

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 8

ANALYZING AMILLENNIALISM, PART 2

The amillennialist believes the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom is here now but it will not be fully consummated until the Second Coming at which time every person is resurrected, a final judgment is enacted with some going to the lake of fire and some into the presence of God, and eternity begins. According to this Eschatology, there is never a literal, on earth with Jesus ruling from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem, Millennial Kingdom.

The Jews thought in terms of this age and the age to come; amillennialists also refer to two ages but not in the same way. "In rabbinic theology of that day, the rabbis spoke of two ages: *this age*, in which we now live; and *the age to come*, the Messianic Age." [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, p. 624]. The problem for amillennialists is they interpret this coming age as the Kingdom partially here now rather than as a literal, future Messianic Kingdom which is how the Jews meant it. They spiritualize both ages. "In every case the qualities assigned by the biblical writers to 'this age' were always temporal in nature and represented the fallen world and its sinful inhabitants awaiting the judgment to come at our Lord's return. This becomes clear when we see 'this age' as the biblical writers intend—an age which stands in stark contrast to the eschatological 'age to come.'" [Riddlebarger, pp. 83-84]. This doesn't fit into their already/not yet view of Eschatology. They insist the age to come is somehow here now but they contradict that by saying the Second Advent is "the line of demarcation between these two ages." [Riddlebarger, p. 85]. Which is it? Is it partially here now with complete fulfillment in the future or is there a distinct "line of demarcation" between the two? How can these two ages be in stark contrast with one another if the second one is partially here now? Once literal hermeneutics are abandoned, confusion reigns; they can't keep their theology straight because it doesn't agree with biblical revelation. Therefore, their presuppositions and their hermeneutic prevent a biblical understanding of this issue from the start. Once their presupposition is wrong, their conclusion is wrong. "The period of time between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ—the time between the establishment of Christ's kingdom as described in the Gospels and the consummation of all things—is the same period described in Revelation 20 as 'a thousand years.' This means that the so-called millennium is a present reality and not a future hope. The events depicted in Revelation 20 refer not to the future but to the present. The thousand years is that same period of time in which citizens of *this age* await the age to come. However, given the present reality of the kingdom of God and the work of the

Holy Spirit, the *age to come* is already a present reality for believers in Jesus Christ. This tension between the *already* and the *not yet* characterizes much of New Testament eschatology as Christians await the final consummation of Christ's present kingdom on the great and glorious day of the Lord Jesus." [Riddlebarger, pp. 81-82]. If the Kingdom is a "present reality and not a future hope", why do they even talk about two ages? These theologians can make this stuff sound all biblical and righteous but when you examine the real issues in connection with the Word of God, it is contradictory and makes no sense. Don't be beguiled by things that sound good; let the Scriptures be the guide.

Before moving on, it is time to deal with the issue of 1,000 years in Revelation 20:1-6. Does "a thousand years" mean a literal thousand years or is it symbolically referring to an indefinite period of time encompassing the period between the First and the Second Advents of Christ Jesus? Does the fact that Revelation is apocalyptic literature mean that it has no literal meaning and must be interpreted spiritually or symbolically at all times in all situations? Or should it be read according to a literal hermeneutic?

Revelation 20:1-6 ¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. ⁴Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

The first issue to deal with is the amillennial insistence that because 1,000 years is mentioned only here in connection with a Millennial Kingdom, it doesn't mean what it says. Since when does it take more than one verse in the Bible to establish biblical truth? These verses refer to a literal 1,000 year Kingdom whether these are the only verses in the Bible that say it or not.

Certainly, this pericope is dealing with spiritual issues in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, but does that make them less than literal? No! There is nothing about the use of this number that suggests anything other than a literal 1,000 years is meant. Numbers

are used in the Bible to indicate quantities in the same way we use them to number various things. If a number is symbolic, the context makes that readily apparent. Numerology is a highly speculative and subjective interpretive method that must be used with care, if at all. In most instances, numerology is as serious a departure from literal hermeneutics and a product of the human mind just as much as allegorical and spiritualizing hermeneutics are departures from literal interpretations. Even in apocalyptic literature, numbers are used “in the normal quantitative way” over 90 percent of the time. [Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, p. 384]. In Revelation 5:11, John wrote that there were “myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands” around the throne so he was capable of expressing that number in an indefinite manner if he chose to do so. Writing under the inspiration of the Spirit in Revelation 20:1-6 he didn't do that; he made the number specific. There is no literary or interpretive reason for believing that John is writing about anything less than a literal, 1,000 year reign of Christ in a literal Millennial Kingdom.

