

Amillennialism - What is it?

Amillennialism is one of the many views regarding the Millennial Kingdom—the thousand-year reign of Christ during the end times. The names of these beliefs (including premillennialism and postmillennialism) do not refer to when the Millennial Kingdom will occur, but to when Christ will return to earth in relation to the kingdom. "Amillennialism" is a bit of a misnomer. Linguistically, the word means there will be no ("a") thousand-year ("millennial") kingdom. In actuality, those who ascribe to amillennialism believe that the millennial kingdom is not literal. That is, it is neither one thousand years nor a physical reign of Christ. Amillennialism was championed by St. Augustine and is the view held by the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and many Protestants.

The point of the Millennial Kingdom has always been to establish Christ's rule on earth and to fulfill the prophecies of God's blessings on His people that have yet to be fulfilled (Deuteronomy 29:1-29; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Jeremiah 31:31, 33). Like postmillennialism, amillennialism "spiritualizes" the prophecies regarding the end times—refuses to take them literally. This leads to two specific characteristics.

To whom the prophecies refer: Like postmillennialists, amillennialists believe in replacement theology or supersessionism. This theology teaches that the unfulfilled prophecies promising peace under Christ's reign and blessings to His people do not apply to Israel. They believe Israel's work in God's plan is finished and all unfulfilled prophecies have been transferred to the church. This is a common view despite the fact that no literal interpretation of the Bible supports it.

How the prophecies will be fulfilled: Amillennialism goes even further than postmillennialism in spiritualizing the prophecies by claiming they will not be fulfilled literally. The peaceful kingdom (Micah 4:2-4), the lion laying down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6-9), and the borders of the Palestinian covenant (Genesis 17:7-8) are all considered metaphors along with the thousand-year time period (Revelation 20:2-7). Instead, amillennialism teaches that the millennial kingdom is manifest either in the hearts of the saints who have died and now rest with Him (the minority view) or in the hearts of all who follow Him on earth (the most common belief). This point of view, and the scholars who originated it, is informed more by Greek philosophy than biblical truth. The popular view of Gnosticism taught that the physical was corrupted, and only the spiritual was capable of good. It was a short slide to then believe that the perfect Son of God could not rule over a physical kingdom, so His reign must be over the immaterial hearts and souls of mankind.

Amillennialism alters the timeline of the end times to fit these two views. Christ's kingdom was established at His resurrection. The "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:4-6) does not refer to the physical resurrection of the saints, as premillennialism teaches, but to a spiritual resurrection, that is, the point in history when the Holy Spirit became available to dwell in the hearts of the believers. The "kingdom," then, is a kingdom in spirit only and lasts until Jesus' second coming. The second coming is concurrent with the rapture of the believers. Everyone will be judged, and then the second resurrection will return physical bodies to souls. The eternal state will immediately follow.

Like many theological beliefs, amillennialism was born from a combination of human cultural influence and a reluctance to believe God meant His Word as literal truth. Despite the many ways scholars try to convince us otherwise, God did not create the physical to be bad. Adam and Eve had physical bodies on a physical world, and God called it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). God came down to earth as a physical being (Luke 2). When Jesus was resurrected, it was with a physical body (Luke 24:42-43). And the prophecies that have been fulfilled were done so literally and physically. There is no need for a different method of interpretation—God's power is not dependent upon our ability to understand how He will manifest it.