

Millennialism



Millennialism

- Review of Week 1
 - Millennialism is the idea that Christ will reign on earth for 1000 years and often considered apocalyptic (supernatural and cataclysmic)
 - Forms have existed since before Christ and in other religions
 - 4 major Christian views today – Pre(2), Post, A
 - The C of C has a history of various teachings
 - Jesus doesn't know when he's returning
 - Hasn't stopped people thru time predicting it
 - Many people have died over this idea
 - Where did this idea come from?

Revelation 20:4-6 (NET)

- ⁴ Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge. **I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony about Jesus** and because of the word of God. These had not worshiped the beast or his image and had refused to receive his mark on their forehead or hand. **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 finished.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Early Church Millennialism

- During the first 100 years of Christian history, the church taught a form of millennialism...
 - the Parousia (the second coming of Christ) would bring about a 1,000-year kingdom of fellowship, justice, peace, and abundance here on earth
 - <https://israelmyglory.org/article/a-description-and-early-history-of-millennial-views/>

Early Church Millennialism

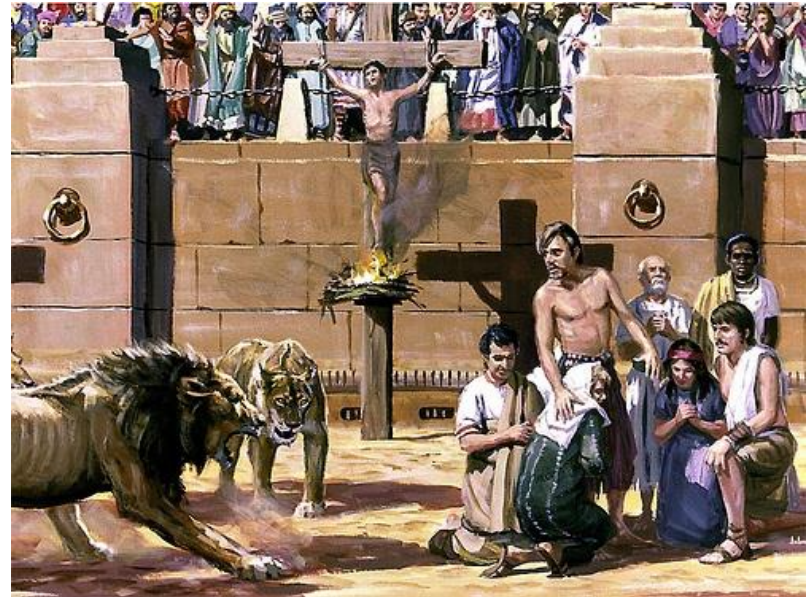
- Historians quote many church fathers and say that Premillennialism was the dominant view of the early church and was part of the proclamation of the gospel.

They state that the early Christians (c. 50-150) believed:

- (1) in an impending last terrible battle with the enemies of God
 - (2) in the speedy return of Christ
 - (3) Christ will judge all men
 - (4) Christ will set up a kingdom of glory on earth of fixed duration most prevalently one thousand years
- They also say that Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.) who had been saved out of pagan Greek philosophy, “speaks of millennialism as a necessary part of complete orthodoxy, although he knows Christians who do not accept it and is the strongest proof that these expectations were inseparably bound up with the Christian faith down to the middle of the second century.”

Early Church Millennialism

- Roman persecutions triggered millennial excitement
- Martyrdom and millennial promises are two aspects of the end times (Rev 20:4-6)
- Apocalyptic zeal waned for periods because the End never came and the pressure of persecution was intermittent



Early Church Millennialism

- Large numbers of Roman citizens were converted to Christianity and their worldly success and the failure of apocalyptic expectation reduced Christian antagonism toward the empire



Early
Christian
Church
reopens
to the
public

Early Church Millennialism

- Millennial thought lost favor with the clerical elite
- It remained popular and appealed to Montanists and other heretics

