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What Will the End Times Be Like? - Part 2

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In part one of this look at the various views of eschatology, we looked at Historic Premillennialism and Premillennial Dispensationalism. You can read part one at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/04/what-will-the-end-times-be-like-part-1>. In part 2, we will look at Amillennialism and Postmillennialism.

As a short review, we noted in part one that eschatology is the study of last things, and made the point that, in the grand scheme of things, eschatology is a secondary doctrine that does not relate to whether or not one is actually a Christian. Its importance lies in the fact that a second coming of Christ is definitely taught in the Bible, though there is no systematic teaching about the details – thus the different views.

As in part one, in order to organize the thoughts of this article in a way that makes it easy to compare and contrast the various points of view, we will continue to explain each of them using three categories.

- Definition and Explanation
- Underlying philosophy
- Storyline

Amillennialism

The term "Amillennialism" (sometimes also referred to as Inaugurated Millennialism) is often misunderstood by those who hold other millennial points of view. Many people believe that Amillennialists simply ignore Revelation 20:1-6 where the concept of a millennium is mentioned, thinking that they have no belief whatsoever about a mil-

lennium. Rather than ignoring it, however, Amillennialists simply interpret it in a non-literal way. In fact, the term was never a self-designation. The word "Amillennial" was actually coined as a derogatory term by people who held premillennial views.

Definition and Explanation

The Amillennialist believes that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated at Christ's resurrection (hence the term "Inaugurated Millennialism") at which point he gained victory over both Satan and the curse. Thus, they take the concept of an earthly millennium, as mentioned in the Book of Revelation, to be a symbolic reference to Christ's eternal reign (which is already ongoing) and not a physical thousand year reign of Christ on earth. One of the phrases that is often associated with Amillennialism is "already but not yet." The idea is that Christ even now reigns over the entirety of creation and is already victorious over Satan, but the consummation has not yet occurred.

Underlying Philosophy

To understand Amillennialism, it is important to understand the genre of writing called Jewish apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a genre of prophetic writing that emerged following the Jewish exile. The word apocalypse is derived from the Greek word *apokalupsis* meaning "revelation." This is why the book of Revelation is also sometimes called "The Apocalypse." The literal meaning of the word refers to an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known, and which could not be known apart from the unveiling.

This literary form is highly symbolic featuring various numbers, colors, animals, strange creatures, and cer-

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tain items that represent concrete ideas. In some ways, it is like a code language. It was often used to hide the real meaning of a writer within a fantastical story that persecutors, in particular, would not be able to understand, or even recognize as religious writing. It became popular among some of the early Christians for this very reason. There are too many symbols to list all of them here, but here are some samples of the kinds of symbols that are found in apocalyptic writing.

- Numbers (6 = imperfection; 7 = perfection or completion; 12 = the people of God)
- Colors (White = purity; Red = aggression, taking peace from the earth; Black = famine)
- Visual Symbols (lampstands = the gathered churches; Scroll = the heavenly record)
- Measures (quarts = standard daily rations; denarius = standard daily wage)
- Creatures (The Antichrist = anyone who opposes Christ; The Dragon = monstrous evil)

Most of the apocalyptic writings that are known have *not* been recognized as Scripture. These include such writings as the book of Enoch, the Secrets of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, and many, many more.

There are some notable examples of apocalyptic writing, however, that are found in Scripture. The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are probably the most notable examples of apocalyptic literature, as well as several individual passages within other biblical writings in such places as Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 17, 1 Timothy 4, and several others.

Those favoring an amillennial view interpret the Bible using what is called a redemptive-historical ap-

proach to biblical interpretation. This approach considers that Old Testament narratives are not merely moral examples for Christians to follow, but are also revelations of the coming Messiah. They are seen to be pointing forward in history to when Israel's Messiah would be revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Concerning Israel and the church, rather than seeing the two as having separate identities as in dispensationalism, the church is understood to be the eschatological fulfillment of Israel. In other words, the church is the new Israel. Under the kingship of Christ, it is understood that all Christians partake in God's eternal plan based on their personal relationship with Him by grace through faith in the King Jesus Christ. In the current age, that truth is understood by faith, but at Christ's return will be known by sight.

