

An Assessment of Amillennialism

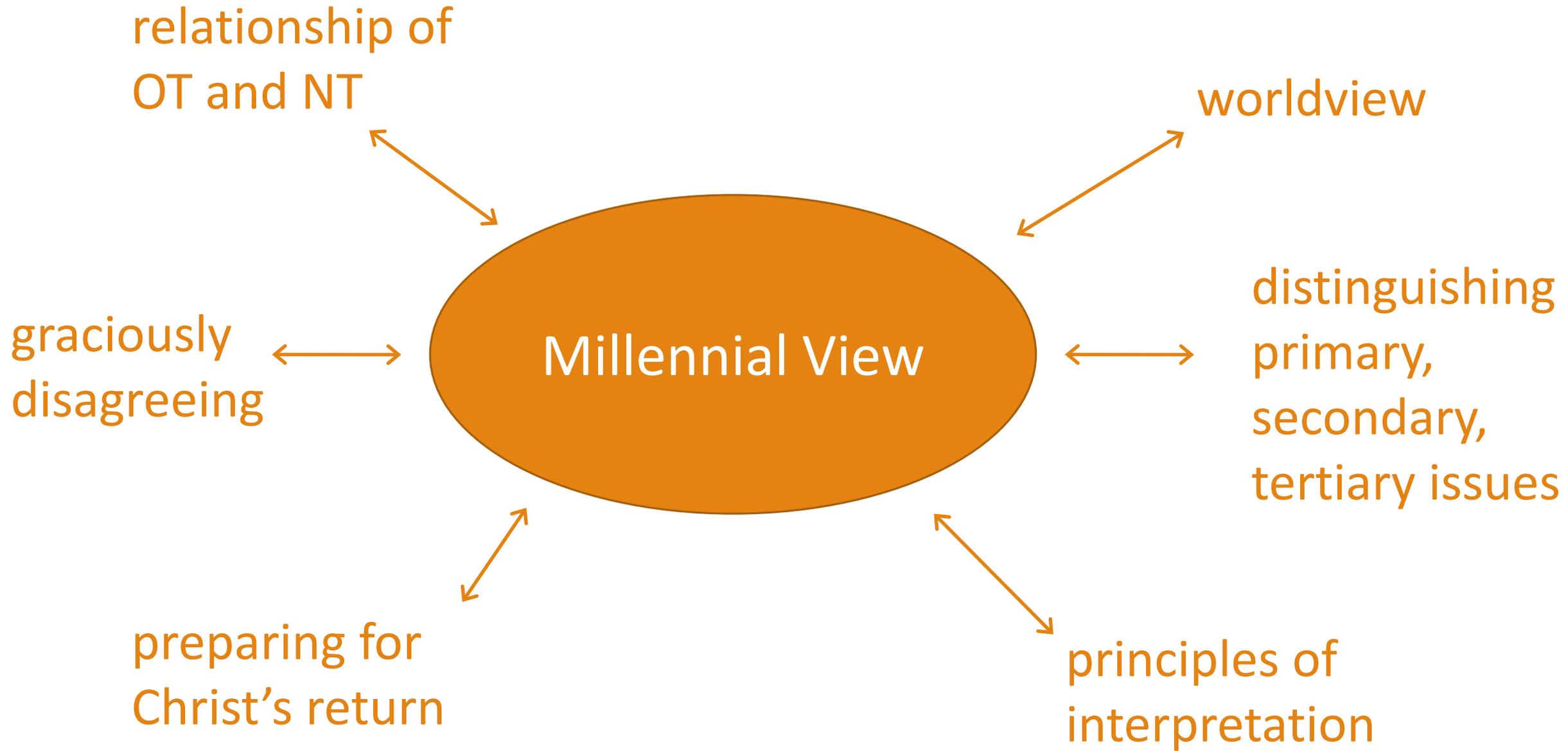
SEEING THE GLORIOUS HOPE OF THE GOSPEL IN A STUDY OF LAST THINGS

We consider strengths and weaknesses of amillennialism in light of the two-age structure taught by Jesus and the apostles as well as Revelation 20.

A Review of Millennial Views

When will Christ return in relation to the millennium?

