized by Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest/most influential American theologian ever. This view was likely influenced by the optimistic view of the 18th C American Puritans who saw a nearly universal Christian nation
- B. Details of view
 1. Within this view are advocates of a literal 1000 year reign and a symbolic 1000 year reign
 2. Christ is in heaven for the millennium, not on earth, but he exercises his reign through his Spirit and the church’s preaching of the gospel
 3. First resurrection is believers’ spiritual transition from death to life through union with Christ (Eph 2:4-6)
 4. Because Satan cannot deceive the nations any longer (Rev 20:3), the church’s mission will result in the conversion of all nations and peoples until the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD (Hab 2:14)
 5. Jesus’ victory will be plain as political and legal systems are conformed to God’s righteousness, cultural pursuits such as labor and the arts are redeemed, and increasing quality and length of life are displayed as God’s blessing
 6. After this millennium, God will release his restraint on Satan and wicked humanity will converge in a defiant assault on Christ’s church
 7. Jesus will return bodily from heaven to destroy his enemies and administer his last judgment, then come the new heavens and new earth
- C. Assessment (strengths/weaknesses)
 1. Strengths
 - a. The Great Commission leads us to expect that the gospel will go forth in power and eventually result in a largely Christian world (not necessarily that most individuals are Christian, but societies and culture will be influenced by Christianity more than other religions, worldviews, etc.)
 - b. Parables of the gradual growth of the kingdom indicate that it eventually will fill the earth with its influence (e.g. Matt 13:31-32, parable of the mustard seed)
 - c. The world is becoming more Christian as it spreads throughout the world to more and more nations and people groups
 - d. Very optimistic about the power of the gospel to change lives and bring about good in the world
 2. Proposed Weaknesses
 - a. The authority of Christ in Matt 28 does not necessarily imply that Christ will use that authority to bring about a conversion of majority of the population of the world
 - b. The parables of the kingdom, such as the mustard seed, do say that something small will grow into something large, but it does

not tell us the extent. Even now we can say that the seed has grown very large without requiring that we have achieved the state required for postmillennialism to work

- c. The world is becoming more Christian in terms of scope and numbers, but evil is likewise growing exponentially. If anything, the culture of Europe (and likely now America) can be called, as many have, post-Christian.
 - d. Several passages seem antithetical to the postmillennial position
 - i. Jesus' words in Matt 7 suggest that believers are few and those who travel the road to destruction are many
 - ii. Luke 18:8 asks if the Son of Man, when he comes, will find faith on earth, suggesting it will be dominated by those without faith rather than those with faith
 - iii. Rather than becoming better, Paul suggests in 2 Thess 2:3-4 that things will get worse
- D. Notable supporters of this view: Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield.¹ Although not identifying themselves as specifically postmillennial, R.C. Sproul, N.T. Wright have views closely related to and compatible with the majority of postmillennialism.²

¹Hodge and Warfield's positions are quite close in many respects to amillennialism; several charts and publications place one or both of them in that position instead of postmillennialism.

²"I don't particularly consider myself to be post-millennial though if I had to choose between that and pre- I would obviously take post." From a May 2004 interview with N.T. Wright.