

## Our Blessed Hope: A Study of Biblical Eschatology

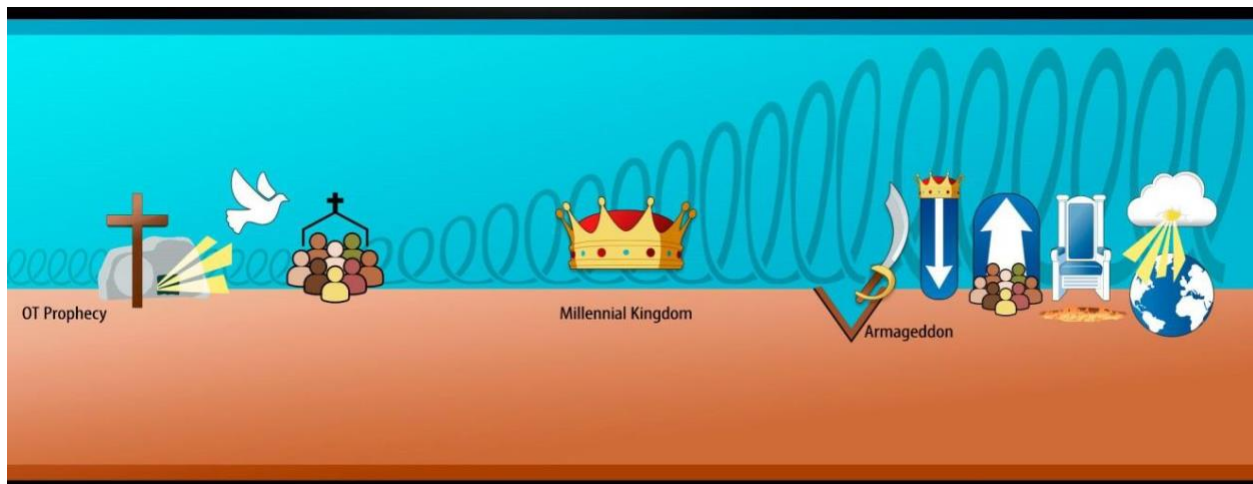
### Lesson 7: Amillennialism – Strengths and Weaknesses

#### I. A Definition

Amillennialists believe Revelation 20:1-10 describes the *present* church age. This is an age in which Satan’s influence over the nations has been greatly reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world. Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years are Christians who have died and are already reigning with Christ in heaven. Christ’s reign in the millennium, according to this view, is not a bodily reign here on earth, but rather the heavenly reign Jesus spoke of when he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”.

Therefore, there is no future millennium yet to come. The “thousand years” referenced in Revelation is merely a figure of speech for a long period of time “in which God’s perfect purposes will be accomplished”. Christ’s second coming will mark the end of this time, and usher in the resurrection of both believers and unbelievers, the latter of which will be judged and sent to eternal condemnation while the former will stand before the judgment seat of Christ before entering into the joy of heaven eternally.

#### II. Eschatological Calendar:



#### III. Prominent Adherents

Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos, J. I. Packer, A.W. Pink, Louis Berkhoff, Vern Poythress, Michael Horton, Anthony Hoekema, Kim Riddlebarger, Sam Storms, Voddie Baucham

#### IV. Basic Tenets

##### A. The Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutic

There are two major systems of biblical interpretation among conservative evangelicals: the *grammatical-historical* method and the *redemptive-historical* method.

Both are both committed to the literal, intended, grammatical, and historical meaning of the text. Both approaches hold to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and both rightly guard against relativism and subjectivism. Both methods seek to understand what the original authors—whether that be Moses or the apostle Paul—meant by unpacking the grammatical and historical context of the passage.

And “context, context, context” is the golden rule to interpretation for both approaches.

The difference between the two is *eschatology*.

The redemptive-historical method asks this critical question: **What is the end, purpose, and objective behind the historical events of Scripture? What is the final goal of all things?**

Eschatology aides are hermeneutics because it helps us understand the conclusion of the story. Understanding the conclusion helps us comprehend the overall purpose of the story... the big picture.

