

HE SHALL HAVE DOMINION

A Postmillennial Eschatology

Third Edition: Revised and Expanded

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.M., Th.D.



Draper, Virginia

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th. M., Th. D.
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“The sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the truth.”
Athanasius, Defender of orthodoxy
Council of Nicaea A.D. 325

**Dedicated to the memory of
two servants of Christ**

Dr. Cornelius Van Til
(May 3, 1895–April 17, 1987)

who taught me to think as Christian

and

Dr. Loraine Boettner
(March 7, 1901–January 3, 1990)

who taught me to hope as a Christian

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ABBREVIATIONS

Biblical

Note: In the interest of space considerations, I use the “scholarly style” abbreviations found in *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*. Ed. by Patrick H. Alexander, John F. Kutsko, et al. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999.

Bibliographical

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| <i>ABD</i> | <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Ed. by Freedman, David Noel. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992. |
| <i>AER</i> | <i>The American Economic Review</i> . |
| <i>ANF</i> | <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . Ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1985. |
| <i>BAGD</i> | <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3d. ed. Rev. by Frederick William Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. |
| <i>DB</i> | <i>A Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Ed. by James Hastings. 5 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988 (rep. 1898). |

- BDB* *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.
- BDT* *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960.
- BECNT* *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*.
- BET* *Biblical Economics Today*.
- BKC* *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament and New Testament* . 2 vols. Ed. by Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Victor, 1983, 1985.
- BNTC* *Black's New Testament Commentary*.
- BP* *Biblical Perspectives*.
- BT* *Banner of Truth*.
- BTS* *Bibliotheca Sacra*.
- C&C* *Christianity and Civilization*.
- CC* *Concordia Commentary*.
- CH* *Church History*.
- CNTC* *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. Ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- COED* *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- CR* *Chalcedon Report* (now called *Faith for All of Life*).

<i>CT</i>	<i>Christianity Today.</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Journal.</i>
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery.</i> Ed. by Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1998.
<i>DBPET</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times.</i> Ed. by J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate, eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
<i>DJBP</i>	<i>Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period.</i> Ed. by Jacob Neusner. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996.
<i>DPT</i>	<i>Dictionary of Premillennial Theology.</i> Ed. by Mal Couch. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996.
<i>EBC</i>	<i>The Eerdmans Bible Commentary.</i> Ed. by Guthrie, Donald and J. A. Motyer, eds. 3d. ed.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.
<i>EC</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Christianity.</i> Ed. by E. Hughes. 4 vols. Marshallton, Del.: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972.
<i>EDBT</i>	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology.</i> Ed. by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
<i>EDT</i>	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.</i> Ed. by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
<i>EGNT</i>	<i>The Expositor's Greek New Testament.</i> Ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951 (rep.).

- Ellicott* *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Ed. by John C. Ellicott. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.
- EQ* *Evangelical Quarterly*.
- Gesenius* *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Ed. by E. Kautzsch. Trans. by A. E. Cowley. 28th ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1946.
- GTJ* *Grace Theological Journal*.
- HCBD* *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. Ed. by Paul J. Achtemeier. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.
- HHMBI* *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. by Donald K. McKim. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1998.
- ICC* *International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- IDB* *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*. Ed. by George Arthur Buttrick. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.
- ISBE*¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. 4 vols. Ed. by James Orr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956 (rep. 1929).
- JAH* *Journal of American History*.
- JETS* *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.
- JFB* *Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments*. Robert A. Jamieson, A. R. Faussett, and David Brown. Hartford, Conn. n.d.
- JCR* *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*.
- J.W.* *The Jewish War*. Flavius Josephus. Trans by William Whiston. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999.

- K-D* Keil, C. F. and Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. 10 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001. Rep.: Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1886-91.
- LC* *Larger Catechism* of the Westminster Standards.
- MDB* *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. by Watson E. Mills. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1991.
- NAC* *New American Commentary*. Ed. by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: Broadman.
- NBC* *The New Bible Commentary*. Ed. by Francis Davidson. 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968.
- NCBC* *New Century Bible Commentary*. Ed. by Matthew Black. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- NDBT* *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Ed. by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, Graeme Goldsworthy. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2000.
- NDT* *New Dictionary of Theology*. Ed. by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1988.
- NIBC* *New International Bible Commentary*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson.
- NICNT* *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- NIDOTE* *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed by Willem VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- NIGTC* *New International Greek Text Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- NPNF* Philip Schaff. ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* Peabody, Mass.: Hendrikson, 1999 (rep. 1888).
- NSRB* *The New Scofield Reference Bible*. Ed. by E. Schuyler English. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- NTC* *New Testament Commentary*. By William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- NTS* *New Testament Studies*.
- OCB* *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- ODCC* *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Ed. by Cross, F. L. and E. A. Livingstone. 2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- PEBP* *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*. Ed. by Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 2004.
- PKH* *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*. John F. Walvoord.. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990.
- Proof* Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* (Ferrar translation, 1920).

<i>PSB</i>	<i>Prophecy Study Bible</i> . Ed. by Tim LaHaye. Chattanooga: AMG, 2001.
<i>PTR</i>	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i> .
<i>RE</i>	<i>A Religious Encyclopedia</i> . Ed. by W. Möller, in Philip Schaff. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883 (rev. ed.).
<i>SB</i>	<i>The Standard Bearer</i> .
<i>SC</i>	<i>Shorter Catechism</i> of the Westminster Standards.
<i>SRB</i>	<i>The Scofield Reference Bible</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 1909, 1917.
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. by Gerhard Kittel, G. Johannes Botterwick, and Helmer Ringgren. Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
<i>TNTC</i>	<i>Tyndale New Testament Commentary</i> . Downer's Grove: Tyndale.
<i>TOTC</i>	<i>Tyndale Old Testament Commentary</i> . Downer's Grove: Tyndale.
<i>TRC</i>	<i>Theonomy: A Reformed Critique</i> , ed. by William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
<i>UBD</i>	<i>Unger's Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. by Merrill F. Unger. 2nd ed.: Chicago: Moody Press, 1961.
<i>USR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Review</i> .
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i> , ed. by Bruce M. Metzger. Dallas: Word.
<i>WCF</i>	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i> .

- WTJ* *Westminster Theological Journal.*
- ZIBBC* *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary.* Ed. by Clinton E. Arnold. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- ZPED* *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible.* 4 vols. Ed. by Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.

“Christ Shall Have Dominion”

From *The Psalter*, 1912
Based on Psalm 72

(Tune: “Onward Christian Soldiers”)

Christ shall have dominion over land and sea;
Earth’s remotest regions shall His empire be;
They that wilds inhabit shall their worship bring,
Kings shall render tribute, nations serve our King.

When the needy seek Him, He will mercy show;
Yea, the weak and helpless shall His pity know;
He will surely save them from oppression’s might
For their lives are precious in His holy sight.

Ever and forever shall His name endure,
Long as suns continue It shall stand secure;
And in Him forever all men shall be blest,
And all nations hail Him King of Kings confessed.

Unto God Almighty joyful Zion sings;
He alone is glorious, doing wondrous things.

Evermore, ye people, bless His glorious name;
His eternal glory through the earth proclaim.

PREFACE

Third Edition

By the grace of God, this work continues to meet the needs of many Christians interested in deeper studies of eschatology, and especially those holding to the optimistic outlook of postmillennialism. *He Shall Have Dominion* has been in print continuously since 1992, with this being its third edition and third publisher. I want to thank Jerry Johnson for his interest in and commitment to updating and republishing this work, and for his appointing me as Director of NiceneCouncil.Com. Working with Jerry is a joy and a privilege.

This is truly a new edition. In it I update a great many of the bibliographical references and add newer ones in order to make the work more current.¹ Though I drop many of the older references, I do not drop them all in that I want to interact with some of the more important ones. I intend to offer the best of both worlds: analysis of classic works, as well as interaction with contemporary contributions. A secondary benefit of this practice is to let dispensationalists know that despite their “plain and simple” method of interpretation, their system keeps changing — thereby demonstrating things are not so “plain and simple.”

1. For example, I replaced Ryrie’s quotes from his *Dispensationalism Today* (1965), with his revised version re-titled simply *Dispensationalism* (1995).

I also give more attention to amillennialism than in previous editions, though I still deal more extensively with dispensationalism. In upgrading my amillennial critique I employ the more recent works by Robert B. Strimple, Vern Poythress, Dennis Johnson, Robert L. Reymond, Cornelis Venema, Kim Riddlebarger, and others. The amillennial presentation has changed over the years, moving from a more exegetical approach to a more theological one. I critique both approaches.

For the most part this edition adds new material, with each chapter undergoing significant expansions. I would especially note that I significantly lengthen the three chapters considering objections to postmillennialism — partly in order to handle more amillennial objections. I would also point out that I have re-titled the Appendix on hyper-preterism in that I greatly expand my critique in order to include exegetical as well as theological concerns regarding this aberrant movement. Though this heterodox movement continues to grow, signs are appearing that it may be coming apart at the seams. Their continual patching of new material on the old garment is making matters worse. I hope to loosen a few of its threads myself.

Despite my general tendency to expand the material, I also remove some. The chapter on “The Righteousness of God” (a defense of theonomic ethics) has been removed for three reasons: (1) I deal with theonomy extensively in other publications.² (2) This removes an easy

2. See: Gentry, *Nourishment from the Word* (2007). Gentry, *Covenantal Theonomy* (2005). Gentry, *God's Law in the Modern World* (1993). See also my chapters in Schlissel, *The Standard Bearer* (2002).

target for those who are not able to distinguish the difference between theonomy (ethics) and postmillennialism (eschatology). The two views bear no necessary link, despite the confusion of some. (3) New expansions bring greater bulk. One way to reduce the book's overall bulk is to remove material, and this chapter seemed an appropriate one to excise. I also removed the Appendix on "Cultural Antinomianism" in that it was relatively dated.

Though it no longer appears as an Appendix, I did not remove the material formerly appearing as "Postmillennialism and Suffering." Rather, I absorb it into other chapters where I deal with amillennialism. Amillennialists apparently endure so much suffering that I really did not feel good about exacerbating the problem by presenting a separate Appendix. I hope that they will not suffer unduly due to my removing that Appendix without using anesthesia.

My prayer is that this book will lead God's people to pray more fervently and believingly: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is heaven" (Mt 6:10). And in better understanding and praying that, they might more diligently labor to "make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 29:19), knowing that "he shall have dominion" (Ps 72:8 KJV).

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.M., Th.D.
Director, NiceneCouncil.com
Pastor, Living Hope Fellowship
Valentine's Day, 2009

Second Edition

I have been gratified with the response to and acceptance of the first edition of *He Shall Have Dominion*. It has been used as a textbook in some Christian colleges and seminaries and has been placed on eschatological resource reading lists in others. So it is with great joy that I present this second edition of *He Shall Have Dominion* to the world of biblical studies. I am thankful to Dr. Gary North for his encouragement in producing this second edition — and for his important ministry at the Institute for Christian Economics.

The changes in the second edition are relatively minor. No positions have changed and the presentation's flow is virtually identical in format and argument with the original. The reader of the first edition will probably remember with some pain the several typographical and layout errors that appeared in the original. These errors have been corrected (hopefully!) in this new edition. Some heading and paragraph changes at some junctures should make for easier reading.

Of course, in any new edition it is important to include more recent works in the presentation. Consequently, there are a number of new bibliographic resources employed to fill out and update the argument. Most of these will appear in the footnotes, though a few have altered the text itself by providing important new information. The time lapse between the first edition (1992) and the second (1996), however, is not sufficiently long enough to require a wholesale re-orientation of the argument.

The reader will also notice a new appendix providing a general critique of the hyper-preterist movement. Though I appreciate much of

the “consistent preterist” research and insight into eschatology, I am convinced that they have gone too far. And I hope they will, with further study and analysis, make the necessary corrections and return to a more orthodox view of the second advent and the Resurrection. But since that movement is making its presence felt and I receive correspondence asking for my thoughts, I deemed it necessary to provide at least a brief analysis of some of the problems I have with its positions. Especially since some dispensationalists confuse my orthodox preterism with their heterodox form.

The postmillennial reader will be encouraged to know that Zondervan will be publishing a three views book on eschatology in 1997. That work, under the editorship of Darrell L. Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary, will present the progressive dispensational viewpoint (Craig Blaising, Dallas Theological Seminary), the amillennial viewpoint (Richard B. Gaffin, Westminster Theological Seminary), and the reconstructionist postmillennial viewpoint (me, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.). The postmillennial viewpoint, assumed by many to be dead, is coming back — as any postmillennialist would expect. Therefore we remember with joy and hope that we must not “despise the day of small things” (Zec 4:10).

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D.
June 28, 1996

First Edition

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

So begins Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. And such is an appropriate introduction to the present work. For this study in eschatology is also a tale of two cities: the City of God and the City of Man. And we today may declare that in many respects it is the best of times, while in other respects it is the worst of times.

As I write this book, modern man is witnessing remarkable world events. It has not been too many months since the Berlin Wall dividing the two Germanys fell (1989), Eastern Europe freed itself from Soviet Communist domination (1990), and East and West Germany reunited (1991). The Beirut hostage crisis has finally come to an end, after many years of frustration (1991). Within the past few weeks of my writing these words, the Soviet Union has officially vanished, having broken into twelve independent democratic republics (1992). In addition, there are remarkable revivals of Christianity in various Third World countries, as well as in the former Soviet Union. Such would suggest the best of times.¹ Five years ago, who would have thought that these world-shaking events would occur? The bleak shadow that the Soviet Bear cast over the earth has vanished with the dawn of a new day. In many respects, these events signal the best of times for those long afflicted by Communism and the rest of us who were threatened with nuclear destruction by its existence.

1. Not all would agree that these are good signs. Dispensationalist theologian Robert P. Lightner comments: "Even the present evident failure of atheistic, communistic governments brings great fear and uncertainty." Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 161.

But these are also the worst of times. The Chinese Communists are still brutally repressing free speech. Not long ago, Iraq's Saddam Hussein started (and lost) a cruel and potentially disastrous war, but he still remains in power (1992). There is fear that the turbulent Middle East will buy up the brains and weaponry of the former Soviet Union. Abortion still ranks as one of America's leading surgical procedures and is widely practiced throughout the world. The AIDS epidemic shows no signs of abating, but rather of increasing; the same is true of the nearly incurable strain of tuberculosis that now accompanies AIDS. The federal government's debt is enormous and growing rapidly. Though there are bright historical and social rays of hope, these are too often eclipsed by the clouds of political gloom and the smoke of cultural upheaval.

One day the world events listed above will be understood in terms of the all-controlling plan of God. "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps 115:3). For right now we can only surmise what God might be doing and what the end result will be. But I have not written this work as a prophetic commentary on the times; I am not interested in newspaper exegesis. Christianity has been embarrassed by too many failed prophets in this century.²

Yet I believe there is a system of biblical eschatology that has in the past and will yet again demonstrate itself a valid force in the development of world events. And that eschatology is postmillennialism.

2. See: Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now*. Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*. See also: Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist* (1995). Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (1992).

For the last fifty years many Christians (wrongly) deemed post-millennialism a theologically dead issue.³ It held too optimistic a prospect for the future for those who lived in an era that witnessed the rise of Communism and two World Wars. But postmillennialism has begun to make headway once again as a theologically credible alternative to the more popular eschatologies of despair. And it is important to realize that its remarkable resurgence antedates the collapse of Soviet and Eastern Bloc communism. These events cannot be laid down as the psychological bases for the modern resurgence of postmillennial optimism.

The market for works on eschatology is ripe. Many of the best-selling Christian works in the last few years have dealt with prophecy. In this work I hope to set forth compelling reasons for a return to postmillennialism by evangelical Christians. These reasons will be shown to be pre-eminently exegetical and theological. For the Christian, exegesis and theology should provide the basis of expectation for the future, not current events.

I would like to thank several friends for assisting me in proofreading the chapters: Bill Boney, Edmond Sandlin, and Kim Conner. Their friendship, assistance, advice, and encouragement are much appreciated. They are Christians who are persuaded that *He Shall Have Dominion*. Thanks also to my son Stephen for spending several days helping me to double-check direct quotations for accuracy.

3. See discussion in chs 4 “Introduction to Postmillennialism” and 17 “Pragmatic Objections.”

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.” (Isa 46:9–10)

The Importance of Eschatology

Few doctrines of the Bible receive more attention among evangelicals today than the second coming of Christ. And since his return is a foundational doctrine of the historic Christian faith, it well deserves our notice.¹ Unfortunately though, the second advent is more deeply loved and firmly believed than biblically understood and accurately proclaimed. Evangelicals too often tend to have a “zeal without knowledge” when approaching this great biblical theme. This is especially tragic in that properly comprehending it is vitally important for framing in a Christian worldview. After all, it exalts the consummate glory of his redemptive

1. See my chapter on creeds in Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?*, ch. 1.

victory, completes God's sovereign plan for history, and balances a full-orbed theology of Scripture. In this regard I would note:

First, the second coming exalts the victory of Christ in redemption. When Christ comes in his first century incarnation, he comes in a state of humiliation. That is, he dwells among sinners in the dust of the earth, suffers rejection, abuse, and torment from them, then dies in agony on the cross, experiencing even rejection by God the Father (Mt 27:46//), and is buried in a tomb in the dust of the earth. As Paul expresses it: "being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Php 2:8; cp. Mt 1:21; Lk 19:10). But Scripture does not leave him on the cross or in the tomb; it teaches his consequent glorification through four steps: resurrection, ascension, session, and, ultimately, *return*.

Christ's return in glory is necessary for completing his redemptive victory, for then he returns as the all-conquering Redeemer-King. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Php 2:9–11). But as Hebrews notes: "Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" (Heb 2:8b). So then, Christ's second coming is necessary for conclusively demonstrating his redemptive victory for all to see.

Second, the second coming completes God's plan for history. Though Christ legally secures the defeat of sin, death, and the devil in the first century,

all three evils remain with us (Ro 7:18–25; 1Pe 5:8–9). Just as we have been legally sanctified in the past (Heb 10:14), are being experientially sanctified in the present (Ro 6:19–22), and will be finally sanctified at the resurrection (1Th 5:23), so Scripture presents Christ's victory in three stages: He vanquishes these enemies *legally* before God's judicial bar (Col 1:13–14; 2:13–15). He continues vanquishing them *historically* through the gospel's continuing progress (Ac 26:18; 1Co 15:20–23). He will vanquish them *eternally* at his second advent, when he concludes history (Ro 8:18–25; Rev 20:10–15).

One of the tragic consequences of the novel theology known as hyper-preterism² is its leaving sin and death operating in the Universe so that God must endure their presence forever and ever. However, the Scriptures teach that history will conclude with a final, permanent conquest of evil: "according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Pe 3:13). This occurs when Christ returns: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one

2. For a presentation and critique of this recent phenomenon, see Appendix: "The Hyper-preterist Error." See also: Gentry, "Christ's Resurrection and Ours," (CR) (April, 2003). Jonathan Seraiah, *The End of All Things* (1999). Sproul, ". . . in Like Manner," (*Tabletalk*): 4–7. Crisler, "The Eschatological *A Priori* of the New Testament: A Critique of Hyper-Preterism," (*JCR*): 225–56. Mathison, *Postmillennialism* (1999), App. C. Mathison, ed., *When Shall These Things Be?* Jay E. Adams, *Preterism* (2003).

from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. . . . Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Mt 25:31–33, 41; cp. 2Pe 3:3–15). "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1Co 15:26), which results at his return (1Co 15:23–25, 54). Thus, Christ's second coming appropriately concludes history.

Third, the second coming balances the theology of God in Scripture. This glorious doctrine not only finalizes Christ's redemptive victory (pouring eternal glory on his redeeming love) and completes the plan of God (demonstrating divine wisdom in his creational plan). But it also provides us with a full-orbed doctrinal system balancing out majestic biblical truths. Were it not for the second advent:

We would have a creation (Ge1:1; Heb 11:3) without a consummation (Ac 3:20–21; Rev 20:11), resulting in an open-ended Universe (1Co 15:23–24; 2Pe 3:3–4).

We would have a world eternally groaning (Ro 8:22; 2 Co 5:1–4), without any glorious perfection (Ro 8:21; 2Pe 3:12–13).

We would have a Savior quietly departing before his followers (Lk 24:50–52; 1Co 15:5–8), without ever enjoying a victorious exhibition before his world (Ro 14:11; Php 2:10–11).

We would have a redemption spiritually focused (Ro 8:10; Eph1:3), without a physical dimension (Ro 8:11; 1Th 4:13–18).

We would have a Redeemer bodily ascended into heaven (Ac 1:8–11; Col 2:9), without any physical family joining with him (1Co 15:20–28; Php 3:20–21).

We would have a gospel continually necessary (Mt 28:19; Ac 1:8), without any final victory (Mt 28:20; 1Co 15:24) — the number of the elect would never be filled.

Truly, the second coming is a “blessed hope” upon which we must carefully focus.³ Unfortunately, though it is “blessed” and hope-filled, “eschatology, perhaps more than any other branch of theology, is laden with divisiveness, and this is particularly true in conservative evangelical circles.”⁴ Tragically, this issue “has been a matter of debate, sometimes acrimonious.”⁵ Indeed, “perhaps no doctrine has more divided modern evangelical Protestantism.”⁶ So, before we can properly understand all the implications of the second coming, we must establish our theological context.

Let us begin our quest by considering:

The Meaning of “Eschatology”

3. See my discussion of Tit 2:13 and the “blessed hope” in ch. 19 “Biblical Objections.”

4. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 28.

5. Sauter, *Eschatological Rationality*, 33.

6. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 87.

The English word “eschatology” is a fairly late theological term, apparently not put into common use before the nineteenth century.⁷ Its first use, however, appears as far back as in Germany in 1644 in the last section of Philip Heinrich Friedlieb’s *Dogmatics*. That section was titled: *Eschatologia seu Florilegium theologicum exhibens locorum de moret, resurrectione martuoru, extreme iudicio, cosummatione seculi, inferno sue maorte aeterna et denique vita eterna* (which explains why you never see it mentioned on a bumper sticker).⁸

The term “Eschatology” is the compound of two Greek terms: *eschatos*, which means “last,” and *logia*, which means “word, discourse.” Etymologically then, eschatology is “the study of the last things.”⁹ The term derives from certain Scriptural passages that speak of “the last days” (2Ti 3:1; Heb 1:2), “the last time” (1 Pe 1:20; Jude 18), “the last hour” (1 John 2:18), and other comparable statements. We find similar examples

7. Oscar Cullmann and W. Georg Kümmel, “Eschatology,” in *ODCC*, 469. See also: *COED*, 1:893, cites George Bush’s *Anastasis; or the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body*, written in 1845, as the earliest work employing the term “eschatology.”

8. Sauter, *Eschatological Rationality*, 136.

9. Some theologians and dictionaries define it as: “The department of theological science concerned with ‘the four last things: death, judgement, heaven, and hell.’” *COED*, 1:893.

in the Septuagint, the second-century BC Greek translation of the Old Testament.¹⁰

Theologians generally divide eschatology into two categories, cosmic and personal. “Cosmic eschatology” deals with the consummational history of the *world system* and the *human race*.¹¹ It involves the study of the biblical data regarding the providentially governed flow of history as it develops toward its foreordained consummation. Cosmic eschatology especially focuses on the unfolding of God’s kingdom in history, the second advent of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the eternal state. “Personal eschatology” focuses on the destiny of the *individual* at death.¹² This necessarily involves a study of physical death, the immortality of the soul, and the intermediate state. Of course, because it ushers the individual out of the temporal and into the eternal world, it also relates to heaven and hell. Eschatology as a whole asks the

10. See the Septuagint *eschatai hemerai* (Ge 49:1; Isa 2:2; Jer 37:24; Eze 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1; Da 10:14) and *eschaton ton hemeron* (Nu 24:14; Dt 4:30; 31:29; Jer 23:20; 25:18).

11. Louis Berkhof and Wayne Grudem call it “general eschatology”; John Murray and Geerhardus Vos call it “collective eschatology”; Bruce calls it “world eschatology.” See: Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 666. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1091. Murray, “The Last Things,” in *Collected Writings*, 2:403. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 5. F. F. Bruce in *EDT*, 362.

12. Berkhof, Murray, Vos, and Bruce prefer “individual eschatology.” Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 667. Murray, “The Last Things,” 2:401. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 5. Bruce, *EDT* 362.

question: “What yet lies ahead, for both person and cosmos?”¹³ In this book I will focus on cosmic eschatology.

Although eschatological matters have been before the church for almost 2000 years,¹⁴ they have only in the last seventy-five years come to prominence as an area of *systematic* inquiry. Berkhof noted in this regard: “When Klieforth wrote his *Eschatologie*, he complained about the fact that there had never yet appeared a comprehensive and adequate treatise on eschatology as a whole. . . . In general it may be said that eschatology is even now [in 1941] the least developed of all the loci of dogmatics.”¹⁵ Near the same time, Feinberg observed: “Eschatology remains a much neglected field of theological study and research. If one were to scan the

13. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 2:369.

14. Some of the earliest of post-apostolic Christian literature dealt with eschatological issues. See especially *The Shepherd of Hermas* (ca. AD 80s); Barnabas (ca. AD 100), *Epistle*, ch. 15; Papias (ca. AD 60–130), *Against Heresies* 5:33; Justin Martyr (ca. AD 100–165), *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, chaps. 32, 51, 110 and *Apology* 1:50–52; and Irenaeus (ca. AD 100–200), *Against Heresies* 5:23–26. Many early creeds and liturgies alluded to eschatological issues. See the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, Clementine liturgy, liturgy of James, and the liturgy of Mark in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (5th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1985), 2:598. Gentry in Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?*, ch. 1. For important studies of eschatological interests see: Hill, *Regnum Caelorum* (2001). Carroll, *The Return of Jesus in Early Christianity* (2000). McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (1994). McGinn, *Visions of the End* (1979).

15. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 664.

standard work of theology, he would be surprised to find the little attention that is given to eschatology.”¹⁶ Even more recently Erickson can comment that the broader field of eschatology “has remained relatively undeveloped in comparison to such doctrines as the nature of the sacraments and the person and work of Christ.”¹⁷

The deficiency more recently, however, is not as bad as it once was. Unfortunately though, dominating eschatological inquiry are writers offering either rationalistic assessments (e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Hendrikus Berkhof¹⁸), dispensationalistic novelties¹⁹ (e.g., Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost), or sensationalistic prognostications (e.g., Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, John Hagee). Today the lack has been greatly relieved by a growing body of important evangelical studies (e.g., Stanley J. Grenz, G. K. Beale, Cornelis Venema). Nevertheless, a careful, systematic, full-scale, current presentation of the *optimistic* eschatology of *postmillennialism*

16. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 32. This, apparently, is from the earliest edition (1936) and was not amended in the 1980 version.

17. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1156.

18. For helpful summaries of liberal eschatologies, see: Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1162–68. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 288–316. Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 981–985.

19. Erickson calls dispensationalism’s reckless over-indulgence “eschatomania.” Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1158.

remains a genuine need within the church.²⁰ I am presenting this revision of my 1997 second edition to fill this need.

Unfortunately, most evangelicals are still not familiar with postmillennialism, and many who are aware of it resist it as something “new.” Some lament the introduction of new ideas or the resystematization of older views in the eschatological marketplace of eschatology. One theologian writes that “we do not need another defense of a particular view of the future and certainly not a new view.”²¹ Another comments in a review of a new work on eschatology that he “sincerely questions . . . the necessity of adding a fifth position to an already overcrowded rapture debate.”²² Yet it is vitally important that we continue inquiring, systematizing, and correcting our understanding of this important field of theology.

I will present three justifications for a new work on eschatology.

The Priority of Scripture

Our Lord prays for us before he mounts the cross: “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.” (Jn 17:17). Paul informs us in 2 Timothy 3:16

20. Though even here no *total* lack prevails, due to several recent contributions to the debate. In addition to the first two editions of *He Shall Have Dominion*, see: Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (1985); Davis, *The Victory of Christ's Kingdom* (1996); Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus* (1999); Mathison, *Postmillennialism* (1999); Gentry in Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium* (1999); Gentry, *Thine Is the Kingdom* (2003).

21. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 93.

22. Stanton, “A Review of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*” (BTS): 90.

that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Consequently, Paul’s mission was to declare the *whole purpose of God* to his listeners (Ac 20:27). The study of any of Scripture’s doctrines will benefit the Christian. And eschatology is certainly one of the major fields of systematic theology, as well as for biblical theology. Contrary to a widespread practice in populist literature today, Scripture, not the newspapers, must be the foundation of our eschatology.

As I will demonstrate in more detail later, the material of biblical eschatology begins at the very genesis of universal history and extends to its ultimate consummation. Thus, its sweep encompasses the whole of time and the entirety of the biblical record. As Jürgen Moltmann puts it: “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.”²³ J. J. Van Oosterzee agrees: “All true Theology is at the same time Teleology, which must of itself lead to Eschatology. The eschatological is not an element of Christianity, but is the medium of Christian faith as such”²⁴

23. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16. Berkhof also laments the epilogical placement of eschatology: “In such a scheme eschatology could only appear as the finale of history, and not at all as one of the constitutive elements of a system of truth.” Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 664.

24. Van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:581.

Willem Van Gemeren succinctly notes that eschatology is “the totality of the teaching of Scripture on the redemption of God.”²⁵ Thus, as Michael Horton observes: “Eschatology should be a lens and not merely a locus. In other words, it affects the way we see everything in scripture rather than only serving as an appendix to the theological system.”²⁶ Indeed, “revelation is therefore the servant of redemption.”²⁷

As Geerhardus Vos notes regarding Paul’s theology, “not only Christology but also the Soteriology of the Apostle’s teaching is closely interwoven with the Eschatology, that, were the question put, which of the strands is more central, which more peripheral, the eschatology would have as good a claim to the central place as the others. In reality, however, there is no alternative here; there is backward and forward movement in the order of thought in both directions.”²⁸ Indeed, to demonstrate the matter statistically in this econometric age, some research suggests that the prophetic element in Scripture accounts for more than one-fourth, or about 27% of the biblical record. That is, we find predictive prophecy in 8,352 of the Bible’s 31,124 verses.²⁹ As Stephen

25. Van Gemeren, *Progress of Redemption*, 458.

26. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 5.

27. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 5.

28. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 29.

29. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 675, 681. Of course, this is not to say that all of these prophecies are future to *our* time. All evangelicals who have not converted to Judaism are preterists in *some* cases, as regarding the prophecies of the virgin birth (Isa 7), crucifixion (Psa 22), outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2), and

Williams observes in 1997: “theologians have emphasized the eschatological dimension of Christian faith these last thirty years or so.”³⁰ Eschatology is vitally important to a proper understanding of biblical revelation.

Louis Berkhof puts the significance of eschatology in proper perspective regarding its relation to the other branches of systematic (or dogmatic) theology:

In theology it is the question, how God is finally perfectly glorified in the work of His hands, and how the counsel of God is fully realized; in anthropology, the question, how the disrupting influence of sin is completely overcome; in christology, the question, how the work of Christ is crowned with perfect victory; in soteriology, the question, how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God; and in ecclesiology, the question of the final apotheosis of the Church. All these questions must find their answer in the last locus of dogmatics, making it the real capstone of dogmatic theology.³¹

H. D. McDonald asserts of Jesus’ teaching: “It is much more than a mere paradox to say that the first things in the Gospels is their presentation of

so forth.

30. Stephen Williams, “Thirty Years of Hope: A Generation of Writing on Eschatology” in Brower and Elliott, eds., *Eschatology in Bible & Theology*, 247.

31. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 665.

the last things. Their theology, like any sound theology which is true to its biblical perspective, involves an eschatology, a doctrine of end events.”³²

For the evangelical Christian, the Scripture necessarily holds a dominant sway over his general outlook on life, his worldview.³³ Given the heavy biblical emphasis on eschatological issues, we must not overlook this field of study. In fact, this leads me to my next, related concern:

The Philosophy of History

Regarding any philosophy of history, a number of questions arise:

- What is man?
- Where did man come from?
- What is the role and impact of human agency?
- Does history have any meaning, purpose, or significance?
- Is history structured or random?
- Does history have a unified movement?
- Can we have knowledge of the past?
- Can we learn from history?
- Is history going anywhere?
- Did history have a beginning?
- Will it have an end?

32. McDonald, *Living Doctrines of the New Testament*, 116.

33. See ch. 5 “The Revelation of Truth.”

These are important questions to bear in mind as we begin a study of cosmic eschatology. After all, the issue of eschatology is “not just one of how to interpret Rev 20, but one that bears on the entire philosophy of history.”³⁴

Carl Henry observes that “Judeo-Christian revelation has nurtured a universal conviction that no theology or philosophy can be comprehensive unless it deals with the direction of history and the goal of the universe, with the matter of man’s ultimate destiny and the problem of death.”³⁵ Vos notes:

It is no wonder that such energetic eschatological thinking tended towards consolidation in an orb of compact theological structure. For in it the world-process is viewed as a unit. The end is placed in the light of the beginning, and all intermediate developments are construed with reference to the purpose *a quo* and the terminus *ad quem*. Eschatology, in other words, even that of the most primitive kind, yields *ipso facto* a philosophy of history, be it of the most rudimentary sort. And every philosophy of history bears in itself the seed of a theology. . . . All eschatological interpretation of history, when united to a strong religious mentality cannot but produce the finest practical theological fruitage. To take God as source and end of all that exists and happens, and to hold such a view suffused with the warmth of genuine devotion, stands not only related to

34. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 234n.

35. Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays*, 6:492.

theology as the fruit stands to the tree: it is by reason of its essence a veritable theological tree of life.³⁶

Although I will not flesh out a full philosophy of history, we must at least be generally aware of its significance.³⁷ Basically, three approaches to history are significant to our inquiry, as presented by Reinhold Niebuhr and Arthur F. Holmes.³⁸ These views are the pagan cyclical view, the Christian linear view, and the secular evolutionary view.

A Brief Historical Sketch

Studying history is a complicated task. The difficulty of arranging all the evidence we have (which gives us but a fraction of all that occurred) is truly imposing. Tolstoy once commented that “History would be an

36. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 61.

37. For a helpful introduction to some of the elements of a Christian philosophy of history, see: Rushdoony, *Biblical Philosophy of History* (1969) and Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (1966). See also: Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (1959). Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live?* (1996). Dooyeweerd, *Christian Philosophy and the Meaning of History* (1996). Nash, *The Meaning of History* (1998). For an historical study see: Bebbington, *Patterns in History* (1979). For helpful material on the worldview implications of Christianity as a corollary to a philosophy of history, see: Hoeffecker, *Universe, Society, and Ethics*, 2 vols. (1986) and Hoeffecker, *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (2007).

38. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 17. Holmes, *Contours of a Christian Worldview* (1983).

excellent thing if only it were true.”³⁹ In the late 1600s, systematic historical Pyrrhonism arose, which discounted the value of history due to the philosophical skepticism regarding all human knowledge.⁴⁰ Developing an explicitly biblical philosophy of history is a task of great significance for the Christian, despite deconstructionist and postmodern influences in the contemporary scholarly world.

Although “societies have existed, and continue to exist, where there is little awareness of the ongoing historical process,”⁴¹ there eventually arose in the ancient pre-Christian world a cyclical view of history.⁴² The cyclical interpretation of history held (and in some cases still holds) a strong influence in the East: China, India, and Persia. In fact, “almost all of the great civilizations existing before the beginning of the Christian era ascribed a cyclical pattern to history.”⁴³ This cyclical view of history

39. Cited by Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 8.

40. La Mothe le Vayer in 1668 was an early systematizer of historical Pyrrhonism. Pyrrhonism is based on the philosophy of the Greek skeptic Pyrrho (365–275 BC), who argued that all knowledge, including knowledge based on the senses, is uncertain.

41. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 21.

42. For a fuller discussion of the cyclical view of history, see: Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, ch. 2. Nash, *Meaning of History*. Marsh, *The Fullness of Time* (1952). Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (1966). Usher, “The Dynastic Cycle and the Stationary State,” 1031–44.

43. Nash, *Meaning of History*, 163

influenced the West through Greece and Rome.⁴⁴ Based on the seasonal rhythm of nature, it presents history as an endless, recurring series of cycles.

Given the pagan conception of recurring cycles and the unconnectedness of reality under competing gods, no unified conception of reality is possible. Such views destroy any hope of historical progress, thereby trapping men in a dead-end Universe of relentless political cycles.⁴⁵ In Greece arises a “rigorously anti-historical metaphysics”⁴⁶ as a result of the influence of Aristotle’s concern with the eternal. Aristotle (384–322 BC) writes: “For indeed time itself seems to be a sort of circle” (*Physics* 4:14). The Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56–117) comments that “not only the seasons but everything else, social history included, moves in cycles” (*Annals* 3:55). Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 121–180), the Stoic philosopher and Roman emperor, clearly expresses the cyclical view: “Future generations will have nothing new to witness, even as our forefathers beheld nothing more than we of today, but that if a man comes to his fortieth year, and has any understanding at all, he

44. The three fundamental eastern forms were Chinese dynasticism, the recurrent world cycle, and the Persian pattern of decline from a golden age. See Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 33.

45. For a brief discussion of the debate over whether the Greeks held to historical progress, see: North, *Moses and Pharaoh*, ch. 17: “The Metaphor of Growth: Ethics.”

46. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 20.

has virtually seen – thanks to their similarity — all possible happenings, both past and to come” (*Meditations* 11:1).

The epistemologically self-conscious Christian has a wholly different conception of reality. His realistic conception of the world and life gives rise to a distinctive and meaningful philosophy of history. We may rightly call Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (AD 354–430), the father of the philosophy of history.⁴⁷ Augustine’s influence on Christianity is so far-reaching that Warfield notes that he does not just create “an epoch in the history of the Church, but has determined the course of its history in the West up to the present day.”⁴⁸ In his *City of God* he sets forth one of his most powerful tools of influence: a philosophy of history that derives its meaning from the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which is an important aspect of the eternal plan of Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. By this work he became “the first Christian thinker to attempt a full-scale account of the universal-historical significance of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁹ For

47. However, we should understand that Augustine was not the first Christian thinker to oppose the pagan cyclical worldview. See: Justin Martyr, *The Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 1:5. Cited in Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 52. Actually, *City of God* was “the first Latin Christian attempt to produce a global philosophy of history.” *HHMBI*, 25.

48. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 306.

49. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 109. However, earlier “Irenaeus’s *Adversus haeresis* advances an embryonic redemptive-historical hermeneutic that grounds the revelation of God in this world and in the service of redemption.” Horton, 119. Irenaeus flourished from AD 175–95.

Augustine, “the whole of human history was articulated in terms of decisive landmarks within the history of salvation.”⁵⁰ He writes his *City of God* in the aftermath of Alaric’s sack of Rome in 410, when pagans are blaming Christians for that event due to their leading so many to forsake the gods.⁵¹

Van Gemenen well notes that “Biblical history reveals the pattern of God’s redemption and, together with the history of the church, unfolds the plan of God. History from the biblical perspective focuses on the acts of God in Christ, but even more, it points to the future transformation of all things. Redemptive history thus gains meaning when events are viewed in the light of the future. . . . History has an eschatological dimension, for all events have meaning in the light of the plan of God.”⁵² Neil Faulkner notes that Judaism (the foundation of Christianity) “was a highly teleological faith: it rejected the cyclical views of time which dominated pagan thought, seeing history instead as a linear progression, in which God’s design gradually unfolded and his people were led towards a predetermined end.”⁵³ Consequently, many authorities “believe

50. Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 433.

51. Sauter, *Eschatological Rationality*, 182. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 197–202, 433.

52. Van Gemenen, *Progress of Redemption*, 448.

53. Faulkner, *Apocalypse*, 123.

that linear history is one of the great gifts or treasures that the Hebrews have given to the world.”⁵⁴

Eventually, the contemporary calendar of the West is dated *Anno Domini* (“in the year of our Lord”). Dionysius Exiguus, a monk from Scythia Minor (present day Romania), develops this dating system in 525, though it does not become prevalent until the eighth century.⁵⁵ Cullmann observes: “Our system of time does not number the years in a continuous forward moving series that begins at a fixed initial point. . . . Our history . . . does not proceed from an initial point, but from a *center*. . . . This event is the birth of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”⁵⁶

Augustine argues that God’s providential intervention in earthly affairs gives meaning to history. In addition, “since, according to Augustine, human history is but the unfolding of the divine drama, history has direction.”⁵⁷ He sees history moving to a glorious conclusion;

54. John D. Currid, “The Hebrew World-and-Life View,” in Hoeffecker, ed., *Revolutions in Worldview*, 63. See also: Cahill, *Gifts of the Jews* (1999).

55. The fuller designation is actually *Anno Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*, which is Latin for “In the Year of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” The preceding era was not designated “BC” (Before Christ) until the eighteenth century. If anyone ever offers you a rare coin with a BC date on it, do not purchase it!

56. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 17.

57. Jones, *The Medieval Mind*, 135.

hence, he views it as *linear* rather than cyclical.⁵⁸ In fact, according to Daley, since Augustine's day:

central . . . to the early Christian theological tradition is what has been called a "*linear*" view of history: the conviction that history has an origin and an end, both rooted in the plan and the power of God. So both the Gnostic contempt of the temporal world and Origen's apparent flirtation with the possibility of future cycles of salvation-history were sharply rejected by most Orthodox writers as making the gospel absurd. Sixth-century apologists contested, with equal fervor, Platonic theories on the eternity of the world. In order to be a history of salvation, time must have its limits and must move unrepeatably in a single direction.⁵⁹

The four basic elements defining and governing a Christian view of history are: (1) creational beginning, (2) linear movement, (3) divine intrusion, and (4) teleological orientation.

The Christian-Augustinian view of universal history reigns with great influence throughout the Medieval period.⁶⁰ According to Löwith, the

58. Although secularist intellectuals are still debating the origin of the linear conception of history, most accept that it derives from the Bible. Ferkiss, *Technological Man*, 22, 43–44. See also: Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, chs. 1–2.

59. Daley, *The Hopes of the Early Church*, 219.

60. See: Schmidt, *Under the Influence* (2001). For helpful books on the Christian worldview, see: Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview* (1998). Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (1983). Nash, *World Views in Conflict* (1999). Naugle, *Worldview* (2002). Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (1989 [rep. 1908]).

Augustinian conception “is the pattern of every conceivable view of history that can be rightly called ‘Christian.’”⁶¹ For awhile, a secular philosophy of history — influenced by the Renaissance concern with classical antiquity — largely displaces the Christian view. We see this, for instance, in Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Discourses*. For a brief time in 1792, the leaders of the French Revolution attempt to impose a new calendar on France to rid themselves of the Christian-based calendar.⁶² In fact, the very designations “Middle Ages,” “Medieval Period,”⁶³ “Dark Ages,” and so forth, betray a bias against the Christian influence on history. Anti-theists often consider the period of Christianity’s dominant influence in the Middle Ages as a dark period separating the golden days of pagan Greece and Rome from their glorious modern heirs in secular humanism beginning in the Italian renaissance.⁶⁴ Notice the dim view that the Marquis de Condorcet expresses regarding the Middle Ages: “Man’s only achievements were theological day-dreaming and superstitious imposture, his only morality religious intolerance.”⁶⁵

But ancient pagan and modern secular histories are not glorious at all. Rome engages in wars of annihilation, sadistic judicial torture, and

61. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 166.

62. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 33–35.

63. This term is based on the Latin, *medium* (“middle”) and *aevum* (“age”).

64. Woody Allen claims to have taken a history course in which they analyzed the decision to hold the renaissance in Italy.

65. Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, 77.

public barbarity as a means of entertainment. And it is more than a little interesting that the twentieth century, which many praise as the age of the triumph of humanism, is also noted for being history's bloodiest century.⁶⁶ As Niall Ferguson observes: "the hundred years after 1900 were without question the bloodiest century in modern history."⁶⁷ This should not be surprising in that "with the complete triumph of humanism in the modern world a void has opened in the realm of ethics. For with the jettisoning of Christianity, man has gone in search of an alternative moral point of view."⁶⁸

Christian historian C. Gregg Singer relates an experience he had at an annual meeting of the American Historical Association in the early 1970s. He was attending an informal small group meeting with several leading historians. The subject under discussion was the meaning and purpose of history. The six other historians present were convinced that history "lacks any decisive meaning and any discernible purpose."⁶⁹ Singer responded: "If this be the case, then why do we teach history?" His query was met with surprise and disgust. The group broke up, with all the historians returning to their various discussion seminars on the subject they teach in colleges, but which by their own estimation had no inherent meaning.

66. See: Elliot, *The Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* (1972). See also: Gentry, "The Greatness of the Great Commission," (JCR) 19–24.

67. Ferguson, *The War of the World*, dust jacket blurb.

68. Kelley, *The Impulse of Power*, 302.

69. Singer, "History," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, 53.

According to the various competing modern, secular, evolutionary views, history can really have no meaning, purpose, value, or direction.⁷⁰ The floor of reality is Chance. In such a system, the ultimate foundation of the rational, therefore, becomes the irrational. Thus, not only does man have no ultimate meaning and purpose, but no foundation for ethics, i.e., for moral values. The chaos of modern culture is the fruit of the widespread permeation of this modern philosophy of history.⁷¹

Presuppositions of the Christian Philosophy of History

The presuppositions undergirding the Christian philosophy of linear history include the following several elements, which I will only briefly present. We must bear these in mind from the outset, for if we do not, we will throw eschatological inquiry into hopeless confusion. These will undergird my analysis of the biblical eschatological system. The fundamental presuppositions of the Christian philosophy of history,

70. The modern Western intellectual rules out in principle “the possibility that the universe might be ordered teleologically.” Smith, *Chance and Necessity*, 21. And “although no fully articulated cyclical theory is popular in the West today,” it should be noted that “cyclical theory is not dead.” Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 40. In fact, some physicists who hold to the Big Bang fluctuation theory of the universe do hold to a cyclical view of reality. See North, *Is the World Running Down?*, ch. 2.

71. For a study of a biblical apologetic undergirding a truly significant history and meaningful man, see the works of Cornelius Van Til. These are helpfully summarized in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic* (1998).

which appear in both testaments, are: God, creation, providence, fall, redemption, revelation, and consummation.⁷²

God. A proper view of history, its meaning, and purpose requires a proper view of God. God exists and is absolutely independent and wholly self-sufficient. In Exodus 3:14 he defines himself via his special covenantal name “YHWH” (“Yahweh / Jehovah”). This name is so prominent that the Scriptures can simply mention “the name” (Lev 24:11, 16). God jealously declares that this is his name “forever” (Ex 3:15). In Exodus 3:14 he identifies himself as: “I am that I am.” This self-designation is peculiarly important to our understanding of God. This name-statement is found in the imperfect tense in Hebrew, thereby emphasizing a constantly manifested quality.

From this name we may discern certain of God’s intrinsic qualities: (1) His *aseity*: God exists of himself. He is wholly uncreated and self-existent. There is no principle or fact back of God accounting for his existence: “the Father has life in Himself” (Jn 5:26; Ac 17:25; cp. Isa 40:20–25). Indeed, “in the beginning God” (Ge 1:1a) — for he “created all things” (Eph 3:9). (2) His *eternity*: He is of unlimited, eternal duration. The combination of the verb tense (imperfect) and its repetition (“I am” / “I am”) emphasize his uninterrupted, continuous existence. “From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God” (Ps 90:2; cp. Ps 93:1–2; Isa 40:28; 57:15). (3) His *sovereignty*: He is absolutely self-determinative. He

72. There are those who (wrongly) argue that the Old Testament operates from a cyclical view of history. Curtis, “A Suggested Interpretation of the Biblical Philosophy of History” (1963).

determines from within his own being. He can declare absolutely “I am that I am,” without fear of any overpowering or countervailing entity to challenge him. As the Absolute One he operates with unfettered liberty. He is not conditioned by outward circumstance. He is what he is because he is what he is. He is completely self-definitional and has no need of anything outside of himself (Isa 40:9–31), for “I am God, and there is no one like Me” (Ex 9:14; cp. Isa 44:7; Jer 50:44). (4) His *immutability*: He declares “I, the LORD, do not change” (Mal 3:6). He is forever the same, for in him “there is no variation, or shifting shadow” (Jas 1:17). Thus, we can trust that he will not change his mind or his plan in governing history, for “God is not a man, / that He should lie, / Nor a son of man, / that He should repent; / Has He said, and will He not do it? / Or had He spoken, and will / He not make it good?” (Nu 23:19).

*Creation.*⁷³ All of reality derives from a personal, moral, sovereign being. The Christian’s creational viewpoint puts man under God and over nature (Ge 1:26–27; Ps 8). It imparts transcendent meaning to temporal history and sets before man a high calling.⁷⁴ The entire Universe from the smallest atomic particle to the largest and farthest flung galaxy was created *ex nihilo*. It exists solely by the exercise of God’s creative will, and was brought into being by his sovereign, successive divine fiats (Ge 1:1;

73. See ch. 8 “Eschatology and Creation” for more detail.

74. Rushdoony, *Biblical Philosophy of History*, 3. See also: Lee, *The Central Significance of Culture* (1976).

Ex 20:11; Heb 11:3).⁷⁵ All facts and laws, all people and materials, trace their origin, meaning, and purpose back to God.⁷⁶ Goldberg reminds us that “for both Judaism and Christianity, ordinary, profane time is real, and it is real precisely because it — rather than some other ‘Great Time’ which transcends it — is the locus (and focus) of redemption and meaning.”⁷⁷

Providence. God has an eternally decreed, minutely detailed, sovereignly determined, and unfailingly certain plan for the Universe. He personally and intimately administers this plan for his own glory.⁷⁸ Providence imparts transcendent meaning into the control of history. “The entire scheme of the Bible is structured around the movement ‘from creation to new creation by means of divine redemptive interventions.’”⁷⁹ God “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11; cf. Ps 33:11; Isa 45:10–11). Providence is the alternative to the Chance and brute factuality (i.e., the unrelatedness of reality) of the non-Christian viewpoint.

Fall. Because of God’s testing of Adam, which results in Adam’s Fall (Ge 3:1–8), history becomes the battleground of Christ and Antichrist (Ge

75. See: Gentry and Butler, *Yea, Hath God Said?* (2002). Kelly, *Creation and Change*, 1997.

76. Ps 24:1; Jn 1:4; Ro 11:36ff; Col 1:16–17; Rev 4:11.

77. Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative*, 56.

78. Ps 115:3; Pr 16:1–4, 9; Da 4:35; Mt 10:29, 30. See discussion under “The Providential Word” in Ch. 5. See also: Gentry, *A Biblical Defense of Predestination*.

79. Brower, *Eschatology in Bible & Theology*, 22.

3:15). Sin affects every aspect of human endeavor, distorting all of reality. We cannot understand our historical situation apart from the intrusion of sin, as an unnatural factor. Neither may we think of man's fundamental problem as ontological, related to his finite being. Adam's pre-Fall abilities were remarkable (Ge 2:15, 19–20), as will be our resurrected existence (1Co 15:42–53). Man's fundamental problem is ethical, related to his rebellion against the Law of God (Ro 5:10; 8:7–8). Because of this he labors under God's curse (Ge 3:15; Ro 5:12–19; Gal 3:10).

But God does not abandon history because of man's Fall. History does, however, witness the rise of a new factor: redemption.

Redemption. A major motif of history is God's redemptive activity in reconciling creation back to himself (Ge 3:15; Col 1:19–23). This will very powerfully and directly affect our understanding of biblical eschatology. God establishes his redemptive plan in order to bring wayward man back to himself. "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him" (Jn 3:17). We can possess no proper understanding of historical progress and direction when referring only to the Fall of man. We must take into account also the restorative acts of God in redemption.⁸⁰ The division of history into BC and AD highlights Christ as the focal point of the historical process.⁸¹

80. North, *Is The World Running Down?*

81. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 18–19.

Such an historical designation has theological implications. Some scholars opt for BCE and CE dating, which is a sign of an anti-Christian bias.⁸²

*Revelation.*⁸³ God reveals himself and various aspects of his will infallibly and inerrantly in his Holy Word, the Bible: “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2Ti 3:16; cp. Jn 10:35; 2Pe 1:20, 21). The causative prophetic word of the Creator providentially governs history. God’s eternal decree, from which his prophetic Word springs into history, is neither abstract nor random; it is concrete and rational. It is not raw force, but structured power. God’s Word intelligibly constructs all things, “declaring the end from the beginning” (Isa 46:10; cp. Ps 33:11; 148:5; Heb 1:3; 11:3). God’s objective revelation in Scripture is foundational to a truly Christian eschatology.

Consummation. Not only does history have a beginning, but God is providentially guiding it to a particular end: “He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness” (Ac 17:31; cp. Isa 46:10; 55:11). Our labor on earth “is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58). We labor in the present with a view to the future — and ultimately to history’s consummation and the eternal state. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who

82. Before the Common Era and Common Era. For instance, see the practice preferred in Alexander, Kutsko, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 69. Hudson, *The Christian Writers Manual of Style*, 135.

83. This factor of the Christian philosophy of history will be brought to bear more precisely regarding the eschatological question in ch. 5 “The Revelation of Truth.”

will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Php 3:20-21). In fact, "it was the Christian view of history that gave western civilization its remarkably widespread conviction that the future offers hope."⁸⁴

I can afford no more space to this important matter of the philosophy of history. But I urge you to keep these general statements in mind as you read this study of biblical eschatology from the postmillennial perspective. We are dealing with a very important matter: *the Christian philosophy of universal history*. We must recognize that "Scripture affirms that all history has a purpose and goal, that history is unrepeatable, and that it moves toward the final triumph of the good."⁸⁵ To read much of popular eschatological literature, one could surmise that the Bible is an eschatological jigsaw puzzle, a grand trivial pursuit.⁸⁶ Such is not the case.

Whether or not the entire course of world history is under the absolutely sovereign administration of the infinitely personal God of Scripture means everything to eschatological inquiry. Whether or not we view the Universe as God's creation designed for his glory is fundamentally important. If God is not absolutely sovereign, some competing god or some countervailing principle or some unforeseen

84. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 42.

85. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6:493.

86. Bacchiocchi, *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle* (1987). Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle?* (1978).

fortuity could throw a dark blanket of obscurity over the ultimate eschatological outcome of universal history and human existence. This would undermine any hope for a moral conclusion to world and universal history.⁸⁷

Regarding the facts of eschatological eventuation, God has an eternal plan that absolutely governs the origin, process, direction, and outcome of history. A Christian philosophy of history must insist that his will is determinative rather than responsive.⁸⁸ God is not merely reacting against forces inherent within historical processes, whether resulting from a competing spiritual being or beings, or flowing from autonomous human activity, or arising from “natural” phenomena. Furthermore, God graciously and objectively reveals himself and his will to man. If neither of these biblical “givens” is true, then, hopelessness prevails. Denying the former, God himself cannot certainly know the future because it would

87. See Bahnsen, “The Problem of Evil” in *Biblical Worldview*: 7:10; 7:12.

88. This is contrary to Open Theism which holds that fully knowing the future is impossible even for God, for the future is “open,” not closed and determined. God only has anticipatory foreknowledge through his intimate knowledge of his creatures. Current theologians espousing this view include: Gordon Olson, Winkie Pratney, Richard Rice, Gregory Boyd, Thomas Jay Oord, Clark Pinnock, John E. Sanders, C. Peter Wagner, William Hasker, David Basinger, and Bob Enyart. For critiques of this position, see: Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory* (2000); Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?* (2006). For eschatology from this perspective, see: Pinnock, “Toward a More Inclusive Eschatology,” in Baker, *Looking into the Future*, ch. 15.

be definitionally random and unknowable. Denying the latter, we could have no hope for lifting the veil of the future; our inquiry would be pure guess-work.

The Implications of Eschatology

As will become increasingly evident in the following chapters, eschatology tremendously affects the Christian's worldview and, consequently, his practical, daily living. In this book I will highlight one particular eschatological theme that dominates the entire prophetic Scriptures and that most influences hope-filled family living, a full-orbed Christian witness, and Bible-based social activism: *the gospel victory theme*. We must understand the biblical worldview and its practical influence on the Christian's approach to culture. Broadly speaking three approaches to culture lie before us: the *Identificationist Model*, the *Separationist Model*, and the *Transformationist Model*.⁸⁹

The Identificationist Model essentially represents Christianity's left wing. It sees the church's role as flowing alongside of and sanctifying the evolutionary changes in culture, while adapting to them. It is wholly this-world in orientation, inevitably adopting the contemporary worldview. Liberation theology and main line denominations are contemporary representatives of this view.

89. In Machen's article, "Christianity and Culture," *PTR* (reprinted in *What Is Christianity?*) he identifies these three views: subordination to the prevailing anti-supernatural culture, destruction of culture, and consecration of culture.

The Separationist Model represents Christianity's right wing (i.e., it is to the right of what God intends for Christianity). It urges Christians to be wholly separated from contemporary culture. The focus of this view is on heavenly citizenship, seeing the church as but a pilgrim community passing through this world to a greater world above. It is essentially retreatist, recognizing sin's power at work in the world and seeking to avoid staining itself with such tendencies.

When contrasted to the two views above, the Transformationist Model represents the truly centrist wing of historic, orthodox Christianity. It sees an important role for Christianity in leading human culture according to the directives of God's Word, with a view to transforming every area of life. The Transformationist Model sees the significance of this world in light of the world above and seeks to promote God's will on earth as it is in heaven. It promotes godly culture in the stead of an ungodly culture. As we will see postmillennialism provides a better foundation for the Transformationist Model.

We should lament the omission of the gospel victory theme in most of modern eschatological speculation. Its replacement with a defeatist scheme for Christian enterprise paralyzes the Christian cultural enterprise, empties the Christian worldview of practical significance, and gives Christians a sinful "comfort in lethargy," because it tends "to justify social irresponsibility."⁹⁰ It leaves the earth (which is the Lord's, Ps 24:1⁹¹)

90. Peters, *Futures*, 29, 28.

91. This declaration frequently appears in Scripture: Ex 9:29; 19:5; Lev 25:23; Dt 10:14; 1Sa 2:8; 1Ch 29:11, 14; 2Ch 29:11, 14; Job 41:11; Ps 24:1; 50:12; 89:11;

to a conquered foe: the enemy of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This paralysis is all the more lamentable because it forfeits the great gains made by the tireless and costly labors of our Christian forefathers, particularly from the Reformation era through the early 1900s.

We may characterize as pessimistic three of the four major evangelical eschatological systems,⁹² whereas the view I will be explaining and defending is fundamentally “optimistic.” In categorizing them as pessimistic, I am speaking of the following issues:

- (1) As systems of gospel proclamation, each teaches Christ’s gospel will fail to exercise any major influence in the world before Christ’s return;
- (2) As systems of historical understanding, each holds that the Bible teaches prophetically determined, irresistible trends downward toward chaos in the outworking and development of history; and therefore
- (3) As systems for Christian discipleship, each dissuades the church from anticipating, planning, and laboring for wide-scale success in influencing the world for Christ during this age.

Ps 115:16; 1Co 10:26, 28.

92. See chs. 3 (“The Pessimistic Millennial Views”) and 4 (“The Postmillennial System”) for a study of the four major evangelical eschatological systems.

Timothy P. Weber appropriately notes regarding postmillennialism: “Operating with the certainty of prophetic promises, evangelicals built schools, churches, publishing houses, and missionary agencies in order to carry out God’s plan to Christianize America and the world.”⁹³ But he resists this optimistic eschatology on his pessimistic assumptions, noting postmillennialism’s “unrealistic expectation that Christians can produce this millennium apart from God’s supernatural intervention.”⁹⁴ Apparently, God’s supernatural providence is insufficient.

Dispensationalist Paul N. Benware relates the matter clearly: “Both premillennialists and amillennialists believe just the opposite [of postmillennialism]: that spiritual and moral conditions in this world will get worse and worse as this present age draws to a close.”⁹⁵ Millard J. Erickson recognizes that “basically, then, postmillennialism is an optimistic view” in that “the major tenet of postmillennialism is the successful spread of the gospel.”⁹⁶ He sets this distinctive over against the other millennial positions.⁹⁷ When Stanley J. Grenz analyzes “The Deeper Issue of Millennialism,” he opens his postmillennial discussion

93. Weber in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 5.

94. Weber in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 69.

95. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 124. He only presents three millennial views because in typical dispensational fashion he collapses dispensationalism into premillennialism — despite the vigorous antagonism between the two systems.

96. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1213, 1214.

97. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1218, 1222

with these words: “Postmillennialism sets forth a basically optimistic outlook toward history and our role in the attainment of God’s program.”⁹⁸ He even notes that: “It is no historical accident that by and large the great thrusts toward worldwide evangelistic outreach and social concern in the modern era were launched by a church imbued with the optimism that characterizes the postmillennial thinking.”⁹⁹ Then he comments: “In contrast to the optimism of postmillennialism, premillennialists display a basic pessimism concerning history and the role we play in its culmination.”¹⁰⁰ Of his own amillennialism he states: “victory and defeat, success and failure, good and evil will coexist until the end,” so that “both unchastened optimism and despairing pessimism are illegiti-mate.”¹⁰¹

The pessimism/optimism question has very much to do with the *practical* endeavors of Christians in the world *today*.¹⁰² Of course, all evangelical Christians are optimistic in the *ultimate* sense that God will miraculously win the war against sin and Satan. This is virtually demanded in the evangelical definition of God. This will occur at the end

98. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 803.

99. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 804 n 43.

100. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 805.

101. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 805.

102. Gary North observes that Christians who are either premillennial or amillennial tend to become operational postmillennialists when they get involved in social action projects, whether or not these are political activities. North, “Ghetto Eschatologies,” 3–4, 6.

of history by direct, supernatural intervention, either in an earthly millennial kingdom introduced by Jesus at the second coming¹⁰³ or at the final judgment, which introduces the New Heavens and New Earth.¹⁰⁴ Thus, “no matter what their differences on the details, all Christians who take the Bible as their final authority agree that the final and ultimate result of Christ’s return will be the judgment of unbelievers and the final reward of believers, and that believers will live with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth for eternity.”¹⁰⁵

Dispensationalist John F. MacArthur, Jr. expresses the matter well:

We believe the final triumph will be won easily and instantly by Christ Himself at his appearing. But we do not expect a hostile world to capitulate gradually to His lordship before He returns in glory, nor does Scripture anywhere teach that such a thing will happen. If it seems ‘pessimistic’ to rest our confidence in Christ alone, rather than entertaining the vain hope that the world will

103. For example: “The Bible expects the world to be conquered not by Christianity, but only by the second coming of Christ.” Walvoord, “Review of House Divided” (*BTS*): 372. “The premillennialist sees Christ intervening catastrophically in a moment of history, resulting in an establishment of his mediatorial rule.” House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 140.

104. Hoekema has written: “*Old Testament prophecies interpreted by postmillennialists as referring to a future millennial golden age picture the final state of the redeemed community . . . [in] a new heaven and a new earth.*” Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 177. Cf. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 33.

105. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1094.

become progressively more friendly to Him, so be it. In my assessment, the belief that this world will get better before Christ returns is not 'optimism'; it is misplaced faith.¹⁰⁶

Dispensationalism

The dispensationalist urges believers to accept the view that “the church age will end in apostasy, not revival” because it is destined by God.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, believers today are taught by this view that:

“This current world is headed toward judgment. After that judgment, Christ will take control of the world and rule it. But until that happens, the message and activities for believers should be, ‘Flee the wrath to come by finding safety in Jesus Christ.’”¹⁰⁸

“We are witnessing in this twentieth century the collapse of civilization. It is obvious that we are advancing toward the end of the age. . . . I can

106. MacArthur, *The Second Coming*, 226. Sadly, he radically mischaracterizes postmillennialism as if it expects a naturalistic historical progress or on the basis of mere human effort. Thankfully not all dispensationalists misunderstand the system. Dispensationalist Paul Benware presents the postmillennial hope quite accurately: “It is through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel that the nations of the earth will be converted and begin to practice biblical principles. The gospel is powerful and can bring change as the church proclaims it.” Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 125.

107. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 390, 378.

108. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 356.

see no bright prospects, through the efforts of man, for the earth and its inhabitants.”¹⁰⁹

“This present world is rapidly coming to an end. It is on an irreversible collision course with destiny.”¹¹⁰

“The evidence points rather to a world that is growing more and more wicked.”¹¹¹

“The misguided optimism is a major error in postmillennialism.”¹¹²

“Both premillennialists and amillennialists believe just the opposite [to postmillennialism]: that spiritual and moral conditions in this world will get worse and worse as this present age draws to a close.”¹¹³

“Pretribulationists believe the world will get worse as time goes on.”¹¹⁴

Because of this, dispensationalists dogmatically teach their followers: “Christians have no immediate solution to the problems of our day.”¹¹⁵ In fact, they aver that “to attempt to establish a long-term change of

109. Strauss, “Our Only Hope,” (*BTS*): 154.

110. Van Impe, “There Is Hope!,” 1.

111. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 128.

112. *PEBP*, 275. This statement (and chapter) also appears in Zuck, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, 100.

113. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 124.

114. Thomas Ice in *PEBP*, 289.

115. John F. Walvoord, “Why Are the Nations in Turmoil?” in Feinberg, ed., *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 212. Walvoord continues: “A solution to this unrest and turmoil is provided in the Bible, and there is no other. That solution is that Jesus Christ himself is coming back to bring peace and rest to the world” (210).

institutions before Christ returns will only result in the leaven of humanism permeating orthodox Christianity”¹¹⁶ and “that our main business should be to rescue people out of the mess and not try to improve it or preserve its good characteristics.”¹¹⁷ Dispensationalists are prone to lament: “Without the hope of our Lord’s return . . . what future do any of us have?”¹¹⁸

I am not taking these statements out of context; they are quite conventional. The language of social and political disengagement is basic to the dispensational outlook. Hal Lindsey¹¹⁹ states the situation about as strongly as possible: “Christ died for us in order to rescue us from *this present evil age*. These verses show what our *focus, motivation, and hope* should be *in this present age*. We are to live with the constant expectation of the any-moment appearing of our LORD to this earth.”¹²⁰ In fact, he writes, “the world will progressively harden its heart against the Gospel and plunge itself into destruction.”¹²¹ His call to Christians is: “We should

116. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 340.

117. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America*, 278.

118. Kirban, *Your Last Goodbye*, 252.

119. Lindsey is best known for his 35-million best-seller, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), the largest-selling book of the 1970s, which is still selling well today even though much of the material is dated and his expectation of the rapture in the 1980s failed. Consequently, his ideas exercise a great influence over untold numbers of Christians.

120. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 279.

121. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 36.

be living like persons who don't expect to be around much longer."¹²² As R. A. Torrey put it: "The darker the night gets; the lighter my heart gets."¹²³ Christianity has no future in this view for "we are in the time of the end."¹²⁴ In fact, Dave Hunt declares that "Paul's final warning to Timothy leaves no doubt that the Church at Christ's return will have been corrupted through the rejection of sound doctrine."¹²⁵

Dispensationalists have no practical, long-range hope for Christian labor *in the here and now*. "It would appear the great Judge is poised on the threshold of a new age just ready to usher in the next major movement in His plan for the world (James 5:9). . . . Every saint should be standing on tiptoe in anticipation."¹²⁶ Charles C. Ryrie¹²⁷ denies any

122. Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 145.

123. Cited from Wilson, *Armageddon Now!*, 37. The implication of the theological necessity of cultural withdrawal cannot easily be evaded, and American dispensationalists until the mid-1970's did not seek to evade it. From the mid-1970s on, this language of cultural retreat created a problem for dispensational activists. In 1982, Gary North warned that this would create a major crisis in dispensationalism: North, "The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right" (C&S): 1–40.

124. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 31.

125. Dave Hunt, "Deception in the Last Days," in *PSB*, 1427.

126. Hoyt, *The End Times*, 13.

127. Ryrie is perhaps the most influential dispensationalist theologian alive today. He is a former Dallas Theological Seminary professor, who has trained hundreds of evangelical pastors. His best-selling *Ryrie Study Bible* alone gives him an influence well beyond other dispensationalist theologians.

optimistic gospel victory, when he teaches that “defection and apostasy, among other things, will characterize [the] entire period” of church history.¹²⁸ Dave Hunt argues that “only a small percentage of mankind is willing . . . to come to Christ in repentance and be born again by the Spirit of God” and that “the vast majority of people will continue to reject Christ in the future just as they have in the past.”¹²⁹ John MacArthur declares: “Scripture clearly indicates that this world’s hatred of Christ will not only continue unabated, but will even grow worse — until He personally returns. . . . That, in fact, is the very gist of the Olivet Discourse.”¹³⁰ The dispensationalist is alarmed at the thought of Christian cultural transformation. In his view, to attempt such “is to err so grievously as to lead one into a program that is hopeless; it calls necessarily for the adopting of means that are unauthorized, and the setting of a goal that is unattainable as it is unscriptural. Herein lies the great mistake of the ‘kingdom builders’ (their tribe decreases) who have as their goal a vision of Christianizing the world.”¹³¹

We can clearly see how accurate is Grenz’s assessment in this regard: “One danger is the heightened pessimism that characterizes classical dispensationalism. . . . The classical dispensationalist vision of the end times serves to augment and heighten the pessimism inherent in

128. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 461.

129. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 178, 274.

130. MacArthur, *Second Coming*, 226.

131. Charles E. Stevens, “The Church of Christ and the Kingdom of Christ in Contrast,” *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 101.

premillennialism in general.”¹³² Donald G. Bloesch agrees that “premillennialism can be rightly criticized for entertaining an overly pessimistic view of world history, sometimes bordering on fatalism.”¹³³ Premillennialists Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung concur: “The logical corollary of classic dispensationalism is that the world is going to hell in a handbasket and the most we can hope to do is save souls before the end is upon us and we have no further opportunity to do so.”¹³⁴

Historic premillennialism

Historic premillennialists, though disagreeing with both amillennialism and dispensationalism, would join in the denial of the gospel victory theme. The following citations exhibit a strong disposition to a pessimistic assessment regarding the future, a pessimism as deeply rooted as in amillennialism:

J. Barton Payne believes that “evil is present in our world as predicted in the Holy Books” (of the Bible). This evil must occur because it is a forecast of Christ’s imminent return.¹³⁵

132. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 118.

133. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 93.

134. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 172.

135. Payne, *Biblical Prophecy for Today*, 10.

Robert H. Mounce laments that “it is difficult to see from history alone any cause for optimism.” He is certain a “persecuted church will witness the victorious return of Christ”¹³⁶ rather than a world-conquering church.

George Eldon Ladd concurs: “In spite of the fact that God had invaded history in Christ, and in spite of the fact that it was to be the mission of Jesus’ disciples to evangelize the entire world (Mt 24:14), the world would remain an evil place. False christs would arise who would lead many astray. Wars, strife, and persecution would continue. Wickedness would abound so as to chill the love of many.”¹³⁷ “This evil Age is to last until His return. It will for ever be hostile to the Gospel and to God’s people. Evil will prevail. . . . Persecution and martyrdom will plague the Church.”¹³⁸

Craig L. Bloomberg and Sung Wook Chung complain regarding postmillennialism: “Postmillennialism, followed consistently, engenders an unbridled optimism in what God wants to do in Christianizing the earth through his Spirit-filled followers, an optimism that is hard to mesh with humanity’s experience in any prolonged period of world history.”¹³⁹

Amillennialism

136. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 47; cf. 44.

137. Ladd, *The Last Things*, 58.

138. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 124.

139. Bloomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 172.

Among amillennialists we discover the same sort of despair. This despair regards life within the church and in society. Amillennialists clearly deny any positive assessment of man's prospects on earth before the coming of Christ in glory.

William E. Cox states against postmillennialism's long term optimism: "Amillenarians agree with premillenarians on this point. Although we believe the kingdom of God began as a small mustard seed and grows steadily larger, we also believe that evil grows proportionately faster."¹⁴⁰

William Hendriksen comments that "the majority will ever be on the side of the evil one."¹⁴¹ Indeed, history "will finally result in the complete destruction of the church."¹⁴²

Philip E. Hughes comments on "the witness of the New Testament that the latter part of this age will see not a decrease but an intensification of the power of evil in the world."¹⁴³

Herman Bavinck states that "Jesus only knows of two aeons: the present and the future aeons. In the present aeon his disciples cannot expect anything other than oppression and persecution and must forsake all things for his sake." So then, "nowhere in the New Testament is there

140. Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 5.

141. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 228.

142. Hendrikson, *More Than Conquerors*, 178.

143. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 99.

a ray of hope that the church of Christ will again comes to power and dominion.”¹⁴⁴

H. de Jongste and J. M. van Krimpen forthrightly declare: “there is no room for optimism: towards the end, in the camps of the satanic and the anti-Christ, culture will sicken, and the Church will yearn to be delivered from its distress.”¹⁴⁵

Anthony A. Hoekema expresses the characteristic position of amillennialism (the parallel development of good and evil): “Alongside of the growth and development of the kingdom of God in the history of the world since the coming of Christ we also see the growth and development of the ‘kingdom of evil.’ . . . Evil and good continue to exist side by side. . . . For every advance, it would seem, there is a corresponding retreat.”¹⁴⁶

Richard Gaffin states: “Over the interadvental period in its entirety, from beginning to end, a fundamental aspect of the church’s existence is ‘suffering with Christ’; nothing, the New Testament teaches, is more basic to its identity than that.”¹⁴⁷ In addition, “Until Jesus comes again, the church ‘wins’ by ‘losing.’”¹⁴⁸

144. Bavinck, *The Last Things*, 109, 110.

145. de Jongste and J. M. van Krimpen, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*, 27.

146. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 35.

147. Gaffin, in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*, 210–11.

148. Gaffin in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*, 215–16.

Willem VanGemenen: “An overly optimistic view of the gradual sanctification and betterment of the earth is equally destructive to the Christian faith.”¹⁴⁹

Donald G. Bloesch states that he agrees with Reinhold Niebuhr who states that “the antinomies of good and evil increase rather than diminish in the long course of history.”¹⁵⁰

Robert B. Strimple puts the matter starkly: “Our Lord knows of only *two* ages, the present age and the age to come. He tells his disciples that in this present age they cannot expect anything other than oppression and persecution and must forsake all things for his sake.”¹⁵¹

Cornelis Venema (though an “optimistic amillennialist”¹⁵²) argues that “amillennialists ordinarily reject the postmillennialist conviction that the millennium will be a period marked by universal peace, the pervasive influence and dominion of biblical principles in all aspects of life, and the subjection of the vast majority of the nations and peoples to Christ’s lordship. Amillennialists believe that the biblical descriptions of the inter-advental period suggests that the world’s opposition to Christ and the gospel will endure, even becoming more intense as the present

149. Van Gemenen, *Progress of Redemption*, 452.

150. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 111. I should note that Bloesch holds an improvised amillennialism: “while close to Grenz’s amillennial vision, I must take exception to a consistent and thorough-going amillennialism” (100).

151. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 63.

152. Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 360.

period of history draws to a close.”¹⁵³ He writes that “I do not believe in inevitable progress toward a much better world in this dispensation” and God’s “church has no right to take an optimistic, triumphalistic attitude.”¹⁵⁴

Kim Riddlebarger speaks of church history as the period “of both the triumph of the spiritual kingdom of God in the midst of the corresponding rise of evil in opposition to Christ and his kingdom.”¹⁵⁵ In fact, he bemoans the “lamentable state of affairs” as “an inevitability for Christ’s church,” in that “he expected heresy and false teaching to plague Christ’s church until the end of the age.”¹⁵⁶ He admits the “failure of some amillenarians to take their responsibility to the cultural mandate seriously.”¹⁵⁷

And the beat goes on: Hendrik van Riessen writes that “Babylon will be the city of the end.”¹⁵⁸ Amillennialist Donald Guthrie, according to dispensationalist John F. Walvoord, “readily agrees that the biblical point of view is pessimistic, that is, the world as it is now constituted will not be revived and improved, but instead, will be destroyed and replaced.”¹⁵⁹

153. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 239; cp. 141, 156, 242.

154. Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*, 44, 45.

155. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 29.

156. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 126.

157. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 245.

158. Riessen, *The Society of the Future*, 233. See a similar sentiment in Zorn, *Church and Kingdom*, 182–184.

159. Walvoord, “Review of Donald Guthrie (*BTS*): 251.

Hendrikus Berkhof notes the effect of such thinking on the average Christian: “The average Christian does not expect to see any positive signs of Christ’s reign in the world. He believes that the world only becomes worse and races in the direction of the antichrist.”¹⁶⁰ Dale H. Kuiper blasts postmillennialists because “they are fiercely opposed to speaking of a parallel development of good and evil, of God’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom, of the world becoming progressively worse and falling away, of the church’s tribulation increasing and the end of the world finding the church lonely and sorely beset.”¹⁶¹ Herman Hanko insists that “we must indeed expect an age when the powers of darkness shall rule in the earth.” Consequently, “there is nothing optimistic here or filled with hope for the future.”¹⁶²

An entire issue of *The Standard Bearer* of the amillennial Protestant Reformed Church is dogmatic in its despair.

The hope of the Reformed Christian is not in any kingdom in this sorry world. Why, after all, would he *want* to place it there? For, what is the Taj Mahal, even . . . compared to the mansion prepared for him in heaven. . . . Another decade has ended. We are a step closer [to the end]. We do well to meditate on that.”¹⁶³ “In all his or her ‘sorrows and persecutions,’ the child of God living in January,

160. Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History*, 174.

161. Kuiper, “What Constitutes Victory?,” 51–52.

162. Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 22, 23.

163. Doezeema, “In This Issue” (*SB*): 146.

AD 1990 longs for one thing, and one thing only: the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead, by which he and all Christ's chosen ones shall be translated to Christ. . . . All other hopes are miserable delusions and pipe dreams.¹⁶⁴

The woe continues, when the article notes that the:

world [is] filled with sin and getting worse, a hopeless situation beyond repair and impossible to salvage" is before us. Thus, the postmillennial hope of the growth of the true Christian faith to dominance "holds before us an illusory hope. . . . It is a mirage, therefore, a false hope. . . . It is a mirage because the kingdom which the Postmillennialists described is, in fact, the kingdom of Antichrist. . . . The hope of the believer, and for this I am profoundly grateful, is not on any kingdom in this sorry world, but is fastened with eagerness, with longing and with great optimism, on the everlasting kingdom of righteousness which shall be realized only in the new heavens and in the new earth where sin shall be no more.¹⁶⁵

In later articles by different writers we read:

164. Engelsma, "The Reformed Faith" (*SB*): 149. This dramatic overstatement reduces all Christian hope to one event: the second advent. It effectively undermines the missionary and evangelistic hope of bringing others to Christ — as well as other such hopes — in that "*all* other hopes are delusions."

165. Hanks, "The Illusory Hope" (*SB*): 159, 160.

Because of God's curse, man lies in the midst of death with no escape. Man goes in a circle, a vicious circle. He has made progress, but his progress consists only in that he runs his miserable circle at a faster pace. The best of man's earthly life is labor and sorrow (Psalm 90:10). Nothing is free from becoming dust.¹⁶⁶

Apostasy grows worse and worse as time goes on. We live in the last days and we know that our Lord prophesied that in our days there would be few in the world that believe.¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

Few things have been more destructive to implementing a well-rounded, biblically grounded Christian worldview than an incorrect perspective on the end times. A stark, though inadvertent, illustration of this is available in a 1977 interview with premillennial evangelist Billy Graham:

Q. If you had to live your life over again, what would you do differently?

A. One of my great regrets is that I have not studied enough. I wish I had studied more and preached less. . . . Donald Barnhouse said

166. VanOverloop, "The Hope of Every Believer Regarding His Future Earthly Life" (SB): 162.

167. DenHartog, "Hope and the Protestant Reformed Churches' Mission Calling" (SB): 165.

that if he knew the Lord was coming in three years he would spend two of them studying and one preaching. I'm trying to make it up.¹⁶⁸

A similar problem is admitted by Tim LaHaye. Many Christians are committed to the approaching end of the age, with all of its horror (according to their dispensational view):

Most knowledgeable Christians are looking for the Second Coming of Christ and the tribulation period that He predicted would come before the end of the age. Because present world conditions are so similar to those the Bible prophesies for the last days. . . , they conclude that a takeover of our culture by the forces of evil is inevitable; so they do nothing to resist it.¹⁶⁹

Such pessimistic outlooks cannot encourage promoting a full-orbed Christian worldview. A book review in *Christianity Today* further illustrates this mindset. There we read that “Myers calls us ‘not to change the world, but to understand it.’” The review also notes that author Myers writes: “If we cannot expect our culture to be a holy enterprise, we can at least try to avoid participating in its profanities.”¹⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, the defenders and extenders of pessimistic eschatologies often speak of suffering and sorrow as the lot of Christians

168. “Taking the World’s Temperature” (interview), *Christianity Today* (Sept. 23, 1977): 19.

