To answer these questions regarding the extent of kingdom dominance and how God's ultimate goal relates to specific events in redemptive history, Christian people have developed three basic schools of thought: Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Nonmillennialism. Each of these viewpoints attempt to harmonize Re 20:1-6, the only passage that specifies a "thousand year reign" of Christ, with the eschatological teaching of the rest of Scripture. The following is a description of the respective emphases of these three basic schools for the interpretation of prophecy.

**Premillennialism**

Premillennialism (from mille, the Latin for "thousand") or chiliasm (from the Greek chilias) is the view that "the second coming of Christ will be followed by a period of world-wide peace and righteousness, before the end of the world, called 'the Millennium' or 'the Kingdom of God,' during which Christ will reign as King in person on this earth." It is currently the most popular view of last things. Even though an arguably credible case can be made for the dominance of historical premillennialism in early Christian history, it was rejected by Augustine in the fourth century who "laid the ghost of pre millenarianism so effectively that for centuries the subject was practically ignored." It reappeared in the Protestant Reformation but was dismissed by Melancthon and Luther in their Augsburg Confession as a "Jewish opinion." John Calvin also rejected it as a "fiction too puerile to require or deserve refutation." But individuals, here and there, including people of high theological caliber like John Gill, continued to espouse it, until finally, it once again assumed prominence in the twentieth century. Historical premillennialism, however, was soon replaced by Dispensational premillennialism, a new view that had been introduced by John Darby, a nineteenth century minister with the Plymouth Brethren, and popularized by C. I Scofield in the notes of his widely circulated Scofield Reference Bible.

Dispensational differed from Historical premillennialism, primarily, in that it divided the second coming of Christ into two phases, the first phase being the secret rapture of the church and the second, Christ's return seven years later to establish his earthly reign in Jerusalem. Historical premillennial thought was also post-tribulational, insisting that the church will experience the Tribulation, while Dispensationalism was primarily pre-tribulational. Other differences could be cited, but these would serve only to complicate the current study. For present purposes, it will suffice to focus on the basic emphases of premillennialism that the two branches share in common.

Premillennialism teaches that Christ will come before the millennium. With a strong emphasis on the "literal" interpretation of prophecy, proponents of this view look for an earthly reign of Christ in the city of Jerusalem for a literal one thousand years. The pre-mil position strongly distinguishes between Israel and the Church, suggesting that God's covenant with national Israel is still in force and that God has a distinct program for both Israel and the Church. The sequence of events in the premillennial scheme is: (1) A period of great apostasy will precede the coming of Christ; (2) A period of tribulation will break out in which Antichrist will rule the
earth; (3) Christ will be revealed from heaven and conquer Antichrist and the hosts of evil at the battle of Armageddon; (4) Christ will establish a 1000 year period of earthly blessedness from Jerusalem and the resurrection of believers will occur; (5) At the end of the millennium, unbelievers will be resurrected, judged and the eternal state will begin.

Some may object to this general description because of subtle nuances I've either included or excluded, but for the most part, it is a fair description of premillennial thought. The primary features of the pre-mil scheme are its emphases that Christ will come before the millennium and establish an earthly reign in the literal city of Jerusalem, and its distinction between Israel and the Church.

The premillennialist conceives of a day when life on planet earth will be characterized by utopian peace. Expecting a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel's restoration, he looks for a new age - a "kingdom" age - in which swords will be beat into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, children will play on the hole of the asp without danger, the wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like the bullock, and a little child will lead them. (Cf. Isa 11:6-9; Eze 34:25; Isa 65:17-25; 60:1-22)

In premillennial vocabulary, the "kingdom" is generally viewed as a synonym for the "millennium." Much of Matthew's gospel, consequently, like the Sermon on the Mount and the Kingdom Parables, is characteristically applied to the future millennium, especially by Dispensational millenarians. Dispensationalists suggest that Jesus offered the theocratic kingdom to Israel at his first advent but because of their rejection of His offer, the kingdom was postponed until His second coming. In the interim, God established a "parenthesis" in His program known as "the church age." This parenthesis is inserted between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9. J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "The millennial kingdom is declared to be a literal, earthly kingdom over which Christ rules from David's throne in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant...This kingdom was proclaimed as being 'at hand' at Christ's first advent, but was rejected by Israel and therefore postponed. It will again be announced to Israel in the tribulation period. It will be received by Israel and set up at the second advent of Christ." Later he adds, "During this present age, then, while the King is absent, the theocratic kingdom is in abeyance in the sense of its actual establishment on the earth."

