

Amillennialism

Introduction

Three questions to answer:

1. Is the 1,000 year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20 a literal 1,000 years?
2. What does the millennium in Revelation 20 actually signify?
3. When does Christ return in relation to the millennium?

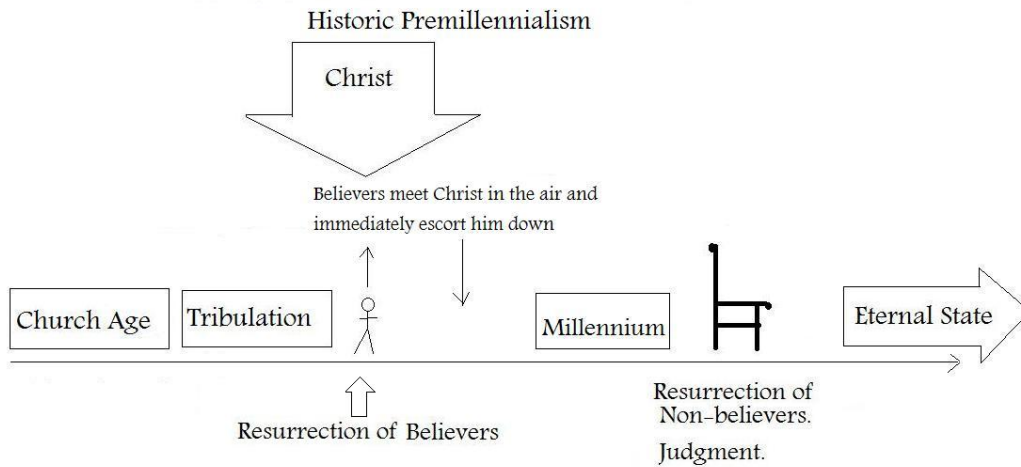
If you think Christ comes back before the millennium, you are premillennial (“pre” means “before”). If you think Christ comes back after the millennium, you are postmillennial (“post” means “after”). If you think that you cannot interpret the millennium in that concrete way you are amillennial (“a” is called an “alpha privative”) and negates something (like the “a” in the word “atheism”).

“The doctrine of the millennium has never yet been embodied in a single Confession, and therefore cannot be regarded as a dogma of the Church.” –Louis Berkhof

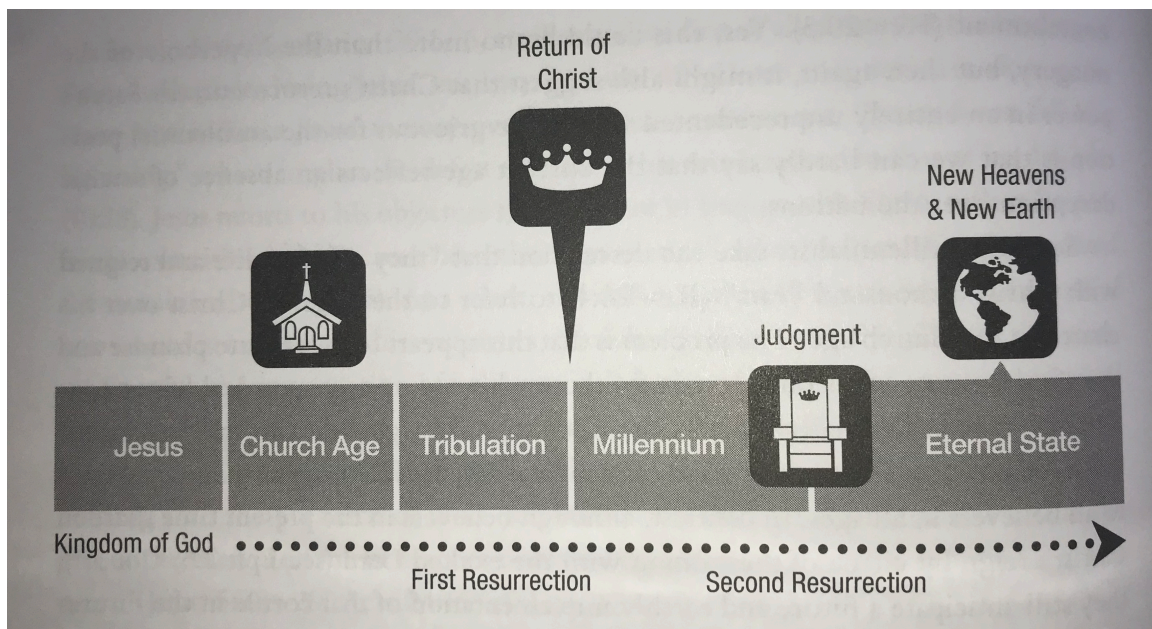
The text in question

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 those 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...

