

Postmillennialism - What is it?

Postmillennialism is one of several interpretations of the end times prophecies as given in the Bible. It, as well as premillennialism and amillennialism, attempt to determine the timing of Jesus' return in regards to the thousand-year kingdom and what that kingdom will look like. Postmillennialism was inspired by the inherent flaws of amillennialism but, like amillennialism, very much informed by the culture of the time—in this case, the philosophical and technological advances of the early 18th century. The industrial revolution, which began shortly after, seemed to validate the optimism and humanism of postmillennialism. The defining tenet of the belief is that Jesus will not return until after the peaceful millennial kingdom has been established. This obviously comes from an allegorical reading of prophecy. The allegory is further used to interpret the prophecies of the end times to refer to the church and not Israel.

Postmillennialism is similar to amillennialism in many aspects. They both spiritualize end times prophecy; they both believe that the church has superseded Israel's role in God's plan; and they both teach that the reign of Christ in the millennial kingdom is purely spiritual—in the hearts of His followers. Their timeline is also similar in that Christ will return only at the end of days, and the physical resurrection and judgments will take place immediately. But where amillennialism has a somewhat realistic view of fallen human nature, postmillennialism teaches that the reign of Christ in the hearts of His followers will naturally develop into a world that is characterized by biblical behaviour and a desire to follow God. Not everyone will be saved, but the earth will experience a "golden age of spiritual prosperity," reflected in politics, entertainment, the family, and social life.

Although this golden age is to be powered by Christ, the church is responsible for bringing it to fruition. This may take several different forms. Classical postmillennialism relies on aggressive witnessing to ensure the bulk of the world's population follows Christ. The more recent liberal postmillennialism promotes a "social gospel" that works to ensure all the worldly needs of all the people are met. A new form, called "theonomy" (also known as "dominionism" or "reconstructionism") takes this influence further and insists the kingdom can only come to be if every political system is under the control of the church. Extreme dominionists believe that it is the responsibility of the church to take over the governments of the world and reinstate the Old Testament law.

Postmillennialism takes the thousand-year time span to be a figurative period. Some believe it began at Jesus' resurrection and will continue until His return. Others hold that it will gradually come about as mankind brings the peaceful kingdom to fruition. After an indefinite amount of time, Jesus will return and battle against Satan and his forces. Right after will be all the judgments and resurrections.

Postmillennialism has an optimistic view of humanity and its ability to create a peaceful society. Technology and the call to the better angels of our nature will create a world worthy of having Christ as King. This belief is both a draw and a danger. Humanism is a seductive philosophy because it is so optimistic; we want to believe we can do better. But no man-made institution can lead the entire world into a period of peace, no matter how influenced by Christ. Following the Bible, championing social causes, and influencing politics can be expressions of Christ's influence on us, but they cannot create a world so peaceful it is worthy of a gift to God.

A literal interpretation of the Bible makes no false promises that mankind can save itself. Instead, it consistently tells us how dependent we are on God for every good thing (James 1:17). End times prophecy continually explains how wicked the world will grow (2 Timothy 3:1-7; 2 Peter 3:3-7). The time before Christ's arrival will be one of curses (Revelation 6–16) and war (Revelation 17:14), not peace. And Revelation 19:11-21 makes it clear that it is the power of Jesus that will bring in His own kingdom, not the works of the church.