Understanding the *progressive* nature of biblical revelation is essential because as new revelation came, it not only developed the storyline but brought greater clarity and insight to the earlier parts of the story. Therefore, we use latter revelation to understand the original and intended meaning of earlier revelation – especially using the New Testament to understand the Old Testament.

Here’s why:

1. Because all Scripture is inspired by God and has a single Author.
2. Because there is a single story line, or metanarrative, that centers around the gospel of Jesus Christ—known as the story of redemption.
3. Because the story of redemption is progressive.
4. Because of the analogy of the faith, which is the biblical principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture.
5. Because our understanding of the covenants (and their relationship to one another) shapes our understanding of Scripture.

## **B. Believers are the Children of Abraham**

A critical question: Whom did God have in mind when He promised Abraham an heir? Was it Ishmael or the Ishmaelites? Was it Isaac? The Israelites? Was it Christ Jesus? Or was it believers?

Which of the three—Ishmael, Isaac, or Jesus—did God have in mind when He promised Abraham a seed? Of which of the three can it properly be said, “In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 26:4)?

Not Ishmael and the Ishmaelites ...

Not Isacc and the Israelites ...

Who then is the ‘seed of Abraham’?

**Christ is** the Seed of Abraham.

According to Paul, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is Jesus Christ: “‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

**The Church does not** *replace* Israel.

Paul made it clear that believers were not taking the place of Israel. To explain the original meaning of the Abrahamic covenant, Paul compares physical Israel with Ishmael and believers with Isaac.

Physical Israelites without faith are no more the children of promise than Ishmael.

The future inclusion of the Gentiles into God's covenant people was prophesied in the Old Testament.

This prophecy, according to Paul, was Speaking of Gentiles who had become the children of Abraham by faith.

The Old Testament teaches that not all Israel is of *real* Israel.

“The first point of amillennialism is the redemptive-historical hermeneutic, which claims that the end of the story helps us understand the beginning of the story. And seeing the New Testament fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant helps us understand the second point of amillennialism—that not all physical Israel are of spiritual Israel. Believers who are united to Christ—the church, which consists of Jews and gentiles alike—are the true children of Abraham. Being a physical child of Abraham is not what matters. It’s not the law or circumcision that make a person a child of Abraham but faith in Christ. The promises are received by faith alone. And these promises are not merely for believing Jews but extend to believing gentiles. Through Christ, all believers, both Jews and gentiles, are the children of Abraham and heirs to the promises”. (Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Five Points of Amillennialism*, p. 42).

### **C. The Church is the Davidic Kingdom**

The kingdom promised to Abraham, and again promised to David, is (at this present time) a spiritual kingdom.

Amillennialists view the kingdom of God as consisting of only born-again believers without any earthly politicians, military soldiers, or weaponry. Only those who have willingly bowed in submission to the lordship of King Jesus are in the kingdom of heaven and enjoy true unity and peace with God and with one another. And because the kingdom of heaven consists of only believers, it is an everlasting kingdom that has no end.

*The Kingdom promised in the Abrahamic Covenant ...*

*The Kingdom Promised in the David Covenant ...*

*The Kingdom promised in the New Covenant ...*

“The son of David is not only on the throne of David, he will and must continue to reign on David’s throne until He has conquered all His enemies (1 Cor. 15:25). Yet, before He returns to defeat the last enemy, death, He must continue to subdue His own people’s hearts by rescuing them from the coils of the serpent. And He must continue to reign until He has gathered every last promised child of Abraham into the everlasting kingdom.

And when He has finished building His kingdom by populating it with the children of Abraham, He will subdue the wicked by destroying and purging the world with fire. Then, when everything is perfectly restored, Christ will deliver the kingdom to His Father as a spotless bride, holy and without blemish. Afterward, all tears will be wiped away, and Christ Jesus will dwell with His people forever in the Land of Promise—the new heavens and the new earth.” (Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Five Points of Amillennialism*. p. 53).