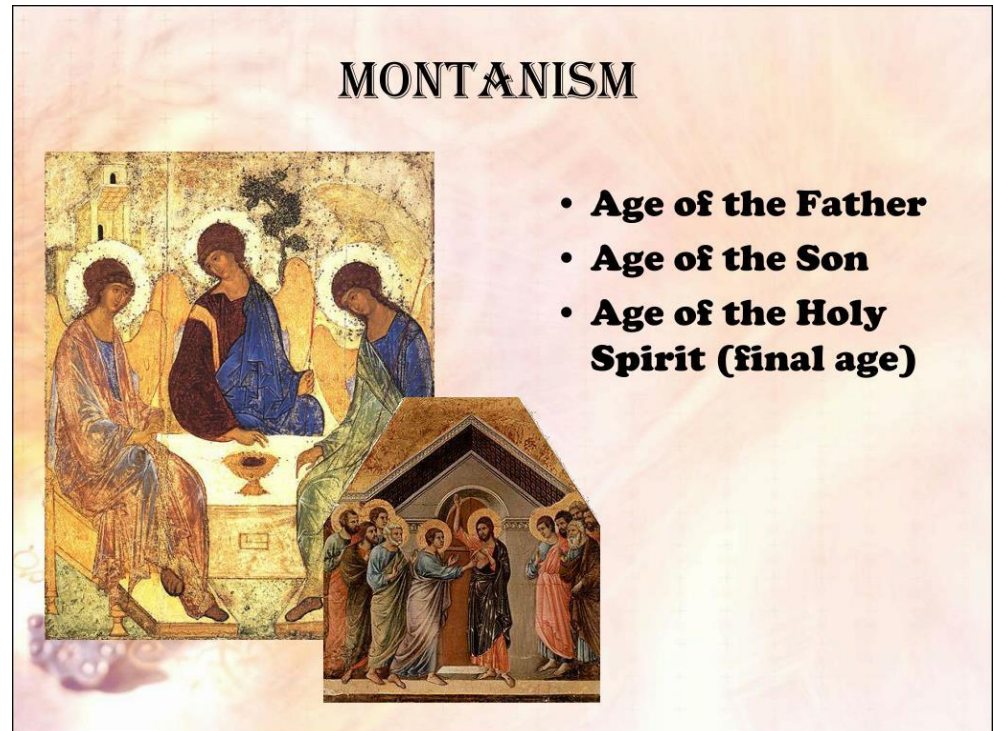
MONTANUS



- **Founder of Montanism**
- **Began movement by preaching**
- **Originally a pagan priest**
- **Excommunicated by the Church (Turkey)**
- **Had two female prophets with him**
- **Believed that the “end” was at hand**