169. LaHaye, *Battle for the Mind*, 217.

170. Rabey, “Review of Kenneth A. Myers,” (CT): 43.

throughout the Christian history, with no hope of a let up.¹⁷¹ Writes amillennialist professor Richard Gaffin of Westminster Theological Seminary: “Over the interadvental period *in its entirety*, from beginning to end, a *fundamental* aspect of the church’s existence is (to be) ‘suffering with Christ’; *nothing*, the New Testament teaches, *is more basic* to its identity than that.”¹⁷² “The normal situation for the community of Jesus is not to be influential and prosperous but poor and oppressed.”¹⁷³ “The church is called to suffer in this world.”¹⁷⁴ “Such tolerance as [Christians] receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history.”¹⁷⁵

The study of eschatology is a worthy Christian endeavor. Its significance to the Christian worldview is evident in the large role it plays in Scripture, which holds priority in developing a truly Christian worldview. It is also crucial to the development of a distinctively Christian

171. For a postmillennial understanding of suffering and a rebuttal to amillennialism’s pessimism on this principle, see Appendix B. See also Gentry, “Whose Victory in History” in North, *Theonomy*. Gentry, “Agony, Irony and the Postmillennialist,” (WTJ).

172. Gaffin in Barker, *Theonomy*, 210–211 (emph. added). For a response to the suffering argument, see: Appendix “Postmillennialism and Suffering,.” See also: Gentry in North, *Theonomy*, ch. 8. and Gentry, “Agony, Irony, and the Postmillennialist,” (WTJ).

173. Van Riessen, *Society of the Future*, 234.

174. Muether, “The Era of Common Grace,” (RTS Ministry): 18.

175. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 85.

philosophy of history, which is fundamental to the Christian understanding of the here and now. In addition, eschatology significantly impacts the Christian's cultural endeavors because it sets before the Christian the foreordained pattern of the future. If that pattern is one of pessimism, it will tend to discourage and thwart the Christian social enterprise.¹⁷⁶

In this work I will set forth a biblically-based eschatology that emphasizes the gospel victory theme. The optimistic eschatological perspective from which I write is that of postmillennialism — a post-millennialism generated neither by a contemporary can-do American optimism nor by a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, but by a careful exegetical and theological study of Scripture.

I believe with Roderick Campbell that “the church today needs this kind of vision — the vision of her reigning Lord with all the resources of heaven and earth under His command for the help and protection of His church and the ingathering of His elect.”¹⁷⁷ In the *Foreword* to that book, O. T. Allis writes:

My own studies in this and related fields have convinced me that the most serious error in much of the current ‘prophetic’ teaching of today is the claim that the future of Christendom is to be read not in terms of Revival and Victory, but of growing impotence and

176. See: North, *Is the World Running Down?* and Jordan, *Christianity and Civilization*: “The Failure of American Baptist Culture.”

177. Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, 79.

apostasy, and that the only hope of the world is that the Lord will by His visible coming and reign complete the task which He has so plainly entrusted to the church. This claim . . . is pessimistic and defeatist. I hold it to be unscriptural. The language of the Great Commission is world-embracing; and it has back of it the authority and power of One who said: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations." The duty of the church is to address herself to the achieving of this task in anticipation of the Lord's coming, and not to expect Him to call her away to glory before her task is accomplished.¹⁷⁸

Contrary to many theologians, Stanely Grenz observes of postmillennialism: "its unquestioning optimism concerning the work of God through the proclamation of the gospel and the activity of the church in the world stands as a major contribution of postmillennialism."¹⁷⁹

178. Allis, "Foreword," in *Israel and the New Covenant*, ix.

179. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 88.

2

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TREATISE

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. (1Pe 3:15)

The writer of Ecclesiastes remarks that “of making many books there is no end” (Ecc 12:12a). Today this seems especially true with eschatological books. As I note in the preceding chapter, some even complain about fielding additional material relating to the “overcrowded field” of eschatology. In this third edition of my book, I aim at the following goals.

First, I aim to furnish helpful information on the eschatological debate, since the debate still rages even though we have entered into the twenty-first century since Christ’s birth. Judging from the long-standing debate, it seems that only the return of our Lord will halt the discussion. For the dispensationalist this is encouraging, for he expects the rapture at any moment; for the postmillennialist, we realize this will likely continue on for centuries.

Second, I aim to carefully exposit major prophetic themes in the Bible, since they carry the eschatological weight in Scripture. Payne

provides an impressive statistical index to the prophecies of Scripture showing their “amount and distribution.”¹ Many of these are historical rather than eschatological, but many are truly eschatological. The Bible is clearly a prophetic work.

Third, I aim to vindicate postmillennialism, since it has been so neglected in the latter half of the twentieth century even to the present. In the Introduction to his massive 750 page *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, Payne mentions the evangelical millennial options. In a footnote (and only a footnote!) he states: “the position of 19th-century postmillennialism, as represented for example in the writings of P. Fairbairn . . . is here dismissed as no longer a current option.”²

And to make matters worse, when theologians do critique it, they often mis-portray it. For instance, amillennialist Kim Riddlebarger criticizes postmillennialism by arguing that “the full realization of such blessings will be wrought by Jesus Christ at his second advent and not through a gradual eclipse of evil and the cessation of unbelief.”³ No postmillennialist — *not even one* — believes that temporal history will experience “the full realization” of divine blessings before Christ returns. Riddlebarger is quite mistaken in implying that we do. Donald Bloesch

1. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, xvi. See 674ff.

2. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 58 n 7. But I suppose I may take comfort in the fact that at least he slaps around amillennialism, too, noting that “amillennialism, held by the Reformation church (inherited from Roman Catholicism). . . “ (596 n 24.

3. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 237.

even stumbles here: “Against the postmillennialists” he argues “the kingdom of God is advancing, but its triumph within history is always partial, never complete.”⁴ Consider one of the great postmillennialists of the first part of the twentieth century, B. B. Warfield:

The earth — the whole world — must be won to Christ before He comes; and that is precisely this conquest of it that He is accomplishing during the progress of this inter-adventual period.

Whether [these verses] go so far as to say that this winning of the world implies the complete elimination of evil from it may be more doubtful. . . . Perhaps it may be affirmed that what is thus true of each individual must be true of the congeries of these individuals which we call the world. Perhaps it may be maintained on such grounds as these that as the perfecting of the individual waits for the next life, so the perfecting of the world must wait until the conquest is over — the last assize is held — and the New Jerusalem descends from heaven. . . . There is a ‘golden age’ before the Church — at least an age relatively golden gradually ripening to higher and higher glories as the Church more and more fully conquers the world and all the evil of the world; and ultimately an age absolutely golden when the perfected Church is filled with the glory of the Lord in the new earth and under the new heavens.⁵

All postmillennialists agree. As I state in *Thine Is the Kingdom*:

4. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 111.

5. Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” 616.

Unfortunately, as this factor of the debate illustrates, postmillennialism is the easiest eschatological option to misconstrue. Too often faulty hidden presuppositions taint the arguments, even though the evangelical and reformed critics are seldom aware of these. In this regard I must note up front that postmillennialists do *not* assert: (1) universalism (not all will be saved at any point in history); (2) perfectionism (the saved are never perfect on earth); or (3) satisfactionism (we do not prefer earthly dominion over consummational glory). If the critics would do a “virus check” for these three latent errors, we could more accurately and fruitfully focus the debate.⁶

Finally, I aim to provide a biblical invitation for the reader to adopt the postmillennial eschatology, since its optimism is so God-honoring and so needed in our time. As I point out in the first chapter, pessimism is the current mood and is the favored eschatology of the evangelical world. It is also the mode of secularism.⁷ Undoubtedly, the biggest Christian publishing event in recent times is the *Left Behind* series that painted the approaching future in bleak shades of black. According to the *Left Behind* website, between 1995 and 2008 the series sold sixty million copies. On February 4, 2002, its authors appeared on CBS popular program *60 Minutes* and on July 1 of the same year the *Left Behind* series appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine as a cultural phenomenon.

6. Gentry, ed., *Thine Is the Kingdom*, 85.

7. Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope* (1999). This work uses the failure of a purely secular hope to encourage a renewal of the Christian view of the future.

Remarkably, even competent theologians (not just best-seller populists who coronate themselves as “prophecy experts”) hop on the newspaper exegesis, big sales bandwagon by publishing such superficial and naive books as: *Bible Prophecy for Today* by Payne, *The Living End* by Ryrie, and *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis* by Walvoord.⁸

To introduce these aims I will divide this chapter into four sections that encompass these four goals:

- Information
- Exposition
- Vindication
- Exhortation

Information

Theological Awareness

Christians should be aware of contemporary theological issues, particularly theological formulations impacting evangelicalism. Too few Christians today have an adequate grasp of biblical doctrine. This is due to a widespread disinterest in doctrinal preaching and deep reading. John A. Sproule laments: “The tragedy today . . . is the apparent disinterest in the preaching of doctrine in the church. . . . Caught up in the craze for ‘Christian’ entertainment and psychology, the church is worse off for it.”⁹

8. *Biblical Prophecy for Today* (1978). Ryrie, *The Living End* (1976). Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (1990).

9. John A. Sproule, “A Tribute to S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.: Theologian and Preacher” in Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 318.

This problem, though intensified in our day, is not new. Eighty years ago J. Gresham Machen lamented: “The growth of ignorance in the Church is the logical and inevitable result of the false notion that Christianity is a life and not also a doctrine; if Christianity is not a doctrine then of course teaching is not necessary to Christianity.”¹⁰

Regarding the material in Christian bookstores, R. C. Sproul comments: “My guess is that in the current Christian bookstore the simplistic books outweigh the simple books by at least 10 to 1. I’ve often wondered where Jesus would apply His hastily made whip if He were to visit our culture. My guess is that it would not be money-changing tables in the temple that would feel His wrath, but the display racks in Christian bookstores.”¹¹ Much of the doctrine evangelical Christians pick up today is through informal instruction that is largely inadequate and often downright heretical.¹² For instance, dispensationalist John Hagee recently released a best-seller that teaches that “not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament . . . says Jesus came to be the Messiah.”¹³

10. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 177.

11. R. C. Sproul, *Lifeviews* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Revell, 1986), 184.

12. Horton, *Agony of Deceit* (1990). McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (2002). Hannegraff, *Christianity in Crisis* (1997). McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (1995). Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy* (2001). Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (1985).

13. Hagee, *In Defense of Israel* (2007), 136. See my extensive critical review at: http://www.nicenecouncil.com/media/display.pl?media_file=88

The doctrine of eschatology, because of its theological complexity, historical sweep, and practical implications, requires intense study and careful reflection. We witness the need for care in this area in the proliferation of “last days” cults over the last 200 years: Seventh-Day Adventists, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (i.e., Mormons), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Herbert W. Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God, the Children of God, the Unification Church, and others.

A divine lament in Scripture is quite apropos today: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). Christians must “be diligent to show themselves approved, workmen of God that need not to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15). Scripture emphasizes light as an apt metaphor for God’s word, noting that it is “a lamp to my feet, / And a light to my path” (Ps 119:105) and “the unfolding of Thy words give light” (Ps 119:130).¹⁴ Consequently, obscurantism and

14. The word “light” occurs seventy-six times in the New Testament. It is used metaphorically most often.

ignorance are not virtues for God's people.¹⁵ We need to get things bright and clear, theologically and ethically.

Because of both our sin and our finitude, we cannot know anything *exhaustively* (though we can know truly what we do know).¹⁶ Consequently, no one knows all there is to know regarding Scripture: we always need to study it more to understand it better.¹⁷ The Scripture teaches that “a wise man will hear, and will increase learning” (Pr 1:5). And the better we apprehend and apply Scripture, the closer will be our walk with God, for sanctification comes through the means of the Word of God: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”¹⁸

All Christians, therefore, should “desire the sincere milk of the word, that [they] may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). As we grow in the knowledge of

15. The call to “know” is a frequent refrain in the New Testament, particularly in Paul’s writings, where it occurs no less than sixty-one times. The rebuke “know ye not” occurs fifteen times; see: Ro 6:3, 16; 7:1; 1Co 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24; 2Co 13:5; Jas 4:4. “I would not have you ignorant [i.e., unknowing]” occurs seven times; see: Ro 1:13; 11:25; 1Co 10:1; 12:1; 2Co 1:8; 2:11; 1Th 4:13. “We / ye know” occurs thirty times; see: Ro 3:19; 7:14, 18; 8:22, 26, 28; 1Co 2:12, 14; 8:1, 2, 4; 12:2; 15:58; 16:15; 2Co 5:1; 8:9; 13:6; Gal 3:7; 4:13; 3:19; Eph 5:5; Php 2:22; 4:15; 1Th 3:3; 4:2; 5:2; 2Th 2:6; 3:7; 1Ti 1:8; 3:5. “I would have you know/that ye may know” occurs nine times; see: 1Co 11:3; 2Co 2:4; Eph 1:18; 6:21, 22; Col 4:6; 1Th 4:4; 1Ti 3:15; 2Ti 3:1.

16. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ch. 3.

17. Ps 1:2–3; 119:97; Mt 13:23; Ac 17:11.

18. Jn 17:17; cf. Jn 8:32; 15:3; Eph 5:26; 2Th 2:13; Jas 1:21.

the Word of Truth, we should strive to reach a level of understanding that would equip us to be competent teachers of the Word (Heb 5:12–14; contra Jn 3:10). None of us “knows it all.” Thus, studying contemporary issues always is practically beneficial for Christians. Diligent and systematic study of Scriptural issues is essential to pleasing God.

My concern herein is with an evangelical audience. Consequently, I will only occasionally refer to the various eschatological formulations by liberal theologians, such as we might discover in neo-orthodoxy, process theology, liberation theology, and the like.¹⁹ This approach does not imply that a study of the errors involved in rationalistic eschatological formulations is unneeded.²⁰ For a full-orbed Christian witness, we should strive to understand and be able to respond to those who would subvert doctrine within the church. Nevertheless, due to space limitations, I will not engage such in the present work.

Hasty Postmortems

19. For a helpful introduction to *historical* development of theological liberalism (by a liberal), see: Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (2003). See also: McGrath, *Historical Theology* (1998).

20. For helpful introductions to liberal eschatological views, see especially: Brower and Elliott, *Eschatology in Bible & Theology*; Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology* (1977), chs. 1–2, and Erickson, *Christian Theology* (1985), 3:1155ff. *The Bible and the Future* (1979), 288–315 (Appendix: “Recent Trends in Eschatology”). Oswalt, “Recent Studies in Old Testament Eschatology and Apocalyptic” (*JETS*): 289–302.

Many evangelicals obscure the facts regarding contemporary options, sometimes through abject ignorance, sometimes through careless overstatement. Whatever the reason, a great disservice is done to the unsuspecting reader who inadvertently adopts and then labors under a delusion.

For instance, we often read that postmillennialism is dead, supposedly having totally collapsed because of World War I. Although postmillennialism falls upon hard times after World Wars I and II, it does not totally disappear from the Church. Here are several statements from different decades regarding the alleged death of postmillennialism. These are at best misleading overstatements and at worst downright erroneous.²¹

In 1936 Lewis Sperry Chafer states: “postmillennialism is dead. . . . It is *dead* in the sense that it offers *no living voice* in its own defense when the millennial question is under discussion.”²² “It exists only in the limited literature which it created and with no living voice to defend it” (1948).²³

21. For a brief analysis of the theological problems inherent in such statements, see: R. J. Rushdoony, “Introduction,” in Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, vii–ix. Although the three statements to follow all come from dispensationalists, the problem is not one limited to that school of thought. Premillennialists and amillennialists are also guilty of such hasty postmortems. See for example, amillennialist Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 2, 4, 96.

22. Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Foreword to the First Edition,” in Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 9 (emph. mine).

23. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:281.

In 1956 Culbertson and Centz observe: “Devout Postmillennialism has virtually disappeared.”²⁴

In 1958 J. Dwight Pentecost writes that “Postmillennialism is *no longer an issue* in theology. . . . Postmillennialism finds *no defenders or advocates* in the present chiliastic discussions within the theological world.”²⁵

In 1959 John F. Walvoord suggests that “Postmillennialism is not a current issue in millennialism” and that “in eschatology the trend away from postmillennialism became almost a rout with the advent of World War II.”²⁶

In 1961 Merrill F. Unger claims of postmillennialism: “This theory, largely disproved by the progress of history, is practically a dead issue.”²⁷

In 1970 Hal Lindsey comments: “There *used to be* a group called ‘postmillennialists’. . . . *No* self-respecting scholar who looks at the world conditions and the accelerating decline of Christian influence today is a ‘postmillennialist.’”²⁸

In 1973 J. Barton Payne (as noted previously) dismisses postmillennialism in a footnote: “the position of 19th-century postmillennialism, as repre-

24. Culbertson and Centz, ed. *Understanding the Times*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956.

25. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 386, 387 (emph. mine).

26. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 9.

27. Unger, “Millennium” (*UBD*), 739.

28. Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 176 (emph. mine).

sented for example in the writings of P. Fairbairn . . . is here dismissed as no longer a current option.”²⁹

In 1990 John Walvoord writes: “Postmillennialism largely died out in the first quarter of the 20th century. World War I dashed the hopes of those who said the world was getting better and Christianity was triumphing.”³⁰

The impression left by such statements is simply false. What is worse, the statements were incorrect *when originally made*. Chafer’s 1936 statement demonstrates little awareness of the strong postmillennialism current in Southern Presbyterian circles in the 1920’s.³¹ Important articles on postmillennialism were published after World War I in *Union Seminary Review* by Eugene C. Caldwell in 1922³² and T. Cary Johnson in 1923.³³ A postmillennial book by Russell Cecil was published in 1923.³⁴ And sometime after 1921 David S. Clark published a postmillennial

29. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 58 n 7.

30. Walvoord, “Review of *House Divided*” (*BTS*): 371.

31. The following material and bibliographic data regarding Southern Presbyterian postmillennialism is derived from Jordan, “A Survey of Southern Presbyterian Millennial Views Before 1930” (*JCR*): 106–121.

32. Caldwell, “A Kingdom That Shall Stand Forever” (*USR*): 112.

33. Johnson, “The Signs of the Times” (*USR*): 47ff. Johnson was professor of systematics at Union. This was written after World War I and in spite of it to show that Christ “is going to disciple all the nations of the earth. . . . Further triumph is ahead for the church.”

34. Cecil, *Handbook of Theology*, 101.

commentary on Revelation.³⁵ J. Gresham Machen, who died in 1937, was a widely known writer, who fought valiantly against encroaching liberalism in the church and in society. He also was a postmillennialist.³⁶ Chafer was simply in error when he stated that postmillennialism was “dead” and had “no living voice” in his time.

J. Dwight Pentecost has even less reason in 1958 to assert postmillennialism’s total demise. In the 1940s premillennialist D. H. Kromminga and amillennialist Floyd E. Hamilton contend with postmillennialists. Kromminga writes in 1945: “That all three major eschatological views are still persisting among Protestants and in our country, Floyd E. Hamilton

35. Clark, *The Message from Patmos* (rep. 1989). The book is undated, but on page 9 he refers to the “very recent” publication of A. S. Peake’s commentary on Revelation, which was published in 1919..

36. See: Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen* (1978). Machen urges Christians to go forth joyfully, enthusiastically to make the world subject to God” (p. 187). “And despite all ridicule of peace movements I cherish the hope that the gospel is going to win” (p. 245). “I do believe that there is going to be a spiritual rebellion of the common people throughout the world which if taken at the flood may sweep away the folly of war” (p. 261). See also: Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 49, 152, 178, 180. Gary North writes: “I once asked [Paul] Woolley what eschatological views were held by J. Gresham Machen. . . . Woolley replied that he had been a postmillennialist, to the extent that he ever announced his views, which I gathered was infrequently.” North, “Editor’s Introduction,” *JCR* 3:2 (Winter 1976–77): 3–4. Professor Norman Shepherd subsequently told North that Woolley had said much the same thing to him about Machen’s views.

makes clear.”³⁷ O. T. Allis, an important defender of the faith and a writer well-known to Pentecost,³⁸ defends postmillennialism in 1947 and 1954, just prior to Pentecost’s *Things to Come*.³⁹ Not long before Pentecost’s statements, J. M. Kik (1948, 1954), Allan R. Ford (1951), Roderick Campbell (1954), and Loraine Boettner (1958) contribute important postmillennial works to the eschatological debate.⁴⁰ In 1952 premillennialist George E. Ladd (in a book referenced in Pentecost’s *Things to Come*) admits that “the postmillennial interpretation . . . is not altogether dead.”⁴¹ In 1953 enough interest in postmillennialism exists to justify

37. Kromminga, *Prophecy and the Church*, 257. See: Hamilton, *The Basis of the Millennial Faith*, 1942.

38. The first two quotations and six of the thirty-four quotations in the first chapter of Pentecost’s *Things to Come* were from Allis’ *Prophecy and the Church*.

39. We can point to at least two postmillennial contributions to the debate by Allis, one in 1947, the other in 1954. Allis, “The Parable of the Leaven” (EQ): 254–273 and Allis, “Foreword,” in Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, vii–x.

40. J. Marcellus Kik produced two book-length contributions to the discussion. See: *Eschatology of Victory*. This book is a collection of two smaller books by J. M. Kik dated 1948 and 1954 (as well as a short series of lectures given at Westminster Seminary in 1961). For the two earlier dates see: Boettner, *The Millennium*, 12, 385. See also: Ford, “The Second Advent in Relation to the Reign of Christ” (EQ): 30–39; Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*; Boettner, *The Millennium*.

41. Ladd, *Crucial Questions*, 47–48. In 1978 he spoke of it as “a minority view today.” Ladd, *Last Things*, 108–110.

reprinting David Brown's postmillennial work, *Christ's Second Coming*. Pentecost's statements simply is not justified by the evidence.

In the case of the statement by popular prophecy writer, Hal Lindsey (1970), we have no excuse for the error. In 1989 fellow dispensationalist Thomas Ice admits that "the last *twenty years* has seen an upsurge of postmillennialism."⁴² Just two years after Pentecost's work and a decade before Lindsey's, E. F. Kevan writes: "There are many evangelical believers who hold these post-millennial views."⁴³ The classic dispensational commentary on Revelation by one of Lindsey's seminary professors, John Walvoord, clearly point out in 1966 that Boettner's postmillennial work "has revived" postmillennialism.⁴⁴

By Lindsey's heyday postmillennialism was making its reinvigorated presence strongly felt. John Murray's postmillennial commentary on Romans appears in 1965.⁴⁵ Erroll Hulse's postmillennial work, *The Restoration of Israel*, precedes Lindsey's book by two years.⁴⁶ Boettner's book goes through six printings by the time Lindsey publishes his statement. The Banner of Truth Trust is established in the 1950s and had been

42. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 210. Emph. mine.

43. Kevan, "Millennium" (*BDT*), 353.

44. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 289.

45. Murray, *Romans (NICNT)*, vol. 2. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., seems mistaken as to Murray's amillennialism, based on reviewing Murray's earlier work (1954) rather than his later work (1965). Gaffin, "Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism," *TRC*, 199.

46. Hulse, *Restoration of Israel* (1968).

republishing many Puritan postmillennial books for more than a decade before Lindsey. It also republishes postmillennial articles in its popular magazine.⁴⁷ In fact, postmillennial contributions in *The Banner of Truth* magazine in the year Lindsey published his book (1970) include articles by Donald Macleod, Donald Dunkerley, Iain Murray, Alexander Somerville, S. M. Houghton, and W. Stanford Reid.⁴⁸ Also, 1970 witnesses the publication of R. J. Rushdoony's postmillennial book *Thy Kingdom Come* and Peter Toon's *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel*.⁴⁹ In the next year a major postmillennial work appears and is advertised and promoted in 1970: Iain Murray's *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*.⁵⁰

47. In the very year of the publication of Lindsey's book (1970), issues 76–88 of the monthly *Banner of Truth* were published. In the first article these neo-Puritans mentioned their numbers had "grown steadily over the last decade," despite widespread liberalism and defection around them. Anonymous, "The End of the Sixties" (BT): 3.

48. Macleod, "The Second Coming of Christ" (BT): 16–22. Dunkerley, "Review of *The Time Is at Hand*" (BT): 46–47. Murray, "The Hope and Missionary Activity" (BT): 7–11. This is a reprint of Alexander Somerville's nineteenth century article, "The Evangelisation of the World" (BT): 31–35. Houghton, "Maintaining the Prayer for the World-wide Outreach of the Gospel" (BT): 36–37. Reid, "Christian Realism and Optimism" (BT): 3–6.

49. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come* (1970). Toon, *Puritans, the Millennium, and the Future of Israel* (1970).

50. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (1971). See the advance notice through publication of a chapter entitled "The Hope and Missionary Activity" (BT): 7–11.

To quote Mark Twain, the postmillennial system could well complain: “The report of my death was an exaggeration.” Dispensationalists have only in the last twenty years begun to admit the presence of postmillennialism.⁵¹

The Waxing and Waning of Eschatological Systems

Though many exaggerate postmillennialism’s demise, it is true that by the mid-twentieth century its fortunes greatly recede from its earlier times of near dominance (the 1600s-1800s).⁵² Through most of the 1800s, postmillennialism can be called “the commonly received doctrine,” as it was in 1859.⁵³ Historians can state that the various premillennial views “were scattered throughout the major denominations, but none of those

51. See: House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*; John F. Walvoord, *PKH*, 17; Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 85.

52. For a brief history of postmillennialism, see ch. 4, below. “Postmillennialism became the eschatological position of the theologians who dominated theological thinking for the past several centuries.” Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 386. An illustration of this change of fortunes for postmillennialism may come from comparing William E. Blackstone’s, 1878 *Jesus is Coming* with Charles L. Feinberg’s 1936 (first edition) *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, republished as *Millennialism: The Two Major Views*. Blackstone’s 1878 work defended premillennialism against postmillennialism only; Feinberg’s 1936 book defended premillennialism against amillennialism, with virtually no mention of postmillennialism.

53. Moorhead, “Millennialism in American Religious Thought” (*JAH*): 525.

successfully challenged the hegemony of postmillennialism before the last decades of the century.”⁵⁴

Any historical analysis of postmillennialism’s decline is complex. Nevertheless, Moorhead highlights one factor that does emerge as a leading component in its decline from favor: “in a word, the erosion of postmillennialism was part of the waning of supernaturalism” in the early 1900s.⁵⁵ Evangelical postmillennialism holds to a high supernaturalism that can shake heaven and earth. With the decline of a widespread commitment to supernaturalism in conjunction with the arising of various radical critical theories, interest in postmillennialism diminished.

Nevertheless, “postmillennialism, since 1965, has experienced a renaissance.”⁵⁶ As I indicate above, we have been witnessing an ever increasing stream of postmillennial literature since the 1960s. In the 1980s that stream becomes a flood. Today we are witnessing what appears to be a decline in the fortunes of premillennialism. Some recent dispensational works are mentioning the slipping of premillennial numbers. One dispensationalist writes that “today, a growing number of Christians are [*sic*] exchanging the hope for the rapture for a new hope.”

54. Moorhead, “Millennialism in American Religious Thought” (*JAH*) 525. See also: “History of Opinions Respecting the Millennium,” *American Theological Review* 1 (Nov. 1859): 655. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience*, 185ff.

55. Moorhead, “The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought” (*CH*): 76.

56. North, “Towards the Recovery of Hope” (*BT*):12.

Of dispensational adherents, he laments: “the numbers are dwindling.”⁵⁷ Two other recent dispensational writers comment: “In fact, the premillennial position is probably more on the decline at the present time than the other two views.”⁵⁸ Still another observes that “in the last quarter of the 20th century a movement has begun to return to the Reformation as a basis of theology, and with it an abandonment of dispensationalism and premillennialism.”⁵⁹ Another bemoans that “premillennialism, though still entrenched within many local churches, is *no longer* being taught from the pulpit and is rapidly falling from favor.”⁶⁰ Of course, with its enormous installed base, we should not expect it to dissipate anytime soon.

We can perhaps make a case that premillennialism — particularly its young offspring, dispensationalism — is being *embarrassed to death*. The temptation to date-setting is just too ingrained in the premillennial mindset to resist, as we saw when year 2000 approached.⁶¹ One

57. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, back cover copy; 9. See also: 31, 68, 70, 72.

58. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 210.

59. Walvoord, “Review of *House Divided*,” 372.

60. Shearer, *Political Power*, 16.

61. “As the year 2000 approaches there will undoubtedly be increased interest in premillenarian ideas and even more hazardous speculation that this third millennium will be the Thousand Year Kingdom of Christ.” Wilson, *Armageddon Now!*, 13. Examples of a tendency to a mild form of date-setting among noted dispensationalist scholars may be found in Ryrie, *The Living End*, 128–129; Herman

premillennialist admits: “The premillennarians’ credibility is at a low ebb because they succumbed to the temptation to exploit every conceivably possible prophetic fulfillment. . . . It is not likely that the situation will change greatly.”⁶² Premillennialist Craig L. Blomberg bemoans that “a frightening percentage of the evangelical Christian public seems always to suffer a collective amnesia, forgetting how the same kinds of publications just a decade or two earlier turned out to include a considerable amount of false prophecy. The one statistic that remains unvarying is that to date, 100 percent of all such scenarios have proved wrong,” because of engaging in “the next round of speculation.”⁶³ In the late 1980s a number of dispensationalists sign an agreement attempting to stop this embarrassing situation:⁶⁴

A. Hoyt, “Dispensational Premillennialism,” in *Meaning of the Millennium*, 63; and Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy*, xiv.

62. Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!*, 218. As I originally wrote these words, just a couple of weeks after the conclusion of the Allied victory in the Gulf War of 1991, I discovered a large number of books pointing to Saddam Hussein and Babylon as harbingers of the end. *Christianity Today*, *Newsweek*, and other magazines ran articles on the flood of evangelical doom sayers. Maxwell, “Prophecy Books Become Big Sellers” (*CT*): 60. Some of the titles mentioned in *Christianity Today* are: Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East*, an update of his 1974 book; Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times*; Edgar C. James, *Arabs, Oil and Armageddon*; Charles C. Ryrie, *Crisis in the Middle East*.

63. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 70.

64. See: Lewis, “Prophecy Intelligence Digest”: 6:3. Also reprinted in Pate and Haines, *Doomsday Delusions*, 33. MacArthur agrees: “The Danger of Foolish

1988 Manifesto on Date Setting

Whereas the Scripture clearly says that no man can know the day or hour of the Lord's coming, thus indicating that date-setting serves no good purpose,

And whereas date-setting has historically always proven to be false prophecy which is damaging to the cause of Christ,

And whereas we are living in the *last days and nothing must be* allowed to detract from the nobility and power *or the message of* endtime Bible prophecy,

Therefore we, the undersigned hereby demand that all date-setting and date-suggesting cease immediately. Let abstinence from this type of speculation prevail until the Lord comes."

But the addiction continues.

Even those dispensationalists less prone to date-setting admit the problem. Robert Lightner comments: "Sometimes individuals who embrace a particular view of end-time events embarrass others who hold the same view and they even put the view in poor light by their radical and extreme viewpoints. . . . I refer particularly to date setting for Christ's return."⁶⁵ He specifically mentions Edgar C. Whisenant's *Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988* and Hal Lindsey's *1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*. Dispensationalists Pate and Haines wrote an important work on the

Expectations," in MacArthur, *The Second Coming*, ch. 8. He denounces Lindsey for his continually revised date for the rapture (15).

65. Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook*, 171.

matter: *Doomsday Delusions: What's Wrong with Prediction About the End of the World* (1995).

Thomas Ice laments: "Just this week (the week before Christmas) I received in the mail from an anonymous sender, a book entitled *Blessed Hope, 1996* . . . by someone from the Houston area named Salty Doc. You guessed it, the Rapture is slated for 1996. . . . Unfortunately, both advocates and antagonists of dispensationalism are woefully ignorant that the very Biblical assumptions underlying dispensationalism are themselves hostile to the date-setting of the Rapture. Much harm has been done by the supposed friends, not to mention the critics of dispensationalism by these distortions."⁶⁶ Yet Ice himself cannot resist the attraction, though he qualifies himself: "On the other hand, there is a general sense among many evangelicals that we are near the time of the end. It is possible to have a general belief that the Lord's return is near, but not to engage in the specific act of date-setting."⁶⁷

For instance, dispensational theologian and past president of Dallas Theological Seminary, John F. Walvoord is dogmatic that the rapture of the church must always be imminent. Consider his strong affirmation, when he declares: "There is no teaching of any intervening event. The prospect of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ is not qualified

66. Ice, "Dispensationalism, Date-Setting and Distortion" (BP):1.

67. Ice and Demy, *The Truth About 2000 A.D. & Predicting Christ's Return*, 16. MacArthur falls to this temptation as well by sub-titling his book: *The Second Coming: Signs of Christ's Return and the End of the Age* (1999).

by description of any signs or prerequisite events.”⁶⁸ Yet he could not resist the excitement generated by the Gulf War (the “100-day war”). In an interview in *U.S.A. Today*, we read his words: “Bible prophecy is being fulfilled every day Q. So the prophetic clock is ticking? A: Yes.”⁶⁹ In one of his more recent books Walvoord includes a table recording “Predicted Events Relating to the Nations.” Among those “predicted events” he lists: “1. United Nations organized as first step toward world government in 1946 6. Red China becomes a military power. . . . 8. The Arab oil embargo in 1973,” and other such “predicted events.”⁷⁰

Historian Paul Boyer well notes two problems with date-setting: (1) It is addictive. For instance, regarding the author of *When Your Money Fails*, he notes that “her mother’s solemn homilies on prophecy so affected her as a girl, [Mary Stewart] Relfe wrote, that awareness of the Second Coming ‘filtered to the nucleus of every cell of my being with such force that I could not pry myself from its grasp.”⁷¹ (2) It is profitable. Boyer continues regarding Relfe: “That her books became bestsellers reminds us again that even ‘marginal’ voices, evocative though they may be of the supermarket tabloids, ought not be too quickly dismissed by

68. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 73. See ch. 13 “Eschatological Time Frame” for a critique of the imminence doctrine.

69. Reynolds, “Prophecy clock is ticking in Mideast” (*U. S. A. Today*): Inquiry section.

70. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 400.

71. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 286.

those seeking to understand American popular thought.”⁷² We see this in best-seller Hal Lindsey’s work. After missing the rapture in the 1980s, his ill-fated 1994 work, *Planet Earth 2000: Will Mankind Survive?* writes off any Year 2000 celebrations: “Just for the record: I’m not planning to attend, in fact, looking at the state of the world today, I wouldn’t make any long-term earthly plans.”⁷³

It is likely that a continuing flood of failed expectations will eventually sink premillennial views. Though, tragically the global explosion of Islamist terrorism, especially since September 11, 2001, is breathing new life into the system for awhile. As Boyer notes: “As the configuration of world power alignments and public concerns shifts at the end of the century, prophecy popularizers, like their predecessors over the centuries, are proving extremely resourceful at restructuring their scenario.”⁷⁴

Postmillennial Exposition

When I wrote the first edition of this book I had in mind several major reasons for publishing it. These reasons still hold. My first desire is to set forth in the contemporary theological context a careful, exegetically rigorous foundation for postmillennialism. I will present postmillennialism’s major eschatological underpinnings in Scripture. Sadly, until recently some Christians, including Christian scholars, have

72. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 288.

73. Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth 2000*, 305

74. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 338–39.

been remarkably unaware of postmillennialism's exegetical evidence.⁷⁵ Others doubt that the New Testament provides any hint of postmillennialism, although they recognize a certain plausibility based on Old Testament exegesis.

Complaints Against Postmillennialism

Long ago amillennialists John Demarest and William Gordon charged that: "Postmillenarians can not produce a single passage of Scripture in defense of their spiritualizing system — NOT ONE. This is a great difficulty."⁷⁶ Some amillennialists continue this objection. Dale Kuiper lodges as his first complaint against postmillennialism: "In the first place, we do not find a careful exegesis of Scripture which takes into account the nature of prophecy and vision. . . . We do not find exegesis of passages which would seem to oppose postmillennialism."⁷⁷ Kim Riddlebarger concurs: "There is no biblical evidence that the nations of the earth as a whole will become Christianized. In fact, just the opposite appears to be the case."⁷⁸

Of course, dispensationalists — who have a system unknown to the church for 1800 years and who insert unexpected gaps in passages to

75. Much of this problem has been rectified since the first edition of this book. See: Bock, *Three Views of the Millennium* (1999). See also: Nash, *Great Divides* (1993). Grenz, *Millennial Maze* (1992).

76. Demarest and Gordon, *Christocracy*, 378.

77. Kuiper, "What Constitutes Victory?," 54.

78. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 236.

make their system function — dismiss postmillennialism's argumentation. L. S. Chafer writes it off as wholly devoid of biblical foundations: "Doubtless the stress upon Bible study of the present century has served to uncover the unscriptural character of this system. Its advocates have not been able to meet the challenge made to them to produce one Scripture which teaches a millennium before the advent of Christ, or that teaches an advent of Christ after the Millennium."⁷⁹

John F. Walvoord protests in a similar vein: "the contenders for postmillennialism never set up their own view in a solid way. After all, the issue is whether postmillennialism is taught in the Bible."⁸⁰ Thomas D. Ice complains: "After fourteen years of study it is my belief that there is not one passage anywhere in Scripture that would lead to the post-millennial system. The best postmillennialism can come up with is a position built upon an inference."⁸¹ Later he asserts that "the postmillennial idea of progress is not found in any particular text of the Bible."⁸² Richard Young writes: "The primary weakness of postmillennialism . . . is that it lacks exegetical support."⁸³

79. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:281.

80. Walvoord, "Review of *House Divided*," 370.

81. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 9–10.

82. Ice in Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 310. Perhaps we should argue that the "idea of progress" can be found in unmentioned gaps — such as dispensationalists insert into Scripture, as in Da 9:24–27.

83. Young, "Review of *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*" (*GTJ*): 115.

After citing an optimistic, postmillennial conception of history, amillennialist George Murray complains of the doctrine's absence in the New Testament: "One cannot but regret, however, that with the Bible in his hand, the writer did not produce chapter and verse to prove his contention. The obvious reason is that no such plain promise could be quoted from the New Testament, for neither Jesus Christ nor His apostles gave the slightest indication of any real rest for the church until she enters upon the rest prepared for the people of God on the other side of death."⁸⁴ Jay E. Adams complains: "The New Testament knows absolutely nothing of *imperfect* golden-age preaching. While there is a consistent appeal to look for the *perfect* golden age of heaven, nothing can be found about an imperfect interim."⁸⁵ Millard J. Erickson largely agrees: "Perhaps more damaging to postmillennialism is its apparent neglect of Scriptural passages (e.g., Matt. 24:9–14) that portray spiritual and moral conditions as worsening in the end times. It appears that postmillennialism has based its doctrine on very carefully selected Scriptural passages."⁸⁶

Amillennialist Richard B. Gaffin also doubts the validity of postmillennialism from a New Testament perspective: "Briefly, the basic issue is this: Is the New Testament to be allowed to interpret the Old — as the best, most reliable interpretive tradition in the history of the church (and certainly the Reformed tradition) has always insisted? . . . Will the vast stretches of Old Testament prophecy, including its recurrent, frequently

84. Murray, *Millennial Studies*, 86.

85. Adams, *The Time is at Hand*, 13.

86. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology*, 72.

multivalent apocalyptic imagery, thus be left without effective New Testament control and so become a virtual blank check to be filled out in capital, whatever may be its source, that is something other than the result of sound exegesis?”⁸⁷ Holding the opposite view, Stanley Grenz states: “Postmillennialists draw the theme of the progress of the gospel and its attendant corollaries from the New Testament. This does not mean, however, that they ignore the Old Testament.”⁸⁸

In addition, some less prominent passages for establishing postmillennialism will be of interest to students of biblical prophecy. Some of these are familiar ones being abused today by applying them to supposedly contemporary fulfillments. Many of these intriguing passages will be covered, as well.

An Apologetic for Postmillennialism

As my second goal, I hope to provide a worthy postmillennial apologetic by means of a careful, systematic, theological and historical development of the postmillennial system. Twenty years ago Thomas Finger was not too far wrong when he commented: “Postmillennialism has not been expounded in as minute detail as has dispensationalism.”⁸⁹ This is not as accurate today, due to David Chilton’s *Paradise Restored* (1985, 1994), John J. Davis’ *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom* (1986, 1996), Gary

87. Gaffin, “Theonomy and Eschatology” in Barker and Godfrey, *TRC*, 216–217.

88. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 77.

89. Finger, *Christian Theology*, 114.

North's *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1992), my first two editions of *He Shall Have Dominion* (1992, 1997), Keith Mathison's *Postmillennialism* (1999), Greg L. Bahnsen's *Victory in Jesus* (1999), Bahnsen and Gentry's *House Divided* (1989, 1992), and my *Thine Is the Kingdom* (2003). I hope that this work will continue to serve as a foundational text for postmillennialism in the ongoing debate.

Interaction With Rival Views

Third, a major purpose I have in mind is to compare and interact with the other major evangelical millennial views. In this enlarged and updated edition, I will give more attention to amillennialism than before. But I will, of course, maintain a strong critique of dispensationalism. I would not want to disappoint Ice who bemoans: "amillennialists and postmillennialists both spend a lot of time explaining why they are opposed to premillennialism, especially dispensational premillennialism."⁹⁰ To be more accurate he should add historic premillennialists to his complaint, as in Blomberg and Chung, *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to "Left Behind" Eschatology* (2009).⁹¹ And he should also

90. LaHaye, *PEBP*, 276–77.

91. Blomberg and Chung's work has some of the most scathing denunciations of dispensationalism that you can find. Their book notes tongue-in-cheek that historic premillennialists "host not a single *Post-tribulational Prophecy and the News* program on cable television, nor to they sell board or video games based on their view of the future" (20). They note that the best-selling dispensational works are "*fictionalized* accounts of the end-times scenario: no careful exegesis there" (21).

add Progressive Dispensationalists, who vigorously chasten the naivete of classic dispensationalists. This negative focus on dispensationalism is necessary due to its enormous and confused influence on evangelicalism — and despite the failure of the rapture to occur in the 1980s.⁹²

Too often today populist writers make unwarranted assertions implying the universal adoption of a particular view, without informing their readers of competing systems. This is particularly true in dispensational circles. Thus, I will interact with the non-postmillennial systems, summarizing their salient features and exposing their flaws, as understood from a biblically based postmillennial viewpoint.

Interestingly (or perhaps, tragically), some dispensational writers are harshly attacking the resurgence of postmillennialism.⁹³ Ice rather

They bemoan the expectation of “simultaneous traffic accidents all over the world” resulting from driverless cars at the rapture (61).

92. Though it remains a large influence, Blomberg and Chung (*Historic Premillennialism*, 171) comment that “Weber also rightly points out that classic dispensationalism has dwindled considerably in its presence and impact even within dispensationalist circles.” In the 1980s Thomas Ice complained to me that he suspected that by the year 2000, Dallas Theological Seminary would no longer be dispensational. It does appear that at least progressive dispensationalism has taken over this important school. This will eventually erode classical dispensationalism as more and more pastors graduate and enter into ministry.

93. A helpful corrective and rebuke to such may be found in Passantino, *Witch Hunt* (1990), see especially ch. 8. It needs to be pointed out that the authors are premillennialists. See also: Nash, *Great Divides*, ch.8.

strangely asserts: “The current revival of postmillennialism is fueled by the rise of New Age optimism in a postmodern culture” — as if postmillennialists are New Agers and committed to postmodernism! And he resubmits the old canard: “One should not overlook the role that postmillennialism played in the rise and development of the social gospel.”⁹⁴ Mal Couch warns that “this view was first propagated by Daniel Whitby (AD 1638–1726), a Unitarian.”⁹⁵ The underlying assumption in these works is always dispensationalism’s implicit monopolistic claim to orthodoxy.⁹⁶ A distressing ignorance dominates too many Christians today regarding the existence of non-premillennial eschatologies among Bible-believing, evangelical Christians. A kind of blackout exists within dispensational circles.

Dave Hunt, with historical naivete, castigates the resurgent post-millennialism of the 1980s: “When confronted with an alleged key doctrine that men and women of God have failed to uncover from Scripture in 1900 years of church history, we have good reason to be more than a little cautious. After all, this is the stuff of which cults are made. It takes a certain arrogance to claim to have discovered a vital teaching that the entire church has overlooked for 1900 years.”⁹⁷ This,

94. *PEBP*, 275.

95. Couch in LaHaye, *PSB*, 1530. He does this despite being editor of *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* in which Ice admits postmillennial existed before Whitby (see 308).

96. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*; Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*.

97. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 224.

you understand, comes from a man who defends an eschatological position — pre-tribulational dispensationalism — which arose in 1830.

Postmillennial Vindication

One of the frustrating barriers that postmillennialists face in the modern debate is the tendency by some to distort postmillennialism. Many of the average Christians-in-the-pew have such a flawed view of postmillennialism that it is sometimes difficult to gain a hearing with them. They deem postmillennialism utterly “this-worldly” in an unbiblical sense. They often consider it an aspect of the “social gospel” of liberalism. Or they believe it throws out valid hermeneutical procedures in order to bend and twist Scripture into a liberal system. Still others wrongly assume postmillennialism involves a union of church and state. Again, popularizers of other viewpoints are generally the source of the problem.⁹⁸

Even worse, there are some fundamental misunderstandings of postmillennialism, even by noteworthy theologians. And some of these published errors have been in print for decades without any attempt at correction. This deserves exposure because many simply pick up such confident statements found in published works and promote them as truth. I will deal with such errors in detail in later chapters.

Postmillennial Exhortation

98. See Part Five, “Objection,” below.

Finally, I have a strong concern to exhort evangelical Christians to adopt the Christ-promoting, optimistic, culture transforming postmillennial eschatology. I do not simply desire to produce an academic work that will *present* the case for postmillennialism, but one that will in fact *promote* its adoption. If a strong biblical case for postmillennialism exists (and I believe it does), and if that case can be convincingly presented (which I pray I will do), then the Christian reader must let the biblical case have its ultimate influence in his thinking. He must not merely maintain his former position because of ecclesiastical, social, traditional, or familial pressures.

Casting off one's eschatology in order to adopt a new one is certainly difficult. I know; I have done it.⁹⁹ It is difficult intellectually, as well as ecclesiastically and socially. Intellectually, an eschatological system affects every realm of your theological understanding and philosophical worldview. Correcting your eschatology necessarily produces far-reaching effects throughout your system of thought and conduct. Ecclesiastically, a systemic correction in an eschatological position can cause disruption in some church circles (particularly those requiring dispensational adherence among its officers). Socially, such a change can cost one's fellowship with some Christians (again, this is particularly true among dispensationalists who convert from the system). Yet the Scripture urges: "Let God

99. See my testimony in the Preface (entitled "Why I Could Not Remain a Dispensationalist") to Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, xlvii–lii.

be true though every man be found a liar” (Ro 3:4a). If the case for postmillennialism can be effectively presented, the challenge is issued.

Practically, presenting the postmillennial system necessarily challenges believers to Christian social activism.¹⁰⁰ By adopting a full-orbed, biblical worldview based on postmillennialism, the Christian understands that he *must* confront secular society with the radical claims of Christ. He must do so by means of personal evangelism, church revitalization, and cultural transformation.¹⁰¹ Some critics of postmillennialism recognize the strongly practical element in the system.¹⁰² For instance, Grenz writes of postmillennialism’s “unquestioning optimism concerning the work of God through the proclamation of the gospel and the activity of the church in the world stands as a major contributed of postmillennialism.”¹⁰³

Postmillennialist Iain Murray writes: “In the light of history we can hardly say that matters prophetic are too secondary to warrant our attention. The fact is that what we believe or do not believe upon this subject will have continual influence upon the way in which we live. The greatest spiritual endeavors and achievements in the past have been

100. See North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 254ff. This 400-page work presents a challenge to pessimistic eschatologies regarding the call to practical Christian activism in the world.

101. Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, 1977.

102. See discussion of reconstructionist and pietistic postmillennialism in ch. 4 “The Postmillennial System.”

103. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 88.

those energized by faith and hope.”¹⁰⁴ R. J. Rushdoony provides an excellent brief study of the impact of a positive, optimistic eschatology on Christian endeavor: “A study of hospital patients in relationship to their life expectancy reportedly came to the conclusion that there was a strong correlation between life expectancy and future oriented thinking. A man whose mind looked ahead to activities a year hence was more likely to live than one whose thinking was only in terms of the daily hospital routine. Those without a future in mind had no future, as a rule.”¹⁰⁵ His historical analysis following this statement demonstrates the same truth on the cultural level regarding society’s future orientation. For such a reason, Bruce Milne admits: “There is one aspect of postmillennialism however which *is* worth retaining. That is its optimism concerning the work of the gospel.”¹⁰⁶ His problem is that which affects all amillennialists and all premillennialists: How to retain this optimism, which is contrary to the implications of their eschatological systems.

Conclusion

Christianity, and only Christianity, is the world’s hope. Post-millennialism presents a vibrant, biblically-based, life-changing, culture-transforming Christianity. My concern with advancing postmillennial eschatology is not merely academic; it is both deeply spiritual and

104. Murray, *Puritan Hope*, xxii.

105. Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*, 17.

106. Bruce Milne, *What the Bible Teaches About the End of the World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1979), 81.

intensely practical. When ignorance and confusion prevail regarding the optimistic hope of Scripture, we witness a consequent ebbing of the power and vitality from the Christian faith itself. I am convinced that the rise and acceptance of dispensationalism in the nineteenth century is related to the decline of Christian influence in American society in the twentieth. My heartfelt desire is to encourage Christians to adopt the optimistic biblical eschatology known as postmillennialism.

3

THE PESSIMISTIC MILLENNIAL VIEWS

"When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" (Jn 20:19)

Discussing cosmic eschatology necessarily involves the entire sweep of history, including the spiritual forces that impel history's forward movement toward its God-predestined consummation. It also includes the complex series of events associated with the end of history. One particular aspect in the popular debate, however, has risen to dominance: the *millennium*. Some premillennialists even call the millennium "one of the most controversial and intriguing questions of eschatology."¹ This becomes all the more problematic in that the millennium derives from Revelation 20 which itself is "one of the most divisive passages in the Bible."²

1. Johnson, *Revelation*, 180.

2. Osborne, *Revelation*, 696.

The General Millennial Idea

The word “millennium” derives from two Latin words: *mille* (thousand) and *annus* (year). This theological *term*, employed as early as 1638 by Cambridge scholar Joseph Mede, is based on the “thousand years” of Christ’s reign in Revelation 20:2–7.³ Its original Greek root is *chiliad*, which expresses the Greek sum of “thousand” (*chilias*). “Millennialism” and “chiliasm” have the same connotation (merely deriving from different languages) and may be used interchangeably in eschatological discussion, although the term “chiliasm” is far less current in the modern context (and more likely to make people think of pet chia animal figurines!).

Though dominating modern day discussion and debate, a thousand-year period for the divine kingdom in history is quite rare in Scripture. In fact, we find it only in the first few verses of one chapter in all of Scripture. Unfortunately, the Revelation 20 passage somewhat hampers eschatological debate to its inordinate influence.⁴ James L. Blevins

3. “Millennium,” *COED* 1:1797.

4. “Certainly one of the most controversial and intriguing questions of eschatology is that of the legitimacy of the expectation of a thousand-year reign — the millennium — before the return of Christ. . . . Obviously one’s view of the thousand years of Revelation 20 is intimately connected with the rest of his eschatology. How he thinks of this passage gives a specific color and structure to his expectation.” Berkouwer, *Return of Christ*, 291. For a brief interpretation of the Revelation 20 millennium, see ch. 13 (“Eschatological Time Frames”), below. Of Revelation 20, when compared to the broad sweep of Pauline eschatology, Vos

complains that “the millennium becomes ‘the tail that wags the dog.’”⁵ To make matters worse, B. B. Warfield laments that:

The term ‘Millennium’ has entered Christian speech under the influence of the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation. From that passage, imperfectly understood, there has also been derived the idea which is connected with this term. . . . ‘Pre-millennial,’ ‘post-millennial’ are therefore unfortunate terms, embodying, and so perpetuating, a misapprehension of the bearing of an important passage of Scripture.⁶

Strangely, Mal Couch believes that “one of the objections critics have to the idea of an earthly kingdom is that the word *millennium* is only mentioned in Revelation 20.”⁷ Actually, we do not concern ourselves with “the word *millennium*,” but with the limitation of Christ’s kingdom to a literal thousand years without Scripture previously stating it — despite its (alleged) importance and its appearing only in the most highly symbolic book within it.

writes: “The minor deliverances ought in the harmonizing process be made to give way to the far-sweeping, age-dominating program of the theology of Paul.” Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 226.

5. Blevins, “Revelation, Book of,” in *MDB*, 761.

6. Warfield, “The Gospel and the Second Coming” (1915) in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 348.

7. Couch in Couch, *DPT*, 266.

Oftentimes premillennialists and dispensationalists are more enamored with Revelation 20 than are others.⁸ Writing about some of the great non-premillennial theologians of the twentieth century, dispensationalist Chafer derides such exegetes because of their view of Revelation 20:

Their abandonment of reason and sound interpretation has but one objective in mind, namely, to place *chiloi* ('thousand') years — six times repeated in Revelation, chapter 20 — back into the past and therefore something no longer to be anticipated in the future. The violence which this interpretation imposes upon the whole prophetic revelation is such that none would propose it except those who, for lack of attention, seem not to realize what they do. . . . In sheer fantastical imagination this method surpasses Russellism, Eddyism, and Seventh Day Adventism.

8. "There are some who connect with the advent of Christ the idea of a millennium, either immediately before or immediately following the second coming. While this idea is not an integral part of Reformed theology, it nevertheless deserves consideration here, since it has become rather popular in many circles." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 708. However, Lorraine Boettner was chastised by premillennialist G. E. Ladd for leaving Rev 20 out of his summary presentation of postmillennialism in Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium*, 40. And I was rebuked by progressive dispensationalist Craig Blaising for downplaying Rev 20 in my brief chapter in Bock, *Three Views of the Millennium*, 79.

He speaks of “antimillennialism” as a “strange theory, the origin of which is traced to the Romish notion that the church is the kingdom.”⁹

Apparently those non-millennialists Justin Martyr mentions around the year 150 are committed to “the Romish notion.”¹⁰ Couch attempts to help by showing this was a rabbinic view: “though the Old Testament does not specify the length of the kingdom on earth, [Revelation 20] gives the time frame. Many rabbinical writings agree.”¹¹

In a more reasoned tone, historic premillennialist Ladd admits:

We must recognize frankly that in all the verses cited thus far it would seem that the eschatological Kingdom will be inaugurated by a single complex event, consisting of the Day of the Lord, the coming of the Son of Man, the resurrection of the dead, and the

9. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:281-282.

10. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, ch. 80. This reference is cited below in my ch. 4 “The Postmillennial System.” Osborne notes that “few issues have divided the church for as long as this, for the church in the first three centuries had extensive debates over ‘chiliasm.’” Osborne, *Revelation*, 696.

11. Couch in Couch, *DPT*, 266. Not only does he try to defend the premillennial scheme based on rabbinic authority, but he is quite mistaken when he claims that “many rabbinical writings agree” that the kingdom would last a thousand years. Rabbinical time frames were all over the map, with some being as low as forty years (R. Aqiba), 400 hundred years (R. Eliezer), and 600 hundred years (R. Berekhiah) — all the way up to 365,000 years! And some of those limiting history to six thousand years held that the last 2000 would be the Messianic age (R. Joshua). Neusner, *Theological Dictionary of Rabbinic Judaism*, 125–26.

final judgment. However, in the one book which is entirely devoted to this subject, the Revelation of John, this time scheme is modified The theology that is built on this passage is millennialism or chiliasm. . . . This is the most natural interpretation of the [Rev. 20] passage, and it is the view of the present author. One thing must be granted: this is the only place in Scripture which teaches a thousand-year reign of Christ.¹²

The Standard Millennial Positions

In developing a systematic eschatology we may sort out the standard evangelical viewpoints along millennial lines (though the actual question of the millennium in Rev 20 may not be central to the discussion). In attaching prefixes to the term “millennium” we modify the second coming of Christ in terms of its connection to the millennium: *amillennial*, *premillennial*, and *postmillennial*. The three basic positions may be briefly defined in terms of their chronology as follows:

Amillennialism: The privative *a* in “amillennialism” emphasizes that there will be no earthly millennial kingdom as such. As amillennialist George Murray puts it: “amillennial, a term which indicates a denial of any future millennium of one thousand years’ duration.”¹³

12. Ladd, *The Last Things*, 108-110.

13. Murray, *Millennial Studies*, 87. See also Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 708. See p. 68 below for brief discussion of the acceptability of this term.

Premillennialism: The prefix *pre* indicates that eschatological system that expects a literal earthly millennial kingdom which Christ *introduces* by his second coming before (pre) it. This kingdom will transpire on earth under Christ's direct rule.

Postmillennialism: The prefix *post* points out a lengthy (though not necessarily a literal thousand year long) earthly period in which Christ's kingdom influences the world, which period will *conclude* at Christ's second advent. Puritan era postmillennialism tended to expect a literal thousand-year millennium introduced by the conversion of the Jews (rather than the return of Christ) as the last stage of Christ's earthly kingdom.¹⁴ Modern postmillennialism tends to see the thousand years as a symbolic figure covering the entirety of the Christian era.¹⁵

An important sub-class of premillennialism arose in the 1830s. We know it as "dispensationalism." Generally dispensationalists often attempt to link the two different systems, to beef up their historical argument.¹⁶ But we must understand that historic premillennialists strongly disavow any commonality with dispensationalism. Premillennialist George E. Ladd vigorously protests the equation of dispen-

14. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, *passim*.

15. Some contemporary postmillennialists allow for a future millennial era of unique blessings. See: Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, 93–4; North, *Sinai Strategy*, 86–92: "The Sabbath Millennium."

16. Couch, *DPT*, 259–60. LaHaye, *PEBP*, 232–35. *PSB*, 1530. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, chs. 3–5. Walvoord, *PKH*, 16–17. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, chs. 5–7.

sationalism and historic premillennialism. He even calls any equating of the two a “mistake.”¹⁷ This explains why the popular book edited by Robert G. Clouse is titled *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*.¹⁸ Anthony A. Hoekema notes that “divergent interpretations of [Revelation 20] have led to the formation of at least four major views about the nature of the *millennium* or the *millennial reign* here described.”¹⁹ Many other evangelicals recognize *four* basic positions, including for instance amillennialists Grenz and Riddlebarger, as well as premillennialist Grudem.²⁰

Blomberg and Chung design their recent important historic premillennial work for the express purpose of distinguishing premillennialism and dispensationalism: *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind Eschatology”* (2009). In that work we note the following strong distancing: The two systems “are two very different kinds of movements”

17. Ladd, *Blessed Hope*, 31ff; Ladd, *Crucial Questions*, 49.

18. Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*. See my discussion in Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 234–238. Interestingly, a more recent work is titled: *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (1999). It *omits* both historic premillennialism and classic dispensationalism, while presenting a new form of dispensationalism: progressive dispensationalism. This maneuver suggests that progressive dispensationalists see themselves closer to historic premillennialism. See discussion below.

19. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 173.

20. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 94. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, ch. 2. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, ch. 55.

(p. 2), “two versions of futurist premillennialism” (p. 21), which involve “fierce divisions” (p. 4). They lament that “Ladd paid a price for his [premillennial] views; for the next three decades, he told his Fuller students about the recriminations and condemnations sent his way by angry dispensationalists” (p. 19). In fact, “Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary also paid a price” for allowing “various premillennialist views, which produced intense outside opposition for decades” (p. 19n). They speak of “the differences between dispensational and nondis-pensational premillennialism and the intense concern of their respective adherents that they not be confused” (p. 95).

Classic dispensationalists are aware of their own distinctive differences, as well.²¹ Ryrie even comments: “Perhaps the issue of premillennialism is determinative [for dispensationalism]. Again the answer is negative, for there are those who are premillennial who definitely are not dispensational. The covenant premillennialist holds to the concept of the covenant of grace and the central soteriological purpose of God. He retains the idea of the millennial kingdom, though he finds little support for it in the Old Testament prophecies since he generally assigns them to the church. The kingdom in his view is *markedly different* from that which is taught by dispensationalists since it loses much of its Jewish character due to the slighting of the Old Testament promises concerning the

21. See also: McCune, “An Investigation and Criticism of ‘Historic’ Premillennialism from the Viewpoint of Dispensationalism” (1984).

kingdom.”²² Ryrie even argues for “The Necessity of Dispensationalism” over against premillennialism.²³

Allis offers us a helpful eschatological sorting device, which Adams modifies.²⁴ It works quite well in classifying the three basic millennial positions. Two questions tend to sort the positions into one of the three most basic schools. These questions are:

- (1) What is the *chronology* of the kingdom?
- (2) What is the *nature* of the kingdom?

The chronological question focuses on the timing of Christ’s second advent in relation to the kingdom’s establishment. If his coming is *before* the kingdom, then the position is premillennial; if it is *after* the kingdom, then it may be either amillennial or postmillennial. The question regarding the nature of Christ’s kingdom highlights its historical character. If the kingdom will have a radical, objective, transforming influence in human culture, it is either premillennial or postmillennial; if it will not, it is amillennial.

Furthermore, as Cornelis Venema notes regarding amillennialism and postmillennialism: “Whatever differences exist between the two views, they have in common an identical framework.”²⁵ In fact, both systems are *post* millennial in that they hold that Christ returns *after* the millennium. And the two systems were generally considered as simply two

22. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 38 (emph. mine).

23. Zuck, ed., *Vital Prophetic Issues*, ch. 11.

24. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 4. Adams, *Time Is at Hand*, 8-11.

25. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 220.

perspectives from the same position until sometime around the 1920s. Consequently, they were both called “postmillennialism.” Venema notes that even in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* of 1929–30, no entry appears for “amillennialism.” The term “amillennialism” is coined in the early 1900s. Writing in 1943, Albertus Pieters states: “Recently, those who take this view have begun to call themselves ‘amillenialists.’”²⁶

I will now summarize the millennial positions and provide a brief listing of some their leading advocates. I will consider the positions in alphabetical order (partly to avoid the debate over historical priority). I will define three millennial positions in this chapter; I will focus on postmillennialism in the following chapter — and in somewhat more detail. The reader needs to bear two qualifications in mind as the list of adherents is surveyed. First, in some cases the ancient representatives may hold to only a few distinctive features of a contemporary millennial view. They would not necessarily adhere to any full-blown modern view. Second, any particular adherent cited might disagree with some details of my summation. We always discover nuance differences among adherents within each particular system. In the presentation below I attempt to portray the salient features of the general systems. We find many general treatments of the millennial views in various places today.²⁷

26. Pieters, *Studies in the Revelation*, 310.

27. Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 799–803. Richard J. Bauckham, “Millennium,” in *NDT*, 428–430. Robert G. Clouse, “Millennium, Views of,” in *EDT*, 313–16. Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, ch.

Amillennialism

Before beginning I must note that amillennialists generally do not like the term “amillennial,” in that it suggests “a negatively oriented eschatology.”²⁸ Thomas C. Oden calls it a “misnomer.”²⁹ Jay E. Adams and Anthony A. Hoekema call it “an unhappy term” (i.e., an unhappy choice of terms); Morton H. Smith “an unfortunate term”; Louis A. Brighton a “misnomer”; J. Webb Mealy “misleading.”³⁰ Some prefer something more like “realized millennialism.”³¹ But in that this is too cumbersome and out of keeping with the other prefix names, Gordon Spykman prefers “promillennialism,” whereas Vern S. Poythress suggests “preconsummationist” and Venema “nowmillennialism.”³²

14.

28. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 151. Pieters even complains that “the word is not well compounded, as it uses a Greek prefix for a Latin word” (*Studies in the Revelation*, 310). Perhaps this was the beginning of multi-culturalism.

29. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 423. He leans toward “realized millennialism,” i.e., amillennialism, 429.

30. Adams, *The Time Is At Hand*, 7. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 173. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2:799. Brighton, *Revelation (CC)*, 534 n. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 19. See also: Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 99–100 and Hamilton, *Basis of the Millennial Faith*, 35.

31. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, ch. 4. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 31. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 281–82, n 22.

32. Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 540–43. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 235. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 36.

Nevertheless, with the golden-age connotation of the word “millennium,” the label “amillennial” appropriately describes the system. As Hoekema notes: “The word *amillennial* means that the Second Coming of Christ is to be without a millennium.”³³ Consequently, some amillennialists do not mind the term, *when literally interpreted*: The word ‘amillennial’ is “a term which indicates a denial of any future millennium of one thousand years’ duration.”³⁴ Louis Berkhof accepts it despite its negative connotation.³⁵ Kim Riddlebarger suggests that amillennialist Abraham Kuyper may have been the first to use the term,³⁶ and Riddlebarger’s book is titled: *Amillennialism*. In fact, amillennialist Stanley J. Grenz defends the term: “In keeping with its name, amillennialism asserts that we not interpret the references in Revelation 20 to the thousand years as predicting a literal earthly rule of Christ interjected between the present age and the eschatological judgment, which ushers in the eternal state. Simply stated, a millennialism is an eschatological orientation that awaits no future earthly millennium.”³⁷

General Definition

33. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 173 n 3. Bauckham: “This interpretation of Rev. 20 is often called amillennialist, because it rejects belief in a *future* millennium.” *NDT* 428.

34. Murray, *Millennial Studies*, 87.

35. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 708.

36. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 31.

37. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 150.

Kim Riddlebarger defines amillennialism:

Amillennialists hold that the promises made to Israel, David, and Abraham in the Old Testament are fulfilled by Jesus Christ and his church during this present age. The millennium is the period of time between the two advents of our Lord with the thousand years of Revelation 20 being symbolic of the entire interadvental age. At the first advent of Jesus Christ, Satan was bound by Christ's victory over him at Calvary and the empty tomb. The effects of this victory continued because of the presence of the kingdom of God via the preaching of the gospel and as evidenced by Jesus' miracles. Through the spread of the gospel, Satan is no longer free to deceive the nations. Christ is presently reigning in heaven during the entire period between Christ's first and second coming. At the end of the millennial age, Satan is released, a great apostasy breaks out, the general resurrection occurs, Jesus Christ returns in final judgment for all people, and he establishes a new heaven and earth.³⁸

He further notes that the millennial period (the Christian era) is "anything but a golden age when lions and lambs play together. This period is marked by conflict, martyrdom, and revolt against God."³⁹ Smith adds: "The coming of the gospel in the hearts of believers is seen as bringing the peace that is prophesied in such glowing terms. It is a peace that passeth all understanding."⁴⁰

38. Riddlebarger, *Case for Amillennialism*, 31–32.

39. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 207.

40. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2:800.

Descriptive Features

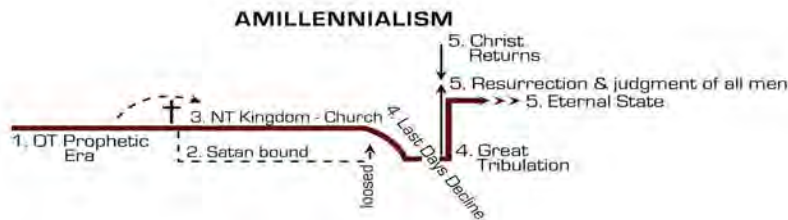
1. The Church Age is the kingdom which the Old Testament prophets predict.⁴¹ God expands his people from the one nation of Israel in the Old Testament to the universal Christian church of the New Testament, making this phase of God's people the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16).

2. Christ binds Satan during his earthly ministry at his first coming. His binding prevents Satan from stopping gospel proclamation. This allows for multitudes of sinners to convert to Christ and insures some restraint upon evil.

3. Christ rules spiritually in the hearts of believers. We may expect occasional, short-lived influences of Christianity on culture and society, especially when Christians live out the implications of their faith.⁴²

4. History will gradually worsen as evil's growth accelerates toward the end. This will culminate in the great tribulation, with the arising of a personal Antichrist.

5. Christ will return to end history, resurrect all men, and conduct the Final Judgment, and establish the eternal order. The eternal destiny of the redeemed may be either in heaven or in a totally renovated new earth.



41. Unlike earlier amillennialists, Hoekema sees the fulfillment of the kingdom prophecies in the New Heavens and New Earth, rather than in the church: *Bible and the Future*, ch. 20.

42. Some "optimistic amillennialists" declare a stalemate in history between the church and the world, rather than a wide-ranging defeat for the faith. But they deny wide-scale Christian transformation of human society and culture. See Venema (*The Promise of the Future*, 360) and Grenz (*The Millennial Maze*, 10). The postmillennialist wonders on what biblical basis they are optimistic, then is confused as to why they do not adopt the postmillennial position because of whatever verses they choose.

Representative Adherents

In the ancient church the following are non-millennialists, who seem to fit within the amillennial system, as understood in the contemporary debate: Hermas (first century), Polycarp (AD 69-105), Clement of Rome (AD 30-100), and Ignatius (*ca.* AD 107),⁴³ to name but a few.

In the contemporary church we may list the following amillennial advocates:

Jay E. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (1966).

Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things* (1996).

G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (1972).

William E. Cox, *Amillennialism Today* (1966).

Richard B. Gaffin, "Theonomy and Eschatology" in Barker and Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (1991).

Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (1992).

Herman Hanko, "The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism" (*SB*; 1990).

William Hendriksen, *Israel in Prophecy* (1974).

Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (1979).

Philip E. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy* (1976).

Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (1987).

Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (1998).

Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (2003).

Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (1962).

Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology* (1994).

Robert B. Strimple in Darrell L. Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (1999).

43. This is according to the research of dispensationalist Boyd, "A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis," 50 (n. 1), 91–92. Premillennialist Kromminga provides evidence in this direction, as well, in his book, *The Millennium in the Church*, 267ff. See also: DeMar and Gumerlock, *The Early Church*. Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrine*.

Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (1950).

Cornelis Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (2000).

Bruce K. Waltke, "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity* (1988).

R. Fowler White, "Agony, Irony, and Victory in Inaugurated Eschatology" (*WTJ*): 2000).

Dispensationalism

General Definition

Paul Benware provides a thorough definition of dispensationalism from which I will draw several key elements:

Certain fundamental elements characterize this type of premillennialism. . . . The belief that the Lord Jesus Christ returns to this earth before the establishment of His kingdom. . . . The belief in two resurrections, which are separated by a thousand years. . . . That the millennial kingdom is a literal kingdom that will exist on this present earth. . . . That the millennial kingdom will be established only *after* human kingdoms have come to an end. . . . That the purpose of the millennial kingdom is to fulfill the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants. Premillennialism thus gives a much greater place to the nation of Israel than the other major millennial views.⁴⁴

Additionally Ed Hindson and David Hocking note that "in one of the great surprises of the apocalyptic drama, Satan is loosed from the abyss after the millennium Mankind rebels against Christ despite the blessing of the millennium. . . . The final revolt is the ultimate proof of human depravity. Unredeemed minds will tolerate Christ's rule, but they will not bow their hearts to Him."⁴⁵

We must be aware (though the average dispensationalist is *not*!) that "dispensationalism is not monolithic and has undergone alterations in interpretation."⁴⁶ In fact, a new form of dispensationalism arose in the 1980s to shake the very foundations of classic dispensationalism:

44. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 95–97.

45. Hinson and Hocking, "Premillennialism," in *PEBP*, 283.

46. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 96.

“progressive dispensationalism.”⁴⁷ This newer position has yet to capture the large installed dispensational audience and is, in fact, vigorously resisted by “classic dispensationalists.”⁴⁸ In that the more recent progressive dispensationalism is not widely held, and is very similar to historic premillennialism, I will focus on the more classical form.⁴⁹

Descriptive Features

1. Redemptive history is divided up into seven categorically distinct dispensations, wherein God works with men under each dispensation in different ways. Hence, the name “dispensationalism.”⁵⁰

2. Christ offers renewed Davidic Kingdom — an earthly, political structure — to the Jews in the first century. They reject it, leading him to postpone it until the future.⁵¹

47. See: Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (1992). Blaising and Bock, *Search for Definition* (1992); Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (1993). Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (1993). Blaising, “Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists,” in Zuck, ed., *Vital Prophetic Issues* (1995), ch. 12. For my interaction, see Gentry in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 228–54. And my “Dispensationalism in Transition” newsletters, written from 1997–98. They are available at: <http://reformed-theology.org/ice/newslet/dit/index.htm>.

48. Willis and Master, *Issues in Dispensationalism* (1994). Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (1995), ch. 9. Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ch. 20. Thomas, “Dispensationalism, Progressive,” in *DPT*, 98–99.

49. For differences effected by progressive dispensationalists see: Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*. Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (1992). Historic premillennialists Blomberg and Chung note that progressive dispensationalism “closely resembles historic or classic premillennialism” (*Historic Premillennialism*, xiv). In the same book, premillennialist Weber observes that “‘Progressives’ have tweaked the system in ways that concede major points to historic premillennialists.” (*Historic Premillennialism*, 21)

50. Premillennialists agree with covenantal theologians that this fragments the Bible, rather than allowing us to see “the Bible is a unified book.” Donald Fairbairn in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 119.

51. There is a growing fragmentation in dispensationalism today over the notion of the kingdom. Some have recently begun to teach a “now and not yet” approach to the kingdom, which allows for a spiritual presence of the kingdom in the present. See: Saucy, “The Presence of the Kingdom” (*BTS*): 33ff; Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity” and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Kingdom Promises As Spiritual and National,” *Continuity and Discontinuity*, chs. 3 and 13.

3. The Church Age is a wholly unforeseen and distinct era in the plan of God. It was altogether unknown to and unexpected by the Old Testament prophets.

4. God has a separate and distinct program and plan for racial Israel, as distinguished from the church.⁵² The church of Jesus Christ is a parenthetical aside in the original plan of God.⁵³

5. The church may experience occasional small scale successes in history, but ultimately she will lose influence, fail in her mission, and become corrupt as worldwide evil intensifies toward the end of the Church Age.

6. Christ will return *secretly* in the sky to rapture living saints and resurrect the bodies of deceased saints (the first resurrection). He is removing them out of the world before the great tribulation. The judgment of the saints transpires in heaven during the seven-year great tribulation period before Christ's bodily return to the earth.

7. At the conclusion of the seven-year great tribulation, Christ will return to the earth in order to establish and personally administer a Jewish political kingdom headquartered at Jerusalem for 1,000 years. During this time, Satan will be bound, and the temple and sacrificial system will be re-established in Jerusalem as memorials.

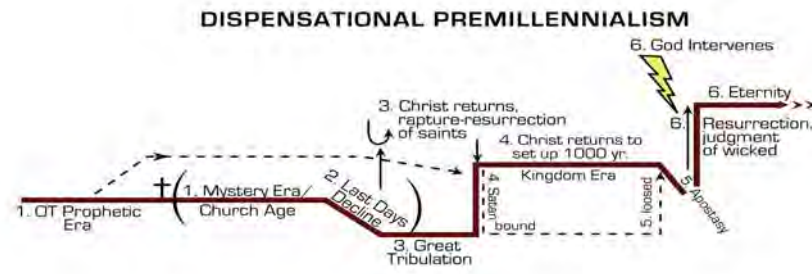
8. Toward the end of the Millennial Kingdom, Satan will be loosed so that he may surround and attack Christ at Jerusalem.⁵⁴

52. In fact, as Craig A. Blaising notes, "perhaps the most important feature of classical dispensationalism is its dualistic idea of redemption. In order to understand the Bible, one needed to recognize that God was pursuing two different purposes, one related to heaven and one related to the earth. These two purposes affected God's dealings with humanity. In fact, they resulted in an anthropological dualism: a heavenly humanity and an earthly humanity," which eternally distinguishes Israel from all other peoples. Blaising in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 23. For an insightful study of the historical origins of dispensationalism's dualism, see: Henzel, *Darby, Dualism and the Decline of Dispensationalism*.

53. Historic premillennialists declare this concept as distinctive of dispensationalism, and as an erroneous one at that. They note that in this view the church is simply "plan B." Chung and Blomberg, *Historic Premillennialism*, xiv.

54. Riddlebarger radically misconstrues this event when he writes that the "thousand years ends with glorified men and women revolting against the visible rule of Christ when Satan is released. . . . A fall of glorified humanity into sin after Christ's second advent means that eternity is not safe from the apostasy and the

9. Christ will call down fire from heaven to destroy his enemies. The second resurrection and judgment of the wicked will occur, initiating the eternal order.



Representative Adherents

In the ancient church: none (created ca. 1830).⁵⁵

In the contemporary church:

Gleason L. Archer, Jr., in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (1984).

Charles Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (1971).

Charles Lee Feinberg, *Millennialism: Two Major Viewpoints* (1980).

John S. Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (1989).

Paul D. Feinberg, in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (1984).

spontaneous eruption of sin in the human heart." Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 208. This is not what dispensationalism teaches. Those who are corrupted are mortals who came through the great tribulation into the millennium. Riddlebarger even recognizes this as the premillennial position (232)!

55. See: Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, 64–99. Alan P. Boyd's carefully researched master's thesis submitted to Dallas Theological Seminary notes: "Indeed, this thesis would conclude that the eschatological beliefs of the period studied [to AD 150] would be generally inimical to those of the modern system (perhaps, seminal amillennialism, and not nascent dispensational premillennialism ought to be seen in the eschatology of the period)." "This writer believes that the Church *rapidly* fell from New Testament truth, and this is very evident in the realm of eschatology. Only in modern times has New Testament eschatological truth been recovered. Dispensational premillennialism is the product of the post-Reformation progress of dogma." Boyd, "Dispensational Premillennial Analysis," 90–91. See also: Ironside, *The Mysteries of God*, 50.

- Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds, *When the Trumpet Sounds* (1995).
- Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2005).
- Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (1989).
- Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. in *Continuity and Discontinuity* (1989).
- Tim LaHaye, *Popular Encyclopedia of the Bible* (2004)
- Robert Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding the Different Views of Prophecy* (1990).
- John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (1999).
- J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (1990).
- Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (1995).
- Robert L. Thomas, "Dispensationalism, Progressive" in Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 98.
- John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy in the New Millennium* (2001).
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (1989).
- Roy B. Zuck, *Vital Prophetic Issues* (1995).

Historic Premillennialism

General Definition

According to historic premillennialist Wayne Grudem, this view holds that:

The present church age will continue until, as it nears the end, a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth . . . After that time of tribulation *at the end of the church age, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom.* When he comes back, believers who have died will be raised from the dead, their bodies will be reunited with their spirits, and *these believers will reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years.* (Some premillennialists take this to be a literal one thousand years, and others understand and it to be a symbolic expression for a long period of time.) During this time, Christ will be physically present on the earth in his resurrected body, and will reign as King over the entire earth. The believers who have been raised from the dead, and those who were on earth when Christ returns, will receive glorified resurrection bodies that will never die, and in these resurrection bodies they will live on the

earth and reign with Christ. Of the unbelievers who remain on earth, many (but not all) will turn to Christ and be saved. Jesus will reign in perfect righteousness and there will be peace throughout the earth. Many premillennialists hold that the earth will be renewed and that we will in fact see the new heavens and new earth this time (but it is not essential to premillennialism to hold to this, for one could be a premillennialist and hold that the new heavens and new earth will not occur until after the final judgment). At the beginning of this time Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit so that he will have no influence on the earth during the millennium (Rev. 20:1–3).

According to the premillennial viewpoint, at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit and will join forces with many unbelievers who have submitted outwardly to Christ's reign but have inwardly been seething in rebellion against him. Satan will gather these rebellious people for battle against Christ, but they will be decisively defeated. Christ will then raise from the dead all the unbelievers who have died throughout history, and they will stand before him for final judgment. After the final judgment has occurred, believers will enter into the eternal state.⁵⁶

We must distinguish historical premillennialism and modern dispensationalism, even though both are *premillennial* in their conception of Christ's Return.⁵⁷ We do so because "these two varieties of premillennial thought differ in essential respects."⁵⁸ As I note above (p. 65), their leading advocates vigorously assert their differences. For instance, George E. Ladd writes: "The futurist view has taken two forms which we may call the moderate and the extreme futurist views. The latter is also known as Dispensationalism. . . . The moderate futurist view differs from the extreme futurist view at several points."⁵⁹ Dispensationalist Charles C. Ryrie agrees that the systems are distinct: "Since Israel and the church are not kept distinct throughout God's program, Ladd fails to meet this

56. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1112.

57. This is similar to our distinguishing amillennialism and postmillennialism even though both are *postmillennial* in their understanding of Christ's return.

58. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 180.

59. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 12. See also: Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1218.

test of dispensationalism.”⁶⁰ We see this distinction also in the structure of Robert G. Clouse’s important book, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (1977). Though the tendency of non-technical, lay-oriented dispensationalist works tend to overlook the distinction, as we see in Mal Couch’s *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*.⁶¹

Descriptive Features

1. The New Testament era church is the *initial* phase of Christ’s kingdom, which the Old Testament anticipates especially in its prophetic books.⁶²

2. The New Testament church may win occasional victories in history, but ultimately she will fail in her mission, lose influence, and become corrupted as worldwide evil increases toward the end of the current era, the Church Age.

3. The church will pass through a future, worldwide, unprecedented time of travail. During this period a personal Antichrist will arise, possessing great religious and political power. This era is known as the great tribulation, which will punctuate the end of contemporary history. Historic premillennialists differ significantly from dispensationalists in that their system is post-tribulational.

4. Christ will return at the end of the tribulation to rapture the church, resurrect deceased saints, and conduct the judgment of the righteous in the “twinkling of an eye.”

5. Christ then will descend to the earth with his glorified saints, fight the battle of Armageddon, bind Satan, and establish a worldwide, political kingdom, which Christ will personally administer for 1,000 years from Jerusalem. (Historic premillennialists often do not demand the Revelation’s 1000 years be a literal time frame.)

6. At the end of the millennial reign, Satan will be loosed and will cause a massive rebellion against the millennial kingdom and a fierce assault against Christ and his saints.

60. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 43. He frequently interacts with and criticizes Ladd’s historic premillennialism, e.g., 63, 75ff, 96ff, 129–30, 148–49, 154ff.

61. *DPT*, 260–61.

62. Blomberg observes that “the church of Jesus Christ” [is] the ultimate fulfillment of many promises to Israel, symbolically depicted *as* Israel,” though he notes that “whatever else this means, the church has not entirely replaced Israel.” Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 77.

7. God will intervene with fiery judgment to rescue Christ and the saints. The resurrection and the judgment of the wicked will occur and the eternal order will begin. The eternal order may be either a recreated material new heavens and new earth, or it may be simply a heavenly environment.



Representative Adherents

In the ancient church: Papias (60–130), Justin Martyr (100–165), Irenaeus (130–202), and Tertullian (160–220).

In the modern church:

Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (1960)

George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days* (1993).

Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).

Oscar A. Campos, in Blomberg and Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).

Wick Broomall, *The Bible and the Future* (1975).

J. Oliver Buswell, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (1962).

Hélène Dallaire, in Blomberg and Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).

Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (1998).

Don Fairbairn, in Blomberg and Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (1994).

Richard S. Hess, in Blomberg and Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).

- R. H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (1973).
George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (1956).
S. H. Kellogg in *Premillennial Essays* (1957).
Thomas Lea, "A Survey of the Doctrine of the Return of Christ in the Ante-Nicene Fathers" (1986).
Allan A. MacRae, "The Premillennial Coming of Christ" (1971).
Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (2002).
Don J. Payne, in Blomberg and Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).
J. Barton Payne, *Bible Prophecy for Today* (1978).
Richard H. Perry, *Of The Last Days* (2003).
Timothy P. Weber, in Blomberg and Chung, eds., *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009).

Conclusion

Certainly each of the millennial views I present above has characteristic features different enough to distinguish them. These differences are of no small consequence. Yet one thing unifies these eschatological systems: an overall pessimism regarding the hope for Christian transformation of civilization in present history before Christ returns. Such pessimism is a fundamentally important matter when we attempt to develop and promote a Christian worldview. This *intrinsic pessimism* is distinctive of these views when classed together against postmillennialism.

In the next chapter I will consider postmillennialism in a somewhat fuller manner. As I do so I will emphasize the historical optimism inherent in postmillennialism — an optimism that is essential for a robust Christian worldview and which is necessary for building a Christian civilization.

4

THE POSTMILLENNIAL SYSTEM

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, / Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." (Ps 110:1)

I do not hold with the philosophy of linguistic analysis that problems of definition lie at the heart of all ambiguity.¹ Yet often enough, carefully defining a theological position helps correct many unnecessary misconceptions. Probably more than any of the three other evangelical views, postmillennialism has suffered distortion through improper definition by its opponents. In this chapter I will set forth a succinct theological explanation of postmillennialism, as well as briefly engage the question of postmillennialism's historical origins.

Unfortunately, postmillennialism is the easiest eschatological option to misconstrue. Too often faulty hidden presuppositions taint the arguments, even though the evangelical critics are seldom aware of these. In this regard I must note again that postmillennialists do not assert: (1) universalism (not all will be saved at any point in history); (2) perfectionism (the saved are never perfect on earth); or (3) satisfactionism (we do not prefer earthly dominion over consummational glory).

A Definition of Postmillennialism

I would succinctly define postmillennialism as follows:

Postmillennialism holds that the Lord Jesus Christ establishes his kingdom on earth through his preaching and redemptive work in the first century and that he equips his Church with the gospel, empowers her by the Spirit, and charges her with the Great Commission to disciple all nations. Postmillennialism expects that eventually the vast majority of men living will be saved. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of men and of nations. After an extensive

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in his preface to his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that "what can be said at all can be said clearly." Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.

era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and gloriously, to end history with the general resurrection and the final judgment after which the eternal order follows.

With this working definition before us, I will expand on some of its key elements and implications.

First, postmillennialism holds that the Lord Jesus Christ founds his Messianic kingdom on the earth during his earthly ministry and through his redemptive labors. His establishing the “kingdom of heaven” fulfills Old Testament prophetic expectations regarding the coming kingdom. The kingdom which Christ preaches and presents is not something other than that expected by the Old Testament saints. In postmillennialism the church is the fulfilled/transformed Israel and is even called “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16).²

Second, the kingdom’s fundamental nature is essentially redemptive and spiritual, rather than political and corporeal. Although it has implications for the political realm, postmillennialism is not political, offering a kingdom in competition with geo-political nations for governmental rule. Christ rules his kingdom spiritually in and through his people in the world, as well as by his universal providence.

Third, because of the intrinsic power and design of Christ’s redemption, his kingdom will exercise a transformational socio-cultural influence in history. This will occur as more and more people convert to Christ, not by a minority revolt and seizure of political power in history nor by the catastrophic imposition of Christ at his second advent from outside of history. As Rushdoony notes: “The key to remedying the [world] situation is *not* revolution, nor any kind of resistance that works to subvert law and order. . . . The key is regeneration, propagation of the gospel, and the conversion of men and nations to God’s law-word.” This is because “evil men cannot produce a good society. The key to social renewal is individual regeneration.”³

Fourth, postmillennialism, therefore, expects the gradual, developmental expansion of Christ’s kingdom in time and on earth before the Lord returns to end history. This will proceed by a full-orbed ministry of the Word, fervent and believing prayer, and the consecrated labors of

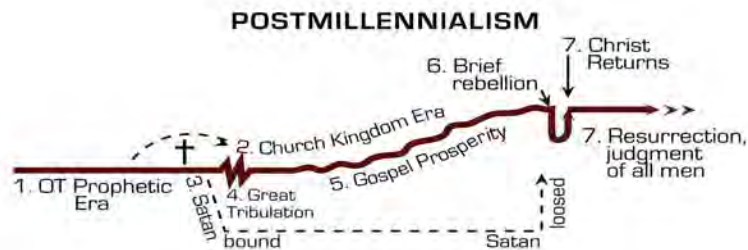
2. See: Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel* and Robertson, *The Israel of God*.

3. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 113, 122. This is a constant theme in Rushdoony (and postmillennialism), 147, 163, 308, 413, 449, 627, 709, 780, etc.

Christ's Spirit-filled people. The ever-present Christ is directing kingdom growth from his throne in heaven, where he sits at God's right hand.

Fifth, postmillennialism confidently anticipates a time in earth history (continuous with the present) in which the very gospel already operating will win the victory throughout the earth, fulfilling the Great Commission. "The thing that distinguishes the biblical postmillennialist, then, from amillennialists and premillennialists is his belief that the Scripture teaches *the success of the great commission in this age of the church*."⁴ The overwhelming majority of men and nations will be Christianized, righteousness will abound, wars will cease, and prosperity and safety will flourish. "It will be marked by the *universal reception of the true religion, and unlimited subjection to the sceptre of Christ*." "It shall be a time of *universal peace*." "It will be characterised by great *temporal prosperity*."⁵

Seventh, "we can look forward to a great 'golden age' of spiritual prosperity continuing for centuries, or even for millenniums, during which time Christianity shall be triumphant over all the earth."⁶ After this extended period of gospel prosperity, earth history will draw to a close by the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ (accompanied by a literal resurrection and a general judgment) to introduce his blood-bought people into the consummative and eternal form of the kingdom. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.



The Confusion Regarding Postmillennialism

Unfortunately, serious errors distort the historical understanding of the origins of millennial views. One eschatological work states that "the

4. Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus*, 74.

5. Brown, *Christ's Second Coming*, 399, 401.

6. Boettner, *The Millennium*, 29.

early church was solidly chiliastic until the time of Augustine.”⁷ Another boldly asserts that “the church from the beginning was premillennial in belief.”⁸ Still another states that “a premillennial belief was the *universal* belief in the church for two hundred and fifty years after the death of Christ.”⁹ Such claims commonly appear in eschatological literature today.

Frequently the false historical data arises from the seriously flawed, long-discredited claims of George N. H. Peters.¹⁰ Peters comments on premillennialism in history: “Now let the student reflect: here are *two* centuries . . . in which positively no direct opposition whatever arises against our doctrine.”¹¹ His claims are quite erroneous, though still persisting and highly regarded by some.¹² Because my primary concern is to trace the rise of postmillennialism, I will only briefly comment on the general historical confusion regarding millennialism. But it does deserve at least passing comment.

The errors in Peters’ analysis and others like it have been exposed by a number of scholars. One of the best recent studies demonstrating the error is Charles E. Hill’s, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*.¹³ Other valuable studies include: Alan Patrick Boyd (a dispensationalist), D. H. Kromminga (a premillennialist), and Ned Stonehouse (an amillennialist).¹⁴ Additional noteworthy studies include those

7. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 200.

8. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 389.

9. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 374 (italics his). But then he quotes Schaff as saying it was not creedally endorsed by the church, but was “widely current” among distinguished teachers. How he leaps from “widely current” to “universal” we probably will never know.

10. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*.

11. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 375, citing Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:494–496.

12. Couch confidently states: “George Peters has done the most work on this subject.” Couch in *DPT*, 264, 302. Walvoord calls it “a classic work.” Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 119. Other dispensationalists employ his findings. See: Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:270–274; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 373–384; Wood, *The Bible and Future Events*, 35ff.

13. Hill presents a helpful chart on eschatological views of the earth Fathers on pages 271–72.

14. Boyd, “A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers”; Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church*, 29–112; Stonehouse, *The Apocalypse in the Ancient Church*, 13ff.

by Louis Berkhof, Philip Schaff, Albertus Pieters, W. J. Grier, George Lyons, John A. McGuckin, and Everett Ferguson.¹⁵

Kromminga carefully examines the sub-apostolic writings, including: Clement of Rome's *1 Clement*, the pseudo-Clementine *2 Clement*, *The Didache*, the Ignatian epistles, Polycarp's *Epistle*, *The Letter of the Church at Smyrna on the Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Barnabas, Hermas, Diognetus, Fragments of Papias, and *Reliques of the Elders*. He convincingly shows that *only Papias among the sub-apostolic fathers is premillennial*. He concludes that "an inquiry into the extent of ancient chiliasm will serve to show the untenableness of the claim that this doctrine was held with practical unanimity by the Church of the first few centuries."¹⁶ Hill presents detailed evidence of "the nonadvocacy, and sometimes outspoken repudiation, of chiliasm" in several Apostolic Fathers including Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Hermas and *Second Clement*, as well as the Apologists, *Epistle to Diognetus*, Melito of Sardis, Athenagora, the Christian Pseudepigrapha, early martyrologies, and others.¹⁷

According to Jaroslav Pelikan: "It would seem that very early in the post-apostolic era millenarianism was regarded as a mark neither of orthodoxy nor of heresy, but as one permissible opinion among others within the range of permissible opinions."¹⁸ In fact, W. G. T. Shedd observes that "early millennialism was held mostly among Jewish converts. A few Apostolic Fathers held it as individuals, but those who do not mention the millennium had greater weight of authority and influence: Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp."¹⁹ This is borne out by premillennialism's failure to receive creedal status. Dispensationalist Robert P. Lightner recognizes that "None of the major creeds of the church include premillennialism in their statements."²⁰ Craig L. Blomberg admits that

15. Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, 262. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:615. Albertus Pieters, two articles: "Chiliasm in the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers" (1938), cited by Kromminga, *Millennium*, 41. Grier, *The Momentous Event*, 19ff. Lyons, "Eschatology in the Early Church," 110ff. McGuckin, "Chiliasm," 58ff. Ferguson, *Church History*, 158.

16. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 30, 41, 42.

17. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 76. See all of Part II.

18. Pelikan, *The Christian Traditions*, 1:125.

19. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 2:390–391. Papias' famous passage on the millennium was taken from the Jewish Apocalypse of Baruch 29:1–8. See Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 233.

20. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 158.

“the classic orthodox creeds of the patristic period, like the major confessions of faith from the Protestant Reformation, never required more than this,” i.e., the basic elements of biblical eschatology: a future second advent, a bodily resurrection, and a final judgment.²¹ Not even the second century Apostles’ Creed.²² Even Tertullian and Irenaeus (who were premillennial) record brief creeds that in no way allude to a millennium.²³ What has happened to the evidence for “pervasive” premillennialism?

Alan Patrick Boyd (a dispensationalist at the time) powerfully analyzes and conclusively rebuts Peters’ claims in his 1977 Dallas Theological Seminary master’s thesis. According to Boyd, he “originally undertook the thesis to bolster the [dispensational] system by patristic research, but the evidence of the original sources simply disallowed this.” He ends up lamenting that “this writer believes that the Church *rapidly* fell from New Testament truth, and this is very evident in the realm of eschatology. Only in modern times has New Testament eschatological truth been recovered.”²⁴ As a consequence of his research, Boyd urges his fellow dispensationalists to “avoid reliance on men like Geo. N. H. Peters . . . whose historical conclusions regarding premillennialism . . . in the early church have been proven to be largely in error.”²⁵

Boyd goes on to admit that “it would seem wise for the modern [i.e., dispensational] system to abandon the claim that it is the historical faith of the Church.”²⁶ Of Ryrie’s bold statement that “Premillennialism is the historic faith of the Church,” he states: “It is the conclusion of this thesis that Dr. Ryrie’s statement is historically invalid within the chronological framework of this thesis.”²⁷ Boyd even states: “This validates the claim of L. Berkhof. . . . ‘It is not correct to say, as Premillennarians do, that it (millennialism) was *generally* accepted in the first three centuries. The truth of the matter is that the adherents of this doctrine were a rather limited number.’”²⁸

21. Blomberg in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 69. Though he overlooks the fact that all the creeds allow only *one* bodily resurrection, not two.

22. Harnack, “Apostle’s Creed” in *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, 1:242.

23. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1:10; 3:4; Tertullian, *Virgin* 1; *Against Praeetus* 2; *The Prescription Against Heretics* 13.

24. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 91n.

25. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 92.

26. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 92.

27. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 89.

28. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 92, n 1.

Clearly, the ancient advocates of premillennialism faced opposition from orthodox non-millennialists. For instance, consider Justin Martyr's response to Trypho regarding the hope of "a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built." Justin (d. AD 165) replies: "I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that *many* who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise."²⁹ Note the reference to "many" who "think otherwise." No unanimity regarding the millennium exists in the early church.

Another premillennialist, Irenaeus (ca. AD 180), observes that "some who are reckoned *among the orthodox*" do not hold to his premillennial views.³⁰ Eusebius (ca. AD 325) points to premillennialist Papias (AD 60–130) in explaining the spread of premillennialism: "But it was due to him that so many [not "all"!] of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their own support the antiquity of the man."³¹ The fact that premillennialism was in no way approaching "universal" in extent is evident also in that Dionysius (AD 190–264) successfully dealt with "this doctrine" in a certain area where it prevailed and split "entire churches." He won the day in that Egyptian district and turns the majority away from premillennialism.³² Later, Epiphanius (AD 315–403) writes: "There is indeed a millennium mentioned by St. John; but the most, and those pious men, look upon those words as true indeed, but to be taken in a spiritual sense."³³

Dispensationalist John Hannah of Dallas Theological Seminary confesses that it is "not an easy task to piece together a picture of what early Christians thought about the end times . . . [because] our sources

29. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 80 (emph. mine).

30. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:31:1 (emph. mine). Shedd comments on this statement: "Irenaeus . . . speaks of opposers of Millenarianism who held the catholic faith, and who agreed with the Gnostics only in being Anti-Millenarians; although he is himself desirous to make it appear that Anti-Millenarianism is of the nature of heresy." Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 2:394.

31. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39. Pelikan observes: Eusebius "was certainly speaking for a large body of theological opinion in the East when he called Papias's millenarianism 'bizarre' and 'rather mythological.'" Pelikan, *Christian Traditions*, 1:125.

32. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7:24; cf. Dionysius 5:6.

33. Epiphanius, *Heresies*, 77:26.

for their thought in this area are relatively limited.”³⁴ In the classic study, *Regnum Caelorum*, Hill summarizes the difficulty ecclesiastical historians face on this matter: “A besetting problem in assessing the distribution and influence of eschatological views in the second and third centuries is the corpus of early Christian writers who are practically silent or seemingly ambiguous on the matter of millennialism.” In his work Hill approaches the matter in a different way, by looking at the role of the intermediate state in eschatological discussion. He argues that “the task of the millennium [was] to supply the necessary further training for the entrance into God’s spatial presence. To allow that the saints could already be enjoying the celestial life would be to eliminate the need for a future, earthly millennium.”³⁵ Hill is able to demonstrate through this backdoor method that the early church (up to the mid-third century) was *not* pervasively premillennial. His fascinating research even demonstrates that “the very womb of chiliasm itself” was “a strand of Jewish piety that probably owes its definitive form to the fall of Jerusalem.”³⁶ He notes that “the debt of the Christian chiliasts to *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and to other pseudepigraphal Jewish apocalypses in matters eschatological is documentable.”³⁷

The Origins of Postmillennialism

Concomitant with the confusion regarding an unbalanced perception of premillennialism’s early influence is the widespread error regarding the origins of postmillennialism. One dispensationalist confidently declares: “There is no evidence of the distinctive teachings of Postmillennialism earlier than the seventeenth century.”³⁸ Another states: “Its advocates admit that it was first taught in the seventeenth century.”³⁹ Many wrongly assume that we may trace postmillennialism back only as far as Daniel Whitby in 1703. Many allege Whitby to be “the originator of what is known as postmillennialism.”⁴⁰ Couch puts in the Bible notes of the *Prophecy Study Bible*: “This view was first propagated by Daniel

34. Hannah, *Our Legacy*, 305.

35. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 246.

36. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 45.

37. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 63.

38. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 29. See also: p. 254.

39. Baker, *Dispensational Theology*, 623.

40. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:280–281.

Whitby (AD 1638–1726), a Unitarian.”⁴¹ This was Thomas Ice’s original view:

Daniel Whitby first put forth his view in a popular work entitled *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (1703). It was at the end of this work that he first set forth what he calls in his own words ‘A New Hypothesis’ on the millennial reign of Christ. Thus, the system called postmillennialism was born in the early 1700s as a hypothesis. Whitby and his modern followers present their arguments and explanations based upon unproved assumptions — assumptions resulting in a hypothesis rather than something which is the fruit of the study of Scripture or even the voice of the church.⁴²

Fortunately Ice has come to recognize his error, for in a later work he acknowledges regarding the Whitby argument: “this does not mean that elements of systematic postmillennialism did not exist prior to Whitby, for they clearly did.”⁴³

Whitby was *not* the founder of postmillennialism — even of its more systematic, modern expression. Rodney Peterson writes that prior to Whitby “this perspective had undergone changes, particularly since Thomas Brightman (1562–1607).”⁴⁴ Amillennialist Venema agrees.⁴⁵ Brightman, who died in 1607, was one of the fathers of Presbyterianism in England. He sets forth his postmillennial views in detail in his book, *A Revelation of the Revelation*. In fact, many consider this work the “most important and influential English revision of the Reformed, Augustinian concept of the millennium,”⁴⁶ “one of the most influential of the Puritan expositors of Revelation.”⁴⁷ This was a *century* before Whitby’s 1703 article. Ball categorically denies Whitby’s foundational role.⁴⁸ Whitby was

41. PSB, 1530. Apparently he inserts “AD” before Whitby’s dates to insure no one thinks Whitby lived before Christ.

42. Ice, in House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 209.

43. Ice, “Postmillennialism,” in Couch, *DPT*, 308. See also: Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 77–80.

44. Rodney Peterson, “The Debate Throughout Church History,” in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 31.

45. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 222.

46. Toon, *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel*, 26. See also: Ball, *A Great Expectation*; Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*.

47. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, 239.

48. W. Ball, *A Great Expectation*, 170n.

simply *not* the “founder” of postmillennialism; he was a modern systematizer. He was helpful in “popularizing”⁴⁹ postmillennialism because he present postmillennialism’s “most influential formulation” to date.⁵⁰

At this very late date, it is time for dispensational authors to follow Ice’s lead and retract their previous statements regarding Whitby as the founder of postmillennialism. And since Lindsey complains “I haven’t seen any evidence whatsoever for Postmillennialism in the early centuries,”⁵¹ perhaps the following material will be helpful to him.

Early Origins of Postmillennialism

Clearly postmillennialism undergoes much systematization from its beginnings to the present. In its simplest form, however, adumbrations of it appear in antiquity. Most scholars would agree with Millard J. Erickson that “all three millennial positions have been held virtually throughout church history”⁵² (he collapses dispensationalism into premillennialism in mentioning only three basic views). Robert G. Clouse writes: “Whereas the other strains of millennialism all have deep roots in the history of the church, the dispensational variety is of recent origin.”⁵³ Donald G. Bloesch concurs: “Postmillennialism has been present throughout Christian history.”⁵⁴ Even premillennialists Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung can write: “representatives of all three millennial perspectives may be found in almost every era of church history.”⁵⁵

The core, distinctive, defining belief within postmillennialism is that Christ will return to the earth *after* the Spirit-blessed Gospel has had *overwhelming success* in bringing the majority of the world to Christ. This is the key distinction which separates postmillennialism from the other eschatological systems which *deny* the proposition. Erickson summarizes it well: “Postmillennialism rests on the belief that the preaching of the gospel will be so successful that the world will be converted.”⁵⁶ Blomberg recognizes this distinctive when he complains of postmillennialism’s

49. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 16–17.

50. R. G. Clouse, “Millennium” in *EDT*, 717.

51. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 77.

52. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1212.

53. Clouse, et al. *New Millennial Manual*, 56.

54. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 102.

55. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, xiii.

56. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1213.

“unrealistic expectation that Christians can produce this millennium apart from God’s supernatural intervention.”⁵⁷

Obviously, systematization is developmental, flowing from the diligent labors of many minds over a great period of time as they build on their predecessors’ research. This should not embarrass postmillennialists, for even dispensationalists such as Ice can write: “The futurist interpretation is the approach used by the earliest church fathers. We do not argue that they had a sophisticated system, but the clear futurist elements were there.”⁵⁸ John F. Walvoord admits: “It must be conceded that the advanced and detailed theology of pretribulationism is not found in the Fathers, but neither is any other detailed and ‘established’ exposition of premillennialism. The development of most important doctrines took centuries.”⁵⁹ Charles C. Ryrie responds to charges regarding dispensationalism’s “recency”: “Informed dispensationalists . . . recognize that as a system dispensationalism was largely formulated by Darby, but that outlines of the dispensationalist approach to the Scriptures are found much earlier.”⁶⁰ Couch agrees regarding the Church Fathers: “It is admitted by all that their systemization of prophecy was primitive and incomplete.”⁶¹

57. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 69. He overlooks the fact that postmillennialists believe that born-again believers promote the progress of the kingdom under Christ’s supernatural providence and blessing.

58. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 275.

59. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 52.

60. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 62.

61. Couch, *DPT*, 264.

I argue similarly for postmillennialism.⁶² We see indicators in antiquity of a genuine hope regarding the gospel's victorious historical progress. Premillennialist Kromminga notes that although most Montanists were premillennialists, while "others were at least containing also the germs for later fullfledged Postmillennialism."⁶³ This nascent postmillennialism arose from the hope (rooted in Scripture) that the Holy Spirit will gradually exercise dominant influence in the affairs of history.⁶⁴ This perspective on Christianity's future appears in the thinking of several Church Fathers.

The Church Fathers who held optimistic expectations for the progress of Christianity, and who may be called "postmillennial" *in this most basic sense*, would not hold to the full-blown systematic postmillennialism as I outline it below. Bearing these matters in mind, let us consider define postmillennialism.

Origen (AD 185–254)

Although much in Origen is unacceptable, he is a noteworthy church father who exercises a considerable influence in antiquity. As Philip Schaff notes, Origen believes in the gospel's enormous power: "Such a mighty revolution as the conversion of the heathen emperor was not dreamed of even as a remote possibility, except perhaps by the far-sighted Origen." He adds further that "Origen seems to have been the

62. Riddlebarger criticizes me for listing ancient postmillennial-like forerunners: "when we ask historical figures to answer modern debates, such as the millennial question, which they never were directly asked nor answered, we inevitably 'accommodate' these men to meet the needs of our own age and situation." Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 249. But then he himself does this very thing when he states: "First given systematic expression by St. Augustine in his famous *City of God*, amillennialism developed a distinctive Reformed emphasis in the work of Geerhardus Vos" (12). I would urge my reader, however, to re-read my (original) paragraph on the "Early Origins of Postmillennialism," noting that I argue *only* that the *global optimism regarding the success of the gospel* was inherent within these writers. I would certainly not claim that any early church father gave "systematic expression" to a millennial system as per Riddlebarger's mistaken charge.

63. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 76.

64. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 84.

only one in that age of violent persecution who expected that Christianity, by continual growth, would gain the dominion over the world.”⁶⁵

Origen comments:

It is evident that even the barbarians, when they yield obedience to the word of God, will become most obedient to the law, and most humane; and every form of worship will be destroyed except the religion of Christ, which will alone prevail. And indeed it will one day triumph, as its principles take possession of the minds of men more and more every day.⁶⁶

This represent the essence of postmillennial optimism.

Eusebius (AD 260–340)

Eusebius even more fully expresses such an optimistic hope. Bloesch well notes: “Postmillennialism was already anticipated in the church father Eusebius of Caesarea.”⁶⁷ In Book 10 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius believes he is witnessing the dawning fulfillment of Old Testament kingdom prophecies. Of Psalms 108:1, 2 and 46:8, 9, which he specifically cites, he writes that he is “Rejoicing in these things which have been clearly fulfilled in our day.”⁶⁸ Later in 10:4–7 he cites dozens of other such passages as coming to fulfillment. He writes: “For it was necessary and fitting that as her [the Church’s] shepherd and Lord had once tasted death for her, and after his suffering had changed that vile body which he assumed in her behalf into a splendid and glorious body, leading the very flesh which had been delivered from corruption to incorruption, she too should enjoy the dispensations of the Saviour.”⁶⁹

After quoting several passages from Isaiah, Eusebius comments: “These are the things which Isaiah foretold; and which were anciently recorded concerning us in sacred books; and it was necessary that we should sometime learn their truthfulness by their fulfillment.”⁷⁰

65. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:591, 122. He cites Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church* (12th ed.), 1:129.

66. Origen, *Against Celsus* 8:68.

67. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:192.

68. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10:1:6. See: Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:192.

69. *Eccl. Hist.* 10:4:46.

70. *Eccl. Hist.* 10:4:53; cf. sections 46–52. Citing Isa 51:10–11; 54:4; 54:6–8; 51:17,18, 22–23; 52:1, 2; 49:18–21.

Of Christ he writes:

What god or hero yet, as he has done, has set aside all gods and heroes among civilized or barbarous nations; has ordained that divine honors should be withheld from all, and claimed obedience to that command: and then, though singly conflicting with the power of all, has utterly destroyed the opposing hosts; victorious over the gods and heroes of every age, and causing himself alone, in every region of the habitable world, to be acknowledged by all people as the only Son of God? . . . What god or hero, exposed, as our Saviour was, to so sore a conflict, has raised the trophy of victory over every foe?⁷¹

After discussing Psalm 110:1 and how “even to this day [Christ] is honored as a King by his followers throughout the world,”⁷² he writes:

It is admitted that when in recent times the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ had become known to all men there immediately made its appearance a new nation; a nation confessedly not small, and not dwelling in some corner of the earth, but the most numerous and pious of all nations, indestructible and unconquerable, because it always receives assistance from God. This nation, thus suddenly appearing at the time appointed by the inscrutable counsel of God, is the one which has been honored by all with the name of Christ.⁷³

Following this, he cites Genesis 12:3, regarding the Abrahamic promise of Christ’s blessing all nations.⁷⁴ Eusebius later states:

Long since had his passion, as well as his advent in the flesh, been predicted by the prophets. The time, too, of his incarnation had been foretold, and the manner in which the fruits of iniquity and profligacy, so ruinous to the works and ways of righteousness, should be destroyed, and the whole world partake of the virtues of wisdom and sound discretion, through the almost universal prevalence of those principles of conduct which the Saviour would

71. Eusebius, *The Oration of the Emperor Constantine* 17:13–14. Though obviously prematurely, he sees in the spread of Christianity the anticipated conquest of the world, *Eccl. Hist.* 1:3:12; 2:3:1; 8:1:1–2, 6.

72. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 1:3:19.

73. *Eccl. Hist.* 1:4:2–3.

74. *Eccl. Hist.* 1:4:13.

promulgate, over the minds of men; whereby the worship of God should be confirmed, and the rites of superstition abolished.⁷⁵

His *Proof of the Gospel* (aka: *Demonstration of the Gospel*) provides even stronger evidence for his postmillennialesque expectations. Consider the following material,⁷⁶ where he argues that the Apostles:

could preach the good news that though one race were lost every nation and race of men would know God, escape from the daemons, cease from ignorance and deceit and enjoy the light of holiness: they could picture the disciples of Christ filling the whole world with their teaching, and the preaching of their gospel introducing among all men a fresh and unknown ideal of holiness: they could see churches of Christ established by their means among all nations, and Christian people throughout the whole world bearing one common name. (*Proof* 1:1 §7)

According to Isaiah, it will be when they behold this very salvation that all men will worship the supreme God, Who has bestowed His salvation on all ungrudgingly. . . . The oracle shall be fulfilled which said that all men should call no longer on their ancestral gods, nor on idols, nor on daemons, but on the Name of the Lord, and shall serve Him under one yoke. (*Proof* 2:3 §61)

There is a prophecy of the whole race of mankind turning away from the error of idolatry, and coming to know the God of Israel. (*Proof* 2:3 §78)

Understand then how the holy Scriptures prophesy that one and the same Being, Christ by name, Who is also Son of God, is to be plotted against by men, to receive the nations for His inheritance, and to rule over the ends of the earth. (*Proof* 4:16 §184)

The prophetic Spirit darkly tells of the subjection of the different nations, which shall be subject to the One of Whom [Isaiah] prophesies, and how they will worship Him as God, how they will pray in His name. (*Proof* 5:4 §225)

And He clearly prophesies the conversion of the Gentiles from idolatrous error to godly religion. (*Proof* 5:29 §255)

75. Eusebius, *Constantine*, 16.

76. My quotations come from W. J. Ferrar's edition of Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*.

Surely those who give the prophecy: which will be clearly seen to be fulfilled, when all the nations that believe in Christ are subdued to the teaching of the prophets. (*Proof 6:2 §259*)

Soon all the world should be filled with the salvation offered by Him to all men according to the prophecy which said, 'Before his face shall his Word go forth, and shall go out into the plains.' (*Proof 6:15 §281*)

After this prophecy, the prophet next proceeds to bear witness, that though the whole earth shall be full of His glory, yet the Jewish race shall not participate. (*Proof 7:1 §312*)

Just as it then began, a day will come when the prophecy will be fulfilled in all its fullness, when, as the apostle says, "the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in." (*Proof 9:18 §459*)

Athanasius (AD 296–372)

Chilton calls Athanasius "the patron saint of postmillennialism."⁷⁷ He was certain of Christ's victory for now "the Saviour works so great things among men, and day by day is invisibly persuading so great a multitude from every side, both from them that dwell in Greece and in foreign lands, to come over to His faith, and all to obey His teaching."⁷⁸ "For where Christ is named, and His faith, there all idolatry is deposed and all imposture of evil spirits is exposed, and any spirit is unable to endure even the name, nay even on barely hearing it flies and disappears. But this work is not that of one dead, but of one that lives — and especially of God."⁷⁹ In fact, regarding idols, Christ "chases them away, and by His power prevents their even appearing, yea, and is being confessed by them all to be the Son of God."⁸⁰

Athanasius continues, exulting in Christ's ongoing victory when he writes:

The Saviour does daily so many works, drawing men to religion, persuading to virtue, teaching of immortality, leading on to a desire for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, inspiring strength to meet death, shewing Himself to each one, and displacing the godlessness of idolatry, and the gods and spirits of

77. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 5.

78. Athanasius, *Incarnation* 30:4.

79. *Incarnation* 30:6.

80. *Incarnation* 30:7.

the unbelievers can do none of these things, but rather shew themselves dead at the presence of Christ, their pomp being reduced to impotence and vanity; whereas by the sign of the Cross all magic is stopped, and all witchcraft brought to nought, all the idols are being deserted and left, and every unruly pleasure is checked, and every one is looking up from earth to heaven. . . . For the Son of God is 'living and active,' and works day by day, and brings about the salvation of all. But death is daily proved to have lost all his power, and idols and spirits are proved to be dead rather than Christ.⁸¹

Athanasius freely applies certain eschatological prophecies of Christ's triumph to the church age. Then he rhetorically asks his reader in great confidence: "But what king that ever was, before he had strength to call father or mother, reigned and gained triumphs over his enemies?"⁸² He then writes: "All heathen at any rate from every region, abjuring their hereditary tradition and the impiety of idols, are now placing their hope in Christ, and enrolling themselves under Him."⁸³ He continues:

But if the Gentiles are honouring the same God that gave the law to Moses and made the promise to Abraham, and Whose word the Jews dishonoured, — why are [the Jews] ignorant, or rather why do they choose to ignore, that the Lord foretold by the Scriptures has shone forth upon the world, and appeared to it in bodily form, as the Scripture said. . . . What then has not come to pass, that the Christ must do? What is left unfulfilled, that the Jews should not disbelieve with impunity? For if, I say, — which is just what we actually see, — there is no longer king nor prophet nor Jerusalem nor sacrifice nor vision among them, but even the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and the gentiles, leaving their godlessness, are now taking refuge with the God of Abraham,

81. *Incarnation* 31:2–3. This is particularly significant in that idolatry was a world-wide phenomenon (2Ki 17:29; 1Ch 16:26; Ps 96:5) in which Satan exercised control of men through demonic power (Lev 17:7; Dt 32:17; Ps 106:37; 1Co 10:19–20). The results of Satan's binding (Rev 20:2–3; Mt 12:28–29) are becoming more evident "day by day."

82. *Incarnation* 36:1. He cites sections from Num 24:5–17; Isa 8:4; 19:1 (§ 33 [context = §§ 30–31]); Da 9:24ff; Ge 49:10 (Sec. 40); Isa 2:4 (Sec. 52:1); 11:9 (§ 45:2; *Discourse Against the Arians* 1:59); Psa 110:1 (*Discourse Against the Arians* 2:15:14, 16); etc.

83. *Incarnation* 37:5.

through the Word, even our Lord Jesus Christ, then it must be plain, even to those who are exceedingly obstinate, that the Christ is come, and that He has illumined absolutely all with His light. . . . So one can fairly refute the Jews by these and by other arguments from the Divine Scriptures⁸⁴

It is right for you to realize, and to take as the sum of what we have already stated, and to marvel at exceedingly; namely, that since the Saviour has come among us, idolatry not only has no longer increased, but what there was is diminishing and gradually coming to an end: and not only does the wisdom of the Greeks no longer advance, but what there is is now fading away. . . . And to sum the matter up: behold how the Saviour's doctrine is everywhere increasing, while all idolatry and everything opposed to the faith of Christ is daily dwindling, and losing power, and falling. . . . For as, when the sun is come, darkness no longer prevails, but if any be still left anywhere it is driven away; so, now that the divine Appearing of the Word of God is come, the darkness of the idols prevails no more, and all parts of the world in every direction are illumined by His teaching.⁸⁵

The gospel's great progress is expected, according to Athanasius' view of Scripture (Isa 11:9; Mt 28:19; Jn 6:45): "And then, from Dan to Beersheba was the Law proclaimed, and in Judea only was God known; but now, unto all the earth has gone forth their voice, and all the earth has been filled with the knowledge of God, and the disciples have made disciples of all the nations, and now is fulfilled what is written, 'They shall be all taught of God.'"⁸⁶

The adumbrations of the gospel's ultimate pacific influence are being felt in his day:

Who then is He that has done this, or who is He that has united in peace men that hated one another, save the beloved Son of the Father, the common Saviour of all, even Jesus Christ, Who by His own love underwent all things for our salvation. For even from of old it was prophesied of the peace He was to usher in, where the Scripture says: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their pikes into sickles, and nation shall not take the sword against

84. *Incarnation* 40:5, 7.

85. *Incarnation*, 55:1–3.

86. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 59:8.

nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' And this is at least not incredible, inasmuch as even now those barbarians who have an innate savagery of manners, while they still sacrifice to the idols of their country, are mad against one another, and cannot endure to be a single hour without weapons: but when they hear the teaching of Christ, straightway instead of fighting they turn to husbandry, and instead of arming their hands with weapons they raise them in prayer, and in a word, in place of fighting among themselves, henceforth they arm against the devil and against evil spirits, subduing these by self-restraint and virtue of soul.⁸⁷

Many other such references could be cited from Athanasius, but insufficient space precludes further discussion.⁸⁸ We have yet to hear from the most influential theologian among the ancient church fathers, Augustine of Hippo. When we read Augustine's work we can easily see that he also exudes a firm confidence regarding the progress Christ's kingdom in history.

Augustine (AD 354–430)

Augustine looms as the greatest Christian thinker in the early church and one of the greatest of all time. Pelikan agrees with Hans von Campenhausen that Augustine is "the only church father who even today remains an intellectual power."⁸⁹ Indeed, his writings are "an integral part of the development of Western thought."⁹⁰

Originally a premillennialist, Augustine turned away from the system.⁹¹ Although many assume his views correspond more closely with amillennialism, some evidence of postmillennial-type thinking appears in his writings, as various scholars note.⁹² According to Zoba, Augustine believes that history "would be marked by the ever-increasing influence

87. Athanasius, *Incarnation* 52.

88. For example, *Incarnation* 46–48; 50; 53–55.

89. Pelikan, "Foreword," in Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages*, xiii.

90. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, xv.

91. Augustine, *Sermons*, 259. *City of God* 20:7.

92. John O'Meara, "Introduction," in Augustine, *City of God*, viii. LaSor, *The Truth About Armageddon*, 160. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 54. Adolf von Harnack, "Millennium," 16:314ff. Finger, *Christian Theology*, 113–115. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 19, 22, 161, 239. Boettner, *Millennium*, 10. Erb, *Bible Prophecy*, 101–102. Even Walvoord is aware of these tendencies in Augustine: *Millennial Kingdom*, 8.

of the church in overturning evil in the world before the Lord's return."⁹³ Historic premillennialist Erickson holds that Augustine is postmillennial.⁹⁴

Several statements in Book 18 of *The City of God* certainly express a postmillennial-like optimism. Of Nahum 1:14 and 2:1 Augustine states:

Moreover, we already see the graven and molten things, that is, the idols of the false gods, exterminated through the gospel, and given up to oblivion as of the grave, and we know that this prophecy is fulfilled in this very thing. (*City of God* 18:31)

"The tents of Ethiopia shall be greatly afraid, and the tents of the land of Midian;" that is, even those nations which are not under the Roman authority, being suddenly terrified by the news of Thy wonderful works, shall become a Christian people. "Wert Thou angry at the rivers, O Lord? or was Thy fury against the rivers? or was Thy rage against the sea?" This is said because He does not now come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (*City of God*, 18:32)

Augustine comments on Haggai 2:6:

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet one little while, and I will shake the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will move all nations, and the desired of all nations shall come." The fulfillment of this prophecy is in part already seen, and in part hoped for in the end. . . . so we see all nations moved to the faith; and the fulfillment of what follows, "And the desired of all nations shall come," is looked for at His last coming. For ere men can desire and wait for Him, they must believe and love Him." (*City of God*, 18:35)

We may also reference his comments on Psalm 2. Regarding the Lord laughing at the nations (Ps 2:4) he writes: "it is to be understood of that power which he giveth to His saints, that they seeing things to come, namely, that the Name and rule of Christ is to pervade posterity and possess all nations." At v. 7 he writes: "'Ask of Me,' may be referred to all this temporal dispensation, which has been instituted for mankind, namely, that the 'nations' should be joined to the Name of Christ, and so be redeemed from death, and possessed by God. 'I shall give Thee the

93. Zoba, "Future Tense," 20.

94. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1212.

nations for Thine inheritance,' which so possess them for their salvation, and to bear unto Thee spiritual fruit."⁹⁵

In one of his sermons he proclaims:

Lately, kings are coming to Rome. A great thing, brothers, in what manner it was fulfilled. When it was spoken, when it was written, nothing of these things was. It is extraordinary! Pay attention and see; rejoice! May they be curious who do not want to give attention to it; for these things we want them to be curious. . . . Let them discover that so many things which they see of late were predicted beforehand. . . . Every age [of individual] has been called to salvation. Every age has already come — every dignity, every level of wealth and human capacity. Soon let them all be inside. Presently a few remain outside and still argue; let them wake up at some time or another to the rumbling of the world: the whole world clamor.⁹⁶

Indeed, Augustine taught that history would eventually issue forth in a “future rest of the saints on earth” (*Sermon* 259:2) “when the Church will be purged of all the wicked elements now mixed among its members and Christ will rule peacefully in its midst.”⁹⁷

Once again I must provide a cautionary word here: I am *not* claiming that Augustine is a full-blown postmillennialist. I am simply pointing out elements in his views that *suggest a postmillennial-like* optimism. He is one of the “adumbrations” of postmillennialism “in its simplest form,” as I state above and in my previous editions. I do not believe my use of Augustine and other early church fathers is an example of “[marshaling] a list of figures from church history who were supposedly postmillennial.”⁹⁸ Postmillennialism *as a system* arose later. My listing of earlier Church Fathers is simply to cite several *forerunners* to postmillennialism, who hold to heightened levels of optimism regarding temporal history. And I certainly never “maintain that this has been the predominant eschatological position of the Christian church,” as per Venema referring to my listing in the second edition of *He Shall Have Dominion*.⁹⁹

95. Augustine in *NPNF*, 8:3.

96. Maxfield, “Divine Providence, History, and Progress in Augustine’s City of God,” 340–41.

97. Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 133.

98. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 249 n 23.

99. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 221. Though Venema does that for his own view: “Since the fourth and fifth centuries, it has been the predominant position

Riddlebarger likewise misreads me when he states regarding my work: “some argue that postmillennialism was the historic position of the church from the days of St. Augustine.”¹⁰⁰

Medieval Postmillennialists

Somewhat later in history, but still well before Whitby, is the medieval Roman Catholic Joachim of Florus (1145–1202). Several non-postmillennial scholars cite him as a postmillennialist,¹⁰¹ due to his view of a coming outpouring of the Spirit, initiating the Age of the Spirit.¹⁰² As Kromminga puts it: “In fact, modern Postmillenarianism of the orthodox type with its expectation of a glorious final Church Age, brought about through the ordinary operation of the Word and the Spirit, embodies nothing but this Pure Church ideal, dissociated from Joachim’s expectation of a future coming of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰³ Strangely, Walvoord points to Joachim as a postmillennialist, then speaks of postmillennialism “originating in the writings of Daniel Whitby” — despite Whitby’s writing five centuries later!¹⁰⁴

Other postmillennialists well before Whitby include: the Franciscans Peter John Olivi (*d. ca.* 1297) and Abertino de Casale (*fl.* 1305); the Dominicans Ghehardinus de Burgo (*fl.* 1254), Mechthild of Magdeburg (*d.* 1280), Fra Dolcino (*fl.* 1330); another Roman Catholic scholar Arnaldus of Villanova (*fl.* 1298); and the forerunner of John Huss, Jan Miliciz of Kremsier (*fl.* 1367).¹⁰⁵

A century and a half before Whitby, John Calvin (1509–1564) held optimistic prophetic views that are commonly associated with postmil-

within the Christian church,” 235. As do Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*, 708) and Spkyman (*Reformational Theology*, 541).

100. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 29.

101. See: Kromminga, *Millennium*, p 20; 129ff; he cites Benz, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 1931. See also: W. Möller in Schaff, *RE*, 2:1183. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 443.

102. Joachim of Florus, *Concordia Veteris et Novi Testamenti, Expositio super Apocalypsin*, and *Psalterium Decem Chordarum*.

103. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 132.

104. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 7, 19.

105. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 135–136, 159ff, who cites the following sources: Johann Heinrich Kurtz, Henry Hart Milman, J. A. W. Neander, and Johann Jacob Herzog. See also: Möller in *RE*, 2:1183; Walker, *History of the Christian Church*, 237; Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 1:435.

lennialism. We discover such postmillennial-like expectations at various places in his commentaries, such as at Isaiah 2:2–4; 65:17; Micah 4:1–4; Matthew 24:26; 28:18–20; Romans 11:24. J. A. DeJong well notes that “John Calvin’s commentaries give some scholars cause for concluding that he anticipated the spread of the gospel and true religion to the ends of the earth.”¹⁰⁶ Iain Murray agrees: “Puritan beliefs as related to the work of Christ stood in direct succession to the beliefs of the Reformers and particularly to those of John Calvin. It was Calvin who recovered from the New Testament the whole concept of Christ’s lordship and sovereign glory in the carrying out of man’s redemption” so that “its ultimate success rest securely upon the position which Christ now occupies.”¹⁰⁷

W. A. Dyrness concurs regarding Calvin’s incipient postmillennialism: “John Calvin emphasized the sovereign interventions of God and the definitive victory of Christ which the resurrection highlights. The ascension implies the filling of all things with his glory, and so the Christian can be optimistic about this world order. The dynamic kingdom of Christ presses the church to bring all mankind under the sway of the gospel.”¹⁰⁸ We must at least agree with John J. Davis: “John Calvin, one of the greatest leaders of the Protestant Reformation, had an understanding of the kingship of Christ that paved the way for the full flowering of the postmillennial view in English Puritanism.”¹⁰⁹ Cornelis Venema agrees.¹¹⁰

Indeed, in his Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France, Calvin writes:

Our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ whom the Father has appointed King to ‘rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth’. . . . And he is so to rule as to smite the whole earth with its iron and brazen strength, with its gold and silver brilliance, shattering it with

106. DeJong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea*, 8. See also: editor’s Preface to Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:904; Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 89ff; Bloesch, *Evangelical Theology*, 2:199–200; Bahnsen, “The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism,” 69–76; Payton, “The Emergence of Postmillennialism in English Puritanism,” 87–106; Gilsdorf, *The Puritan Apocalyptic*.

107. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 87–88.

108. W. A. Dyrness, “Christianity and Culture,” in *EDT*, 214.

109. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 16.

110. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 222.

the rod of his mouth as an earthen vessel, just as the prophets have prophesied concerning the magnificence of his reign.¹¹¹

This hope appears in his commentary on Micah 4:1–4.¹¹² There he sees the church as God’s mountain (197), and states: “He speaks of God’s mountain being so exalted above the others that its glory and wonder will be known throughout the world, in order that God might be worshipped there” (191). “Micah proclaims how all the world will be brought to God at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This reunification has already begun, is taking place now, and will continue until the end of the world” (200). “Jesus Christ has been designated the Lord, not simply of one corner of the world, but of all nations” (206). “Jesus Christ will silence the world’s clamor and animosity, and, instead of mankind engaging in evil, they will change their manner of behavior, even caring enough to assist each other” (210). “Since our Lord Jesus Christ’s kingdom has hardly begun, it is necessary for it to be implemented little by little, until it achieves its full perfection” (213). These statements do not reflect eschatological pessimism; and his views were adopted by his Puritan and postmillennial successors. They had good reasons to see postmillennial optimism in Calvin.¹¹³

I previously mentioned the most important systematizer of English postmillennialism, Thomas Brightman (1562–1607). In addition to him, a growing and influential number of English Puritans and their heirs present postmillennial views well before Whitby, as several important historical studies demonstrate.¹¹⁴ We can list a great number of prominent Reformed writers from this era. Consider the following samples:

William Perkins (1558–1602)	Thomas Brooks (1608–1680)
William Gouge (1575–1653)	John Howe (1630–1705)

111. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:12.

112. Citations and page references are from: Calvin, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*.

113. Amillennialist hesitantly admits: “Calvin gave expression to some ideas that received greater emphasis in later Presbyterian and Puritan writers who were more evidently postmillennialist in outlook.” Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 222.

114. Toon, *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel*; Popkin, ed., *Millennialism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650–1800*; Ball, *Great Expectation*. See also: the previous references to historical works by Iain Murray, J. A. DeJong, James R. Payton, Greg L. Bahnsen, A. J. Gilsdorf.

Richard Sibbes (1577–1635)	John Guyse (1677–1761)
John Cotton (1585–1652)	James Renwick (1662–1688)
Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679)	Philip Spener (1635–1705)
George Gillespie (1613–1649)	Matthew Henry (1662–1714)
John Owen (1616–1683)	David Hartley (1705–1757)
Elnathan Parr (1577–1632)	Thomas Scott (1747–1821)
Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661)	

John Cotton's *The Churches Resurrection, or the Opening of the Fift and Sixt Verses of the 20th. Cha of the Revelation* [sic.], written in 1642, is quite influential in its day and shows obvious influence from Brightman.¹¹⁵

The Westminster Standards (1640s) set forth a robust optimism most compatible with postmillennialism. Christ demonstrates his kingship to his people by his “overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory” (LC 45). Indeed, “Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies” (SC 26). The evidence of his exaltation is made visible to His church when he does “gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies” (LC 54).

According to the Westminster Standards, the second petition of the Lord's Prayer beseeches God “that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called . . . [and] the fullness of the Gentiles brought in” (LC 191). This follows the first petition in which prayer is righteously made “that he would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonorable to him; and, by his over-ruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to his own glory” (LC 190).

115. Most of these references appear in Ball, *A Great Expectation*, 160–161. See also: Cotton, *The Churches Resurrection* (642). Goodwin, *Works* (1886), 12:70, 74, 77. Spener, *Pia Desideria* (d. 1705), 76–78. Guyse, *The Practical Expositor* (1761), v. 3. Doddridge, *The Family Expositor*, v. 6. Scott, *The Holy Bible* (1832), 3:964–66. Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, His Expectations* (1801), 2:380.

This strong optimism comes through most clearly in the Assembly's *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, where ministers were urged to pray for

the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles, the fall of Antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord; for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad from the tyranny of antichristian faction, and from the cruel oppressions and blasphemies of the Turk; for the blessings of God upon the reformed churches, especially upon the churches and kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland, now more strictly and religiously united in the Solemn National League and Covenant.

Congregationalism's Savoy Declaration of 1658 is a strong and unambiguous postmillennialist document, as even Reformed amillennialist Venema agrees.¹¹⁶ At 36:5 it states that "in the latter days, antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of His dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, [they] shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable, and glorious condition than they have enjoyed."¹¹⁷

After a lengthy and informative discussion of many names, premillennialist D. H. Kromminga concludes: "In actual fact there is quite a strain of Postmillennialism in Reformed theology from Cocceius [1603–1669] onward. . . . Reformed theology can therefore in view of these phenomena not well be said to have been uniformly amillenarian, as is rather frequently assumed."¹¹⁸ Venema concurs: "it is undoubtedly true that the Reformed tradition has witnessed the most significant expressions of postmillennialist thought."¹¹⁹ He relates that "postmillennialism was a dominant viewpoint in the influential Princeton tradition, represented by Archibald Alexander, J. A. Alexander, A. A. Hodge, Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield," as well as "many conservative Presbyterian theologians during this period, including Robert Louis Dabney, W. G. T. Shedd, and James Henley Thornwell," and "the Baptist theologian Augustus Strong and the Scotsman Patrick Fairbairn."¹²⁰ As

116. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:273.

117. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:723.

118. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 303.

119. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 222.

120. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 223.

Reformed premillennialist J. Barton Payne states, postmillennialism was “held by most 18th- and 19th- century Protestants.”¹²¹ (This very much contradicts Sung Wook Chung’s gravely mistaken view that “among theological scholars, the Reformed tradition has been almost unanimous in advocating amillennialism” and “a few Reformed theologians have advocated postmillennialism. Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) is a prominent example.” He even classifies Warfield as an amillennialist, though Warfield clearly calls himself a postmillennialist.¹²²)

Simply put: Daniel Whitby was *not* the “founder” of postmillennialism. Postmillennialism’s distinctive theme of historical victory for the gospel is hoary with age.

Representative Adherents to Postmillennialism

As in the preceding chapter, here I will summarily list some noteworthy adherents to postmillennialism.

In the ancient church a nascent postmillennial hope exists in Origen (AD 185–254), Eusebius (AD 260–340), Athanasius (AD 296–372), and Augustine (AD 354–430), to name a few leading advocates.

In the modern, post-Puritan church:

Daniel Whitby (1638–1726)	Robert L. Dabney (1820–1898)
Isaac Watts (1674–1748)	William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)
The Wesley brothers (1700s)	A. A. Hodge (1823–1886)
Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)	Augustus H. Strong (1836–1921)
William Carey (1761–1834)	H. C. G. Moule (1841–1920)
Robert Haldane (1764–1842)	B. B. Warfield (1851–1921)
Archibald Alexander (1772–1851)	O. T. Allis (1880–1973)
Hodge, A. A. (1823–86)	J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937)
Charles Hodge (1797–1878)	John Murray (1898–1975)
Albert Barnes (1798–1870)	Loraine Boettner (1903–1989)
David Brown (1803–1897)	J. Marcellus Kik (1903–1965)
Patrick Fairbairn (1805–1874)	Greg L. Bahnsen (1948–1995)
Richard C. Trench (1807–1886)	David Chilton (1951–1997)
J. A. Alexander (1809–1860)	Rousas J. Rushdoony (1916–2001)
J. H. Thornwell (1812–1862)	

121. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 596 n 24.

122. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 133.

In addition, many contemporary writers defend the viewpoint, such as:

Reuben Alvarado	Keith L. Mathison
Curtis Crenshaw	Iain Murray
John Jefferson Davis	Gary North
Gary DeMar	Stephen C. Perks
J. Ligon Duncan III	Willard Ramsey
John R. deWitt	Andrew Sandlin
Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.	Steve Schlissel
George Grant	Norman Shepherd
Grover E. Gunn	R. C. Sproul
Stephen J. Hayhow	Ray R. Sutton
Erroll Hulse	Kenneth G. Talbot
Douglas Kelly	Jack Van Deventer
Francis Nigel Lee	James West
Peter J. Leithart	Douglas Wilson
Donald Macleod	Colin Wright ¹²³

123. See: Donald Bloesch, *Essentials*, 2:189–204. J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah* (1847). O. T. Allis, “Foreword,” Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (1954). Greg Bahnsen, “The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism,” in *Victory in Jesus* (1977). Albert Barnes, *Isaiah* (1860). Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (1957). David Brown, *Christ’s Second* (1849). Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878). John Jefferson Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom* (1986). Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834). Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (1714). A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (1860). Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1871). Erroll Hulse, *The Restoration of Israel* (1968). Francis Nigel Lee, *Will Christ or Satan Rule the World?* (1977). Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (1971). J. Gresham Machen, in Ned Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (1954), 187, 245, 261. George C. Miladin, *Is This Really the End?* (1972). Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (1971). John Murray, *Romans* (1965) (Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 1027, speaks of Murray’s “postmillennial vision of the conversion of the entire world,” and later states that a “major contention of postmillennialism” is that “mankind of necessity must be brought eventually to a state of virtual moral perfection” [1036]) Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990). John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 8 (1850–1853). R. J. Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory* (1977). Steve Schlissel, *Hal Lindsey and the Restoration of the Jews* (1990). W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (1888). Norman Shepherd, in *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 4:822–823 (1975). Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (1907). J. H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (1871). Richard C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles and Parables of Our Lord* (1875), 88. B. B.

Conclusion

Systematization of the various theological loci naturally develops over time, engaging the gifts and minds of many Bible-based Christian thinkers. Indeed, eschatology is one of the loci that has undergone the most development in history. As I indicate earlier, eschatology is extremely deep and involved, intertwining itself with the very essence of Christianity itself. Because of this the antiquity of an eschatological *system*, as such, is not absolutely essential to its orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the eschatological factors in Scripture cannot have been without some apparent impact upon the nascent development of early Christendom's perception of history's flow. An eschatology lacking *any* historical rooting in antiquity is rightly suspect.

Much popular literature leaves the impression that postmillennial thought is a recent novelty. In this chapter I show that postmillennialism has ample historical precedent in the early centuries of the Christian church. Indeed, it has been the framework of some of the church's best-known thinkers. The crucial element of postmillennialism — the presence of a biblically informed, historically relevant, and ultimately optimistic temporal hope — is clearly present in antiquity.

Furthermore, the postmillennial position appears in more recent centuries among noted and devout defenders of the faith. Postmillennialism is not a fringe eschatology. It particularly influences the development of the Reformed faith, as the list above demonstrates. This is due to Reformed theology's strong conception of God's absolute sovereignty and the first-century coming of Christ's kingdom.

When we properly define postmillennialism, it expresses the glorious hope of all of Scripture. When we carefully read its advocates, we may better understand its antiquity and influence. The widespread confusion regarding postmillennialism's nature, origins, and advocates is lamentable. The modern church, sapped of the power of hope, largely through poor exegesis and a lack of an understanding of church history, is the weaker for it.

Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* (1970). R. C. Sproul, "A Journey Back in Time," *Tabletalk*, 23:1 (Jan. 1999): 6. Willard A. Ramsey, *Zion's Glad Morning* (Simpsonville, S.C.: Millennium III, 1990). Note: On the Puritans, see: Peter Toon, *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel* (1970). See: Bloesch, *Evangelical Essentials*, 2:197.

PART II

INTERPRETATION

5

THE REVELATION OF TRUTH

“So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; / It shall not return to Me empty, / Without accomplishing what I desire, / And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” (Isa 55:11)

As I note in chapter 1 (“The Significance of Biblical Eschatology”), an important element in the Christian philosophy of history is revelation. God reveals himself and his will for man in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. I will not provide an apologetic for the orthodox view of Scripture here — that would take us well beyond my focus.¹ Nevertheless, I must briefly declare the orthodox view of Scripture from which I operate as a postmillennialist.²

God’s Word is Inerrant

The sixty-six books of Scripture are personally and directly revealed by God to the human writers through the Holy Spirit’s superintending governance by inspiration (2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 1:20–21; cp. Gal 1:11–2:21; 1Th 2:13). As Calvin puts it the Scriptures have come to us “by the ministry of men from God’s very mouth.”³ Indeed, we discover in Scripture that God so carefully revealed his word to his prophets that it could be stated of the prophet: “I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Dt 18:18b⁴). Consequently, a constant

1. For this, see: Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, chs. 2–5. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chs. 4–5. And the classic studies: Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* and Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*.

2. Basically my view is that of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. See especially WCF 1.

3. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) 1:7:5.

4. Cf. Jer 1:9, 17; Jn 14:26; Ro 3:2; 1Co 2:13; 1Th 2:13. Although it is true that the ultimate reference of Dt 18:18 is to the Great Prophet, Jesus Christ, it is also true that this reference involves all the divinely commissioned prophets of Scripture, establishing and authorizing the prophetic line. See: Gentry, *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy*, ch. 1.

refrain of Scripture is, “Thus saith the Lord”: the expression occurs in some form 3800 times in the Old Testament.⁵

Being the personally revealed word of the Living and True God, the Scriptures are inerrant in their original autographa in anything they assert. This is as true in historical and scientific matters as in spiritual and ecclesiastical ones.⁶ In fact, “all of finite existence, natural and redemptive, functions in relation to one all-inclusive plan that is in the mind of God. Whatever insight man is to have into this pattern of the activity of God he must attain by looking at all his objects of research in the light of Scripture.”⁷ Christ dogmatically declares: “Thy word is truth” (Jn 17:17); consequently “the Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn 10:35b). God’s wisdom is infinite and unsearchable.⁸ His knowledge is neither limited nor imperfect (Job 37:16). He knows all things fully and exhaustively.⁹ His word is inerrant and will always be demonstrated as such in history.

Thus, the eschatological prophecies of Scripture, when properly interpreted, must absolutely come to pass in the way God intends. If the Bible teaches that anything is true and to be expected, then no matter how difficult for us to imagine, no matter how strongly arrayed against it are the historical forces of Satan, we must bow to the authority of Scripture. We must believe that “with God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26), even if we must endure mockers who point to long “delays” in eschatological matters (2Pe 3:3–16). No historical or philosophical argument counterpoised against Scriptural revelation regarding eschatological eventuation should prevail in the thought of the Christian. The fundamental framework of the Christian eschatology must be rooted firmly in the Bible if it is to be realistic and true.

The Scriptures stand as absolute authority over man, providing a sure record of supernaturally revealed, objective, propositional truth. We believe the Bible to be “the only defensible philosophical position,” as the self-attesting revelation of God.¹⁰ For instance, the New Testament

5. Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 5.

6. Bahnsen, “Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism,” in Youngblood, *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, 199–216.

7. Cornelius Van Til, *In Defense of the Faith*, as cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 209.

8. Job 11:7–8; 37:5, 14, 23; Isa 40:28; 55:10ff; Ro 11:33–36.

9. Ps 147:5; Pr 15:3; Ac 15:18; 1Jn 3:20.

10. Cornelius Van Til, as cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 150. See also 194–220.

apostles insist that men accept their authority.¹¹ The biblical commands compel obedience for the believer, despite and against the wisdom of man and the power of Satan. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds,” therefore we are obliged to “cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2Co 10:4–5). Indeed, Paul commands: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Ro 12:2). Consequently, “there is not a square inch of space where, nor a minute of time when, the believer in Christ can withdraw from the responsibility of being a soldier of the cross. . . . Satan must be driven from the field and Christ must rule.”¹²

God’s word is not only the *theoretical* foundation of the Christian worldview, but is a *practical* revelation of Truth, serving as a motivation to action for God’s people. It spiritually and intellectually equips the believer for every task in every realm of human endeavor, serving as a foundation stone for the Christian worldview (as I show in ch. 1). “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2Ti 3:16–17).¹³ Because of this the godly labor of the believer is “not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58).¹⁴ When the prophetic data of Scripture compel us to a particular historical hope and certain course of action, we are in error when we refuse them. We also stand in sinful unbelief when we timidly doubt them.

God’s Word is Powerful

The very word of God which maps out the plan of history is also the causative power insuring the success of that plan. We may see this from several angles.

11. 1Co 14:37; 2Co 11:3ff; 13:2–10; Gal 1:6–9; 1Th 1:5; 2:13; 2Th 2:13–15; 3:6–15; 2Ti 2:1ff; 3:13ff; Tit 1:9; 2Pe 1:12–2:3; 1Jn 2:21–24.

12. Van Til, *Toward a Reformed Apologetics*, cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 22 n 65.

13. See also Heb 13:21; 2Ti 2:21.

14. Cf. 1Co 10:13; 2Co 9:8; Php 4:13.

The Creative Word

The Bible opens with a strong and determinative statement regarding the absolute power of God's spoken word. The Universe exists solely because of the exercise of God's creative will, and is brought into being by his sovereign, successive divine fiats. God creates the Universe by his mere spoken word: "and God said" is a significant recurring element in the creation record.¹⁵ The creation record sets forth a creation *ex nihilo* in six literal days.¹⁶ Such is the causative power of God's word. The Universe is not a self-evolving, naturalistic phenomenon arising from impersonal forces and lacking meaning or purpose.

The relationship between God's creative word and his revelatory word is important to grasp. The Scriptures tie the two together. The clearest evidence of this is found in Psalm 33:4–6: "For the [revelatory] word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. By the [creative] word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth."

15. Ge 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29. See also later confirmation of this in Neh 9:6; Ps 33:6; Ac 17:24; Heb 11:3.

16. Each of the six days of creation is a literal twenty-four-hour day: (1) "Day" is qualified by "evening and morning" (Ge 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), which specifically limits the time-frame. (2) Scripture employs the very same word "day" on the fourth day to define a time period that is governed by the sun, which must be a regular day (Ge 1:14). (3) In the 119 instances of the Hebrew word "day" (*yom*) standing in conjunction with a numerical adjective (first, second, etc.) in the writings of Moses, it never means anything other than a literal day. Consistency would require that this structure would function in Genesis 1 (Ge 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). (4) Exodus 20:9–11 patterns man's work week after God's original work week, which suggests the literal nature of the creation week. (5) In Exodus 20:11 the plural for the "days" of creation is used. In the 702 instances of the plural "days" in the Old Testament, it never means anything other than literal days. (6) Had Moses meant that God created the earth in six ages, he could have employed the more suitable Hebrew term *olam*. For fuller discussion, see: Gentry, and Butler, *Yea, Hath God Said?* (2002). Kelly, *Creation and Change* (1997). Pipa, and Hall, eds, *Did God Create in Six Days?* (1999). Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 392–96. For a defense of Scripture from the scientific perspective, see the mass of publications by the Creation Research Society, El Cajon, California and Answers in Genesis, Hebron, Kentucky. For a thorough presentation of *creatio ex nihilo*, see Copan and Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing* (2004).

The Providential Word

God's word providentially upholds the Universe through the continued application of its inherent power. The God of Scripture is no deistic Creator; he intimately and personally involves himself in every aspect of his creation, actively maintaining and preserving it by his active word. The divine Christ is "upholding all things (*ta panta*) by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3; cf. Col 1:17; 2Pe 3:7). His word will never pass away (Mt 24:35).

God's sovereignty has a great bearing upon this matter. The Scripture teaches that the Triune God is in total and absolute control of every eventuation in every corner of the Universe, from the smallest atomic particle to the farthest flung galaxy. God's total, absolute, unchangeable control of all things is rooted in his predetermined plan from eternity past.¹⁷ God is not a finite being, limited to the confines of time, the succession of moments, and the competition of other forces. He is the Eternal Now, existing always in the present (Ex 3:14). "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own free will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established" (*WCF* 3:1).

God controls the Universe as a system and rules the "natural" phenomena on earth.¹⁸ "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col 1:17; cf. Isa 45:7a; Heb 1:3). For the Christian "natural law" is but a convenient phrase to explain the phenomena of the Universe in terms of their orderliness. We believe in "providentially directed regularities."¹⁹ Since the Universe is permeated by God's very presence (1Ki 7:17; Ps 139:7–12; Jer 23:23–24), the Christian worldview holds that we live in an ultimately personal Universe (Pr 15:3; Ac 17:28; Heb 4:13). On the Christian view the Universe does not operate under its own inherent power (naturally), but under the constant direction of the ever-

17. For more information, see the classic study: Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932). See also: Gentry, *A Biblical Defense of Predestination* (2008). Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (1961). Steele, et al., *The Five Points of Calvinism* (2004). White, *The Potter's Freedom* (2000). Sproul, *Chosen By God* (1994).

18. Nah 1:3–6; Isa 45:7b; Ps 29; 104:21; Job 36:32; 37:3; 28:23–27; 38:12–39:30; Am 4:7; Mt 5:45; 6:28–30; Ac 14:17.

19. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 78.

present God (supernaturally). What scientists call “natural law” is actually “divine providence,” as it appears in nature.

God governs the ebb and flow of history²⁰ and determines the purpose and the end of all things.²¹ He “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11b). The Universe and earth history exist for God’s glory and are controlled to that end. The Universe exists neither of itself nor for itself. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever” (Ro 11:36). God’s omnipotence and omniscience guarantee that the ultimate outcome of the sum total of all the historical and universal events will conform to his plan, despite man’s railings and Satan’s resistance (Ps 2:1–5; 59:8). God’s will cannot be thwarted for “our God is in the heavens; / He does whatever He pleases” (Ps 115:3). “No one can ward off His hand / Or say to Him, What hast Thou done?” (Da 4:35b).

God controls even the minute details of life.²² His plan is not just a vague sketch of history’s general course, nor a perceptive insight into future possibilities. Rather it is a detailed plan controlling its every phase. God marshals all parts of his plan in subservience to the whole. In terms of ultimate reality, neither chance nor accident nor luck exist. All things occur according to God’s plan, despite their random or fortuitous *appearance* from our perspective.

God’s sovereign control includes even the free acts of men.²³ Man has “free moral agency.” But he cannot do just anything by an act of his will; he is limited and can only act in terms of his nature. Man is not floating about in a vacuum with nothing to “push” against; he operates within God’s all-encompassing plan. He gets his “footing” up against God’s plan. God’s controlling man, however, is not “across the board,” as our control of another would have to be. Rather it is a control that cuts across planes: God above and man below. Such a control secures man true significance (he is no automaton), while guaranteeing God’s true sovereignty (all things issue forth under the direction of his wise counsel). This is not contradiction but mystery — mystery rooted in God’s transcendence.

20. Ezr 6:22; 7:6; Ps 115:2; 135:6; Pr 21:1; Isa 44:28; 54:16; 55:11; Jer 27:5; Da 2:21; 4:17, 35; Ecc 3:1–8, 11; Ro 8:28; 13:1, 4.

21. Ps 24:1; 33:11; Pr 16:4; Isa 43:7; 46:10; Rev 4:11.

22. 1Ki 22:28, 34; Job 1:21; 2:10; 14:5; Ps 37:23; 139:16; Pr 16:33; Ecc 7:14; Isa 46:10–11; Jer 10:23; La 3:37–38; Mt 6:26; 10:29, 30; Ac 17:24–26; Ro 8:28; Eph 1:11.

23. Ge 45:5–8; Dt 2:30; Ezr 7:6; Pr. 16:1; 19:21; Jn 19:11.

Since we are fallen, temporal, and finite creatures, we necessarily face mystery in the perfect, eternal, and infinite being of God.

God's control governs both the evil acts of free moral agents,²⁴ as well as their righteous acts.²⁵ The classic evidence of this is Peter's statement regarding the most evil act in history: "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Ac 4:27–28; cp. 2:23).

Though our holy and righteous God is not implicated in sin, nevertheless, He ordains it and controls it toward a good end.²⁶ God not only ordains all the events of history, he also ordains man's free moral agency and the secondary causes associated with all events. The individual agent is always responsible for his evil action. Nevertheless, his actions are always under God's all-controlling power. "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!" (Mk 14:21a).

The Prophetic Word

God's powerful, determinative word issues forth in prophecy. And prophecy is not mere prescience or a wise surmise, but is a constantly active, irresistibly causative power in history. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa 55:11; cf. Isa 46:10–11). That powerful word even slays his enemies.²⁷

The Restorative Word

Regarding the material of prophetic expectation, I will demonstrate in the course of this work that God's word is also *restorative*. We should note that upon Adam's Fall in Eden (whence sin enters the human race),

24. Ge 50:20; Ex 4:21; 9:12,16; Jos 11:20; Jdg 9:23; 1Sa 2:25; 16:14; 2Sa 17:14; 24:1, 10; 1Ki 12:11, 15; 22:20–23; Mt 21:42; Lk 22:22; Jn 12:39–40; 17:12; Ac 3:18; 4:27–28; 13:27–29; Ro 9:22; 11:8; 1Pe 2:8; 2Pe 2:12; Jude 4; Rev 17:17.

25. Jn 15:5, 16; 1Co 12:6; 15:10; Eph 1:12; 2:10; Php 1:6; 2:12, 13; Heb 13:21.

26. Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Problem of Evil."

27. 2Th 2:8; Rev 19:15; cf. Ps 2:9 (Rev 19:15); Isa 45:23; Jer 5:14; 23:29; Eze 20:47.

the Lord immediately speaks a restorative word of redemption. “And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Ge 3:14–15).²⁸ Hence the presence of Edenic terminology in many eschatological passages, as we shall see.²⁹

Conclusion

Thus, God’s word is creative, providential, prophetic, and restorative. History truly genuinely “his story.” God creates the world and man for his own glory (Ro 11:36; Rev 4:11).³⁰ The Scriptures teach that God controls history by the exercise of his almighty wisdom and power. In fact, the whole idea of *predictive prophecy* depends on this view of history, in that for any prophesied events to occur requires that all preceding and concurrently related events throughout the world and history must fall into place according to plan. Almost always (Christ and John Baptist being notable exceptions) the individual involved in the fulfillment of prophecy is *unaware* that his free action is fulfilling God’s prophecy.

Our sovereign God’s word is creatively constructive. That is, it brings reality into existence (Ge 1; Heb 11:3) and it directs all historical processes (Isa 46:10; 55:11). This two-fold reality of the creative and providential word links the authority of God’s word into human experience. The psalmist notes that the word of the Lord both sovereignly makes and providentially governs the heavens and the earth (Ps 33:6–11). He also notes that it is his creative and sovereign word that reveals to man righteousness and justice: “For the word of the Lord is upright; and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness

28. See fuller discussion of the *protoevangelium* in ch. 8 “Eschatology and Creation.”

29. See: Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, Part Two: “Paradise: The Pattern for Prophecy.”

30. See: Eph 3:21; Php 4:20; 1Ti 1:17; 2Ti 4:18; 1Pe 4:11; 5:11; 2Pe 3:18; Jude 25; Rev 1:6; 5:13; 7:12.

and justice” (Ps 33:4–5a). God’s word/command is the standard of right and wrong obligations, as it was in the garden of Eden.

Even Adam’s unfallen nature was not an ultimate moral standard, but a derivative one. As Cornelius Van Til teaches, Adam was receptively reconstructive of God’s word, rather than creatively constructive. He was to think God’s thoughts after him on the creaturely level. Even in his unfallen state, he knew that he was created to live by supernatural, positive revelation, not by autonomous self-direction. The method by which Adam knows good and evil is by obedience to God’s revelatory word.

Thus, as evangelical Christians we must hold firmly to the truthfulness of God’s word. We need to be like the first grade girl dealing with her unbelieving teacher: The little girl was in art period drawing a picture of Jonah being swallowed by a whale. Her teacher looked at the drawing and said: “Jonah could not have been swallowed by a whale and lived, it would have killed him.” The little girl insisted he was swallowed by a whale because the Bible said so. But the teacher gently kept informing the little girl of her error. In exasperation the little girl finally complained: “When I get to heaven I am going to ask Jonah if he was swallowed by a whale.” The teacher responded: “What if Jonah didn’t go to heaven?” The little girl quickly replied: “Well then you can ask him.”

6

THE COVENANTS OF REDEMPTION

“Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Eph 2:12)

In Scripture the covenant structures God’s relationship with man and exercises a dominant influence on the flow of redemptive history. It is, in fact, “one of the most important motifs in biblical theology.”¹ Indeed, biblical theology shows that “redemption and eschatology are co-eval throughout biblical history.”² We see this illustrated, for example, when the Lord Jesus Christ “specifically linked the Lord’s Supper with the eschatological perspective of the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:16, 18; cp. 1Co 11:26).³

Not only so, but as Michael Horton observes: “a biblical-theological understanding of covenant ties things together in systematic theology whose relations are often strained: ecclesiology (the context of the covenant), theology proper (the covenant maker), anthropology (the covenant partner), christology (the covenant mediator) soteriology (the covenant blessings), eschatology (the covenant’s consummation).”⁴ In light of all of this — and especially in that eschatology is “the covenant’s consummation” — the covenant concept exercises a tremendous bearing on eschatology.

Covenantal Scripture

Covenant Defined

We may define covenant as *a legal bond that establishes a favorable relation between parties based on certain specified terms and promises blessings*

1. NDBT 419.

2. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 325. See also: Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* (1978).

3. Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 965.

4. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology* (2002), 17.

for faithful adherence to those terms, while threatening curses for unfaithful departure from them.⁵

In a covenant the parties solemnly swear to maintain certain specified obligations outlined therein. Scripture notes regarding God's covenant with Abraham: "Since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Heb 6:13). As *legal obligations* covenant parties maintain favorable relations only by faithfully keeping their stipulated terms. Of the covenant set before Israel under Moses, we read: "I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity. . . . I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse" (Dt 34:15, 19). Obedience to covenantal demands brings blessings; disobedience brings cursings (cf. Dt 28:1ff; Lev 26:3ff). Thus, a covenant forms a *legal* bond that establishes and protects specified rights.⁶

Covenant and Scripture

The Bible is very much a covenant document, as even a cursory reading demonstrates. The biblical words for "covenant" appear often in Scripture. The Hebrew *berith* occurs 285 times in the Old Testament, while the Greek word *diatheke* appears thirty times in the New Testament.⁷ Thus, we might well state that "the Biblical category which does the greatest justice to the persistence of God's activity among his people is *the covenant relation*."⁸ Indeed, the covenant "is the primary way in

5. We find an important study of biblical covenants in Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (1980). See also: Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (2000).

6. In fact, the Hebrew word for "covenant" (*berith*) is probably from the Akkadian root *beritu*, which means "clasp or fetter," indicating a bond. Moshe Weinfeld points out the difficulty of ascertaining its etymology, but opts for this derivation as the better one. Weinfeld, "*berith*," in *TDNT*, 2:255. A common biblical representation of covenantal inauguration is "to cut" a covenant, indicating the self-maledictory oath and consequent binding obligation resultant therefrom (1Sa 11:1, 2; 20:16; 22:8; 1 Kgs 8:9; 2Ch 7:18; Ps 105:9; Hag 2:5). See also: *EDBT* 124.

7. Sometimes the Hebrew *berith* is translated either "confederacy" (Oba. 7) or "league" (Jos 9:6ff; 2Sa 3:12ff) In the King James Version New Testament the Greek word for "covenant" (*diatheke*) is sometimes rendered "covenant" and other times (poorly) "testament."

8. C. H. Dodd, cited by Richards and Schweitzer, *Biblical Authority for Today*, 201. This is not to say that "covenant" is the unifying principle of Scripture, or of Reformed theology. The Scripture is much too rich and complex to be organized

which the Bible portrays the relationship between God and his people.”⁹ Most Bible scholars hold that the covenant idea is a dominant biblical theme in Scripture.¹⁰

Mutually established covenants are common among the ancients, as we see from numerous examples both in Scripture and in ancient non-biblical texts.¹¹ By way of example, we might notice the covenants between Abraham and Abimelech (Ge 21:22–32), Isaac and Abimelech (Ge 26:26–31), Jacob and Laban (Ge 31:43–55), Joshua and the Gibeonites (Jos 9:3–15), and Solomon and Hiram (1Ki 5:12). Such mutually established covenants are similar to modern contracts and treaties, although with some important differences.¹² These human covenants are between roughly equal parties: man to man.

Also appearing in Scripture are the much more important sovereignly established divine covenants. The parties in these are decidedly unequal: the infinite-eternal, perfect God and finite-temporal, fallen man. History-structuring divine covenants of epochal significance include those established with Adam (Hos 6:7), Noah (Ge 6:18),¹³ Abraham (Ge 15:18),¹⁴ Israel (Ex 24:8), and David (Ps 89:3).¹⁵ Off in the future from the Old Testament perspective lay the glorious, final, consummative “new covenant” (Jer 31:31–34). These divine covenants are unique to the biblical record, for “outside the Old Testament we have no clear evidence of a treaty between a god and his people.”¹⁶

around one principle.

9. *DBI*, 176.

10. For example: *DBI* 176ff; *EDBT* 124–132. See also: Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1. Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 60ff. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (1962). Richardson and Schweitzer, *Biblical Authority for Today*. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (1980). Willem Van Gemeren, “Systems of Continuity,” in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 2. (For a helpful bibliography of historical treatments of covenant theology, see his footnote 1.) Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 139ff.

11. See Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (1963). Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1955). Hillers, *Covenant* (1969).

12. Covenant and contract cannot be equated. Contracts are not established by a self-maledictory oath under God. See North, *Sinai Strategy*, 65–70. See also: Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 127. Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 5ff.

13. The nature of that covenant is expanded in Ge 6:17–22; 8:20–22; 9:1–17.

14. See also: Ge 12:1–4; 17:1ff.

15. 2Sa 7; 23:5; 2Ch 6:14–17; 21:7; Ps 89:3–4; 132:11–18.

16. Clements, *Abraham and David*, 83.

I will deal with the significance of these covenants for Scripture in the section demonstrating the relationship of “Covenant and Redemption.”

Covenant and Creation

We must even understand the world’s creation in terms of covenant. The creation account portrays a covenantal transaction, even though it does not employ the word “covenant” (*berith*).¹⁷ I argue this on three important bases.

First, the “basic elements of a covenant are imbedded in the Genesis account,” even though the word is lacking.¹⁸ When God creates Adam he enters into a blessed relationship with him (Ge 1:26–27) that establishes a legal bond on the basis of specified terms (Ge 2:15–17). In that bond God promises life for obedience and death for disobedience (Ge 2:16–17; cf. 3:15–21). This forms the essence of a covenantal relation. Even Reformed premillennialist Sung Wook Chung agrees: “I believe that Genesis 1 and 2 should be read from a covenantal perspective.”¹⁹

Second, *later references* speak of the creation as a covenantal action.²⁰ In Jeremiah we read: “Thus saith the LORD: If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season” (Jer 33:20). “Thus saith the LORD: If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth” (Jer 33:25).

As Robertson carefully points out, in Jeremiah 33:25 the Hebrew structure of the verse parallels “ordinances (*huqot*) of heaven and earth” with the “covenant (*berith*) with day and night,”²¹ pointing back to the orderly creation ordained of God.²² This evidently harkens back to

17. See: Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 19–21. Van Gemenen, *The Progress of Redemption*, 60. EDBT 125. The word “covenant” is first used in Ge 6:18. We must not deem this an insuperable problem for covenant theology, despite anti-covenantal dispensationalists. One of the universally recognized covenants of Scripture, the Davidic Covenant, lacks the word “covenant” in the accounts of its establishment. See: 2Sa 7; 1Ch 17.

18. EDBT, 125.

19. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 135.

20. We should note that even the Davidic covenant is not called a “covenant” at its establishment (2Sa 23:5; Ps 89:3; Isa 55:3; Jer 33:21).

21. *Berith* and *huqoth* are paralleled elsewhere in Scripture: Lev 26:15; Jos 24:25; 1Ki 11:11; 2Ki 17:15; Ps 50:16; 105:10.

22. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 18–21. See also: EDBT 125.

Genesis 1:14a: “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night.”

Some might see this as referring to the Noahic Covenant mentioned in Genesis 8:22: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”²³ But in a passage pressing the same point elsewhere, Jeremiah employs the term “ordinance” (*huqoth*) to speak of the sun, moon, and stars as bearers of light (Jer 31:35), as does Genesis 1, but not Genesis 8. Even the reference to “stars” is lacking in Genesis 8, though appearing in Jeremiah 31:35.

Third, Hosea 6:7a employs “covenant” when referring to Adam’s creation. Speaking of Israel God declares: “they like Adam have transgressed the covenant.” Although the Hebrew term *’dam* may be translated either “Adam” (in particular) or “man” (in general), either would point back to the original covenant with Adam in Eden.²⁴ Yet the particular man “Adam” seems to be in view here for several reasons. (1) The significance of Adam’s sin more forcefully exposes Israel’s rebellion. Adam’s role as the great sinner is certainly familiar to the Jews (Ge 3), for “Adam and Eve receive extensive treatment in extrabiblical Jewish . . . sources.”²⁵ Job 31:33 serves as a parallel: “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom.” (2) If we adopt “man” as the proper translation in Hosea 6:7, the verse would be “altogether expressionless.”²⁶ How else could they have sinned than like men? (3) The reference (“they have transgressed”) is directed to Ephraim and Judah (Hos 6:4), not to the priests. Thus, the contrast is not one

23. Interestingly, Ge 6:18 applies the term “establishment” (Heb., *qum*) to the Noahic covenant in a sense meaning to “re-establish.” That being so, the Noahic covenant clearly harkens back to a formal covenant at creation in Genesis 1–2. See: Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 16–20.

24. For an historical study of the various interpretations of the passage, see: Warfield, “Hosea vi.7: Adam or Man?,” *Selected Shorter Writing*, 1:116–129. A. Cohen notes that Jewish commentators have generally taken the position that Adam’s sin in Eden is the historical reference here. See Cohen, *Twelve Prophets*, 23ff.

25. *DJBP*, 11. For example, see Josephus, *Ant.* 1:1:2, 3, 4; 1:2:1ff. Philo, *Alleg. Interp.* 1:29, 30; 2:4, 7, 9; *Cherubim* 1:1, 3; 2:12, 16; *Posterity* 3; 11; 25; *Confusion* 33; 2 *Enoch* 58, 218; *Jubilees* 3:1–7.

26. *K-D*, 4:594. See also: *EDBT*, 125.

between priests and ordinary men, but between “Ephraim and Judah” — and the historical Adam.

Certainly the Scriptures are pre-eminently a covenant document. God even employs covenant in creating the world.

Covenant and Redemption

We may trace Scripture’s unity through the unity of the covenants, which set forth the overarching Covenant of Grace. The heart of God’s “covenants of the promise” (*diathekon tes epaggelias*, Eph 2:12) is: “I will be your God and you will be My people.” This idea occurs many times in Scripture.²⁷ God establishes his redemptive covenants in order to secure a favorable relationship between him and his people.²⁸ By means of the covenant, God’s people are intimately related to the Lord of heaven and earth.²⁹ “The covenant of redemption and grace that governs the Bible begins with Abraham, and it is here that the main image patterns of the covenant become firmly established.”³⁰

Covenantal development is onion-like, layer upon layer: “Each successive covenant supplements its predecessors.”³¹ We may easily see this in comparing the structural and thematic continuity between the covenants.³² For instance, when preparing to establish the Mosaic

27. Ge 17:7; Ex 5:2; 6:7; 29:45; Lev 11:45; 26:12,45; Dt 4:20; 7:9; 29:13–15; 2Sa 7:24; Ps 105:9; Isa 43:6; Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Eze 11:20; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23; Hos 1:10; Zec 8:8; 13:9; 2Co 6:18; Rev 21:3, 7. God’s people are his “special treasure,” His “own possession,” “his people,” and the like, Ex 19:4, 5; Dt 4:20; 9:26, 29; 32:9; 1Ki 8:51, 53; 2Ki 11:17; 2Ch 23:16; Ps 28:9; 33:12; 78:71; 94:14; Isa 19:25.

28. This, of course, would not include the pre-Fall Creation Covenant.

29. We see redemption’s covenantal structure reflected in forensic terminology, such as “judgment/condemnation” (*krinein*), “justification” (*dikaio*), “imputation” (*logizomai*), “judgment seat” (*bema*), God as “judge” (*dikaiois*), judgment based on “law” (*nomos*), etc. In Ac 16:4 the *dogmata kekrimena* (“decrees having been decided upon”) is “court-terminology.” Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 268.

30. DBI, 177.

31. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 28. Earlier dispensationalists held that “the dispensation of promise was ended when Israel rashly accepted the law.” SRB, 20n. Rashly accepted? Though recanted by later dispensationalists, this bold statement well illustrates what is still a continuing tendency in dispensationalism to a strong discontinuity between the covenants. See: “95 Theses of Contention Against Dispensationalism” at www.againstdispensationalism.com.

32. In passing I will note only briefly that we could include the three initial covenants in the survey to follow, as well. All serve as foundations to God’s

covenant “God remembered his covenant with Abraham” (Ex 2:24).³³ Those living under the Davidic Covenant often refer to the Mosaic Covenant frequently,³⁴ as well as to the Abrahamic.³⁵ And, of course, the new covenant relationship to earlier covenants appears in the very formula of the new covenant: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31³⁶).

Interestingly, Ezekiel combines the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants in the chapters in which he deals with the new covenant:

And David my servant shall be king over them [Davidic]; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them [Mosaic]. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt [Abrahamic]; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children’s children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever [Davidic]. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them [New]; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. (Eze 37:24–26)

Willem Van Gemen notes that “the promises of these covenants were renewed and enlarged throughout the history of redemption, even when the external conditions of the covenant relationship changed. McComiskey concludes, ‘The elements guaranteed by the promise covenant undergo amplification and enrichment in their expression in the major administrative covenants.’”³⁷

redemptive purpose: The creation covenant establishes man as the image of God, whom God will redeem (Ge 1:26–28). The Adamic covenant accounts for both man’s sinfulness and redemption’s actual initiation that will overcome that sin (Ge 3:15). The Noahic covenant preserves the world so that God’s redemptive purpose might be realized (Ge 8:22).

33. A number of Scriptures speak of the Promised Land’s conquest under the Mosaic covenant in developing the Abrahamic: Ex 3:16, 7; 6:4–8; Ps 105:8–12, 42–45; 106:45.

34. 2Sa 7:6, 23; 1Ki 2:3ff.; Ps 77:20; 103:7; 105:26; Da 9:11, 13; Mic 6:4.

35. 1Ki 18:36; 2Ki 13:23; 1Ch 16:15–18; 29:18; 2Ch 20:7; 30:6; Neh 9:7; Ps 105:6, 9, 42; Isa 41:8; 51:2; Jer 33:26.

36. See also Eze 34:20ff, where the new covenant relates to the Davidic.

37. Van Gemen, *Progress of Redemption*, 454.

In the new covenant era itself we discover *continuity* with the preceding covenants. Romans 16:20 harkens back to the Adamic Covenant. Second Peter 3:5–7 draws a parallel with the Noahic Covenant. Romans 4:16 founds the new covenant on the Abrahamic. Romans 15:12 harkens back to the Davidic covenant. As mentioned above, Paul sums up the various Old Testament covenants as being “the covenants [plural] of the promise [singular]” (Eph 2:12). Both a basic unity as well as a progressive development undergirds God’s covenants. From his Reformed premillennial perspective, Chung approvingly cites Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest: “It is important to appreciate that Reformed covenant theology has definite merits in promoting ‘the unity of the covenant of grace, being essentially *the same from Genesis 3:15 through Revelation 22:21*.’ It also has strengths in affirming ‘a unity of soteriological purpose. Both Testaments set forth identical promises, the same spiritual life, and the same means of salvation, namely, faith in God’s promises.’”³⁸ Thus, when the new covenant comes in Christ’s ministry, we reach “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4; cp. Mk 1:15).³⁹ And these covenants concern redemption — a redemption, as we shall see, that shall overwhelm the world.⁴⁰

The major competitor to covenantal theology among evangelicals today is dispensationalism.⁴¹ Dispensationalism allows the historic, biblical covenants to play a large role in its theology.⁴² Yet dispensational

38. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 134. Emph. his.

39. “That the Covenant is a basic assumption throughout the New Testament is evident from such passages as: Lk 1:72; 22:20; Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 24:25–27; Jn 6:45; Ac 2:39; 3:25; Ro 11:27; 1Co 11:25; 2Co 3:6ff; Gal 3:14–17; Eph 2:12; Heb 7:22; 8:6–13; 9:1, 15–20; 10:16; 12:24; 13:20. The basic idea, nature, and purpose of the covenants made with Abraham, Israel, and David are carried over into the New Covenant and require no explicit repetition in the New Testament.” Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, 53n.

40. See ch. 9 “Eschatology and Anticipation” for the postmillennial significance of these covenants.

41. See ch. 3 “The Pessimistic Millennial Views” for a definition of dispensationalism.

42. The role of covenants in dispensationalism produces a strange anomaly in the system: it results in a pandemonium of history-structuring devices. History is divided by dispensations, while at the same time it is structured by covenants — *covenants that do not always coincide with the dispensations!* For instance, the Abrahamic Covenant is considered unconditional and everlasting, but the dispensation of promise (the Abrahamic era) is closed by the giving of the Law.

theology and covenantal theology are, in the final analysis, “irreconcilable.”⁴³ Indeed, “reformed covenant doctrine cannot be harmonized with premillenarianism”⁴⁴ because the dispensationalist’s “dispensations are not stages in the revelation of the covenant of grace, but are distinguishingly different administrations of God in directing the affairs of the world.”⁴⁵ Thus, the major difference between covenantal theology and dispensational theology is that covenantal theology traces a relentless forward moving, unified, and developmental redemptive progress, generally understood in Reformed theology as the Covenant of Grace. Dispensational theology, however, maintains two peoples of God serving two different historical purposes. It also moves forward rather fitfully, backing up in the final dispensation to a Jewish era exalting the old covenant people, rebuilding a physical temple, and re-instituting a sacrificial cultus in the millennium.⁴⁶

For better or for worse the very system name “dispensationalism” tends to throw the focus on the system’s discontinuous, compartmental view of history, despite dispensationalists’ protests.⁴⁷ This is because “a dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose. If one were describing a dispensation he would include other things, such as the ideas of distinctive revelation, testing, failure, and judgment.”⁴⁸ So, as noted in the preceding paragraph, dispensations “are

See: Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 202ff, 211.

43. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 87.

44. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 69.

45. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 17.

46. And this is only after leaping over the parenthetical Church Age, during which the “prophetic time clock” stops. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 150. In recognizing this debilitating, systemic problem, some dispensationalists are radically altering dispensationalism in trying to deal with it: *Progressive Dispensationalism*. See: Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (1988). Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (1993).

47. Of covenant theologians, Pentecost writes: “These theologians claimed that they alone had a system that unified the Scriptures into a consistent whole; any other, they insisted, destroyed the unity of the Bible.” Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 9.

48. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 28. This definition is really not true to the system and contradicts Ryrie’s assertions elsewhere. For dispensationalism posits *two* purposes in history: “The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to

not stages in the revelation of the covenant of grace, but are distinguishingly different administrations of God in directing the affairs of the world.”⁴⁹

This necessarily fragments biblical history. In fact, as one dispensationalist notes, “the more one moves in the continuity direction, the more covenantal he becomes; and the more he moves in the discontinuity direction, the more dispensational he becomes.”⁵⁰ Certainly then, *discontinuity in redemptive history* is a major effect of dispensationalism. Even historic premillennialists fault dispensationalism’s fragmentation of redemptive history and the Bible: “One cannot emphasize strongly enough that this [dispensational] hermeneutic is utterly foreign to the early church. . . . The fundamental conviction that binds patristic interpretation together [is that] the Bible is a unified book whose theme is Jesus Christ.”⁵¹ I will show later that this has a major bearing on the development of God’s redemptive purpose in history and thus on Scripture’s eschatology, when I compare the catastrophically introduced millennial kingdom of dispensationalism and the gradually developed kingdom of postmillennialism.⁵²

Although Scripture specifies and implies many covenants, God’s overarching redemptive purpose throws a special emphasis on a select few. These covenants include the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and Christ’s new covenant. Unfortunately, dispensationalism suggests a secular understanding of some divine covenants, rather than a redemptive one (e.g., the Creation, Adamic, and Noahic Covenants). I will prove this in a later chapter when I focus on the postmillennial outworking of redemption.⁵³

heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity” (Ryrie, 39, citing Chafer). It is remarkable that this statement allows the *religion of Judaism* (not just Israel the people) to have an equal role in history with the Christian religion — even in the future, post-Christian millennium! And even more remarkable is Ryrie’s expressed satisfaction following this statement: “This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive” (39)!

49. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 16.

50. Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, xii; see also 64. Feinberg is a dispensationalist.

51. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 119.

52. See Part Three, below.

53. See ch. 9: “Eschatology and Anticipation.”

Covenantal Obligation

Due to Scripture's covenantal emphasis, man's obligations are not fundamentally individualistic, but rather corporate. As we shall see in later chapters, this fits well with a postmillennial eschatology and its strong view of social responsibility.⁵⁴ Here I will briefly outline the case for covenantalism's societal obligations.

God purposefully creates man as an organic, unified race.⁵⁵ Whereas all mankind traces its origin back to Adam, including Eve herself (Ge 2:21–22; Ac 17:26), God creates animals *en masse* (Ge 1:20–25). He even creates angels *en masse* as non-procreative, disconnected individuals (Mt 22:30).

The human race's organic unity is vitally important to God's redemptive plan, as we see in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Adam is the *federal head* of all mankind, a *legal representative*. In him we are legally and judicially dead (Ro 5:12–19; 1Co 5:22). Christ is the federal head of all those “chosen out of” (*eklektos*) mankind. In him God declares us legally and judicially alive (Ro 5:15–19; 1Co 15:22). Christ becomes flesh in order that he might attach himself to the unified race and become its Redeemer (Php 2:5ff; Heb 2:14).⁵⁶

We may see the social implications of God's covenant in his establishing it with Abraham *and his seed* (Ge 12:1–4). Israel's organic connection appears in her portrayal as a vine (Ps 80:8–16; Isa 5:1–7). In addition, when God makes covenant with Israel in the wilderness it includes future generations (Dt 5:3).

Because of this God specifically promises covenant blessings and warns of covenant curses running in communities. Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 detail community curses and blessings that run from generation to generation and expansively cover the broader community. We see this covenantal factor also in Israel's history. For example, the whole nation suffers defeat in war due to Achan's grievous sin (Jos 7:1).

54. See North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990). Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory* (1977).

55. The development of the seed-line in history is a significant aspect of the biblical revelation, as the Scripture genealogies attest. See especially Mt 1 and Lk 3.

56. Angels experience no corporate guilt. But neither do they experience salvation (Heb 2:16).

They were learning corporate responsibility through this “lesson” from God. Outside of Israel God destroys pagans for their corporate evil.⁵⁷

Neither may we properly understand Christianity in terms of radical individualism. By God’s grace, we are in covenant with him as a community. We see this from a number of angles: (1) God grafts us into the *community* of his people as a branch into a tree (Ro 11:17–18). (2) God adopts us into the *commonwealth* of Israel so that we may partake of the covenants of “the promise” (singular, Eph 2:12–16). Thus, we are in the “household” of God (Eph 2:19–22) as stones in a building (1Pe 2:5). (3) God constitutes us as one, inter-related body (1Co 12:12–27). (4) We are part of one, connected vine (Jn 15:1–8). (5) Our blessings as members of the Christian community flow from our Head, Jesus Christ, through the body to us (Eph 1:20ff).

The common societal unit among men is the family. Family solidarity involves covenantal succession, as we see from the following:

- God establishes marriages the world’s first institution (Ge 1:26–28; 2:18–24; Mt 19:4) and as a permanent obligation among men (Ge 2:24; Mt 19:5, 6).
- For Adam to fulfill his dominion mandate requires family procreation and solidarity (Ge 1:28 3:16; 4:1).
- The Bible clearly illustrates family solidarity in God’s sparing the *families* of righteous men during judgments (e.g., Noah, Abraham, and Lot⁵⁸).
- Due to this covenant, responsibilities center around the family: God expects diligent child training (Dt. 6:4ff; Ps 78:1ff; Proverbs, *passim*). His law protects the family (Pr 13:22; 19:14; 1Ti 5:8). Three of the Ten Commandments specifically guard the family (Ex 20:12, 14, 17), while the others easily relate to the family.
- The Scripture declares families to be an heritage from the Lord.⁵⁹ Fruitfulness is a blessing, whereas barrenness is lamented.⁶⁰

57. Jos 2:10; 6:21; Ex 20:16–18; Jos 8:1, 2, 24–29; 10:29–43; 1Sa 15:3. Cf. Lev 18:24–27. See: Gentry, *God’s Law in the Modern World*, ch. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Part 7.

58. Ge 6:8, 9, 18; 7:1, 7; 12:1–3; 17:1, 2, 7; 19:12–16.

59. Ps 127; 128; Ge 33:5; 48:9; Isa 8:18.

60. Ge 25:41; Ex 23:26; Dt 7:14; Ps 113:9.

- God's blessings run in family generations, as we see in the cases of Noah, Japheth, Abraham, Rahab, and covenant people in general.⁶¹ By the same token, God's curses also run in family generations.⁶²

Because of God's covenantal love, he graciously sanctifies the offspring of the covenant faithful (1Co 7:14; Ro 14:17). In the New Testament he frames his blessings in terms including family generations, rather than terms excluding family generations (Ac 2:38, 39; 16:31; 11:14).⁶³

In all of this we learn something of the Christian faith's wider obligations. "We should always bear in mind that there is a collective responsibility, and that there are always sufficient reasons why God should visit cities, districts or nations with dire calamities."⁶⁴ In the soil of covenantal corporate responsibility, postmillennial eschatology takes root then grows under the life-giving light of God's Word.

Objective Blessedness

The covenantal foundation of eschatological hope encourages our anticipating God's historical blessings in time and on earth.⁶⁵ The biblical worldview concerns itself with the material world, the here and now. We see Christianity's interest in the material here and now in God's creating the earth and man's body as material entities, and all "very good,"⁶⁶ in Christ's coming in the flesh to redeem us,⁶⁷ in his Word directing us for living in the present, material world,⁶⁸ and in God's leaving us on earth for our fleshly sojourn and not removing us once we are redeemed.⁶⁹ Due to these four observations, Christians have a genuine concern with their objective environment. And as we shall see, this comports well with the postmillennial outlook for history.

61. Ge 9:9; 9:27; 17:2–7; Jos 2:12–14; Ps 103:17,18; 105:8; 115:13, 14; 37:25, 26; Pr 3:33.

62. Ex 20:5; 34:6, 7; Dt 5:9. Note: Ge 9:24–25; Hos 9:11–17; Ps 109:1, 2, 9, 10; Pr 3:33.

63. See: Gentry, *Nourishment from the Word*, ch. 2 "Infant Baptism."

64. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 260.

65. See: North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*.

66. Ge 1:1–31; 2:7.

67. Ro 1:3; 9:5; 1Jn 4:1–3.

68. Ro 12:1–2; Eph 5:15–17; 2Ti 3:16–17.

69. Jn 17:15; Job 14:5; 2Co 5:9–10.

Furthermore, eventually all men will enter the spiritual world, the eternal realm (either heaven or hell).⁷⁰ But again, prior to our entering the eternal state, all men live before God in the material world,⁷¹ which he creates for His own glory and as our place of habitation.⁷² We may, therefore, expect his covenant sanctions (blessings for the righteous; curses for the unrighteous) in history.

In Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 we see the *objectivity* of covenantal blessing, which undergirds the postmillennial eschatology. When God's covenant people are faithful to his Law-word, he will bless them in all areas of life.⁷³ When they fail him, his curses will pursue them to overtake them (Dt 28:15–68; Lev 26:21–39).

A number of biblical references allude to God's objective blessings. Among these blessings are reduced disease,⁷⁴ abundant food,⁷⁵ lengthened life spans,⁷⁶ fruitful offspring,⁷⁷ economic prosperity,⁷⁸ cultural stability, and social peace.⁷⁹ In fact, such passages provide the biblical basis for historical progress: not just linear movement, but upwardly linear progress.

We must keep life's material blessings in perspective. Nevertheless, Christ promises them for his people: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33). He even promises His people that if they leave all for him, they will receive many times more in this life: "Then Peter said, 'See, we have left all and followed You.' So he said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children,

70. 2Co 5:8; Php 1:23; Lk 16:22–23. See ch. 12 "Eschatology and Consummation."

71. 2Ch 16:9; Ps 33:13–15; Pr 15:3; Ac 17:28; Heb 4:13. No U. S. Supreme Court "right-to-privacy" decision can alter this truth.

72. Ps 24:1; 115:16; Pr 15:3; Da 5:23; Ac 25:24–31; Rev 4:11.

73. Dt 28:1–14; Lev 26:3–20, 40–46. Cf. Ps 37:25; 112:1–3; Pr 13:22.

74. Ex 15:26; 23:25; Dt 7:15; Ps 103:3.

75. See Ex 23:24–25; Dt 8:7–9; Ps 67:6; Isa 30:23–24; 65:21–23; Jer 31:12; Eze 34:26–27; 36:29–38; Am 9:13; Zec 8:12ff.

76. Dt 4:40; 5:33; 32:46, 47; Isa 65:20; Zec 8:4.

77. Dt 5:29; 7:13.

78. Dt 7:12–16; 8:18; 28:1–15; Ps 112:3; Pr 13:22. See: Gary North, "An Outline of Biblical Economic Thought," in North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, ch. 18.

79. Jos 1:5; Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3; Isa 11:6–9.

for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life” (Lk 18:28–30).

Conclusion

The various divine covenants are “the covenants of the promise” (Eph 2:12). The covenant concept runs throughout Scripture. It frames God’s creational process, structures his dealings with man, and, most importantly for this book’s thesis, *insures his divine program’s success in history*. This program is not about the defeat of Christ’s redemptive work in history. The gospel of salvation, the building of His church, and the establishment of his comprehensive, worldwide kingdom lead to Christendom and the victory of the faith over all opposition.⁸⁰

Covenantal theology’s decline in the late nineteenth century leads to the decline of postmillennialism and to the decline of Christian influence in society. *Postmillennialism is fundamentally covenantal, presenting a full-orbed Christianity in its pristine authority and power*. The specific covenants of the Old and New Testaments support the postmillennial position, as I will show in greater detail as I continue this study.

80. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (2009).

7

THE HERMENEUTIC OF SCRIPTURE

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. (2Pe1:20)

An issue receiving much attention in the eschatological debate among evangelicals is *hermeneutics*: the principles governing biblical interpretation. How are we to approach the biblical prophecies in order to gain a proper understanding of their meaning and significance? For instance, what are the prophets' historical expectations regarding eschatological eventuation? Although I will not go deeply into hermeneutic discussion,¹ certain aspects of the debate must be highlighted. Several full-length books on the market more than adequately set forth the principles of biblical interpretation.²

I would note, however, that postmillennialism is committed to the position that the Lord Jesus Christ and his inspired apostles should be our guide in interpreting God's Old Testament revelation. We would agree with amillennial theologian Richard B. Gaffin, who expresses the matter well:

Is the New Testament to be allowed to interpret the Old as the best, most reliable interpretive tradition in the history of the church (and certainly the Reformed tradition) has always insisted? Does the New Testament as a *whole* — as the God-breathed record of the end point of the history of special revelation — provide the *controlling* vantage point for properly understanding the entire Old Testament, including its prophecies?³

1. For the most part my hermeneutic will be *illustrated* below in the actual exposition of key passages in Part III: Exposition.

2. See: Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* (1987). Kaiser and Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (2007). Milton Terry's classic on the history of interpretation is also helpful: *Biblical Hermeneutics* (2001; rep. 1898). For helpful critiques of the dispensational method see: Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1991), Part 2; Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (1987).

3. Gaffin, in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*, 216–27.

This is very much different from the dispensationalist approach to the Old Testament which “requires only its own grammatical-historical interpretation, regardless of how a New Testament writer uses it.”⁴ Dispensationalists claim by this statement to have a better interpretation of the Old Testament than do Christ and the Apostles! In fact, even historic premillennialists disagree with dispensationalism on this point, aligning themselves with historic Christian orthodoxy in biblical interpretation: Premillennialist Sung Wook Chung argues that “one cannot emphasize strongly enough that this [dispensational] hermeneutic is utterly foreign to the early church. . . . The fundamental conviction that binds patristic interpretation together [is that] the Bible is a unified book whose theme is Jesus Christ.”⁵

Three particularly important issues for the eschatological debate that I will consider are: literalism, preterism, and Israel.

Literalism and Prophecy

Especially since the rise to prominence of dispensationalism in the late nineteenth century, interpretive principles have become a major focus of eschatological discussion.⁶ One of the classic dispensationalist’s leading arguments is the claim to consistent interpretive literalism. Charles C. Ryrie sets forth interpretive literalism as a *sine qua non* of this leading branch of dispensationalism: “Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. . . . The dispensationalist claims to use the normal principle of interpretation *consistently* in *all* his study of the Bible.”⁷ Thomas D. Ice declares: “Futurism . . . is the only approach that can consistently apply literal interpretation.”⁸ Earl Radmacher states: “It is so utterly fundamental to understand that the foundational premise of dispensationalism is not theological but hermeneutical.”⁹ Paul N. Benware calls it a “face value” form of interpretation.¹⁰

4. *PEBP*, 140.

5. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 119.

6. For the evolution of literalism in fundamentalism, see: Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980).

7. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 80, 82.

8. Thomas Ice in *PSB*, 1312.

9. Earl D. Radmacher, “The Current Status of Dispensationalism and Its Eschatology,” in Kantzer and Gundry, *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, 166.

10. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 20.

Since Ryrie is perhaps the most prominent and respected classical dispensationalist, a few examples of literalism from his writings serve as illustrations of the classic dispensational approach to hermeneutics. For instance, he chides Mickelsen for suggesting that the ancient weapons and chariots of Ezekiel 39 (which both Ryrie and Mickelsen deem to be in the future) are symbolic equivalents of modern weaponry: "If specific details are not interpreted literally when given as specific details, then there can be no end to the variety of the meanings of a text."¹¹ Here the principle of consistent literalism is so vigorously held that we are left with what non-dispensational evangelicals consider an absurdity, despite attempts at formal explanations.¹²

But Ryrie is not alone in this bizarre line of reasoning. Robert L. Thomas even goes so far as to place Jesus and the armies of heaven on literal horses at his second advent from out of heaven — and suggests a special creative act for explaining horses in heaven (which would apparently also cover their ability during the second advent from heaven to survive the sub-zero, high altitude temperatures, rarified air, and then scorching friction upon entering the earth's atmosphere). Of Revelation 19:14 he argues: "These are real armies and horses, not imaginary ones The origin of the horses need not create a problem as they conceivably are a special creation of 'The Word of God' for the purposes of this occasion."¹³

Elsewhere, Ryrie writes: "Jerusalem will be exalted (Zec 14:10), and there is no reason to doubt but that this will be literal and that the city by means of certain physical changes shall be exalted above the surrounding hills!"¹⁴ John Walvoord concurs: "topological changes will take place which apparently will elevate Jerusalem so that waters flowing from Jerusalem will go half to the eastern sea, or the Sea of Galilee, and half to the western sea, or the Mediterranean."¹⁵ Their literalism on this issue even appears in the most symbolic book in Scripture. Of Revelation 16:20

11. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 89–90. Elsewhere he suggests that horses will play a role in Armageddon because of Ezekiel 38:4, 15. Ryrie, *The Living End* (1976), 54. See also Charles H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," in *BKC* 1:1301.

12. "With the worldwide catastrophes evident during the first three and one-half years of Daniel's 70th Week (Mt 24:6–8; Rev 6), a reversion to more primitive methods of warfare might become possible." *BKC* 1:1301.

13. Thomas, *Revelation* 8-22, 387–88.

14. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 148.

15. Walvoord, *PKH* 333.

Thomas writes: “These words speak of literal topographical changes, not figuratively of political turmoil. A literal understanding is no obstacle.”¹⁶

But consider the physical problems associated with such an elevation of Jerusalem: Were Jerusalem raised up to be the highest mountain, it would involve such tectonic upheaval that it would absolutely destroy the city. Earthquakes are destructive natural phenomena, but this up-thrusting is even worse. It involves full-scale mountain building, which would absolutely destroy an already built city. Furthermore, if it were raised above the highest mountains, it would be uninhabitable for it would be higher than Mt. Everest. This would give it an intolerably freezing climate. Surely this prophecy is speaking symbolically of the exaltation and dominance of God’s kingdom, not its physical elevation.

What is more, Paul Lee Tan inadvertently exposes literalism’s absurdity when he argues that the New Jerusalem is a city that “will be 1,323 miles in all directions” that could hold a staggering 72 billion inhabitants.”¹⁷ The Space Shuttle flies around 200 miles high; this city extends over 1000 miles higher! The earth’s diameter is about 8000 miles at the equator; the city will extend out a full sixteen percent further in one small 1300 mile square spot on the earth’s 196,935,000 square mile surface. Thomas explains that its size “is no more unimaginable than a pearl large enough to serve as a city-gate.”¹⁸ His explanation only complicates the problem: I cannot imagine an oyster large enough to produce such a pearl. John F. Walvoord explains that “the city as such would be far too large to place on the millennial earth, but in the new earth there will be plenty of room.”¹⁹

In the final analysis, though, the New Testament applies this imagery non-literally. For instance, Luke applies Isaiah 40:4 to John Baptist’s ministry: “Every ravine shall be filled up, / And every mountain and hill shall be brought low” (Lk 3:5a). Unless the dispensationalist argues that in the third decade of the first century John flattened all mountains on the earth, their literalistic approach to mountain building and mountain destroying passages fails.

16. Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 277. See also 568 and *Revelation* 1–7, 455.

17. Paul Lee Tan, “The New Jerusalem,” in LaHaye, *PSB*, 829. Hopefully it will be built on a four inch concrete slab to keep it from sinking in the ground.

18. Thomas, *Revelation*: 8–22, 467.

19. Walvoord, *PKH*, 638.

Can anyone accept such views of Jerusalem as reasonable, especially since we may easily understand these elements as figures of exaltation and influence?

Ryrie gives three arguments for the literalistic hermeneutic.²⁰

1. "Philosophically, the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation. . . . If God be the originator of language and if the chief purpose of originating it was to convey His message to man, then it must follow that He, being all-wise and all-loving, originated sufficient language to convey all that was in His heart to tell man. Furthermore, it must also follow that He would use language and expect man to use it in its literal, normal, and plain sense."²¹
2. "Prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ — His birth, His rearing, His ministry, His death, His resurrection — were all fulfilled literally. There is no non-literal fulfillment of these prophecies in the New Testament."²²
3. "If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost."

Despite the dispensationalists' vigorous assertions, "consistent literalism" is an impossible ideal, as even progressive dispensationalists admit: "contemporary dispensationalists are pointing the direction in which the discussion needs to progress" (see discussion below).²³ To make matters worse, it gives rise to absurd conclusions. Vos well states: "Chiliasm is a daring literalizing and concretizing of the substance of ancient revelation. Due credit should be given for the naive type of faith such a mentality involves." But it gives rise to "the resulting evil" that "lies largely in the deficit thus caused in the appraisal of other eschatological processes far overshadowing in importance, this one

20. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 81–85.

21. As Benware expresses it: "Literal interpretation assumes that, since God wants His revelation understood by people, He based His revelatory communication on the normal rules of human communication." *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 19.

22. See also: Ice in *PSB*, 1312. Walvoord in Zuck, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, 19–20. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 41. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 10. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 126–127.

23. Blasing, "Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists," in Zuck, ed., *Vital Prophetic*, 176.

features, at least to the normally-constituted Christian mind. Its tendency towards eclipsing views more important than itself has done much harm.”²⁴

Consider the following problems for the Ryrie-style “consistent” literalist.

The Philosophy of Language Argument

The immediately striking point about Ryrie’s first proof is that it is preconceived. This is quite evident in Ryrie’s statement that “principles of interpretation are basic and ought to be established before attempting to interpret the Word.”²⁵ Does not his approach to language function disallow the possibility of a spiritual interpretation *at the very outset*? Why must we begin with the literalist assumption? May not so rich a work as the Bible, dedicated to such a lofty and spiritual theme (the infinite God’s redemption of sinful man), written by many authors over 1,500 years, allow a variety of literary approaches?

Even dispensationalists admit that biblical revelation often employs figures of speech. But this brings up the very controversy before us: *when* is prophecy to be interpreted literally, and when figuratively? Vern Poythress rightly suspects that dispensationalists “may have conveniently arranged their decision about what is figurative *after* their basic system is in place telling them what can and what cannot be fitted into the system. The decisions as to what is figurative and what is not figurative may be a product of the system as a whole rather than the inductive basis of it.”²⁶ Ryrie’s statement appears to support this conclusion: “The understanding of God’s differing economies is *essential* to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.”²⁷ In other words, you must have a dispensational framework (“understanding God’s differ-ing economies”) in order to do “proper interpretation”!²⁸

24. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 227.

25. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 79.

26. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 53. For a discussion between Poythress and two leading dispensationalists over Poythress’ arguments, see: *Grace Theological Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1989): 123–160.

27. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 29.

28. This is despite Ryrie’s complaint: “Thus the nondispensationalist is not a consistent literalist by his own admission, but has to introduce another hermeneutical principle (the ‘theological’ method) in order to have a hermeneutical basis for the system he holds.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 84.

Feinberg agrees: “Every prophecy is a part of a wonderful scheme of revelation; for the true significance of any prophecy, the whole prophetic scheme must be kept in mind and the interrelationship between the parts in the plan as well.”²⁹

For dispensationalists to presume *consistent* literalism is unreasonable. “To assert, without express authority, that prophecy must always and exclusively be one or the other, is as foolish as it would be to assert the same thing of the whole conversation of an individual throughout his lifetime, or of human speech in general.”³⁰

In addition, Ryrie’s first argument commits the logical fallacy of *petitio principii* (begging the question). He argues that because God created language, “the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation” on the basis that “it must . . . follow that He would use language and expect man to use it in its literal, normal, and plain sense.”³¹ “Language was given by God for the purpose of communication with humankind. Therefore, God would give His linguistic communication in the most understandable way — literally and normally.”³² This is not very convincing, given that he often communicates in Scripture through poetry, metaphor, parable, and other literary means.³³

Finally, as dispensational theologians frame the matter in the debate, they set out their hermeneutic practice as immune to criticism by its excluding countervailing evidence. As Vern S. Poythress demonstrates, dispensationalists apply prophecies in a non-literal way by calling them

29. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 40.

30. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:30.

31. A problem of which dispensationalists seem to be unaware is the question as to *whom* a prophecy is “plain.” The dispensational practice is to try to make it plain to the 20th-century reader. What about the ancient audience to whom it was written?

32. Ryrie, “Dispensationalism,” in *DPT*, 94.

33. Pentecost follows suit: “Inasmuch as God gave the Word of God as a revelation to men, it would be expected that His revelation would be given in such exact and specific terms that His thoughts would be accurately conveyed and understood when interpreted according to the laws of grammar and speech. Such presumptive evidence favors the literal interpretation, for an allegorical method of interpretation would cloud the meaning of the message delivered by God to men.” Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 10.

“applications”³⁴ or “partial fulfillments,”³⁵ or by classifying them as spiritual level fulfillments,³⁶ or arguing that sometimes original prophecies contained figures themselves. Poythress queries, how can we know this in advance?³⁷ His point is well-taken.

The First-Coming Fulfillment Argument

This literalism argument is one of the most frequently employed and one of the most compelling to the layman. But it also suffers from question-begging. “The Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ’s birth and rearing, ministry, death, and resurrection were all fulfilled literally.”³⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost holds that this is “one of the strongest evidences for the literal method.” He vigorously asserts: “When the Old Testament is used in the New it is used only in a literal sense.” “No prophecy which has been completely fulfilled has been fulfilled any way but literally.”³⁹ Walvoord argues that “the literal fulfillment of promises pertaining to the first coming is a foreshadowing of the literal fulfillment of promises pertaining to the second coming.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere he claims: “Because approximately half of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled in a literal way, it gives a proper intellectual basis for assuming that prophecy yet to be fulfilled will likewise have a literal fulfillment.

Problems for this argument. The New Testament does not support this bold claim. To say that all prophecies transpiring in the New Testament are fulfilled literally requires that one’s system *already be in place*. The interpretation of a passage is grounded in the expositor’s original pre-supposition. Literalism *definitionally* writes off all non-literal fulfillments. For instance, it ignores Old Testament kingdom prophecies fulfilled in the *ministry of Christ*, though not as a literalistic, political conception (Mt

34. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 80.

35. For example, Psa. 69:25 in Ac 1:20. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 51.

36. For example, the church’s participation in the new covenant. Walvoord, *PKH*, 502–503.

37. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 53–55.

38. Ryrie, “Dispensationalism,” in *DPT*, 94.

39. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 10–11. See also: House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 321–323.

40. Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy*, 3:61.

12:28; Lk 17:20–21).⁴¹ These prophecies are clearly fulfilled in the first century, for the prophecies of the Spirit's outpouring, which is associated with them, comes to pass (Ac 2).⁴² Part III of this book will demonstrate this.

Even apart from the debate regarding Christ's kingdom, the dispensationalist argument is unfounded. For instance, although Matthew often interprets Old Testament prophecies literally, *he does not always do so*. Crenshaw and Gunn carefully demonstrate that “out of 97 OT prophecies only 34 were directly or literally fulfilled, which is only 35.05 percent.”⁴³ They show that the New Testament presents many examples of non-literal fulfillment. By way of example, Matthew employs typological fulfillment when he states: God's calling Israel up out of Egypt (Hos 11:1) was fulfilled when the young Jesus returned from his flight to Egypt (Mt 2:15). He also presents us with analogical fulfillment, as when Bethlehem's weeping for its children (Mt 2:18) fulfills Rachel's weeping for her children (Jer 31:15).

In the New Testament *antitypes* fulfill Old Testament *types*. For instance, *historical Jerusalem* is a type of its antitype, *the heavenly city*. Paul sets the new covenant over against the old covenant, and the heavenly Jerusalem over against the earthly Jerusalem in teaching that *Christianity represents the heavenly Jerusalem*: “For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal 4:25–26; cf. 22–31). The writer of Hebrews does the same, when he states that new covenant Christian converts (Heb 12:24) from old covenant Judaism are now come “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22–23). John sees the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to earth in the establishment of Christianity (Rev 21:1–2).⁴⁴ This

41. This whole matter will receive careful exposition in ch. 10 “Realization of Prophecy.”

42. See Isa 32:14–17; Eze 36:25–27; Joel 2:28ff. Cf. Jn 7:39; 16:12ff.

43. Crenshaw and Gunn, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, 22. See their helpful chart on pages 14–22. For an excellent analysis of the matter, see: Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*.

44. For a brief statement regarding the New Jerusalem/church connection, see ch. 16: “Eschatological Apocalypse.” It seems clear from the time statements in

was the heavenly city that Abraham ultimately sought beyond the temporal (and typical) Promised Land (Heb 11:10, 16).

Premillennialist LaRondelle insightfully observes: “In dispensationalism we face the fact that the hermeneutic of literalism accepts Christian typology for some selected historical parts of the Old Testament. But it suddenly rejects each typological application of God’s covenant with Israel to Christ’s new covenant with His Church. This seems to be an arbitrary, speculative use of typology with the Old Testament.”⁴⁵ This is a telling observation. Poythress provides a helpful critique of dispensationalism’s use of typology.⁴⁶

Problems in Acts. In Acts 2 we find a classic and eschatologically relevant spiritual fulfillment of the Old Testament in the apostolic era.⁴⁷ Peter interprets the Davidic kingdom prophecies in general (Ac 2:30) and Psalms 16:8–11 (Ac 2:25–28) and 110:1 (Ac 2:34–35) specifically as being fulfilled in Christ’s ascension and session:

Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. (Ac 2:30–33)⁴⁸

Revelation following the New Jerusalem imagery that this must come to pass not long after John wrote (Rev 22:6, 7, 10). See my chapter in Pate, *Four Views of Revelation* (1997) and ch. 5 in my *The Book of Revelation Made Easy*.

45. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 48.

46. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 111–17. One of my Grace Theological Seminary professors, Dr. Charles Smith (a dispensationalist), once told us in a theology class that while a student at Dallas Theological Seminary he hung a sign on the door of one classroom stating: “Come to typing class and see how many types you can word per minute.”

47. Later in this chapter, I will treat another important passage: Ac 15:15–17.

48. On a personal note, this passage led me out of dispensationalism, when I was a student at Grace Theological Seminary.

This is the standard exposition of non-premillennial covenant theologians, as well as non-dispensationalist premillennialists and progressive dispensationalists.⁴⁹

Later, Paul preaches that Christ's resurrection fulfills David's promise to Israel: "And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David'" (Ac 13:32–34).

Problems from following Rabbinic exegesis. Dispensationalists point to early rabbinic exegetical method as historical confirmation of their own method. Mal Couch writes:

The rabbis as well taught that these two expressions, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, refer not to some spiritualized kingdom but to the literal earthly reign of David's Son. In fact it may be argued that, in light of how the Jews understood these two phrases, they only mean in the Gospels the messianic rule on earth. The earlier Dead Sea Scrolls, too, continually refer to the coming messianic kingdom in which the Messiah's rule encompasses both heaven and earth.⁵⁰

He observes further: "Overall, the Jewish rabbis are to be commended for being scrupulous with the very letters of Scripture."⁵¹ Pentecost emphasizes Judaic literalism as one line of defense for dispensationalism's method: "The prevailing method of interpretation among the Jews at the time of Christ was certainly the literal method of interpretation."⁵² Couch agrees: "Jewish orthodoxy generally interpreted the Old Testament literally" — even pointing to the Pharisees as an example.⁵³

Interestingly — or perhaps I should say, "tragically" — "it was their expectations of a literal earthly kingdom and political ruler that caused many Jews to fail to recognize Jesus as their Messiah at his first

49. See: Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 220–21. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 344.

50. Couch in *DPT* 266.

51. Couch in *DPT*, 153.

52. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 17.

53. Couch in *PEBP*, 148.

coming.”⁵⁴ Postmillennialist Boettner makes this argument very forcefully.⁵⁵ We find an interesting analysis of official Judaism’s treatment of Christ in Peter Schafer’s *Jesus in the Talmud* (2007).

The Objectivity Argument

The charge of “encroaching liberalism.” Because of the alleged “objectivity” factor, dispensationalists commonly deem any non-literal interpretation of Scripture as evidence of encroaching liberalism. We may note Ryrie’s comments in this regard:

Although it could not be said that all amillennialists deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, yet, as it will be shown later, it seems to be the first step in that direction. The system of spiritualizing Scripture is a tacit denial of the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. . . . Thus the allegorical method of amillennialism is a step toward modernism.⁵⁶

Elsewhere, Walvoord states that postmillennialism “is a system of theology based upon a subjective spiritualizing of Scripture” that “lends itself to liberalism with only minor adjustments.”⁵⁷ In fact, he can trace this problem back to ancient heresy: “Amillenarians usually concede that the basic approach of the Alexandrian school was to take Scripture, especially prophecy, in a nonliteral sense. . . . Amillenarians admit that the school at Alexandria was heretical.”⁵⁸ Consequently, Walvoord points out that “unlike amillennialism and postmillennialism, the premillennial interpretation has no liberal adherents as it builds on the concept that the Bible is the Word of God and that prophecies are to be interpreted in their normal literal sense.”⁵⁹ Robert P. Lightner agrees when he notes that “it is a fact that there are few, if any, theologically liberal premillennarians because premillennialists follow the literal method of interpreting all the Bible.”⁶⁰

54. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 79.

55. Boettner, *The Millennium*, 86.

56. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 34, 35, 46.

57. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 34, 35.

58. Walvoord, “Basic Considerations in Interpreting Prophecy,” in Zuch, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, 16.

59. Walvoord, *PKH*, 17.

60. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 106.

This argument is not at all persuasive. We must note that literalism does not necessarily protect orthodoxy. We may easily point out that many *cults* approach Scripture literalistically — and erroneously. Consider the premillennial cult of Mormonism. They teach that God has a literal, tangible body. After citing Genesis 1:26–27 regarding Adam’s creation “in the image and likeness of God,” LeGrand Richards, a former Apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints, writes: “Attempts have been made to explain that this creation was only in the spiritual image and likeness of God. . . . Joseph Smith found that he was as literally in the image and likeness of God and Jesus Christ, as Seth was in the likeness and image of his father Adam.”⁶¹

The reality of inconsistent literalism. Besides being naive, the dispensational claim to “consistent literalism” is frustrating due to its *inconsistent* employment — despite contrary claims. For instance, some dispensationalists do not understand certain Old Testament prophecies about David’s millennial reign literally. H. A. Ironside writes: “I do not understand this to mean that David himself will be raised and caused to dwell on the earth as king. . . . The implication is that He who was David’s Son, the Lord Christ Himself is to be the King.”⁶² On what basis can a consistent literalist allow this view?

Neither is it necessary that we understand literally Elijah’s coming prophesied in Malachi 4:5–6. Pentecost writes: “The prophecy is interpreted by the Lord as being fulfilled, *not in literal Elijah*, but in one who comes in Elijah’s spirit and power.”⁶³ Here he breaches two hermeneutic principles of his dispensationalism: He allows the New Testament (Lk 1:17) to interpret the Old Testament (Mal 4:5–6), and he drops his consistent literalism. This is convenient but illegitimate.

Walvoord hesitates, but declares: “It was clear that Elijah was a type of John and to some extent that John the Baptist fulfilled Elijah’s role. But, predictively, it is difficult to determine whether the future one will come in the spirit and power of Elijah or be Elijah himself.”⁶⁴ On their

61. Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder*, 16. There are even non-Mormons who point to the biblical references to God’s “hand” as indicative of a body: Dake, *Annotated Reference Bible*, New Testament, 280.

62. Ironside, *Expository Notes on Ezekiel the Prophet*, 262, cited in J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 498–499. Cf. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 88. Walvoord, *PKH*, 60.

63. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 311–313; cf. English, “The Two Witnesses,” 666.

64. Walvoord, *PKH*, 339–40.

“consistent” literal hermeneutic, why should this be difficult? Does not Walvoord himself open this very book with these words: “Unmistakably, the evidence is overwhelming that God means exactly what He says as prophecy after prophecy has already been literally fulfilled.”⁶⁵ (Despite such a statement, he can explain Jos 11:11–23 thus: “Though the Lord was said to have fulfilled all His promises, as the Book of Judges makes clear, much of the territory had not yet been possessed”!⁶⁶)

According to Ezekiel 45, the “millennial” sacrifices actually “make reconciliation” (Eze 45:15, 17, 20. The prophecy uses the piel of the Hebrew *kaphar* (as in Lev 6:30; 8:15; 16:6ff⁶⁷). But Pentecost notes that “the sacrifices *will be memorial* in character.”⁶⁸ Yet this question needs to be faced by self-professed literalists: what literalist, reading the phrase “make reconciliation,” would surmise that this is only “memorial”? Where is the consistent literalism here?⁶⁹ Some dispensationalists allow that this passage “is not to be taken literally,” but is merely “using the terms with which the Jews were familiar in Ezekiel’s day.”⁷⁰ This is convenient but illegitimate, for it breaches the claim to “consistent” literalism.

In *The New Scofield Reference Bible* at Ezekiel 43:19 we read: “The reference to sacrifices is not to be taken literally, in view of the putting away of such offering, but is rather to be regarded as a presentation of the worship of redeemed Israel, in her own land and in the millennial temple, using the terms with which the Jews were familiar in Ezekiel’s

65. Walvoord, *PKH*, 7.

66. Walvoord, *PKH*, 44.

67. Often sacrifices in Scripture speak figuratively of prayer (Ps 141:2), praise (Ps 44:6; Jer 17:26; 33:11), thanksgiving (Ps 107:22; 116:17), joy (Ps 27:6), righteousness (Ps 4:5; 51:19), confession (Ps 66:13), contrition (Ps 51:17), and so forth.

68. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 525. See also Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1299.

69. The whole idea of a re-instituted sacrificial system is repulsive to the biblical scheme (see Hebrews). The dispensational system presents an unnecessary confusion here. Consider: By Christ’s appointment, the Lord’s Supper is the sign of the new covenant (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25). It is to be kept until he comes (1Co 11:25–26). But in dispensationalism, when Christ comes to establish the new covenant with Israel for a millennium, he will do away with the Lord’s Supper (which is the sign of the new covenant), while re-establishing the bloody sacrificial system (which is an old covenant foreshadowing of Christ’s redemptive labor, Heb 10:1–3) as a “memorial.” And the millennial priests will perform this memorial in Christ’s bodily presence! See below (pp. 356–65).

70. *NSRB*, 888, n. 1 (at Ezek. 43:19).

day.” Though it diminishes the final work of Christ (cf. Heb 10:10), at least Johnston maintains literalism when he declares: “The Prince and the Zadokites will offer sacrifices to YHWH to make atonement for sins and express worship: sin, guilt, burnt, grain, drink, freewill, and fellowship offerings (Ezek. 40:38–43; 43:18–44:31).”⁷¹

Isaiah 52:15 declares of Messiah: “So shall he sprinkle many nations.” The *New Scofield Reference Bible* comments: “Compare the literal fulfillment of this prediction in 1 Pet. 1:1–2, where people of many nations are described as having been sprinkled with the blood of Christ.” Is this literal? When was Jesus’ blood *literally* sprinkled on the nations? This sounds more like “spiritualizing” than “consistent literalism.”

We learn that Isaiah 13:17–22 “predict[s] the destruction of the literal Babylon then existing. The verses also look forward to the destruction of both political Babylon and ecclesiastical Babylon in the time of the Beast.”⁷² At Revelation 18:2 we read: “The term ‘Babylon’ in prophecy is sometimes used in a larger sense than mere reference to either the ancient city or nation.”⁷³ I agree. This is exactly the case. This same approach is true in many other such cases, as with Israel (Gal 6:16; Heb 8:6–13), David’s throne (Lk 1:32; Ac 2:29–31), circumcision (Php 3:3; Col 2:11), sacrifices (Ro 12:1; 1Pe 2:5), the temple (1Co 3:17; Eph 2:19–22), the tabernacle (Ac 15:16; Heb 9:11), and so forth.

But when it suits dispensationalists, they vigorously argue for literalism. For instance, of Isaiah 9:7 we read: “‘The throne of David’ is an expression as definite, historically, as ‘the throne of the Caesars,’ and does not admit of spiritualizing.”⁷⁴ Yet Gordon H. Johnston writes: “God will fulfill His promises in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:8–16) to establish the eternal Davidic dynasty over Israel through a single ideal Davidic King who will reign eternally (Ps. 89:20–37).”⁷⁵ But when we read this passage we discover it expressly mentions David himself, not a “Davidic King”: “I have found David My servant; / With My holy oil I have

71. Gordon H. Johnson, *DPT*, 270.

72. *NSRB*, 724, n. 3.

73. *NSRB*, 1369.

74. *NSRB*, 721. Poythress (*Understanding Dispensationalism*, 24 n) cites many examples of non-literalism in the notes of the original *SRB*: Ge 1:16; 24:1; 37:2; 41:45; 43:45; Ex 2:2; 15:25; 25:1, 30; 26:15; Eze 2:1; Zec 10:1; Jn 12:24. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 24 n.

75. Johnston in *DPT* 269.

anointed him, / With whom My hand will be established; / My arm also will strengthen him" (Ps 89:20–21).

Johnston continues: "The Davidic King will rule as the co-regent, Prince (Ezek. 34:24), under the divine kingship of YHWH (Ps. 72:19; Isa. 40:4–5)."⁷⁶ Pentecost states that "the promises in the Davidic covenant concerning the king, the throne, and the royal house are fulfilled by Messiah in the millennial age," then lists Ezekiel 34:23–25 and Hosea 3:5 as evidence.⁷⁷ But Ezekiel 34:24 actually states: "And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken" (Eze 34:24). While Hosea reads: "Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king." And again Johnston declares: "Judah and Israel will serve the Davidic King."⁷⁸ Yet the verse actually states: "But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them" (Jer 30:9). How can references to David actually mean Christ — in a strictly literalistic system?

The catastrophic judgment prophecy in Jeremiah 4:23–28, where the heavens become black and the mountains shake and all the birds flee, is not to be understood literally, according to dispensationalist Charles H. Dyer: "Jeremiah pictured God's coming judgment as a cosmic catastrophe — an undoing of creation. Using imagery from the Creation account (Gen. 1) Jeremiah indicated that no aspect of life would remain untouched." The universal catastrophe imagery had to do with "the approaching army of Babylon."⁷⁹ The *Prophecy Study Bible* agrees.⁸⁰ John A. Martin, writing in the same dispensational commentary, explains the language of Isaiah 13:10–13, where the sun, moon, and stars are darkened and the earth is moved out of its place: "The statements in 13:10 about the heavenly bodies (*stars . . . sun . . . moon*) no longer functioning may figuratively describe the total turnaround of the political structure of the Near East. The same would be true of *the heavens trembling and the earth shaking* (v. 13), figures of speech suggesting all-encompassing destruction."⁸¹

Historic Protestant interpretation. Yet the historic Protestant approach requires that rather than such alleged "objective" interpretations, the

76. Johnston in *DPT*, 269.

77. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 476.

78. Johnston, *DPT*, 269.

79. Charles H. Dyer, "Jeremiah," *BKC*, 1:1136, 1135.

80. *PSB*, 841.

81. John A. Martin, "Isaiah," *BKC*, 1:1059.

Christian exegete must allow the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament. “The Christian interpreter comes to the Old Testament with a different theological perspective than the Jewish expositor.”⁸² As Willem Van Gemeren well states: “Christian students of the Old Testament *must pass by the cross of Jesus Christ on their return to the Old Testament*, and as such they can never lose their identity as a Christian.”⁸³ Simply put, Poythress notes: “We cannot forget what we have learned from Christ.”⁸⁴ This approach to biblical interpretation allows God’s conclusive New Testament revelation authoritatively to interpret the incomplete revelation in the Old.

Bavinck expresses the matter clearly:

In Old Testament exegesis the question is not whether the prophets were totally or partially conscious of the symbolic nature of their predictions, for even in the words of classic authors there is more than they themselves thought or intended. It is a question, rather, what the Spirit of Christ who was in them wished to declare and reveal by them. And *that* is decided by the New Testament, which is the completion, fulfillment, and therefore interpretation of the Old. The nature of a tree is revealed by its fruit.⁸⁵

The dispensationalist resists this: “As a result of the covenant of grace idea, covenant theology has been forced to place as its most basic principle of interpretation the principle of interpreting the Old Testament by the New.”⁸⁶ This is true, and the Scripture suggests that even the prophets could not always fathom their own predictions because of predictive prophecy’s nature (Nu 12:8).⁸⁷ Nor could the pre-resurrection, pre-Pentecostal disciples.⁸⁸ Nor could the old covenant’s last prophet John Baptist (Mt 11:2–6). Why not? Because “with respect to eschatology, people in the Old Testament were not in the same position as they were for short-range prophecy. . . . The exact manner of fulfillment frequently

82. LaRondelle, *Israel of God in Prophecy*, 7.

83. Gemeren, *Progress of Redemption*, 21.

84. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 104.

85. Bavinck, *The Last Things*, 96.

86. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 191.

87. 1Pe 1:10,11. See: Da 8:27; 12:8; Zec 4:13; Rev 7:13–14; 17:8–9. Young defends the view that Daniel did not understand his prophecies in Da 8:27 and 12:5. Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 182.

88. Mt 16:21–22; Lk 18:31–34; John 2:22; 20:9.

could not be pinned down until the fulfillment came.”⁸⁹ The conclusive New Testament revelation was needed (Heb 1:1–2).

The Emmaus disciples, holding to current literalistic Jewish conceptions, need Christ to open the Scriptures to them (Lk 24:32, 45). Christ rejects the Jews’ *political Messianism* (Mt 23:37–38; Lk 19:41–42; 24:21–27; Jn 6:15; 18:36). The Jews have a dullness of understanding⁹⁰ that is at least partially due to problem that “the prevailing method of interpretation among the Jews at the time of Christ was certainly the literal method of interpretation.”⁹¹ After all, when Christ confronts Nicodemus, he points to this very matter: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? . . . If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?’” (Jn 3:10, 12). Literalism plagued the Jews throughout Jesus’ ministry.⁹² Few would dispute the fact that the Jews of Christ’s day looked for a political Messiah (Jn 6:14–15; 18:33–36). Christ rebukes the Emmaus disciples for just such a conception (Lk 24:17–21, 25–26). Christ suffers, then enters immediately into his glory.⁹³ Israel’s rejecting Christ is due (at least partially) to their not recognizing that he fulfills biblical prophecy (Lk 19:42–44; Mt 23:37, 38).⁹⁴

Consequently, “it is irresponsible to jump unprepared into the area of end-time prophecies of Scripture. By considering such apocalyptic portions of Holy Scripture by themselves, in isolation from the total prophetic-messianic framework, one will necessarily fall into the pitfall

89. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 107.

90. 2Co 3:14; cf. Mt 13:15; Jn 8:12; 12:46; Ac 28:26–27; Ro 11:7–8. The dullness led eventually to their ascribing Satanic influence to Christ (Mt 12:22–28).

91. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 17. See also: *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, ch. 1. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 48f. In fact, we may trace the fundamental idea of a premillennial kingdom back to the literalistic Jewish conception, and thus we may see that “premillennialism is a descendent of ancient Judaism.” Masselink, *Why Thousand Years?*, 20. See also: Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 234; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, cxxxiii; Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 34–35. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, Part I, ch. 3 and Part 4.

92. See: Jn 2:19–21; 3:5–7; 4:10–15, 31–38; 6:31–35, 51–58; 8:21–22, 32–36, 51–53; 9:39–40; 11:11–14; 13:33–37; 18:33–37.

93. Lk 24:26; 1Pe 1:11. Cf. Jn 12:23–24; Php 2:8–9.

94. Ultimately, their spiritual condition is the source of their rejection, with the misapprehension of prophecy a result of that.

of a geographic and ethnic literalism.”⁹⁵ The whole concept of *progressive revelation* points to this truth. Thus, the historical-grammatical analysis “cannot be separated from interpretation ‘in faith.’ The Bible requires continual submission of our understanding to what the spirit of God has inspired (1 Cor. 2:12–15).”⁹⁶

Declining literalism influence among academics. Fortunately, in recent years we see literalism — the previously popular, linchpin hermeneutical argument appearing in earlier Dallas Seminary dispensationalists — losing adherents. For instance, John S. Feinberg, a noted contemporary dispensationalist, admits that on hermeneutics, “Ryrie is too simplistic.”⁹⁷ Craig A. Blaising (while a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary) warns that: “consistently literal exegesis is inadequate to describe the essential distinctive of dispensationalism.”⁹⁸ Blaising and Darrell Bock note: “hermeneutical methodology has been rethought and is no longer perceived as an exclusively dispensational hermeneutic.”⁹⁹ This is due to the “conceptual naivete” of Ryrie’s hermeneutic which involves a “methodological deficiency in the very hermeneutic that it proposed.” This is gravely serious in that “this hermeneutical deficiency was structured into the very meaning of dispensational thought and practice in its advocacy of clear, plain, normal, or literal interpretation.”¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, we find that less well-informed dispensational authors still insist on identifying a broader hermeneutic as *the* danger of a non-

95. LaRondelle, *Israel of God in Prophecy*, 7. As Young notes: “In speaking of the future or Messianic age, Isaiah, as a prophet of the Old Testament, uses the thought forms and the figures which were current in that age. It is obvious that the language of the prophet cannot be interpreted in a consistently literal sense. Rather, Isaiah takes the figures which were the property of the Old Testament economy and makes them the vehicles of expression for the truths of salvation and blessing which were the characteristics of the age of grace.” Young, *Isaiah*, 1:99.

96. Van Gemeren, *Progress of Redemption*, 27.

97. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 73. One major theologian who converted from dispensationalism is former Dallas Seminary professor S. Lewis Johnson, who warns of the anti-apostolic nature of literalism, which he says interprets “woodenly.” Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New*, 83.

98. Blaising, “Development of Dispensationalism,” *ITS*, 272.

99. Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 378.

100. Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 29.

dispensational eschatology.¹⁰¹ “Many believe the [Progressive Dispensational] approach will radically shift dispensationalism from its consistency and strength, which is a uniform approach to opening up Scripture. With PD, a greater area of subjectivity will be added to hermeneutics.”¹⁰²

Preterism and Prophecy

Another important interpretive issue (but one that does not necessarily impact postmillennialism, in that not all postmillennialists adopt it) is *preterism*. The term “preterism” derives from the Latin *preteritus*, which means “gone by, past.”¹⁰³ The preterist sees certain prophetic passages as *already fulfilled*. (Surprisingly, dispensationalist Robert L. Thomas vigorously rejects preterism while repeatedly extolling Milton S. Terry’s manual on hermeneutics — despite Terry’s being a strong preterist.¹⁰⁴)

Actually, all Christians — even dispensationalists — are preterists to some extent. This is due to Christianity seeing Christ fulfilling a great many of the Messianic passages at his first coming.¹⁰⁵ On these points, Christians differ from the “futurism” of Orthodox Judaism. Orthodox Jews today and also in antiquity insist that Christians are misapplying the Old Testament’s Messianic prophecies to past events.¹⁰⁶ They hold that in the future “when Israel fully accepts God’s rule, then the messiah will

101. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, ch. 14. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, ch. 12. Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust*, ch. 3. Though this continues among some of the more intellectual dispensationalists: Walvoord in Zuck *Vital Prophetic Issues*, ch. 1. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, chs. 5, 9. Thomas and House in *PEBP*, 138–141, 295–97. Benware, *Understanding End Times*, ch. 1.

102. Gordon H. Johnston and Mal Couch in *DPT*, 152.

103. *CEOED*, 2:1330.

104. Thomas, *PEBP* 138–39. See Terry’s *Biblical Apocalypics* (1888 [1898]).

105. See the list of passages in *PEBP* 219–23. See dispensationalist quotations above, which proclaim that the first coming of Christ fulfills some Old Testament prophecies.

106. See for instance: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* in *ANF* v. 1. For example, of Isa 7:14 Trypho challenges Justin (chs 77ff): “Proceed then to make this plain to us, that we may see how you prove that that [passage] refers to this Christ of yours. For we assert that the prophecy relates to Hezekiah” (237). For some helpful insights, see: Russell, *From Early Judaism to Early Church* (1986) and Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (1983).

come.”¹⁰⁷ Ancient rabbinic Judaism believes that “the messianic era could not come before Elijah had set things straight.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, “the belief in the [future] coming of the Messiah is one of the ‘Thirteen Articles of Creed’ of Maimonides included in the daily Jewish ritual.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, “in our day many Jews still await the coming of the true Messiah ‘in the End of Days.’”¹¹⁰ Of the incarnation as revealed in prophecy, early church father Athanasius writes: “So the Jews are trifling, and the time in question, which they refer to the future, is actually come.”¹¹¹

Given the enormous number of prophecies fulfilled in ancient Israel and in the coming of Christ, Thomas Ice’s complaint exposes his extreme naivete: “If preterists are correct, then most of the prophesied events in history are over.”¹¹² He should have said: “If *evangelical Christians* are correct, then most of the prophesied events in history are over.” But then, that would not serve his purpose.

The preterist approach teaches, for instance, that many of the prophecies of Revelation and the first portion of the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:1–34//) are fulfilled in the Olivet Discourse during the Jewish War in AD 67–70.¹¹³ In Revelation almost all of the prophecies are also fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70).¹¹⁴ Preterists have strong exegetical indi-

107. *DJBP*, 426. Glasson notes: “Orthodox Jews at the present time look for a Messiah who will reign on earth for a limited period. This has been Jewish teaching for many centuries and goes back to pre-Christian times. We have evidence from the BC period in 1 Enoch 91–108.” Glasson, “The Temporary Messianic Kingdom and the Kingdom of God,” 517.

108. Neusner, *First-Century Judaism in Crisis*, 15.

109. Bridger, *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 317. Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) was the greatest codifier of Judaism in the Middle Ages.

110. Bridger, *New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 318.

111. Athanasius, *Incarnation* 40:1. Cf. Lapide and Luz, *Jesus in Two Perspectives* (1985).

112. *PEBP*, 289.

113. In this I differ from heretical hyper-preterists who go much farther and claim that even the second advent, resurrection, and judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem. See: Russell, *The Parousia* (1983, rep. 1887). Noe, *Beyond the End Times: The Rest of the Greatest Story Ever Told* (2000). See App.: “The Hyper-Preterist Error.” Unfortunately, Blomberg and Chung mistakenly associate me with hyper-preterism (Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, xv), as does Norm L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 635.

114. See ch. 16 below. See also: Gentry in Pate, *Four Views of the Book of Revelation*.

cators undergirding our system, which I will briefly illustrate. But I must first explain the preterist hermeneutic.

Two foundational principles for sound biblical hermeneutics are: (1) The clearer (didactic discourse) statements of Scripture interpret the less clear (figurative imagery) and (2) Scripture interprets Scripture. I will briefly illustrate the preterist argument from the Olivet Discourse and Revelation based on these two principles. I contend that rival views (e.g., dispensationalism) frequently dishonor both principles.¹¹⁵

The Olivet Discourse

That Matthew 24:4–33 fulfills Jerusalem's destruction is both intellectually reasonable and exegetically necessary. Even futurists must admit to *some* preteristic elements in the discourse. Dispensationalists such as Paul Enns, Tim LaHaye, Louis A. Barbieri, John F. Walvoord, Thomas D. Ice, and others generally hold regarding Matthew 24:1–2: "These words found their fulfillment in A.D. 70 when Titus destroyed Jerusalem."¹¹⁶ Amillennialists, such as Robert L. Reymond, Kim Riddlebarger, and Cornelis P. Venema; postmillennialists, such as John J. Davis, David Chilton, Greg L. Bahnsen, and Keith L. Mathison; as well as premillennialists, such as George E. Ladd and Wayne Grudem, hold that even the fuller passage merges both the AD 70 event with the second advent.¹¹⁷ Historic premillennialists do the same, as when Sung Wook

115. For additional insights into the preteristic approach to the Olivet Discourse, see ch. 14 "Eschatological Features"; for Revelation, see ch. 16 "John's Revelation." For my debate with a dispensationalist, see: Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation* (1999). See also: France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT), *ad loc.* Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, *passim*. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen*, *passim*. Wright, *Victory*, 339–67. Gentry, *Perilous Times* and in Pate, *Four Views of Revelation*. DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (1999). Mathison, ch. 10. For interesting dispensational flirtations with preterism: Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew," 7. Turner calls his position a "preterist-futurist" view (26). Pate and Haines, *Doomsday Delusions* (1995).

116. Paul P. Enns, in *DPT*, 286. See also: Thomas Ice in *PEBP* 249. LaHaye, *PSB* 1152. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 249. Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:86. Walvoord, *PKH*, 381. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," *BKC*, 2:76.

117. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 999–1008. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, ch. 13. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 142–158. Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, 107. Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, *passim*. Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus*, 12–17. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 111–15. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Ladd,

Chung states: “For Jesus, then, ‘great tribulation’ refers neither to the events of the second century BC nor to a period of time only just preceding his return but, at least in part, to the distress at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the city, and the razing of the temple by the Romans in AD 70.”¹¹⁸

That Matthew 24:4–33 *en toto* is already fulfilled seems quite obvious on the two following bases. First, its introductory *context* strongly suggests it. In Matthew 23 Jesus sorely rebukes the “scribes and Pharisees” *of his own day* (Mt 23:2ff). He urges *them* finally to “fill up then the measure of your fathers” who killed the prophets (23:31–32).¹¹⁹ Christ says that they are a “generation” of vipers (23:33) that will persecute and slay his disciples (23:34). He notes that upon *them* will come all the righteous blood shed on the earth (23:35). He then dogmatically asserts: “Truly I say unto you, all these things shall come upon *this generation*” (23:36).

Then in Matthew 23:37–24:2 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, and declares that its temple will be destroyed stone by stone, despite his disciples’ surprise. Regarding these actions and statements the disciples ask, “When shall these things be?” As a matter of historical record we know the temple was destroyed, stone by stone, in August, AD 70: “Since that time [AD 70], the Temple has never been rebuilt, though the remains of its foundation walls are an archaeological highlight of modern Jerusalem.”¹²⁰

Second, its express temporal indicators demand it. We must not miss the clear references to the *contemporary expectation*. Enclosing the discourse’s relevant portion, we have Christ’s own time designation. In 23:36 he dogmatically asserts “*all* these things shall come upon *this* generation.” He closes this portion of his prophecy by repeating the time frame: “Truly I say unto you, *this* generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Mt 24:34). The Romans destroy Jerusalem and the temple just forty years later. Contextually the “this generation” of Matthew 24:34 *must* involve the same time frame as Matthew 23:36.

Presence of the Future, 310–11. Unfortunately, Bahnsen’s argument is marred by whoever transcribed it after his death.

118. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 73.

119. As did John Baptist before him (Mt 3:1–12).

120. Neusner, *DJBP*, 626. Unfortunately, “archaeological remains” of the temple “are rather small” (625).

In fact, in this verse (Mt 24:34) Christ solemnly affirms the matter. The Lord emphasizes his point when he begins a statement with: “verily.” Thus, he emphatically draws the disciples’ attention to what he is about to say, just as he does in 24:2, when he makes the statement spurring the whole discourse. In fact, he does not just tell them; he underscores what he is about to say with: “I tell you.” Furthermore, a literal translation of the Greek reads: “Truly I tell you that by no means passes away generation this until all these things happens.”¹²¹ The “by no means” is a strong, double negative (*ou me*). Jesus places it early in his statement for added emphasis. He is staking his credibility, as it were, on his prophecy’s absolute certainty.¹²²

But what does Jesus so carefully, dogmatically, and emphatically tell them? Whatever the difficult apocalyptic imagery in some of the preceding verses (e.g., vv. 29–31) may indicate, Jesus clearly says that “all these things [*panta tauta*]” will occur *before* “this generation” passes away. We also find the phrase “this generation” in Matthew 11:16; 12:39–45; and 23:36. Only with great difficulty may these references mean anything other than Jesus’ contemporary generation. Even Ice admits: “It is true that every other use of ‘this generation’ in Matthew . . . refers to Christ’s contemporaries.”¹²³ We must understand that “most biblical writers seem to consider thirty to forty years to be a normal generation (Deut. 2:14; Job 42:16; Ps. 95:10). Usually ‘generation’ simply refers to all of the people at a given time.”¹²⁴

The Lord employs the near demonstrative regarding verses 2–34: these events will come during “*this [tauta]* generation.” He uses the far demonstrative in 24:36 to point to the second advent involving “*that [ekeines]* day.” Thus, the “great tribulation” (24:21; cf. Rev 7:14) is coming *soon* — upon “this generation” (23:36; 24:34; cf. 1Th 2:16) — with certain signs foreshadowing it (24:4–8). But the second advent waits at “that” far away day and hour, and no particular signs will precede it, for no man can know it (24:36).¹²⁵

121. Marshall, *Interlinear NASB-NIV*, 80.

122. He contrasts the durability and integrity of his prophetic word here with that of the material universe (24:35).

123. Ice in Ice and Gentry, *Great Tribulation*, 103.

124. *HCBD*, 366.

125. For more detail on the division between vv. 34 and 36 see: Gentry, *Perilous Times*, 90–91. See also: France, *Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT), 893–894, 936–38.

Preterism has a secure foundation in Matthew 24:3–34, as many early church fathers recognized.¹²⁶

The Book of Revelation

The judgments in Revelation 4–19 lie in our past as we may discern from John's various time indicators. Significantly, these appear in his less symbolic, more didactic introduction and conclusion.¹²⁷ As we begin we should note that Revelation closely relates to the Olivet Discourse: (1) Both expect the events to occur soon (Mt 24:34; Rev 1:1, 3). (2) Both uniquely merge Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 (Mt 24:30; Rev 1:7). (3) Both refer to "the great tribulation" (Mt 24:21; Rev 7:14). (4) Both refer to Jesus' words regarding the temple's destruction (Lk 21:24; Rev 11:2) and his statement about the righteous blood shed on the earth (Mt 24:34; Rev 18:24). Consequently, it should not surprise us that the preterist argument is as clear in Revelation as it is in Matthew 24.

Revelation 1:1 opens Revelation's prophecies and prepares the reader for them: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must *shortly* [*en tachei*] come to pass." John reiterates this by employing synonymous terminology in Revelation 1:3c: "the time is at hand" (*kairos engus*). He again repeats these ideas as he closes: "These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which *must shortly be done*" (*genesthai en tachei*) (22:6). "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the *time is at hand* [*ho kairos gar engus estin*]" (22:10). The point is clear: John expects the events he prophesies to occur soon.

Evangelicals cannot lightly dismiss these text-bracketing temporal indicators. After all, John is writing to seven historical churches (Rev 1:4, 11; 2:1–3:22; 22:16), which are expecting trouble (2:1–3:22). He is

126. See especially Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:7:1–2; *The Clementine Homilies* 3:15; and Cyprian, *Treatises* 12:1:6, 15. For more detail, see: DeMar and Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World*. See also: Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 276–282.

127. See ch. 16 below for a brief outline survey of Revelation. For a popular introduction to the preterist view of Revelation see my: *The Book of Revelation Made Easy* (2008). For more detail regarding preterism in Revelation, see my *Before Jerusalem Fell* (1998) or my *The Beast of Revelation* (2002). See also: Pate, ed., *Four Views of Revelation*.

currently sharing with them in “tribulation” (1:9). He expects those very churches to hear and understand (1:3; 22:10) the “revelation [i.e., uncovering of truth]” (1:1) and to heed the things in it (1:3; 22:7), because the events are near (1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). One of the agonizing cries from his fellow sufferers receives special emphasis. In Revelation 6 the martyrs in heaven plead for God’s righteous vindication: “They cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” They receive heavenly comfort in that “a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest *a little while longer*” (6:10–11).

Original relevance, then, is the lock and the time-texts the key for opening Revelation’s heavy door. What clearer terms for contemporary expectation could John use other than those he employs in Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10 and other places?

Final Observations

Some dispensationalists like to point out that a Roman Catholic priest, Luis De Alcazar (1554–1613), presents the first formal, full-scale preterist approach to Revelation. This, of course, is a classic example of the “genetic fallacy,” discounting something because of its early use by an unpopular group. Furthermore, it overlooks two countervailing facts: (1) That preteristic tendencies can be found among the early church fathers in a number of passages, including Matthew 24 (e.g., Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3:7) and Revelation (e.g., Andreas of Cappadocia’s commentary on Revelation). Alcazar simply presents a more consistent, full scale preterist interpretation of Revelation. (2) That the futurist system itself is also highly developed by another Jesuit priest from the same era. Ice writes: “Jesuit Francisco Ribera (1537–1591) was one of the first to revive an undeveloped form of futurism around 1580.”¹²⁸ Thus, the same “problem” of Roman Catholic involvement is true with a formal, full-scale *futurist* approach to Revelation.

128. Ice in Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 16. He confesses this just two pages after citing Merrill C. Tenney’s statement that “the first systematic presentation of the preterist viewpoint originated in the early seventeenth century with Alcazar, a Jesuit friar” (14). Premillennialist Chung also recognizes this derivation of futurism: Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 9.

As with any system developed by fallen men and held in fallen minds, we must recognize that no hermeneutic approach can be pure. Consider the “futurism” of dispensationalism, for instance. No dispensationalist is “pure” futurist. He believes *some* prophecies of Scripture have already occurred, and therefore must be interpreted preteristically. For instance, Isaiah 7:14 prophesies the virgin birth of Christ. This is a past event in our day; which we cannot interpret futuristically. We could mention any number of other passages dealing with the coming of the Messiah in the first century (see argument above under “Literalism and Prophecy,” pp. 140–57). Modern orthodox Jews may be futuristic in their handling of Messianic passages, but not even the dispensational *futurist* would agree at this point.

In fact, preterism has a sound basis in New Testament theology, textual exegesis, and historical analysis as we may see in both the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. Consequently, we should not discount a preterist approach to Revelation, for instance, as rendering Revelation irrelevant today, as some do. For shall we declare that the many Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of Christ are “irrelevant” because they involve historical matters already occurring in our past? Are we to set aside historical references to Christ in the Gospels and the Apostles in Acts, simply because they are dealing with “ancient history”? Surely not.

We must also remember that almost all of the New Testament epistles are what we call “occasional epistles.” That is, they are dealing with specific occasions regarding the historical experiences of the first century Christians. For instance, 1 Corinthians deals with particular sins in a local church 2000 years ago. Is it therefore irrelevant to us today? The Epistle to the Hebrews warns first century Jewish converts to Christianity that it is both dangerous and pointless to return to temple-based Judaism because the temple system is “about to disappear” (Heb 8:13). The temple system disappears long ago. Indeed, the writer sends this glorious epistle to “Hebrews.” Is it irrelevant to those of us who are Gentiles living centuries later?

We should understand several very important “relevancies” of fulfilled prophecies such as in Revelation: (1) They demonstrate the general truth that God’s prophetic word will come to pass, for in several places we already see a past fulfillment. Thus, when we read such passages, they affirm the truthfulness of God’s word. (2) Though Revelation prophesies events that occurs almost 2000 years ago, we can learn principles of God’s operations in history from those events. We see God

protecting his people, warring against his enemies, leaving a witness behind for the ongoing church, demonstrating the catastrophic results of rebellion against God by those who are his people. We may discern ethical and spiritual lessons through those first century trials of faith. And more. (3) Since Revelation largely speaks of events occurring in and around AD 70, we have an inspired interpretation about what becomes of the temple and Judaism, both of which are for so long central in redemptive history. We see that God overthrows the temple and judges Israel in order to move his new covenant church in new directions, not tying it to a particular race, a specific land, a single temple, and a ritualistic worship. Preterists believe with Paul that old, fulfilled, historic Scriptures are “written for our admonition” (1Co 10:11).

Israel and Prophecy

The leading distinctive of dispensational theology is Israel's role as God's separate and special people. This is true both in its classic and progressive forms. In fact, as Poythress suggests, this theological presupposition is probably the *raison d'être* of the literalistic hermeneutic: “The dualism of Israel and the church is, in fact, the deeper dualism determining when and where the hermeneutical dualism of ‘literal’ and ‘spiritual’ is applied.”¹²⁹ Non-dispensational evangelical exegetes — including historic premillennialists¹³⁰ — broadly agree *against* dispensationalism's radical Israel/church dichotomy.

Non-dispensationalists must grasp dispensationalism's understanding of Israel, for herein lies the system's fundamental error. This crucial mistake entirely destroys the flow of redemptive history, the unity of God's people, our understanding of prophetic fulfillment, and proper hermeneutic theory.

Ryrie points to the distinctiveness of Israel as the first of the three *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: “A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct.”¹³¹ Elsewhere, he provides even more detail:

129. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 24.

130. For example, Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 120, 122.

131. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 39. See also: Towns and Ice in *PEBP*, 83. Thomas, in *DPT* 94. McCall in *DPT*, 193–97. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 84–89. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 9. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 81ff.

- (1) The Church is not fulfilling in any sense the promises to Israel.
- (2) The use of the word *Church* in the New Testament never includes unsaved Israelites.
- (3) The Church Age is not seen in God's program for Israel. It is an intercalation.
- (4) The Church is a mystery in the sense that it was completely unrevealed in the Old Testament and now revealed in the New Testament.
- (5) The Church did not begin until the day of Pentecost and will be removed from this world at the rapture which precedes the Second Coming of Christ.¹³²

Yet, the Scripture does not support such theological assertions.

Israel in Scripture

Old covenant Israel is continuous with the new covenant church, which is the fruition of Israel.¹³³ Or as the Westminster Confession of Faith expresses it, Israel is "a church under age" (WCF 19:3). Quite appropriately, then, New Testament Christians may even call Abraham "our father" (Ro 4:16) and the old covenant people our "fathers" (1Co 10:1), clearly evincing a *spiritual* genealogical relation. Employing another figure, Paul says we are grafted into Israel (Ro 11:16–19) so that we become one with her, partaking of her promises (Eph 2:11–20). Jesus teaches that Gentiles are other sheep which must be brought in to make "one flock" (Jn 10:16). In fact, the Lord appoints twelve apostles to be the spiritual seed of a New Israel, taking over for old covenant Israel's twelve sons. John incorporates the names of the twelve tribes (representing the old covenant community) *and* the twelve apostles (representing the new covenant people) into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:12, 14).

Dispensationalists strongly object, asserting that "the Scriptures never use the term Israel to refer to any but the natural descendants of Jacob."¹³⁴ Nevertheless, Scripture applies old covenant terms to new covenant citizens: we are the "seed of Abraham" (Ro 4:13–17; Gal 3:6–9, 29), "the circumcision" (Ro 2:28–29; Php 3:3; Col 2:11), "a royal priesthood," (Ro 15:16; 1Pe 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; cp. Ex 19:6), "twelve tribes" (Jas 1:1), "*diaspora*" (1Pe 1:1), the "temple of God" (1Co 3:16–17; 6:19; 2Co

132. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 136. See also: Borland in *PEBP*, 54. McCall in *DPT*, 194. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 84–89.