They confuse the announcement that the “Kingdom is at hand” as both the Lord and John the Baptist proclaimed it with their assumption that the Kingdom actually arrived with Christ Jesus. In reality, the Kingdom was offered by the presence of the King but the offer and the King were rejected. They cannot understand this set of facts because they don't believe there ever was going to be a Jewish Kingdom—then, now, or ever—and they believe Jesus began the Messianic Kingdom at His First Advent but it is not yet fully consummated. They are confused. On the one hand, Riddlebarger, who is representative of amillennial theology, will admit the Old Testament prophets were indeed predicting a Jewish Messianic Kingdom, but on the other hand, once Christ was crucified Israel was no more and it was actually the church the prophets of old were predicting would inherit those promises but the prophets just didn't know it.

Amillennialists do not, cannot, and deliberately will not recognize a literal Messianic Kingdom. Instead, they relegate the Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven, which are the same Kingdom, to the reign of the Sovereign God over the entire spectrum of history. They do not recognize the Messianic Kingdom as such; instead, they recognize a general, overarching Kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God, therefore, is to be understood as the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of God's people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. It means that the new age has been ushered in.” [Hoekema quoted by Riddlebarger, p. 104]. When redemption is made to be the primary goal of history, then everything else is subordinated to that purpose and that presupposition prevents a literal understanding of the promised Kingdom to national Israel. The Kingdom is now instead of postponed and the postponed Kingdom Jesus Christ actually offered will never exist except as a spiritual entity.

Amillennialists claim that because the Jews wanted a political deliverer, Christ was killed because He was only offering them a spiritual Kingdom. "...[S]everal messianic expectations were widely held throughout Palestine in the days of Jesus. First, when the Messiah appeared, he would bring salvation and blessing to his people and judgment on the wicked nations that had oppressed Israel. Second, God would return this long-promised messianic king to David's throne. Third, this messianic king would liberate Palestine from Israel's Gentile oppressors, especially the Romans. When Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, these were the expectations his hearers used to interpret his words. But his would have been a thoroughly secularized and politicized kingdom. In many ways it is the kingdom envisioned by dispensationalists and postmillenarians. Jesus spoke of a different kingdom, where God would bring deliverance from humanity's true enemy, the guilt and power of sin. Because Jesus did not offer the economic, political, and nationalistic kingdom so many in Israel longed for, he was put to death." [Riddlebarger, p. 106]. While there is truth to the Messianic expectations Riddlebarger describes here, what the people were expecting from the Messiah did have spiritual dimensions and he was in fact put to death for spiritual reasons as well as for political reasons. Specifically, he was condemned by the Jewish religious leaders for blasphemy and as the religious leaders led the nation into the rejection of their King, so followed the majority of the nation. It is not true that if the Kingdom had been installed at the First Advent that it would have been "thoroughly secularized and politicized;" it would have been the Old Testament predicted Messianic Kingdom. The only reason to deny that is theological; the church has replaced Israel. It's just not true that Jesus wasn't offering the very Kingdom predicted in the Old Testament.

Matthew 26:62–68 ⁶²The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" ⁶³But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; ⁶⁶what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!" ⁶⁷Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, ⁶⁸and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"

The fact that many people responded to John the Baptist and his call for repentance because the kingdom of heaven was at hand showed they wanted to separate themselves from the spiritually corrupt religious leaders and their religious system. Many people apparently realized the system enforced by the Pharisees and the Sadducees was not what God originally intended for them.

Matthew 3:1–6 ¹Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ³For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, “THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!’ ” ⁴Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; ⁶and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

Jesus performed all the signs the prophesied Messiah was to perform as the means of authenticating His identity. He was presenting His Messianic credentials to them, so to speak.

Matthew 4:23–25 ²³Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. ²⁴The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

What amillennialists apparently fail to understand is that the prosperity in the land cannot be divorced from the spiritual nature of the promised King and His Kingdom. To say that the Israelites only expected physical deliverance without any spiritual ramifications is overstating the case. They still had their religious system although it had become corrupt and was operating far from the truth God intended for it. That was the point in the Sermon on the Mount; the Lord was calling them to adhere to the true intent of the Law and in so doing, they would fulfill God’s purpose for them and they would surpass the phony righteousness inherent in the system of religion the Pharisees and Sadducees had installed. The Messiah was to be Prophet, Priest, and King and Jesus was authenticating Himself to be the Messiah for whom they were looking. It is true that by the time of Christ, the spiritual elements had been seriously marginalized and neglected to the point that even the disciples were only looking for a political deliverer who would set the nation free. In other words, they had forgotten about Prophet and Priest and were looking only for the King. They had departed from God’s original intent for them as a nation and had devolved into a religious, ritualistic system that was far from God. But the spiritual background of the covenants was not totally irrelevant for life in Israel. They had the Temple and its sacrifices, the priesthood, and the Feasts. Everything was based on their covenantal relationship to and with God whether the Jews wanted it that way or not. The Jews as a group were in varying degrees more

or less faithful to but that doesn't mean they had all completely separated the temporal from the spiritual.