Premillennialism (Historic)



Note. Some who hold this view believe that the new heaven and new earth begin in the millennium, others hold that they begin in the eternal state.



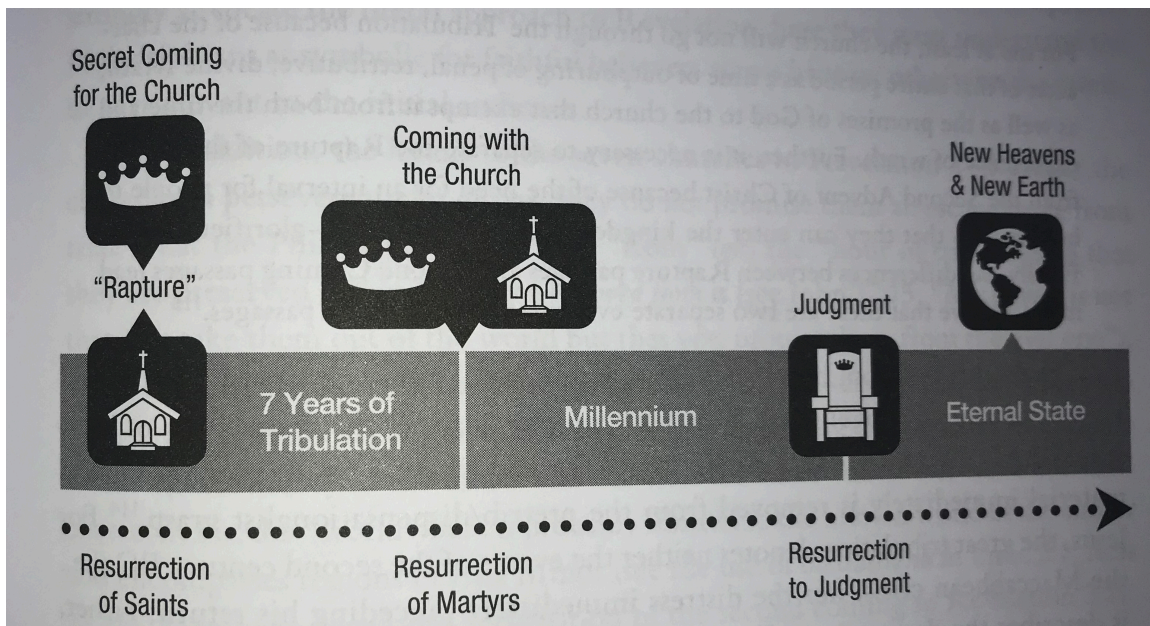
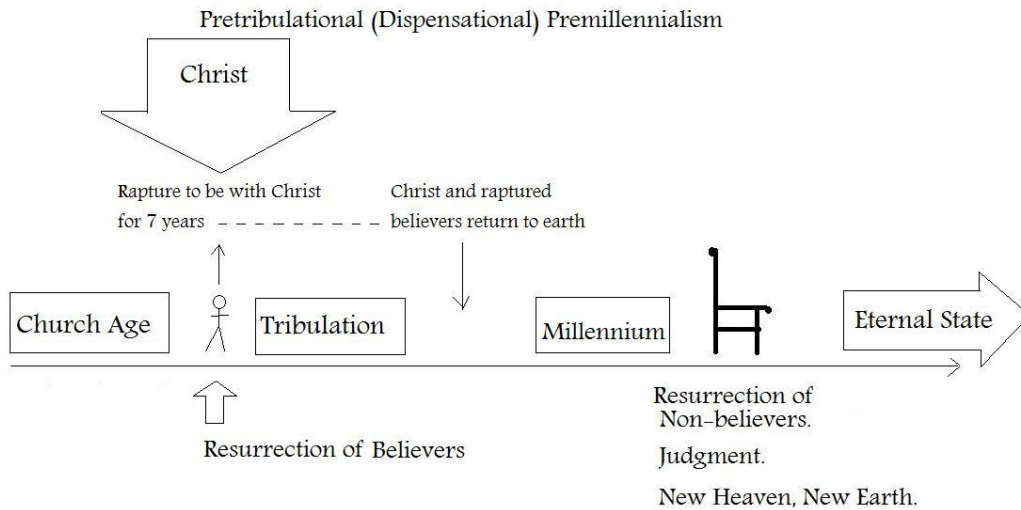
Order of events:

Tribulation > Resurrection of believers and the Return of Christ > Millennium > Judgment and Resurrection of non-believers > New Heavens/Earth

Who held to it?

Much of the early church: Papius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, et. al.

Premillennialism (Dispensational)



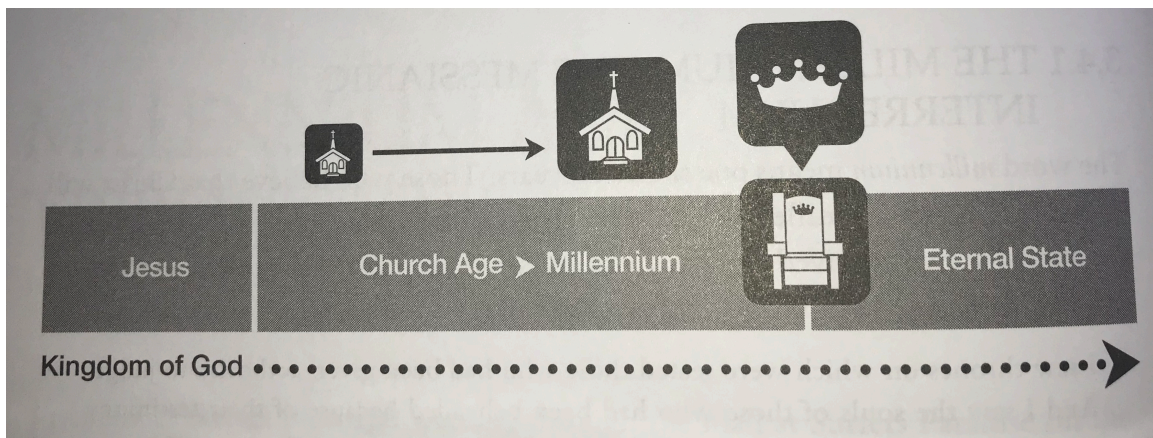
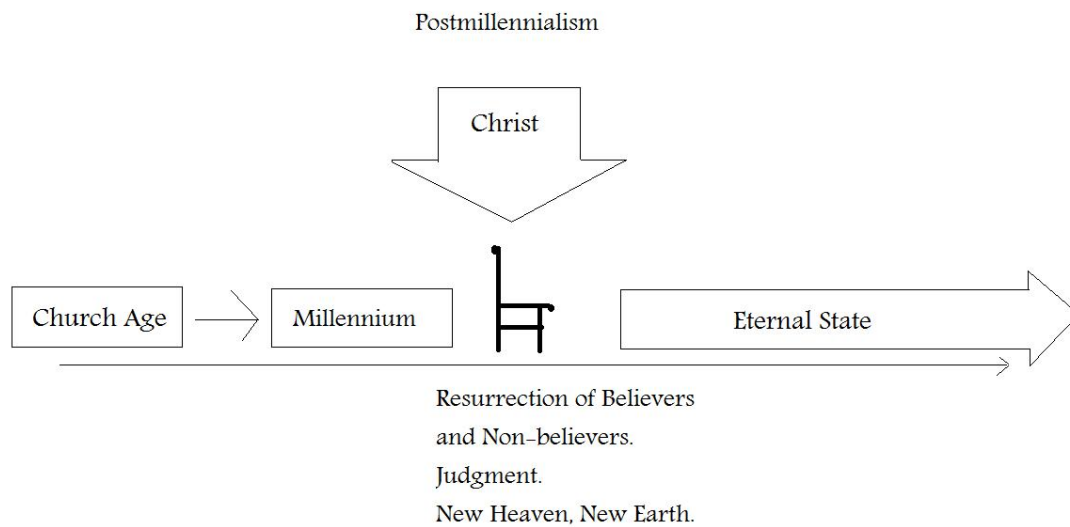
Order of events:

Resurrection of believers and the *First* Return of Christ ("The Rapture") > Tribulation > Second Return of Christ (and the Resurrection of martyrs) > Millennium > Judgment and Resurrection of non-believers > New Heavens/Earth

Who held to it?