133. See especially: Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, chs. 1–4. Robertson, *Israel of God* (2000). Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 863. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 154–55.

134. Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 230. See also: NSRB, 1223. "The term *Israel* is nowhere used in the Scriptures for any but the physical descendants of Abraham." Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 127.

1:16; Eph 2:21). These terms clearly reflect Israel's covenantal identity. Their descent from Abraham was a source of great Jewish pride¹³⁵ and circumcision was *the* Jew's distinguishing covenantal mark.¹³⁶ Yet the New Testament applies these images to Christians. Peter designates Christians as "stones" building up a "spiritual house" (1Pe 2:5–9). But he does more: he draws upon several Old Testament designations of Israel and applies them to the church. He calls Christians: "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (1Pe 2:9–10; Ex 19:5–6; Dt 7:6). He and Paul call Christians "a peculiar people" (1Pe 2:10; Tit 2:14), which is a familiar Old Testament designation for Israel (Ex 19:5; Dt 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4).

"*The Israel of God.*" If Abraham can have Gentiles as his "spiritual seed,"¹³⁷ why may we not envision a *spiritual Israel*? In fact, Paul applies the name "Israel" to Christians: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). The "and [*kai*]" preceding "Israel of God," is probably exegetical, so that we should translate the passage: "mercy upon them, that is, upon the Israel of God." Dispensationalists see Galatians 6:16 applying to Jewish converts to Christ, "who would not oppose the apostle's glorious message of salvation."¹³⁸ But such is surely not the case, for the following reasons.¹³⁹

Galatians' entire context opposes any claim to a special Jewish status or distinction: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither

135. We read often of "the God of Abraham" (Ge 28:13; 31:42, 53; Ex 3:6, 15–16; 4:5; 1Ki 18:36; 1Ch 29:18; 2Ch 30:6; Ps 47:9; Mt 22:32; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:37; Ac 3:13; 7:32). The Jews expected blessings in terms of their Abrahamic descent (Mt 3:9; 8:11; Lk 3:8; 13:16, 28; 16:23–30; 19:9; Jn 8:39, 53; Ro 11:1; 2Co 11:22).

136. Circumcision is *the* special sign of God's covenant with Abraham and Israel (Ge 17:10, 13). Circumcision appears eighty-six times in the Scriptures; we read of the uncircumcised sixty-one times. Tertullian calls circumcision "their well-known bodily sign" (Tertullian, *Apol.* 21). In b. Sanh. 39^a a rabbi calls upon the Emperor Julian the Apostate (361–63) to be circumcised and "become like us" to effect unity.

137. *NSRB*, 1223 (at Ro 9:6).

138. *NSRB*, 1223. See also: Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 128; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 89; Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:611.

139. For a helpful study of this passage, see: Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 38–46. See also: Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 174ff. *DBI*, 430–31.

male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26–28). In the new covenant Christ does away with all racial distinctions. Why would Paul hold out a special word for Jewish Christians (“the Israel of God”), when he states immediately beforehand that we must not boast at all, save in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14)? After all, “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Gal 6:15).

Paul explains this “new creation” in detail in Ephesians 2:10–22, where God merges Jew and Gentile into one body, the church:

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Eph 2:13–16)

Dispensationalism demands two groups and repairs Paul’s broken down barrier by making of the one new man, two.

As Poythress points out, the church is not a “straight-line” continuation of Israel. It fulfills Israel through Christ.¹⁴⁰ All God’s promises are “yea” and “amen” in Christ (2Co 1:20). Since we are all the sons of Abraham through Christ (Gal 3:29), we receive God’s full blessings through him (Ro 8:17; Eph 1:23; Col 2:10).

The new covenant. Jeremiah presents the vitally important “new covenant” in Jewish terminology: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31¹⁴¹). As I will show, this provides evidence that we cannot interpret this text literalistically, despite dispensationalist claims that they use “the principles consistently in interpreting Scripture.”¹⁴² Jeremiah’s new covenant causes enormous difficulties for dispensationalism and their literalistic hermeneutic.¹⁴³

Ryrie’s *Basis of the Premillennial Faith* outlines three leading dispensational views: (1) The Jews Only View. This is “the view that the new

140. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 126.

141. See also: Eze 11:16–21; Joel 2:32; Zep 3:12–13.

142. *PEBP*, 138.

143. See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, ch. 8, for details.

covenant directly concerns Israel and has no relationship to the Church” (p. 107). (2) The One Covenant/Two Aspects View: The one “new covenant has two aspects, one which applies to Israel, and one which applies to the church” (p. 107). (3) The Two New Covenants View. This is Ryrie’s view, for this actually “distinguishes the new covenant with Israel from the new covenant with the church. This view finds two new covenants in which the promises to Israel and the promises to the Church are more sharply distinguished even though both new covenants are based on the one sacrifice of Christ” (p. 107). In his more recent *Dispensationalism* (p. 174), he cautiously maintains this view when referring to 2 Corinthians 3:6–11: “It may indicate that Paul is focusing on a new covenant made with the church. . . . If so, there are two new covenants.” Then he immediately adds: “perhaps even more”! This was the view of Chafer and the earlier Walvoord.¹⁴⁴

More recently Walvoord argues that some “hold that the covenant is with Israel but that the church derives blessing from the covenant of Israel.” But he immediately notes that this solution does not “solve the problem of how the church can have a New Covenant that is different in its qualifications than the New Covenant with Israel” (PKH 502). Pentecost is apparently one of those Walvoord is rebutting.¹⁴⁵ John R. Master illustrates how confused dispensationalism is over this issue, in that he “is a contemporary advocate of a position similar to Darby’s,” arguing that “the new covenant is strictly for Israel in the future messianic kingdom.”¹⁴⁶ Today, dispensationalists no longer hold to three views of the new covenant. They now have *four* views: “there are four major dispensational views of the new covenant.”¹⁴⁷

Despite the contortions dispensationalists go through to avoid the obvious, Christ clearly inaugurates this new covenant toward the end of his ministry as he establishes the New Testament phase of his church. Yet Pentecost is quite correct when he writes of Christ’s establishing the Lord’s Supper: “In its historical setting, the disciples who heard the Lord refer to the new covenant . . . would certainly have understood Him to be

144. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:325. Walvoord, “Millennial Studies,” 193–205.

145. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 175. See also: Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 71–73 and DPT, 73.

146. DPT, 281. See Master’s view in “The New Covenant” in Willis and Master, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ch. 5.

147. DPT, 280.

referring to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31.”¹⁴⁸ What could be more obvious? In fact, the sudden appearance of the “new covenant” designation in the New Testament record, without qualification or explanation, demands that it refer to Jeremiah’s well-known new covenant (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25). The apostle to the Gentiles even promotes the new covenant as an important aspect of his ministry (2Co 3:6). He does not say he is a minister of a “second new covenant” or “another new covenant” or “some few aspects of the new covenant.”

On everyone’s view Hebrews 8 cites Jeremiah’s new covenant in a context in which he is speaking to New Testament Christians. Yet Ryrie argues that “the writer of the Epistle has referred to both new covenants”!¹⁴⁹ This is literalism?

Other passages. Though Ryrie dogmatically affirms “Israel means Israel” via his literalistic hermeneutic, he does so on the basis of a principle which he inconsistently applies. Elsewhere he fails to demand that “David” means “David.” He cites Jeremiah 30:8–9 as proof of Messiah’s millennial reign: “They shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.” Then he says: “The prophet meant what he said — and what else can we believe.” He cites also Hosea 3:4–5, where “David their king” will be sought in the millennium, then comments: “Thus the Old Testament proclaims a kingdom to be established on the earth *by the Messiah*, the Son of David, as the heir of the Davidic covenant.”¹⁵⁰ This is literalism?

We may find other passages in the New Testament that illustrate how the church fulfills prophecies regarding Israel. As premillennialist Craig Blomberg comments: “the church of Jesus Christ [is] the ultimate fulfillment of many promises to Israel, symbolically depicted *as* Israel.”¹⁵¹ Unfortunately for premillennialism though, Blomberg notes: “recognizing that in some spiritual sense the church does fulfill the role of Old Testament Israel, historic premillennialists live with tension and are

148. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 126.

149. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 121.

150. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 86–87, 88. (emph. mine)

151. Blomberg in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 76–77. Emph. his.

criticized by both dispensationalists and amillennialists for their apparently selective approach.”¹⁵²

Citing Amos 9:11–12 James says God is rebuilding David’s tabernacle through the calling of the Gentiles (Ac 15:15ff).¹⁵³ In Romans 15:8–12 Paul notes that the Gentiles’ conversion is a “confirming of the promises to the fathers.” And at least one of the verses Paul presents serves as proof of Christ’s Messianic kingdom rule (Ro 15:12). In Acts the preaching of the gospel touches on the very hope of the Jews, which was made to the fathers (Ac 26:6–7). *The promises did not set forth a literal, political kingdom, but a spiritual, gospel kingdom.* Psalm 2 begins its fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ — not at the second advent (Ac 13:32–33). The idea of the church is not racial; it represents a *purified Israel* (Ro 2:28–29), not a wholesale adoption of the Jewish race. Ryrie’s argument is irrelevant; the church fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

Regarding the “parenthesis” or intercalation view of the church, I note above that some Old Testament prophetic passages apply to the Gentiles’ calling in the New Testament. Consequently, they speak of the church. Another illustration is Paul’s use of Hosea 1:9–10 and 2:23. In Romans 9:24–26 Paul interprets these very strong Jewish-contextured verses as referring to Gentile salvation in the church’s new covenant phase.

Neither should we deem the new covenant era, international church as a mystery “completely unrevealed in the Old Testament,” as Ryrie does.¹⁵⁴ Certainly the revelation’s *clarity* increases in the New Testament, and the *audience* who hears it expands, but the revelation itself *was* given in the Old Testament. Is not Isaiah clear? “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth” (Isa 19:23–24). We see this also in Zechariah:

And a mongrel race will dwell in Ashdod, / And I will cut off the
pride of the Philistines. / And I will remove their blood from their
mouth, / And their detestable things from between their teeth. /

152. Blomberg in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 97.

153. O. Palmer Robertson, “Hermeneutics of Continuity,” *Continuity and Discontinuity*, ch. 4.

154. See also: *PEBP* 239. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 433–34.

Then they also will be a remnant for our God, / And be like a clan in Judah, / And Ekron like a Jebusite. (Zec 9:6–7)

We must understand *for whom* the revelation was a mystery. Ephesians 3:3–6 reads: “By revelation he made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the *sons of men*, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ.” In Romans 16:25–26 Paul points out that the “mystery” of Gentile salvation is hidden only from the *Gentiles* (which in Eph 3 Paul calls “the sons of men”), not from the Old Testament prophets — for he defends his doctrine of the mystery by referring to “the scriptures of the prophets.” He speaks of “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and *by the scriptures of the prophets*, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, *made known to all nations* for the obedience of faith.” Paul declares that the “mystery” is “now made manifest” to “*all nations*” — not just to Israel.

In Luke 24:44–47 the Lord teaches that it was necessary for him to die in order to fulfill Scripture in bringing salvation to the Gentiles: “All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among *all nations*.”

Union of Church and Israel. Under the new covenant the distinction between Jew and Gentile ceases *forever*:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the common-wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who *hath made both one*, and *hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us*; Having *abolished* in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for *to make in himself of twain one new man*, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, *having slain the enmity thereby*. (Eph 2:11–16)

Thus, “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ” (Gal 3:28) and “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision” (Col 3:11; cp. Ro 10:12). Yet dispensationalists see the church as a *temporary parenthesis* in God’s plan. After the great tribulation a rebuilt Jewish temple and its animal sacrifices will supersede the church.

Early church fathers. Many of the early church fathers — even those claimed as premillennialists by modern dispensationalists — understood the church as receiving Israel’s promises. Historic premillennialist Blomberg states: “when patristic writers do insist on the literal fulfillment of Old Testament promises, they also insist that the church takes part in this fulfillment, and so they make utterly no distinction between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God.”¹⁵⁵ The Th.M. thesis of Dallas Seminary-trained historian Alan Patrick Boyd states: “The majority of the writers/writings in this period [AD 70–165] completely identify Israel with the Church.”¹⁵⁶ He specifically cites Papias, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, Barnabas, Hermas, the Didache, and Justin Martyr.¹⁵⁷ Boyd notes that “in the case of Barnabas, . . . he has totally disassociated Israel from the precepts of the Old Testament. In fact he specifically designates the Church to be the heir of the covenantal promises made to Israel (4:6–7; 13:1–6; 14:4–5).”¹⁵⁸ Elsewhere, he writes: “Papias applied much of the Old Testament to the Church.”¹⁵⁹ Of Hermas he notes “the employment of the phraseology of late Judaism to make the Church the true Israel.”¹⁶⁰ Justin Martyr, observes Boyd, “claims that the Church is the true Israelitic race, thereby blurring the distinction between Israel and the Church.”¹⁶¹

Jesus and the Jews. Even while the New Testament speaks of Jew and Gentile uniting in one body — through converting to Christ— it also presents Israel’s judgment as a distinct people in the first century. Jesus

155. Blomberg in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 120.

156. Boyd, “A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers,” 47.

157. Papias, *Fragment* 6; 1 Clement 3:1; 29:1–30:1; 2 Clement 2:1–3; 3:5; Barnabas, *Epistles* 2:4–6, 9; 3:6; 4:6–7; 5:2, 7; Hermas, *Similitudes* 9:16:7; 9:15:4; 9:12:1–13:2; the Didache (14:2, 3), and Justin Martyr (*Dialogue* 119–120, 123, 125). See Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 46, 60, 70, 86.

158. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 46.

159. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 60–61.

160. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 70.

161. Boyd, “Dispensational Premillennial Analysis,” 86.

speaks in such tones that we may not expect any exaltation or preferential treatment of Israel in the future. In fact, in Matthew's Gospel we can easily see the enormous redemptive-historical significance of Israel's judgment in AD 70. Interestingly, Matthew's strong denunciation of Israel leads liberal theologians to declare it one of the most anti-Semitic books in the New Testament. And this despite the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* declaring: "Matthew, standing at the head of the NT canon, emphasizes the messianic hope of Israel and is the gospel of Christ the King."¹⁶² Let us see how this is so by a quick overview of his Gospel.

In Matthew 1 the Apostle traces the genealogy of Christ to Abraham, the father of the Jews. But in Matthew 2:3 he shows that men from the east come to worship him, while "all Jerusalem was troubled" at the news. Thus, early on in his commentary Matthew is preparing us for the Lord's rejection by the Jews and his acceptance by the Gentiles. And because of this, Matthew will begin unfolding the judgment of Jerusalem and Israel as a recurring drumbeat.

In Matthew 3:9–12 John the Baptist rebukes the Jews for claiming Abraham as their father (3:9; contra Matthew 1 genealogy of Christ). He then warns just before Christ's ministry begins that "the axe is already laid at the root of the trees" (3:10) and that "He who is coming" has a "winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:12). This anticipates AD 70.

In Matthew 8:10–12 we read of the faithful gentile who exercises more faith than anyone in Israel. We hear once again of people from the east. This time they sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the rightful place of the Jews), while the Jews themselves are "cast out" into "outer darkness." In Matthew 9:16–17 Christ teaches that the constraints of Judaism are like old wineskins that would burst with the content of Christ's kingdom. Consequently, God will provide new wineskins (the new covenant church) to contain the wine of the kingdom. In Matthew 10:5 Jesus limits his ministry to Israel, yet in Matthew 10:16–17 he notes that the synagogues will punish his followers. So in 10:23 he promises that he will return to judge before they finish going through all of Israel (referring to AD 70). In Matthew 10:34–36 he warns that he does not come into the world to bring peace on the earth (the Land), but a sword

162. Gerald B. Stanton, "Millennium," *DPT*, 261.

which will divide homes (because of the Jewish opposition, e.g., Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

In Matthew 11:14 Christ declares John the Baptist the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah's return. When we read of this in Mal 3–4 we discover Christ will come to judge Israel. In Matthew 11:20–24 The Lord rebukes and warns cities in Israel regarding their judgment, comparing them unfavorably to wicked OT cities. In Matthew 12:39 he speaks of the Jews of his day as an "evil and adulterous generation." In Matthew 12:41–42 he once again rebukes and warns cities in Israel of their approaching judgment.

In Matthew 12:43–45 the Lord speaks of the seven-fold demonization of Israel in "this generation." In Matthew 13:58 he performs no miracles in Nazareth due to their lack of faith. In Matthew 15:7–14 he rebukes the rabbis in Israel for neglecting God's word and teaching falsely, according to Isaianic prophecy. In Matthew 16:4 he once again speaks of Israel as an evil and adulterous generation.

In Matthew 16:21 Jesus teaches his disciples that Israel's chief priests will kill him. In Matthew 16:28 he notes that some of his followers will live to see the kingdom come with power. In Matthew 17:10–13 Jesus declares John the Baptist to be Elijah, whom the Jews do not recognize as such and therefore kill him, just as they will kill Jesus.

Matthew 19:28 the Son of Man will come and the apostles will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. In Matthew 20:18–19 Christ once again prophesies that the chief priests will condemn him to death.

In Matthew 21:12 he casts out the moneychangers and overturns their tables — as prophetic theater showing the soon overthrow of the temple. In Matthew 21:19–21 he curses the fig tree and speaks of throwing "this mountain" into the sea, as signs of judgment on Israel ("this mountain" probably points to the temple mount). In Matthew 21:33–43, 45 the parable of the landowner shows God taking the kingdom from the Jews and crushing them. In Matthew 22:2–7 prophesies the AD 70 burning of "their city," Jerusalem.

In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounces seven woes upon the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:34–36 first century Israel will be judged for the righteous blood shed in the land. In 23:36–38 he laments the temple and declares it desolate. In 24:2–3 he leaves the temple and prophesies its destruction. In 24:16 he notes that his followers are to flee Judea, because in 24:34 "this generation" will experience judgment.

In Matthew 26:3–5 the chief priests and the High Priest counsel Jesus' death. In Matthew 26:47 the High Priest secures Jesus' arrest. In 26:57 the

High Priest tries Jesus, even bringing in brings false witnesses (26:59). In 26:63–64 Jesus warns that the High Priest will see him coming in judgment.

In Matthew 27:1 the High Priest confers with others to kill Jesus. In vv 15–21 the chief priests encourage the crowd to seek the release of the robber Barabbas, instead of the innocent Messiah Jesus. In v 25 the people call his blood down upon themselves. While he is dying on the cross in vv 39–40, the people mock him for declaring the destruction of the temple. In vv 41–43 the scribes, elders, and chief priests deride him as he dies. In Matthew 28:11–15 the priests assemble after the resurrection to bribe the Roman guards at Jesus' tomb, directing them to claim that his disciples stole his body.

Then finally in Mt 28:18–20 the Lord gives the Great Commission — which directs his followers to take the gospel to “all nations,” rather than limiting their ministry to Israel as previously (10:16–17; 15:24). Here we see God turning from the Jews to the world.

Matthew's picture certainly does not suggest any distinctive favoring of racial Israel in the future. In fact, it appears as strong evidence against such a viewpoint. It would seem that dispensationalists would be wise in avoiding Matthew's Gospel, rather than emphasizing it.

Conclusion

The Bible reveals a holy and gracious God to sinful, rebellious man. It is a vast and deep work touching on time and eternity. It is written over a period of fifteen centuries by “holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2Pe 1:21). Because of the richness of its expression and the glory of its content, we must approach it with a holy reverence for God and a fearful appreciation of its own majesty and grandeur. No simplistic formula can properly open Scripture.

Of course, we must recognize general rules of interpretation if we are to understand its message. Postmillennialists follow the general evangelical approach to Scripture known as the grammatico-historical hermeneutic. Evangelical premillennialists and amillennialists share this view. Postmillennialists stand with these over against the peculiar literalism common to dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism's “plain and simple” or “face value” approach to biblical passages is not always the correct one. This is why we often read Jesus saying: “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.” This is why his Jewish hearers often misunderstand his preaching — as we see repeat-

edly in John's Gospel. Tragically "first-century Jews primarily expected a political deliverer and warrior, who would enable them to throw off the oppression of the Roman government and regain political independence, international prominence, prosperity, peace, and respect. They were surprised, and sometimes offended, by the unconventional form that Jesus' ministry took."¹⁶³ Biblical interpretation requires careful thought and reflection, rather than mechanical manipulation of the text by pre-supposed principles. Unfortunately, as Vos puts it: "chiliasm is a daring literalizing and concretizing of the substance of ancient revelation."¹⁶⁴

In the material above I focus on three critical issues necessary for illustrating postmillennialism's reasonable hermeneutic: the danger of simplistic literalism in kingdom prophecy, the necessity of preterism regarding certain judgment passages, and the function of Israel in Scripture. Objectors frequently complain against these views, particularly dispensationalists. So, instead of rehearsing the common principles of biblical interpretation — principles found in many hermeneutics manuals — I concentrate on these key points of contention. The remainder of my book will illustrate the postmillennial hermeneutic in action.

163. Poythress, "New Testament Worldview," in Hoffecker, *Revolutions in Worldview*, 75.

164. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 227.

PART III

EXPOSITION

8

ESCHATOLOGY AND CREATION

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Col 1:16–17)

I will now begin presenting the direct argument for postmillennialism. Postmillennialists hold that a predominant and distinguishing theme of biblical eschatology is the *sure expectancy of gospel victory in time and on earth before the second advent*. We see this in various ways in the Old Testament revelation. Indeed, to exposit postmillennialism we must begin with the creation record.

The Christian faith holds a deep and abiding interest in the material world, as I note in chapter 6 above. God creates the earth and man's body as material entities, and all "very good" (Ge 1:1–31; 2:7). As Horton observes: "When the Gospels date the nativity 'in the time of King Herod,' when 'a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered,' a census that was taken 'while Quirinius was governor of Syria,' the reference to world history is the narrative's reference."¹ Consequently, the creation record is important for developing a Christian worldview, and therefore for understanding biblical eschatology.

In order to understand a thing aright, we must understand its purpose according to its designer and builder. Eschatology is a theological discipline concerned with *teleology*, with discovering the divinely revealed, long-range *purpose* of the material world and its history. Indeed, "as Paul expounds in Colossians 1, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 15, redemption is an eschatological re-creation (cf. Eph 1:10), and the full realization of creation's *telos*."² What will the consummation be? What

1. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 167.

2. David B. Garner, "The First and Last Son," in Tipton and Waddington, *Resurrection and Eschatology*, 256.

are its precursors? How will it be brought about? When will it occur? By necessity, then, *eschatology concerns itself with creation, for eschatology focuses on the divinely decreed fruit of creation*. In short, the end is tied to the beginning.³

Genesis is significant for the Christian faith. The very title “Genesis” derives from the Septuagint translation of Genesis 2:4a: “This is the book of the generation [*geneseos*] of heaven and earth.”⁴ The word *geneseos* means “origin, source.” Genesis’ opening chapters (chs 1–3) provide the foundational elements necessary for a biblical eschatology. The end flows from the beginning. *Creation has a glorious purpose*.

The Edenic Expectation of Victory

God creates the world for a purpose. Despite the confusion brought into the question by certain leading dispensationalists,⁵ Reformed theology sees God’s glory as the ultimate goal of universal history.⁶ His creational intent in bringing the world into being is to manifest his own glory: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev 4:11; cp. Ro 11:36; Col 1:16).⁷ All men live before God in the material world,⁸ which he creates for man’s habitation.⁹

The image of God. At the very outset of history God creates man in his own “image and likeness” (Ge 1:26). Long ago David asks one of the

3. Isa 46:10. See the Edenic imagery in Rev 2:7; 20:2; 21:6; 22:2, 13–14.

4. The term *geneseos* occurs frequently in Genesis as a heading to various sections. See: Ge 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2. My name “Gentry” derives from the same root.

5. According to Ryrie: “A third aspect of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is a rather technical matter which will be discussed later. . . . The covenant theologian in practice makes this purpose salvation, and the dispensationalist says the purpose is broader than that, namely, the glory of God.” Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 40. See also: *PEBP*, 83.

6. Reformed theology’s emphasis on God’s glory is expressed in its most basic, covenantal creed: the Westminster Standards. See the Confession of Faith (3:3, 7; 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 16:2, 7; 18:1; 33:12), the Larger Catechism (Q. 1, 12, 13, 190), and the Shorter Catechism (Q. 1, 2, 7, 47, 66, 101, 102, 107). See also: Kuiper, *God Centered Evangelism*, 93; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:535ff.

7. See also: Ps 8:1; 19:1–16; 89:11b; 82:8b.

8. 2Ch 16:9; Ps 33:13–15; Pr 15:3; Ac 17:28; Heb 4:13.

9. Dt 32:8; Ps 8:6; 24:1; 115:16; Pr 15:3; Da 5:23; Ac 17:26–27; 25:24–31; Rev 4:11.

crucial questions confronting us even today in the modern world: “What is man?” (Ps 8:4a). Contrary to the modern evolutionary view, he is not a random collection of molecules, a made-over fish, or an advanced ape, who arrived on earth after long eons of chance events.¹⁰ In Genesis, the “book of origins,” we see that from his very beginning God expressly creates man as the “image of God” (Ge 1:26–27). This distinguishes him from and elevates him above the animal kingdom which is to be in submission to him (Ge 1:26–28).

The statement regarding the “image of God” may seem rather suddenly to appear in the creation record without prior preparation. The Genesis’ creation account, however, is a flowing narrative that actually prepares us for this concept. Six features define man as God’s image with a view to his reflecting God in these dimensions: (1) *Personality*. Ten times in Genesis 1 God speaks. In his speaking he communicates himself and converses with man who is to respond (Ge 1:29–30; cp. 2:18; 3:11). (2) *Rationality*. Not only does God speak, but he speaks rationally, with structure and purpose: “Let there be . . . and there was” (Ge 1:3, 6, 14). He blesses man (Ge 1:28) and reasons within himself (Ge 2:18). He communicates with man, expecting man to rationally respond (Ge 1:29–30). (3) *Creativity*. Over and over again we see God creating, for he “made” (Ge 1:7, 16, 25, 31) and commands “let there be” (Ge 1:3, 6, 9, 14). Then he puts man in Eden to creatively cultivate it (Ge 2:15) so that he can create human culture (Ge 4:20–22).

(4) *Authority*. Things are what they are because God sovereignly calls them thus (Ge 1:5, 8, 10). God teaches man to exercise a creaturely authority and dominion (Ge 2:19). In fact, as he declares man as his image, God commands: “Let them have dominion” (Ge 1:26, 28). (5) *Morality*. God’s creation is beautiful, harmonious and righteous in the beginning. God sees that all that he creates is “good” (Ge 1:31) and he tests man to promote moral goodness (Ge 2:16–17). (6) *Society*. As the Triune God, the Lord speaks in the plural: “Let us make. . .” (Ge 1:26).

10. According to contemporary cosmologists: “In the greatest leap of imagination, most cosmologists now believe that the universe arose from nothing, and that nothing is as certain to give rise to something as the night is to sire the dawn.” “Where the Wild Things Are,” *Newsweek* (June 13, 1988): 60. Cited from Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 120. On p. 123 Reymond quotes Sir Arthur Eddington in his *New Pathways in Science*: Man is “the gruesome result of nature’s failure to take antiseptic precautions.”

Then he declares that man should compose a society, for “it is not good” that man is alone (Ge 2:18).

The Creation Mandate. The revelation regarding man as God’s image appears in the context of the Creation Mandate. This mandate occurs as the “swelling of jubilant song” at the accomplishment of God’s creative activity.¹¹ God is now ready to pronounce his creation “very good” (Ge 1:31–2:2). One vital function of that image is man’s acting as ruler over the earth and under God. We see this in the close connection between the interpretive revelation regarding his creation in God’s image and the divine command to exercise rule over the creation order: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’ (Ge 1:26–27). Because man is God’s image, he has the capacity for and responsibility to dominion.

In his recent contribution to the debate, historic premillennialist Chung offers some excellent observations on God’s image and man’s dominion:

God’s action of creating man and woman in his own image and likeness means that God wants to have his representatives in physical form. ‘The image is a physical manifestation of divine (or royal) essence that bears the function of that which it represents; this gives the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes of the one represented and act on his behalf. The major task of these representatives is to rule over the whole creation as God’s vice-regents. Lordship and dominion over the entire creation are given to man and woman unconditionally on the basis of God’s sovereign grace.’¹²

And he makes a valid observation against *amillennialism* for its failure “to grasp the covenantal significance of Genesis 1:26–28.”¹³ Unfortunately, he believes this observation affirms premillennialism’s future earthly kingdom; and he does not even mention postmillennialism’s historical application of this kingdom quest. This leads him to an erroneous conclusion:

11. *K-D: The Pentateuch*, 1:64.

12. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 136. In this quote he cites John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 131.

13. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 137.

Reformed covenant theology as it has been traditionally upheld by Reformed theologians has serious problems. First of all, on account of its overemphasis on the soteriological dimension of the covenant of grace throughout the Bible, Reformed covenant theology has not paid deserved attention to the kingdom dimension of God's work within history. . . . By overly focusing on the covenant of works in Genesis 2:15–17, Reformed covenant theology has not correctly understood the significance of Genesis 1:26–28 for the reality of God's kingdom in general and the millennial rule of Christ in particular.¹⁴

Reformed covenantal postmillennialism *does* account for this very matter — and in a manner more biblical than premillennialism.

God's image in man is constitutive of man; it is prior to and definitive of man's duty, dominion.¹⁵ "Man does not simply *bear* or *possess* the image of God, but truly *is* God's image."¹⁶ Man however is not an absolute sovereign; he is God's vice-regent. God creates him and grants him temporal sovereignty, putting him *under command* to act obediently in terms of God's ultimate sovereignty.¹⁷ As Murray points out, dominion is "a function or office based upon the specific character defined as the image of God."¹⁸

God intends man's dominion obligation as an act of generic worship, for "the setting of six days of labor in the context of one day of worship and rest indicates the true perspective from which man's dominion over the earth is to be viewed."¹⁹ Thus, we must understand man's temporal sovereignty as deriving from and being interpreted by God's prior and absolute sovereignty. God creates (Ge 1:26), God blesses (Ge 1:27), God gives (Ge 1:28), and God commands (Ge 2:16). Man must obey (Ge

14. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 134, 135.

15. Amillennialist Herman Hanko insists that through the Fall, "the image of God was changed in him to the image of Satan" and "that the fall brought about a complete loss of the image." Hanko, "An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism", 23, 22. The Scripture, however, grants that even fallen man is still in the image of God, although it is a fragmented and corrupted image (Ge 9:6; 1Co 11:7; Jms 3:9). This image testifies to him of his sin. It is renewed and strengthened in holiness and righteousness in a redeemed man (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

16. Garner in Tipton and Waddington, *Resurrection and Eschatology*, 261.

17. North, *Dominion Covenant*, ch. 3.

18. Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:41.

19. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 80.

2:16–17), fellowship with (Ge 3:8), and worship God (Ge 2:3; Ex 20:11). Man lives up to his creational purpose as he multiplies (Ge 1:28a) and acts as a social creature (Ge 2:8) exercising righteous dominion (Ge 1:28b) in the earth. God implants within man the drive to dominion.²⁰

God gives the Creational (or Dominion) Mandate at man's very creation. This distinguishes him from and elevates him above the animal kingdom and defines his task in God's world according to God's plan. We must understand Adam's naming the animals in Genesis 2 in a Semitic sense:

In Israel as among other peoples there was awareness of the significance attached to a name, and of the power which resided in it. . . . By giving someone a name, one establishes a relation of dominion and possession towards him. Thus acc. to Gn. 2:19f. Adam names all the animals. This means that he exercises dominion over creation and relates it to his own sphere. To name a conquered city (2 S. 12:28) or lands (Ps. 49:11) is to establish a right of possession and to subject them to one's power.²¹

We should not assume that God limits Adam's sovereign dominion to Eden. Eden is only his starting point. God intends for Adam to extend Eden's cultured condition (Ge 2:17) throughout the world (Ge 1:26). We see this in that God creates "him to rule over the world of Thy hands; / Thou has put all things under his feet" (Ps 2:6) — not just those things in Eden.

Not only does God give the Cultural Mandate at creation *before* the Fall, but it remains in effect even *after* sin's entry. We may see this in many ways; consider just two of them. First, the revelational record of man's beginnings show him acting as a dominical creature and with God's approval, subduing the earth and developing culture. Indeed, from the very beginning and continuing into the post-Fall world, Adam and his descendants exercise dominion. This dominion impulse operates at a remarkably rapid rate, contrary to the primitivist view of man held by evolutionary anthropologists.²² Man quickly develops various aspects of

20. See: Hoeffecker, ed., *Building a Christian Worldview*, 2 vols (1986). Lee, *Culture: Its Origin, Development, and Goal* (1967). Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1961 [rep. 1898]). Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (1959). Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live* (1976).

21. Hans Bietenhard, "onoma," *TDNT*, 5:253.

22. That apes, lemurs, and monkeys are called "primates" (from the Latin word

social culture: raising livestock, creating music and musical instruments, crafting tools from metal, and so forth (Ge 4:20–22).

Because man is a social creature (Ge 2:18), his culture-building includes the realm of political government, as well. We see this in God's ordaining governmental authority for man's "good" (Ro 13:1–4). At his very creation, not only does God command Adam to develop all of creation, but he actually begins doing so. Culture is not an accidental aside in the historical order. Any primitiveness found in human cultures from long ago serve as a record of the consequence of sin and estrangement from God, not of original creational status. As Willem Van Gemenen well expresses it: "Christians are responsible for fulfilling the creation mandates to subdue the earth, develop culture, and establish Christian families" so that "the Christian community can be the salt of the earth, or an agency of transformation."²³

Second, Scripture often repeats the Creation Mandate. This assertion bothers Hanko, who argues:

Adam did not *abandon* the cultural mandate; sin and the curse made it impossible for Adam to continue it. This is not a mere quibbling over words; this strikes at the very heart of the [millennial] question. Forgotten is the fact that sin and the curse made it forever impossible for the cultural mandate to be fulfilled in this present world.²⁴

This view deliberately ignores Scripture.

We see the Cultural Mandate in force in both testaments (Ge 9:1ff; Heb 2:5–8).²⁵ Psalm 8 clearly evidences the Cultural Mandate: "What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion

primus, "first") indicates an evolutionary view of man.

23. Van Gemenen, *Progress of Redemption*, 452. Though as a true amillennialist he introduces and concludes this powerful thought negatively: Just before it he warns that "an overly optimistic view of the gradual sanctification and betterment of the earth is . . . destructive to the Christian faith." After it he immediately reminds us that "the world and its structures must fall!"

24. Hanko, "An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism," 10.

25. See allusions elsewhere: Ge 3:15–20; Ecc 3:1–17; 5:18–19; 9:9, 10; 1Co 10:31; 15:22–28; Heb 4:9–16; 6:7–11; Rev 20:12; 21:24–22:5.

over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Ps 8:4–6).

Postmillennialism’s optimistic expectations comport well with God’s creational purpose. They highlight the divine expectation of the created nature of man *qua* man. Postmillennialism expects the world as a system (*kosmos*)²⁶ to submit to God’s rule by the active, sanctified agency of redeemed man, who is renewed in God’s image (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). In other words, postmillennial eschatology expects *in* history (though not perfectly so) what God originally intends *for* history (man’s ruling the world for God’s glory).²⁷ It sees God maintaining his plan and moving history toward its original goal, but now on the new basis of his sovereign and gracious redemption. Hanko’s objection to postmillennialism’s employing the Cultural Mandate arises from his deep sense of the genuine fearsome power of sin. The postmillennialist, however, sees God’s continuing the Cultural Mandate on a new principle: the very real and even greater power of redemption in Christ.

Postmillennialism also well answers historic premillennialism’s concern that “the covenantal unity of the entire Bible demands that the millennial kingdom should be materialized on this earth before the beginning of the new heavens and earth.”²⁸ So then postmillennialism *does* “acknowledge that Genesis 1:26–28 must be taken as an account of the covenant of blessings/promise.”²⁹ Indeed, in postmillennialism we see that “Adam, as God’s vice-regent, and his progeny were to put ‘the finishing touches’ on the world God created in Genesis 1 by making it a liveable place for humans. . . . God’s ultimate goal in creation was to magnify his glory throughout the earth by means of his faithful image-bearers inhabiting the world in obedience to the divine mandate.”³⁰

The Post-Fall Expectation of Victory

26. *Kosmos* (“world”) is the Greek word (used in the New Testament) that expresses the orderly system of the world; it is contrary to *chaos*. For a discussion of this concept, see ch. 11: “Eschatology and Expansion.”

27. The *perfect* application of God’s Edenic expectation awaits his finally removing sin from us.

28. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 144.

29. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 145.

30. Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 82.

The first explicit eschatological statement in Scripture occurs very early: in Genesis 3:15.³¹ In keeping with revelation's progressively unfolding nature, however, this eschatological datum lacks the specificity of later revelation. "Revelation is the interpretation of redemption; it must, therefore, unfold itself in installments as redemption does. . . . The organic progress [of redemptive revelation] is from seed-form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree. . . . The truth is inherently rich and complex, because God is so Himself."³²

This nascent stage of revelation does not sharply exhibit the coming Redeemer's identity; only later will further revelation more narrowly focus the picture, a picture not perfectly clear until Christ comes. Peter points out this remarkable fact, when he notes that even angels "long to look" into the glorious matter which was set forth in the Old Testament (1Pe 1:12).

Yet the broad outlines in this original eschatological statement are clear enough: "O.T. Revelation approaches the concept of a personal Messiah very gradually. It sufficed for fallen man to know that through his divine power and grace God would bring out of the human race victory over the serpent."³³ As Michael Horton expresses it:

The covenant of grace . . . is announced after the fall and develops from Seth and his line, leading to Abraham and the messianic Seed, in whom 'all the nations will be blessed.' That covenantal line is persecuted from within and without and narrows progressively until is reduced to a single individual: Jesus Christ.³⁴

Orthodox Christians recognize that "the seed of the woman" in Genesis 3:15 refers to Christ.³⁵ Here Scripture promises that he will crush his great enemy — undoubtedly Satan, "the serpent of old, who is the devil

31. Though we must understand the eschatological *implication* existing prior to the fall: "Vos has a strong eschatological understanding of the first creation. while beautiful and satisfying, there was more to come, as indicated by the Tree of Life." William Edgar, "Geerhardus Vos and Culture" in Tipton and Waddington, *Resurrection and Eschatology*, 391.

32. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 14, 15, 16.

33. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 55.

34. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 166.

35. Some liberal scholars argue that this prophecy must be understood etiologically rather than messianically. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 89–90.

and Satan” (Rev 12:9; 20:2), who heads up a nefarious kingdom.³⁶ This verse portrays in one sentence a mighty struggle between the woman’s seed (Christ and his kingdom)³⁷ and the serpent’s seed (Satan and his kingdom).³⁸ As G. C. Aalders observes:

Unless we want to separate the second part of the verse completely from the first part and apply the deeper meaning only to the second part while taking the first part strictly literally, we cannot escape the conclusion that the first part of the verse announces the ongoing spiritual conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. In other words, what we have portrayed here is the constant conflict between the children of the devil and the children of the kingdom.³⁹

Philip Hughes concurs: “This first gospel promise, therefore, despite the terse and figurative language in which it is expressed, provides a true perspective of the whole sweep of human history.”⁴⁰ In this verse we witness God establishing the covenant of grace in history.⁴¹ Later New Testament revelation records this prophecy’s fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Christ; it is not still awaiting some distant fulfillment.⁴²

In this verse we see history’s underlying struggle as Satan resists God’s creational and redemptive purposes. Anthony Hoekema cites Genesis 3:15 over against postmillennialism, asserting that “the expectation of a future golden age before Christ’s return does not do justice to the continuing tension in the history of the world between the kingdom

36. Rev 12:9, 14–15; 20:2; cf. Mt 12:26; 24:41; Jn 8:44; Ro 16:20; 2Co 11:3, 14; 1 Jn 3:8.

37. Although there must be a specific reference to Christ as *the* Seed (the Hebrew suffix on “heel” is masculine singular), clearly here we have reference to a collective seed, as well. Eve is called the “mother of all living” (Ge 3:20). Cf. Mt 25:40, 45; Lk 10:18; Jn 8:44; 15:1–7; Ac 13:10; Ro 16:20; 1Co 12:12–27; 1 Jn 3:10; Rev 12:7–9.

38. See the conflict between Adam and Satan, Abel and Cain, the Sethites and Cainites, Noah and Nimrod, Abraham and the Chaldeans, Israelites and Canaanites, Christians and pagans.

39. Gerhard Charles Aalders, *Genesis (Bible Student’s Commentary)* trans. by William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1:107. See also: Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 97ff.

40. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 11.

41. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 180.

42. 1Jn 3:8; Heb 2:14; Col 2:14, 15.

of God and the forces of evil.”⁴³ But he draws too much out of this terse statement, for despite the fact of historical struggle, this poetic datum points to a *victorious issue* by the woman’s seed. After all, later revelation develops the nature of the struggle and its outcome in history, as Hoekema himself admits: “We may say that in this passage God reveals, as in a nutshell, all of his saving purpose with His people. The further history of redemption will be an unfolding of the contents of the mother promise.”⁴⁴ In addition, the verse seems clearly to relate Satan’s death blow to Christ’s heel-wound, his crucifixion, which occurs at his first coming. Why then may we not refer this victory to Christ’s first coming and his kingdom’s establishment (cf. Col 2:15; Ro 16:20)?⁴⁵

Thus, here we have at prophecy’s very inception the certain hope of victory. Just as Adam’s fall has a world-wide negative effect, so does God’s salvation: because of the work of the Last Adam in arising from the dead (Ro 5:15ff; 1Co 15:22, 45).⁴⁶ Satan’s crushing does not await Christ’s consummational victory over Satan. The superior strength and glory of Almighty God the Creator through Jesus Christ will progressively overwhelm Satan the Destroyer, his nefarious kingdom, and its evil effects.

Conclusion

The Bible’s opening chapters set the stage for redemption’s optimistic prospect. God creates man to rule the world under him and to his glory. He commands man to develop culture, to promote civilization, to exercise righteous dominion in the earth. Postmillennialism expects the mandate to be fulfilled before the return of Christ.

Man falls from God’s favor by the tempter’s intrusion. Rather than scrapping his original purpose for the world, the Lord *immediately* begins working out his redemptive plan in history. The outcome of that plan is prophetically clear: the woman’s seed will crush the serpent’s seed. God will extend his covenantal dominion in history through his covenant-keeping representatives in history. The spiritual heirs of the Second Adam will progressively fulfill the comprehensive task that God originally assigns to the First Adam. Redemption progressively triumphs in history

43. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 180.

44. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 5.

45. On the binding of Satan, see below in chs. 11 “Eschatology and Expansion” and 16 “Eschatological Apocalypse.”

46. North, *Is the World Running Down?* (1988).

over reprobation. Christ's resurrection is more powerful than Adam's fall — not just judicially in the heavenly realm but also culturally in the earthly realm.

Speaking in a different context, G. B. Caird expresses the point well: His purpose is worked out in history and must be vindicated in history. There must come a time on earth when it is true to say; 'the sovereignty of the world has passed to our God and to his Christ.' Unless the world is moving to such a goal, Christ has won only a Pyrrhic victory which, whatever the theologians may claim, leaves the powers of evil in possession.⁴⁷

Amillennialism denies this understanding of the power of Christ's resurrection and his ascension to God's right hand.⁴⁸ The amillennialist implies that Adam's fall is the more powerful force in mankind's cultural development. He sees Christ's redemption as "souls-only, church-only, Christian families-only." He draws the line at culture, which is to say, he draws a *judicial boundary* around the Gospel's transforming power. This is because he has already drawn an *eschatological boundary* around the transforming power of the Gospel.⁴⁹

The historical outworking of God's redemptive plan is covenantal, as I note in chapter 6. We may trace covenantal redemption's development from these opening chapters of Genesis and throughout the Scriptures. In the next chapter I will briefly sketch redemption's progress through the Old Testament revelation. Again, postmillennialism fits well with this prophetic expectation, co-ordinating God's redemptive and creative actions.

47. Caird, *Revelation*, 254.

48. Premillennialists also deny it in their view of church history prior to Christ's bodily return to establish his thousand-year earthly kingdom.

49. Perhaps it is the other way around. Van Til argued that ethics is primary; intellectual error is secondary. Thus, Gary North suggests that it is Christians' desire to escape personal and corporate responsibility for fulfilling the terms of the Dominion Mandate that has led them to invent false, pessimistic eschatologies.

9

ESCHATOLOGY AND ANTICIPATION

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Ge 12:2-3)

As I note in the previous chapter, God calls man to exercise dominion over the earth at creation, while he begins man's redemptive restoration to that call immediately after the fall. Following God's revelation in Scripture we may trace the Redeemer's line, developing the hope-filled eschatological expectation of the comprehensive redemption that he will surely bring.

Anticipation in the Patriarchal and Mosaic Eras

The Noahic Covenant

We find the Noahic Covenant's various features in Genesis 6:17–22 and 8:20–9:17. Here God reaffirms the Cultural Mandate, which is fundamental to the outworking of his eschatological purpose through his highest creature, man.¹ We also witness God's continuing gracious redemptive relation to man as the ongoing basis of the Cultural Mandate. This too is necessary to the redemptive-historical character of eschatology.²

God establishes this covenant with his people: the family of Noah, which alone escapes the deluge by God's grace (Heb 11:7; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 2:5). Thus, this is *not* solely a common-grace covenant, for God establishes it with his people (Noah's family) and on the basis of

1. Cf. the references to the birds, cattle, etc. (cp. Ge 6:20; 8:17 with Ge 1:24, 25), the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Ge 9:1, 7 with Ge 1:28), and the dominion concept (cf. Ge 9:2 with Ge 1:28).

2. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 111. He refers to L. Dequeker, "Noah and Israel. The Everlasting Divine Covenant with Mankind," *Questions disputes d'Ancien Testament, Methode et Theologie* (Gembloux, 1974), 119.

sovereign grace and redemptive sacrifice (Ge 6:8; 8:20–22). Furthermore, Scripture unites the Noahic covenant with God's other redemptive covenants (cf. Hos 2:18 with Ge 6:20; 8:17; 9:9ff).³ The Cultural Mandate, then, especially relates to the function of God's people in the world: God expressly reaffirms the Mandate with God's people, the "you" of Genesis 9:1–12. On the basis of divine covenant God calls his people to the forefront of cultural leadership, with the religious aspects of culture being primary.

In revealing the Noahic covenant we also witness God's objective - relationship with man: God judges the world *in history* for its sin. God establishes the rainbow as a sign of his covenant mercy with Noah and all that are with him, including their seed (Ge 9:12). This indicates that the world will be protected from God's curse through the presence of God's people. God makes the covenant only indirectly with unbelievers, who benefit from God's protection only as they do not oppose God's people. Because of God's love for his people, he preserves the orderly universe (Ge 8:20–22).

Thus we see God's *objective corporate sanction* against sin in the Flood, which also serves as a type of final judgment (2Pe 3:4–6). We also witness God's judicial sanctions in history in his ordaining capital punishment (Ge 9:6). God's objective judgment therefore finds *civil expression* in man's affairs. The Lord grants legitimate authority to the civil government to enforce capital punishment. God bases this on a fundamentally religious principle, namely, God's image in man (Ge 9:6), and gives it to the world through the church (i.e., Noah's family).⁴ God ordains civil sanctions as a means for preserving the human race for his redemptive purposes (cf. Ro 13:1–4; 1Pe 2:13–14; cp. 1Ti 2:1–4; Ac 25:11).

As we trace redemption's scarlet thread through the fabric of Scriptural revelation and covenant history, the hope of redemptive victory becomes even more clear. The patriarchal and Mosaic eras demonstrate this. Here I will survey a few of the more significant references in these eras in order to illustrate this truth.

The Abrahamic Covenant

3. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 111.

4. This does not mean that the *institutional church* has the authority to execute criminals. The institutional church is an agent of grace and mercy; the state an agent of justice.

In the Abrahamic Covenant God intensifies his redemptive work designed to bring man back to himself: “Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you’” (Ge 12:1–3a).

We must note three aspects of this covenantal promise: (1) the seed,⁵ (2) the land,⁶ and (3) the nations.⁷ Genesis 15 emphasizes the land and seed features. For example: “Then He brought [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates’” (Ge 15:18).

Certainly the divine promise involves temporal blessings for Abraham, including a seed and a land. Scripture records God’s fulfilling the seed⁸ and the land⁹ promises in the Old Testament.

So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. . . . Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. (Jos 21:43, 45)

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance; they were eating and drinking and rejoicing. Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. (1Ki 4:20–21; cp. Ge 15:18; Jos 1:4)

5. Ge 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 17:2–6; 18:18; 22:17; cf. Ge 20:4; 28:4, 14; 32:12.

6. Ge 12:2, 7; 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; 24:7; cf. Ge 28:4.

7. Ge 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; cf. Ge 26:4; 28:14. See also the prophetic and New Testament era development of this universal theme.

8. Ex 12:37; Nu 22:11; Dt 1:10; 10:22; 1Ki 4:20; 1Ch 27:23; 2Ch 1:9; Heb 11:12. Notice that Christ is the special seed, Jn 8:56.

9. 1Ki 4:21; 8:65–66; 2Ch 9:26.

You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to go in and possess. (Ne 9:23)

Even historic premillennialists recognize this, over against dispensationalists:

God's promise to make Abraham into a great nation was fulfilled in the history of Israel. God's promise to give Abraham numerous descendants was fulfilled by the Israelites' being fruitful and multiplying in the land of Egypt (Exod. 1:1–7). God's promise to give Abraham's descendants a land was fulfilled by Joshua's conquering the land of Canaan. And God's promise to give Abraham's descendants many kings (Gen. 17:6) was fulfilled through David and his royal line.¹⁰

The dispensationalist argues for a future fulfillment based on the promise that God will give Abraham the land “forever” (Ge 13:15), as an “everlasting” possession (Ge 17:8). This argument is faulty, however. In the first place, a common use of *olam* (often translated “forever, everlasting”) frequently applies to long-term temporal situations rather than eternal ones. Is the Passover literally forever (Ex 12:14, 17, 24)? the priesthood (Ex 29:28; 40:15; Nu 25:13)? sin offerings (Lev 6:18)? burnt offerings (Lev 7:36)? the temple (2Ch 7:16)? Do slaves forever attach themselves to their masters (Ex 21:6)? Many other examples confirm this use of *olam*.¹¹ The term

does not seem to mean eternity in the philosophical sense of the word (i.e., neither unbounded time nor eternal timelessness), although there are a few vv. where the meaning of the nom[inative] is very much like the idea of eternity. . . . Such distant time is clearly relative: it can be a time in one's own life (Ps 7:5 [6]), a life span (Exod 21:6), or the furthest conceivable time (15:18).¹²

Secondly, God's covenants and promises are conditioned upon ethical obedience, even when this is not specifically stated. Covenantal promises are like prophetic utterances in this regard: “It is the conditional nature

10. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 144.

11. See also: Ex 29:28; 30:21; Lev 6:18, 22; 7:34, 36; 10:15; 16:29, 31; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 41; 24:3; Nu 18:8; Jos 4:7.

12. *NIDOTTE* 3:346.

of all prophecy that makes the outcome contingent on the ethical decisions of men.”¹³ For instance, God clearly tells Jonah that he will overthrow Nineveh in forty days (Jon 3:4), yet God “repented” of his determination (v 10). God informs Paul that no life will be lost on the ship: “there shall be no loss of life among you” (Ac 27:22). But he later adds a condition: “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved” (v 31).¹⁴ The conditions of the Abrahamic Covenant include the ethical obligation to “keep the way of the Lord” (Ge 18:17–19).¹⁵ Israel’s forfeiture of the Land promised in the Abrahamic Covenant is clearly possible, as God’s Word makes abundantly clear.¹⁶

Consequently, we must understand the biblical view of the land. The land of Israel is “His holy Land” (Lev 25:23; Ps 78:54). It depends on his favor upon Israel (Hos 9:3; Jer 2:7) and his dwelling therein (Nu 35:34; Lev 26), which continues as long as Israel obeys him (Dt 4:40; Isa 1:19; Jer 15:13–14; 17:1–4).

Furthermore, the Promised Land serves as a *type* of the whole earth (which is the Lord’s, Ps 24:1¹⁷). It is, as it were, a *tithe* to the Lord of the entire earth. As such, it pictures the rest brought by Christ’s kingdom, which shall cover the earth (see Heb 3–4). “Hebrews 11:8–16 shows that although Abraham received the physical land of Canaan, he was looking forward to the eternal city and Kingdom of God. Canaan is a type of the new heavens and earth that began with the first advent of Christ, in seed form (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22–29).”¹⁸ In Psalm 37:11 the psalmist speaks of God’s promise to his people: “But the meek shall inherit the land.” But Jesus takes this promise and extends it over the entire earth in Matthew 5:5. Abraham apparently understands the land promise as a down payment representing his inheriting the world (Ro 4:13). Paul expands the Land promises to extend across all the earth, when he draws them into the New Testament (e.g., Eph 6:3). In several divine covenants we detect

13. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 120. Warfield, “The Prophecies of St. Paul” (1886) in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 470ff. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 232ff.

14. Cf. also 1Sa 2:30; Isa 38:1–6; Jer 26:13–19; Joel 2:13–14. See: Jones, “An Amill Reply to Peters,” 333–341.

15. Cf. Ge 17:9–14; 22:18; 26:5; Heb 11:8.

16. Ex 19:5; Dt 28:15ff; 30:5–19; Lev 26:14ff; Jos 8:34; 24:20 1Ki 2:3,4; 9:2–9; 11:11; 2Ki 21:8; 1Ch 28:76; 2Ch 7:19–22; Jer 18.

17. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, ch. 4.

18. Crampton, “Canaan and the Kingdom of God — Conclusion,” 19.

the expanding of these Land promises: God gives Adam a garden (Ge 2:8); he grants Abraham's seed a country (Jos 1); he promises the New Covenant church the world (Mt 28:18–20).¹⁹

But the fundamental blessedness of the Abrahamic Covenant, like that of the Adamic Covenant before it, is essentially *redemptive* rather than political. The seed line is primarily designed to produce the Savior; the Land promise is typological of the Savior's universal dominion. The Abrahamic Covenant involves a right relationship with God, as indicated in Genesis 17:7: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." That which is most important in God's plan is the spiritual relation, rather than the blood relation (Jn 8:44, cf. Mt 12:47, 50; Jn 1:12–13). As Paul says, so it is even in the Old Testament era: "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter" (Ro 2:28–29).²⁰

Now I will focus on the postmillennial victory expectations inherent in the Abrahamic Covenant. Here the redemptive line narrows down from "the seed of the woman" (i.e., the human race) to the family of Abraham. It will continue to narrow until it results in the singular seed, Christ (Gal 3:16; Jn 8:56; cf. Lk 3:23–38). Nevertheless, the consequence of God's redemptive promise ultimately will broaden out to include "all the families of the earth."²¹ The Hebrew word for "families" here is *mispachah*, which includes nations.²² Thus, the Abrahamic Covenant will include the families — or more properly *nations*, — beyond Israel. The *ultimate purpose* of the Abrahamic Covenant is nothing less than *world conversion* (as we shall point out more particularly in our next section), rather than Jewish exaltation, as per dispensationalism.²³ We should expect this since

19. See my *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, Part II.

20. The internal and ethical are always back of the external and national, and hold priority. For instance, see the emphasis on the spiritual significance of the sacrifices: Ps 40:6; 51:17; Isa 1:10–18; 66:2–3; Jer 6:19–20; Am 5:21–24; Mic 6:6–8; Mal 1:10.

21. Ge 12:2–3; 13:14–16; 15:5; 16:10; 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:4; 28:14.

22. Ps 22:27–28; Jer 1:15; Eze 20:32; Am 3:2; Zec 14:18.

23. According to dispensationalists, when the Abrahamic Covenant comes to fruition in the millennium: "The redeemed living nation of Israel, regenerated and regathered to the land will be head over all the nations of the earth. . . . So he

the Lord is King of the whole earth²⁴ and desires the world to know Him.²⁵

The New Testament clearly informs us of the spiritual implications of the seed, in terms of the blessings for the nations. Abraham becomes “the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham. . . . Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all” (Ro 4:12, 16). “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. . . . If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:7–8, 29). Thus I will show in the next section that the Old Testament kingdom prophecies anticipate the sharing of the covenantal glory with others universally.²⁶

Due to redemption God counters the Genesis 3 curse upon all men by the Abrahamic covenant, in which he begins “nullifying of the curse.”²⁷ The victory expectation is so strong that we find repeated casual references based on confident expectation. The seed is promised victory in accordance with the original *protoevangelium*. Abraham’s seed is to “possess the gates of the enemy” (cf. Ge 22:17 with Mt 16:18).²⁸ Genesis

exalts them above the Gentile nations. . . . On the lowest level there are the saved, living, Gentile nations.” Herman Hoyt, “Dispensational Premillennialism,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 81. On this Zionistic tendency in dispensationalism, see ch. 11 below.

24. Ps 22:28; 27:5; 47:2, 7, 8, 29; 66:7; 96:10a; 97:1; 99:1; 103:19; Da 4:17, 25, 32.

25. 1Ki 8:43, 60; 2Ch 6:33; Ps 2:9–12; 83:18; Ob 21.

26. Isa 25:6; 45:22; 51:4–6; Mic 4:1ff.

27. Aalders, *Genesis*, 1:270. See also: LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 91.

28. “Enmity” in Ge 3:15 (*ybah*) is related to the verb (*yb*). In participial form it “occurs repeatedly, alluding frequently to the very struggle between God’s and Satan’s people.” Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 96n. Abraham possesses the gates of his enemies (Ge 22:17). Judah overcomes his enemies (Ge 49:8). God shatters his enemies (Ex 15:6) and will be an enemy to Israel’s enemies (Ex 23:22). The Canaanites are Israel’s enemies (Dt 6:19).

49:8–10 promises that Judah will maintain the scepter of rule until Shiloh [Christ] shall come — and then to him “shall be the obedience of the peoples.” We should note the plural “peoples”; Shiloh’s winning of obedience is not among the Jews only (the people, singular). Here we comes upon the first express mention of a personal redeemer, one who will rule over all peoples. Ezekiel and Paul both allude to this with confidence — Ezekiel in anticipation (Eze 21:27), Paul in realization (Gal 3:19).

Numbers 14:21 confirms the victorious expectation with a *formulaic oath*: “Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.” In Numbers 24:17–19 Balaam harkens back to Jacob’s prophecy in Genesis 49:10. He foresees an all-powerful, world-wide dominion for the Messiah: “A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir, its enemies, also shall be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion, and shall destroy the remnant from the city.” First Samuel 2:10 promises that “the adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.” Thus the New Testament declares: “For the promise that he would be the *heir of the world* was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Ro 4:13).

Anticipation in the Messianic Psalms

In the prophetic era we discover God’s accelerating development of redemption, and with it the sure promise of a glorious victory for the redeemed. Here I will only briefly consider three of the leading psalmic references.

Psalms 2

This psalm provides us with another glorious vision involving God’s interpretation of human history. It relates the cosmic turmoil among the nations to the prophetic assurance of its glorious outcome. Thus, it follows the pattern of the protoevangelium (Ge 3:15), showing temporal struggle followed by historical victory.

The psalm opens with the nations noisily raging “against the Lord and against his Anointed One” (Ps 2:1–3). Ultimately considered, the world’s turmoil grows up from opposition to God’s authority, which is the

essence of all sin (Ge 3:5; Ro 1:18–21). The nations of the world are seeking to free themselves from the sovereign rule of the Lord and his Anointed: “Let us break *their* chains” (v 3).

Their rage is not only intrinsically evil but pathetically futile, for the Lord sits serenely enthroned in transcendent majesty above: “The One enthroned in heaven laughs; / the Lord scoffs at them” (v 4). Here the psalmist bitingly portrays God’s confidence in his laughing mockery of the nations’ opposition against him and his “Anointed One” (v. 2). In Psalm 2:2 the term “Anointed One” (Heb.: “messiah”) designates the great Deliverer and King, whom the Jews long expected (see: Jn 1:20, 24–25, 41, 49; cp. Mk 15:32; Lk 24:19–21). He is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Mk 8:29–30; 14:61–62).

The New Testament interprets this psalm messianically, with the nations expressly raging at the crucifixion: “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed” (Ac 4:25–27). In the crucifixion this psalm “attained its height, but was not finally exhausted or fulfilled” in that the cosmic battle rages on.²⁹

In v 5 the long-suffering confidence of God gives way to his righteous indignation: “Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.” In fact, in Psalm 2 David borrows four Hebrew terms (*‘az*, *nibhalu*, *‘ele*, *yoseb*) from Exodus 15, where a celebration-song recounts the routing of Egypt and anticipates the terror of Israel’s Canaanite enemies. Messiah will vanquish the raging nations of the world as surely as God conquers Israel’s Canaanite foes. Alexander comments: That such folly “is often suffered to proceed long with impunity is only, in the figurative language of this passage, because God first laughs at human folly, and then smites it.”³⁰ Providence moves slowly in that “with the Lord . . . a thousand years are like a day” (2Pe 3:8).

In contrast to the nations’ futile rage, God sovereignly declares: “But I [emphatic personal pronoun in the Hebrew] have installed my King on Zion” (v. 6). God does not speak of this installed one as “a king” or “the

29. Alexander, *The Psalms*, 14.

30. Alexander, *The Psalms*, 15.

king,” but as “*my* King.” Verse 7 expands our understanding of this installation, showing the Messiah himself speaking: “I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: / He said to me, ‘You are my Son; / today I have become your Father.’” The “decree” is a pledge of adoption by God, a holy coronation rite establishing this King’s legitimacy (see: 2Sa 7:13–14; Ps 89:26–27).

The word “today” suggests a formal moment at which the title applies to the new ruler. Rather, than occurring at Christ’s second advent, as many assume, the New Testament relates it once again to the first century: at the exaltation of Christ beginning with his resurrection. “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’” (Ac 13:33; cp. Ro 1:4). At the resurrection/ascension God installs Christ as the King (Ro 1:4), who will rule from God’s right hand (Ro 14:9–11; Eph 1:20ff; Co. 1:18; 1Pe 3:22; Rev 17:14; 19:16). The Great Commission speaks of Christ’s being “given” all authority — apparently at his recent resurrection (Mt 28:18; cp. the aorist tense in Php 2:9).

But what of this installation “on Zion”? Zion is an historical site, to be sure; it is a Jebusite fortress David captures and renames the “City of David” (2Sa 5:6–9). With David’s bringing the Ark to Zion, the hill becomes sacred (2Sa 6:10–12). Because of its holy significance, then, the name “Zion” gradually applies beyond the historical site to include Mount Moriah where Solomon builds the temple (Isa 8:18; Joel 3:17; Mic 4:7) — and eventually to all of Jerusalem (2Ki 19:21; Ps 48:2, 11–13; 69:35; Isa 1:8). “Zion became in Hebrew tradition the central symbol of God’s rule, the kingdom of God, a realm of justice, righteousness, and peace.”³¹ As such it can even represent the whole Jewish nation (Isa 40:9; Zec 9:13). In the New Testament Zion/Jerusalem transcends Old Testament realities, reaching to heaven itself (Gal 4:25–26; Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1). Thus, God transfers the center of theocratic rule to heaven, where Christ presently rules over his kingdom (Jn 18:36; Rev 1:5).

Now all that the enthroned Messiah need do is “ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession” (v 8). The Lord promises his Messiah the “nations” (not just one nation, Israel) and “the ends of the earth” (not just one region, Palestine) as his permanent ‘possession’ (v 8). Though they will resist him (vv 2:1–3), he will break them in his dominion (v 9).

31. Lamontte M. Luker, “Zion” in *MDB*, 986.

Remarkably, this securing of “the nations” is the very task the Messiah assigns to his followers in the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19a; see discussion below). He will rule over them with his rod and dash in pieces those who refuse to submit (Ps 2:9). This he does through his mighty word and under his controlling providence (Heb 1:3, 8–13; e.g., Mt 21:43–44). Because of this ultimate hope, the raging nations receive warning: “Therefore, you kings, be wise; / be warned, you rulers of the earth. / Serve the LORD with fear / and rejoice with trembling. / Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, / for his wrath can flare up in a moment. / Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps 2:10–12).

This psalm gloriously develops the redemptive-historical theme of struggle and victory which begins with the protoevangelium. It throbs with historical optimism and serves virtually as a postmillennial tract urging confidence in God’s people.

Psalms 22

Psalms 22 prophesies that “all the ends of the earth will remember³² and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee” (v 27).³³ Interestingly, like Psalm 2 this psalm refers to Christ’s suffering. In fact, evangelicals universally recognize Psalms 22:1–21 is prophesying the crucifixion. Verse 1 is uttered by Christ in his agony on the cross (Mt 27:46); verse 18 is also fulfilled at the cross (Jn 19:2).

Yet his suffering quickly gives way to his glorious dominion (vv 22–31), as per the pattern of the New Testament: suffering then glory (Lk 24:26; Php 2:6–11; 1Pe 1:11). After his suffering men will declare his praise in the church (Ps 22:22; Heb 2:12). That praise includes the church (“great assembly,” Heb 12:23) proclaiming his victory (Ps 22:27ff). The reason he will save the earth is that the earth is his by right (Ps 22:28); he creates the material earth for his glory. And he displays his glory through worldwide redemption.

32. They “remember” because of their being created in God’s image (Ge 1:26) and having an innate awareness of the Creator (Ro 1:19–20).

33. Cf. Ps 66:4; 68:31–32; 82:8; 86:9. In the Old Testament, worshiping before God means worshiping in Jerusalem. But in Messiah’s day it means worshiping anywhere: Mt 18:20; John 4:21; Isa 66:23; Mal 1:11.

J. A. Alexander, E. W. Hengstenberg, and others note the interesting collusion of Christ's concluding words on the cross ("It is finished") with the closing words of Psalm 22, which speaks of the cross and the glory to follow: "He has performed it."³⁴ His redemptive work includes both the cross and the crown — in time and on earth. This obviously anticipates the fruition of the God's covenant, which he administers through Abraham and expands to Moses and David. We cannot understand this amillennially as occurring in heaven or in consummate new earth, for it speaks of the earth as turning and remembering, i.e., undergoing *conversions*. It also speaks of death (v 29) and later generations following their fathers (vv 30–31).

Psalm 72

Here the Lord once again ties Messianic victory to pre-consummational history, i.e., before he establishes the eternal new heavens and earth.

Let them fear Thee *while the sun endures, / And as long as the moon,*
throughout all *generations.* / May he come down like rain upon the
mown grass, / Like showers that water the earth. / In his days may
the righteous flourish, / And abundance of peace till the moon is no
more. / May he also rule from sea to sea, / And from the River to the
ends of the earth. (Ps 72:5–8)

Psalm 72 is a "glowing description of the reign of the Messiah, as righteous (vv 1–7), universal (vv 8–11), beneficent (vv 12–14), perpetual (vv 15–17)."³⁵ It speaks of the social (vv 2–4, 12–14) and economic factors of his reign (v 16), as well as the spiritual benefits (vv 5–7, 17). The image of pouring rain reflects Christ's spiritual presence through the Holy Spirit (Ro 8:9; Jn 14:16–18) poured out upon the world from on high (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Eze 39:29; Joel 2:28–29; Zec 12:10; Ac 2:17–18).

According to the Psalmist, kings of the various nations will rule in submission to him (vv 10–11). Because of his beneficent reign, population will increase (v 16b; Zec 2:4). The flourishing of the righteous (v 7) in the city (v 16) indicates a rapid population increase under his beneficence, because depopulating wars and pestilence cease. Prophecy frequently associates population increase with Messiah's reign (Ps 110:3; Isa 9:2;

34. Alexander, *Psalms*, 107; Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 1:396.

35. Alexander, *Psalms*, 301.

49:20; Zec 2:4). This harmonizes well with the Cultural Mandate (Ge 1:26ff) and covenantal blessing (Dt 28:4; Lev 26:9).³⁶

*Psalm 110*³⁷

Psalm 110:1 “is quoted in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament text.”³⁸ It exercises a great bearing on New Testament theology. Psalm 110:1–2 reads:

The LORD says to my Lord: / “Sit at My right hand, / Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” / The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. / Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

The Psalm is purely prophetic, not referring to David himself.³⁹ This becomes obvious in light of Jesus’ teaching (Mt 22:42–45) and in that David was not a priest (v 4). And it clearly anticipates Christ subjugating his enemies. But he does this while sitting at the right hand of God (“sit until”⁴⁰), not by his leaving heaven and returning to the earth at the second advent. We see that this Psalm is now in force and expects Christ’s ultimate victory, in both its numerous New Testament allusions and in that he is already the Melchizedekian priest, mentioned in verse 4 (cf. Heb 7). According to Genesis 14:18, this peculiar priest is both king and priest — as is Christ.

His strong rod will rule from Zion, which portrays the New Covenant-phase church headquartered at Jerusalem, where the Apostles first preach the gospel (Lk 24:47; Ac 1:8; Gal 4:26). He rules through his rod, which is his word (Isa 2:3; 11:4). He leads his people onward into battle against the foe (v 3). The allusion to kings in verse 5, following as it does the

36. See also: Ge 9:1, 7; 17:6; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; Ps 128:3; Jer 23:3.

37. For a fuller postmillennial commentary on this Psalm, see: William O. Einwechter, “Psalm 110 and the Postmillennial Hope” in Gentry, *Thine Is the Kingdom*, ch. 2.

38. Bruce K. Waltke, “Psalm 110: An Exegetical and Canonical Approach,” in Tipton and Waddington, *Resurrection and Eschatology*, 60. Quotations include: Mt 22:44; 26:64; Mk 12:36; 14:62; Lk 20:42–43; 22:69; Ac 2:34–35; Heb 1:13. Allusions may be found in: 1Co 15:24; Eph 1:20–22; Php 2:9–11; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12, 13; 1Pe. 3:22; Rev 3:21. For a detailed study of this psalm’s impact in both Jewish and Christian literature, see Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand* (1973).

39. Waltke in Tipton and Waddington, *Resurrection and Eschatology*, 85.

40. The Hebrew adverbial particle ‘d indicates duration. See: Perowne, *Psalms*, 2:292–293.

reference to Melchizedek in verse 4, probably reflects Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek after his conquest of the four kings in Genesis 14. Because "kings" is in the emphatic position in Hebrew, it indicates Christ will not only rule the lowly, but also kings and nations through his redemptive power, as in Psalms 2 and 72. His rule shall be over governments, as well as individuals; it will be societal, as well as personal.

Anticipation in the Prophets

The prophets greatly expand the Messianic victory theme. I will highlight several prophetic pronouncements regarding his victory.⁴¹

Isaiah 2:1–4

In Isaiah 2 we learn that the "last days" will experience a universal attractive influence to divine worship and an international dispersion and influence of Christianity. This will result in righteous living on the personal level and social peace on the international level:

He shall judge between the nations, / And shall rebuke many people;
/ They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into
pruninghooks. (Isa 2:4a)

Isaiah indicates the "last days" will be the era that witnesses these things — not some era *after* these last days.⁴² The "last days" begin with the coming of Christ.⁴³ Isaiah's younger contemporary, Micah, repeats this prophecy almost verbatim (Mic 4:1–3).

Here "Judah and Jerusalem" stand for God's people, as "Israel and Judah" do in Jeremiah 31:31, which the New Testament specifically

41. For fuller helpful exposition see: Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*; Alexander, *Isaiah*.

42. Kim Riddlebarger stumbles when he complains against postmillennialists regarding Isa 2:2–4: "This leaves open the possibility of interpreting those passages which speak of a new heaven and earth as applying to the present age (i.e., Isa. 2:2–4)." Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 240. We apply this passage to "the present age" because Isaiah states that it will be "in the last days," i.e., *during* the last days.

43. That is, in the times initiated by Christ at his First Advent, Ac 2:16, 17, 24; 1Co 10:11; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1, 2; 9:26; Jas 5:3; 1Pe 1:20; 1Jn 2:18; Jude 18. For a discussion of "the last days," see ch. 13 "Eschatological Time-Frames" below.

applies to the church.⁴⁴ The “mountain,” the “house of the God of Jacob,” and “Zion” refer to the church, which, according to the New Testament, is the temple and house of God⁴⁵ and the earthly representation of the city of God (Heb 12:22; 1Pe 2:6; Rev 21:2⁴⁶), which is set on a hill (Mt 5:14; Heb. 12:22).⁴⁷ Again, we must remember that this is *in Jerusalem* where Christ effects historical redemption (Ac 10:39; Ro 9:33; 1Pe 2:6)⁴⁸ and where Christianity begins (Ac 1–2).

Isaiah’s statement that it will be “established” (Heb.: *kun*) in “the top of the mountains” indicates Christ’s church will be “permanently fixed, rendered permanently visible.”⁴⁹ After the introductory phrase “last days,” Isaiah places the word “established” first for emphasis. In Ezekiel and Zechariah this house is enormous (Eze 40:2ff); Jerusalem appears as towering over a plain (Zec 14:10).⁵⁰ Christianity, the last stage of God’s redemptive plan in history, will be so established as to be firmly fixed: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28).⁵¹ In Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 the niphal participle “must be understood of *an enduring condition*, and the same is implied in the representation in vss. 3, 4 of Jehovah’s teaching function, of his

44. See my previous discussion: ch. 7: “The Hermeneutic of Scripture.”

45. The church is the “temple of God,” 1Co 3:16; 6:19; 2Co 6:16; Eph 2:19–22; 1Pe 2:5. She is specifically designated “the house of God,” 1Ti 3:15; Heb 2:6; 1Pe 4:17. See my discussion in ch. 14 “Eschatological Features.”

46. The heavenly city of God comes to earth in the establishment of Christ’s kingdom and church, Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10, 14ff. See my brief discussion of Revelation 21–22 in ch. 16 “Eschatological Apocalypse.”

47. See discussion of “The Holy Mountain”: Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, ch. 4.

48. A well-known phenomenon in Luke’s gospel is his emphasis on Jerusalem, particularly Christ’s determination to go there for his crucifixion. It was eschatologically necessary for him to die in Jerusalem, so that his redemption would flow from the “city of peace” to effect “peace with God” (Ro 5:1; 15:33; 16:20; 2Co 13:11; Php 4:9; 2Jn 3): “Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem” (Lk 13:33). See also: Conzelmann’s discussion of Jerusalem in Luke’s eschatology. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 132ff.

49. Alexander, *Isaiah*, 1:97.

50. Cp. the measurements of this picture of the church in Rev 21:15–16.

51. Mt 7:24–27; 1Co 3:11; Eph 2:20; 2Ti 2:19; Rev 21:9ff.

judging between many nations and of the state of peace and security prevailing, every man sitting under his vine and fig-tree and to make none of them afraid (the last in Micah only).⁵²

To this eschatological phenomenon “all nations shall flow” (Isa 2:2–3). It witnesses “the gathering of the people” (Ge 49:10) and enjoys the inflowing of “many people and strong nations” (Zec 8:20–23).⁵³ The nations shall flow like a river to worship the Lord as a result of the desire arising from conversion: they shall be enjoy discipling in his ways and learning the holy strictures from his Law (Isa 2:3). The coming redemptive eschatological fulfillment (Mk 1:15; Mt 13:17; Ac 2:16ff; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1, 2) leads to Christianity’s permanent establishment as an agency of gracious influence in the world unto salvation and sanctification. We see evangelism at work in the image of the flowing river of people urging others to “come, go ye” to God’s house (Isa 2:3). Due to the overwhelming numbers converting to Christ and undergoing discipling in God’s Law,⁵⁴ great social transformation naturally follows (Isa 2:4). “It is a picture of universal peace that Isaiah gives, but it is a religiously founded peace.”⁵⁵ This peace with God (vv 2–3) gives rise to peace among men (v 4).

Amillennialist Herman Hanko disposes of this postmillennial text as treated by Lorraine Boettner with an incredible sweep of the hand:

Now it is true that Mount Zion has a symbolic and typical meaning in Scripture. It is also true that the reference is often to the church of Jesus Christ — as Boettner remarks in connection with Hebrews 12:22. But one wonders at the tremendous jump which is made from the idea of Mount Zion as symbolic of the church to the idea that “the church, having attained a position so that it stands out like a mountain on a plain, will be prominent and regulative in all world affairs.” There is not so much as a hint of this idea in the text. The conclusion is wholly unwarranted.⁵⁶

Having granted that Mount Zion is “symbolic of the Church,” how can Hanko legitimately call the postmillennial argument a “tremendous jump”

52. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 7.

53. Again, see Rev 21:24–25; 22:2.

54. See Gentry, *Greatness of the Great Commission*. See also North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* and Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory*.

55. Young, *Isaiah*, 1:107.

56. Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism”, 6.

with “not so much as a hint” and “wholly unwarranted”? Hanks’s argument is merely a loud denial rooted in his predisposition to amillennialism. What we need here is careful exegesis, not loud assertions.

Isaiah 9:6–7

To understand Isaiah 9:1–7 we must note the close connection between the birth of “the son” (his redemptive humiliation, v 6) and his receiving universal government (at his exaltation at the resurrection/ascension). The promise is that *this kingdom will grow, issuing forth in peace* (v 7). When Messiah comes into the world he does so to receive a kingdom. The preceding context points also to Christ’s first coming as inaugurating this prophecy’s fulfillment. The reference in verse 2 to the people in darkness who see a great light is fulfilled in Christ’s ministry (Mt 4:16). In fact, the great light is Christ (Jn 8:12; 12:46).

In verse 3 the Lord promises to multiply Israel. This is according to the Abrahamic Covenant’s promise of a great seed and influence among the nations. God will accomplish this by calling the Gentiles to be the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:29). This involves their ingrafting into Israel’s stock (Ro 11:16–19), the merging of Jew and Gentile into one body (Eph 2:11–17). The increase of Israel’s joy (v 3) indicates the joy in the Savior’s coming (Lk 2:10; Jn 3:29⁵⁷). As in Isaiah 2:3–4 Christ’s coming results in oppression and war ceasing (vv 4–5), which Isaiah portrays in the burning of soldiers’ garments as a symbol that they will no longer be needed.⁵⁸ This is similar to the earlier casting off of swords (Isa 2:4).

Christ’s reign over his kingdom begins at his first coming⁵⁹ and will be “progressive and perpetual.”⁶⁰ In prophecy Christ appears as the son or branch of David (Jer 23:5; 33:13), or as David himself (Jer 30:9; Eze 34:23, 23; 37:24; Hos 3:5). After his resurrection he ascends to David’s throne (Ac 2:30–31), which represents God’s throne (1Ch 28:5; 29:23). His reign brings peace, for he is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). This peace grows incrementally through history: Christ “extends its boundaries far

57. Christ brings joy to his people, Jn 15:11; 16:20ff. Where Christianity goes, joy follows, Ac 8:8; 13:52; 15:3; Ro 14:17; 15:13; 1 Pe 1:8; 1Jn 1:4.

58. Young, *Isaiah*, 1:328.

59. For fuller argumentation, see ch. 10: “Eschatology and Realization.”

60. Alexander, *Isaiah*, 1:205.

and wide, and then preserves and carries it forward in uninterrupted progression to eternity.”⁶¹

Isaiah 11:9

Isaiah 11:1–10 speaks gloriously of the eschatological hope beginning with Adam, flowing through Noah, and expanding with Abraham. The preceding context contrasts with the collapse of David’s house and of the Jewish government to Assyria (Isa 10). Though the nearly extinct house of David is but a stump, it still has life and will bud with a branch. That branch is Christ: he restores David’s house in the New Testament,⁶² hence the emphasis in the New Testament on his genealogy from David (Mt 1:1–17; Lk 3:23–38⁶³).

Christ comes in the first century as a stem or branch (Isa 11:1). The Holy Spirit richly indwells him (11:2)⁶⁴; he will judge his adversaries (v 4, particularly first-century Israel, Mt 3:1–12; 21:43–45; 23:33–38; 24:2–34). And once again, righteousness and peace flow in his wake. Isaiah describes the peace between men as a removal of the enmity between wolf and lamb, bear and cow, lion and calf, leopard and kid, serpent and child (vv 6–8).⁶⁵ God’s grace will transform their warring nature (cf. Eph 2:1–4).

Because of his coming, earth’s future is glorious: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9).⁶⁶ This

61. Calvin, *Isaiah*, 1:96. See later discussion of the principle of gradualism in ch. 11: “Eschatology and Expansion.”

62. Mt 1:17, 18; Mk 11:10; Ac 2:34–36; 13:34; 15:16.

63. See also: Lk 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; Ro 1:3; Rev 3:7; 5:5; 22:16.

64. Mt 3:16–4:1; 12:17–21; Lk 4:14–21; Jn 3:34; Ac 10:38.

65. Several of these dangerous creatures are compared to Satan and sinners elsewhere: wolves (Eze 22:27; Zep 3:3; Mt 7:15; 10:16), bears (Pr 28:15; Lam 3:10; Da 7:5; Rev 13:2), serpents (Ps 140:3; 2Co 11:3; Rev 12:9ff), leopards (Jer 13:23; Da 7:6; Rev 13:2), and lions (Jer 12:8; Eze 22:25; Da 7:4; 1Pe 5:8; Rev 13:2). Three of them converge in the Dal 7 and Rev 13 image of wicked rulers, perhaps suggesting that Isaiah speaks of the pacification of rulers through conversion.