As it relates to the rapture, Amillennialists believe that immediately upon Christ's return, all the saints, both living and dead, will meet the Lord in the clouds and will immediately proceed with Christ to judge the nations. After that, they will follow Him into their eternal state.

Storyline

As mentioned above, Amillennialists view the concept of a millennium as symbolic of Christ's sovereign reign over all of God's creation – which includes the present era. Amillennialists believe that at the conclusion of this present age, Christ will immediately return, judge the wicked, then usher the church into its eternal state. The amillennial perspective emphasizes that the coming of the Kingdom of God is a two-part event.

Part one is understood to have dawned at Christ's first advent. In Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist proclaimed, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." When Christ won the final victory over death and Satan at the cross, He as-

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cended to heaven to reign upon the throne of David forever (Luke 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-31). Thus, the Amillennialist sees final things as already accomplished, though currently seen by faith, not yet by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The second stage of the amillennial perspective is found in the final consummation when Christ returns. At that point, Christians will no longer see by faith alone, but by sight. Amillennialists have no expectation of any kind of earthly glory for the church. All of their hope is placed on heavenly glory.

The amillennial storyline is as follows:

- Creation
- Fall
- Christ's death
- Ascension
- Coming of the Holy Spirit
- Symbolic millennium (the church on earth in tribulation)
- Second coming
- Last judgment

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism is an extremely optimistic point of view that sees the gospel message to be so powerful, that it eventually takes over the entire world.

Definition and Explanation

Postmillennialism gets its name from the belief that a millennial period will occur, and, following that, Christ will return. With Christ's return, He will judge the wicked, then immediately usher the church into its eternal state.

While this point of view was rather popular among American Protestants back in the mid 1800s, there are actually very few theologians in evangelical circles these days who hold to this position. Due to the increasing popularity of Premillennialism, the increasing number and brutality of world wars, and the increasingly implausible concept of the

gospel Christianizing the world, Postmillennialism has mostly died out as a major eschatological belief.

Underlying Philosophy

Postmillennialism interprets the Bible using a covenant-historical methodology. To Postmillennialists, the church is considered to be the fulfillment of Israel's covenant with God. In the Old Testament, God promised Abraham that he would become "a great nation" and that "all peoples on earth would be blessed" through him (Genesis 12:2-3). They see the millennial kingdom as the fulfillment of this covenant promise.

In Postmillennialism, however, the millennium is not understood to be a literal thousand year Golden Age period that occurs prior to Christ's second coming. Rather, they understand it to have begun with the crucifixion of Christ, and continues forward as the gospel gradually accomplishes God's work in the world. It is considered that during this period, Christ will increasingly rule over the whole earth through an unprecedented spread of the gospel. Through this massive, irresistible revival movement, the large majority of people on earth will ultimately become Christians. Thus, the Kingdom of God is not seen as a literal reign of Christ in the physical world, but symbolically represents a spiritual process expressed on earth through the Christianizing affect of the gospel over time.

Storyline

The postmillennial storyline is as follows:

- Christ's death and resurrection
- Millennium (the church age - not a literal thousand years)
- Second coming and last judgment
- Eternal state

Conclusion

Eschatological disagreements should never divide Christians. Sadly though,

this is one of the areas of belief that seems to cause many divisions among believers. And while eschatology is an important topic, is it not one of the essential doctrines of Christianity. What is meant by that is that no one's personal salvation is affected by their particular belief about the end times. When we finally get to the gates of heaven and see the ultimate eschatological truth, no one will be turned away because they were wrong, and no one will be let in because they got it right.

Because of the tendency for there to be strong disagreements about this topic, it is important for us to not only understand the different perspectives, but, perhaps even more importantly, to understand the origins of the different points of view and the relative importance of eschatology as a doctrine.

What we do know, without fail, is the truth that is embraced by each of the four perspectives above – that Jesus Christ came to earth, lived, died on the cross for our redemption, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will return to consummate God's redemptive plan. What we can only speculate about and try to discern from the disparate passages of Scripture that speak of the end are the details.

As a word of encouragement for the body of Christ to unite in our common task of bringing the gospel to the world, it is my personal hope that understanding the various eschatological points of view, and the relative importance of this doctrine, will serve to promote a kind of unity within the church that will allow us to more fully accomplish the purpose of God in the world together.

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