Even during the call of the disciples which was at the beginning of the Lord's ministry, they realized He was the One who Moses spoke about. God identified Jesus as the One to come when He spoke to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Deuteronomy 18:15 ¹⁵"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

John 1:45 ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Matthew 17:5 ⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

The leadership was obviously apostate and in rebellion, but they knew the truth and they realized the signs of the Messiah Jesus was performing; they just didn't want to lose power. The sign Jesus performed by resuscitating Lazarus caused many people to believe in Him and the Pharisees, who knew the significance of not only that sign but all the signs and who knew they couldn't deny them or wish them away, instead plotted to kill Him. As the leadership went, so went the nation. Amillennial, Replacement theologians cannot understand any of this.

John 11:47–48, ⁵³ ⁴⁷Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸"If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." . . . ⁵³So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

In a theological system in which the Jewish people and their nation are replaced by the church, the spiritual dimensions of God's relationship with the Jewish people are destroyed in the minds of today's theologians as though they never existed. Replacement theologians can never understand the concept that God always has a remnant of Jewish believers. It is true in this age they are in the church but prior to Pentecost they were Old Testament believers. The church did not begin until Pentecost and it was not in the Old Testament. Forcing the church into the Old Testament destroys God's biblical covenants and God's Kingdom program for history.

Amillennialists claim that Jesus is the true Temple. The problem with this is the Bible never says Jesus is the Temple. They use this presupposition to deny the truth of Ezekiel that predicts a Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40-48). They also deny the possibility of animal sacrifice during the Messianic reign. "Traditional amillennialists criticize such images of perpetual animal sacrifices and temple worship after the second advent of Christ, saying this would undercut his saving work, especially since these aspects of Mosaic economy were fulfilled at Calvary.... We have already seen that the New Testament taught that Christ is the true Israel and David's greater son. The Old Testament prophecies regarding Jerusalem and the mountain of the Lord are fulfilled in Christ's church. The promise of a land, as we have seen, will be fulfilled in a new heaven and earth in the consummation. Likewise, the New Testament taught that Christ is the new temple and that a new order of commemoration involving the ceremonies typical of the earthly temple can only commemorate the types and shadows, not the reality." [Riddlebarger, pp. 78-79]. Since amillennialists deny a literal Kingdom, they cannot allow Ezekiel to refer to literal rituals and a Temple. They go from this age to the eternal state with no Kingdom intervening between the two.

The Millennial Kingdom will be a Kingdom of righteousness and restoration but it will not be perfect as the eternal state will be perfect. There will be sin present; therefore, the presence of Aaronic priests from the order of Zadok and animal sacrifices are not inconsistent with a return to a Law oriented society once again. That is not to say grace will not be present in the Kingdom; it will be just as it was in the Mosaic dispensation. "Righteousness will prevail during the Millennium (Isa. 1:26-27; 35:8-10; Zeph. 3:11). The effects of sin will still be present, but they will largely be held in check and dealt with in perfect justice. The curse of sin on the creation of the earth will not yet be entirely removed. However, as mentioned, there will be no accidental death during this time. No tornadoes, hurricanes, or other disasters will take the lives of believers and unbelievers living at that time. It should be noted that during the millennial aspect of the Kingdom, life on earth will not be perfect. Perfection will not be ushered in until the earth is re-created." [J. B. Hixson and Mark Fontecchio, *What Lies Ahead: A Biblical Overview of the End Times*, p. 390].

In the amillennialist scheme of things, history moves from this age right into eternity; therefore, they cannot comprehend the nature of the Millennial Kingdom in which sin will be present. "The most serious problem to be faced by all premillenarians is the presence of evil in the millennial age. Recall that the thousand years depicted in Revelation 20 begins with the binding of Satan when he is prevented from deceiving the nations. When the thousand years have ended, Satan is released and again deceives the nations. This culminates in a worldwide revolt against God's people and a fiery and final judgment from heaven upon Satan and his cronies, the beast and the false prophet. If the 'thousand years' do not begin until after the second coming of

Christ, as premillenarians insist, then we must pointedly ask, Who are these people who are deceived and then revolt against Jesus Christ?" [Riddlebarger, pp. 86-87]. Don't amillennialists such as Riddlebarger claim we are at least partially in the Kingdom age right now in this dispensation? Indeed, they do. If that's true, how does he explain evil in this present age since the Millennium is also now as well as future? Again, by denying literal hermeneutics, his system becomes confused and contradictory. He has evil in the Kingdom as he sees it; therefore, why condemn premillennialists on that issue? He assumes that everyone in the Kingdom as will be saved but that is not necessarily correct and we will examine that issue soon.