66. The future tense in the first clause (“they shall not hurt or destroy”) and a preterit in the second clause (“the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord”) suggests that peace will follow the initial spread of righteousness through faith.

unfolds *gradually*, beginning “in that day” when the “root of Jesse” shall stand as a banner (signal, place of rendezvous⁶⁷) to the Gentiles (v 10) followed by the conversion of the Jews (v 11). The first century calling of the Gentiles certainly shows the fulfillment of verse 10 is underway; that calling continues even to this very day (Ro 15:4–12, see especially v 12). The future conversion of the Jews will conclude the fulfillment (Ro 11:12–25).⁶⁸

We learn later in Isaiah that God will heal even his arch-enemies Egypt and Assyria and will place them on an equal footing worship with Israel:

And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the Lord, and He will respond to them and will heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth. (Isa 19:22–24)

The God of the Bible is the Healer of the nations.

Additional Prophecies

Jeremiah foresees the day when no one will even remember the ark of the covenant, but in which “all the nations will be gathered before” the “throne of the Lord” (Jer 3:16–17). The New Covenant (initiated by Christ, Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25) will issue forth in worldwide salvation (Jer 31:31–34). God will pour blessings upon Israel’s natural enemies during the last days: the Gentiles (Isa 49:23), Moab (Jer 48:47), Ammon (Jer 49:6), Elam (Jer 49:39), and many nations (Mic 4:2; Zec 2:11).⁶⁹

Daniel sees the kingdom’s expanding to worldwide dominion: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Da 2:44; cf. Isa 2:2–4; 9:6–7). Christ’s kingdom will

67. Cf. Jn 11:52; 12:32.

68. See later discussion in ch. 14: “Eschatological Features.” See also: Alexander, *Isaiah*, 1:257ff.

69. See also: Egypt and Assyria (Isa 19:23–25); the Gentiles (Isa 49:23); Edom (Am 9:12); many nations (Zec 2:11); the Philistines (Zec 9:7).

crush the world kingdom, which appears in the Lord's day as the Roman Empire.⁷⁰

Messiah's ascension and session will guarantee world dominion: "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before Him. Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Da 7:13–14). We must note that Daniel 7:13–14 speaks of Christ's ascension *to the Ancient of Days*, not his return to the earth at the second advent.

After his ascension to God's right hand he will gain universal dominion, which will eventually result in days of prosperity, peace, and righteousness.⁷¹ Particularly in Isaiah and Ezekiel

the catholicity of the Church's worship is expressed by all nations flowing to Jerusalem, and going up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; whereas in Malachi, *instead of them going to the temple, the temple is represented as coming to them*. . . . We must understand both representations as designed to announce just the *catholicity and spirituality* of the Gospel worship.⁷²

Contrary to amillennialism, these and many other such references apply to the *inter-advental age*, not to the eternal state. Note the following evidence: First, numerous prophetic references portray *factors inappropriate to the eternal state*, such as the overcoming of active opposition

70. Although the imagery in Da 2 suggests a rapid destruction of the image, such prophecies often unfold gradually over time (see ch. 11 below on the principle of gradualism in prophecy). "Thus the threatening against Babylon, contained in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Isaiah, if explained as a specific and exclusive prophecy of the Medo-Persian conquest, seems to represent the downfall of the city as more sudden and complete than it appears in history." However, that prophecy should be "regarded as a panorama of the fall of Babylon, not in its first inception merely, but through all its stages till its consummation." Alexander, *Isaiah*, 1:30.

71. Ps 22:27; 46:8–10; 47:3; 66:4; 67:4; 86:9; 67:2; 72:11, 17; 82:8; 86:9; 102:15; Isa 2:2–3; 25:6–7; 40:5; 49:6, 22–23; 52:15; 55:5; 60:1–7, 10–14; 61:11; 66:19–20; Jer 3:17; 4:2; Da 7:14; Am 9:11–15; Mic 4:1–3; 5:2–4, 16–17; 7:16–17; Hab 2:14–20; Hag 2:7ff; Zep 3:10; Zec 2:11; 8:22–23; 9:9–10; 14:16; Mal 1:11; 3:1–12.

72. Brown, *Christ's Second Coming*, 347.

to the kingdom (e.g., Ps 72:4, 9; Isa 11: 4, 13–15; Mic 4:3), birth and aging (e.g., Ps 22:30–31; Isa 65:20; Zec 8:3–5), conversions (Ps 22:27; 72:2–7; 86:9), death (e.g., Ps 22:29; 72:14; Isa 65:20), sin (e.g., Isa 65:20; Zec 14:17–19), suffering (e.g., Ps 22:29; 72:2, 13, 17), and national distinctions and interaction (e.g., Ps 72:10–11, 17; Isa 2:2–4; 19:22–24; Zec 14:16–17).

Second, though reduced to minority proportions, the curse will continue despite the dominance of victory (Isa 65:25). Isaiah 19:18 may suggest a world ratio of five Christians to one non-Christian.⁷³

Third, some passages speaking of prophetic glory apply to Christ's first advent. Isaiah 9:6 ties his Messianic rule in with his birth: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6). In Daniel 2 he appears as the destroyer of the world empires in the days of the fourth kingdom, Rome (Da 2:35ff).

Fourth, some prophetic passages expect the *present, pre-consummative order* to continue into that glorious era, such as the continuance of the current sun and moon (Ps 72:5, 7, 17). Yet 2 Peter 3 indicates the destruction and re-creation of the universe prior to its renewal for eternity.

Fifth, hermeneutically it would seem that prophetic figures should not be figures of figures. For instance, if the nations' breaking their bows and spears is a figure of peace, would the prophetic breaking of bows and spears be a figure of peace (the absence of carnal warfare), which would in turn be a figure of salvation (the absence of spiritual warfare with God)?

Conclusion

The Old Testament anticipates the Messianic kingdom's coming, growth and victory in history. We may trace this hope from the earliest days of God's covenantal dealings with man. In the Old Testament divine covenants frame in the hope of dominion, while the prophets fill out that Messianic expectation. The Old Testament expects universal acquiescence to Messiah's rule. His rule begins in the spiritual realm, but is not limited to it. His rule will have objective effects in *all* areas of life — not just in the heart, the family, and the local church. Christ's redemption is

73. This view is held by such commentators as: Alexander, *Isaiah*, 1:355–357. Calvin, *Isaiah*, 68–71. Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 4:108.

as comprehensive as sin is, and more powerful. Christ's bodily resurrection is more powerful than death. So are the objective effects of his resurrection in history.

10

ESCHATOLOGY AND REALIZATION

After John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk 1:14–15)

As God's infallible and unified revelation, the Scriptures continue the prophetic victory theme in the New Testament. This is despite the charges by some amillennialists that postmillennialists cannot demonstrate this hope from the New Testament: "Whatever support postmillennialism may draw from its own interpretation of the Old Testament, we question seriously whether the New Testament gives any valid encouragement to this theory."¹ Some even go so far as to hold (generally) that:

If you believe only the Old Testament, you could possibly be either a premillenarian or a postmillenarian or a postmillenarian, but you *could not* possibly be an amillenarian If you believe the New Testament (except for the book of Revelation), you could possibly be an amillenarian or a premillenarian, but you cannot possibly be a postmillenarian. If you believe the whole Bible, you can only be a premillenarian.²

This chapter will show that such charges are wholly without merit. The New Testament powerfully presents the postmillennial hope. While dispensationalism's Zionistic approach to the Old Testament's kingdom promises runs into serious problems in the New Testament, such is not the case with postmillennialism.

On the one hand, it seems that premillennialism finds its greatest strength in the Old Testament — when divorced from the New. This is undeniably the situation with dispensational premillennialism. On the

1. Murray, *Millennial Studies*, 86. See also: Gaffin, "Theonomy and Eschatology," in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*, 217.

2. Cited by Kenneth S. Kantzer in Campbell and Townsend, *A Case for Premillennialism*, 9.

other hand, amillennialism garners its strongest arguments from the New Testament — when interpreted apart from its Old Testament foundations. Postmillennialism alone most consistently relates *both* the Old and New Testament revelation into one unified eschatological framework. To test my assertion let us turn our attention to the New Testament record.

Inauguration of the Kingdom

The Birth of the King

In paradigmatic, biblico-theological fashion, in the first chapter of his gospel Luke draws upon and arranges the old covenant expectations that arise in response to the announcement of Christ's birth. As he brings the Old Testament expectations over into the New Testament, he rephrases the prophecies in terms of their New Covenant fruition. Interestingly, most of these are in poetic-song format, indicating the joyousness of the expectations (Lk 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14, 29–32).

The angelic annunciation. In the angelic annunciation to Mary, we hear of God giving Christ David's throne and promising that he will rule endlessly: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:32–33). This is surely an "echo of the sublime prediction" in Isaiah 9:6–7.³ We should remember from our preceding chapter that Isaiah 9:6–7 ties in *kingdom dominion* with the *birth of the king* as historically successive realities. There we also see that Daniel 7:13 equates Christ's coronation with his historical ascension. Daniel 2 also speaks of his kingdom coming in the days of the fourth kingdom, Rome (Da 2:40–45). The New Testament pattern is: humiliation followed *immediately* by exaltation (Jn 7:39; Lk 24:26; 1Pe 1:11). Later I will provide further evidence showing that he presently rules as Messianic king and that his rule never ends. Christ receives "David's throne" as per Old Testament prophecies (Ac 2:29–36; 3:13–15; 5:29–31; Rev 3:7).

The reference in Luke 1:33 to Christ's ruling over "the house of Jacob" is significant. Jacob is the father of the "twelve tribes of Israel" (Ge 35:22–27). Thus, this we should understand this as alluding to the totality of the "Israel of God," which includes all of the redeemed, Jew and

3. David Brown, "Matthew," *JFB*, 2:97.

Gentile alike. Luke's companion, Paul, makes this especially clear (Gal 3:29; 6:16; Eph 2:12–22).⁴

Mary's Magnificat. Mary's praise to God in Luke 1:46–55 reverberates with the victory theme. In verses 47 and 48, she exalts the Lord as Savior, recognizing God's glorious blessing upon her: "From this time on all generations will count me blessed." Why this universal homage? Because "the Mighty One" (v 49) is now moving in history in a powerful way and using Mary for his glory. This declaration receives its impulse from the prophetic victory theme; it counters any notion of despair, any tendency to lamentation, any expectation of perpetual suffering. She recognizes that in the soon-coming birth of Christ, God will do "mighty deeds with His arm" for he will "scatter the proud" (v 51). He will "bring down rulers" and "exalt those who are humble" (v 52). He will fill "the hungry with good things" (v 53). He will do it through his people (v 54) in keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant (v 55). This glad song reverberates with hope and contains absolutely no intimation of defeat.

Zacharias' prophecy. Zacharias continues the hope-filled joy, for he sees Christ's birth as bringing glad tidings of victory for God's people over their enemies (Lk 1:68–71). This again fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant (v 73; cf. Ro 15:8–12). Christ is the sunrise that will "shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (vv 78–79). Elsewhere this refers to the Gentiles (Isa 9:1, 2; Mt 4:16). Later we will see this light as a positive force, dispelling darkness in the present age (Ro 13:11–13; 1Jn 2:8). Because Christ has come, he will bring "peace on earth" (Lk 2:14a). His birth at his first coming insures peace on earth — not his second coming (although in the consummative new earth this peace will come to perfect, eternal realization⁵).

The Approach of the Kingdom

Further promoting the sure hope of the old covenant expectations and the nativity prophecies, when Christ appears in history he announces the kingdom's nearness. The kingdom's coming does *not* await some distant future.

4. See my earlier discussion in ch. 7 "The Hermeneutic of Scripture." Even the premillennialist admits that in their Millennium Christ rules over *all people*, not just the "house of Jacob" literally conceived.

5. See ch. 12 "Eschatology and Consummation."

John Baptist, Christ's divinely commissioned forerunner, preaches: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2). In Mark 1:14–15 Jesus takes up the same theme: "And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.'" This is a very important statement. I will note three crucial aspects of this declaration.

First, Christ asserts "the time" is fulfilled. What is "the time" to which he refers? The Greek term here is *kairos*, which indicates "the 'fateful and decisive point,' with strong, though not always explicit, emphasis . . . on the fact that it is ordained by God."⁶ This "time" surely refers to the prophetically anticipated time, the time of the coming of David's greater Son to establish his kingdom, for he immediately adds: "the *kingdom of God* is at hand." The Father sends Christ into the world in "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10),⁷ to initiate the "favorable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:16–21).⁸ This time is "the accepted time"/ "the day of salvation" (2Co 6:2).⁹ It is the very day righteous men and angels in the old covenant desire to see.¹⁰

Second, Christ clearly asserts that the time "is fulfilled." Actually, a better translation of the verb tense and voice here (the perfect passive) would be: "The time has been fulfilled." Luke 4:21 is similar to Mark 1:14–15 in regard to the time fulfillment: "And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" Both the perfect tense (*peplerotai*, "has come to fulfillment") and the emphatic position of "today" strongly emphasize the beginning of its fulfillment.¹¹ That which is now being fulfilled is Isaiah 61:1ff, from which Christ quotes. The "acceptable year of the Lord" has come.

6. Gerhard Delling, "*kairos*," *TDNT*, 3:459.

7. Of the Eph 1:10 reference Hodge comments: "This phrase does not indicate a protracted period — *the times which remain* — but the termination of times; the end of the preceding and commencement of the new dispensation." Hodge, *Ephe-sians*, 48.

8. For a related discussion of "the last days," see ch. 13 "Eschatological Time Frames."

9. Significantly, Paul is referring to Isa 49:8 which promises God's restoring of Israel's land. Obviously he sees this prophecy as applying in the New Testament context and the growth of the church of Jesus Christ.

10. Mt 13:17; Lk 2:28–30; 10:24; Jn 8:56; Heb 11:13, 39–40; 2Pe 1:10–11.

11. See discussion in Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 49.

Apparently John the Baptist is significant for Christ as a line of demarcation separating the fading *kingdom-expectation* era from the dawning *kingdom-fulfillment* era. Earlier John notes of Jesus: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). And Jesus observes regarding John: “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Mt 11:11–14; cf. Mk 2:18–19; Lk 16:16).

Third, at this historical juncture — the beginning of his ministry — Christ clearly and pointedly announces that the kingdom is near. The root term *engus* literally means “at hand.” The word derives from compounding *en* (in, at) and *guion* (limb, hand).¹²

The time which Christ introduces as “at hand,” Paul later calls “the now time” (2Co 6:2; cf. Ro3:21–26; Eph 3:10; 2Ti 1:9–10). Though John and Jesus announce it, Jerusalem does not recognize the coming of “the time” (Lk 19:44; cf. Mt 23:37). This is a great tragedy for Israel in that their pronouncements

summarized all that had been the object of Old Testament prophecy and of Israel’s expectation of the future from the oldest times. . . . “The time,” i.e., the great turning-point of history, promised by God himself for the full revelation of his kingly glory; the time for the liberation of his people and the punishment of his enemies.¹³

The kingdom’s early new covenant revelation, then, declares its *nearness* in time, not its potential nearness, and certainly not its distance. Jesus promises that some of his hearers would live to see the kingdom’s acting in *great power* in history: “There are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come *with power*” (Mk 9:1). Here the root word *erchomai*, which is translated “come” is “not, as the English words may seem to mean, in the act of coming (till they see it come), but actually or already come, the only sense that can be put upon the perfect participle here

12. *TDNT*, 2:330.

13. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 13.

employed.”¹⁴ Thus, his disciples expect to live to see its exhibition *in power*. This would not be immediately, for some of his disciples would die before it comes in power. Yet it must be within the lifetimes of others, for “some” standing there would witness it. This apparently refers to the dramatic AD 70 destruction of the temple and the removal of the Old Testament worship system (cf. Heb 12:25–28; Rev 1:1, 3, 9). This occurs as a direct result of Jesus’ prophecies (Jn 4:21–23; Mt 21:33ff; 23:31–34:34).

Such data as these set the stage for clearly elucidating the victory theme. The long-awaited kingdom, which the Old Testament prophets expect, is about to break forth in history. Would its effect be wholly internal, limited to small pockets of the faithful? Or would it exhibit itself in powerful victory, transforming the mass of men in salvation, whole cultures by righteousness, and national governments for justice? Postmillennialists take the latter view.

The Establishment of the Kingdom

Because “the time” is “fulfilled” and the “kingdom of God” is “at hand,” we should expect its appearing in the gospel record. God determines the “times” (Da 2:21; Ac 1:7), and the time has come. Clear and compelling evidence persuades us that *the kingdom does in fact come in Christ’s ministry*. Perhaps one of the clearest gospel proofs for the presence of the kingdom of heaven¹⁵ is Matthew 12:28: “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” The truth is, Jesus *does* cast out demons by the Spirit of God. The protasis of this “if/then” statement being true, then the apodosis follows: “the kingdom of God is come.” The very fact that Christ invades Satan’s kingdom and takes away possessions (demoniacs) (Mt 12:25–29) proves that the kingdom comes in his ministry.

In Luke 17:20–21 we read: “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” Notice that Christ answers the Pharisees’ question regarding “when” the kingdom should come by speaking in the present tense: the kingdom *is* [Gk., *estin*] present. It is not awaiting a future, Armageddon-introduced

14. Alexander, *Mark*, 230.

15. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 107.

manifestation; it exists now and among them. Hence, even in Christ's ministry men are pressing into it (Lk 16:16).

The Triumphal Entry of Christ is interesting in this regard: "The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!' Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt'" (Jn 12:12–15). Here the crowds not only declare Christ as "king," but he accepts this public affirmation, despite Pharisaic rebukes (Mt 21:15–16). He does so because he is fulfilling prophecy (Zec 9:9). And once again, this prophecy promises victory: "He will speak peace to the nations; / And His dominion will be from sea to sea, / And from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zec 9:10).

During his trial and at the inquiry of Pilate, Christ directly affirms his kingship and the presence of his kingdom: "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth'" (Jn 18:36–37a; cf. Mt 27:11; Mk 15:2; Lk 23:3).

Although he defines his kingdom as something other-worldly, rather than essentially political (as was Caesar's kingdom),¹⁶ he nevertheless indicates his kingdom is present: He speaks of "my kingdom" (v 36a). He claims to have his own "servants" (even though they do not fight with sword to defend Him, v 36b). He clearly states "I am king" (v 37a). And, as we might expect, given our previous study of Mark 1:14–15, he states that he comes into the world to be king (v 37b).

Application of Kingship

In that the gospel record presents Christ as the king, we expect to hear of his coronation. The New Testament does not disappoint our expectation.

16. On "The Kingdom's Spiritual Nature" see below (299–32).

The Coronation of the King

A frequent refrain in the New Testament regards Christ's glorious and powerful enthronement, which the nativity prophecies anticipate. Several passages speak of his ascending into heaven and royally sitting at God's right hand.

The Great Commission. His post-resurrection, pre-ascension Great Commission clearly declares his enthronement.¹⁷ Christ prefixes the actual commission with a bold — and necessary — claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This prefatory declaration dramatically contrasts with his previous humility: "I can do nothing of myself" (Jn 5:19, 30; 8:28). No longer does he speak as if he continues in his humiliation. But what happens in his ministry? When does he receive this authority?

Both the position and the tense of the word "given" in Christ's declaration instruct us. "Given" appears in the emphatic first position; its verb form *edothē* is in the aorist indicative, signifying point action in past time. Obviously the point when this occurs is at the resurrection. The historical circumstances of the Great Commission not only suggest this (Christ utters the commission shortly after his resurrection, cf. Mt 28:1–10, 16), but also other passages. Romans 1:4 states that he "was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead."¹⁸ Philippians 2:8, 9 uses the same tense¹⁹ in pointing to the resurrection as that time when Christ is "bestowed" authority: "he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name." As noted earlier this grant of kingly authority fulfills Psalm 2:6–7. The resurrection, followed shortly by the ascension, establishes Christ as the King possessing "all authority."

Acts 2:30–31 agrees that Christ's resurrection results in his kingly authority: "But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing

17. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (1990).

18. Of course, in light of his essential deity this "all authority given" was "not as a new gift, but a confirmation and practical realisation of the power over all things, which had been delivered unto Him by the Father" as regards his human existence. Cook, *St. Matthew — St. Mark — St. Luke*, 196.

19. Philippians 2:9, however, employs a different word for "given": *echaristato* from *charizomai*.

what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ.” While referring to Psalm 100 Peter adds: “For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”’” (Ac 2:34b–35).

Matthew 28:18 indicates something new occurs at his resurrection. He is *now* given “all authority.” The spoils of victory are his — victory over sin, death, and the devil belong to him (Col 2:14, 15; Heb 2:13, 14; 10:12–14). His new-found authority entails *universal* dominion: it encompasses “heaven and earth.” Thus, his authority is identical with God the Father’s (Ge 14:19; Mt 11:25), who possesses unbounded lordship. As Kuiper observes: “The Great Commission is usually thought of as a missionary command. It is that and far more than that. Its theme is *The Sovereign Christ*. It is a glorious declaration of his sovereignty.”²⁰

R. T. France expresses the matter powerfully and clearly:

Here at the end of the gospel, then, we find the culmination of the theme of kingship which was introduced by the Davidic royal genealogy (1:1–17), developed in the magi’s search for the ‘king of the Jews’ and the political threat to Herod in ch. 2, adumbrated in the developing language of Messiahship, and dramatically enacted in Jesus’ royal ride to Jerusalem (21:1–11); since then Jesus’ alleged claim to kingship has been a matter of accusation and mockery (27:11, 29, 37, 42), but now the true nature of that kingship is revealed. It stands far above local politics and extends far beyond the people of Israel.²¹

Not only is Christ’s authority above all other, but it penetrates every realm. It is not just in the spiritual arena (the inner-personal realm), but in all spheres of life. It universally and comprehensively serves as the basis for a truly Christian worldview. The “all” which defines “authority” is here used in the *distributive* sense. A. B. Bruce notes that Christ claims “every form of authority; command of all means necessary for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.”²² Each and every realm of thought and activity is under his authoritative command: ecclesial, familial, and personal — as well as ethical, social, cultural, financial, judicial, legislative, political, and so on. Consequently, we are to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of

20. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism*, 60.

21. France, *Matthew*, 1113.

22. A. B. Bruce, “Matthew” in *EGNT* 1:339.

God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2Co 10:5). The rich reward of his redemptive labor is sovereign lordship over all (Eph 1:19–23; Col 1:18; Php 2:9–10; 1Pe 3:21–22; Rev 1:5; 17:14; 19:16).

After triumphantly securing universal lordship, Christ sets in gear the machinery he will employ in exercising his dominion. He entrusts his kingdom’s extension to his Spirit-blessed people, whom he indwells and leads: “Therefore go and make disciples of *all nations*.” This fits well with all that I note above: the Great Commission is world-encompassing. The ascended Christ mandates an expanded church. Would he assert his sovereign lordship so vigorously and command his disciples so majestically were it not his intention that they fulfill his obligation?

With these words he does not merely send “forth his disciples *into* all nations” (Jay Adams) to be a “witness” (Charles Feinberg), providing a “testimony” that “calls for a decision” (Anthony Hoekema; cp. John Nolland). Nor does he simply commission them “to proclaim a message to the ends of the earth” (J. Dwight Pentecost) or “to preach the gospel unto all nations” (Arie denHartog) or “to urge universal proclamation of the gospel” (Herman Hoyt; cp. Pentecost) in order to draw “out a people from among the peoples or nations of the world” (Thomas Ice).²³ According to the Commission’s clear words Christ commands his disciples actually to “make disciples of all the nations.” As D. A. Hagner puts it: “this connection between the authority of Jesus and the fulfilling of the tasks now assigned to the disciples and those who come after them in Matthew’s and every church is made plain in the connective *oun*, ‘therefore.’ Jesus’ authority (v 18) and his presence (v 20) will empower his disciples to fulfill the commission he now gives them.”²⁴

The absolutely essential precondition to the postmillennial hope is evangelism leading to the new birth. After all, “no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (Jn 3:3b). Hence, Christ commands our marking out people as his own through baptism (Mt

23. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 44 (emph. mine). Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Jew After the Rapture” in Feinberg, *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 182. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 138. Nolland, *Matthew*, 1265. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 221. denHartog, “Hope and the Protestant Reformed Churches’ Mission Calling,” 166. Hoyt, “A Dispensational Premillennial Response,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 145. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 221. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 159.

24. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 886.

28:19). His kingdom expands not through evolutionary forces, human wisdom, or political strategy; or military conquest: it comes through obedient service to Christ while proclaiming the gospel, “which is the power of God unto salvation” (Ro 1:16b; cp. 1Co 1:18, 24).²⁵

Though earlier he limits their ministry to Israel (Mt 10:5–6; 15:24), Christ now commissions his followers to disciple “all the nations.” Since Acts takes up the history of the Christian faith where the Gospels leave off, it naturally traces the gospel’s nascent progress among the nations. It opens with Christ commanding the same few disciples to promote his message in “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Ac 1:8); it ends with Paul in Rome boldly preaching the gospel (Ac 28:16, 31). This progress from Jerusalem to Rome witnesses thousands of conversions, testifying to the dramatic power in Christianity.²⁶

Many scholars recognize the Great Commission as “a clear reference to the prophecy in Daniel 7:14, not only as to the fact but in the words themselves.”²⁷ Daniel’s passage provides that after Christ *ascends to the Ancient of Days* (not: returns to earth, v 13) “to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him” (Da 7:14). This is precisely what the Great Commission expects: that by his universal authority we will disciple all nations, resulting in their baptism into the glorious name of the Triune God.

What is more, not only does he authoritatively command them to disciple all nations, but he even promises he will be with them (and all his people) “throughout all the days” (Gk: *pasas tas hemeras*, Mt 28:20). That is, he will be with them through the many days until the end to oversee the successful completing of the task.²⁸ This is the postmillennial hope.

25. It is important to understand that definitionally there can be *no* liberal postmillennialism. That is, by definition postmillennialism believes *Christ will return* after the millennium. What liberal theologian believes in the return of Christ to end history?

26. Ac 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 9:35, 42; 11:24–26; 17:4; 18:8, 10; 19:18, 26.

27. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 467. Matthew 28:18–20 “has been formulated quite consciously in terms of” Daniel 7:13–14 (Gaston, *No Stone on Another*, 385). See also: Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1264. Hendrikson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 998. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1112. Mounce, *Matthew*, 267.

28. The New Testament suggests long “seasons” pass before Christ returns, Mt 25:5, 19; Ac 1:7; 2Ti 3:1; 2Pe 3:4–9. Postmillennialism does not hold to the imminency of Christ’s return. Great prophecies remain: the conversion of the Jews

The Pentecostal Message. The first of the enthronement passages in the post-resurrection age is Acts 2:30ff. This text associates Christ's enthronement with his exaltation, which begins with his resurrection and proceeds to his ascension and session at God's right hand. Concerning David's prophecy anticipating his seed who will sit upon his throne, Peter proclaims:

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. . . . Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Ac 2:30, 31, 33–36)

David's prophecy regarding one who will sit on his throne looks to the "resurrection." Christ suffers ultimate humiliation on the cross and in the tomb. But then his resurrection initiates his exaltation in preparation for his ascension to God's throne, the place of universal rule and authority. There he is "crowned with glory" (Heb 2:9) to begin his rule²⁹ by wielding all authority and power (Mt 28:18; Ro 1:4; Eph 1:21).³⁰

A mighty transformation takes place in Christ's ministry as a direct result of his resurrection. The outpouring of the Spirit (Ac 2:34–36) powerfully exhibits his regal authority. This celebrates his coronation by distributing gifts to his subjects, in the manner of a warrior-king returning triumphantly to his capital city upon his victory over the enemy (Ac

(Ro 11) and the dominant victory of Christianity (Isa 2:2–4). See ch. 12 "Eschatology and Consummation" below.

29. Ro 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 12:2; 1Pe 3:22; Rev 3:21.

30. Athanasius writes of Ac 2:36: "Therefore the Word Himself became flesh, and the Father called His Name Jesus, and so 'made' Him Lord and Christ, as much as to say, 'He made Him to rule and to reign.'" Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians* 2:15:16. Of Peter's Great Confession he writes: "He knew Him to be God's Son, confessing, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God;' but he meant His Kingdom and Lordship which was formed and came to be according to grace, and was relatively to us." *Against the Arians*, 2:15:18.

2:33; Eph 4:7–12).³¹ It promises his royal assistance to his people (Ro 8:34).

Since his ascension Christ's enthronement is an accomplished fact. The New Testament is replete with the confident refrain of his coronation and enthronement. We are not awaiting his future kingship: He is *now* already enthroned. Indeed, in the New Testament the most quoted or alluded to Old Testament passage is Psalm 110. That passage records God the Father's word to Christ the Son: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." In various forms it appears sixteen times in the New Testament.³² His sitting at God's "right hand" is a semantic equivalent to sitting on God's throne, as is evident in Revelation 3:21: "I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Contrary to John Walvoord Revelation 3:21 does not require a millennial throne for Christ, which is both entirely future and wholly separate from the Father's throne.³³ It no more refers to two distinct thrones than Jesus' statement to Mary in John 20:17 requires two distinct persons, when He speaks of "my Father and your Father." The throne of God and of Christ is *one* throne (Rev 22:1, 3).

The Proclamation of the Kingdom

This is why the New Testament so frequently proclaims the "kingdom of God."³⁴ In Acts 3:15 Peter preaches Christ as the "prince of life." In Acts 5:31 he asserts his obligation to disobey civil authority when it demands that he cease preaching Christ. His rationale is important: "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior." The word "prince" here may literally be translated "leader, ruler, prince."³⁵ He is exalted as prince or ruler.

In Acts 17:7 we learn of the civil turmoil the early Christians cause. The charge that the Thessalonians bring against them is most interesting and must be based in reality, even if largely misunderstood by the

31. Cf. Ge 14; 1Sa 30:26–31; Jdg 5:30. See: Isa 53:12.

32. Mt 22:44; 26:64; Mk 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Lk 20:42–43; 22:69; Ac 2:34–35; Ro 8:34; 1Co 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12.

33. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 98–100.

34. See: Ac 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Ro 14:17; 1Co 4:20; 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:11; 1Th 2:12; 2Th 1:5; 2Ti 4:1; 4:18; Heb 1:8; 12:28; Jas 2:5; 2Pe 1:11.

35. BAGD, 138.

unbelieving populace. Just as the Jews accuse Jesus of claiming to be a king,³⁶ so we read of the charge against his followers: “These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.” Just as Jesus declares himself a king (though in a non-political sense, Jn 18:36–37) so his followers do the same.

According to Paul God “*put* all things under his feet” (Eph 1:22; 1Co 15:27). God *gave* him a title/name higher than any that is named (Php 2:9). In each of these places Paul employs aorist tense verbs, which speak of a point in *past* time, i.e., at his resurrection-ascension-enthronement. Hence, the scores of references to him as “Lord” throughout the New Testament. In fact, “Christ is Lord” evidently becomes a creedal statement of sorts in the apostolic era.³⁷

Paul speaks to the Colossians in a way quite agreeable to this view of the coming of the kingdom: “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:12, 13). Inarguably, he is speaking of Christ’s kingdom for he calls it “the kingdom of his dear Son.” Just as clearly he considers this transferring to the kingdom as a past act (nearly 2,000 years ago now), not a future prospect. Paul uses aorist tense verbs when he speaks of their being “delivered” and “transferred”; he does the same in 1 Thessalonians 2:12. He even speaks of his ministry “for the kingdom of God” (Col 4:11).

John follows suit in Revelation 1:6 and 9: “And [Christ] hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. . . . I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” In these verses John speaks of first century Christians (Rev 1:4, 11; 2–3) as already “made” (aorist tense) to be “a kingdom” (literally). In fact, John is already a fellow with them in the “kingdom” (Rev 1:9).

The Building of the Kingdom

In light of the above, Christians *now* rule and reign with Christ in the world. Ephesians 1:3 declares we are blessed “in heavenly places.” Ephesians 2:6 specifically teaches that he “raised us up with Him, and

36. See: Mt 27:29, 37; Mk 15:12, 26; Lk 23:3; Jn 18:33; 19:12, 15, 21.

37. Ro 10:9; 1Co 12:3; Php 2:11. See discussion of the creed-like status of this declaration in: Gentry, *Nourishment from the Word*, 4–6.

seated us with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.” In God’s eyes we sit with Christ in heavenly places (which, in essence, is the idea of Rev 20:4–6), i.e., *in regal position*.

Interestingly, the Epistle to the Ephesians can serve virtually as an anti-dispensational polemic from the Apostle Paul. Notice how Ephesians contradicts dispensational doctrines: Christ is presently a kingly Lord (Eph 1:19–22) and we are now sitting with him (1:3; 2:6). Paul applies “the covenants [plural] of *the promise*” to Gentiles in the church (2:10–12). He emphasizes the removing of the Jew / Gentile distinction (2:12–19). He portrays the church’s building up as the building of the temple (2:20–22³⁸). He notes that the Old Testament teaches the New Testament phase of the church, although not with the same fullness and clarity (3:1–6).³⁹ The pouring out of spiritual gifts at Pentecost celebrates Christ’s kingly enthronement (4:8–11), while expecting the church’s historical maturation (4:12–14). He speaks of the kingdom in a way that indicates its spiritual rather than political nature (5:5).

In 1 Corinthians 3:21–22 Paul presents the noble status of Christians in the world: “For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours.” Elsewhere we see the present kingly status of Christians (e.g., Ro 5:17; Col 3:3; 1Ti 2:11, 12).

The initial excitement at Christ’s first kingdom proclamation sees men and women crowding their way into it. “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven has been taken by storm and eager men are forcing their way into it” (Mt 11:12, J. B. Phillips’ translation). Calvin understood this as saying “so many sought it with burning zeal.”⁴⁰

The Kingdom’s Spiritual Nature

Despite dispensationalism’s confusion, the Scripture clearly presents the kingdom as a spiritual reality. Dispensationalism asserts that Christ offers to Israel a literal, political, earthly kingdom, but that the Jews

38. Cf. 1Pe 2:4–5; 1Co 3:16–17; 6:19; 2Co 6:16; Rev 3:12. See discussion in ch. 14: “Eschatological Features.”

39. See my discussion above in ch. 7 “The Hermeneutic of Scripture.”

40. Calvin, *Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 2:7. See also: Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 54.

reject it, thus causing its postponement.⁴¹ In fact, in dispensationalism “the concept of prophetic postponement is crucial to a proper interpretation of several prophetic texts in the Old Testament.”⁴² This is because “the church occupies a parenthetical period in the fulfillment of Israel’s destiny.”⁴³ This view of the kingdom is totally erroneous. As a matter of fact, it is just this sort of kingdom that the first-century Jews want and which Christ refuses: “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (Jn 6:15).

In reading the New Testament we learn that even the disciples themselves miss his point for the most part — while Christ is on earth and they are under his direct daily tutelage for three and one-half years (just as they missed his teaching regarding his death and resurrection, Lk 24:6–9; Jn 2:22; 20:9, 24–26). In the Emmaus Road encounter after the crucifixion, certain disciples lament: “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done” (Lk 24:21). Jesus rebukes them for such foolishness: “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:25–27). They expect Israel’s political deliverance and exaltation through the Messiah.⁴⁴ But Jesus explains prophecy’s true meaning, showing them that he *must* suffer and then enter his resurrected, heavenly glory.⁴⁵

41. *DPT*, 236: “the restoration of the theocratic kingdom on earth was deferred until the return of its ruler and His acceptance by national Israel.” Pentecost, “Kingdom of God,” *PEBP*, 189: “This announcement did not cancel the covenants and promises given to Israel concerning the earthly kingdom of David’s greater Son, but only postponed the realization of those hopes.” *PEBP*, 198: “the messianic kingdom offer is withdrawn.”

42. Randall Price, “Prophetic Postponement,” *PEBP* 300.

43. Randall Price, “Prophetic Postponement,” *PEBP*, 301.

44. Cf. their hope that he would “redeem Israel” with the Old Testament declaration that God “redeemed” Israel by delivering them from Egypt to become an independent nation, Dt 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18; 1C. 17:21; Mic 6:4.

45. Surely we cannot deny that at Christ’s resurrection and ascension he immediately “entered his glory,” which is evidenced by Pentecost: Jn 7:39; 12:16; 12:23; Ac 3:13. He is now the “Lord of glory,” cf. Jas 2:1; 1Pe 1:11; 2Pe 3:18; Heb

In response to the Pharisees Christ specifically declares that the kingdom does not come visibly with temporal fanfare. “And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:20–21). Obviously this demands the kingdom’s spiritual conception in contradiction to dispensationalism’s Armageddon-introduced, geo-political kingdom, where “every eye shall see him.” Walvoord goes to the trouble of providing a strange, technical explanation of Revelation 1:7, showing how every eye will see him when he returns, no matter where they are on the globe. He notes in this regard:

The question is raised how, in a global situation with the world’s population all over the globe, at any one moment every eye will be able to see Christ’s coming to earth. The answer seems to be found in 19:11–16. The coming of Christ, unlike the Rapture, will not be an instantaneous event but will be a gigantic procession of holy angels and saints from heaven to earth. There is no reason why this should not take twenty-four hours with its termination on the Mount of Olives. In that period the earth will revolve, and regardless of what direction Christ comes from, people will be able to see His coming from their position on the earth.⁴⁶

All of this explains why Christ goes about preaching the “*gospel* of the kingdom” (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mk 1:14–15). He proclaims a redemptive, spiritual kingdom, not a political, visible kingdom. Hence, when he ascends to his heavenly throne he pours out spiritual gifts rather than political entitlements.⁴⁷

The Jewish authorities accuse Jesus of promoting a political kingdom to compete with Caesar’s empire (Lk 23:2; Jn 19:12, 15; cf. Ac 17:7; 15:8). This explains why Jesus asks Pilate where he received the political

2:9.

46. Walvoord, *PKH*, 524. Regarding Walvoord’s statement that “regardless of what direction Christ come from, people will be able to see” him because of the earth’s revolution: Not only is this rather naive in its attempted literalism, but he overlooks the fact that the earth revolves from east to west, which means people in the extreme north and south would not be able to see him. The view of the southern sky in Australia differs from the northern sky in Canada.

47. Lk 24:44–49; Ac 2:30–35; 3:22–26; 8:12; Eph 4:8–11.

accusation against him (Jn 18:34) — he knows of the Jews' misconception in this regard. His answer indicates his kingdom's spiritual nature:

Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself on this, or did others tell you this about Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (Jn 18:33–37)

At his triumphal entry into Jerusalem he presents his kingship in terms of *meekness and lowliness*, not as a conquering, *political* authority. "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass'" (Mt 21:4, 5). John adds that "these things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto Him" (Jn 12:15–16). They initially conceived of him in political terms, as did the Emmaus Road disciples (Lk 24:18–21).

Paul picks up on and promotes the spiritual-redemptive nature of Christ's kingdom, when he writes that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Ro 14:17). He disavows any geo-political conception of the kingdom. Likewise, he speaks of attaining an inheritance in the spiritual kingdom (the heavenly aspect of the kingdom) for those who are righteous (1Co 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal 5:21). He very plainly declares the kingdom's heavenly aspect: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (1Co 15:50). How could an earthly, political kingdom not offer an inheritance for flesh-and-blood people? That is the whole idea supporting the notion. But Christ's kingdom is salvific, whereby we are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:12, 13).

The Kingdom's Cosmic Advance

A distinctive feature of dispensationalism is that the millennial kingdom is fundamentally Jewish in character, even to the point of rebuilding the temple, setting up David's tabernacle, re-instituting the Jewish sacrificial system, and exalting the Jews over elect Gentiles. Ice writes: "This is the point: once Israel is restored to the place of blessing and the tabernacle of David is rebuilt, then will follow the third phase in the plan of God. That period will be the time of the millennium, when the nations will indeed be converted and ruled over by Christ."⁴⁸ Whitcomb states that: "Isaiah foresaw not only God's New Covenant with Israel but also a Temple in the holy land (2:2–3; 60:13). Animal sacrifices would be offered on its altar by Egyptians (19:21) and Arabians (60:7), through priests and Levites (66:21)."⁴⁹ Dispensationalism surprisingly emphasizes the following distinctions between Jew and Gentile in the millennium:

God has two distinct purposes — one for Israel and one for the Church.⁵⁰

Israel, regathered and turned to the Lord in salvation, will be exalted, blessed, and favored through this period.⁵¹

The Gentiles will be Israel's servants during that age. . . . The nations which usurped authority over Israel in past ages find that downtrodden people exalted and themselves in subjection in their kingdom. And these are not unsaved Gentiles: The Gentiles that are in the millennium will have experienced conversion prior to admission.⁵²

The redeemed living nation of Israel, regenerated and regathered to the land will be head over all the nations of the earth. . . . So he exalts them above the Gentile nations. . . . On the lowest level there are the saved, living, Gentile nations.⁵³

God will keep his original promises to the fathers and will one day convert and place Israel as the head of the nations.⁵⁴

48. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 169.

49. John C. Whitcomb, "Millennial Sacrifices," in *PEBP*, 226.

50. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 85.

51. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 149.

52. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 508.

53. Hoyt, "Dispensational Premillennialism," in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 81.

54. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 175.

Israel will be a glorious nation, protected from her enemies, exalted above the Gentiles. . . . In contrast to the present church age in which Jew and Gentile are on an equal plane of privilege, the millennium is clearly a period of time in which Israel is in prominence and blessing. . . . Israel as a nation will be exalted.⁵⁵

In the millennium Israel as a nation will rule over the Gentiles.⁵⁶

The whole point of this passage [Ro 11] revolves around Israel's being restored to a position of preeminence as a believing nation.⁵⁷

The biblical teaching [is] that the coming millennial kingdom will have its headquarters in Jerusalem with the Messiah ruling the world from the throne of David and with national Israel restored to its place of supremacy over the nations.⁵⁸

Yet in Scripture Christ's kingdom is *pan-ethnic*, rather than Jewish. While on earth Christ forthrightly teaches that God would soon set aside national Israel as a distinctive, favored people in the kingdom. As I show in ch. 7 on hermeneutics (pp. 174–76), Matthew draws a gloomy picture of Israel's condition and prospects. In Matthew 8:11–12, in the context of the Gentile centurion's faith, Matthew records Jesus expressly teaching that the “sons of the kingdom shall be cast out” while “many from the east and west” shall enjoy the Abrahamic blessings. In Matthew 21:43 he parabolically teaches the rejection of national Israel when he says: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it.” In Matthew 23–24 he prophesies the removal of Israel's beloved temple, declaring that it will be left “desolate” (Mt 23:38) during the great tribulation (Mt 24:21) when men should flee Judea (Mt 24:16). He emphatically notes that “all these things shall come upon this generation” (Mt 23:36; 24:34).

Postmillennialism believes that racial Jews will enter the kingdom in great mass in the future (Ro 11:11–25).⁵⁹ The hermeneutical rub comes when dispensationalists distinguish Jew from Gentile and exalts the Jew over saved Gentiles, along with turning back redemptive history by re-engaging “the weak and beggarly elements” of the sacrificial system. As

55. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 136, 302–303.

56. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “Israelology, Doctrine of,” *PEBP*, 201.

57. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 176. He also notes that “Israel's Restoration Will be National and Eternal” (p. 97; emph. mine).

58. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 246.

59. See discussion of this prophecy in ch. 11 “Eschatology and Expansion.”

I noted previously Isaiah 19:19–25 expressly teaches that Gentiles will enter the kingdom on an equal footing with righteous Jews: “In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth” (v 23). Here the former enemies receive an equal share of God’s favor. In Zechariah 9:7 God speaks of his future favor upon other enemies of Israel. He refers to Ekron, one of the five chief cities of Philistia (Jos 13:3; 1Sa 6:16): “I will remove their blood from their mouth, and their detestable things from between their teeth. Then they also will be a remnant for our God, and be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite.” This (former) Philistine enemy will be like “a clan in Judah.”

Israel’s demise from dominance directly relates to her covenantal failure: she crucifies the Messiah, the Lord of glory. Jesus makes this point in his parable of the householder (Mt 21:33ff). Although the Romans are responsible for physically nailing Christ to the cross (Jn 18:30–31), when covenantally considered the onus falls squarely on those who instigate and demand it: the first century Jews. The biblical record repeatedly affirms that the *Jews* seek his death (Mt 20:18–19; 26:59, 66; 27:1; 27:11–25; Mk 10:33; 15:1; 14:64; Lk 18:32; 23:1–2; 23:22–23; 24:20; Jn 18:28–31; 19:12, 15). In doing so they commit the most heinous sin of all time; their leading role in this becomes a constant refrain in the New Testament: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross” (Ac 5:30; cf. Ac 2:22–23, 36; 3:13–15a; 4:10; 5:28; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27–29; 26:10; 1Th 2:14–15).

The New Testament-era church is not a distinct body of God’s people for a time; rather it is the restructured body of God’s people for *all* time. This new covenant church is one with the Jewish forefathers, being grafted into the Abrahamic root and partaking of its sap (Ro 11:17–18). Because of the redemptive work of Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). In Ephesians Paul emphasizes this. Though in the past the Gentiles (Eph 2:11) were “strangers to the covenants of promise” (2:12), Christ has brought them “near” (2:13) by breaking down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile through redemption (2:14–15). This makes one people out of two separate peoples (2:16–17), who worship one God (2:18). This makes the Gentiles “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (2:19) in that they are built upon one foundation (2:20–22).⁶⁰

60. See: Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*. See also Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 188–91.

Conclusion

The New Testament portrays Christ as a King who comes sovereignly to establish his kingdom. At his birth we witness an outburst of hymnic joy responding to the coming of the long prophesied King. As John Baptist's ministry winds down the gospels present Christ publically presenting himself as the Messiah. Early in Christ's ministry he declares his kingdom's approach, and then sets out to establish it through preaching and teaching.

Upon his coronation Christ begins ruling judicially over the nations through spiritual means rather than by political means. He rules representatively through his covenant people, just as Satan rules representatively through his people. The redeemed are members of his kingdom. As they labor for him they rule by spiritual and ethical power with a goal of seeing all nations baptized in Christ. The essence of Christ's kingdom is spiritual and ethical, not political and racial.

ESCHATOLOGY AND EXPANSION

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened." (Matthew 13:31-33)

In the preceding chapter I show that Christ introduces in his ministry the Messianic kingdom which the Old Testament prophesies. We see in that evidence that the Old Testament envisions the kingdom's massive universal influence among men and nations.

Though the New Testament era does witness the faith's remarkable expansion, it does not experience universal dominance. Yet it is clear that it does anticipate the gospel's worldwide victory as a result of the kingdom's inauguration in the first century and before the second advent. This era will produce a worldwide transformation of men, societies, and nations through the gospel's redemptive power. Truly, the gospel "is the power of God for salvation" (Ro 1:16).

Some recoil today at the mention of the word "dominion" in association with Christianity's advance.¹ Yet the concept of dominion is revealed in Scripture. The word "dominion" is used in significant ways in God's Word.² God's providential rule over the universe is his "dominion" over his kingdom (Ps 145:13; Da 4:3). The Old Testament anticipates Christ's "dominion" in history (Ps 72:8; Da 7:14; Zec 9:10). Of course, those who lament "dominion" are not concerned about its referring to God's rule, but to his people's rule in contemporary history. Yet as we

1. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 127–28. Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust*, ch. 2; House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, chs 1, 15; Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, chs. 10–11. LaHaye, *No Fear of the Storm*, 9. Zuck, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, ch. 8. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 82.

2. The English word "dominion" is derived from the Latin *dominus*, "lord."

saw in chapter 8, “dominion” is a general calling God gives to man as his image (Ge 1:26–28; Ps 8:6). Expecting “dominion” specifically for God’s redeemed people is also legitimate in that we currently sit as kings based on Christ’s “dominion” (Rev 1:6). Ours is a derivative, subordinate dominion under God and over his creation, and as such is representative (as we mirror him).

Unfortunately, due to imprecise thinking by some, many wrongly believe that dominion implies a carnal militarism (such as in Islamic fundamentalism) or an ecclesiocracy (such as in medieval Romanism). Nevertheless, the New Testament both commands and assures dominion.

Dominion Commanded

The postmillennial view is the *only* one of the four major evangelical eschatologies that builds its case on the very charter for Christianity, the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20). David Brown wrote over a century ago:

The disciples were commissioned to evangelize the world *before* Christ’s second coming; not merely to preach the Gospel, ‘for a witness,’ to a world that would not receive it till he came again . . . but to accomplish, instrumentally, the actual ‘*discipleship of all nations*,’ to baptize them when gathered in, and to train them up as professed Christians in the knowledge and obedience of the truth, for glory – all before his second coming. In the doing of this, He promises to be with them – not merely to stand by them while preaching a rejected Gospel, and to note their fidelity, but clearly to prosper the work of their hands unto the actual evangelization of the world at large, *before* his coming.³

Sixty-five years later postmillennialist O. T. Allis cited the Great Commission and commented: “There is no room for pessimism or defeatism in these words. The Captain of our salvation is an invincible commander. His triumph is sure and assured.”⁴

Dispensationalists scoff at postmillennialists because the latter “believe that the Great Commission will be fulfilled.”⁵ Amillennialists also note the postmillennial reliance upon the Great Commission.⁶ But the

3. Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, 298.

4. Allis, “The Parable of the Leaven,” 272.

5. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 441. See also: Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 49; House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 139–160; Ice in Zuck, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, 103.

6. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 177.

postmillennial case, based (in part) on the Great Commission, is not so easily dismissed.

In the last chapter I briefly deal with the Great Commission as evidence of *Christ's kingly authority*. Here I mention it as New Testament evidence for *Christianity's victorious future*. The Great Commission reads:

Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." (Mt 28:18–20)

Here are the disciples, just days after the Roman procurator oversees their Lord's cruel crucifixion. Christ confronts the little group, who had all forsaken him and fled (Mt 26:56) in fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19). Though earlier he confines their ministry to Israel (Mt 10:5–6; 15:24), he now commissions them to disciple "all the nations." Luke traces the gospel's nascent progress among the nations in Acts, which takes up the history of the Christian faith where the Gospels leave off. Acts opens with the Lord reissuing a commission to the same few disciples. He directs them to promote his message in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Ac 1:8); Acts ends in chapter 28 with Paul in Rome (Ac 28:16). This progress from Jerusalem to Rome witnesses thousands of conversions, testifying to the dramatic spread of Christianity.⁷

Only after claiming the Lord God's unbounded authority over heaven and earth (Mt 28:18; cf. Mt 11:25; Jn 17:2) does Christ commission his disciples. And we must carefully note the nature of his commission. As I note above (p. 224), non-postmillennial writers greatly reduce its meaning — and this despite the wording being unambiguously clear. They have Christ simply sending the disciples into the world, or being a verbal witness to all men, or providing a testimony to others, or preaching the gospel message far and wide. These ideas are obviously included in the commission, for without them it could not even get started. But these notions fall far short of the full implications of what Christ actually commands. Only the postmillennial approach adequately handles the greatness of this Great Commission.

According to the Commission's specific wording the Lord Jesus Christ commands his disciples to go forth and actually *make disciples of all the*

7. Ac 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 9:35, 42; 11:24–26; 17:2; 18:8, 10; 19:18, 26.

nations. They are not simply to preach the word to all, that is, simply to deliver the message. Rather, they are to labor to bring the hearers under Christ's yoke of authority. They are to lead the nations to baptism into the name of the Triune God and to formally instruct them in all things that he taught them. They themselves are "disciples" of Christ, as we see in many Gospel references (e.g., Mt 10:1; 11:1; 13:36; 16:24). Their task in this Great Commission is to replicate in others what Christ has effected in them. They are to make "all the nations" his disciples, just as they have become his disciples. Though the task is enormous, and though their numbers are few, and though they are initially fearful and fumbling, Christ promises that he will be with them (and all his people) "throughout all the days" (*pasas tas hemeras*) until the end (Mt 28:20) to insure the task's successful completion. Thus, the enormous task may take much time, he encourages them to understand that he is with them to see that they accomplish it in good order. They are not left to themselves: the Lord of Glory not only commissions them but *accompanies* them in their task.

Clearly pessimistic assessments of the Great Commission, such as the following, are without warrant: "We do not imagine that there will be a worldwide conversion of all or even of the majority of peoples on the earth. The Lord gathers unto Himself a remnant according to the election of his grace."⁸ Even a cursory reading of the Commission shows that it strongly supports the optimistic postmillennial eschatology by commanding God's people to seek the *discipling* of *all* the nations. This encourages Christ's church to seek universal victory among men, in service of the King of kings and Lord of lords (1Ti 6:15; Rev 17:14).

Now let us move on to consider:

Dominion Assured

Since the Great Commission occurs at the end of his earthly ministry, we must understand that Christ issues it on the basis of all of his prior eschatological teaching. So then we must consider several important passages from the Gospels in this regard. We must let Christ fill the meaning of his Commission with his own teaching. While speaking at a conference in Toledo, Ohio, in 2008 (along with Dr. Richard Gaffin and Dr. Thomas Ice), I heard Thomas Ice, a dispensationalist, boast that

8. A. denHartog, "Hope and the Protestant Reformed Churches' Mission Calling," 166.

premillennialism is the only system that can go to one text of Scripture and present its whole system. Of course, he was speaking of Revelation 20.⁹ It immediately struck me that postmillennialism can point to (at least) two texts which elucidate its basic system: Matthew 13 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–28.

Matthew 13

The Apostle Matthew appears, at least in part, to place the Kingdom Parables in the narrative context in order to explain the “problems” surrounding the kingdom.¹⁰ In Matthew 12:28 we read: “if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” But if the kingdom now exists, why does it not show itself? Remember: the Jews expect a political Messianic kingdom. Why does it appear so small and weak? Why do so many reject it? Indeed, most of Israel is rejecting the king, as we see in Mt 13:57: “And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household.’”

The Lord presents this whole set of parables, then, so that his followers might “know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven” — though to others “it has not been granted” (Mt 13:11), and intentionally so (13:13–16). Consequently, the parables frequently mention the kingdom’s hidden nature, small presence, and wavering condition (Mt 13:9–17, 19–22, 35–28, 31, 33, 44–45). This is not the first century Jewish hope for the Messianic kingdom; nor is it the premillennialist or dispensationalist expectation of an Armageddon-introduced kingdom. Contrary to such thinking, Matthew carefully records our Lord’s explaining the “mystery” of his kingdom, a mystery that confuses even his followers: “we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21; cp. Mt 13:36). As per the postmillennial system (and much like its sister, amillennialism) the Kingdom Parables sketch the *present, spiritual, and developmental* nature of the kingdom. I will save the parables of the mustard seed and leaven until last in that they directly support the

9. He conveniently overlooks its lacking a secret rapture and the rebuilding of the temple, which John does not mention there. Nor does Ice seem aware that on his literalistic system, only those who are “beheaded” and who live during the time of the beast (Rev 20:4), and therefore none who live during the “Church Age,” will populate the millennium.

10. France, *Matthew*, 518.

postmillennial emphasis, whereas the other parables may support either postmillennialism or amillennialism.

The Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3–23).¹¹ The first parable fits well with a postmillennial scheme and differs greatly from premillennial expectations. In fact, we know that in the wider Gospel record Christ rejects all political and revolutionary implications for his kingdom. He simply shows no interest in a political kingship. When he perceives that a crowd was “intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king” he “withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone” (Jn 6:15). When the Pharisees press him regarding his kingdom’s coming, he distinguishes it from political kingdoms and from the dramatic Jewish expectations: “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Lk 17:30–31). When he stands before the Roman procurator Pilate, who was entrusted with keeping Judea under Roman control, the Lord declares that his kingdom “is not of this world” and therefore his servants will not fight (Jn 18:35). Rather his kingship is “to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). His response to Pilate is so clear — and so different from the Jewish accusations — that Pilate declares: “I find no guilt in Him” (Jn 18:38). Pilate sees Christ in a far different light than he does the revolutionary Barabbas (Mt 27:16–17).

In the Parable of the Sower Jesus notes that the kingdom spreads by means of God’s Word — not by “sword’s loud clashing” (Mt 26:51–52; Lk 17:30–31). And that its message fails to convert some hearers, though not those of good heart (Mt 13:18–23).¹² He even explains that Satan hampers the kingdom’s growth (Mt 13:19). But despite this means of the kingdom’s spreading and its resistance from Satan, the kingdom nevertheless “bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” in those who convert (Mt 13:23).¹³ Furthermore,

11. Actually I should call it the Parable of the Soils, but I will stick with the more widely accepted title.

12. This does not suggest any natural ability of the hearer to accept or reject the message, as if salvation depends on one who has “root in himself” (Mt 13:21) or in the wisdom of one “who hears the word and understands it” unaided by the Spirit (13:23). In its original context the good soil / good heart (13:23) represents those truly redeemed old covenant Jews, like Simeon and Anna in the temple (Lk 2:34–36).

13. See below for an explanation of the four soils representing four *kinds* of soil not a *ratio* of three bad soils to one.

rather than awaiting the distant future for establishing his kingdom, in the first century Christ sows his kingdom in the world.

The Parable of the Tares (Mt 13:24–30, 36–43) and the *Parable of the Dragnet* (Mt 13:47–50). In the first of these parables the Lord points out that he will widely distribute the kingdom by spreading the “good seed.” According to his interpretation, this means that “the Son of Man” (13:37) will sovereignly spread the “sons of the kingdom” (Christians) throughout “the world” (13:24, 38). Thus, instead of the kingdom being for Israel alone, it is for the “world” at large, just as Matthew’s Gospel anticipates throughout (Mt 2:3; 5:14; 24:14; 26:13; 28:18–20).¹⁴ He leaves absolutely no impression that God’s plan includes elevating the Jews above the Gentiles and to a special status in his kingdom (cp. Mt 8:10–12; 12:41–42; 21:45). He presents only good seed and bad seed, saved and lost — not Jewish dominance or leadership. As we learn later from his servant Paul (Ac 9:15–16; Ro 1:1; Tit 1:1), the Lord teaches that “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; cp. Ro 10:12; Col 3:11).

But Christ adds that though Satan cannot totally hinder the kingdom’s reception among men (see previous parable), he will infiltrate the kingdom by mixing the unrighteous within its borders. Christ’s kingdom will never be perfect and pure on the earth. Contrary to some, postmil-lennialism does not teach a perfected earthly kingdom (see below on pp. 262–64). Nevertheless, we should note that he presents the world as a wheat field through the sowing of the seed; it is not a tare field.

In both of these parables we learn that God will not sort out this intermixture of the legitimate kingdom members from the false ones until the end of history (Mt 13:40, 49). On Judgment Day God will remove the lost first (contrary to the dispensational scheme, 13:41–42, 49–50), then he will bring the saved into the eternal kingdom where they will shine forth in perfection (13:41–43). This occurs “at the end of the age” (13:40), not 1000 years prior to the end (contrary to all forms of premillennialism).

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Mt 13:44) and the *Parable of the Pearl of Great Price* (Mt 13:45–46). Both of these parables speak of the kingdom’s priceless value and the “enthusiastic and wholehearted

14. Again, the OT expects this, Ge 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; Ps 67:2; 72:11, 17; 86:9; Isa 2:2–4; 19:23–24.

commitment” required to enter it.¹⁵ But they do so by highlighting the kingdom’s *hidden* nature and its quiet discovery (cp. 6:33), rather than any catastrophically imposed appearance through warfare: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and *hid*; and from joy over it he goes and *sells all that he has*, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding *one pearl of great value*, he went and *sold all that he had*, and bought it” (Mt 13:44–46).

These kingdom parables are quite relevant to Jesus’ disciples who must forsake all to follow Christ, even risking the wrath of official Judaism (Mt 4:20–22; 19:27–29).¹⁶ They must not be like the rich man who loved his riches and status more than the kingdom (Mt 19:16–22). This parable contrasts these true sons of the kingdom to those who reject it, while preferring the things of the world (13:20–22). Men enter Christ’s kingdom voluntarily through conversion now rather than catastrophically through political imposition later, contrary to the premillennial conception.

The *Parable of the Mustard Seed* (Mt 13:31–32) and the *Parable of the Leaven* (Mt 13:33). These two parables instruct us regarding the kingdom’s *gradual development* and *ultimate outcome*. I will consider these parables a little more closely since they greatly impact the postmillennial argument.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed reads: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches” (Mt 13:31–32).¹⁷ Unquestionably, the image symbolizes something magnificent beyond expectation: a minuscule mustard seed giving rise to a large tree.

Though birds could easily eat a mustard seed, the mustard tree becomes large enough that they flock to it in order to build their nests for their young. The Old Testament provides similar imagery that assists us: birds singing among the tree branches picture *peaceful serenity and divine provision* (Ps 104:12, 17). In Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 31:3, 6 Daniel

15. France, *Matthew*, 539.

16. See also: Lk 6:22; Jn 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2; 19:38; 20:19.

17. An excellent postmillennial analysis of this parable may be found in the classic work by Trench, *Notes on the Miracles and the Parables of Our Lord*, 2:109–115.

portrays Babylon and Assyria (which God providentially prospers, Jer 27:5–8; Eze 31:3, 9¹⁸) as massive kingdoms to which birds flock to build their nests. Daniel 4:12 indicates that this speaks of the gracious provision of food for all; Ezekiel 31 shows that this symbolizes the kingdom's fairness, greatness, and provision for all great nations. That is, these kingdoms were great for a time, securing provisions and shelter for men.

But God has a kingdom that also will become a great tree providing a nesting place for the birds and their young. Ezekiel 17:22–24 reads:

I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree.

This symbolizes the universal magnificence and exaltation of the kingdom of heaven, which will graciously provide shelter for all, when it comes to full fruition. Daniel's vision seems to provide the specific backdrop of Christ's parable, which he adapts by recasting it as a mustard plant.¹⁹ Both point to the dominance of Christ's kingdom: the twig is planted on a high mountain above all the trees; the mustard seed becomes the largest plant in the garden. So then, the Mustard Seed Parable speaks of the kingdom's *extension* in the world (cp. 13:37–38).

The *Parable of the Leaven* reads: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened" (Mt 13:33).²⁰ Here Christ symbolizes the kingdom's *intensive* progress in the world. Leaven is a penetrative agent that diffuses itself throughout its host from within (cf. Lk 17:20–21). Thus, here the leaven will thoroughly penetrate the whole three pecks of meal (surely "the world," as in Mt 13:38). As Trench explains: "Nor can we consider these words, '*till the whole is leavened*,' as less than a prophecy of a final complete

18. Cf. Ps 75:6–7; Da 2:21; 4:17, 32; Job 12:23.

19. "The language is closest to that of Dn. 4:21." Nolland, *Matthew*, 551. See also: France, *Matthew*, 526–27.

20. For an helpful treatment of this parable, see: Allis, "The Parable of the Leaven," 254–273.

triumph of the Gospel — that it will diffuse itself through all nations, and purify and ennoble all life.”²¹ The kingdom of heaven will have “a dramatic effect on human society.”²² B. B. Warfield notes of these parables that they “announce the complete conquest of the world by His Kingdom.”²³

The leaven parable, then, parallels the kingdom’s glory in the other parables. The kingdom will *penetrate all* (Mt 13:33). It will produce up to a hundred-fold return in its converts (Mt 13:8). It will grow to *great stature* (Mt 13:31–32). It will *dominate the field/world* (having sown the wheat seed in the world, that world to which Christ returns will be a wheat field, not a tare field, Mt 13:30).²⁴

Both the mustard seed and leaven parables picture the kingdom’s *growth*. Clearly Christ is proclaiming in these kingdom parables the nature of the kingdom, which he is establishing and promoting during his ministry. His ministry opens by proclaiming “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17; cp. 3:2; 10:7). He immediately sets out preaching that kingdom (4:23) as a present reality (5:3, 10, 19; 6:33; 9:35; 12:28), which begins in earnest in the days of John the Baptist (11:11–12). It does not come catastrophically as a full-blown kingdom, but slowly grows to dominance. This gradualism contradicts the premillennial view. I will deal with the principle of gradualism below.

The Kingdom Parables, then, outline the postmillennial system in a way contradicting premillennialism:

- The kingdom begins in the first century as Christ ministers God’s word among men (13:24, 37). It does not await the distant future thousands of years after Christ’s ministry on earth, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom comes by spreading the word (13:3, 19, 23). It does not appear in the context of a Battle of Armageddon. Nor does it involve any armed conflict whatsoever, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom works within, from the heart (13:19) involving conversion (13:23). It is not essentially a political, bureaucratic

21. Trench, *Notes on the Parables*, 88.

22. France, *Matthew*, 528.

23. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 339.

24. Cf. ch. 19 “Biblical Objections” below for a response to amillennialism’s view of the Parable of the Tares.

reality that is imposed upon a recalcitrant world from without, as per premillennialism.

- The kingdom calls for a life of heart-felt commitment (13:44–46). It does not involve political choices or imposed subservience, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom struggles against various hindrances and false starts (13:4–7, 19–22). It does not powerfully impose itself by overwhelming the world in a great battle, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom is a valuable reality that not all men realize, being hidden (13:44–46). It does not picture a kingdom that comes full scale and publically upon men, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom operates in the world even as Satan resists it (13:19, 25, 38–39). It is not protected by a literal binding of Satan so that he is absolutely restrained from any earthly activity, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom results in a wide range of responses, including some rejecting it and others only temporarily accepting it (13:4–7, 19–22). It operates in fits and starts rather appearing catastrophically and universally, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom even includes unbelievers within it (13:24–26, 47–48). It does not come through a battle that destroys all opposition and allows only the saved to enter it, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom grows from an insignificant beginning, gradually producing results over time (13:8, 23, 31–33). It does not dramatically and catastrophically appear on the scene of history all at once, as per premillennialism.
- The kingdom gradually grows from the first century, resulting in remarkable, dominant growth, which ultimately penetrates the whole world (13:31–33). This universal, pre-second advent dominion contradicts premillennialism (and amillennialism).
- The kingdom grows as a present reality until the resurrection and judgment at the end of the age, where God finally separates the saved and the lost (13:30, 49–50). The kingdom does not involve a two-fold resurrection separated by 1000 years of a new and different age, as per premillennialism.

- In the imagery of the parables, the angels remove the lost from the kingdom for judgment before the saved (13:30). This contradicts the unique dispensational scenario.
- The kingdom reaches perfection only at the resurrection (13:43). This contradicts complaints of some that postmillennialism suggests universalism and perfection.

Dispensational Objections

Dispensationalists resist viewing the Kingdom Parables as portraying positive gradual growth.²⁵ The NSRB's states regarding the Mustard Seed Parable: "The parable of the mustard seed suggest the rapid but unsubstantial growth of the mystery aspect of the kingdom."²⁶ Walvoord teaches that "the birds of the air perch in its branches, referring to evil influences of those who are not even in a sphere of profession that relates to the church."²⁷

But how does the mustard plant portray "unsubstantial growth"? Jesus seems to emphasize the very opposite, portraying the plant's substantiality in growing from a seed too small for birds to bother eating to a plant where they may build their homes. And why must we assume birds represent "evil influences"? Christ says nothing that suggests their negative influence. Birds are not necessarily types of evil in Scripture.²⁸ Similarly, the lion is not necessarily a type of evil, for in addition to symbolizing the destructive power of Satan (1Pe 5:8), it also symbolizes the sin-conquering power of Christ (Rev 5:5). In fact, if we press the details of the parable, we may even suggest that the birds that originally seek to destroy the seed of the kingdom in the ground (Mt 13:4, 19) finally convert under the seed's influence. After all, each of Christ's converts are at one time his enemy.²⁹

Regarding the Parable of the Leaven (Mt 13:33), Walvoord states that leaven "makes the dough look much larger than it really is without adding any food value." It works to "puff up the dough" like the "ex-

25. Walvoord, *PKH*, 374–376. Louis J. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *BKC* 2:51. Edward E. Hindson, "The Gospel According to Matthew" in *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament*, 52. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:46

26. *NSRB*, 1015 n 31.

27. *PKH*, 375.

28. Ge 1:20; Dt 14:20; Isa 31:5; Mt 6:26.

29. Ro 5:10; Eph 2:1–4; 1Ti 1:15.

ternalism of the Pharisees.”³⁰ He notes that “leaven is universally used to represent evil.”³¹

If leaven represents something lacking “food value,” we may wonder why people add it to bread as good thing. Leaven lightens and softens bread, while it adds flavor. Besides is Christ really teaching that “the kingdom of heaven is like . . . *evil*?” Leaven does not *always* represent evil, for God commands it as an offering in Leviticus 7:13 and 23:7. Exodus 12:15 forbids leaven in the Passover because the people are to portray the *haste* with which God removes them from Egypt (Ex 12:11). Some offerings in Leviticus do forbid leaven, but do not tie this to leaven’s symbolizing evil. Interestingly, in some offerings God even forbids honey — despite its symbolizing the Promised Land.³² In Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; and 1 Corinthians 5:6, 8, the negative references to leaven do not stand alone. The speakers modify each one by such phrases as: “of the Pharisees” and “of malice.” Regarding Paul’s reference to leaven in Galatians 5:9, he is speaking about the danger of false doctrine by alluding to a general maxim that can apply in either a good or an evil sense: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

Actually, leaven’s subtle penetrating power is the source of its legendary interest. It can speak of the penetrating influence of *either* good or evil. Surprisingly, we may side with Pentecost: “This new form of the kingdom would operate according to an internal force that would be continuous and progressive until the whole mixture had been leavened.” By this he means: “Here the emphasis was on the Holy Spirit and concerned His ministry to the world.”³³

Progressive dispensationalist Blaising resists my postmillennial exposition at several points.³⁴ First, regarding the mustard seed and leaven parables he complains: “these parables do not say anything about ‘the gradual development’ of the kingdom. They only contrast the beginning with the end.” This is odd for several reasons: (1) The seed-to-tree and leaven-to-loaf images both naturally imply slow progress. (2) Mark 4 adds an additional kingdom parable to the mix which absolutely

30. *PKH*, 375, 376.

31. *PKH*, 376. See also: *NSRB*, 1015 n 3.

32. Ex 3:8; Lev 20:24; Nu 13:27; Dt 6:3; Jos 5:6.

33. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 223.

34. Blaising in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 77. The following quotations are all taken from this page.

*demand*s gradual growth: “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows — how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head” (Mk 4:26–28) (3) Even on Blaising’s analysis the most important point for postmillennialism is not necessarily growth (meager growth would not be sufficient). Rather it is *final size and dominance*. As when a tiny seed becomes “larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree” (Mt 13:32) or when leaven which a woman can hide in “three pecks of meal, until it was *all* leavened” (Mt 13:33). Blaising’s argument is not compelling.

Second, regarding the Parable of the Sower Blaising notes: “the bountiful harvest is the fruition of that Word in a person’s life, not a great number of people who respond to Christ. If the parable of the soils represents how gospel preaching will be received in this age, then it shows that only about one in four truly respond — not good news for the postmillennialist.”³⁵ In response, consider: (1) This argument fails even though the abundant fruit certainly applies to individual converts. After all, the context shows that it bears even more fruit, multiplying in further conversions as the obedient hearer spreads the good word he receives. The sower is doubtlessly planting a cereal grain (such as rice, barley, and corn) and most probably a wheat seed as we see in its manner of sowing (Mt 13:3–8) and the following parable referring to the wheat field (Mt 13:24–25). The wheat seed (or any other cereal grain) famously produces a head containing many more seeds for future multiplication. (2) Throughout Christ’s ministry we hear of the word of the gospel spreading and growing, and this continues into Acts. Christ even teaches that only by abiding in him, his followers may bear fruit (Jn 15:1–5). He does not teach that the branches grow bigger, stronger, and straighter, but that they bear much fruit (which is not a branch). Thus, the fruit of such plants contain seeds to produce *other* like plants.

The four types of soil here are just that: four *types of soil*. They do not represent a response ratio so that the sower fails three-fourths of the time. After all, Christ highlights the abundance from his sowing, not its failure, by saving the best response for last as the goal of the parable. A hundredfold crop is a blessing from God (Ge 26:12; cp. Mk 10:30). As France well notes: “There is no indication of what proportion of seed

35. See also: Walvoord, *PKH*, 373.

meets with the various fates mentioned, so that it is not legitimate to state, as some commentators do, that only one quarter of the seed was successful. Presumably, unless this is an extraordinarily incompetent farmer, the majority of the seed falls into good ground and produces a crop."³⁶ But surely this is not an "incompetent farmer," for the Lord expressly teaches in a following parable that the sower is the Son of Man (Mt 13:37).

Indeed, what is

of central importance is that we have yield figures for the seed in the good soil which are so high that they cause the heavy losses documented for the three cases of failure to pale into insignificance. Up to this point the story has set us up to expect failure. The situation developing through the three previous scenarios seems irrecoverable, but has turned out not to be so. The listeners are invited to make a last-minute revision to their construal of the earlier parts of the story. . . . What is it that has rescued him from the jaws of failure? It can be nothing other than the fecundity of the seed he sows!³⁷

This is especially important to note in light of it involving a "mystery" of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 13:11) and in the historical context of "the mixed response to the Galilean ministry of Jesus as chs. 11–12 have outlined it. The disciples were to take courage at that time from recognizing that there is fruitful as well as unfruitful seed."³⁸

John 12:31–32

In these verses Christ powerfully and confidently asserts: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

The moment of his greatest weakness (his crucifixion) will unleash his great strength, securing the world's "judgment," Satan's casting out, and the drawing of all men. And this is about to occur, for he says it "now is." Calvin's comments on the word *judgment* (*krisis*) is helpful:

The word *judgment* is taken as "reformation" by some and "condemnation" by others. I agree rather with the former, who expound

36. France, *Matthew*, 505.

37. Nolland, *Matthew*, 529.

38. France, *Matthew*, 518.

it that the world must be restored to due order. For the Hebrew word *mishpat* which is translated as *judgment* means a well-ordered constitution. . . . Now we know that outside Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world. And although Christ had already begun to set up the kingdom of God, it was His death that was the true beginning of a properly-ordered state and the complete restoration of the world.³⁹

Christ is correcting the *chaos and evil* that Adam's submission to Satan brings into the world. Tasker writes: "By His own forthcoming conflict with evil in His passion, the situation created by the fall of Adam will be reversed. It was because of disobedience that man was driven by God out of the garden of Eden for having submitted to *the prince of this world* (31); now by the perfect obedience of Jesus on the cross the prince of this world will be deposed from his present ascendancy."⁴⁰

The Lord immediately explains the means of restoration: he will cast out man's great hinderer, Satan,⁴¹ and will begin redemptively drawing all men to himself. The same word for "draw" (*elkuo*) here appears in John 6:44: "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." It speaks of the Spirit's drawing power, and implies a certain resistance that is ultimately overcome. We see this overcoming of resistance in John 21:11 where Peter "draws" to shore a heavy net "full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three."

Christ's death will exercise a massive influence in history by gradually, relentlessly, and graciously drawing all men to him. By this redemptive means, he will move the world as a system⁴² back to God. Christ will not accomplish his universal sway over men "with sword's loud clashing" by political imposition, but by spiritual transformation. The final result, however, is not an each-and-every universalism. Rather, it is a massive, systemic conversion of the vast majority of men, who then progressively transform the world.

Romans 11:11–26

In Romans 11 we must begin by noting that Paul is dealing particularly with the question of *racial* Jews in redemptive history's new

39. Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John* (CNTC), 2:42.

40. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 150.

41. For the demise of Satan, see discussion later in this chapter.

42. See the discussion of *kosmos* later in this chapter (271–74).

covenant phase. But the way he handles the matter leads him to make global observations regarding Christianity's future — almost in passing as he simply *assumes* the gospel's global conquest.

Let us note the setting of his argument. Romans 8 and 9 strongly assert God's absolute sovereignty.⁴³ But this causes a question to arise: What about the Jews? If God is sovereign, how can we explain their rejecting Christ and falling away from God's favor? Are they not "His people" (Ro 11:1, 2). Are not "the gifts and the calling of God" upon them irrevocable (11:29)? Romans 9–11 answers that important question.

Paul is clearly dealing with racial Jews when he raises the question: "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Ro 11:1). He defines "His people" by referring to the racial tribes (11:1), by citing Elijah's experience (11:2), and by distinguishing them from the Gentiles (11:11–13, 25).

The Apostle provides the answer to the Jewish question.⁴⁴ He presents two questions: Has God rejected his people? (Ro 11:1)? And has Israel stumbled for the purpose of absolutely falling away (11:11)? In answering these questions in his context, he argues that God's sovereignty does not fail in that: (1) Even "at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (11:5; cp. 2–6) and God himself sovereignly hardens the rest (11:7–10). (2) He will bring the Jews back into God's favor in the future on an equal footing with the Gentiles (11:11–26). Thus, the current presence of a remnant shows his rejection is not *total* and the future hope of their fullness shows that his rejection is not *final*.

The four basic millennial schools present distinctive approaches to Paul's highly debated statement in Romans 11:25–26a: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved." The premillennialist and dispensationalist sees the statement that "all Israel will be saved" as promising a future national, geo-political restoration.⁴⁵ Generally the amillennialist sees this as signifying that the church fulfills

43. See: Gentry, *A Biblical Defense of Predestination*, ch. 7.

44. I follow Murray's exegesis in *The Epistle to the Romans*, *ad loc.*

45. See for example: Walvoord, *PKH*, 453–55. Ladd, *Crucial Questions*, 95.

Israel's promises by becoming the true Israel.⁴⁶ The postmillennialist sees here the promise of world conversion as finally including Israel herself.⁴⁷

The postmillennial approach best fits the flow of Paul's argument. In the second phase of his argument proving that God's sovereignty does not fail, he explains that Israel did not stumble at Christ *for the purpose that* (Gk., *hina*) they might utterly and finally fall away (Ro 11:11). In *introducing* the problem he vigorously rejects any such prospect: "May it never be!" for "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (11:1, 2). He also rejects this possibility immediately *after* posing the question: "May it never be!" (11:11). Rather God's purpose in Israel's current condition is to afford an opportunity for the Gentiles to be saved, with a view to eventually drawing the Jews to salvation. Worldwide Gentile salvation will move Israel to repentance: "salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (11:11).

Paul then states: "Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!" (Ro 11:12). We must understand that since Israel's loss is almost total (only a remnant remains, 11:5), her "fulfillment [Gk., *pleroma*]" must be commensurate with her loss, which means it must be virtually total. Hence, postmillennialists believe in future, massive conversions among the Jews, not only due to general systematic requirements of worldwide salvation, but also due to this exegetical evidence.

In this context Paul speaks of Christianity's future glory: for the Jewish failure will eventually bring "riches for the world" (Ro 11:12), resulting in "the reconciling of the world" (11:15), leading to "the fulness of the Gentiles" (11:25). All three references point to massive, worldwide conversions; all three underscore the postmillennial hope.

Amillennialists dismiss this view for two contextual reasons: (1) This salvation of Israel is a "mystery" (Ro 11:25), which presents an unexpected resolution to the Jewish problem: the church becomes Israel

46. See for example: Strimple in Bock, *Three Views of the Millennium*, 112–18. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, ch. 14. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 1026–30. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 87–91. Robertson, *Israel of God*, ch. 6. Though some see this passage teaching the conversion of racial Jews: Van Gemenen, *Progress of Redemption*, 463. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 134–38. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 168–75. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 155–57. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 202 (he is a modified amillennialist, 100).

47. For example see: Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 124–30. Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, 60–63. Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*.

so that God fulfills Israel's promises through her. (2) Paul uses the phrase *kai houtos* ("and thus"), which means "in this manner," "in this way." This phrase does not refer to temporal sequence, so that we are to see Jews falling away, then Gentiles being converted, and finally Jews converting. Strimple comments: "The combination of Greek words Paul uses here (*kai houtos*) is *never* used to refer to temporal sequence but always to refer to either a *logical* relationship or the manner by which something is done."⁴⁸

Postmillennialism can answer both objections. In that Paul emphasizes ethnic Israel in his opening question (Ro 11:1–2) and in that he plays Gentiles over against Israel (11:11–13, 25), the "mystery" is the remarkable method whereby God plays Israel off the Gentiles, which involves the salvific wave motion of Israel falling, Gentiles coming into God's favor, then Israel being moved to jealousy for their God. Regarding *kai houtos*, many noted commentators accept the outright temporal significance of the term (M. Stuart, C. K. Barrett, E. Käsemann, B. Corley), while others allow its temporal nuance here (O. Michel, J. D. G. Dunn, R. Schmitt, A. Feuillet).⁴⁹ This presents no problem to the postmillennial interpretation.

1 Corinthians 15:20–28

We now come to one of the strongest New Testament passages supporting postmillennialism. Here Paul teaches not only that Christ presently sits upon the throne, but also that he rules with a confident view to subduing his enemies. (I will employ the New International Version as my basic English translation.)

In 1 Corinthians 15:20–22 Paul speaks of the resurrection order: Christ is resurrected as a first fruits promise of our resurrection. In verses 23–24 we read about the sequence of events involving the resurrection: "But each in his own turn:⁵⁰ Christ the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come." We today are currently in the era awaiting Christ's end-time coming, when all believers will arise in resurrection glory. When Christ comes this will be "the end!"⁵¹ No millennial age will follow.⁵²

48. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 116–17.