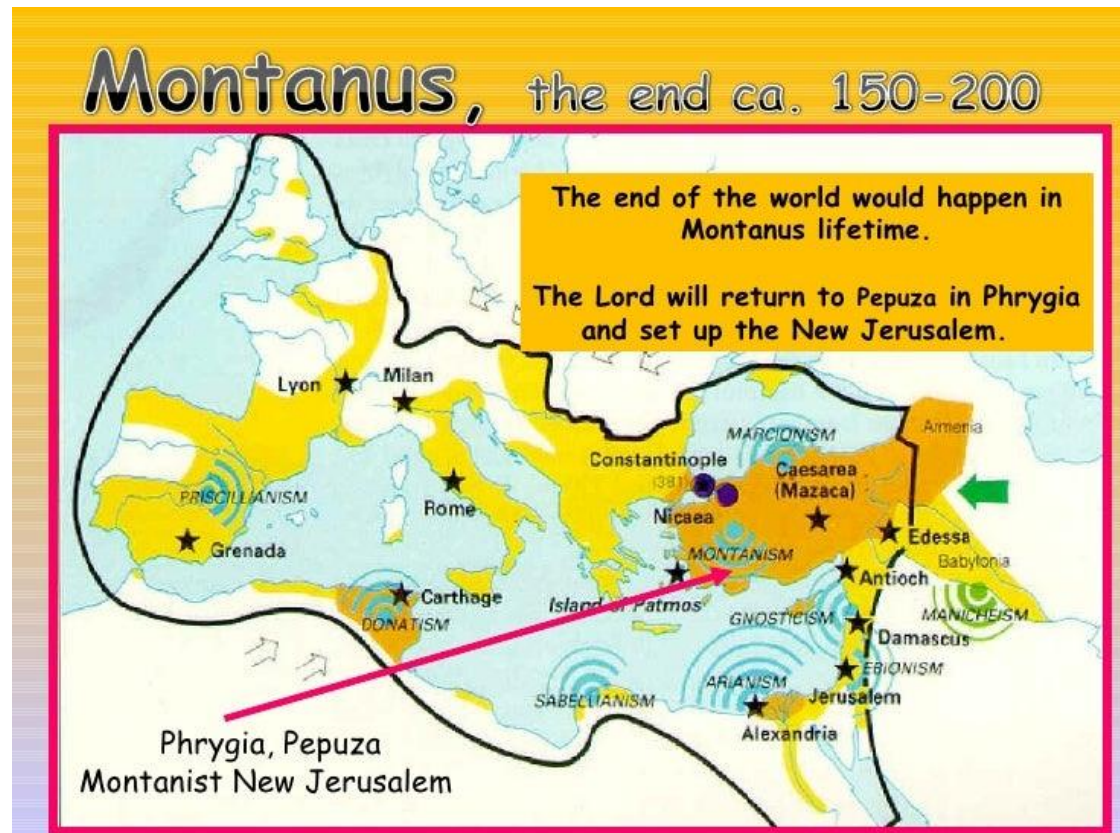
Early Church Millennialism

- Montanus divided history into the time of the Father, the time of the Son and now the time of the Holy Spirit



Early Church Millennialism

- Phrygia (now in Turkey) became the center of this movement, whose leaders claimed divine inspiration for their visions and utterances and believed in the imminent descent of the heavenly Jerusalem to the small Phrygian town of Pepuza



Early Church Millennialism

- About AD 200, apocalyptic expectations reached unusual levels
- Montanism spread throughout the Roman Empire, including Tertullian (155-220AD), a North African lawyer and theologian
- Apocalyptic prophets roused their flocks with visions of the imminent End and led them into the desert to meet Christ returning on the clouds



"He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies."

Tertullian

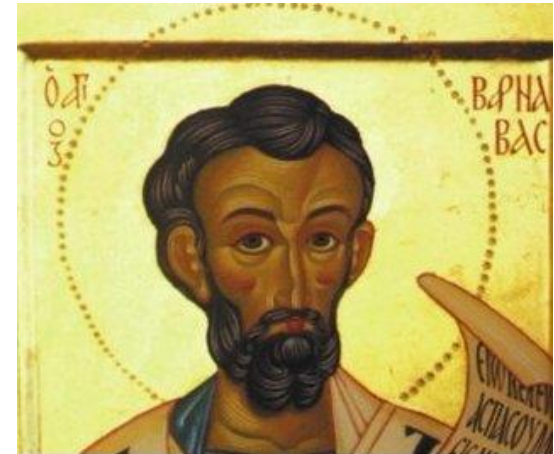
Early Church Millennialism

- Three non-apocalyptic ideas of millennialism emerged to counter movements like Montanism
- I. **Sabbatical Millennium**
 - The *Epistle of Barnabas* 110AD, held that because God had created the world in six days and rested on the seventh and because 1,000 years is a day in God's sight (Psalm 89/90), the world must labor 6,000 years before the sabbatical millennium of peace, abundance, and joyful rest for the Lord's weary would begin
 - Begs the question, when was the world created? 6000 years from when?



Early Church Millennialism

- Barnabas 15:3
Of the Sabbath He speaketh in the beginning of the creation; *And God made the works of His hands in six days, and He ended on the seventh day, and rested on it, and He hallowed it.*
- Barnabas 15:4
Give heed, children, what this meaneth; *He ended in six days.* He meaneth this, that in six thousand years the Lord shall bring all things to an end; for the day with Him signifyeth a thousand years; and this He himself beareth me witness, saying; *Behold, the day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years.* Therefore, children, in six days, that is in six thousand years, everything shall come to an end.
- Barnabas 15:5
And He rested on the seventh day. this He meaneth; when His Son shall come, and shall abolish the time of the Lawless One, and shall judge the ungodly, and shall change the sun and the moon and the stars, then shall he truly rest on the seventh day.