It is not a slur to say that premillennialism is admittedly pessimistic regarding the condition of the world prior to the second coming of Christ. The daily newspaper headlines together with the moral disintegration of the culture would seem to confirm its pessimism.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism is the view of last things that teaches that "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, that the world eventually will be Christianized, and that the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the Millennium." The postmillennialist looks for "a golden age" of spiritual influence on the earth accomplished by the
Three Views Of The Millennium

Written by Michael Gowens  
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Risen Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, prior to the Savior's second advent.

If premillennialism is labeled as essentially pessimistic in its future outlook regarding the success of Christ's kingdom in the earth, postmillennialism, on the other hand, is basically optimistic. The post-mil camp claims that the basis of Christian hope is God's covenant promise. If one looks at the circumstantial evidence of current events, they concede, there is little basis for optimism. But Christian people are called to walk by faith, not by sight. The postmillennialist, then, finds an abundance of evidence in Scripture regarding the promised success of the gospel and prosperity of the kingdom of God. By faith, he believes that the kingdom of God will "break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever". {Da 2:44} Though the pre-camp would necessarily claim that the post- camp is hopelessly idealistic, the postmillenarian would counter that his confidence is predicated on the word of God, not the daily news. The post-mil insistence on maintaining the "big picture" the Bible portrays of the advance of Christ's kingdom is very helpful, but, as Jay Adams observes, it is "too difficult to grant when Christians must face the fact of hydrogen bombs in the hands of depraved humanity." Could it be that the post-mil concept of an "increasing" {Isa 9:7} and ultimately victorious kingdom {Re 11:15} is true, but that its emphasis on when that universal triumph will occur in the end-times chronology is misdirected? I think so. The most unhappy feature of both the pre- and the post-millennial schools is their insistence on an earthly utopia. Certainly, there are many solid arguments for postmillennialism. One should not assume that its proponents are either ignorant or out of touch with reality. Both Lorraine Boettner in his book Post-Millennialism and Iain Murray in his excellent work The Puritan Hope present plausible and compelling post-mil arguments. It is safe to say, however, that today, by and large, postmillennialism is the exception, not the rule, in eschatological thought. Two World Wars in this century alone have made for an almost impassable hurdle to its popular acceptance.

This view assumed prominence among several of the magisterial Reformers and the Puritans. Today, there is a revival of interest in postmillennialism in the Christian Reconstruction or theonomy lit. Divine Law movement. Contemporary theologians include men like R. J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, D. James Kennedy, and George Grant. The post-mil emphasis of the Christian Reconstruction movement, however, is somewhat distinct from traditional postmillennialism. Its conviction that the basic call of Christian discipleship is to reconstruct society for the glory of God by infiltrating government, business, education, science, the arts, and every dimension of culture so as to establish a society ruled by God through the principles of His word.

This position is commonly termed Civil Millennialism. It is postmillennial in the sense that it conceives of an earthly millennium prior to the Lord's return, but it differs in that its methodology of achieving this state of earthly blessedness is not the proclamation of the gospel but political action. Much of the modern interest in "reclaiming America's Christian heritage" is a product of this particular brand of postmillennial thought. Though it is inaccurate, and hence unfair, to say that all theologians define "the Kingdom of God" in nationalistic terms, yet in their passion to get God readmitted to public schools and recover the high standards of public morality specified in God's word, distinctions between "church" and "state" are characteristically blurred, if not rejected outright. But is America the new Israel? Is the "Kingdom of God" synonymous with
Western Civilization?

The Civil Millennialism of the Christian Reconstructionists is also post-millennial in its understanding of the revolutionary nature of Christ's kingdom. Indeed, the Lord intends to take over the universe, to crush all enemies under his feet, to "put down all rule and all authority and power...that God may be all in all". {1Co 15:24,28} Christ does in fact intend to reign unchallenged in the universe as "the only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords". {1Ti 6:15}

The question that begs an answer, however, is "Does he intend to extend the borders of his kingdom by the vehicle of politics or preaching?" Is the primary task of the church social change through public rallies, planned marches, picket signs, and passive resistance? Or is the calling of the church to disseminate truth through the faithful preaching and teaching of God's word?