49. Noted in Moo, *Romans*, 719 n 38.

50. For a discussion of the Greek word *tagma* ("turn") — often confused by dispensationalists — see: Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 484.

51. The Scripture is clear that the resurrection is a "general resurrection" of

But notice what *precedes* the end. Verse 24 says: “the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father.” Earth history ends “whenever”⁵³ Christ “hands over” the kingdom to the Father. In the syntactical construction before us, his “handing over” (NIV) or “delivering up” (KJV) the kingdom must occur simultaneously with “the end.”⁵⁴ Here the timing is contingent: “whenever” he delivers up the kingdom, *then* the end will come. In addition, he will deliver up his kingdom to the Father only “*after* he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”⁵⁵

Gathering these exegetical data together, we see that *the end is contingent*: it will come whenever he delivers up the kingdom to his Father. But this will not occur until “after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (see also: ESV). Consequently, the end will not occur, and Christ will not turn the kingdom over to the Father, until *after* he has abolished *all* opposition. Here again we see the gospel victory motif in the New Testament in a way co-ordinate with Old Testament covenantal and prophetic expectations.

Notice further that v 25 demands that “He must [*dei*] reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” Here the present infinitive *basileuein* (“reign”) indicates his ongoing reign. I show in ch. 10 above that Christ is presently reigning, and has been so since his ascension. References elsewhere to Psalm 110 specifically mention his sitting at God’s right hand. Sitting at the right hand entails active ruling and

both the righteous and unrighteous (Jn 5:28–29; Ac 24:15), which will occur on the “*last day*” (Jn 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48). See ch. 12 “Eschatology and Consummation.”

52. For helpful discussions of this prohibition against an intervening kingdom (*Zwischenreich*) era prior to the end, see: Barrett, *From First Adam to Last*, 101; Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 238–258; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul*, 556–559; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 291–298. See also: Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:191.

53. A better translation of *hotan* is “whenever.” We know not “when” this will be, Mt 24:36; Ac 1:7; 2Pe 3:10.

54. The Greek translated “hands over” here is *paradidōi*, and is in the present tense and subjunctive mode. When *hotan* is followed by the present subjunctive it indicates a present contingency that occurs in conjunction with the main clause: here the coming of the end. *BAGD*, 730.

55. In the Greek text the *hotan* is here followed by the aorist subjunctive, *katar-gese*. Such a construction indicates that the action of the subordinate clause precedes the action of the main clause. *BAGD*, 731.

reigning, not passive resignation or anxious waiting. He is now actively “the ruler over the kings of the earth” and “has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (Rev 1:5; cp. 3:21).⁵⁶

Thus, in v 25 Paul states that Christ must continue reigning as he puts his enemies under his feet. But to what point in time does his reign continue? The answer is identical to our previous conclusion: his reign from heaven extends to the *end of history*. We must understand his rule as definitive, progressive, and consummative. During his earthly ministry he awaits his resurrection in order to secure the *definitive* (legal) abolition of all rival rule, authority and power (Mt 28:18; Eph 1:19–22; Php 2:9–11; 1Pe 3:21–22). Now that he rules from heaven until he returns, his return delays until he *progressively* (actively) puts “all His enemies under His feet.” Paul’s repeating the fact of his sure conquest before the end is significant. Then *consummatively* (finally), the last enemy he will subdue is death, which he conquers by means of the final resurrection at his coming.⁵⁷ Thus, church history begins with his *legal* victory at the cross-resurrection-ascension, continues *progressively* as he subdues all of his other enemies, and *finally* ends at the eschatological resurrection and the conquering of the final enemy, death.

In v 27 Christ clearly has the legal title to rule, for the Father “has put everything under His feet.” This Pauline expression (borrowed from Ps 8:6) corresponds with Christ’s declaring that “all authority has been given

56. Lenski, *First and Second Letters to the Corinthians*, 672. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 147. Loader, “Christ at the Right Hand,” 208. Lambrecht, “Paul’s Christological Use of Scripture in 1 Cor. 15:20–28,” 506. This is contrary to how dispensationalist MacLeod sees Psalm 110 used in Hebrews: He admits that Psalm 110 employs tokens of kingship (vv. 3, 8–9, 13): Christ’s “throne, scepter, and kingdom — all tokens of power and dominion are mentioned.” Yet he goes on to comment on the use of Psalm 110:3 in Hebrews: “Closer examination, however, reveals that Hebrews has no emphasis ‘on Christ as present ruler of the world . . .’ The expression ‘He sat down’ carries the sense of a finished work of sacrifice (10:12) rather than that of a present reign as King. . . . At the present time Christ sits at God’s right hand waiting for the day when He shall return to earth to reign (1:6, 13; 10:13).” David J. MacLeod, “The Present Work of Christ in Hebrews,” 199.

57. Contrary to dispensationalist confusion, the resurrection of the lost is not mentioned here only because his primary concern (as in 1Th 4:13) is with Christians and their ethical actions.

Me” (Mt 28:18). He has both the *right* to victory as well as the *promise* of victory. Psalm 110, especially as expounded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, shows that he will secure historical victory over all earthly opposition before his second advent.

Progressive dispensationalist Blaising disputes my interpretation as involving “an exegetical mistake.”⁵⁸ He notes that Paul’s three-fold use of “then” marks three stages of development: “Christ’s coming marks the second stage, not the third (in which the end occurs). How long a time will pass between the second and third stages? Almost two thousand years have passed between the first and second stages; thus, one should not preclude the possibility that some period of time may pass between the second and third stages as well.”⁵⁹

Though Blaising’s observation is valid, it is not compelling for two reasons: (1) As he himself notes, it is only a “possibility.” So my point remains as much a “possibility” as his own. (2) Remembering that Blaising is a premillennialist, in his scenario Paul skips over *without any mention* Christ’s glorious personal millennial rule. This text absolutely demands a statement regarding the millennium — if premillennialism is true. Paul’s silence is deafening, and destroys premillennialism with its golden silence.⁶⁰

Other Passages

I could exegete numerous other New Testament passages to fill out the victory motif. I will just briefly cite two more.

Ephesians 1:19–23 praises God’s “mighty power” in Christ’s resurrection as a stepping stone to Christ’s rising “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named.” Because of this we may rest assured that God “put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church” (1:22). The church, which is his body, has as its head the exalted Christ. How can we expect historical failure under such a glorious person? The

58. Blaising in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 79.

59. Blaising in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 79.

60. For fuller exegetical arguments against premillennial viewpoints, see: Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 236–46. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 480ff. Reymond surveys several important New Testament eschatological passages, noting that none of them even alludes to a millennium, despite being perfect places for such an allusion (*A New Systematic Theology*, 1033–36, 1046–47).

church, which has been given the task of baptizing all nations (Mt 28:19; cp. Ac 1:8), has a sovereign Lord as its head.

The writer of Hebrews contrasts the old covenant and the new covenant (Heb 12:18–28), pointing out that new covenant recipients are currently receiving (*paralambanontes*, pres. act. ptcp.) “a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).⁶¹ This kingdom will “remain” after God shakes down the old covenant order at the temple’s destruction in AD 70 (Heb 12:26–27; cp. 8:13), destroying those temple implements made with hands (9:11, 24; cf. Mk 14:58; Ac 7:48). In Hebrews 1:3, 13 we learn that “when He had by Himself purged our sins” He then “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” anticipating his enemies becoming his footstool (cf. Heb 10:13). The kingdom, which he receives in history, is unshakable and will “remain” until the last enemy is vanquished (cp. Mt 16:18).

Extension Guaranteed

The Principle of Gradualism

If we are to properly understand Scripture’s eschatological victory, we must recognize an important redemptive-historical method of divine operation: gradualism — “here a little; there a little” gradualism (Isa 28:10). This principle expects the kingdom’s developmental unfolding and expansion over time.

Contrary to postmillennialism, the dispensational and premillennial views operate on the basis of *catastrophism*. As premillennialist Erickson puts it: “Whereas the postmillennialist thinks that the millennium is being introduced gradually, perhaps almost imperceptibly, the premillennialist envisions a sudden, cataclysmic event.”⁶² Dispensational-

61. For some reason Hanko states: “So far as I have noticed, no postmillennialist would ever say that the kingdom of Christ to be realized here upon this earth is brought about by ‘the removing of those things that are shaken’ (which, according to vs. 26, refers to heaven and earth); nor that even this glorious kingdom to be realized here on earth is a ‘kingdom which cannot be moved.’ Even an ardent Calvinistic postmillennialist believes, I think, that this earthly kingdom, as glorious as it is, shall be moved when Christ comes again.” Hanko, “Response to ‘The “Other Side” of Postmillennialism,” 297. See also: White, “Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1–10,” 1040. Again, postmillennialists see an end to earth history and a final removing of the temporal order. But that is not what the writer of Hebrews envisions.

62. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1217.

ism believes that at Christ's second advent "he will depose the earthly rulers and will begin His millennial reign."⁶³ In their theological systems Christ's kingdom with all of its attendant glory will invade history as a great catastrophe, being suddenly imposed on a recalcitrant world.

A careful survey of Scripture shows that gradualism is a common divine *modus operandi* apparent throughout biblical revelation. Consider just five samples:

- Creation: Even God's creating the universe proceeds upon a gradualistic principle — an accelerated gradualism, to be sure, but gradualism nonetheless. God creates the world *ex nihilo*, but he does not create it as a complete system by one divine fiat — though he could easily do so. He employs a series of successive divine fiats that stretch out over a period of six days (Ge 1; Ex 20:11).
- Dominion: Though God places Adam in the Garden of Eden with a command to cultivate the soil there (Ge 2:15), he expects Adam to begin working the implications of the Cultural Mandate into all the world (Ge 1:26–28). Chung notes that "Adam's rule was anticipated to be extended to the entire creation beyond the boundary of the garden of Eden."⁶⁴
- Redemption: God promises redemption just after sin enters into the human race in Eden (Ge 3:15). Yet its accomplishment follows thousands of years after Adam (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10).
- Revelation: Rather than giving his total special revelation all at once, God gradually unfolds his word to men over a period of 1,500 years (Heb 1:1, 2; 1Pe 1:10–12).
- Sanctification: Even in salvation, justification, which is a once-for-all act (Ro 4:2–3; 5:1), gives rise to sanctification, which comes by process (Php 2:12–13; 1Pe 2:2).

The Kingdom and Gradualism

Now we must note that God's redemptive kingdom also develops gradualistically. It incrementally unfolds through history, progressing from small, imperceptible beginnings to a glorious, dominant, worldwide

63. Bobby Hayes, "Premillennialism," *DPT*, 311

64. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 139.

conclusion. I will survey several relevant passages illustrating this important principle.

An historical indicator of kingdom gradualism appears in the Promised Land's conquest. In Deuteronomy 7:22 we read: "And the Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you." Here Moses specifically informs Israel that gradual conquest is for her good, allowing her people to conquer where they could secure and maintain control.

In Daniel 2:31–45 Christ's kingdom comes down to earth as a stone smiting the world kingdom, which exists under a fourth imperial rule. As we read through the passage we learn that the kingdom grows to become a great mountain in the earth: "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces And the *stone* that struck the image *became a great mountain* and filled the whole earth. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Da 2:34–35, 44).

In this imagery we have both linear continuity over time and remarkable upwardly progressive development: the stone *grows* to become a "great mountain." We also witness struggle and resistance: the stone smashes the image. Finally, we rejoice in its fortunes: the God-defying image is thoroughly crushed. Daniel 7:26 portrays a gradual progress to victory against opposition: there we witness victory as "the result of *many* blows rather than of *one*."⁶⁵ This process manifests progressive corporate sanctification in history.

In Ezekiel 17:22–24 God promises to establish the kingdom as a small "sprig from the lofty top of the cedar." Then he will nurture it until it becomes "a stately cedar." It produces great boughs so that "birds of every kind will nest under it." This growth is certain for "I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

In Ezekiel 47:1–9 redemption flows forth from God's temple in stages. The waters of life initiate from under the altar, first "to the ankles" (v 3), then to the knees (v 4a), then to the loins (v 4b), then it "was a river that I could not ford" (v 5). This is the river of life (v 9). In

65. Brown, *Christ's Second Coming*, 334.

fact, in John 7:38 Christ presents himself as fulfilling this prophecy.⁶⁶ This is quite consistent with Christ's presenting himself as the true temple (Jn 2:19–21). John 7:38 reads: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." At Pentecost the torrential flow of the living water begins in earnest (Ac 2:33).

In Matthew 13 the Kingdom Parables speak of the kingdom's increase in size and transformational influence. Matthew 13:3–9 portrays the kingdom as scattered seed that gradually grows to bear abundant fruit. Matthew 13:31–33 speaks of its growth as that of a mustard seed becoming a great plant and as a little leaven leavening three bushels of meal. In Mark 4:26–29, God's kingdom begins as mere seed (v 26), then it puts forth the blade, then the head, the mature grain (v 27).

In Romans 13:11–14 and 1 John 2:8 the apostles see the kingdom light as already shining, ready to dispel the darkness. "The manifestation of the Messiah is regularly termed by the ancient Jews *yom*, *day*, because previously to this all is *night*." "The apostle considers the state of the *Gentiles* under the notion of *night*, a time of darkness and a time of evil practices. . . ."⁶⁷ He considers the Gospel as now visiting the *Gentiles*, and the *light* of a glorious *day* about to shine forth on them."⁶⁸

Satan will not be able to thwart the kingdom's progress and growth, for the "gates of Hades will not be able to prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). Though slow, it will advance in God's good time.

Vastness, Not Universalism

Some mistakenly suppose that postmillennialism implies either the ultimate salvation of all men or at least a form of temporal universalism. Riddlebarger, for instance, speaks against postmillennialism: "Although the kingdom advances throughout this age, the final eschatological victory is won by Jesus Christ himself at his second coming (1 Cor. 15:54). Not before." And of certain negative verses he comments that they "all speak of the present spiritual kingdom as finally consummated in 'the age

66. Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, 40 and Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 74–79.. For a helpful treatment of John 7:38, see: Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 21–26.

67. *Gentiles* walk in darkness (Eph 5:8). The church is called to bring light to the world (Mt 5:14) and must expose the works of darkness (Eph 5:11). Christians are "children of light" (Jn 12:36; Eph 5:8; 1Th 5:5) and ought to "walk in the light" (1Jn 1:7).

68. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.), 6:149.

to come' but not before."⁶⁹ Reymond believes of the postmillennial vision that "the world of mankind of necessity must be brought eventually to a state of virtual moral perfection — the major contention of postmillennialism . . . a representation of world conditions at the time of Christ's return which amillennialists reject."⁷⁰

But postmillennialism does *not* claim that "final" eschatological victory comes before Christ returns. We do believe that because of the kingdom's long-term expansion "the number finally of the lost in comparison with the whole number of the saved will be very inconsiderable."⁷¹ And that the redeemed "shall embrace the immensely greater part of the human race."⁷² That "ultimately the vast majority of the whole mass of humanity, including all generations, will be actually redeemed by Christ."⁷³

Nor do we expect that at any given point in history all men will be born-again Christians. Brown comments: "Have we not evidence that *during* that bright period the world's subjection to the scepter of Christ will not be quite absolute?"⁷⁴ Campbell writes that the phrase "Christianized world" certainly "does not mean that every living person will then be a Christian, or that every Christian will be a perfect Christian. It does surely mean that the righteous rule and authority of Christ the King will be recognized over all the earth."⁷⁵ Boettner observes only that "evil in all its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world."⁷⁶

Though clearly expecting Christ's dominion throughout the world, Scripture nevertheless teaches that a minority of the human race will not convert to Christ. Evidence for this exists in the events associated with Christ's return, which include a brief rebellion, as indicated in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 and Revelation 20:7–9. We must always expect tares in the wheat field (Mt 13:39–43).

69. Riddlebarger, *Case for Amillennialism*, 97, 99.

70. Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 1036.

71. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:879–80.

72. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 349.

73. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 525.

74. Brown, *Christ's Second Coming*, 145.

75. Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, 298.

76. Boettner, *Millennium*, 14.

Some suggest, and I tend to agree, that Isaiah 19:18 symbolically implies a five-to-one ratio for Christians over non-Christians at the height of the millennial glory.⁷⁷ “In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the LORD of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction.” To speak the language of God’s people seems to indicate salvation. Language plays an important role in Scripture: if it is the language of God’s people, it evidences his favor (Isa 19:18; 57:19; Zep 3:9); if not, it symbolizes his curse (Dt 28:49; Ps 81:5; 114:1; Jer 5:15; Eze 3:5–6).⁷⁸

The progress of redemption not only grows imperceptibly, but oftentimes sporadically. Postmillennialists deny “that this current age will be a time of *steady* and upward growth.”⁷⁹ Its historical progress is often intermittent, being intermingled with eras of divine pruning (Jn 15:5–6) in anticipating the final harvest. Such pruning is certainly true with Israel of the Old Testament (Isa 6:9–13). At one point God offers to do away with Israel and establish a new people from out of Moses himself (Ex 32:10). Of course, by the new covenant era, this has long been Israel’s experience (Mt 3:9–12; Ro 11:16–24). Such pruning can leave a region, once strongly influenced by Christianity, wholly without a Christian witness — for a time. It is like seed, which is planted and grows and produces other seed (Mt 13:3–9, 23). Thus, we can expect it to grow in certain areas and perhaps even to die, but eventually it will come back because the productivity of seed involves its death and renewal (Jn 12:24; 1Co 15:36). Ultimately, God gives the increase (1Co 3:6–7) when and where he pleases (cf. Isa 55:9–11; Jn 3:8).

Cultivation Encouraged

Christ establishes his messianic kingdom in the first century through his redemptive labors. He establishes his glorious kingdom by his mighty power and for the majesty of his glorious Name. But by his providence,

77. Alexander holds this view and notes it was Calvin’s position, Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:355–356. Matthew Henry leans to this interpretation. Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 4:108.

78. See the function of tongues as a sign of judgment-curse on Israel, Ac 2:4–40; 1Co 14:20–21. See: Gentry, *Nourishment from the Word*, ch. 4; DBI, 876; Robertson, *The Final Word*, 41–50. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 102–109. Coppes, *Whatever Happened to Biblical Tongues?*, 48–52. Baxter, *Charismatic Gift of Tongues*, 51–54.

79. “Postmillennialism,” DPT, 310.

he carries out his kingdom work through his redeemed people (Mt 28:19; Ac 1:8; 9:15). The world-encompassing Great Commission is no command to make bricks without straw. Christ does the initial and definitive work as the Son of Man; but we who are united with him and under his providential governance are to promote his kingdom rule in history. Being joint-heirs with Christ (Lk 12:32; 22:29; Ro 8:17), we presently reign with him in his world: He has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).⁸⁰

As B. B. Warfield comments: “Christians are His soldiers in this holy war, and it is through our victory that His victory is known.”⁸¹ “There is the church struggling here below — the ‘militant church’ we may call it; the triumphing church he would rather teach us to call it, for the essence of his presentation is not that there is continual strife here to be endured, but that there is continuous victory here to be won.”⁸²

God’s rich and abundant gifts to his people are of surpassing greatness: they are well suited to promoting his kingdom in the world. Christ commands his disciples to wait in Jerusalem “for power on high” (Lk 24:46–49) — i.e., the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) — in order to equip them for the world-transforming task. He teaches that their faith, which overcomes the world,⁸³ is such that it can remove mountains.⁸⁴ We know that the Apostles greatly rejoice in God’s super-abundant grace and Christ’s unsearchable riches,⁸⁵ declaring that God blesses us with “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3) because of Christ’s ascension and pouring out of his wondrous gifts upon his people (Eph 4:8–11). We must believe that we can do “all things” through Christ and that God will supply all we need “according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Php 4:13, 19). Since we are “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37) we are certain that “with God nothing shall be impossible.”⁸⁶

The church possesses ample gifts and grace to get the job done, in obedience to the Great Commission — a covenantal obligation upon God’s people.⁸⁷ Consider the following blessings: First, the ever-present

80. Ro 5:17; 1Co 4:8; 2Co 5:20; Col 3:1–3; 2Ti 2:12; 1Pe 2:9; Rev 1:6; 3:21.

81. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 493.

82. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:348.

83. 1Jo 2:12–14; 3:8; 5:3, 4.

84. Mt 17:20; 21:21; Mk 11:23; 1Co 13:2.

85. Ro 5:17; Ac 4:33; 1Pe 4:10; Eph 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8.

86. Lk 1:37; Mt 17:20; 19:26; 18:27; Mk 9:23; 10:27.

87. Gentry, *Great Commission*, ch. 2.

Christ. We have the very presence of the Risen Christ with us.⁸⁸ The Great Commission specifically promises his authoritative presence (Mt 28:20) in the context of commanding that we “disciple all nations, baptizing them” (Mt 28:19). He who will never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5) has “all things under His feet” and is “head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22).

Second, the indwelling Spirit. Since Christ’s ascension we have God’s Holy Spirit richly dwelling within us.⁸⁹ He will convict the *world* of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:7–15). In fact, it is “expedient” for us that Christ goes away in his temporal body, so that we might have his spiritual presence in the person of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰ The Holy Spirit’s coming is glorious in every respect. God accomplishes his will through the Spirit’s working: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts” (Zec 4:6b).

Third, the Father’s redemptive delight. God delights to save sinners.⁹¹ He sovereignly and graciously saves unworthy sinners for his own glory.⁹² He sends Christ to “reconcile the *world* to Himself” (Jn 3:17; Ro 11:15; 2Co 5:19). I will return to this theme of world reconciliation below.

Fourth, the powerful gospel. We have the gospel, which is the very power of God,⁹³ and we employ God’s Word as our spiritual weapon for victory.⁹⁴ “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and *every* high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing *every* thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2Co 10:3–5).

Fifth, the means of prayer. We have full access to God through Jesus’ name,⁹⁵ in prayer⁹⁶ by which we shall do even greater works than Christ did on earth (Mt 21:21; Jn 14:12). Prayer opens to us the full resources of

88. Jn 6:56; 14:16–20, 23; 15:4–5; 17:23, 26; Ro 8:10; Gal 2:20; 4:19; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; 1Jn 4:4.

89. Jn 7:39; 14:16–18; 1Co 3:16; 2Co 6:16.

90. Jn 7:39; 14:27–28; 16:7; Ac 2:33.

91. Eze 18:23; 33:11; Lk 15:10; 2Co 5:19; 1Ti 1:15; 2:5.

92. Ro 5:10ff; Eph 1:3–11; 2Ti 1:9.

93. Ro 1:16; 15:19; 16:25; 1Co 1:18, 24; 1Th 1:5.

94. 2Co 6:7; Eph 6:17; 1Th 2:13; Heb 4:12.

95. Jn 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26; 1Jn 3:22; 5:14, 15.

96. Mt 7:7–11; 21:22; Eph 2:18; Php 4:6; Heb 4:16; 10:19–22; 1Jn 3:22; and 5:14–15.

heaven (Jn 14:13; Jas 4:15; 1Jn 5:14). The Lord's Prayer even directs us faithfully to pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). As Calvin comments: "So in this prayer we ask that, with all impediment removed, He may bring all mortals under His command, and lead them to consider the life of heaven. . . . So we pray that . . . the whole world may willingly come over to Him. . . . And now, as the Kingdom of God increases, stage upon stage, to the end of the world, we must every day pray for its coming. As far as iniquity holds the world in sway, so far is the Kingdom of God absent, for complete righteousness must come in its train."⁹⁷

Sixth, a conquered foe. In his ministry Christ witnesses the falling of Satan as the disciples exercise authority over demoniacs (Mk 16:17; Lk 10:17). In fact, Christ casts down Satan (Jn 12:31) and binds him in order that he might "spoil his goods."⁹⁸ Christ specifically comes that he might "destroy" Satan (Heb 2:14) and his "works" (1Jn 3:8), making a show of him, openly triumphing over him (Col 2:15; Eph 4:8–11⁹⁹), having judged him (Jn 16:11). Consequently, his people might not only resist the devil so that he will flee from them (Jas 4:7; 1Pe 5:9), but they may also expect to "bruise Satan under" their feet (Ro 16:20), "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1Jn 4:4). Because of all this, the gospel has the power to "open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Ac 26:18). In the Lord's Prayer a strong relationship ties together two important petitions "Thy kingdom come" and "deliver us from the Evil One."¹⁰⁰

God's presence with and promises to his people should embolden us to great conquests in his name. God encourages Elisha's servant by the vision of the mountains filled with angelic chariots (2Ki 6:17). Zechariah receives strength by a vision of God's angels roving the earth (Zec

97. Calvin, *Synoptics*, 1:207–8. Cf. Scott, *Holy Bible . . . with Explanatory Notes*, 3:28.

98. Mt 12:28–29; 2Ti 2:26; cf. Rev 20:2–3.

99. See: Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, 213–214 and Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 281ff. The word "triumphing" "is derived from *thriambos*, a hymn sung in festal procession and is kin to the Latin *triumphus* (our triumph), a triumphal procession of victorious Roman generals." Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:495. An example of a victor leading captives may be found in Titus' treatment of John of Gischala and Simon, Josephus, *J.W.* 7:5:7. Examples are also found in *The Acts of Paul and Peter* 33; and Taitian, *Graece* 26.

100. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 108.

1:7–11). We should be even more confident in the power of the new covenant, which has “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). Do we not see Christ walking among his churches (Rev 1:10–13)? Does he not promise he will always be with us (Mt 18:20; 28:20; Ac 18:10)? Does not Christ build his church upon rock, rather than sand (Mt 7:26–27)? Does he not promise the “gates of Hades” will *not* prevail against his church?¹⁰¹

Function Specified

Postmillennialists believe that evangelism is the absolute precondition to worldwide, culture-changing, society-stabilizing, peace-securing postmillennial success. We strongly promote the “*gospel of the kingdom*.”¹⁰² We expect the Christianization of the world *by the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ*. Evangelism has priority in Christianization.

In Matthew 28:19–20 the Great Commission requires baptism — the sacramental sign and seal of entry into the covenant. Postmillennialism strongly asserts that “apart from [Christ] you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5), but that we “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” because “God shall supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Php 4:13, 19). This leads us to “work out [our] own salvation [i.e., work it out into all of life] with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Php 2:12, 13). All of this hope has but one foundation: the gospel of the resurrected Christ (Ac 4:12; 1Co 3:11). Hence Paul’s testimony regarding his approach: “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1Co 2:2).¹⁰³

The Full-Orbed Character of Redemption

Too many Christians restrict the focus and effects of Christ’s redemption. Pessimists inform us, for instance, that “the purpose of the church

101. “The expression *Gates of Hades* is an orientalism for the court, throne, power, and dignity of the infernal kingdom. Hades is contemplated as a mighty city, with formidable, frowning portals.” Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 1:96. Satan has the power of death (Heb. 2:14).

102. Mt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mk 1:14–15.

103. By this he obviously did not mean that he only taught about the gospel details, for he taught them about church divisions (1Co 1–2), church discipline (ch. 5), marriage (ch. 7), etc., not to mention all the other things he taught to them and to others.

in this present age [is] that of a *witness*.”¹⁰⁴ The words of the Great Commission “refer exclusively to Christian evangelism and soteriological salvation,”¹⁰⁵ by which the writer means the salvation of individuals. “Nothing could be plainer in the New Testament than that in this age of grace God uses the church, members of the body of Christ, to be witnesses throughout the earth (Mt 28:18–20; Ac 1:8).”¹⁰⁶

Though I deal with the Great Commission above, I must consider some additional implications that we may draw from it. Clearly the initial focus of the Great Commission is evangelism, for the result of our going forth is the baptism of converts (Mt 28:19).¹⁰⁷ The other, supplemental commissionings of Christ recorded in Mark 16:15 and Luke 24:47–49 emphasize the salvation of men, as well. Yet this form of the Great Commission in Matthew’s Gospel speaks to the Christianization of every area of life, as men submit to the rule of Christ in salvation.

We must understand the significance of the “all” in the “all authority,” which Christ receives (Mt 28:18). The Lord uses it in the distributive¹⁰⁸ sense, speaking of *every* form of authority whether in heaven or on earth. This is the very authority of God Almighty, who is “Lord of heaven and earth” (Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21; Ac 17:24; cp. Ge 14:19, 22; 2Ki 19:15; Isa 37:16). We must not imagine that moral persuasion among individuals presses the limits of his authority. He also has authority in the ecclesiastic and familial realms, as well as the societal, political, economical, and so forth. As Revelation 1:5 says of him *in the days when John wrote*, he is “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” He *now* has a Name above *every* name for he is the “King of kings and Lord of lords.”¹⁰⁹

Following his claim to universal authority, Christ obliges his few followers to engage a plan for world conquest: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20). The command of the resurrected Christ, who possesses “all authority,” is for his followers to convert, baptize, and

104. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 165.

105. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 151.

106. Feinberg, “The Jew After the Rapture,” in *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 182.

107. Ac 2:38; 8:12, 36; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15, 33; 18:8.

108. A. B. Bruce, “Matthew,” in *EGNT*, 1:339.

109. Rev 17:14; 19:16. See: Ge 14:22; 24:3; Dt 4:39; 10:14; Jos 2:11; 2Ki 19:15; 1Ch 29:11; Mt 11:27; Lk 10:21; Ac 14:27. Christ has been given this authority: Jn 3:35; 13:3; Ro 14:11; Eph 1:20ff; Php 2:9; Col 1:18; 1Pe 3:22; Rev 17:14; 19:16.

disciple all nations. This is precisely what Old Testament prophets expect as they foresee all nations flowing to Mount Zion (e.g., Isa 2:1–4; Mic 4:1–4) and anticipate “no more shall any man teach his neighbor, ‘Know the Lord, for they shall all know the Lord’” (Jer 31:34; cf. Isa 11:9).

In addition the Commission urges our “teaching them to observe *all* things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19). He gives us instruction for all of life (cf. 2Ti 3:16–17). The call for repentance is a vital aspect of the gospel message. Should not the “repentance for forgiveness of sins” (Lk 24:47) that we preach be particular and detailed rather than general and vague? That is, should not repentance be a “change of mind”¹¹⁰ regarding the *particulars* of our conduct in *all* of life, so that we strive to live differently (i.e., Christianly)? According to Luke 3 should not we then bring forth particular fruits worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8), such as changing our external behavior by being transformed by God rather than conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1–2)? Displaying a care for the poor (Mt 25:31–46; Luke 3:11; 16:19–25; 2Co 8:13ff)? Being honest governmental officials (Lk 3:12–14)? Developing godly employer-employee relationships (Eph 6:5–9; Lk 10:17)? Promoting honest wages (1Ti 5:18; Lk 10:7)? Securing free-market bargaining (Mt 20:1–15)? Defending private property rights (Ac 5:4)? Urging godly citizenship and the proper function of the state (Ro 13:1–7; 1 Pe 2:13–17)? Encouraging the family as the primary welfare agency (1Ti 5:8)? Cultivating a proper use of finances (Mt 15:14ff)? Warning against the dangers of excessive indebtedness (Ro 13:8)? Instructing in the morality of investment (Mt 25:14–30)? Supporting leaving an inheritance to our offspring (2Co 12:14)? Demanding penal restraints upon criminals (Ro 13:4; 1Ti 1:8–10), lawsuits (1Co 6:1–8), and more?

Should not the Christian realize that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2Co 10:4–5)? If we cast down “every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” will we not be engaging in culture-transforming change? If we are going to “witness” to the people of the world how they are to behave, should we not behave ourselves according to our witness and strive to lead *them* to live accord-

110. The Greek term *metanoia* means a “change of mind.”

ing to our witness, by the grace of God? Should not we do *all* things — whether eating or drinking or whatever we do in word or deed — to the glory of God (1Co 10:31; Col 3:17)? Especially since we will give account of *every* word and deed before Christ (2Co 10:5; Mt 12:36; Ro 14:12)? In other words, should not redemption affect *all of life*? May not redemption involve the turning from sin in *all* of life, even to the point of issuing forth in a distinctive socio-political culture, since Israel's old covenant "redemption" accomplishes such?¹¹¹

The Breadth of Redemption

All of this discussion regarding the kingdom enterprise comes home to the eschatological argument when we consider the biblical expectations regarding redemption. I will be focusing on redemption's influence on the "world." So first, I must provide a study of the Greek word *kosmos* ("world").

The nominal form of the word originally meant "that which serves to beautify through decoration, *adornment, adorning*" (BAGD, 561). The verbal form (*kosmeo*) entails "to put in order so as to appear neat or well organized" (BAGD, 560). We see the verbal idea of "put in order" operating in Matthew 12:44, where the cast out demon returns to his former "house" and finds it "clean, swept, and *put in order*." The noun originally speaks of building something from individual parts to form a structured whole. It eventually applies to relations between men, as in the case of ordering soldiers in armies and governments in matters of state. Finally, *kosmos* comes to speak of the well-ordered universe, "the sum total of everything here and now, *the world, the (orderly) universe*" (BAGD 561) and, as such, is an important term in Greek philosophy. In the New Testament the word *kosmos* frequently speaks of the sum of all created being. Acts 17:24 speaks of God creating the "world and all that is in it," signifying the universe and all that it contains.

In the passages below, the word "world" refers to *the world as the orderly system of men and things*. That is, the world that God creates and loves is his creation *as he designs it to be*: a world system subject to man (Ge 1:26–28; Ps 8:6–8; 115:16), who in turn submits himself to God (Ps 2:5; 82:6; Ecc 12:13–14; Mic 6:7; 1Co 10:31; Col 3:17; 1Pe 2:17). This is why at the very beginning of human history man operates as a cultural

111. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*.

creature: Adam is to “cultivate” the world (Ge 1:26–28), beginning in Eden (Ge 2:15).

The New Testament often speaks of the redemption of the “world,” the God-created system of men and things. These passages even lead postmillennialists to surmise that because of the kingdom’s long-term expansion “the number finally lost in comparison with the whole number of the saved will be very inconsiderable.”¹¹² That the redeemed “shall embrace the immensely greater part of the human race.”¹¹³ That “ultimately the vast majority of the whole mass of humanity, including all generations, will be actually redeemed by Christ.”¹¹⁴ Several passages speak of redemption’s world-wide scope and powerfully inform our postmillennial eschatology. They clearly present Christ in his redemptive labors, assuring us of the divinely assured world-wide effect of his redemption.¹¹⁵

In 1 John 4:14 we discover the divinely covenanted goal in God’s sending his Son: he is, in fact, to be the “Savior of the *world*.” Thus, John 3:17 sets forth very explicitly that “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the *world* should be saved through Him.” John 1:29 views him as actually in process of saving the world: “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the *world*.” John expresses this even more strongly in 1 John 2:2, where he states that Jesus Christ is “the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the *whole world*.” Paul, too, applies Christ’s reconciling work to the world (Ro 11:15; 2Co 5:19).

Undeniably these verses speak of a cosmic redemption. Consider John 1:29. Here Christ is *presently in process* of “taking away” sin. “Taking away” here is the translation of a present participle based on the verb *airo*. The idea is to actually “take away, remove, lift up and carry off.” First John 3:5 states that Jesus is *manifested for the very purpose* of bearing away his people’s sins. This does not suggest a mere possibility or offer; nor does it restrict the statement’s force by using “if.” And if the Son, whom the Father sanctifies and sends into the world, is endeavoring to bear away the world’s sin, we may rest assured that he will accomplish this task.

112. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:879–80.

113. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 349.

114. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 525.

115. See Warfield, “Jesus Christ the Propitiation for the Sins of the Whole World” (1921), *Selected Shorter Writings – I*, ch. 23.

John 3:17 states the incarnational motive is that “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him.” In this verse’s syntactical construction we have *hina* followed by the aorist, subjunctive verb *sozo*. Such grammatical structure is a purpose clause. And when used of God’s actions they signify his divine intent (cf. Jn 1:7; 1Jn 5:20; Rev 20:3), a divine intent that is by the very nature of the case unthwartable (Isa 46:10; 55:11; Da 4:35). As a matter of fact, this very construction occurs in John 3:16 where we read: “He gave His only begotten Son that [*hina*] whoever believes in Him should not perish [*apoletai*, aor. subj.]” May we suggest that some who truly believe in him will perish? Syntactically then, we must expect the purpose’s certain accomplishment; historically the divine will assures it.

First John 4:14 does not use the purpose clause, but does speak of God sending Christ to be the *soter* (“savior”) of the world. He is not merely to help us toward salvation, or to offer himself as the potential or conditional Savior, *if*. . . . Conditional constructions are available to John. He could use *ean* plus the subjunctive — suggesting the idea of a “more probable future condition” and indicating that some uncertainty is implied. Or he could employ *ei* and the indicative — suggesting the idea of “simple condition” and expressing a wish. Though these are available, he does not employ them in 1 John 4:14.

In 1 John 2:2 the force of the teaching does not depend on syntactical features such as purpose clauses, but upon strong redemptive terminology: “He Himself is *the propitiation* for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” The word “propitiation” (*hilasmos*) is one of the most potent redemptive terms in Scripture.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19 Paul employs another significant redemptive term: “reconciling [*katalasson*].” Reconciliation involves the bringing back of a favorable relationship between God and man. It speaks of actual relief from sin’s consequence (vv. 19, 21). Notice the emphasis on God’s action: “All these things were from God, who reconciled us . . . namely, that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world to Himself” (vv 18–20). Later v 21 states: “He made Him that knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.”

Paul also presents the idea very clearly in Romans 11:15: “For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” The argument Paul is presenting in Romans 9–11 involves the racial Jews’ place in the plan of God in light of God’s calling of the Gentiles. At this juncture Paul points to their casting away by God’s judicial sentence. Though Paul laments this judgment at present, it is necessary in order to effect “the reconciliation of the

world.” And we must understand that “*the reconciliation of the world*, implies, of course, the conversion of multitudes of men, and the prevalence of true religion.”¹¹⁶

Thus, in each of the passages passing under our scrutiny, we see the sure provision of full and free salvation. Scripture employs several significant redemptive terms in underscoring the serious nature of salvation. Consequently, when these verses speak of God’s actions in Christ as being in process of “taking away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29), as setting forth Christ as “the Savior of the world” (1Jn 4:14), as not intended to “condemn the world” but to “save” it (Jn 3:17), as being “the propitiation for the sins of the world” (1Jn 2:2), as “reconciling the world to Himself” (2Co 5:19), the idea must be protensive. That is, *Christ’s redemptive labors will eventually effect the redemption of the created order of men and things*. And that redemptive activity extends out into the future. A day is coming when Christ’s labors will be evident in a world redeemed by gospel forces long operating.

Though these passages do not teach an “each-and-every universalism,” as in liberal thought, they do set forth the certain, divinely assured prospect of a coming day in which the world *as a system* (a *kosmos*) of men and things, and their relationships, will be redeemed. A day in which the world will operate systematically upon a Christian ethico-redemptive basis. Christ’s redemptive labors will gradually bring about the era of universal worship, peace, and prosperity, which the Old Testament prophets expect. As John puts it to the first century Christians undergoing persecution from the majority: Christ is the propitiation not for their sins only, they being few in number (a little flock, Lk 12:32; a mustard seed, Mt 13:31), but for the sins of the world as such. A day is coming, in other words, in which Christ will have sought and have found that which was lost (Lk 19:10): the world. Hence, the Great Commission commands us to baptize “all nations” (Mt 28:19).

116. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 365. Some amillennialists mistakenly complain that postmillennialism’s view of Romans 11 claims “that the Jews will be saved as *Jews*.” They feel the postmillennial view “neglect[s] the New Testament truth that Jews who are saved lose their national identity.” Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 12, 17. This is simply not true. The argument confuses the Jew as a racial entity with the Jew as religiously committed to Judaism. Racial Jews will be saved, when they forsake Judaism and become Christians. The two-covenant theory of salvation is not postmillennial.

The Drawing of All Men

Another class of passages having an identical import speaks of Christ's labors bearing fruit among "all men." Particularly relevant in this regard are John 12:32 and 1 Timothy 2:6. In John 12:32 Jesus is comforting his disciples while in the shadow of the cross: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." In 1 Timothy 2:6 Paul is encouraging Christians to effectual fervent prayer for all men (1Ti 2:1) because: Christ "gave himself a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time." We will only briefly deal with these two passages, in that the idea basically involves the same as in the previous verses containing the word "world."

In John 12:32 Christ teaches: "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." The condition in the protasis reads: "If I be lifted up from the earth." The apodosis promises the following result: "I will draw all men to Myself." The condition does not depend upon the action of the creature — a fallen creature, at that. Rather, it depends upon God's own divine plan and action.

Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:6 is no less clear. He employs strong redemptive language when he states that Christ "gave Himself a ransom for all." Christ's "ransom" (*antilutron*) is given "in behalf of" (*huper*) not a few, but "all" (*panton*). Then he reminds us that time will testify to this fact. That is, the day for its accomplishment will come. Paul, with John, looks to the eventual outcome of Christ's redemptive labor: "all" the world will one day be ransomed. After all, that is why "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Conclusion

Thus, we are to "love the Lord thy God with all [our] heart, and with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind, and with all [our] strength" (Mk 12:30). We are not to concern ourselves only with the "inner spiritual life," but with the totality of life, even engaging our strength (labor) in promoting God's will. Warfield comments:

The Scriptures teach an eschatological universalism, not an each-and-every universalism. When the Scriptures say that Christ came to save the world, that he does save the world, and that the world shall be saved by him, they do not mean that there is no human being whom he did not come to save, whom he does not save, who is not saved by him. They mean that he came to save and does save the human race; and that the human race is being led by God into a racial salvation: that in the age-long development of the race of

men, it will attain at last to a complete salvation, and our eyes will be greeted with the glorious spectacle of a saved world. Thus the human race attains the goal for which it was created, and sin does not snatch it out of God's hands: the primal purpose of God with it is fulfilled.¹¹⁷

We are not able to attain perfection — personal or cultural — in history; that will transpire only in “the new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2Pe 3:13). Even at the height of postmillennial victory sin remains in the world so that “the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth” and “we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Ro 8:22, 23). Those amillennialists and premillennialists who use such phrases as “utopian perfection” when dismissing postmillennialism’s vision of society’s future are substituting populist rhetoric for scholarly analysis. Postmillennialism does not expect heaven’s full arrival on earth before the second advent. But it does expect that God will favorably answer the Lord’s Prayer progressively as time goes on: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.” Contrary to amillennialism, we will witness this day in history; contrary to premillennialism, we may expect this prior to the bodily return of Christ.

117. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 102–103.

ESCHATOLOGY AND CONSUMMATION

But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. (1 Corinthians 15:23–24)

Postmillennialism is quite close to amillennialism in its understanding of the eschatological complex of end time events. As such, it is in harmony with the church's historic creeds, which know nothing of a millennial era in redemptive history, nor allow for more than one resurrection and judgment.¹ Consequently, regarding consummational events, postmillennialism stands in direct opposition to all forms of premillennialism, whether historic (e.g., George E. Ladd, Robert Mounce, Grant Osborne, and Craig L. Blomberg), dispensational (e.g., Charles Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Robert L. Thomas), or cultic (e.g., Seventh-day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints).

The redemptive-historical, preteristic postmillennialism² I promote in this book differs, as well, from the radical preterism of a few writers, who see the second advent (including the "rapture," destruction of Satan, the resurrection, and judgment) as occurring in AD 70.³ My preterism is fully orthodox. I will focus on four major final-eschatological issues: the Second Advent, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the eternal state. Because this work focuses primarily on the optimistic distinctives

1. See: Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols.

2. For "preterism" see ch. 7 "Hermeneutic of Scripture"; ch. 14: "Eschatological Features"; and ch. 16: "Eschatological Apocalypse." For the hyper-preterist imbalance and error see: Appendix: "The Hyper-Preterist Error."

3. See especially the masterfully written book by J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (1887; 1983). For more recent works see: Frost, *Misplaced Hope* (2002). Fenley, *The Second Coming of Jesus Christ Already Happened* (1997). Noe, *Beyond the End Times* (1999). See my Appendix: "The Hyper-preterist Error."

of postmillennial eschatology, I will only briefly survey these well-known, relatively non-controversial eschatological features.

The Second Advent

Christ is coming again — visibly, bodily, and in great glory. Unfortunately, too many expositors overlook the different ways in which Christ “comes.”⁴ Such error is especially rampant among eschatological popu-lists, particularly those of the dispensational school. Not all biblical references to his *coming* are to the second advent at the close of history. This is an important qualification that I must note before turning to the second advent itself.⁵

The Various Comings of Christ

His spiritual comings. Christ comes spiritually to each individual believer *in the Holy Spirit’s ministry*. He expressly teaches this when he says: “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. . . . I will not leave you orphans; I will *come* to you” (Jn 14:16, 18, cf. vv 23, 28). This is his coming in soteric *regeneration*. Those not saved by God’s grace are by definition “without Christ” (Eph 2:12; cp. Ro 8:9).⁶ Salvation, then, requires a “coming” of Christ into a person’s life to save them.

Christ comes spiritually to believers *in fellowship* as they worship and serve Him. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will *come* in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20). The spiritual implications of Christian fellowship, thus considered, are far deeper than any human friendship relations (cf. 1Co 12:13ff). They are even deeper than family relations (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26; Jn 19:25–27).

4. For additional help on the various ways Christ comes, see: Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming* (1882; 1990), ch. 1. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:792. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (1878), 566. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (1945), 176–180. Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (1954), ch. 8. Boettner, *The Millennium* (1957), Part III, ch. 9.

5. We should recognize that *parousia* is not a technical term for the second advent. In several passages Paul speaks of his own *parousia* or that of his fellow-laborers in the ministry: 1Co 16:7; 2Co 7:6, 7; 10:10; Php 1:26; 2:12. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 74.

6. Mk 4:11; 1Co 5:12–13; Col 4:5; 1Th 4:12; 1Ti 3:7; cf. Jn 15:1–7.

He comes among his people spiritually *as they worship together before Him*. “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). Though the word “come” does not appear in this reference, it necessarily implies his coming. For wherever two or three are *not* gathered together in his name, he is not present in this sense. Christ comes among his worshiping people in a special, holy, covenantal sense that differs from his coming in regenerative salvation and individual fellowship. When fully understood this heightens the spirituality and seriousness of worship.

He comes spiritually to *believers at death*. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will *come* again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14:3).⁷ We know that the disciples (and other believers) are with the Lord in heaven upon the moment of their deaths (Php 1:21–23; 2Co 5:6–9). Hence, this statement must mean he comes to them at their deaths. Though Stephen’s death is unique in Scripture, it may indicate something of Christ’s personal involvement in the decease of all his saints (Ac 7:59). Are we left to find our way to heaven? Or does Christ personally receive his own into the presence of the Father? After all, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6).

His exaltation coming. He comes into the presence of the Father *at his ascension*, in order to receive his kingdom. “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He *came to* the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him” (Da 7:13). He leaves the world so that he may “come” to the Father: “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I *come to* You. . . . Now I *come to* You, and these things I speak in the world” (Jn 17:11, 13a).⁸

His metaphorical coming. Beyond these spiritual comings and in addition to the bodily second advent, Scripture speaks of another sort of coming. This “coming” is a metaphor for Christ’s providential coming in *historical judgments upon men*.⁹ The Old Testament frequently employs

7. Shedd, *Dogmatic*, 2:654. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 2:356. Lightfoot, *St John’s Gospel*, 275–76. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 5:249. Even pre-millennialist Payne interprets Jn 14:3 as a reference to Christ’s coming in the believer’s death (*Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 561).

8. See: Lk 9:51; 24:51; Jn 8:14; 13:1, 3; 14:28; 16:28; Ac 1:10.

9. Riddlebarger apparently does not understand the evangelical preterist sys-

clouds as symbols of God's wrath and judgment. We often see God surrounded with foreboding clouds which express his unapproachable holiness and righteousness.¹⁰

Furthermore, Scripture poetically portrays God in certain judgment scenes as *coming in the clouds* to wreak historical vengeance upon his enemies. For example: "The burden against Egypt. Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at his presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst" (Isa 19:1).¹¹ This occurs in the Old Testament era when the Assyrian king Esarhaddon conquers Egypt in 671 B.C.¹² Obviously it does not imply a literal riding on a cloud, any more so than Psalm 68:4: "Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Extol Him who rides on the clouds, By His name YAH, And rejoice before Him."¹³

The New Testament picks up this apocalyptic judgment imagery, when it speaks of Christ's coming in judgment clouds during history. Matthew 26:64, for instance, must speak of a first century "coming to judge." Christ says that his accusers in the Sanhedrin will witness it: "Nevertheless, I say *to you*, hereafter *you* will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt 26:64).

According to Matthew 24:30 the Jews of "this generation" (Mt 23:36; 24:34) would see a sign that the Son of Man is in heaven: "Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven."¹⁴ The sign that the Son of

tem at this point. He does not realize that we believe the Bible sometimes speaks only *metaphorically* of a divine coming in AD 70. Of "partial preterists" he (wrongly) asserts: "they do believe Jesus did come back in judgment on Israel (a *parousia*)" and that they teach "that our Lord returned in judgment in A.D. 70." This, he believes, leads to our holding that "Jesus does not return once but twice." Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 239 (see also 241). I wonder how he would interpret Isa 19:1? See my explanation of the metaphorical nature of his coming in Mathison, *When Shall These Things*, 51–55.

10. Ge 15:17; Ex 13:21–22; 14:19–20; 19:9, 16–19; Dt 4:11; Job 22:14; Ps 18:8ff; 97:2; 104:3; Isa 19:1; Eze 32:7–8.

11. 2Sa 22:8, 10; Ps 18:7–15; 68:4, 33; 97:2–39; 104:3; Isa 13:9; 26:21; 30:27; Joel 2:1, 2; Mic 1:3; Nah 1:2ff; Zep 1:14–15.

12. Even dispensationalists recognize this: *BKC*, 1:1066. *PKH*, 102. *PSB* 772.

13. See even the dispensational commentary: John A. Martin, "Isaiah," *BKC*, 1:1066.

14. Marshall, *Interlinear NASB-NIV*, 79. The Greek word order is important here.

Man is in heaven is the smoking rubble of Jerusalem, which he prophesies beforehand (Mt 24:2, 15–21; cf. Ac 2:16–22, 36–40).¹⁵

Christ teaches a parable regarding God's judgment on Israel in Matthew 21:40. After presenting the parable, he asks: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard *comes*, what will he do to those vinedressers?" The interpretation is evident even to many premillennialists. Henry Alford, for instance, makes the following important observation: "We may observe that our Lord makes 'when the Lord cometh' *coincide with the destruction of Jerusalem*, which is incontestably the overthrow of the wicked husbandmen. This passage therefore forms an important key to our Lord's prophecies, and a decisive justification for those who like myself, firmly hold that *the coming of the Lord* is, in many places, to be identified, primarily, with that overthrow."¹⁶

The Second Advent

In Chapter 1 I point out that the Christian conception of history is linear. Because of this, God-governed history has a beginning and it will have a conclusion. The Scripture not only informs us of the world's beginning, but also of its end. The end comes about by the personal, sovereign intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ in great power and visible glory. The universe will not suffer a naturalistic heat death under random atomic forces, as per naturalistic scenarios. It will be a heat renovation brought about through supernatural intervention at the pre-ordained time (2Th 1:6–10; 2Pe 3:7, 10–12).

A personal, visible, glorious return of Christ is evident in Scripture.

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was

The New American Standard Bible alters that word order thus confusing the reader. This may be related to the premillennial commitment of the translators, which commitments are evident in paragraph headings also.

15. In Scripture the bellowing of smoke clouds from a scene of judgment often serve as evidence of that judgment (Ge 19:28; Jos 18:20; 20:40; Ps 37:20; Isa 14:31; 34:10; Rev 14:11; 18:9).

16. Alford, *The Greek New Testament*, 1:216 (emph. his).

taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Ac 1:9–11)

Here Luke clearly and compellingly refers to the second advent. He carefully reports that the disciples are “beholding” (*bleponton*, present participle, Ac 1:9a) him as he ascends; he is received “from the eyes of them” (*apo ton ophthalmon auton*, v 9b); they are “gazing” (*atenizontes*) as he is “going” (v 10); they are “looking” (*blepontes*, v 11); they “beheld” (*etheasasthe*). Clearly his ascension is a visible phenomenon involving his tangible resurrected body.¹⁷

The word translated “gazing” (*atenizontes*) derives from *antenizo*, from which our term “attention” arise. It means “look intently at,”¹⁸ even “stare at.”¹⁹ As Alexander expresses it: “The Greek verb strictly denotes tension or straining of the eyes.”²⁰ The word *etheasasthe* arises from *thea-omai*, from which we derive our word “theater” from *theaomi*. The verb connotes “intensive, thorough, lingering, astonished, reflective, comprehending observation.”²¹ And Luke records that an actual visible cloud appears to carry the Lord away (v 10). This cloud “is probably to be interpreted as the cloud of the Shekinah,” the same cloud witnessed at the transfiguration.²² All references to the Shekinah cloud present it as a visible phenomenon.

The angelic messengers resolutely declare that “this same Jesus” — the Jesus they knew for over three years, whom they “handled” (1Jn 1:1; Lk 24:39; Jn 20:27), who is now in a tangible resurrected body — will “so come *in like manner* as you saw Him go into heaven” (v 11). The Greek *on tropon* literally means “what manner.” The Greek phrase “never indicates mere certainty or vague resemblance; but wherever it occurs in the New Testament, denotes identity of mode or manner”²³ (e.g., Ac 7:28; 2Ti 3:8). Consequently, we have express biblical warrant to expect a visible, bodily, glorious return of Christ paralleling in kind his leaving this earth

17. For a discussion as to the nature of his resurrected body, see the next major section below: “The Resurrection,” 286ff.

18. *EDNT* 1:177.

19. *BAGD* 148.

20. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:14.

21. *EDNT* 2:136.

22. Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 41. Ramsey, “What was the Ascension?”, 43ff. See: Ex 16:10; 19:16; 24:15; 40:34–38; Mt 17:5.

23. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles*, 16.

at his ascension. This glorious event is mentioned in a number of Scripture passages.²⁴

When the Lord returns at his second advent, this will signal the end of history. Paul notes that when Christ returns, the end will come: “Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father” (1Co 15:23–24a).²⁵ This is why Scripture calls the era we have been living in since Christ’s incarnational coming “the last days” (Heb 1:1–2): no remaining days of history follow them.²⁶ The resurrection occurs on the “last day” (Jn 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24) at the “last trumpet” (1Co 15:52). Christ’s second coming does not open a whole new redemptive historical era known as the millennium. Rather, it *concludes* history.

Consequently, just as the beginning of history involves Christ (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16), so will history’s end (1Co 15:23–24). He is the “Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Rev 1:8; cf. 1:11; 21:6; 22:13). (Below I will survey a few of the major concomitant events associated with his second advent.)

A Dispensational Distortion

Scripture teaches that Christ’s eschatological return is a singular, visible, glorious event. Dispensationalism, with its systemic pandemonium, however, teaches multiple literal, bodily eschatological comings of Christ from heaven to earth. The initial one is the “rapture,” which is a secret coming. As Ryrie states: 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 “cannot refer to the Second Coming of Christ because that event was not a mystery unrevealed in the Old Testament. The reference is to something distinct, that is, the rapture of the Church before the tribulation.” First Thessalonians 4:13–18 “speaks of the same event.”²⁷ “The rapture as expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4 seems to be a private event involving the

24. For example, to list but a few: Mt 13:30, 39–43; 24:36–24:56; 1Co 11:26; 15:23–24, 51–52; Php 3:20–21; Col 3:4; 1Th 4:13–17; Tit 2:13; Rev 20:9.

25. See early discussion of this passage in the preceding chapter (pp. 255ff).

26. See the next chapter (“Eschatological Features”) for a discussion of the last days.

27. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 133. Other dispensationalists agree: PSB 1363. PEBP 309. DPT 337. Walvoord, PKH, 481. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 248–249 and *Things to*, 206–207. Thomas L. Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” BKC, 2:704. Benjamin C. Chapman, “1 Thessalonians,” *Liberty Commentary: New Testament*, 586.

church only, and unseen and unknown to the world. . . . The actual event seems to be a secret experienced only by the church.” “First He comes secretly to rapture away His bride.”²⁸ “There is no indication, however, that residents of earth will be able to see the church thus raptured.”²⁹ The rapture “will be a secret appearing, and only the believers will know about it.”³⁰

Thus the dispensational view requires at least *two* more literal eschatological comings of Christ: a *second* coming and a *third* coming. What is more, some dispensationalists teach that “the second coming of Christ involves several stages.”³¹ But this assertion is woefully mistaken, even on dispensationalism’s own system requirements. In the first place most leading dispensationalists admit to two distinct eschatological comings. Chafer dogmatically asserts of the distinction between the rapture and the second advent: “The first event is in no way whatsoever a part of the second event.”³² John Walvoord disagrees with those who make “the Rapture a phase of the second coming of Christ” or who teach “the Rapture will be a part of the Second Coming.”³³ J. Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie say that these are separate “events.”³⁴ Also, in that these two events are separated by seven years, involve different peoples (the church vs. tribulation saints), and two different purposes (removal of the church from history vs. the establishment of the new era of the millennium in history), they cannot represent a two-phased event.

The Bible, however, speaks only of a “second” eschatological coming. Hebrews 9:28 says: “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the *second* time without sin unto salvation.” In regard to his physical coming to earth, the Bible speaks of his coming *again* (Ac 1:11), not of his “comings” or his “coming again and again” or of a “third coming.”

But let us note just one of dispensationalism’s major proof-texts: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Walvoord feels that “a careful study of this passage in 1 Thessalonians will do much to set the matter in its proper biblical revelation,” demonstrating “the difference between the Rapture

28. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 303, 304.

29. Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy*, 3:83.

30. Ford, *Seven Simple Sermons*, 51.

31. See discussion in Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 478.

32. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 5:288.

33. Walvoord, *PKH*, 494.

34. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 206. Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 133.

of the church and Christ's second coming to judge and rule over the earth."³⁵ Another dispensationalist author comments that "this is undoubtedly the primary passage on the Rapture of the Church."³⁶ Benware agrees: "without a doubt this is the central passage on the rapture of the church."³⁷ As with all orthodox, evangelical, non-dispensationalists I believe that this passage refers to the visible, glorious, second advent to conclude history, not an invisible rapture removing believers in preparation for setting up another redemptive-historical era (the great tribulation followed by the millennium).

On the very surface it is remarkable that one of the noisiest verses in Scripture pictures the *secret* rapture. Paul says: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a *shout*, with the *voice of an archangel*, and with the *trumpet of God*. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1Th 4:16). By all appearance, this seems emphatically to be a very public event, even if we do not take these elements as literal trumpet blasts and loud audio vocalizations.³⁸ Besides, this event involves millions of physical resurrections and the transformation of millions of living believers, removing them from the world. This must have a public impact.

In addition, the passage teaches that "so shall we ever be with the Lord." It says nothing of Christians going with him to heaven for seven years, then returning to the earth to rule in a thousand-year millennium, then returning back to heaven. Some (not all) dispensationalists hold that: "The locale of their future is not permanent as they will be in heaven during the time preceding the Second Coming [i.e., during the seven-year great tribulation]. They will be on earth during the millennial kingdom."³⁹ If this is such a "significant" passage for the dispensational view, why are not the dispensational distinctives found here?

That it does not mention the resurrection of the wicked here does not suggest there will be two resurrections or two distinct comings of Christ. The reasons the resurrection of the wicked does not appear here

35. Walvoord, *PKH*, 481.

36. Stanton, "Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Rapture." *Biblical Perspectives* 4:4 (July/Aug. 1991): 2.

37. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 159. See also: *PEBP*, 309. *DPT* 338.

38. Remarkably, Walvoord, a dispensational literalist, even allows the possibility that the "clouds" may be figurative allusions to the great numbers of saints involved! Walvoord, *PKH*, 484.

39. Walvoord, *PKH*, 484.

are: (1) The resurrection of the righteous and the wicked operate on different principles. The righteous are in Christ; their resurrection is to glory. The unrighteous may not expect such glory at the resurrection, for theirs is “a resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:29). (2) Paul’s purpose is not to deal with all the implications of the resurrection. Rather, as Walvoord himself admits: “Though this passage is more informative concerning the nature of the Rapture, it is designed to be an encouragement to those who are living for Christ.”⁴⁰ Paul is comforting Christians regarding their deceased loved ones. If a glorious millennium lay in the future, it would seem that he should mention that here as a word of comfort. But, rather than that, Paul places all believers in the presence of the Lord forever, not for a seven year tribulation period.

Walvoord’s main argument for distinguishing this event from the second advent is: “Most significant in this passage is the fact that there are no preceding events, that is, there are no world-shaking events described as leading up to this event. As a matter of fact, the church down through the centuries could expect momentarily the Rapture of the church, which hope continues today. By contrast the second coming of Christ will be preceded by divine judgments on the world.”⁴¹

But how can this prove a distinction between the rapture and the second advent? Does not Walvoord admit a limited design for the passage: to comfort Christians concerning the resurrection of deceased loved ones? Why would Paul have to provide the whole complex of eschatological phenomena? The dispensational argument is one from silence, based on a preconceived theory. In addition, this is the very same Walvoord who teaches that the seven churches of Revelation portray long ages of church history leading up to our own time (he is not alone in this contradiction)!⁴² If these ages *have* to occur in history, how could the rapture be deemed imminent or momentary, with no intervening events expected? This leads us naturally to consider:

The Resurrection

40. Walvoord, *PKH*, 484.

41. Walvoord, *PKH*, 484.

42. Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 52. Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming*, 38ff. *SRB*, 1331–2. *NSRB*, 1353. Ryrie, *Revelation*, 21ff. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 149.

An important feature of the eschatological complex is the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust. God created angels to dwell in the spiritual realm (Ps 104:4; Heb 1:7, 13–14) and man to dwell in the material realm (Ge 2:7; Ps 115:16; Lk 24:39), hence the resurrection. God's almighty power will accomplish this through one resurrection involving all men, i.e., the "general resurrection." No millennium will follow our resurrection; it is consummational, bringing to an end the temporal order.

This doctrine is so clear in Scripture and so important to orthodoxy that it is a constant refrain in the historic creeds of the church.⁴³ We see the resurrection in such ancient creeds as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Council of Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed. It appears as well in later ecumenical creeds and church confessions, including the Tetrapolitan Confession, the First and Second Confessions of Basle, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Orthodox Confession of 1642, the Westminster Confession of Faith,⁴⁴ the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England,

43. The Bible clearly teaches a future existence beyond the grave: Ge 5:22, 24; 15:15; 25:8; 35:29; 37:35; Nu 20:24; 27:13; Mt 10:28; 20:30; 22:32; 25; Lk 16:26; Jn 5:24; 8:51; 11:25; 12:25; 2Co 5:1–10; 1Co 15; Heb 2:16; Jude 14–15. Ancient Greeks and Romans had a conception of the afterlife, but these were Platonic, denying the resurrection and calling for the immortality of the soul only (Ac 17:18, 32; 26:8). For example: Socrates' *Phaedrus* and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* 10; Pliny, *Natural History* 1:7; cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 48 and *Against Marcion* 5:9; Origen, *Against Celsus* 5:14; Julian *Against the Christians* (known only through Cyril, *Contra Julian* 1:7).

44. It is strange that a church as strongly committed to creedal theology as Presbyterianism would tolerate any form of premillennialism with its demand for two resurrections. The Westminster Standards are strongly anti-premillennial. See: Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 839. Hence, the premillennial Bible Presbyterian Church revised the Confession of Faith in 1938 to rid this doctrine from it. Their WCF 32:2–3 reads: "2. At the return of the Lord Jesus Christ such living persons as are found in him shall not die but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever. 3. The bodies of the unjust shall, after Christ has reigned on earth a thousand years, be raised by the power of God to dishonor."

and the Augsburg Confession.⁴⁵ Of course, our primary concern here is with the Scriptural evidence.

I will not here engage the age-old scientific and philosophical questions regarding the difficulty of resurrecting bodies long-destroyed.⁴⁶ My concern is with issues relevant to theological questions regarding the eschatological resurrection.

The Nature of the Resurrection

The Scripture teaches that Christ arises from the dead in the same body in which he dies, though with certain super-added spiritual powers.⁴⁷ His resurrection does not merely revivify a lifeless cadaver; but neither is it the creation of a new body. Just as he prophesies, the very body which dies also comes forth from the tomb (Jn 2:19, 22). As such, it miraculously attests the truth of his divine mission on earth (Jn 2:18–21).⁴⁸

This is why the tomb and burial clothing are empty: his physical body departs from them (Mt 28:6; Jn 20:4–11, 15). After the resurrection the Gospels show Christ in a material body that people can touch and handle (Lk 24:39), and which still has the wounds of the cross (Jn 20:27; cf. Rev 5:6). On other occasions he bids Mary Magdalene to quit clinging (*haptomai*) to him (Jn 20:17). The women who meet the Lord later “held [*krateo*] him by the feet, and worshiped” (Mt 28:9). He even eats food, while in his resurrection body (Lk 24:42–43; Jn 21:11–14). The record of his friends not recognizing him is due either to their vision being distorted by tears (Jn 20:11–16) or by supernatural intervention (Lk 24:16), not by a radical morphological change.

45. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*. See: Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 9, 14.

46. For brief and insightful discussions see: Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 834–836; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:774–780. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 3:402–03.

47. Tragically, there is a renewed debate among evangelicals as to whether “Christ arose from the dead in the same material body of flesh and bones in which He died.” Stackhouse, “Evangelical Fratricide,” 64–66. Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection* (1991). Harris, *From Grave to Glory* (1990). Pinnock, “Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions” (Sept. 1990). See also the liberal international “Jesus Seminar” conducted in the first half of the 1990s. Hutchinson, “The Jesus Seminar Unmasked,” 28ff.

48. Mt 12:39–41; 16:1–4; Lk 11:29.

Likewise is it with the final resurrection. The general resurrection raises the body (Job 19:23–27; Isa 26:19; 1Th 4:16), which is why it occurs at the place of burial (Da 12:2; Jn 5:28).⁴⁹ Scripture calls Christ “the first fruits of them that slept” (1Co 15:23) and “the firstborn of the dead” (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5; cf. Ro 8:29). Yet we know that others physically arose from the dead prior to him, some during his own ministry.⁵⁰ Thus, Christ’s resurrection is of a different order, an order making him a “first” in that respect. That difference distinguishes his resurrection as eschatological: unlike other resurrections (miraculous revivifications), his body possesses elevated powers of the Spirit that would render it incapable of dissolution (1Co 15:28, 41–42), thus suited for the eternal order (see response to hyper-preterists below for more information).⁵¹

The Dispensational Resurrections

But dispensationalism multiplies resurrections — as they do many other things, such as comings of Christ, peoples of God, dispensations, and so forth. Adams has called this phenomenon “premillennial diplopia.”⁵² The dispensational system gets so bound up in its conflicting programs and divergent peoples of God that it necessarily multiplies resurrections. Most prominently dispensationalism, with its mother premillennialism, emphasizes two resurrections: one of the just and a separate one for the unjust. These resurrections are separated by at least 1000 years, on the sole basis of the highly wrought symbolism found in Revelation 20:1–6. What is worse, dispensationalism’s system requirements result in *several* resurrections.

Dispensationalists teach: “The Bible knows nothing of one future general resurrection.”⁵³ “All bodily resurrections fall into two categories”

49. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 831–837, 845–846. Yet, although Da 12:2 seems to be presenting a metaphor regarding Israel’s resurrection, it bases it on the concept of a physical resurrection. See my discussion on this text in the Appendix: “The Hyper-preterist Error” (pp. 538ff).

50. 1Ki 17:17–23; 2Ki 4:24–37; Mt 27:52; Heb 11:35. See Christ’s miracles in Mt 9:18–26; 10:8; Mk 5:22–23, 35–42; Lk 7:12–15; Jn 11:14–44.

51. For some of the unusual functions of his resurrected body, see: Lk 24:31ff; Jn 20:13ff; 21:7; Ac 1:9–11. For discussions of this concept see: Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption*, *passim*. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, ch. 8. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 478–85.

52. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, ch. 3.

53. Boyer, *For a World Like Ours*, 141.

and the first “resurrection will include several groups: the dead saints of this Church Age (1Thess. 4:16), the dead saints of Old Testament times (Dan. 12:2), and martyrs of the tribulation period (Rev. 20:4). These resurrections of the saints of all ages constitute the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6).”⁵⁴ The first “resurrection is made up of a number of component parts” and “includes within it all who, at any time, are raised to eternal life.”⁵⁵ “The important thing to discover is whether or not the first resurrection must be a simultaneous resurrection of all the just at one definite moment, or whether the first resurrection may be understood to mean the resurrection of all the just, to be sure, but in a series of two or more ascensions.”⁵⁶

But the Bible allows for only *one* eschatological resurrection at the end of history, a resurrection of both the saved and the lost.⁵⁷ Note the following:

First, the resurrection will occur on *the last day*. “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:39–40). He does not say, “I will raise him up 1,007 years before the last day,” allowing for a millennium, tribulation, and resurrection of the unjust to follow (as per dispensational doctrine⁵⁸). Christ says the resurrection will be simultaneous for “all who are in the graves” (Jn 5:28). John’s gospel record is quite clear on this matter (Jn 6:44, 54; 11:24). The resurrection occurs in conjunction with “the end” and at the “last trump” (1Co 15:23–24, 52).

The premillennial system absolutely depends on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1–6 in order to assert two resurrections. It is enlightening to note: (1) This fundamental passage is in the most highly figurative book in the Bible. Revelation is widely regarded as the

54. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 518.

55. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 397.

56. English, *Re-thinking the Rapture*, 32.

57. “It must be admitted that [the resurrection of the wicked] does not stand out prominently in Scripture. The soteriological aspect of the resurrection is clearly in the foreground, and this pertains to the righteous only. They, in distinction from the wicked, are the ones that profit by the resurrection.” Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 723.

58. NSRB, 1131, note 1; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 400. Walvoord, *PKH*, 408.

most difficult book of Scripture by eminently qualified biblical scholars.⁵⁹

(2) The premillennial approach to Revelation causes other difficulties, for if the rapture and resurrection of the saints occur before the Great Tribulation and if the second resurrection at the end is for unbelievers, where are great tribulation saints resurrected? Where is the resurrection for believers who die in the millennium? And for that matter, what about the Old Testament saints: they are involved in a different “program,” and should not be included in the rapture, which is for the church.

(3) The material appears in a scene that is manifestly figurative. It involves, for instance, a key to the abyss (where is that key stored? what sort of lock holds the abyss shut?) and a great chain for binding a spiritual being (Satan) (Rev 20:1–2). (4) This passage is written by the very John who speaks of the resurrection only on the *last* day, and involving both the just and the unjust simultaneously (Jn 5:28–29, see further discussion below). (5) Revelation 20:11–15 appears just after the verses in question, yet “if ever language expressed the doctrine of a *simultaneous and universal resurrection*, surely we have it here.”⁶⁰ John is speaking of *all* men, as is evident in his language, not just of unbelievers: (a) He says the dead “small and great” will be judged. This terminology applies at times to believers in Revelation (Rev 11:18; 19:5). (b) The righteous are judged on the basis of their works, as those here are (Ro 2:5–6; 14:11–12; 2Co 5:10). (c) He mentions the “book of life” here (Rev 20:12, 15), which involves the righteous.⁶¹

Second, the Lord’s teaching in the Kingdom Parables demands a general resurrection: “But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn”’” (Mt 13:29–30; see also vv 49–50). If anything, this parable teaches that the resurrection of the wicked *precedes* that of the righteous.

59. Warfield, “The Book of Revelation,” 2:80. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 466. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, xii. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 5. Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 10. Reuss, *History of the Sacred Scriptures*, 155. Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 1.

60. Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, 195.

61. Rev 3:5, 8; 17:8; 21:27; 22:19; cf. Php 4:3.

Third, Scripture knows of only one resurrection, no resurrection centuries from the end will occur. “There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Ac 24:15). “*The hour* is coming in which *all* who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5:28–29).

Premillennialists attempt to maneuver around the rocky shoals of John 5:28–29 by arguing that the *hour* “allows for its extension over a long period.”⁶² This permits the reference to cover the 1,007 years necessary for their position. Certainly, “hour” can encompass a long period of time. But to argue such here involves the dispensationalist in manifest absurdity: It allows that the “resurrection to life” occurs over the *entirety* of the 1,007 years involved. It suggests that the “shout/trump” of Christ in John 5:28–29, 1 Corinthians 15:51, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 continues throughout the period, for this shout/trump is that which causes the resurrection. It also involves the system in internal contradiction: it permits the resurrection of the damned to occur over that same period, despite the assertion that it occurs at the end (and only in one phase).

Actually “it is not the *length of time* which this word ‘hour’ is designed to mark . . . but it is the unity of *period and action* which alone is intended.”⁶³ That is, it speaks of a general resurrection, which will involve both the just and unjust.

Fourth, the resurrection signals death’s destruction: “But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1Co 15:23–26). Clearly this “last enemy” is destroyed at “the end,” and both occur in conjunction with the resurrection.

The Hyper-preterist Resurrection

Unfortunately, a new gnosticism is infecting the church: hyper-preterism. One major feature of hyper-preterism is its denying the believer’s future physical resurrection at the end of history. The hyper-

62. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 400.

63. Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, 191.

preterist points out that Paul speaks of a “spiritual body” (1Co 15:44) and argues that “you do not sow the body which is to be” (1Co 15:37). I deal with this matter in my Appendix: “The Hyper-preterist Error” (531ff).

But just briefly I would note that the “spiritual body” is not a body made out of spirit, over against a physical body. Rather it is a body more in tune with the *Holy Spirit* (Paul’s normal use of “spiritual”) and his leading. It is the body raised into its eternal, incorruptible, perfected estate, no longer beset by indwelling sin and fallen animal appetites.

The Final Judgment

Our covenantal God deals with men legally, reckoning to them their just desserts on the basis of their infractions of his law, which is a divine transcript of his holy character (Ro 7:12). Man desperately needs salvation because he is a covenant-breaker (Isa 24:5; Hos 6:2). He must answer for transgressing God’s law (Gal 3:10; Jms 2:10), which calls forth God’s “righteous judgment” (Ro 1:32; 2:5; 2Th 1:5). Scripture characteristically describes God’s judgment with forensic terminology, such as *krinein* (“to judge”), *krisis* (“judgment”), and *dikaiois* (“justification”).

God’s law is the legal standard of judgment. Speaking of judgment day (Ro 2:5), Paul writes: “when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them, in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Ro 2:14–16; cf. Mt 7:23; 13:41; Jms. 2:10–12).

Sin must receive an *eternal* resolution in that man has broken God’s eternal law (Ps 119:142, 144) — despite the hyper-preterist notion that the earth continues on forever, which allows sin to exist forever.⁶⁴ This resolution is necessary also, since man continues to exist forever after God creates him (Ecc 3:11; Lk 16:23).⁶⁵ He will either exist always as one

64. See: Noe, *Beyond the End* (1999). Noe argues, for example: “the Bible never speaks of an end of time” (91) and “It won’t ever end” (265). And just to be sure, he writes: “The world is never, repeat never-ever going to end. We live in a never-ending world” (45). See my Appendix for a brief comment on their eternal earth doctrine.

65. For a brief but insightful study of the question of the immortality of the soul, see Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, ch. 8. “If we wish to use the word *immortality* with reference to man, let us say that man, rather than his soul, is

made righteous at the resurrection or as one cast into hell as judgment for his sin. Furthermore, God will make this eternal resolution public in front of all rational creatures and will involve man in his total being, body and soul (made possible by the resurrection, see Mt 10:28). The Scriptural view of man differs radically from the Platonic, which denigrates the material aspect of man and elevates the spiritual.⁶⁶

History's consummation, which Christ accomplishes at his second advent, involves both a general resurrection (as we have seen) and a *general judgment*. God commits this judgment to the God-man, Jesus Christ: "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (Jn 5:22; cf. Mt 11:27; Jn 3:35). The reason for Christ's leading role in the judgment is due to his incarnational relation to the human race: "He has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (Jn 5:27). It also serves as the necessary outcome of his incarnation: "It was right that when the Lord of all condescended, in His unspeakable mercy, to assume the form of a servant, and endure the extremist indignities of His enemies, He should enjoy this highest triumph over them, in the very form and nature of His humiliation"⁶⁷ (cf. Php 2:9–11). Christ's prominence in the final judgment is a frequent theme in the New Testament.⁶⁸

We may discern the doctrine of the *general* judgment (i.e., of all men in one scene) from various angles. First, the coming judgment "day." "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (Ac 17:31a). This singular judgment day appears in a number of Scriptures.⁶⁹ As with the day of resurrection, this day of judgment cannot be stretched out over a 1,007-year period, as per dispensationalism (see previous discussion).

Second, the parties judged. At the resurrection both the just and the unjust will enter into their judgment, one to life, the other to condem-

immortal" (91).

66. The Christian faith concerns itself with the material aspect of man's being, as well as the spiritual. (1) God creates the earth and man's body as material entities, and all "very good" (Ge 1:31; 2:7). (2) Christ comes in the flesh to redeem man (Ro 1:3; 9:5; 1Jn 4:1–3). And, of course, (3) the resurrection. A denial of a material resurrection would capitulate to Platonic gnosticism.

67. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 846.

68. Mt 25:31–32; Jn 5:22, 27; Ac 10:42; 17:31; Ro 2:16; 14:9–10; 2 Co 5:10; Php 2:9–11; 2Ti 4:1, 8.

69. Da 7:10; Mt 7:22; 11:22; 12:36; Ro 2:5; 2Ti 1:10–12; 4:8; 2 Pe 3:7; 1Jn 4:17.

nation: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn 5:28–29).

Romans 2:5–8 clearly speaks of a day of judgment encompassing both classes of men: "In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath."

The simultaneous judgment is inescapable in Matthew 25:31–46, where we read (in part): "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Mt 25:31–32). The judgment occurs when Christ returns, not hundreds of years later. This general judgment is found elsewhere in Scripture.⁷⁰

Although the judgment is one event encompassing both the just and the unjust, it follows a particular order. It seems that God will judge the wicked immediately prior to the righteous, according to the order of events in Matthew 13:30, 41, 43 and Matthew 25:46. It is "as if, in some literal sense, 'with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked' (Psalm 91:8)."⁷¹

Of course, the righteous are not condemned, rather they are rewarded.⁷² And we should understand that "the relation between our works and our future reward ought, however, to be understood not in a mechanical but rather in an organic way. When one has studied music and has attained some proficiency in playing a musical instrument, his capacity for enjoying music has been greatly increased. In a similar way, our devotion to Christ and to service in his kingdom increases our capac-

70. Ecc 12:13–14; Mt 12:36; 13:41; Mt 25:14–30; Ac 10:42; Ro 3:6; 2Co 5:9–11; 2Th 1:6–10; 2Ti 4:1; Heb 10:27–31; Jude 14–15; Rev 20:11–15.

71. David Brown, "The Gospel According to S. Matthew," in *JFB*, 2:44.

72. Ro 2:5–10; 1Co 1:4–8; 3:8; 15:32, 58; 2Co 4:16; 5:10; 9:6–8; Gal 6:5–10; Php 1:10, 26; 2:16; Col 1:5; 3:24; 1Th 3:13; 5:23; 2Th 1:7; 1Ti 2:18; 4:8; 5:25; 6:18–19; 2Ti 2:11; 4:4–16.

ity for enjoying the blessings of that kingdom, both now and in the life to come.”⁷³

Dispensational Distortion

As with other features of eschatology (peoples, programs, returns of Christ, resurrections), dispensationalists multiply judgments. For instance, one source states that “the idea of a single general judgment at the end of time is inconsistent with biblical revelation.”⁷⁴ They attempt to justify this (at least partially) by assembling together temporal and spiritual judgments in lists with the eschatological judgment. The *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* complains that “although one general judgment, (into which we several other judgments are merged), is often assumed by Christian theologians . . . a thoughtful, inductive study of Scripture reveals a minimum of at least seven major divine judgments and as many as twelve well-defined judgments, depending on where one begins.” Then it lists the “judgment of the Rapture,” “the judgment of Israel,” “the judgment of Old Testament and Tribulation saints,” “the judgment of Satan,” “the judgment of fallen angels,” “the judgment of the unsaved dead,” and the judgment of the present heavens and earth.”⁷⁵

This is a patently erroneous conception, however. We are discussing God’s eschatological judgment of man. As in the case with the resurrection, the Scripture presents a singular (Ac 17:31), unified (Ro 2:16) eschatological judgment. That event will occur at the last day: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn 12:48). In fact, the resurrection introduces men to the judgment. “Resurrection and Judgment are the two correlated acts of the final consummation of things.”⁷⁶ And since there is a general resurrection, there will be a general judgment.

The Eternal State

73. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 264. See: Morris, *Biblical Doctrine of Judgment*, 73ff.

74. *PEBP*, 182.

75. *DPT*, 226--27.

76. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 261.