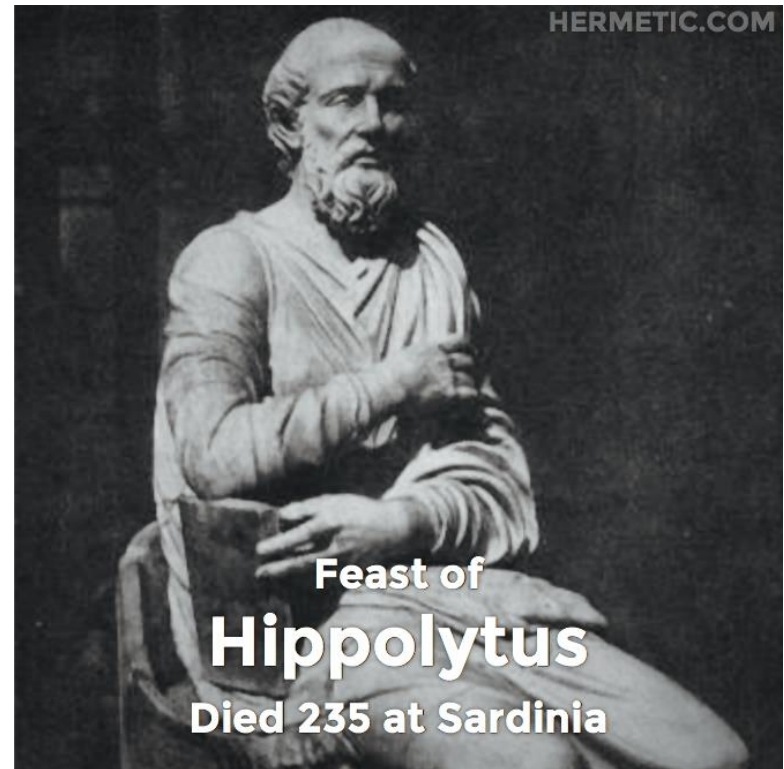
THE EPISTLE
OF BARNABAS
BARNABAS



- Not written by Barnabas
- Quoted by church fathers
- Interpreted Jewish scriptures by early Christian beliefs

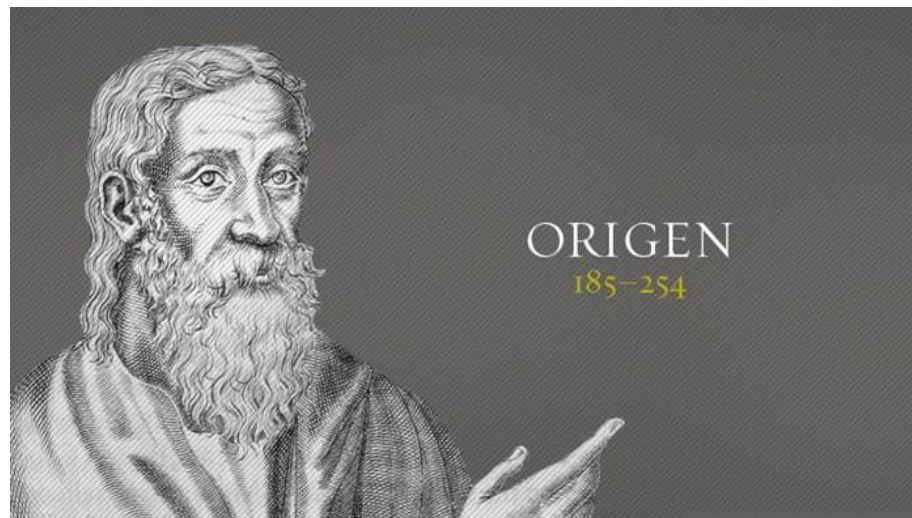
Early Church Millennialism

- Hippolytus, because of the irresponsible apocalypticism of his day, connected the sabbatical millennium to a specific date
- By dating Jesus' birth to 5500 *anno mundi* (AM; Latin: "in the year of the world"—i.e., from the Creation), he argued in 5700 AM (AD 200) that there were still some 300 years left before the Parousia
- This reaffirmed millennialism as dogma and offered a concrete date
- For at least two centuries, its teachings offered a solution to the problem of apocalyptic millennialism



Early Church Millennialism

- 2. **Spiritual Millennium**
 - The 1000 year reign was not physical but spiritual
 - Greek thought influenced Christian theology and offered church leaders an alternative to the millennial worldview
 - Origen, the great 3rd-century Alexandrian Christian thinker, emphasized the manifestation of the kingdom in the soul of the believer rather than in the world, a significant shift toward the spiritual



