V. THREE ESCHATOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

A. POSTMILLENNIALISM

1. Definition of Postmillennialism
Loraine Boettner defines Postmillennialism with these four points:¹

- The kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals.
- The world is eventually to be Christianized.
- The return of Christ occurs after a long period of righteousness and peace called the Millennium.
- A general resurrection, general judgment and eternity follow the 2nd Advent.

2. Characteristics of Postmillennialism
- Optimism about the success of the church in evangelizing the world
- Confidence in the power of God through the Gospel
- The Church is God's instrument to bring about the Millennium on earth
- The 1000 year Millennium is not literal but figurative of a long period.
- The Millennium will be a time of peace, material and spiritual prosperity but not all men will be saved. Sin will be reduced but not eradicated. Christian principles will be the rule not the exception. Satan will be bound more than he is bound now (Rev 20)

3. Biblical Support for Postmillennialism
- OT texts which predict a golden age on earth are the same texts Premillennialists use to support a millennium after Christ's 2nd coming. Postmillennialists believe the Church not ethnic Israel is the instrument which brings them to pass.
- Since the Gospel is the power of God (Rom 1:16) it must conquer the world.
- They insist that the leaven of the gospel will convert the world (Matt 13:33)
- Israel will be converted (Romans 11)
- A great multitude of the redeemed will be in heaven. (Rev 7)

4. Adherents of Postmillennialism
- Jonathan Edwards & George Whitefield. (18th Century)
- Theological Liberals of the 20th century adhered to a humanistic postmillennialism which was shattered by WWI and WWII.
- Theonomists promote Postmillennialism through the Gospel and the imposition of the Mosaic Law upon society at large.

B. AMILLENNIALISM (REALIZED MILLENNIALISM)

1. Definition of Amillennialism
   - There is no physical, earthly Millennium coming in the future.
   - The present age continues with a parallel development of good and evil.
   - The present age ends with the 2nd Advent of Christ followed by a general resurrection and general judgment of all people.

2. Characteristics of Amillennialism
   - Some Amillennialists are fellow believers who hold a high view of inspiration.
   - The First Advent of Christ brought His Spiritual Kingdom to the world.
   - Christ now reigns over the Church at the right hand of God.
   - The Millennium is spiritually present in the reign of Christ in our hearts.
   - Two Views of the Millennium exist in Amillennialism:
     a. Millennial passages are fulfilled by the church on earth now
        Allis and Berkof
     b. Millennial passages are fulfilled by the church in heaven now
        Warfield and Hamilton
   - The OT Covenant promises are fulfilled spiritually in the church now or were conditioned upon obedience and need not ever be fulfilled.
   - The new heaven and earth follow the Church Age and consummate history.

2. Arguments Commonly used for Amillennialism
   - The OT prophets spoke of the coming Messianic Age in types and figures familiar to Old Covenant saints. The OT is to be read in light of NT revelation. The OT shadow of sacrifice, feast, Temple and land, give way to the substance which is fulfilled in Christ. Christ, not the Hebrew people is the subject of the OT prophets. The true Israel is Christ. Since Christ is the true Israel, the true seed of Abraham, we who are in Christ by faith are the true Israel, the Israel of faith, not of mere natural descent (Gal 3:7-9, 26-27, 29)²
   - The NT interprets the OT in non-literal ways. Amillennialists contend that hermeneutics favor Amillennialism. They contend that we should interpret the OT in the same way that the Apostles interpreted it. If apostolic interpretation was not consistently literal, then neither should our interpretation be consistently literal.
   - The church is a spiritual continuation of Israel not distinct from it.
     1 Peter 2:9-10 applies to the Church terms used of Israel. We are now “the people of God and a chosen race and a holy nation.” They argue that the church has replaced Israel in the program of God. The Church is “spiritual Israel.” The “Israel of God” in Gal 6:16 is the Church.

March 19, 2017  Lesson 3

- A Millennial Kingdom is not necessary and would even be a regression. Since according to Hebrews, Christ is the final sacrifice and all other sacrifices have forever ceased, resuming sacrifices in a future Millennium would be impossible. Ezekiel’s Temple and sacrificial system must be understood in a figurative way.

- The outline of the future is simple (1 Cor 15:23-28)

- The New Covenant is the culmination and fulfillment of all other covenants.

- The Church replaces Israel. Christians are the true Jews now. Spiritual not physical descendants of Abraham are God’s chosen people (Rom 1:28-29).

- Revelation 20:1-6 is interpreted, non-literally, as spiritually present now.

- Abraham was looking for the heavenly city not an earthly one (Heb 11:10) therefore we should not look for an earthly Millennial kingdom. Our hope is the new heavens and earth not the Millennium.