Because Amillennialists believe there will only be glorified, resurrected people left to go into eternity at the Second Coming, they accuse premillennialists of teaching that those who revolt at the end of the Tribulation are resurrected, saved people. "Who are these people who are still one earth at the end of the millennial age who revolt against Christ? Are they the redeemed? If so, the premillennialist has just introduced a 'second fall' of humanity into sin into the course of redemptive history. This time, however, we have a fall of glorified saints after the resurrection and the judgment. This simply cannot be, though premillennial commentators ignore the force of this, choosing instead to make the hermeneutical crux an overly rigid exegesis of the first resurrection of Revelation 20:5, often overlooking the important parallel passages in John 5:24-25 which explicitly tells us when the first resurrection occurs—at the moment of conversion." [Riddlebarger, p. 87].

This is a red herring argument. He assumes his argument to be biblical, which it isn't, and then he destroys premillennialism because it doesn't agree with his system. The problems with his argument are numerous. He rejects the literal Kingdom. He assumes that those in the Millennial Kingdom are all glorified saints; that's not correct. They are human beings still possessing a sin nature. He assumes premillennialists are saying redeemed people revolt at the end. We do not say that and in a moment I will offer an explanation of this revolt. He completely destroys biblical truth concerning the resurrection because he believes there is only one resurrection—not two as the Bible proclaims—and he misrepresents the timing of a person's resurrection. He believes that at Christ's Second Coming everyone is resurrected and a general judgment of believers and unbelievers alike occurs at that time; therefore, every believer receives glorified bodies at that event. That is simply unbiblical. Let's examine the Scriptures he just cited.

Revelation 20:5–6 ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection [ἀναστασις]. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection [ἀναστασις]; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Amillennialists use John 5:24-25 as a proof text to deny the truth of two resurrections.

John 5:24–25 ²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. ²⁵“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

What is the “first resurrection?” Resurrection, ἀναστασις, is never used to refer to the new birth. In John 5:25, the Lord is talking about spiritually dead people receiving eternal life when they believe. Regeneration and not resurrection is the point here. Note that Jesus says this hour is not only coming but it “now is.” In vv. 28-29, he switches to the future resurrection of physically deceased people.

John 5:28–29 ²⁸“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection [ἀναστασις] of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection [ἀναστασις] of judgment.

The Lord is talking about two resurrections both of which are future. This is referring to a bodily resurrection and not to a spiritual resurrection. There is no such thing as a spiritual resurrection; we have a spiritual rebirth and not a spiritual resurrection. The first bodily resurrection belongs to all who believe but it is accomplished in stages and not all at once. Upon the death of Christ on the cross, some believers in Jerusalem were raised (Mt. 27:52). Jesus was raised (Mt. 28:1-10). Those who are in Christ will be raised (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Old Testament believers will be resurrected (Dan. 12:2). The two Tribulation witnesses will be raised (Rev. 11:11). Those martyred during the Tribulation will be raised (Rev. 20:5). This will end the first resurrection. The second resurrection consists of unbelievers who will face judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment. Therefore, in the Lord's words in John 5:29, there is an order to resurrection; first the saved, then the unsaved. The time of the new birth is both coming and now is, but the time of resurrection is in the hour that is to come, that is, the eschatological time that is in the future. The first resurrection is for the saved throughout history but it occurs in stages and not all at once at the Second Coming as amillennialists insist. It is completed 1,000 years before the unsaved are resurrected. The doctrine that there is only one general resurrection for all people, both saved and unsaved, at the Second Coming of Christ is not exegetically supported by the Scriptures. Actually, the only people specifically resurrected at the Second Coming will be the Old Testament believers. Furthermore, using John 5:25 to make the claim that people are resurrected the moment they believe is contrary to the concept of literal hermeneutics. The second bodily resurrection occurs only after the Millennial Kingdom has ended. Why is that? It is

because all the unbelievers from the beginning of history to the end will be gathered all together all at one time to face the Great White Throne Judgment.