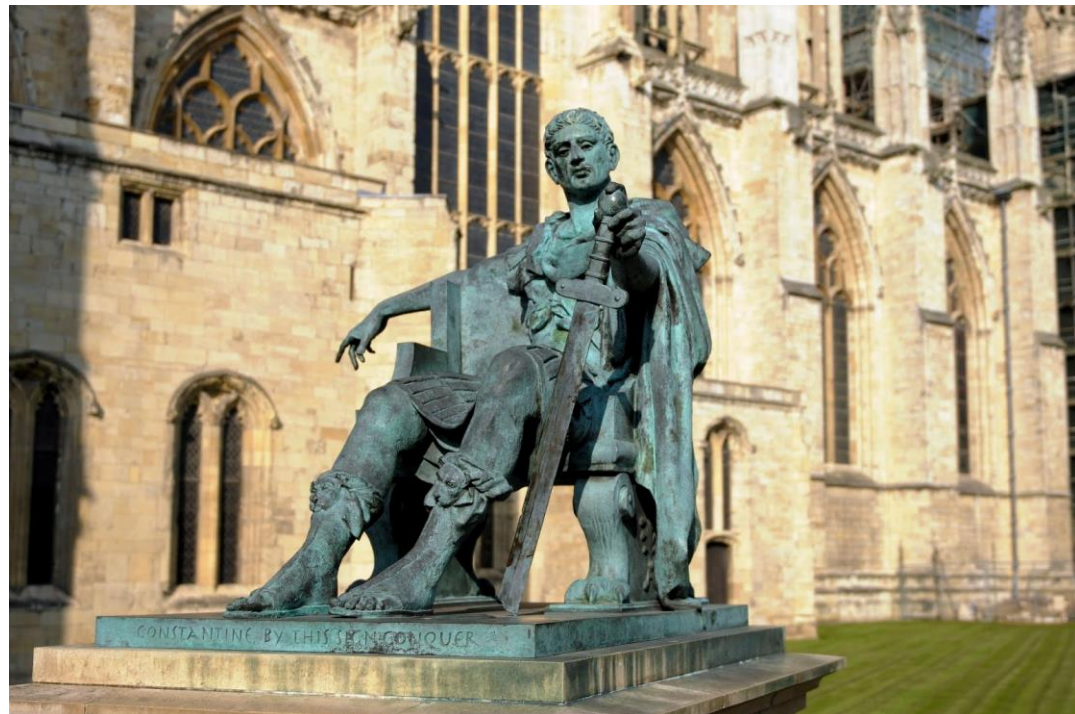
Early Church Millennialism

- 3. **Roman Empire Millennium**
 - The association of apocalyptic millennialism with the Montanist heresy and other troubling antiauthoritarian beliefs and practices discredited it, especially among the clerical supporters of the “monarchical episcopacy” (bishops) of the 3rd century, who laid the groundwork for the revolutionary notion in Christianity of a sacred empire



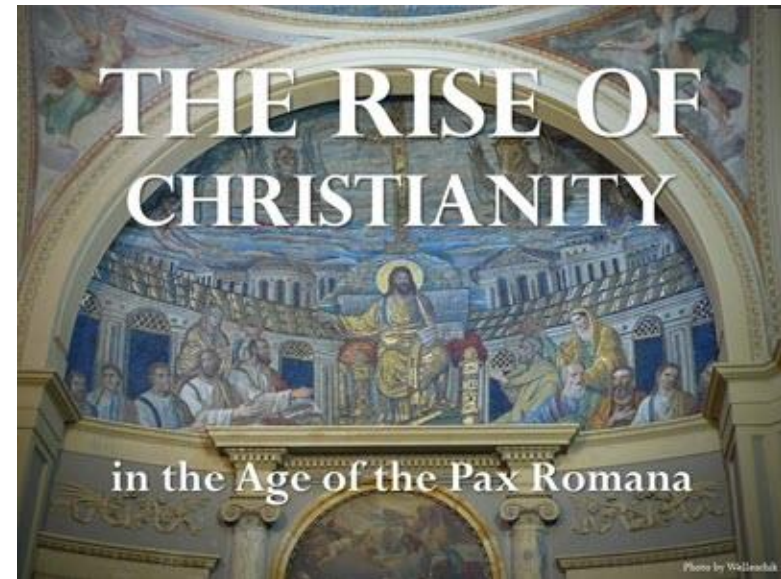
Early Church Millennialism

- This third idea became more plausible with the conversion of Constantine the Great and the adoption of Christianity as the favored, and eventually sole, religion of the empire



Early Church Millennialism

- The *pax romana Christiana* (Latin: “peace of the Christian Roman Empire”) was associated with Isaiah’s vision of the peace of the nations (2:1–4)
 - They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.
- Rome became the fulfillment of the Millennial Kingdom!

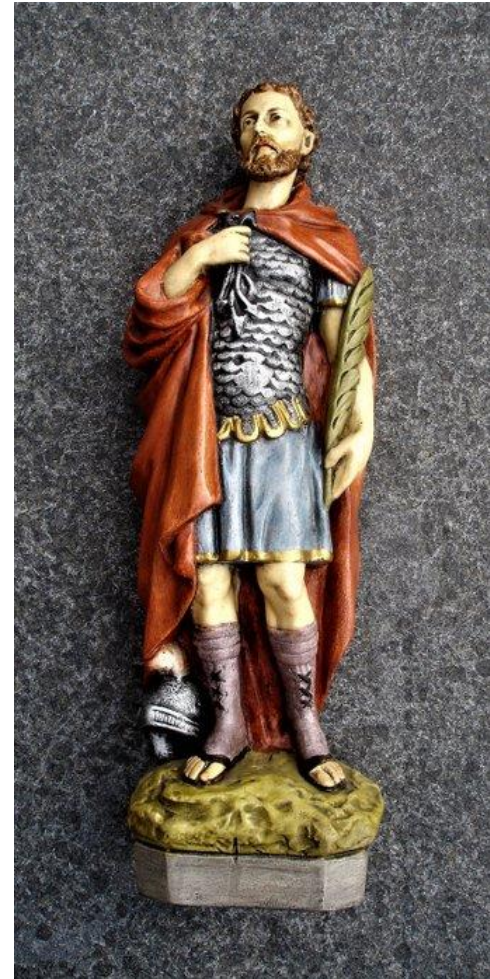


Early Church Millennialism

- They believed Rome's dominion kept the Antichrist at bay
 - II Thessalonians 2:3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.
- "Eternal Rome" became a symbol of the longevity of the new millennial kingdom
- Just as God rules over all in heaven, so the emperor rules on earth
- Did anyone see this coming... When an earthly empire becomes the manifestation of the reign of Christ, Christianity slowly absorbs pieces of that culture.
- In the 4th and 5th centuries, imperial Christianity absorbed the messianic symbols of pagan Rome
(<https://www.slideshare.net/AlfredRussell/pagan-symbols-in-catholic-church>)

Early Church Millennialism

- But, popular millennialism was not dead yet and emerged in groups like the North African Donatists
- Leader Donatus, bishop of Carthage died 355AD
- The Donatists belong to the tradition of early Christianity that produced the Montanist and Novatianist movements in Asia Minor and the Melitians in Egypt
- Their goal : Martyrdom following a life of penance
- They survived Roman, Vandal, and Byzantine rulers until the extinction of Christianity in North Africa in the early European Middle Ages



Early Church Millennialism

- Apocalyptic Millennialism was not so prominent in the Eastern Church
 - Very late admission of *Revelation* into the Eastern Church's canon of Scripture, the only book of the New Testament not read from in the liturgical year
 - Clement and Origen disliked the literalism of millennialism and promoted a more spiritualized Christianity



Augustinian Millennialism



By Botticelli 1480

- **St. Augustine of Hippo (Algeria now)**
354 - 430
- Bishop of Hippo and perhaps the most significant Christian thinker after St. Paul
- Confessions (c. 400) and The City of God (c. 413–426), helped lay the foundation for much of medieval and modern Christian thought.
- In Roman Catholicism he is formally recognized as a doctor of the church.

Early Church Millennialism

- Twenty years before Augustine died a catastrophic event shocked the world
- Rome was sacked by the Goths/Visigoths from the north in 410 AD
- Wow! That would make it hard to believe that the Roman Empire was the “1000 year reign”
- Similarities to Alexander Campbell?

Augustinian Millennialism

- The pagans blamed the Christians ...
- *“Within a few decades, these Christians had gained the political power of the emperorship. Rome’s centuries of pagan gods were then officially abandoned by the government. Now these Christians had messed up everything. They had put a bunch of ‘Bible-thumping’ idiots into power, offending our pagan moral sensitivities, and leaving the empire vulnerable to their northern enemies. The once-great empire was now on the verge of total collapse, no thanks to these ‘Bible thumpers.’ These Christians are to blame for our troubles!”*
- so thought the pagans, in their mockery.

