

Amillennialism or The Truth of the Return of the Lord Jesus

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In the past two articles the theories of Postmillennialism and Premillennialism have been defined and briefly discussed. In both cases it was shown that these views did not satisfy all the revealed data presented to us by the Scriptures. Each view has elements of truth to recommend it; yet at the same time each came into conflict with various portions of the Bible. Although the truth concerning the parousia of Jesus Christ has been suggested previously, it is the task of this article to develop more fully that true conception, and show how the unity of the Scriptures may and must be preserved also in respect to the day of Christ's appearing. We believe this is accomplished when one holds to what has been called Amillennialism.

This term is, perhaps, unfortunate. Literally it means "no thousand years"; the amillennialist then does not believe in the millennium. The defect in the name is that the Bible DOES teach a 1000 year period in SOME sense, and the term is completely negative. Since the term is with us, let us define it in such a way that it has positive content: Amillennialism is that view of the last things which denies a literal thousand year reign of Christ on this earth (Premillennialism) or a thousand year period of peace and righteousness on this earth just before Christ returns (Postmillennialism), but holds that the millennium mentioned in Rev. 20 refers to the entire period between Christ's first and last coming, from Pentecost to just before Judgment. This view is not new! It is implied in the early historic creeds of Christianity. It was held by the greatest theologians of the Church: Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. More recent theologians have also expounded this view: A. Kuyper and H. Bavinck in the Netherlands, and L. Berkhof and H. Hoeksema in this land. Also, it is the position of the Reformed Confessions, and hence of all truly Reformed believers. Revelation 20:1-10 ought to be read at this point. A brief commentary on this passage is in order.

The book of Revelation is highly symbolic and figurative and is not to be thought of as exact chronology. Thus it may not be interpreted literally in many instances, nor does it present us with twenty-two chapters of events that happened in consecutive order. Again and again the apostle John recapitulates and gives us another view of the same period of time. (Rev. 6:12-16, 16:15-19, 14:17-20 for example) Thus whatever the first ten verses of Rev. 20 may mean, it does not follow that it is all yet in the future. Rather, the apostle sees a long period of history from another point of view, that of the nations of God and Magog. And since this is a vision, and the angel, the chain, and the binding are all figurative, we may safely assume that the thousand years are also figurative. How often are numbers in this visionary book to be conceived as symbolic!

The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ had great significance for the Church not only, but for Satan as well (see John 16:11 and Rev. 12:7-9). In our present passage the view is that Satan, who derives all his power from God (Job 1), has the power limited during the present age; this is the significance of the binding for a thousand years, verse 2. Satan, who desires to bring all possible force upon the Church of Christ to completely destroy her, is prevented from accomplishing this purpose. Oh, he is still active to a considerable extent: he goes about as a roaring lion. Yet he is not able to do all he has in mind to do. He is bound (restricted) from the time of Christ's ascension until just before His glorious return. Then for a short time he is loosed to accomplish his desire: the deceiving of God and Magog, those nations which during this age have lived on the outskirts of civilization and history (verse 7-8); those vast throngs join together under the devil's direction to come against all the Christian nations in which the Church is found, but God destroys them all with fire even as He destroyed the enemies of Israel with fire (Ezek. 38).

That this is briefly the thrust of the passage may also be seen from the fourth verse. The apostle John also sees "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast neither his image (13:12), neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands (13:16,17); and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Clearly, this thousand years is the same period of time during which the devil is bound. It is equally clear that these beheaded individuals are saints who have already died and are in heaven, and who reign with Christ until the general resurrection of the dead. At that time all those that are Christ's join Him, in body and soul, in full heavenly perfection and glory. Those that are not His, whom he never knew, do not live now and shall not live after the resurrection; they perish everlastingly (vs.5).

In other words, during the ages of history there is a simultaneous development of two lines or seeds. From the time of Paradise, the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman grow and multiply: the Seed of the line of Eve is Jesus Christ and all those given unto Him by the Father, the church; the culmination and endpoint of the serpent's seed in the kingdom of Antichrist. If God and Magog refer to the numberless throngs to be found in eastern Asia, perhaps we can say that we live not only near the end of the ages, but during that time in which Satan is "loosed for a little season". At any rate, all things reach their full end and development at the same moment. The kingdom of this world, Satan's empire, culminates in the man of sin, that son of perdition, the Antichrist. Under God's longsuffering grace, the last one of His elect is born and comes to repentance so that there is a full harvest of God's children. Thus God's eternal purpose and good pleasure is reached: a Church is saved out of the midst of the world unto His eternal glory!

An interpretation as outlined above allows for a natural, consistent explanation of all Scripture passages that speak of the return of Jesus. Let us notice a few relevant points: 1. There is ONE church and ONE covenant composed of the spiritual seed of Abraham, whether they be Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3). 2. The majority of mankind is not saved, but the true Church at any given time is small and despised (Luke 12:32 and Matt, 22:14). 3. The Antichrist did not come in the past, at the destruction of Jerusalem, for example, but is yet coming (II Thess. 2:3-10). 4. The world is not being brought under Christian influence and wars are not disappearing, but wickedness increases and wars abound (Matt. 24:6, 7). 5. The Church is not spirited away from the earth before the great tribulation begins, but is on the earth with the calling to endure (Matt. 24:22). 6. We must yet expect apostasy and a falling away from the faith to a staggering degree (Matt. 24:10-12 and I Tim. 4:1). 7. There shall be one resurrection of all the dead at the return of Christ in judgment (John 5:28-29). And 8. This return of Christ is very near, though no man knows the day or the hour, "The end of all things is at hand" (I Peter 4:7) and "Little children, it is the last hour" (I John 2:18).

Thus the orthodox, Reformed truth of Scripture states that Christ shall soon appear with power and glory in His resurrection body. He comes in order to raise all the dead and change the bodies of the living, to judge all men and reward them according to their works, to make a new heaven and a new earth as a fit dwelling place for Himself and His people, and thus cause all creation to partake of the liberty of the Sons of God; and finally He comes to take His redeemed Church to eternal glory and cast out the devil, his hosts, and all the wicked into everlasting fire.

What is our calling in the light of all this? How must we react to the fact that we live near the end, on the very brink of eternity? Peter expresses it this way: "Be ye, therefore, sober, and watchful unto prayer." Do not, as the drunken man, stagger through life ignoring all reality, especially the reality of the Truth of God's Word. Do not scoff and say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." Do not stand by with tears in your eyes as you see this world coming to an end. But with SPIRITUAL SOBRIETY rejoice as you see history moving to the end! Hope unto the end, for your redemption draws nigh!

The child of God must also WATCH. Observe the signs of Christ's coming; the world is filled with them if we have eyes to see. See the fulfilling of Matthew 24 in nature, in the history of the church, and in the history of nations. Watch the world in which you must for a time live. This does not require a partaking of the things of the world, but rather a critical evaluation of its activities and philosophies. See in the world the enemy, a very real threat to the peace of Zion. And also watch yourself, constantly asking the question, "Am I a stranger here? Do I live as a true pilgrim, out of the power of hope?"

You sense immediately that such a sober, watchful attitude requires prayer. The pilgrim does not have this strength in himself, but must often take refuge in the secret place of the Most High and under the shadow of the Almighty. Through prayer we are given to understand that our God is in the heavens, sovereignly doing His good pleasure. Through prayer we receive the strength to endure the rigors and temptations of each day. Through prayer we are encouraged and filled with determination and faithfulness. And it is through prayer that we know that our sins are forgiven, so that when Christ comes as Judge, we shall be perfectly vindicated by His blood! Then also we desire to pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And "Come Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly."