

Overview of Amillennialism

There are three broad schools of thought regarding eschatology:

Premillennialism believes that the return of Christ will be prior to the reign of Christ on earth. This view believes in a future period of tribulation and a rapture of the church.

Amillennialism believes that there is no earthly kingdom.

Postmillennialism believes that as the coming of Christ approaches, Christ through the church will be bringing a long period of peace and righteousness.

The word "millennium" comes from the Latin words "mille" (thousand) and "annus" (year). So it is apparent how each system is named, depending upon when the millennium occurs.

Description of Amillennialism

Amillennialism holds that there will be no millennium before the end of the world. Until the return of Christ, good and evil will develop in parallel. After the second coming of Christ at the end of the world there will be a general resurrection and a general judgment of all people.

Doctrine Distinctives of Amillennialism

Many amillennialists are liberal in doctrine and many are conservative, however, they are united on several points:

- While premillennialists argue that the biblical promises of a future earthly millennium are yet to be fulfilled, amillennialists believe those promises are either fulfilled spiritually in the church or they were conditional and the conditions were not met.
- Amillennialists deny the rapture, believing that there will only be a second coming of Christ to usher all of God's people into heaven.
- Amillennialists deny there will be a Great Tribulation period, believing that all passages referring to a tribulation period or to a coming wrath are the trials and suffering of the church on earth.
- Amillennialists deny there will be a literal reign of Christ upon the earth.
- Amillennialists believe that Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ and Christ is now ruling in heaven on the throne of David (cf. Revelation 20).
- Amillennialists believe the present age between the first and second comings is the fulfillment of the millennium.

History of Amillennialism

Origen (d. 254 A.D.) was the first to adopt the allegorical method of interpretation and to spiritualize the future kingdom. This view was popularized by Augustine, who taught that the kingdom was found in the existence of the church in the world.

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Martin Luther believed in the Great Tribulation but believed he was in the midst of it and believed he was living just before the second coming. Most of the reformers were also amillennial as they took that system of eschatology with them from Catholic Church when they separated or were cast out.

Amillennialism continues to the modern era, defended by Warfield, Berkhof and Allis. It is primarily found in the main-line denominations, as well as in the Roman Catholic Church.

Arguments for Amillennialism

- The hermeneutics of amillennialism begins with the belief that the extent of God's kingdom is its spiritual manifestation in the church today.
- Amillennialism is based in Covenant Theology, where God has a single overall program in all ages for His people.
- Since the Church and Israel share in one continuous plan, God's promises to Israel are applicable to the church. Or as Oswald T. Allis writes, "The millennium is to be interpreted spiritually as fulfilled in the Christian Church".
- How can God's promises to Israel about a land and a nation and a king and a kingdom be fulfilled by the church? By spiritualizing these prophecies.

For example, L. Boettner in The Millennium says the promise that ferocious animals will be tame refers to spiritual transformation such as Saul of Tarsus who was changed from a wolflike persecutor to a lamb-like disciples.

Analysis of Amillennialism

As we have seen, amillennialism is rooted in the allegorical method of interpretation. Floyd Hamilton, an amillennialist, acknowledges that "a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures".

The decision therefore is not "which millennial system should I choose?" but "how do I think the Bible should be read?"