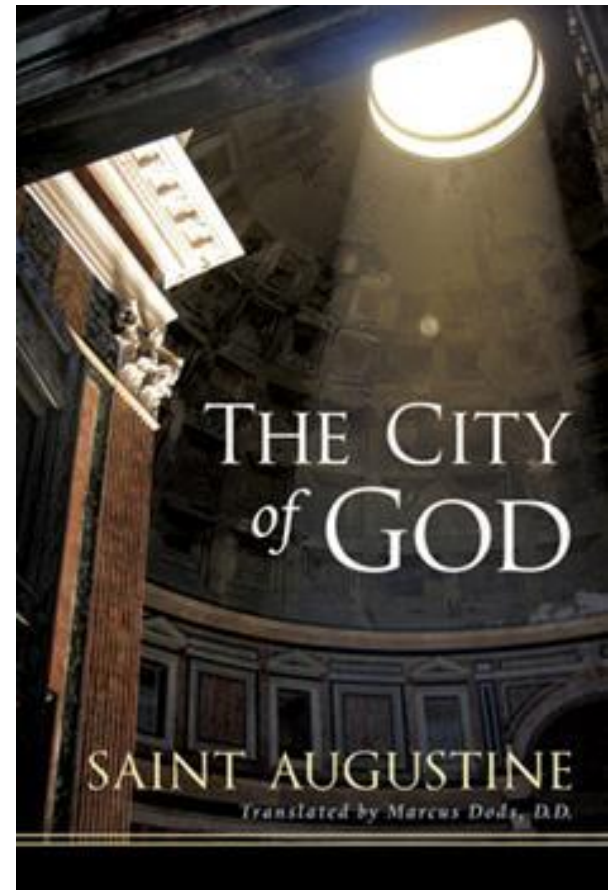


The sack of Rome in 410 A.D.
Gog and Magog – Goths and Visigoths

<https://sharedveracity.net/2018/02/13/why-saint-augustine-changed-his-mind-about-the-millennium/>

Augustinian Millennialism

- Most Christians could not respond to these charges and so became the perfect scapegoat for Rome's collapse
- However, Augustine, in his monumental work, *City of God*, laid the blame for Rome's troubles on the moral and ethical decline that had plagued pagan Roman culture for centuries

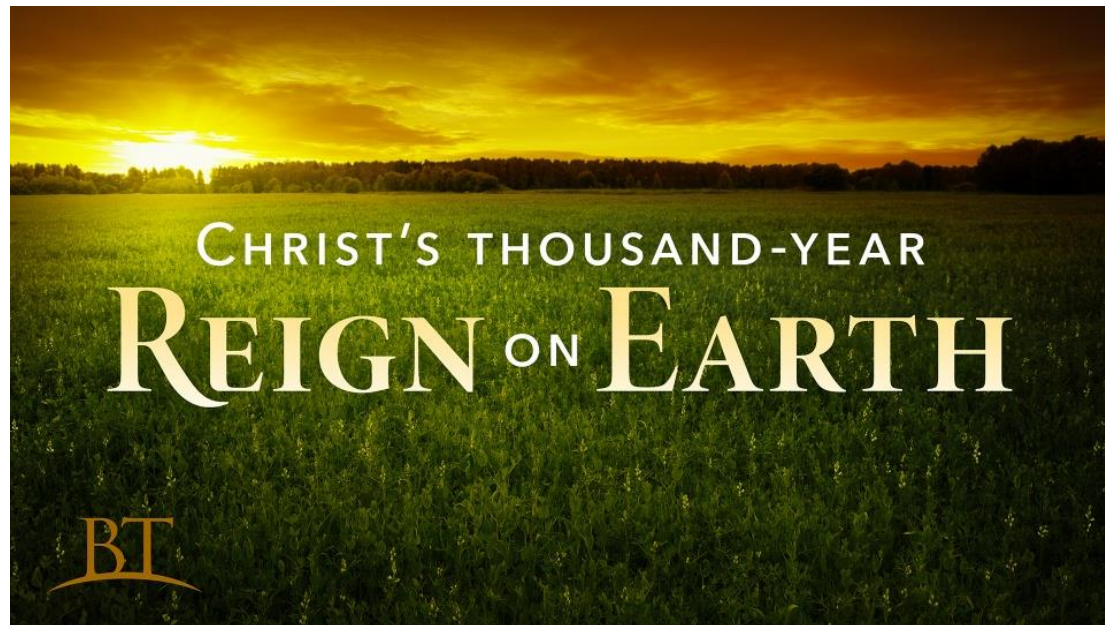


Augustinian Millennialism

- In early life, Augustine held a literal view of a future 1000-year reign of Jesus, following Christ's Second Coming, *historic premillennialism*
- Different than the modern view of premillennialism
 - No belief in a complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promise to national, ethnic Israel mainly due to Justin Martyr's teaching that this earthly reign of Christ would involve mostly *Gentile* Christian believers, since the Jews had been punished by God for their unbelief, through the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, in 70 A.D.

Augustinian Millennialism

- Even though Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and even Augustine's contemporary, Jerome, believed the 1000-year reign was allegorical, Augustine still believed in a literal 1000-year earthly reign of Christ.



Augustinian Millennialism

- Eventually, Augustine came to believe that many Christians had misinterpreted the meaning of the “millennium,” the 1000-year reign of Christ, described in Revelation 20:1-6.
- Augustine appeared to have “gone liberal”, flip-flopped, and changed his mind. But why?



Augustinian Millennialism

- Augustine became concerned with two things...
 - 1. Many Christians believed that the sack of Rome was a fulfillment of prophecy which would immediately bring about the literal millennium.
 - 2. Some taught that the Christians during the millennium would enjoy carnal delights similar to what many Islamic jihadists believe today that if you fly planes into skyscrapers, then God will reward you with a harem in the next life. ³
- Augustine thought these became an embarrassment to the cause of Christ.
 - He believed Scripture should be taken as literally as possible but he would forego his “literalism,” if such “literalism” was leading towards tarnishing the reputation of the Gospel.

Augustinian Millennialism

- Augustine was intrigued with Tyconius' idea that the “*binding of Satan*” in Revelation 20:2-3 happened, not at Christ's Second Coming, but rather at his First Coming. Christ bound Satan at His work on Cross in the 1st century A.D., at the very beginning of the millennium.
- Satan's influence was not fully eliminated, but his power was greatly restrained, at least until he would be later “*released*” towards the end of this millennium.
 - *Rev 20:2 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.*

Augustinian Millennialism

- In the *City of God*, Augustine encouraged his readers to trust that Christ's death on the Cross had won the ultimate victory, binding the restless Satan into submission.
 - God continues to build his church from among "*the nations*"
 - Only at the very end of the millennial period would Satan temporarily have his way, and that time had not yet come
 - Even if the Roman empire were to perish, it did not mean "the end of the world."
 - Jesus would still rule and reign in his church.
 - People should put their trust in God, and not in political empires.
 - As a result, Augustine understood the "millennium" to be synonymous with the age of the church, and that the "1000 years" should be interpreted figuratively, ending at an unknown time, thus avoiding the temptation of the millennialists, who are forever trying to fix dates for Jesus' return.

Augustinian Millennialism

- History appeared to vindicate Augustine's views.
 - The old Roman empire eventually did crumble.
 - The barbarians over the centuries were won to Christ by the preaching of the Gospel.
 - Christ continued to build His church.
 - This demonstrated that despite the efforts of Satan, he was still bound, and his power was limited.
- How should Christians view their relationship to political empires, within the context of the expectation of Christ's return?
 - Augustine's solution in *The City of God* was to take a "long haul" approach to building God's Kingdom.
 - Christ may come again at anytime. But until then, the church has work to do. Christians may participate in the political realm, but they should also be wary of associating any political regime with the Kingdom of God itself.

Augustinian Millennialism

- How convincing was Augustine to his contemporaries?
- His debate with the apocalyptic Dalmatian bishop Hesychius in 418–419 indicates that church leaders, almost a decade after Rome's sack, remained intensely apocalyptic in their reading of contemporary history.
- Some bishops believed that their vocation was to “nourish their flocks” with apocalyptic fervor and viewed the collapse of the Roman Empire as an apocalyptic event.



Augustinian Millennialism

- As Anno Mundi I (500 AD) approached Augustine eventually 'supported' a new chronology ...
- *Anno Mundi* II, Jesus' birth occurred not in 5500 AM but in 5199, and thus the year 6000, when Christ returned, would come in AD 801 rather than 500
- What a relief! For people living in late 400s, 500s, 600s!



Augustine could use it to refute the apocalyptic significance of Rome's fall. Like his Tyconian reading of Revelation, Augustine's acceptance of the new, nonapocalyptic chronology of AM II dominated the writing of theologians.

Augustinian Millennialism

- The belief in historic premillennialism, eventually faded in official church teaching and Augustine's *amillennial* interpretation became dominant, for the most part, in the minds of Western Christians, until about the 17th century when Protestant thinkers rethought the meaning of the millennium.
- But it was not until the 19th century birth of dispensationalism, with its emphasis on God's future purposes for national, ethnic Israel, and the founding of the modern nation-state of Israel in 1948, that premillennialism once again flourished within the thinking of the evangelical church.

Medieval Millennialism

- Stay tuned for what happened next...