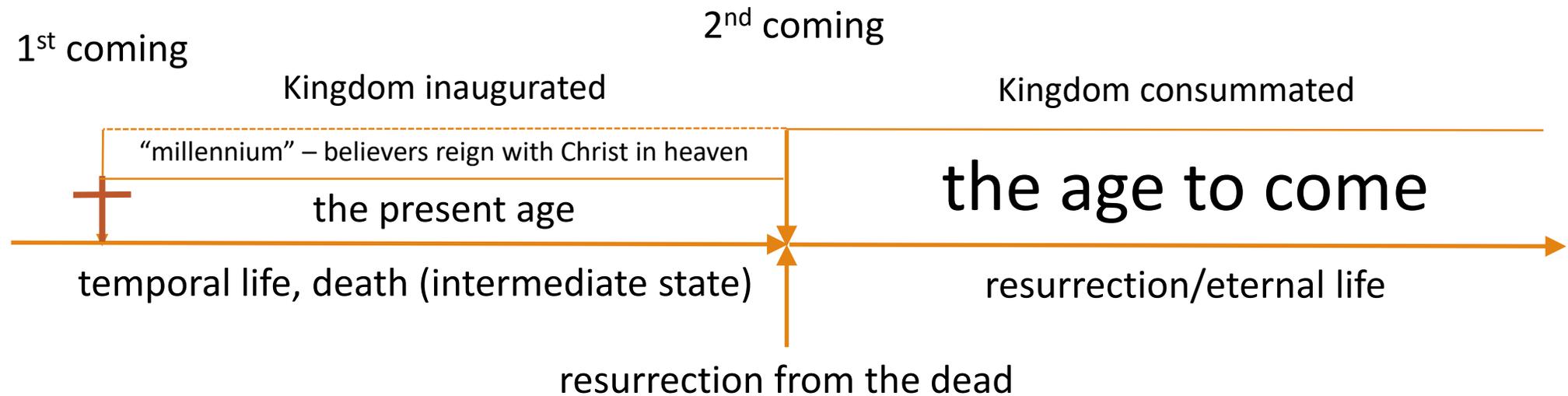
- Before the millennium—*premillennialism*
- After the millennium—*postmillennialism*
- No literal millennium—*amillennialism* (or realized millennialism)



Definition of Amillennialism

- Amillennialism asserts that the millennium is now, coinciding with the present age.
- 1000 years is taken to be symbolic of a long, complete period.
- Jesus is reigning now from heaven, and those who die in the present age are reigning with him.
- Satan is bound so that he cannot deceive the nations; that is, he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to all nations in the present age.
- There will be a parallel growth of good and evil in the present age.
- Christ will destroy all evil and rebellious people at his coming and usher in the eternal age.

Overview of Amillennialism



Progressive Parallelism in Revelation

- Revelation has seven parallel sections, each depicting the church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of his second from different perspectives.
- Each section unfolds more than the previous section.
- The sections correspond to these chapters:
 1. 1-3
 2. 4-7
 3. 8-11
 4. 12-14
 5. 15-16
 6. 17-19
 7. 20-22



Revelation 20 does not follow Revelation 19 chronologically.

Revelation 20:1-8

1 ¶ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. 4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth.

Criticisms of the Amil View

- The interpretation of Revelation 20 appears somewhat forced to some.
- A willingness not to interpret prophecy literally leads some to fear that amillennialists may not take all Scripture seriously.
- Handling of OT prophecy leaves some feeling that the interpretation evades the obvious meaning of certain passages. See Isaiah 65.
- Some passages seem to teach a universal expansion of the gospel.
- Some believe it is difficult to hold this view and maintain optimism concerning the church overcoming the gates of hell.
- Some believe it leads to disengagement with the culture.

How Do We Interpret Isaiah 65?

17 ¶ “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. 20 No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

2 Pet 3:12b-13 ...waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Rev. 21: 1,4 1 ¶ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more... 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Realistic Growth in the Present Age

“Let both [the wheat and the weeds] grow together until the harvest.” Matthew 13:30

“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” Matthew 13:33

“The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age.” Matthew 13:47-49

““Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not **receive a hundredfold now in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, **with persecutions**, and in the age to come eternal life.” Mark 10:29-30

Biblical Motivation

Do we need to believe that the gospel will largely convert the world and transform cultural institutions so that we will pursue these things with determination?

Do we need to believe that we will largely complete our sanctification before Christ takes us home so that we will pursue holiness with determination?

- Few Christians believe that! Reformed Christians don't believe it.
- Heidelberg Catechism: "In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God."

The parables of the kingdom tell us that we can expect growth of the kingdom even in the face of evil and opposition. The NT pervasively teaches that Jesus has claimed the whole world as his own. That is enough motivation.

Titus 2:11-13 11 ¶ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Other Considerations

- simplicity --- principle of Occam's razor
- meshes well with two-age structure of redemptive history --- this age and the age to come
- fits well with the many passages that teach that the second coming, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth happen in close chronological proximity
 - Matt. 16:26-27 --- judgment at 2nd coming
 - 2 Pet. 3:3-4,7,10-13 --- 2nd coming, final judgment, new heavens/new earth
 - Jn. 6:39-40,44 --- resurrection on last day
 - Matt. 25:31-34,41,46 --- general judgment, happens at 2nd coming, judgment leads directly to eternal life or eternal damnation. (Cmp. to Rev. 20:12-15) Where is there room for the millennium?

Conclusion and Preview

- Amillennialism is a simple scheme that fits well with the two-age structure taught in the NT. It suggests a specific way to understand Revelation 20.
- We must submit our expectations and our motivation to Jesus.
- Preview: What happens when Christ returns? What is the resurrection? What happens in the judgment?