

### *Amillennialism in the Ancient Church*

- *The question: What is the origin of the millennial controversy?*
  - *This question came about because of:*
    - *The popularity of premillennialism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its declaration that the Bible was premillennial.*
    - *The decline of classic liberalism, which led to more serious study of the Word.*
  - *The question has brought about:*
    - *A renewed study of “church fathers.”*
    - *A fresh study of Scripture.*
    - *A vigorous attack on premillennialism, with a desire to weaken their claim on “earliest position.”*
- *Millennialism in the Bible*
  - *Some will claim that the Bible is premillennial but only because the early writers were mistaken.*
  - *The Bible contains no record of a millennial controversy.*
    - *Claims that Christ was amillennial only go so far as to say, “The Pharisees were premillennial, Christ was opposed to the Pharisees, therefore Christ was Amillennial.*
- *Amillennialism in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries*
  - *No evidence for any amillennialism in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century except for a disputed work under the name of Barnabus.*
  - *In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the “Alexandrian School” (from Alexandria, Egypt) adopted the allegorical method of interpretation. With this arose the first known attack of premillennialism.*
  - *At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the Bishop of Alexandria (Dionysius) had a public controversy with Nepos, a strong premillennialist who was leading entire churches away from association with the Alexandrian bishopric, due to the allegorizing of Scripture within that district.*

### *Amillennialism from Augustine onward*

- *Thou shalt not underestimate the importance of Augustine on modern theological thought.*
  - *Through history, in both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, Augustine is foundational and almost every doctrine.*
  - *He could be called “The father of amillennialism.”*
    - *There are no other proponents of amillennialism before him.*
    - *His viewpoint led to the “shelving of premillennialism” (pg 48) and the wholesale adoption of the Augustinian view by the Roman church.*
- *Augustine’s Millennial Teachings*
  - *There is a great conflict between the City of God and the City of Satan (the church and the world).*
  - *There will be the ultimate triumph of the City of God (the church).*
  - *The age of this conflict is the millennium.*
  - *Satan has been bound (based on Lk 10:18).*
- *Augustine’s principle of spiritual interpretation*
  - *He did not use this principle in areas such as predestination but found it suitable for use in prophetic Scriptures.*
  - *His doctrine of the binding of Satan is essential in his interpretation.*
    - *Both Scripture and history are strongly opposed to this Augustinian doctrine.*
    - *“It can be stated flatly that Augustine’s exegesis is an outright error as far as the binding of Satan is concerned” (Pg 51)*

- *His interpretation of Revelation 20 is equally problematic, in which he claims the “first resurrection” is the spiritual birth of believers (failing to reconcile this with the fact that those in the first resurrection are clearly stated as “those who were beheaded.”)*
- *The failure of Augustine’s millennial teaching*
  - *Augustine taught that the present age was the millennium*
  - *He taught that the millennium was 1,000 years.*
    - *We’ve been 2,000 years since his supposed “binding of Satan.”*
    - *For a time, followers said we were in the “little season” of Rev. 20:3, but time has gone too long for this to be claimed with any sort of sanity.*
  - *This brought about a revision (rather than rejection) of amillennialism:*
    - *The creation of a postmillennial concept, proposing that the millennium was / is just beginning.*
    - *The spiritualization of “millennium” to mean an indefinite period of time.*
- *Amillennialism in the Protestant Reformation*
  - *All of the protestant leaders are amillennial, “content to follow the Roman Church in a weakened Augustinian viewpoint” (pg. 55).*
    - *Calvin was especially anti-premillennial. “Those who assign the children of God a thousand years to enjoy the inheritance of the future life, little think what dishonor they cast on Christ and his kingdom” (pg. 56)*
    - *Augustine rejected premillennialism based on a “carnal” millennium, Calvin on a limited eternity.*
    - *No premillennialist would accept a carnal millennium nor a limited eternity.*
- *Modern amillennialism*
  - *Continues to follow Augustine in spiritualizing prophecy.*
  - *Is in two camps:*
    - *Adherents of the “earthly millennium” view (of Augustine), in which the church is the Kingdom and the present age is the millennium.*
    - *Adherents of a “heavenly millennium” view in which the millennium is nothing more than a picture of deceased believers now in heaven.*
      - *BB Warfield, “[The millennium] is a vision of the peace of those who have died in the Lord.”*

### **Amillennialism as a Method of Interpretation of Scripture**

- *“The crux of the millennial issue is the question of method of interpreting Scripture” (pg. 59).*
  - *Gramatical-historical-literal method.*
  - *Spiritualization method. “Fundamentally its charm lies in its flexibility” (pg. 60).*
- *Reasons the amillennial approach to Scripture has thrived:*
  - *It enhances the church as an institution (i.e.: P-O-W-E-R)*
  - *Simplicity – there is no need for a prophecy conference or work to harmonize prophetic Scripture*
  - *Amillennial scholars have consistently resorted to ridicule rather than substance in their objection of premillennialism.*
- *The amillennial method:*
  - *Literal interpretation except in prophetic texts (for conservative amillennialists)*
  - *Spiritualizing method for prophetic passages*
    - *Not allegorical method.*
      - *In allegory: “Israel is like a vine”*
      - *In spiritualization: “Israel is the church”*
    - *Allegory is a comparison, spiritualization changes the meaning.*
- *Problems with the amillennial method:*
  - *It would be “utterly destructive to Christian doctrine” if used in other areas (pg. 66)*
  - *It is only used when necessary to build their millennial doctrine.*

- *It is born of necessity rather than exegesis.*
- *It spreads too easily.*
- *It does not develop a consistent theology (thus there are Catholic, Calvinist, and liberal amillennialists).*

### *Amillennialism's theological byproducts*

- *It rejects verbal-plenary inspiration.*
  - *The one who rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ uses the same principles as the one who rejects a literal future kingdom.*
  - *If you find a premillennialist, you've found a conservative. This is because the method of interpretation for premillennialism doesn't allow liberalism.*
- *It has a "binding of Satan" problem which fosters-*
  - *Denial of reality*
  - *Charismatic concepts of spiritual warfare*
    - *And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.*
- *It created covenant theology.*
  - *God made a covenant with Himself, three-in-one, and the Godhead agreed that the Father would offer salvation by grace to the elect, Jesus would pay for salvation for the elect, and the Spirit would enable salvation for the elect.*
  - *Every Scripture is about God's work to save the elect. Any dispensational revelation is nothing more than progressive revelation as God unfolds his plan.*
- *It creates a loose ecclesiology (doctrine of the church)*
  - *The church is all of God's elect at all times.*
  - *Rather than the church being a living organism (the body of Christ), the church is the organization of believers at that time. Therefore, hierarchical structure almost always accompanies amillennialism.*
  - *The Roman Catholic system necessitated a definition of the church which was inclusive of Israel and in which the church is the successor of Israel.*
  - *Both in Roman and Protestant amillennialism, the church is the Kingdom of God.*
  - *The doctrine of sacraments is a result of the amillennial view of the church.*