Not held until the mid 19th century, primarily in English-speaking countries: John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Dwight Moody, Charles Ryrie, et. al.

Postmillennialism



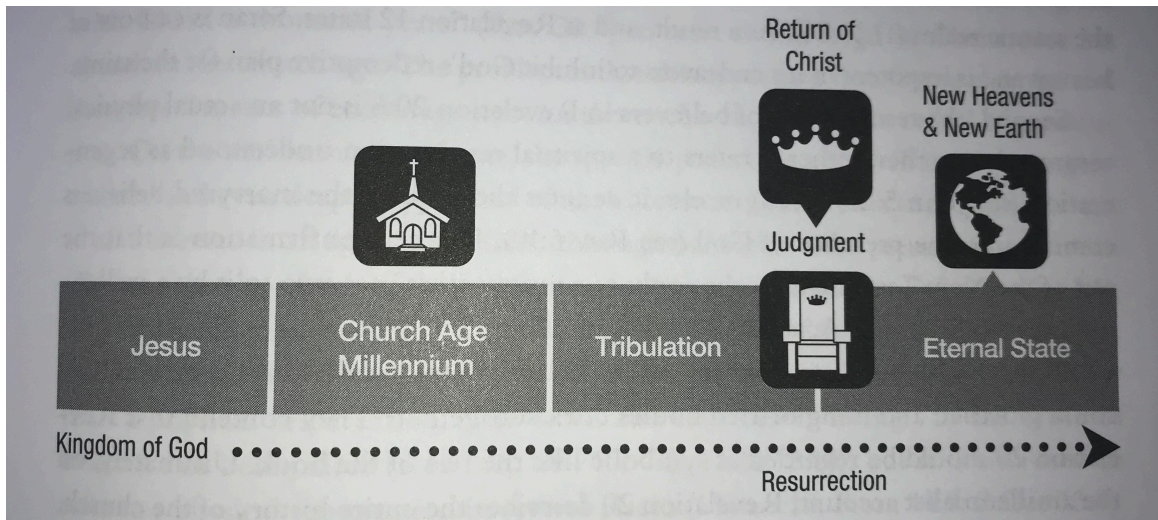
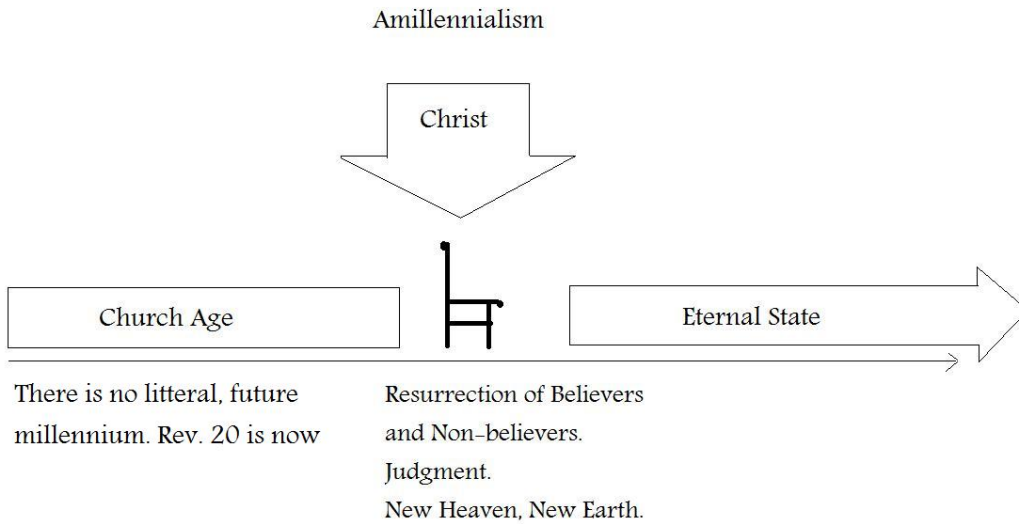
Order of events:

The church expands which becomes the Millennium > Return of Christ, Resurrection of everyone, and Final judgment > New Heavens/Earth

Who held to it?