4. Conflicting Interpretations within Amillennialism

Amillennialists differ on the fulfillment of the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

- They were conditional and the conditions were never met.
- Fulfilled in the time of Joshua (Joshua 21:43-45).
- Fulfilled under King Solomon (1 Kings 4:21).
- Being fulfilled now in the Church.
- Will be fulfilled in the heavenly Jerusalem.

(Note that if any one of these are true the others are proven false automatically!)

C. Premillennialism

1. Definition of Premillennialism

- The Second Coming of Christ will occur before the Millennium.
- After Christ comes He establishes his kingdom on earth for 1000 years.
- Several different resurrections and judgments will take place.
- Eternity begins after the 1000-year reign of Christ.
- Within Premillennialism there are different views on the timing of the Rapture.

2. Characteristics of Premillennialism

- Premillennialists may be either covenant or dispensational, but Dispensationalists will always be Premillennial.
- Premillennialists hold a high view of inspiration and innerrancy.
The Millennium follows the 2nd coming of Christ.

The duration of the Millennium will be 1000 literal years.

The place where Christ reigns during the millennial kingdom is the earth.

The purpose is to fulfill the yet unfulfilled prophecies about the earthly kingdom.

There are differing views as to how Jewish and how literally the prophecies of the kingdom in the OT will be fulfilled.

Premillennialists apply a literal (normal) hermeneutic to Scripture from which they derive their system.

Dispensational-Premillennialists consistently distinguish the church from Israel. (This is the one, absolute essential of Dispensationalism)

VI. THE HISTORY OF MILLENNIAL INTERPRETATION

While the Bible, not history is the determining factor about what we believe, the evidence from history helps us understand how the early Christians understood eschatology.

In the first 300 years after Christ, church leaders held a general Premillennial view, but the details were not always clear (Historic Premillennialism). They taught that Christ would come a second time, resurrect the believers and establish a literal kingdom on earth. The Millennium included the future reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem. Although some distinguished Israel from the Church, others equated or connected them.

Church historian Philip Schaff summarizes as follows: “The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age (before the Nicene Council) is the prominent chiliasm, or millennarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers.”

The first appearance of an allegorical hermeneutic occurs with Origen. He appears to be influenced by Greek philosophy and he applied that hermeneutic to other doctrines of the Scripture with devastating results. In Alexandria, Origen opposed chiliasm as a Jewish dream, and spiritualized the symbolical language of the prophets. Later, Augustine popularized the Amillennial view which the Reformers retained.

Origen’s allegorical method of interpretation undermined the historical-grammatical method of interpretation upon which Premillennialism is built.

Origen’s disciples in Alexandria and the Greek Church rejected the Book of Revelation from the canon of Scripture.

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A century later when Alexandrian Theology was brought to the west, Latin theologians such as Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine rejected Premillennialism.

Augustine (354-430) wrote *The City of God*, as the first to teach that the organized universal Church is the Messianic Kingdom and the Millennium began with the first coming of Christ.  

THE DOMINANT VIEW OF ESCHATOLOGY IN CHURCH HISTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
<th>DOMINANT VIEW</th>
<th>BELIEF</th>
<th>OUTLOOK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st to 4th centuries</td>
<td>Premillennialism</td>
<td>Christ waits at the Father’s throne to return to earth and reign over earth’s kingdoms.</td>
<td>Pessimistic about man’s ability to achieve utopia.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Supernatural Millennialism)</td>
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<td>Utopia achieved only by the supernatural intervention of Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th to 17th centuries</td>
<td>Amillennialism</td>
<td>Christ reigns now on the throne in heaven or in believer’s hearts</td>
<td>Optimistic that the spiritual kingdom will advance in the world.</td>
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<td>(Realized Millennialism)</td>
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<td>17th- 19th centuries till end of WWI</td>
<td>Postmillennialism</td>
<td>Through the spread of the gospel the whole world will be Christianized. Society transformed both by the gospel and progress Christ rules from his heavenly throne and returns to earth at the end of the 1000 years of man’s progress.</td>
<td>Optimistic about the course of history and man’s progress upward toward utopia.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Progressive Millennialism)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th - 20th 1830- Present</td>
<td>Premillennialism</td>
<td>Dispensationalism Covenant-Premill</td>
<td>Darby D. L. Moody C. I. Schofield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-Present</td>
<td>Amillennialism</td>
<td>Majority view today</td>
<td>R. C. Sproul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 – Present</td>
<td>Postmillennialism</td>
<td>Reconstructionism Theonomy Dominion Theology</td>
<td>Rushdoony Success of the Great commission in this age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Earle E. Cairns, “Eschatology and Church History,” Part I