Yes, Christianity is by nature revolutionary, but its revolution is not against Caesar. It's against Satan. It seems to me that both ideologically and methodologically, the theonomy movement is off target. Taking over the country by political muscle and taking over the world by conquering people's hearts - that is the difference between the two. The early church, as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles, was certainly revolutionary. They "turned the world upside down." They did it, however, not by organized demonstrations and political muscle, but by preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Classical Postmillennialism is correct in its insistence that the Lord Jesus Christ extends his reign a little further every time someone's heart is conquered by His glorious gospel. It is, furthermore, consistent with Biblical prophecy in its hopeful outlook on the future of Christ's Kingdom. But its anticipation of a golden age of earthly blessedness prior to the event of Christ's return is questionable, for it does not adequately satisfy the tension between the gospel's influence on the regenerate and the unregenerate. No respectable postmillennialist, in other words, would teach universalism. None would suggest that every human being will be converted. What, then, will be the relationship of the unregenerate to the gospel during the millennial utopia? In answer, most post-mil's reply that the "golden age" they anticipate is not a perfect, but a quasi-utopia. The majority of the world population, but not the whole, will be regenerate. To that I must respond, "Then, in what sense can it be said that 'the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'?"

Nonmillennialism

Nonmillennialism (also called amillennialism) is the view that "the Bible predicts a continuous parallel growth of good and evil in the world between the first...and the second coming of Christ; the kingdom of God is now present in the world through His word, His Spirit, and His church." The nonmillennial model does not expect a period of total dominance by the kingdom of God in human history. The struggle against the kingdom of darkness is ongoing to the end of time. It is a spiritual war in which sometimes the Kingdom of God makes gains and sometimes the kingdom of darkness prevails for a season. Overall, however, the Kingdom of God is moving triumphantly, ever increasing its territorial borders, toward the Second Coming of Christ, which event will mark the end of time, the judgment of the wicked, and the eternal state of perfect righteousness.
The term "amillennialism" is unfortunate because it means "no millennium." Of course, Re 20:1-15 teaches the reality of a thousand year reign - i.e. a millennium - in no uncertain terms. Technically speaking, to be an "amillennialist," one would have to deny that Re 20:1-6 is in the Book. No true follower of Christ would do such a thing.

Why is the label "a-mil" employed, then, to describe this particular viewpoint? Because unlike the pre- and the post-, the amillennialist does not believe that Revelation 20 teaches a thousand year period of earthly or physical blessedness. He does in fact affirm a millennium, but denies that it is a utopian millennium on this earth. He also believes there is a future golden age, but does not equate it with the millennium, but with the eternal state ushered in at the second coming of Christ. The "golden age" Peter anticipated was not a quasi-utopian state, but a new universe of perfect righteousness. {2Pe 3:14} Only the eternal state ushered in by "his coming" {2Pe 3:4,9-10} corresponds to such descriptions of a sinless world. {Re 21:27}

Jay Adams suggests the term "Realized Millennialism" as a more accurate designation of the non-millennial explanation of prophecy. He writes, "To the pre- and post- views the millennium is a golden age, and therefore, since the present age can hardly qualify as such, they do not believe the millennium is realized. The realized millennialist does not think that the millennial age is represented in Scripture as a golden period. He reads nothing about this in the one and only passage in which the one thousand years are mentioned. And from a study of the Apocalypse, he is convinced that the proper exposition of the twentieth chapter demands an identification of the one thousand years with the so-called 'church age,' and the golden age with the new heavens and the new earth of the last two chapters of the book."

Because the realized millennialist believes that the non-utopian character of the millennium describes a period between the two comings of Christ, his entire eschatology focuses on the significance of the Redeemer's return as the single epochal event in the chronology of redemptive history. On that momentous day, Christ will once and for all vanquish every foe, wipe every tear, open every grave, subjugate every knee, right every wrong, level every inequity, judge every sinner, gather every saint, silence every competitor, stop every clock, conquer every false doctrine, fulfill every prophecy, and glorify every last one that was given to him in covenant before the morning of time. The second advent is the ultimate revival, the golden age of utopian righteousness, the day when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"!