Mainly those after the time of the Reformers: Jonathan Edwards, John Cotton, John Owen, Charles Finney, et. al.

Amillennialism



Oder of events:

Return of Christ, Resurrection of everyone, and the Final judgment > New Heavens/Earth

Who held to it?

Most of church history through the Reformation: Eusebius, Clement, Origen, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, probably Jesus, et. al.

What does it teach?

-The millennium is a present reality with a future consummation.

-The church age and the millennium are the same thing.

-The second coming, the judgment, and bodily resurrection all happen in the same timeframe.

-Some define it as Christ reign over Christians who have already died (the church triumphant) and others define it as Christ's reign over the hearts of believers today (the church militant). Some just generically define it as Christ's reign.

-The "first resurrection" mentioned in Rev 20 is a reference to spiritual resurrection (i.e. regeneration) or to the martyrs' souls going into the presence of God.

Revelation 20:4–6 ...Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those 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.

-The binding of Satan mentioned in Rev 20 happened in the ministry of Jesus.

Luke 10:17–19 - The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Luke 11:20–22 - But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

Revelation 12:7–9 - Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

-The binding of Satan in Rev 20 means his ability to deceive the nations is restricted, not that he cannot deceive in any way. The fact that the gospel goes to all nations in the book of Acts is evidence that Satan's influence to deceive the nations has been severely limited.

-Amillennialism, like premillennialism, teaches that the world and lost culture is getting worse, not better.

What are its strengths?

-It is nice and neat. The resurrection, the judgment, the second coming, etc. all happen at once. It is probably what you naturally assume will happen.

-In Revelation 19 everyone evil is condemned, so how can you still have lost people in the millennium in Revelation 20?

-The numbers and symbols in revelation are highly symbolic, so the same should probably be true of the millennium.

-Revelation 20 doesn't explicitly say there is a reign of Christ *on the earth*. The thrones are in heaven, and so are the martyrs, so we may also conclude that Christ's reign is in heaven.

-It recognizes that you can't be overly precise in details when it pertains to apocalyptic literature.

-It accords well with other passages that teach that Christ is reigning now.

Matthew 28:18 - And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Ephesians 1:20–22 - that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

1 Peter 3:21–22 - ...Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

-There are other biblical passages that teach that *believers* are reigning with Christ now, which is what you see in Rev 20.

Ephesians 2:5–6 - even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

-Revelation 20 may be retelling Revelation 19:11-21 from another perspective.

-It avoids the weirdness of both postmillennialism and premillennialism. The Achilles' heel of postmillennialism is that it requires that the secular world is becoming more holy and more Christian. The Achilles' heel of premillennialism is that it requires that resurrected Christians are living on earth with non-resurrected lost people who are still sinning and dying.

What are its weaknesses?

-It has to interpret the word “resurrection” (which is the exact same word in Greek) as a “spiritual resurrection” in the first instance but as a “physical resurrection” in the second. Every single time the word resurrection (grk. *anastasis*) is used in the New Testament, in reference to people, it means physical resurrection. However, note that this is the first place the phrase “first resurrection” is used, so John may be trying to use the word in a novel way.

-The devil seems completely bound, not just limited, in Rev 20.

Revelation 20:1-3 - Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer...

Yet that doesn't seem to be what's happening now:

1 Peter 5:8 - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

2 Corinthians 4:4- In their case the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Ephesians 2:2 - in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

-The promise of reigning with Christ a thousand years seems to be a future hope for John's readers to stay faithful. The promise that you get to reign with Christ in Rev 3:21 is not something that Christians currently have in the church age but something they are to try to seek in the future by remaining faithful.

Revelation 3:21 - The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

-The amillennial position says that the first resurrection is regeneration and the second is physical resurrection. But that *may imply* that those in the first resurrection do not partake in the second.

Revelation 20:5 - The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended...

-A premillennialist would say that nowhere does scripture actually say that there will *not* be two resurrections which means the amillennialist cannot use that point against them.

Why does it matter?

1. Theologically - God wants us to know everything he has put into the Bible.
2. Culturally – God wants us to know the direction the world is going and to be aware of the times.
3. Personally – God wants our knowledge of what happens in the future to give us hope in the present.