## **D. The New Earth is the Promised Land**

To say that the kingdom of God is spiritual and heavenly in nature is not to say that the kingdom will not one day be physical in nature. Though Abraham, by faith, was looking for a heavenly city, it was the world that God promised to give him (Rom. 4:13). He was not only promised the land he walked on, Abraham was promised everything to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west as an everlasting inheritance (Gen. 13:14–15). Thus, it would seem that the heavenly and eternal city that Abraham was looking to inherit was to be located one day on the earth.

1. The Promised Land was physical land... the very land that Abraham saw with his own eyes.
2. The promise was given to Abraham, not just to his children.
3. Abraham is yet to inherit any of this land.
4. The land was to be an everlasting inheritance.
5. The heavenly city is an everlasting city, and Abraham will have everlasting life, or else he could not enjoy it forever.
6. The children of Abraham, who also inherit the land, will live forever in the land of promise.
7. The children of Abraham, who will enjoy the Promised land forever, are heirs by faith.
8. For the Promised Land to be the Earth, the term Promised Land must refer to the new heavens and new earth, a place where only righteousness and righteous people dwell.

Partial fulfillment ...

1. there is a two-phase fulfillment of the kingdom of God
2. there are two comings of Christ,
3. two ages,
4. two kingdoms

“Though the kingdom of God has already been spiritually inaugurated with the first coming of Christ, it will not be physically consummated until the second coming of Christ. Though the kingdom is currently spiritual, as Christ presently reigns in the hearts of those who believe, it will one day be physical at His second coming. Then, when Christ returns, the realm of Christ’s dominion will extend from sea to sea, and the glory of the Lord will fill the earth (Hab. 2:14). But until then, “God’s kingdom,” as William Cox states, “exists as an incomplete realization awaiting its perfection at the appearing of the King of Glory.” (Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Five Points of Amillennialism*. p. 80).

## **E. The Finality of the Second Coming**

The more difficult passages of Scripture, such as Revelation 20, must be understood in light of the easier passages of Scripture and not the other way around. And when we read 2 Peter 3, we learn that the second coming of Christ brings about the end of the world. This also brings us to the fifth and last point of amillennialism—the finality of the second coming.

According to New Testament teaching found from Matthew through Jude, there are certain events that will occur when Christ returns:

1. The general resurrection of the dead.
2. The destruction of the world.
3. The final judgment.
4. The ushering in of the eternal state.

Revelation 20:1-3

“The fifth point of amillennialism is the finality of the second coming of Christ. The only hope of salvation is now—before the second coming of Christ. He will come like a thief in the night, but once He appears, the just and the unjust will rise from the dead, the world will be destroyed with fire, and everyone will face God in judgment to either be cast into the lake of fire or to enter into God’s eternal rest. Amillennialism is not complex. It’s simply the gospel applied to the history of the world.” (Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Five Points of Amillennialism*. p. 99).

## V. Strengths

While the early church fathers were divided between premillennialism and amillennialism, nearly all Christians from the 400s to the 1500s (and many today) have held this view.

This is probably the SIMPLEST of the four views.

It emphasizes the PROGRESSIVE nature of biblical revelation.

It unites the Old and New Testaments with Israel and Christians seen as one PEOPLE OF GOD.

It acknowledges the TRIBULATION of persecuted believers in the first century, those throughout the centuries, as well as those at the end of the age.

It acknowledges that Christ reigns NOW as the sovereign Lord over all things.

It teaches that the imminent RETURN OF CHRIST is the consummation of all things and marks the fullness of both the kingdom of God and the age to come.

## VI. Weaknesses

Is LITERALNESS being sacrificed?

Is Israel being REPLACED?

Are prophecies (OT) OVER-SPIRITUALIZED?

Revelation 20 questions

Is this chronological?

Are TWO resurrections being conflated into ONE?

In what sense is Satan “BOUND”?

Does this view lead to a PESSIMISTIC view of the Church’s INFLUENCE?

Does the view harmonize with the PROGRESSIVE victory of the Kingdom that Jesus seems to indicate?

What about Christians and TRIBULATION ... what is the intent of the *Great Tribulation*?

It has some *potential* negative “downstream” effects:

Proponents may be DISENGAGED from the CULTURAL mandates of Scripture. (An over-spiritualization of Church and Kingdom)

**Next week:** The Nature of Hell and the Fate of the Lost