Temporal history comes to an end with the final judgment, but life goes on in the eternal state. Herman Bavinck perceptively notes that “just as it is appointed for humans to die once, so also there must come an end to the history of the world.”⁷⁷ The Bible does not tell us as much about that estate, particularly our glorious heavenly abode, as we might like to know. G. C. Berkouwer refers to its revelation in this area as a mere “whisper,” according to Anthony Hoekema, who agrees.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, man will experience an everlasting existence beyond the judgment.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we learn that eventually, after Christ subdues his enemies in history and disposes of them at the end of history, then God the Son will turn his kingdom rule over to the Father. “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1Co 15:28). This passage speaks of Christ turning over the kingdom to the Trinity, not God the Father. The work of redemption is no longer being prosecuted by the Mediator in eternity.⁷⁹

Heaven

The righteous will experience their final state in God’s glorious presence.⁸⁰ This existence will involve holy perfection⁸¹ and absolute impeccability (1Th 4:17; Heb 4:9; 12:23). Heaven is not a state, but a place, for there reside Enoch (Ge 5:22–24; Heb 11:5), Elijah (2Ki 2:1, 11), and Christ (Ac 1:9–10) in their bodies. Not surprisingly more people believe in heaven than in hell. According to a May 2007 Gallup poll, 81% of Americans believe in heaven, while only 69% believe in hell.

Because evangelicals largely agree on heaven, I will not elaborate on this doctrine. Rather, I will focus a little more attention on the much disputed doctrine of hell. For a helpful discussion of heaven, see: Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pages 1233–42.

Hell

77. Bavinck, *The Last Things*, 79.

78. See: Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 94n. He disputes the English translation of Berkouwer’s *The Return of Christ*, 63.

79. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:690ff.

80. Jn 14:1–3; cf. Job 19:27; Psalms 17:15; Jn 17:24.

81. Eph 5:27; Ro 8:21; Heb 12:23; 1 Jn 3:2.

The doctrine of eternal punishment in hell has long been vigorously debated, occasionally even among evangelicals.⁸² Consequently, it appears prominently in Christian theodicies due to its terrifying nature. Of course, absurdities arising from its popular treatment do not help promote a good understanding of this dreadful biblical doctrine, either. One website operated by Dial-the-Truth Ministries argues for a widely-held populist view that hell is in earth's core and that volcanic eruptions issue from it.⁸³

Orthodox Christians from ancient times have accepted this doctrine. Though recognizing the clear dominance of the orthodox view, Henry overstates the case, however: "Except for Origen, whose views on the subject were condemned, the entire Christian movement had remained unchallenged for more than sixteen centuries . . . in teaching eternal punishment of the impenitent wicked."⁸⁴ In fact, a number of Church Fathers deny eternal hell, including Gregory of Nyssa (d. AD 395), Didorus of Tarsus (d. AD 396), Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. AD 429), and others. Augustine states that in his day there were "multitudes who did not believe in eternal punishment."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, many Fathers hold the doctrine, including: Barnabas (ca. AD 120), Ignatius (d. AD 117), Justin Martyr (AD 110–165), Irenaeus (AD 130–202), Tertullian (AD 160–220).⁸⁶ The Council of Constantinople (AD 543) condemns the denial of hell.

Basically biblical scholars promote three false views of the afterlife of the wicked: *Universalism* teaches that the wicked will all be saved in the afterlife. Advocacy of universalism range from Origen, "the first Christian Universalist,"⁸⁷ to modern writers such as Nels Ferré, D. Walker, William

82. Crockett and Gundry, *Four Views on Hell* (1996). The May, 1989, meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals refused to affirm the doctrine of hell. *World* (June 3, 1989) 9. Travis denies eternal hell in his book, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (1982). See: Packer, "Is Hell Out of Vogue in this Modern Era?," 10–11. Erickson, "Is Universalistic Thinking Now Appearing Among Evangelicals?," 4–6.

83. Terry Watkins, "The Proof of Hell." This may be found at the following web location: http://www.av1611.org/hell_proof.html. See also: Parrott, "Hell Found Under Siberia," 6.

84. Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays*, 278.

85. Cited in Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:612.

86. Martyr, *Apology* 1:8, 21; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:28:7; 3:4:1; Barnabus, *Epistle* 20. For a list of early fathers holding to the doctrine, see: Buis, "Hell," 116.

87. Schaff, *History*, 2:611. Though many think Origen teaches the final resto-

Barclay, Thomas B. Talbot, and John Hick.⁸⁸ F. D. E. Schleiermacher was the most influential popularizer of universalism in the nineteenth century, laying the ground work for its appearance among twentieth-century Christians, where it is experiencing “a significant resurgence in recent years.”⁸⁹ *Restorationists* argue that God will punish the wicked for a time and then allow them into the body of the redeemed.⁹⁰ This is a rare view. *Annihilationists* hold that God will punish the unrepentant to elimination. Arnobius (ca. AD 327) is an example of an ancient annihilationist.⁹¹ Modern evangelical annihilationists include Philip E. Hughes, John R. W. Stott, and Clark H. Pinnock.⁹² Annihilationists generally argue that only believers receive immortality, as a consequence of their union with Christ.⁹³

Hell is the judicial outcome of God’s covenantal curse upon rebellious man, whom God creates as an ever-living soul. Hell represents the final legal sanction upon all those who rebel against God’s eternal law, both humans and demons. As such, hell is a place of conscious torment, as the

ration of Satan, this does not appear to be true. See: *Epistle to the Romans* 1:8:9 (*Opera* 4:634) and *Ad quosdam amicos Alexandria* (*Opera* 1:5), as cited in Schaff, 2:611, n 3. For a brief history of universalism, see: Bauckham, “Universalism: A Historical Survey,” 22–35.

88. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (1964). Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God*, 228ff. Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography*, 60ff. Talbot, “The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment,” 19–42. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (1966). In addition see Robinson, *In the End God*, chs 10–11. Paul Knitter holds there are more true religions than Christianity. Knitter, *No Other Name* (1985).

89. Erickson, “Is Universalistic Thinking Now Appearing Among Evangelicals?,” 4–6.

90. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*. Hick was once an evangelical theologian.

91. Arnobius, *Against the Nations* 2:14.

92. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials* (1988). “John R. W. Stott on Hell: Taking a Closer Look at Eternal Torture,” *World Christian* 8 (May 1989) 31–37. Hughes, *The True Image* (1989). Philip Edgcumbe Hughes was relieved of his duties at Westminster Theological Seminary in the late 1980s due to his denial of hell. Pinnock has recently adopted a view he calls “postmortem evangelism,” which allows for a second chance salvation: Pinnock, “Fire, Then Nothing,” 40. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (1992). For more regarding Pinnock, see Gerstner, *Repent or Perish* (1990). Erickson, “Is Universalistic Thinking Now Appearing Among Evangelicals?” 6. Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 8–11. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (1994).

93. Dean, *Resurrection* (1977), 110ff. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (1982).

Scripture demonstrates (Lk 16:23; Rev 14:11). This torment is endless,⁹⁴ though the degree of this torment differs according to the extent of one's rebellion.⁹⁵ Its horrible nature is directly due to the withdrawal of the presence of God (Mt 25:41, contra v 34).

Interestingly, despite the revulsion by some to the doctrine, "the strongest support of the doctrine of Endless Punishment is the teaching of Christ, the Redeemer of man."⁹⁶ Due to the same language of eternal duration applying both to hell and to heaven (e.g., Mt 25:46), "we must either admit the endless misery of Hell, or give up the endless happiness of Heaven."⁹⁷ The classic study on hell is W. G. T. Shedd's, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1886). An excellent recent defense of hell is Robert A. Peterson's *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Hell* (1995).⁹⁸ A shorter but valuable presentation is Robert L. Reymond's in his *A New Systematic Theology*.⁹⁹

New Earth

Though not all postmillennialists agree, biblical evidence suggests a refashioning of the earth as the saints' eternal abode. Evangelicals often distort Scripture, when they overlook the "already/not yet" understanding of the kingdom. Just as the "already" aspect of the Messianic Kingdom (Mt 12:28) exists, while a "not yet" aspect (Mt 6:10) remains, an "already" aspect of the new creation (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15) currently exists, even while awaiting its "not yet" future (2Pe 3:13). Because I am dealing with consummational features of eschatology in this chapter, I will focus on

94. Mt 10:28; 13:41–42, 49–50; 18:8; 25:41, 46; Mk 9:43–48; Lk 3:17; 16:22–23; Jude 7; Heb 6:2; Rev 14:10–11; 20:10). See also: Jn 5:29; Jude 13. Although many orthodox scholars, while holding to the grievous, conscious misery involved, doubt whether literal flames of fire are used in the torment of the wicked. See: Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 580. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 853–854.

95. Mt 10:15; Lk 12:48. This is also implied in there being books of judgment, Rev 20:11–13.

96. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:675. See: Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1944). Cf. Buis, "Hell," *ZPEB*, 3:114.

97. Stuart, *Several Words Relating to Eternal Punishment*, 89.

98. See also: Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (1984), which is a helpful refutation of Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*. Nicole, "The Punishment of the Wicked" (1958). Packer, "The Problem of Eternal Punishment," 18–25.

99. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 1068–85.

the new creation's "not yet" aspect. For a discussion of the "already" *spiritual* new creation, which precedes and prepares us for the material new creation, see ch. 14 "Eschatological Features."

Regarding a consummational new earth, Scripture suggests that we may expect a renovated material new earth for a variety of reasons. Consider the following lines of thought.

First, the biblical analogy. We may expect a renewed earth on the analogy of the individual's transformation. Just as we receive a new body at the resurrection (Eph 1:14), so we will inherit a renewed earth on which to dwell with that body.

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption [resurrection] of our body. (Ro 8:19–23)

The comprehensive nature of sin and redemption (involving both soul and body), demands a comprehensive new earth (involving spiritual and material aspects). Why else would we return to our bodies by means of resurrection, if we are to remain solely and forever in the spiritual, heavenly realm?¹⁰⁰ Beale argues for a physical new earth in eternity, noting that

among the "hints" [Paul] mentions are Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 15, and parts of Revelation. . . . Several Old Testament texts, and many New Testament passages, speak explicitly of the future physical resurrection of the saints, which is certainly a partial reference to a future, consummated new creation, since physically resurrected bodies are new created bodies, and the way saints will inhabit a broader new creation is through resurrection. I believe this is more than a "hint" of a consummated physical, new creation.¹⁰¹

Second, the biblical calling. Scripture seems to present our temporal labor in the physical earth as a training ground for eternity. The biblical

100. See: Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 1:350.

101. Beale in Brower and Elliott, *Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, 28 n 40.

concept of rewards points in this direction: “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things [in earth history], I will make you ruler over many things [in the new earth?]. Enter into the joy of your lord’” (Mt 25:21). As we strive to subdue the earth in a holy and spiritual fashion we are living up to God’s design for us (Ge 1:26–28; Ps 8:5–8). In addition, our present cultural labors are clothed with eternal significance in that Scripture commands us in light of Christ’s bodily resurrection to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58).

Amillennialist Hoekema goes too far in assigning obviously spiritual references (e.g., Isa 65:17–20) and many kingdom victory passages (Ps 72) to the consummate new heavens and new earth.¹⁰² Nevertheless, he well shows our cultural labor’s significance in the light of eternity: “We may firmly believe that products of science and culture produced by unbelievers may yet be found on the new earth. . . . Our mission work, our attempt to further a distinctively Christian culture, will have value not only for this world but even the world to come.”¹⁰³ This comports well with the postmillennial drive to cultural and spiritual activity by the redeemed, who are images of God renewed by grace.

Third, the biblical assertion. The key passage presenting the consummate new heavens and new earth is found in 2 Peter 3. Unfortunately, this passage creates much confusion among interpreters. Some dispensationalists hold that it refers to the earthly millennium, while others argue that it speaks of the consummate new creation.¹⁰⁴ Some postmillennialists teach that it refers to the present era introduced by Jerusalem’s destruction,¹⁰⁵ while others apply it to the consummate new heavens and new earth.¹⁰⁶ Many amillennialists refer all new creation references in Scripture solely to the final consummate order, allowing

102. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 177–178, 201–203.

103. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 39–40.

104. See the brief discussion in Walvoord, *PKH*, 510–513, 633.

105. Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, ch. 13. See also the amillennialist and preterist Vanderwaal, *Search the Scriptures*, 52–53.

106. See: John Calvin, *Hebrews and I and II Peter (CNTC)*, 363–366. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 850–852. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:665.

this passage to control all others.¹⁰⁷ Some hyper-preterists see the spiritual new creation occurring after a literal first century rapture at AD 70.¹⁰⁸

A part of the problem with 2 Peter 3 lies in the fact that the passage employs terminology that *sometimes* designates the *spiritual* new creation and at other times the destruction of *physical* Jerusalem in AD 70. But similarity does not entail identity. This passage does not speak of either the present spiritual new creation (cf. Isa 65:17) or the future Jerusalem conflagration (as does Heb 12:25–29). It points instead to the consummate order which follows the resurrection and the final judgment. Note the following arguments.

(1) Peter's whole thrust in his second epistle promotes a spiritual *perseverance* for the historical long run. That is, he writes about a long period in history that finally ends up in the eternal new creation. He is not writing about the spiritual new order arriving shortly after he dies, the new covenant era of the post-AD 70 world.

Peter urges his readers to *persevere* (2Pe 1:6) and warns against *short-sightedness* (1:9). He states that Christians may have access to the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ only through long-term perseverance (1:10–11, 19). He does this by presenting Noah and Lot as examples of saints who persevere through evil times (like the evil times his faithful readers are facing). By persevering against their ungodly cultures, Noah and Lot come out on the other end of God's judgment *still upon the earth* (2Pe 2:5, 7, 9). So Peter's readers should expect to come out on the other end of the chaos surrounding them (2:9a) — still on the earth because of God's power to deliver. God delivers Noah and Lot so that his name will continue on earth through their witness (2:6b; cp. 1:8) and offspring (2:5b) to live into the distant future. Thus, those first century Christians should expect their offspring to continue into the distant future (cp. 1:15). They must persevere even against false teachers who will arise among them (2:1). He is urging the Christians toward a long term commitment, not a short-term expectation.

107. See for example: Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, ch. 20. Adams, *Time Is at Hand*, 13ff. Hughes, *Interpreting Prophecy*, 131–135. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, ch. 7. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 274.

108. Hyper-preterists even teach a first century rapture at AD 70, since their system pushes them in that direction. See: Russell, *Parousia*, Preface, and 126, 137, 165, 168, 199, 445, 525. Stevens, "Expectations Demand A First Century Rapture" (2003).

As a part of his argument in this context, Peter teaches that ever since those judgments in the Old Testament long ago God has kept unrighteous angels in “pits of darkness, *reserved for judgment*” (2Pe 2:4) and “the unrighteous [tormentors of Noah and Lot] under punishment *for the day of judgment*” (2:9). That is, though these evil ones suffered *temporal* judgment *long ago*, they *are still to this day* awaiting a final, eternal judgment *in the future*. Similarly, Peter will be showing his faithful readers that they too have something reserved for them in the future. After they endure temporal judgments in their own time, they can expect something glorious: “we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (3:13). Thus, he parallels God’s reserving *future judgment* for those evil characters with his reserving *future blessing* for his faithful Christians — blessings not just a few years away (AD 70), but at a great distance. Indeed, “the present heavens and earth,” he notes, “are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men” (3:7).

So then, while contemplating God’s judgment cleansing of the earth in Noah’s day (2Pe 3:6), Peter urges Christians to many “holy livings” and “pieties” (*en hagiais anastrophais kai eusebeiais*, 2Pe 3:11). These Greek plurals occur only here in Scripture. This suggests many acts of righteousness over the historical long term. Consequently, the epistle also ends with a call to perseverance (3:15, 17), just as it opens with such (1:6, 9). He calls on them to glorify Christ now and until “the day of eternity” (*eis hemeran aionos*) begins, whenever that may be (3:18).

(2) Peter’s audience (including us!) should expect mockers who scoff at Christ’s promised second advent due to the long wait associated with it (2Pe 3:3–4, 9). This waiting continues to our very day, and thus is truly long. Despite the trials coming soon (2:9), Peter warns that it may be thousands of years before Christ’s return: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (3:8). This fits well with Christ’s “already/not yet” teaching elsewhere — as when he contrasts the short time until the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt 23:36; 24:34) with the long time until the second advent and the end of history (Mt 25:5, 14).¹⁰⁹

(3) The Lord’s longsuffering is due to a process that will take a long time. Nevertheless, they must understand that despite the long delay: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count *slackness*

109. See Chapter 14 (“Eschatological Features”) below.

[*braduteta*], but is *longsuffering* [*makrothumei*] toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2Pe 3:9 NKJV). They must “account that the *longsuffering* [*makrathumian*] of our Lord is salvation” (3:15a). This process of calling “all” to “repentance” spans the entire inter-advental era and is still continuing to our very day. This “slowness” (*bradutes*, v 9) of Christ’s second advent is so that the postmillennial kingdom victory might continue to grow unto full fruition.¹¹⁰ This comports well with the slow growth of the kingdom like a mustard seed (Mt 13:31–32) and with the necessity of “all the days [*pasas tas emeras*]” for accomplishing the Great Commission (Mt 28:20).

(4) The destruction of the heavens and the earth that he envisions involves the current material creation. Hence, it refers to the distant consummation and not the approaching AD 70 conflagration, despite certain similarities between the two events (since one is the type of the other). Peter expressly refers to the material creation order: “from the beginning of creation” (2Pe 3:4; cf. Ge 1:1¹¹¹); “by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water” (3:5; cf. Ge 1:2, 9¹¹²); “the heavens and the earth which now exist” (3:7). Thus, he defines the “heavens and earth” to which he refers and which God will replace with a “new heaven and a new earth” (3:10, 13). He is not contemplating the destruction of the old Jewish order in AD 70, but the material heavens and the earth at the second advent.

The language describing earth’s destruction seems to go beyond apocalyptic imagery and prophetic hyperbole. The detailed language refers to the actual end-time consummation: “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2Pe 3:10). “The heavens will be dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat” (3:12). In the apocalyptic-symbolic passages thought to parallel 2 Peter 3 we find time frame factors¹¹³ and cultural limitations.¹¹⁴

110. For a discussion on the gradualistic principle of the kingdom, see ch. 11 (“Eschatology and Expansion”) above.

111. The Petrine phraseology (*apo arches ktiseos*) reflects that of the Lord’s when he spoke of the creation of the material universe. See: Mk 10:6 and 13:9.

112. The phraseology is reminiscent of Ps 33:6–7 [Ps 32:6–7 in Hebrew], which speaks of the creative act of God in making the world.

113. For example, see: Mt 24:29 (cf. v 34) and Rev 6:13–14 (cf. Rev 1:1, 3; 6:10).

114. For example, see: Isa 13:10 (cf. vv 1, 14–21).

Furthermore, this destruction terminology does not appear in Isaiah 65:17ff, from where the phrase “new heavens and new earth” derives.

In conjunction with “the promise” of Christ’s coming (2Pe 3:4, 9), we will enter the ultimate “new heavens and new earth” (3:13). Here Peter is obviously borrowing terminology from Isaiah 65:17 (which speaks of a spiritual reality, see ch. 14). Yet as an inspired apostle he expands on that truth, looking to the ultimate outcome of the *spiritual* new heavens and earth in an *eternal* new heavens and earth. We see this re-interpretive application at various places in the New Testament. For instance, the New Testament writers apply Zechariah 12:10 both to the crucifixion (Jn 19:37) and to AD 70 (Rev 1:7). In Revelation John freely employs Ezekiel’s imagery, while adapting it to his own needs. For instance, he totally transforms Ezekiel’s temple vision (Eze 40–45) into a city vision (Rev 21–22), where a temple is wholly lacking (Rev 21:22).

Second Peter’s new creation, then, is the renovated material world that will succeed the present temporal order. God will purify and refashion it by fire. On this new earth the resurrected saints will dwell forever.

Conclusion

As I indicate in chapter 1 Christianity provides a distinctive philosophy of history. History is linear in its movement, having a starting point (creation) and a concluding point (consummation). Both the creation and the consummation result from direct supernatural activity. They do not come about by naturalistic forces. The consummational events — second advent, resurrection, judgment — indicate the Lord God’s personal involvement in directing the universe. These events also indicate the ethical nature of reality: history is moving somewhere specific, to a world in which righteousness dwells; final judgment will finally resolve the sin problem.

Postmillennialism fills out the general Christian conception of linear history. It speaks not only of forward linear movement, but of upward advance. Christ’s redemptive power is progressively drawing men and nations to himself and is sanctifying them in the process. From a postmillennial perspective Christ’s second advent is truly consummational: it eternally resolves the affairs of history, rather than setting up another redemptive-historical era (as per premillennialism and dispensationalism). That glorious consummational day will richly demonstrate God’s almighty power. Not only will he catastrophically intervene to end history with a glorious display of his sovereignty, but he will do so after

a long era of righteousness that will bring salvation to the vast majority of the human race.

PART IV

SPECIFICATION

13

ESCHATOLOGICAL TIME FRAMES

Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding." (Da 2:20–21)

Thus far I have been tracing the major flow of biblical eschatology from creation to new creation. In this and the next three chapters I will survey some of the detail matters often debated in eschatological discussion. Of course, properly understanding most of these issues depends on the *system* of eschatology already presented. We must be able to resolve specific questions arising in the millennial discussion from within our exegetically derived eschatological systems. We should discard any system that fails to resolve these matters on the basis of consistent, sound exegetical and theological analysis.

In this chapter I will begin considering several important *prophetic time frames* that are generally well-known. I will give the bulk of this chapter to a study of Daniel's Seventy Weeks, due to its significance in the eschatological debate.

The Seventy Weeks¹

The chronology Daniel provides in his prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (Da 9:24–27) is a linchpin in the dispensational system, although it is not crucial to any of the other millennial systems. John Walvoord comments that the "interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 is of major importance to premillennialism as well as pretribulationism." Being such, it "provides the indispensable chronological key to Bible prophecy."² Indeed, "the dispensational view *depends* on the validity of interpreting the Seventieth Week eschatologically."³ This is because it is "the major biblical prophecy

1. For a fuller treatment see: Gentry, *Perilous Times*, ch. 1.

2. *PEBP*, 356.

3. *DPT*, 77–78. Emph. mine.

about future events related to the nation of Israel.”⁴ Daniel 9 involves “prophetic postponement” which “is a distinct tenet of dispensational interpretation.”⁵ Surely O. T. Allis is correct when he observes that “the importance of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks in Dispensational teaching can hardly be exaggerated.”⁶

Dispensationalism’s depending on Daniel 9 is unfortunate for two reasons. First, historically: This passage is extremely difficult to interpret. J. A. Montgomery calls the prophecy “the Dismal Swamp of Old Testament criticism.”⁷ Young concurs: “This prophecy is one of the most difficult in the entire OT” and “the interpretations are almost legion.”⁸ Baldwin warns that this prophecy is “the most difficult text in the book.”⁹ Miller agrees: “these are four of the most controversial verses in the Bible.”¹⁰

Second, theologically: This “extremely important prophecy” is the most difficult for dispensationalists to make credible to those outside of their system. Even dispensationalist Robert Culver admits: “The difficulty of the verses that now lie before us is evident.”¹¹ “Premillennial writers of two or three generations ago were very far apart on the details. Much of the same diversity appears in premillennial contemporary writers.”¹² Kenneth Barker confesses: “It is quickly admitted that these verses are among the most difficult to interpret in Daniel.”¹³ In fact, Daniel’s Seventy Weeks prophecy leads dispensationalism into one of its most strained peculiarities: the doctrine of the gap theory of the Church Age.¹⁴ The

4. *PSB*, 1011.

5. Randall J. Price in Willis, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 160.

6. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 111. See also: Walvoord’s works, *The Rapture Question*, 24 and *PKH*, 248–250. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 168. McClain, *Daniel’s Prophecy of the 70 Weeks*, 9. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 240. E. Schuyler English, “The Gentiles in Revelation,” in *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 242.

7. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 400.

8. *EBC* 699.

9. Baldwin, *Daniel*, 163.

10. Miller, *Daniel*, 252.

11. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, 144.

12. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, 144.

13. Barker in Campbell and Townsend, *Case for Premillennialism*, 143 n39.

14. Allis mentions this teaching flowing out of the dispensational approach to Da 9:24–27 as “one of the clearest proofs of the novelty of that doctrine as well as of its revolutionary nature.” Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 109. Kline’s analysis of Daniel 9 leads him to call dispensationalism an “evangelical heresy.” Meredith

dispensational “interpretation requires a prophetic postponement (older writers referred to this as a ‘gap’ or ‘parenthesis’) between the events of verses 26 and 27.”¹⁵ I will consider this later.

Covenantal Structure

As we begin we must grasp the prophecy’s overarching structure. Meredith Kline carefully demonstrates the prophecy’s strongly covenantal cast. He notes of the material leading up to it that it is “saturated with formulaic expressions drawn from the Mosaic treaties, particularly from the Deuteronomic treaty” (cf. Da 9:4–6, 10–15).¹⁶ This prayer regarding covenant loyalty (*hesed*, 9:4) is answered in terms of the covenantal sabbath pattern of the seventy weeks (9:24–27), which results in the confirmation of the covenant (9:27). Daniel 9 is the only chapter in Daniel to use God’s special covenant name, *YHWH* (vv 2, 4, 10, 13, 14, 20; cf. Ge 6:2–4).

Recognizing the Seventy Weeks’ covenantal framework is crucial to its proper interpretation. It virtually demands a focus on the fulfillment of covenantal redemption in Christ’s ministry. Let us see why this is so.

God clearly frames the Seventy Weeks in terms of *sabbatic chronology*. The first phase of the Seventy Weeks is “seven weeks,” or (literally) “seven sevens” (Da 9:25), which results in a value of forty-nine. This reflects the time frame leading up to the redemptively significant Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8ff). The total period of “*seventy sevens*” is also covenantal. Seventy represents ten seven-week periods: ten jubilees. The seventy sevens (weeks) appear to point to a *completed* redemptive Jubilee. This appropriately points to Christ, who brings in that ultimate Jubilee (cf. Lk 4:17–21; Isa 61:1–3; Mt 24:31), and who is the leading character in Daniel’s prophecy. Consequently, the revealed time frame demarcates the period in which “the Messianic redemption was to be accomplished.”¹⁷

Kline, “Covenant of the Seventieth Week,” in Skilton, *The Law and the Prophets*, 452.

15. DPT, 77; cp. Price in Willis, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 133. I would point out that this very author, Randall Price, calls this a “gap,” as do the “older writers,” see: PSB, 1010. Benware does also, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 169.

16. Kline, “The Covenant of the Seventieth Week,” 456.

17. E. J. Young, “Daniel,” EBC, 698.

Chronological Value

The seventy weeks represent a period of seventy times seven *years*, or 490 years: (1) In the preceding context, the original seventy *years* of Jeremiah's prophecy is in Daniel's mind (Da 9:2). Years are suggested, then, by the prior reference which is crucial to the historical context. (2) Scripture frequently refers to the sabbath *year* (the seventh year of the sabbath period) simply as "the sabbath."¹⁸ Thus, it expands a "sabbath day" (Ge 2:2; Ex 20:11) to cover a year. (3) Scripture allows for measuring days in terms of years in several passages (Ge 29:27–28; Nu 14:34; Dt. 14:28; 1Sa 2:19; Eze 4:6; Am 4:4). (4) Daniel seems to shift gears and even notify the reader of the change in Daniel 10:2, where he qualifies his situation by saying he mourned "three weeks *of days*" (Heb.).

The "command" in Daniel 9:25 begins: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem." Initially, it would seem to refer to Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple in 538 BC. This command appears in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 and in Ezra 1:1–4; 5:13, 17, 6:3. Daniel, however, specifically speaks of the command to "*restore and build Jerusalem*," which is an important qualification.¹⁹

Though Israel attempts half-hearted efforts to rebuild Jerusalem after Cyrus' decree, for a long time Jerusalem remains a sparsely populated, unwallled village. But Daniel speaks of the command to "restore" (*shub*, return) Jerusalem (Da 9:25). This requires that it be returned to its *original* integrity and grandeur "*as at the first*" (Jer 33:7). It was not until the middle of the fifth century BC that this is undertaken seriously.²⁰

The first period of seven weeks must indicate something, for it is set off from the two other periods. Were it not significant Daniel could speak of the sixty-nine weeks, rather than the "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" (Da 9:25). This seven weeks (or forty-nine years) apparently witnesses the successful conclusion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.²¹

The second period of sixty-two weeks extends from the conclusion of Jerusalem's rebuilding to the introduction of Israel's Messiah at his

18. Lev 25:2–5; 26:34, 35, 43; 2Ch 36:21; etc.

19. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 2:884ff.

20. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 2:884–911. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, 388ff. Boutflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel*, 195ff.

21. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 2:894ff.

baptism when he begins his public ministry (Da 9:25), sometime around AD 26. This interpretation is quite widely agreed upon by conservative scholars, being virtually “universal among Christian exegetes”²² — excluding dispensationalists. The third period of one week is the subject of intense controversy between dispensationalism and other conservative scholarship. I will turn to this shortly.

Interpretation of Daniel 9:24

Daniel 9:24 states the prophecy’s overriding, glorious expectation: “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”

We should understand the six infinitival phrases of v 24 as three *couplets* (Payne, Terry, Maurer, Hitzig, and the Massoretes), rather than as two triplets (Keil and Young).²³ These six results are the prophecy’s main point, serving as the heading of the following explication. The “know therefore and understand” statement in verse 25 begins that explication.

The general view of Daniel 9:24 among non-dispensational evangelicals is that “the six items presented . . . settle the *terminus ad quem* of the prophecy,”²⁴ that is, they have to do with Christ’s first advent. Dispensationalists, however, hold that these events are “not to be found in any event near the earthly lifetime of our Lord.”²⁵ Rather they teach that “God will once again turn His attention in a special way to His people the Jews and to His holy city Jerusalem, as outlined in Daniel 9:24.”²⁶ The dispensationalist takes a decidedly futurist approach to the prophecy — when he gets past the first sixty-nine weeks.

Let us notice, first, that the Seventy Weeks will witness the *finishing of the transgression*. As just noted Daniel’s prayer of confession regards

22. Montgomery, *Daniel*, 332.

23. For couplet view, see: Payne, “The Goal of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks,” 111; Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 200. Young lists the other two: F. Maurer, *Commentarius grammaticus criticus in Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: 1838); F. Hitzig, *Das Buch Daniel* (1850). For the triplet view, see: Keil, “The Book of Daniel,” *K-D*, 341. E. J. Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 197.

24. *K-D*, *Daniel*, 201.

25. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter*, 155.

26. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 465.

Israel's sins (Da 9:4ff) and the prophecy's focus is on Israel (Da 9:24a). Consequently, this *finishing (kala) the transgression* has to do with Israel's finishing, or completing, her transgression against God. Israel finishes her transgression during Christ's earthly ministry, when she rejects him and demands his crucifixion (Mt 21:37–38; cf. 21:33–45; Ac 7:51–52).²⁷ Barnabas (*ca.* late first century) states: "The Son of God therefore came in the flesh with this view, that He might bring to a head the sum of their sins who had persecuted His prophets to the death."²⁸

The couplet's second part directly relates to the first: After finishing the transgression against God in rejecting the Messiah, now Israel's *sins are sealed up* (NASB marg.; *chatham*). The idea here is, as Payne observes, to seal or to "reserve sins for punishment."²⁹ Because of Israel's rejecting her Messiah, God reserves punishment for her: the temple's final, conclusive destruction, which God reserves from the time of Jesus' ministry until AD 70 (Mt 24:2, 34). The sealing or reserving of the sins indicates that *within* the "Seventy Weeks" Israel will complete her transgression, and with the completing of her sin by crucifying Christ, God will act to *reserve* (beyond the seventy weeks) her sins for judgment.

The third result (beginning the second couplet) involves "*reconciliation for iniquity*."³⁰ The Hebrew word *kaphar* is the word for "atonement," i.e., a covering of sin. It refers to Christ's atoning death, which is the ultimate atonement to which all temple rituals look (Heb 9:26³¹). This also occurs during his earthly ministry — at his death. The dispensationalist prefers to interpret this result as *application* rather than *effecting*. He sees it as subjective appropriation instead of objective accomplishment: "The actual application of it is again associated with the second advent as far as Israel is concerned."³² "This final atonement, while based on the past work of the Messiah, will be effected for the national remnant of Israel

27. Mt 20:18–19; 23:37–38; 27:11–25; Mk 10:33; 15:1; Lk 18:32; 23:1–2; Jn 18:28–31; 19:12, 15; Ac 2:22–23; 3:13–15a; 4:26–27; 5:30.

28. Barnabas 5.

29. Payne, "Goal of Daniel's Seventy Weeks," 111.

30. The definite article, which occurs before "transgression" and "sins," is lacking here. There it referred to the particular situation of Israel; here it considers the more general predicament of mankind.

31. Heb 1:3; 7:27; 9:7–12, 26, 28; 10:9–10. See also: Jn 1:29; Ro 3:25; 2 Co 5:19; 1Pe 2:24; 1 Jn 2:2.

32. Walvoord, *Daniel*, 222. Cf. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 169.

only in the future.”³³ But on the basis of the Hebrew verb, the passage clearly speaks of the actual *making reconciliation* (or *atonement*).

Because of this atonement to cover sin the fourth result effects *everlasting righteousness*, i.e., the final, complete atonement establishes righteousness. This speaks of the objective accomplishment, not the subjective appropriation of righteousness. Christ effects this within the seventy week period, as well (Ro 3:21–22a).

The fifth result (the first portion of the third couplet) has to do with Christ’s ministry on earth, which begins at his baptism: he comes “*to seal up vision and prophecy*.” This means that Christ fulfills (and thereby confirms) the prophecy (Lk 18:31; cf. Lk 24:44; Ac 3:18).³⁴

Finally, the seventy years are for the following goal: “*to anoint the Most Holy*.” This anointing [*mashach*] speaks of the Christ’s baptismal anointing. I would argue this for the following reasons: (1) The overriding concern of Daniel 9:24–27 is Messianic. The temple they build after the Babylonian Captivity will be destroyed after the seventy weeks (v 27), with no further mention made of it. (2) In the following verses the Messiah (*mashiyach*, “Christ,” “Anointed One”) is specifically named twice (vv 25, 26). (3) The “most holy” phraseology speaks of the Messiah, who is “that Holy One who is to be born.”³⁵ Isaiah prophesies that Christ will fulfill the ultimate redemptive Jubilee (Isa 61:1–2a; cf. Lk 4:17–21). At his baptismal anointing the Spirit comes upon him (Mk 1:9–11). This introduces his ministry, of which we read three verses later: “Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘*The time is fulfilled* [the sixty-ninth week?³⁶], and the kingdom of God is at

33. Price in Willis, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 149.

34. Walvoord seems to slip by allowing this prophecy to cover “the cessation of the New Testament prophetic gift seen both in oral prophecy and in the writing of the Scriptures.” Walvoord, *Daniel*, 222. This, however, does not occur in either the first sixty-nine weeks (up to “just before the time of Christ’s crucifixion”) or in the seventieth week (the future great tribulation), the periods which he claims involve the 490 years. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 258. Yet he specifically says that the “six major events characterize the 490 years.” Walvoord, *Daniel*, 251.

35. Lk 1:35; cf. 4:34, 41. See also: Mk 1:24; Ac 3:14; 4:27, 30; 1 Jn 2:20; Rev 3:7; He is called the “anointed one” (Ps 2:2; Isa 42:1; Ac 10:38).

36. Interestingly, in the first century arises a widely held belief that a ruler from within Israel is to arise “at that very time,” i.e., during the Jewish War. Tacitus, *Histories* 5:13: “The majority were convinced that the ancient scriptures

hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14–15). Christ is pre-eminently *the Anointed One*.³⁷

The Seventieth Week

The Messiah now experiences something "after the sixty-two weeks" (Da 9:26), which follow the preceding "seven weeks" (v 25). This will occur, then, sometime *after* the sixty-ninth week. A natural reading of the text requires that this occurs in the seventieth week, for that is the only time frame remaining for accomplishing the prophecy's goal listed in verse 24. That which occurs at this time is: "Messiah shall be *cut off*." The Hebrew word translated "cut off" here (*karath*) "is used of the death penalty, Lev. 7:20; and refers to a violent death,"³⁸ i.e., the death of Christ on the cross.

Given the Hebraic pattern of repetition, we may easily discern a parallel between verses 26 and 27; verse 27 gives an expansion of verse 26. Negatively, Messiah's *cutting off* in verse 26 results from Israel's completing her transgression and bringing it to a culmination (v 24) by crucifying the Messiah.³⁹ Positively, verse 27 states this same event: "He shall *confirm a covenant* with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering." Considered from its

of their priests alluded to *the present as the very time* when the Orient would triumph and from Judaea would go forth men destined to rule the world. This mysterious prophecy really referred to Vespasian and Titus." Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4: "An ancient superstition was current in the East, that out of Judaea at this time would come the rulers of the world. This prediction, as the event later proved, referred to a Roman Emperor." Josephus even picks up on this idea, when he ingratiates himself to Vespasian by declaring he was the one to rule (*J.W.* 3:8:9). The only prophecy regarding Israel that actually dates Messianic era events is Daniel 9:24–27. Josephus also applies the Daniel 9 passage to the rule of the Romans in another context: "In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them. All these things did this man leave in writing, as God had shewed them to him." (*Ant.* 10:11:7)

37. Ps 2:2; 132:10; Isa 11:2; 42:1; Hab 3:13; Ac 4:27; 10:38; Heb 1:9. Vanderwaal denies the Messianic referent of this passage, preferring a Maccabean priestly referent. Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*, 37.

38. Young, *Daniel*, 206.

39. Mt 20:18–19; 27:11–25; Mk 10:33; 15:1; Lk 18:32; 23:1–2; Jn 18:28–31; 19:12, 15; Ac 2:22–23; 3:13–15a; 4:26–27; 5:30; 7:52.

positive effect, this confirming the covenant with many makes reconciliation and brings in everlasting righteousness (v 24). The *confirming of a covenant* (v 27) refers to the covenantal actions of verse 24, which result from the perfect covenantal Jubilee (Seventy Weeks) and are the consequence of Daniel's covenantal prayer (cf. v 4). The covenant mentioned, then, is the *divine* covenant of God's redemptive grace.⁴⁰ Messiah comes to *confirm* the covenantal promises (Lk 1:72; Eph 2:12). He confirms the covenant by dying on the cross (Heb 7:22b).⁴¹

The word translated "confirm" (*higbir*) is related to the angel Gabriel's name, who brought Daniel the revelation of the Seventy Weeks (and who later brings the revelation of Christ's birth [Lk 1:19, 26]). "Gabriel" is based on the Hebrew *gibbor*, "strong one," a concept frequently associated with the covenant God.⁴² The related word found in Daniel 9:27 means to "make strong, confirm."⁴³ This "firm covenant" brings about "everlasting righteousness" (Da 9:24) — hence its firmness.

Daniel's prayer is particularly for Israel (Da 9:3ff), and recognizes God's promises of mercy upon those who love him (v 4). Therefore, the covenant will be confirmed with *many* for *one week*. The "many" refers to the faithful in Israel. "Thus a contrast is introduced between *He* and the *Many*, a contrast which appears to reflect upon the great Messianic passage, Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and particularly 53:11. Although the entire nation will not receive salvation, the many will receive."⁴⁴

This confirming God's covenant to the "many" of Israel occurs in the middle of the *seventieth week* (v 27). This parallels "after the sixty-two [and seven] weeks" (v 26) and provides more detail. We know Christ's three-and-one-half-year ministry focuses on the Jews in the first half of the seventieth week (Mt 10:5b; Mt 15:24). For a period of three and one-half

40. When "covenant" is mentioned in Daniel, it is always God's covenant, see: Daniel 9:4; 11:22, 28, 30, 32. This includes even Daniel 11:22. See: Pentecost, "Daniel," *BKC*, 1:1369.

41. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25; 2Co 3:6; Heb 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24.

42. Dt 7:9, 21; 10:17; Neh 1:5; 9:32; Isa 9:6; Da 9:4. Hengstenberg argues convincingly that the source of Daniel 9 seems to be Isaiah 10:21–23, where God is the "Mighty God" who blesses the faithful remnant.

43. Young, *Daniel*, 209; Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 122; Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 856.

44. Young, *Daniel*, 213.

years after the crucifixion,⁴⁵ the apostles focus almost exclusively on the Jews, beginning first “in Judea” (Ac 1:8; 2:14) because “the gospel of Christ” is “for the Jew first” (Ro 1:16; cf. 2:10; Jn 4:22).

Although the prophecy clearly specifies the terminus of the sixty-ninth week, such is not the case with the terminus of the seventieth. Thus, the exact event that ends the seventieth is not so significant for us to know. *Apparently* at the stoning of Stephen, Christianity’s first martyr, the covenantal proclamation begins turning toward the Gentiles (Ac 8:1). The apostle to the Gentiles appears on the scene at Stephen’s death (Ac 7:58–8:1; 22:20), as the Jewish persecution against Christianity breaks out. Paul’s mission clearly exceeds the narrow Jewish focus (Ac 9:15; 22:21; 26:17; Ro 1:5; 11:13; 15:16; Gal 1:16; 2:7; 3:1, 8; 1Ti 2:7; 4:17).

This covenant’s confirmation occurs “in the middle of the week” (Da 9:27). Above I show that the seventieth week *begins* with Christ’s baptismal anointing. Then, after three and one-half years of ministry — the middle of the seventieth week — Christ suffers crucifixion (Lk 13:6–9; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 1:10:3). Thus, the prophecy states that by his confirming the covenant, Messiah will “bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (v 27) by offering up Himself as a sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:25–26; cf. Heb 7:11–12, 18–22). Consequently, at his death the temple’s veil tears from top to bottom (Mt 27:51), showing that God is *legally disestablishing* the sacrificial system (cf. Mt 23:38), for Christ is the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29; Ac 8:32; 1Pe 19; Rev 5–7), who is offered once and for all (Heb 10:4–10).

The Destruction of Jerusalem

But how are we to understand the latter portions of both Daniel 9:26 and 27? What are we to make of the destruction of the city and sanctuary (v 26) and the abomination that causes desolation (v 27), which most non-dispensational evangelical commentators agree occurs in AD 70?

In verse 26 we learn that *two* events will occur *after* the sixty-ninth week: (1) The Messiah is “cut off” and (2) the city and sanctuary destroyed. Verse 27a informs us that the Messiah’s cutting off (v 26a) confirms the covenant and occurs at the half-way mark of the seventieth week. So, the Messiah’s death is clearly within the Seventy Weeks time

45. Payne, “The Goal of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks,” 109n; Boutflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel*, 195ff; Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 2:898. Young, *Daniel*, 213.

frame (as we expect because of his being the major figure in fulfilling the prophecy).

The events involving the destruction of the city and the sanctuary with war and desolation (Da 9:26b, 27b) are the *consequences* of Messiah's cutting off and do not necessarily occur *within* the seventy weeks time frame. They are an *addendum* to the main prophecy, which Daniel presents in verse 24. The destructive acts are *anticipated*, however, in the divine act of sealing up or reserving Israel's sin for punishment. Israel's climactic sin — her completing her transgression (v 24) by cutting off the Messiah (v 26a) — results in God's act of *reserving* Israel's sin *until a later time*. God will not postpone Israel's judgment forever; it will come after the seventy weeks expire. This explains the "very indefinite"⁴⁶ phrase "till the end of the war": *the "end" will not occur during the seventy weeks*. The end occurs in AD 70, exactly as Christ makes abundantly clear in Matthew 24:14–15 (cp. Mt 23:38; 24:2, 34).

The Dispensational Interpretation

The dispensational interpretation of Daniel's prophecy is encumbered by several peculiar, system-required features.

The Gap in the Seventy Weeks

Dispensationalism incorporates a gap or parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. This gap spans the entire Church Age from the Triumphal Entry to the rapture.⁴⁷ The dispensational arguments for a gap of undetermined length between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks are not convincing. Let us consider a few of their leading arguments in this regard.

First, *the peculiar phraseology in Daniel*. Daniel places the cutting off of the Messiah "*after* the 62 'sevens,' not in the 70th 'seven.'"⁴⁸ This

46. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 115.

47. Walvoord, *PKH*, 256–257. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 465. Pentecost, "Daniel," *BKC*, 1:161. Walvoord, *Daniel*, 230–231. It is interesting to note that the early Fathers held to a non-eschatological interpretation of the Seventieth Week, applying it either to the ministry of Christ or to AD 70. See: Barnabas, *Epistles* 16:6; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1:125–26; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 8; Julius Africanus, *Chronology* 50. See: Knowles, "The Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," 136–160.

48. Pentecost, "Daniel," *BKC*, 1364. See: Walvoord, *Rapture Question*, 25.

(allegedly) allows for a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth-weeks. If the cutting-off did not occur during the sixty-ninth week or during the seventieth week, a gap must exist between them.

In response it is obvious that seventy occurs *after* sixty-nine, and thus fits the requirements of the prophecy. Consequently, such an argument does not prove that the word “after” *requires* a gap. Besides, Daniel mentions only seventy weeks and, as LaRondelle has pointed out, Daniel most certainly does *not* say “after sixty-nine weeks, but not in the seventieth.”⁴⁹ Such an explanation is a gratuitous assumption demanded by dispensational system requirements. Since Daniel has yet to deal with the seventieth week, and since he clearly deals with the preceding sixty-nine weeks (Da 9:25), it is quite natural to assume this cutting off of the Messiah must be sometime *within* the seven-year period covered by the seventieth week.

Second, *a fatal admission*. Walvoord writes: “historically the destruction of Jerusalem occurred in AD 70 almost forty years after the death of Christ.”⁵⁰ So, the argument goes, since Daniel prophesies this event as occurring within the seventy weeks, “the continuous fulfillment theory [is] left without any explanation adequate for interposing an event as occurring after the sixty-ninth seven by some thirty-eight years.”⁵¹

I explain the relation of the seventy weeks to the destruction of the temple in AD 70 above. The goal of the Seventy Weeks is *not* the AD 70 destruction of the temple, which Daniel does not mention in Daniel 9:24. That destruction is a *later consequence* of certain events that will occur within the seventy weeks. The actual act of God’s *reserving judgment* (v 24) occurs within the seventy weeks; the later removal of that *reservation* does not. No necessity at all for a gap exists.

Third, *the general tendency in prophecy*. Walvoord writes: “Nothing should be plainer to one reading the Old Testament than that the fore-view therein provided did not describe the period of time between the two advents. This very fact confused even the prophets (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–12).”⁵² His argument then is: Old Testament prophecy can merge the first and second advents into one scene, though separated by thousands of years. Consequently, we have biblical warrant for understanding the

49. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 173.

50. Walvoord, *Daniel*, 230.

51. Walvoord, *Daniel*, 230.

52. Walvoord, *Rapture Question*, 25.

sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks as merged into one scene, although separated by a gap of thousands of years.

This argument is wholly without merit. Price's explanation to the problem absolutely misses the point of the objection: "Postponement does not affect such fulfillment of measured events. The same chronological events are fulfilled in the same temporal order as if no interruption occurred."⁵³ But the Seventy Weeks appear as a *unit*, though sub-divided into three unequal parts: (1) It is *one* period of seventy weeks that must transpire in order to experience the events mentioned. The plural "seventy weeks" is followed by a *singular* verb "is decreed," which indicates the unity of the time period. (2) An overriding concern of the prophecy, in distinction to all other Messianic prophecies, is that it actually *measures* time. If the dispensational gap theory regarding the seventieth week is true, then the gap separating the seventieth from the sixty-ninth week is now almost 2000 years long, or four times the whole time period of the seventy weeks, which is 490 years. And who knows how much longer it will continue? Such an approach destroys Daniel's unique presentation that actually measures prophetic fulfillment.

Price compounds this problem by stating that "Daniel 9:27 uniquely serves as the single Old Testament text cited by our Lord in the synoptics as a chronological indicator of eschatology events."⁵⁴ Yet how can this prophecy be an indicator of chronology if we may expect enormous gaps in it?

The Dispensational Covenant

Dispensationalists woefully misunderstand the covenant's confirming in Daniel 9:27. According to Walvoord: "This refers to the coming world ruler at the beginning of the last seven years who is able to gain control over ten countries in the Middle East. He will make a covenant with Israel for a seven-year period. As Daniel 9:27 indicates, in the middle of the seven years he will break the covenant, stop the sacrifices being offered in the temple rebuilt in that period, and become their persecutor instead of their protector, fulfilling the promises of Israel's day of trouble (Jer. 30:5–7)."⁵⁵

53. Price in Willis, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 139

54. Price, in Willis, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 142.

55. Walvoord, *PKH*, 257. Pentecost, "Daniel," *BKC* 1:1364.

Several problems plague this interpretation, some of which I deal with above in another connection: (1) The covenant here is not *made*, it is *confirmed*. This is actually the confirmation of a covenant already extant, i.e., the covenant of God's redemptive grace, which Christ confirms (Ro 15:8; cp. Ro 4:16; 2Co 1:20).

(2) As I note above the term "make a firm covenant" relates to the angel's name who delivers the message to Daniel: Gabriel ("God is strong"). The lexical correspondence between the name of God's strong angel and the making strong of the covenant suggests the covenant's *divine* nature. In addition, covenantal passages frequently employ related terms, when speaking of God's strong covenant.⁵⁶

(3) The parallelism with verse 26 indicates that the Messiah's death directly relates to the covenant's confirming. he is "cut off" but "not for himself" (v 26a), for he "confirms the covenant" for the "many" of Israel (v 27a). His "cutting off" *brings* the covenant's confirmation, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb 9:22).

(4) The indefinite pronoun "he" does not refer back to "the prince who is to come" of verse 26.⁵⁷ That "prince" is a subordinate noun; "the people" (plural) is the dominant noun. Thus, the "he" refers back to the last dominant individual mentioned: "Messiah" (v 26a). The Messiah is the leading figure in the whole prophecy, so the temple's destruction relates to his death. In fact, the people who destroy the temple are providentially "his armies" (Mt 22:2-7).

The "Last Days"

An eschatological theme that is as widely misunderstood as it is commonly discussed in popular prophetic literature is the "last days." This factor of eschatological chronology is an important concept that requires our deeply appreciating the complexity of God's sovereignly governing history and the outworking of his redemptive purposes. Unfortunately, too many interpreters greatly abuse the last days concept.

In a popular work Tim LaHaye comments about those of us living among the "generation" (Mt 24:34) of World War I: "There is no question

56. Dt 7:9, 21; 10:17; Neh 1:5; 9:32; Isa 9:6; Da 9:4. See my earlier discussion above.

57. Kline provides interesting arguments for the reference "the prince who is to come" (v 27) being to "Messiah the Prince" (v 25). If this were conclusive, the "he" would then refer back to the Messiah in either view.

that we are living in the last days. . . . The fact that we are the generation that will be on the earth when our Lord comes certainly should not depress us.”⁵⁸ As this comment from a best-selling author suggests, many Christians believe that we live in the very last times, that we live in the shadow of the second coming. Consider some representative statements pointing in alarm to the imminence of the end in the “last days”: (1) The Antichrist “is now close at hand.” (2) “The world is failing, passing away, and it witnesses to its ruin, not now by the age, but by the end of things.” Because of this the Christian should know (3) that “still more terrible things are imminent.” Indeed, (4) “Already the heavenly fire is giving birth, already the approach of divine punishment is manifest, already the doom of coming disaster is heralded.” (5) Because of world circumstances the plea is: “Consider, I beg you, whether the age can bear this for long?” (6) “All creation now waits in suspense for his arrival. . . . The world, which must be transformed anew, is already pregnant with the end that is to come on the final day.” How often have we heard such cries of the end? Are not these the concerns express in so much of current prophetic studies?

I should confess to the reader, though, that I have not been entirely up front. All of the statements in the immediately preceding paragraph are made, not by contemporary prophetic writers, but by Christians living more than a thousand year ago: Number 1 is from Tertullian (160–220), *De Fuga* 12. Numbers 2 and 3 are from Cyprian (AD 195–258), *De Mort* 25. Number 4 is from Firmicus Maternus (ca. AD 346), *De Errore Profanarum Religionum* 25:3. Number 5 is from Evodius of Uzala (ca. AD 412). Number 6 is from Paulinus of Nola (AD 353–431).⁵⁹ Too many Christians misunderstand biblical eschatology and the function of the “last days” — and they have done so for untold hundreds of years.

Properly understood the *last days* focuses on history’s most important episode: *the life of Jesus Christ*, which fulfills so much divine prophecy and is central to redemptive history. *Christ is the focal point of all Scripture*. Old Testament revelation anticipates and the New Testament realizes this grand prophetic fulfillment: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (Jn

58. LaHaye, *Beginning of the End*, 171–172. See also Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon*, 1991. The latter book has to do with Saddam Hussein in contemporary Iraq.

59. For references, see: Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (1991).

5:39).⁶⁰ Thus, Christ stands as history's dividing line — hence the historical appropriateness and theological significance of dividing history between BC and AD.⁶¹

Many prophetic references look forward to the “Messianic age of consummation,” which Christ introduces.⁶² Scripture frequently calls this new covenant era: “the last days” or “the latter days.”⁶³ “The New Testament repeatedly uses precisely the same phrase ‘latter days’ as found in the Old Testament prophecies. And the meaning of the phrase is identical, except for one difference: in the New Testament the end-days predicted by the Old Testament are seen as beginning their fulfillment with Christ’s first coming. All that the Old Testament foresaw would occur in the end-times has begun already in the first century and continues on into our present day.”⁶⁴ His incarnational coming is “nothing less than the beginning of the great *eschaton* of history.”⁶⁵

When Christ comes in the first century, history realizes “the fullness of times”: “The phrase *pleroma tou chronou*, Gal. iv. 4, implies an orderly unrolling of the preceding stages of world-history towards a fixed end.”⁶⁶ Hence, the preparatory preaching at the beginning of his ministry: “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17). Prior to this, the Old Testament era is typological and anticipatory. The Old Testament era serves as the “former days” (Mal 3:4)⁶⁷ that give way to the “last days,” the times Christ initiates: “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke *in time past* to the fathers by the prophets has in these *last days* spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things” (Heb 1:1–2).

Thus, we find frequent references to the last days beginning in the New Testament era. The Son appears in order to initiate the last days (Heb 1:2; 1Pe 1:20) and to effect redemption (Heb 9:26) by his pouring out of the Spirit (Ac 2:16, 17, 24; cf. Isa 32:15; Zec 12:10). The “ends of the ages” comes during the apostolic era (1Co 10:11). These will run until

60. Lk 24:25–27; Jn 1:45; 5:39, 46; Ac 3:24; 10:43; 2Co 1:20; Rev 19:10.

61. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 18–19. See my comments (pp. 14–15).

62. Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, in *K-D*, 1:387.

63. Ge 49:1, 10; Nu 24:14; Dt 4:30; 31:29; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Da 2:28; Ho 3:4; Mic. 4:1.

64. Beale in Bower and Elliot, *Eschatology in Bible & Theology*, 14.

65. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 36.

66. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 83.

67. See: Jer 46:26; La 1:7; Am 9:11; Mic 7:14, 20.

“the last day,” when the resurrection/judgment occurs to end history (Jn 6:39; 11:24; 12:48).⁶⁸ But before we reach the final end point, perilous times will frequently punctuate this era (2Ti 3:1) and mockers will arise (2Pe 3:3).

The last days of Old Testament prophecy anticipate the establishing of Mount Zion/Jerusalem as the enduring spiritual and cultural influence throughout the whole era.⁶⁹ This begins in the first century with the church’s new covenant phase, so that the church becomes the focal point of Christ’s kingdom (cf. Joel 2 with Ac 2:16ff; Heb 12:18–27).

Because the last days begin with Christ’s first century-coming,⁷⁰ no new historical era will follow. These are the *last* days. No millennium introduces another grand redemptive era in man’s history (see discussion of “Millennium” below, pp. 334ff). With Christ’s coming, history reaches “epochal finality.”⁷¹ Christ’s appearing as the “Last Adam” (1Co 15:45) indicates that no different historical age will follow. The finality comes in him, though it undergoes continuous development after its arrival in his ministry.⁷²

Dispensational literature is primarily responsible for generating confusion regarding the “last days.” Dispensationalists point to contemporary international social decline as indicating the onset of the “last days”: “The key that would unlock the prophetic book would be the current events that would begin to fit into the predicted pattern.”⁷³ “The

68. Some argue that John’s “last hour” in 1 Jn 2:18 cannot designate the whole Christian era by functioning the same as “the last days,” because it should be more closely associated with the “last day” (singular). Therefore, the “last days” must mean “the last days of old covenant Israel” which ended in AD 70. However, we must note that though Scripture refers to “last days” and “the last day,” it does not refer to “hours” leading up to “the last hour.” Thus, John’s “the last hour” differs from the singular “last day,” and stands for the whole period of time from Christ’s first advent to his second, emphasizing the unity of the period which is introduced by the arising of first century antichrists.

69. Isa 2:2; 24:23; 37:32; Joel 2:32; Ob 1:17, 21; Mic 4:7.

70. The last day resurrection has yet to occur (Mt 13:39–40, 49). Therefore, the Great Commission is still in effect (Mt 28:20).

71. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 28.

72. Contrary to Gaffin, “Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections of Postmillennialism,” *TRC*, ch. 9. See my response to Gaffin: “Whose Victory in History?” in North, *Theonomy*, ch. 8.

73. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 181. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 154ff.

conflicts that we see in our world today are symptoms of the day in which we live. They may be symptoms of the last days.”⁷⁴ Such observations overlook the biblical function of the “last days” in redemptive history’s grand sweep. The “last days” of postmillennialism comprise the great era of redemptive history that will gradually issue forth in historical victory for the church of Jesus Christ; the “last days” of dispensationalism introduce the collapsing of culture as the great tribulation looms (after which will follow the discontinuous personal reign of Christ on earth).

This Age / The Age to Come

Another eschatological timing issue involves the New Testament principle of “this age” and “the age to come.” Christ speaks of “this age” and another “age to come” (Mt 12:32; Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30; 20:34–35). The present age is sin-laden present in which we live. The “age to come” brings eternal life of the eternal order (Lk 18:30); it involves resurrection and will not include marrying (Lk 20:34–35). It is truly consummate and final.

From the linear perspective of the Old Testament, ancient Israel believes that the “age to come” will be the Messianic era that would fully arrive after their current age ends. Yet in the New Testament we learn that the “age to come” begins in principle with the first century coming of Christ. It overlaps with “this age” which begins in Christ. Thus, we are not only children of “this age” (present, sin-laden temporal history), but are also spiritually children of “the age to come” (the final, perfected eternal age). We have our feet in both worlds. Or as Geerhardus Vos put it: “The age to come was perceived to bear in its womb another age to come.”⁷⁵

Because of this principle, we *already* share in the benefits of “the age to come.” This is because the two ages are linked by Christ’s ruling in both, for he has a name “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come” (Eph 1:21). Therefore, we have already “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:5), despite living in “this present evil age” (Gal 1:4).

74. John F. Walvoord, “Why Are the Nations in Turmoil?” *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 211–212.

75. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 37.

We already experience resurrection — spiritually (Jn 5:24–25; Ro 6:4; Eph 2:6; 1Jn 3:14), though we look forward to a physical resurrection beyond “this present time” (Ro 8:18–23). Indeed, we even now sit “with Him in heavenly places” so that “in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6b–7). We already partake of the “new creation” (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15), though the eternal new creation still awaits us (2Pe 3:13). The shaking of the earth and splitting of rocks at Christ’s death (Mt 27:50–51) signal “that Christ’s death was the beginning of the end of the old creation and the inauguration of a new creation.”⁷⁶

We already enjoy the “new birth” into that new world (Jn 3:3; 1Pe 1:1, 23), though we will experience the fulness of “the glory of the children of God” only in the future (Ro 8:19, 23). We already possess the Spirit, who is the one who in that future age will “give life to your mortal bodies” (Ro 8:11). We already have victory over Satan (Mt 12:29; Ro 16:20; Jas 4:7), though he is the “god of this age” (2Co 4:4). We do good works now so that we might store up treasure “for the future” (1Ti 6:17–19; cp. Ro 2:5–7).

The central principle uniting “this age” and “the age to come” is the resurrection. Gaffin well states: “The unity of the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers is such that the latter consists of two episodes in the experience of the individual believer — one which is already past, already realized, and one which is future, yet to be realized,” so that our “resurrection is both already and not yet.”⁷⁷ Two worlds co-exist in us through the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Thus, the “last days” are unique in involving a merger of “this age” and the “age to come” as an “already / not yet” phenomenon. Truly, “Christ’s life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit, launched the end-time new creation for God’s glory.”⁷⁹

The “Imminent” Return

The imminent coming itself. A most remarkable feature of prophetic interest is the Christian’s conviction that we are living “in the shadow of

76. Beale in Brower and Elliott, *Eschatology in Bible & Theology*, 33.

77. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 60.

78. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 38.

79. Beale in Brower and Elliott, *Eschatology in Bible & Theology*, 23.

the second coming,”⁸⁰ that we are in a “countdown to Armageddon.”⁸¹ We often find linked with a radical misunderstanding of the last days the doctrine of the *imminent return of Christ*, especially among dispensationalists and premillennialists — but also even with amillennialists.⁸²

John F. Walvoord explains imminency for us: “The hope of the return of Christ to take the saints to heaven is presented in John 14 as an imminent hope. There is no teaching of any intervening event. The prospect of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ is not qualified by description of any signs or prerequisite events.”⁸³ Gerald Stanton states that imminency means the event “is next on the program and may take place at any time.”⁸⁴ Indeed, “his coming is next on the revealed program of God.”⁸⁵ It is “the next predicted even in God’s prophetic timetable.”⁸⁶ Earl D. Radmacher vigorously denies any prophecy is being fulfilled today: “Equally as unjustified as date-setting for Christ’s return are the numerous sermons attempting to find fulfillment of prophecy in this age.”⁸⁷

Unfortunately, Walvoord’s statement clashes with the wider body of his work. In his more recent *Prophecy in the New Millennium* he dogmatically asserts: “In the centuries of human progress since Adam, the twentieth century deserves its own unique place as an era of unusual prophetic fulfillment that is unequaled in history, except possibly in the first century.”⁸⁸ Which is it: (1) The Bible offers “no teaching of any intervening event”? Or (2) the twentieth century is “an era of unusual prophetic fulfillment”? If prophecies are fulfilled in the twentieth century are they not “intervening” events until they occur? Are they not events that must transpire before the end? In another work, he even provides a

80. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* (1979).

81. Lindsey, *1980s: The Countdown to Armageddon* (1980).

82. See premillennialist J. B. Payne’s *Imminent Appearing of Christ* (1962). Even amillennialists can sound like dispensationalists when they cry the alarm: “The year 1990 and the decade it initiates will bring that tribulation ever closer.” Kuiper, “The Illusory Hope of the Rapture,” 155.

83. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 78–79.

84. Gerald B. Stanton in Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 222.

85. Stanton in Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 233.

86. Wayne A. Brindle, “Imminence,” *PEBP*, 144.

87. Earl D. Radmacher, “The Imminent Return of the Lord,” in Willis and Master, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, 248.

88. Walvoord, *Prophecy in the New Millennium*, 11.

detailed list of the “predicted order of prophetic events related to Israel,” which include the German holocaust, the United Nations action to form Israel as a nation — and more.⁸⁹ Thus, “in the predictions that Christ made almost 2,000 years ago, He accurately portrayed the progress in the present age” so that “all these situations have been fulfilled in history.”⁹⁰ LaHaye agrees: “there are more fulfilled signs today than in any previous age.”⁹¹ Lindsey concurs: “This is a unique time in history in which all of the predicted signs that were to precede the Second coming of Christ are coming into focus within the same generation.”⁹² Fruchtenbaum follows suit noting of Israel’s reformation as a nation in 1948: “Israelology sees this as a definite fulfillment of prophecy.”⁹³

Furthermore, many dispensational theologians hold this imminency doctrine quite inconsistently. For they simultaneously hold that Revelation 2 and 3 outline the entire Church Age up into our own era.⁹⁴ For instance, Towns outlines the “history” forecast in the letters, showing that Philadelphia points to 1750–1900, while Laodicea deals with the time from 1900 to the present.⁹⁵ (Though he apparently has changed his view in his article in the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*. He must have re-computed the biblical evidence and determined that the Philadelphia era lasts a full ten years more, ending in 1910.⁹⁶) The *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* holds that the Philadelphia period starts exactly twenty years earlier, it still sees this era as prophetically determined: “Philadelphia — Missionary church (AD 1730–1900).”⁹⁷ How could Christ’s

89. PKH, 382.

90. PKH, 383.

91. LaHaye in Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 429.

92. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 54.

93. “Israelology, Doctrine of,” *DPT*, 199. The 1967 capture of Jerusalem “was another milestone in biblical prophecy” (p. 200).

94. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 52; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 149; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 24ff; Boyer, “Are the Seven Letters of Revelation 2–3 Prophetic?,” 267–273; Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming*, 38ff; *SRB*, 1331–2; *NSRB*, 1353.

95. Elmer Towns in LaHaye, *PSB*, 1495.

96. Elmer Towns, “Present Age, the Course of this,” *DPT* 313–14.

97. *PEBP*, 353. Oddly the seven church periods generally start on exact dates opening a new decade (excluding Smyrna and Sardis), whereas the dispensations widely vary in start and stop points (except for the last dispensation which is exactly 1000 years).

return be imminent in the first century if Scripture prophesies events unfolding up through history even to our day? Would these prophecies fail if Christ returns in the second century?

Apparently this problem finally dissuades Walvoord from promoting the view. In his commentary on Revelation he writes: "Many expositors believe that in addition to the obvious implication of these messages the seven churches represent the chronological development of church history viewed spiritually. . . . There does seem to be a remarkable progression in the messages. It would seem almost incredible that such a progression should be a pure accident, and the order of the messages to the churches seems to be divinely selected to give prophetically the main movement of church history."⁹⁸ But twenty-five years later he states: "Some hold that these churches also, in general, represent the history of the church. . . . There is, however, no scriptural verification of this type of interpretation."⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the view still remains popular among dispensationalists.

Even though some dispensationalists attempt to discount this view, they end up with the same problem. For instance, Benware rejects the view but states that the seven churches more generally "represent churches throughout the Church Age, from John's day until the Rapture."¹⁰⁰ But if the second coming has been "imminent" since Christ's ascension, how can Scripture prophesy even the general condition of the church age, which occurs after the ascension, after Pentecost?

The date-setting problem. Often dispensationalists try to distinguish between Christ's return being *imminent* and its being *soon*. This strives to protect them against charges of date-setting. This does not protect them from the charge, however, because it is inconsistently held. In a letter to me dated June 1, 1994, from Thomas D. Ice, Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center, Ice writes: "We distinguish between imminent and soon in the sense that soon would require a near coming, while imminent would allow, but not require a soon coming."¹⁰¹ Bundled in that very letter was his first newsletter entitled: "The Pre-Trib Research

98. Walvoord, *Revelation*, 52.

99. *PKH*, 526.

100. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 314.

101. See also: Walvoord, *Prophecy in the New Millennium*, 128. Wayne A. Brindle, "Imminence," *PEBP*, 144.

Center: A New Beginning.”¹⁰² The first sentence of the newsletter (once past the headings) was: “Our purpose is to awaken in the Body of Christ a new awareness of the soon coming of Jesus.” The system giveth and taketh away. In fact, in a book edited by Ice, Tim LaHaye speaks of “the soon coming of Christ.”¹⁰³

Ironically, dispensationalists should be the last people to seek signs of the approaching end, for such a quest undermines their most distinctive doctrine: the ever-imminent, sign-less, secret rapture. Yet, date-setting has long plagued premillennialism, especially dispensationalism.¹⁰⁴ The last twenty years are particularly rife with cries of the approaching end. In 1990–91 needless American fears over the 30-day Gulf War — Iraq’s great tribulation — fuel the flames of date-setting, much like in World War I.¹⁰⁵ Hal Lindsey writes: “At the time of this writing, virtually the entire world may be plunged into a war in which this city [Babylon] may emerge with a role and destiny that few have any inkling of.” Later he sums up: “This is the most exciting time to be alive

102. Tim LaHaye, “The Pre-Trib Research Center: A New Beginning,” in *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, 1:1 (May, 1994): 1.

103. LaHaye in Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 429.

104. See the classic historical study on the problem: Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (1991). See also: Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour* (2000). For an exegetical study of the error, see: DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (1999). The problem is indicated in the following popular dispensational titles: Lindsey, *Planet Earth – 2000: Will Mankind Survive?* (1994). Sumrall, *I Predict 2000* (1987). Lewis, *Prophecy 2000: Rushing to Armageddon* (1990). Terrell, *The 90’s: Decade of the Apocalypse* (1992). Hunt, *How Close Are We?: Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (1993). Graham, *Storm Warning* (1992). Ryrie, *The Final Countdown* (1991). Jeffries, *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny* (1988). McKeever, *The Rapture Book: Victory in the End Times* (1987). McAlvanny, et al., *Earth’s Final Days* (1994). Marrs, et al., *Storming Toward Armageddon: Essays in Apocalypse* (1992). Liardon, *Final Approach: The Opportunity and Adventure of End-Times Living* (1993). Webber and Hutchins, *Is This the Last Century?* (1979).

105. Arthur Pink wrote: “Brethren, the end of the Age is upon us. All over the world, reflecting minds are discerning the fact that we are on the very eve of another of those far-reaching crises which make the history of our race. . . . Those who look out on present conditions are forced to conclude that the consummation of the dispensation is at hand. . . . The sands in the hour glass of this Day of Salvation have almost run out. The signs of the Times demonstrate it The Signs are so plain they cannot be mis-read, though the foolish may close their eyes and refuse to examine them.” Pink, *The Redeemer’s Return* ([1918], 318–19.

in all of human history. We are about to witness the climax of God's dealing with man."¹⁰⁶ LaHaye's chapter in *When the Trumpet Sounds* (1995) is titled "Twelve Reasons Why This Could Be the Terminal Generation."¹⁰⁷

Even noted dispensational theologians are engaging in date-setting. Ironically, in the summer of 1990, as the Gulf War clouds loomed, Walvoord's book review appeared in which he wrote disparagingly of my insistence that dispensationalists are date-setters: "So premillennialism and dispensationalism have been derided as a date-setting system of doctrine, even though very few of its adherents indulge in this procedure."¹⁰⁸ But in 2001 Walvoord writes: "Many indications exist that human history is reaching its climax in end-time events."¹⁰⁹

The New Testament teaches, however, that the Lord's glorious, bodily return will be in the *distant* and *unknowable* future. It is neither *imminent* nor *datable*. Bahnsen notes that "distinctive to [postmillennialism] is the *denial* of the imminent physical return" of Christ.¹¹⁰ Mathison agrees: "Scripture simply does not teach the dispensational doctrine of the 'imminent' return of Christ."¹¹¹

Christ's return has not been imminent since the ascension. Jesus clearly teaches: "While the bridegroom was *delayed*, they all slumbered and slept" (Mt 25:5). "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a *far* country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. . . . After a *long* time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them" (Mt 25:14, 19). This passage does not expect an *any-moment* return — indeed, the "wise" virgins prepare for his delayed return.

Just before his ascension Christ deals with a problem among his often-confused disciples (e.g., Mt 16:21–23; Lk 24:25; Jn 20:9): "They

106. Lindsey, "The Rise of Babylon and the Persian Gulf Crisis," 2, 51. See also: Lynn, "The Gulf War and the Coming Fall of Babylon," 1.

107. LaHaye in Ice and Demy, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ch. 21.

108. Walvoord, "Review of *House Divided*," 372. Even as I wrote these words in my second edition, on that very day, I received in the mail a leaflet sent to me on "Christ's Second Coming." The author, Thomas W. Staggs of Wichita, Kansas, announces: "Russia attempts to invade Israel. *Ezk.* 38–39." Beside this statement the author wrote: "Soon. Watchman let your people know." On the top of the leaflet, he wrote: "The Truth." The envelope is postmarked: December 3, 1991.

109. Walvoord, *Prophecy in the New Millennium*, 26.

110. Bahnsen, "The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism," 60. Cf. Alis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 173–174.

111. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 206.

asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at *this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know *times* [*chronos*] or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Ac 1:7). *Chronos* indicates a long period of uncertain duration. In fact, it appears in the plural, which indicates “a rather long period of time composed of several shorter ones.”¹¹² As premillennialists Blomberg and Chung put it: this “Acts passage utilizes the two broadest words in Hellenistic Greek for ‘time’ (*chronos* and *kairos*),” which precludes any “claim to be able to pin down end-times events to any definable period of time.”¹¹³

Peter seems to reflect this long-term waiting in Acts 3:19, where he speaks of the “*times* of refreshing” for here “the plural may be intended to convey the idea that it is a long way off” (cf. 2Ti 3:1).¹¹⁴ According to William Urwick “the only errors mentioned in the New Testament respecting the time of our Lord’s coming, all consist in dating it too early.”¹¹⁵ We see this problem in the passages I cite above, as well as in the famous passages: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 and 2 Peter 3:3–4.

Matthew 28:20 states that the Great Commission will stretch through “all the days” (literal translation of the Greek, *pasas tas hemeras*). This indicates a great many days before the end. The parables of the mustard seed and leaven set forth a gradually developing kingdom, which grows until it dominates the world’s landscape and penetrates all of the world’s cultures. This surely suggests a long period of time. As I show in chapter 12, 2 Peter 3 allows a long delay before Christ’s coming as evidence of the “longsuffering” of God. This fits well with postmillennial eschatology, for it allows time for the advancing victory of Christ’s kingdom and encourages a future-orientation for the church’s labors.

A frustrating feature of much amillennialism is the dialectical tension within the system regarding this matter. Amillennialists often hold to contradictory positions, balancing the one (imminency) against the other (a long wait). And they often proclaim this double-speak as a positive merit of the system! For instance, Kim Riddlebarger states: “As we have seen in part 3 in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus taught that his coming is both immanent [*sic*] (‘this generation will not pass away’) and distant (the parable of the ten virgins). He also taught that specific signs precede his

112. BAGD, 1092.

113. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, xii.

114. Williams, *Acts of the Apostles*, 71.

115. Quoted in Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, 41n.

coming and yet that his coming will occur when we least expect it, apparently, after a delay of an indeterminate period of time.”¹¹⁶ Cornelis Venema concurs: “A balanced and complete reading of the Gospels, therefore, reveals a double emphasis. Some passages emphasize the ‘soon-ness’ or imminence of Christ’s coming; others suggest something of a delay or a considerable period of time intervening.”¹¹⁷

But if imminency can cover 2000 years of church history, then postmillennialists have no problem with it. Considered from this perspective, Venema is mistaken when he asserts that “amillennialism has a clearer expectation of the imminence (the ‘soon-ness’) of Christ’s return than does Postmillennialism.”¹¹⁸ Richard Gaffin holds that “Christ *could* have returned at virtually any time since the ministry of the apostles.” But if imminency can stretch out for 2000 years (so far!), then imminency is not imminency. How can 2000 years be called “soon-ness”? We cannot reasonably stretch imminency over a 2000 year period, then declare “as the end approaches and the return of Christ becomes ever *more* imminent.”¹¹⁹ For then imminency has no meaning: it can fit any time-frame and cannot become “more” imminent.

Interestingly, not all Reformed scholars agree with Riddlebarger, Venema, and Gaffin. John Murray denies the doctrine noting that “the insistence that the advent is imminent is . . . without warrant, and its falsity should have been demonstrated by events.”¹²⁰ O. T. Allis and Morton Smith associate imminency doctrine with dispensationalism.¹²¹ Amillennialist Venema can even argue for “the great length of time symbolized in the imagery of the thousand years [in Rev 20],” which covers the entire inter-advental period.¹²²

Christ’s return is not datable. Rather than giving specific signs that allow even generalized date-setting, the Scripture forthrightly states: “of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Mt 24:36). A danger lurks among some who claim to be his people and who may be caught unawares: they will let down their guard because the date is unknowable (Mt 25:1ff). Although prophecy

116. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 240.

117. Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 104–05.

118. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 242.

119. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 185. Emph. mine.

120. Murray, “The Last Things,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:407.

121. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 169. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2:801.

122. D. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 288.

portrays a long era in history in which Christianity will reign supreme, it never gives information allowing us to determine the end. Christ's glorious rule through his covenant people will be for a long time before he returns in judgment — but for how long, no man knows.

The Millennium

As I indicate in chapter 3 the “millennium” in Revelation 20:1–6 is a time frame that plays a far greater role in the eschatological debate than it warrants. Oddly, Stanley J. Grenz asserts of “evangelical postmillennialists” that “as a millenarian viewpoint, of course, it builds its primary case from a futurist interpretation of John's vision.”¹²³ This is simply not so. As I show in chapter 3 and argue in my chapter in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, “I would prefer to leave Revelation 20 out of my presentation.”¹²⁴ In their debate book Antony Hoekema scolds postmillennialist Loraine Boettner for not dealing with Revelation 20:1–6 in his argument for postmillennialism.¹²⁵

Incredibly, this passage dominates the thinking of various eschatological schools. But amillennialist William Cox wisely argues: “Most millennial thinking begins with Revelation 20, since this is the only place in the entire Bible where the thousand years is mentioned. We feel that Revelation 20 ought to be our last stop, not our first.”¹²⁶ Indeed, “this is one of the most hotly debated issues in the whole field of eschatology.”¹²⁷ Grant Osborne reminds us that “few issues have divided the church for as long a time as this, for the church in the first three centuries had extensive debates over ‘chiliasm.’”¹²⁸

The role of Revelation 20 in the debate is absolutely essential to premillennialism.¹²⁹ Historic premillennialist Timothy P. Weber notes that

123. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 72.

124. Gentry in *Three Views on the Millennium*, 50.

125. Anthony Hoekema, “An Amillennial Response,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 150.

126. Cox, *Biblical Studies in Final Things*, 174.

127. Milne, *Know the Truth*, 262.

128. Osborne, *Revelation*, 696.

129. I should note, though, that not only do dispensationalists and premillennialists write more about the tribulation than about the millennium, according to premillennialist Blomberg: “I actually think the doctrine of the tribulation is more important than the doctrine of the millennium.” Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 69.

“the key biblical passage for such [golden age] speculation is Revelation 20, in which Christ returns to earth, defeats Satan, and sets up a thousand-year kingdom on the earth.”¹³⁰ Premillennialist Craig L. Blomberg agrees: “for *evangelical* New Testament interpreters, the millennial debate reduces ultimately to an understanding of Revelation 20.” He notes that: “George Eldon Ladd . . . liked to say in class that he could have been an amillennialist if it were not for Revelation 20.”¹³¹

Premillennialism’s depending on Revelation 20 is surprising for at least two major reasons. First, the *only* place in all of Scripture that associates “one thousand years” with the reign of Christ is in the first six verses of this one chapter. Against such a complaint, premillennialist Ladd comments: “the fact that the New Testament in only *one* place teaches an interim kingdom, between this age and the Age to Come is no reason for rejecting it.”¹³² Yet the postmillennial concern is well-justified. If a literal earthly millennium is a prominent era in redemptive history, the very *goal* of history (as premillennialists and dispensationalists argue), then why should we not expect a reference to the thousand years appearing in more than *one* passage?

Second, the thousand-year reign occurs in the most figurative and difficult book in all of Scripture. If it is a literal time frame, why is it that it is only mentioned in this highly symbolic book? It is a bit odd, too, that this time frame is a perfectly rounded and exact multiple of ten, which seems more compatible with a figurative view. B. B. Warfield is surely correct when he comments: “we must not permit ourselves to forget that there is a sense in which it is proper to permit our understanding of so obscure a portion of Scripture to be affected by the clearer teaching of its more didactic parts. . . . The order of investigation should be from the clearer to the more obscure.” But dispensationalists and premillennialists seldom honor this hermeneutical principle. In fact, “nothing, indeed, seems to have been more common in all ages of the Church than to frame an eschatological scheme from this passage, imperfectly understood, and then to impose this scheme on the rest of Scripture *vi et armis*.”¹³³ Historic premillennialist Chung complains: “Many Reformed theologians

130. Weber in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 3.

131. Blomberg in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 67.

132. Ladd, “A Historic Premillennial Response,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 190.

133. Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” 599.

... spiritualize key passages of the Bible that must be interpreted more literally from the kingdom perspective. For example, many Reformed covenant theologians have taken Revelation 20:1–6 as a metaphorical account, denying the fulfilment of the physical millennial rule on the earth.”¹³⁴

Robert Clouse well notes: “These categories [amillennial, premillennial, postmillennial], although helpful and widely accepted, are in certain respects unfortunate as the distinctions involve a great deal more than the time of Christ’s return.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, as I note above, amillennialist Hoekema scolds postmillennialist Boettner for not dealing with Revelation 20:1–6 in his presentation of the postmillennial conception of the kingdom.¹³⁶

Properly understood, the thousand-year time frame in Revelation 20 represents a long and glorious era and is not limited to a literal 365,000 days.¹³⁷ The figure represents *a perfect cube of ten*, which is the number of quantitative perfection (as Augustine argues long ago). The thousand here is no more literal than that which affirms God’s ownership of the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps 50:10), or promises Israel will be a thousand times more numerous (Dt 1:11), or measures God’s love to a thousand generations (Dt 7:9), or expresses the desire for a thousand years in God’s courts (Ps 84:10), or compares a thousand years of our time to one of God’s days (Ps 90:4). Terry even surmises that “it may require a million years.”¹³⁸

The millennial designation, then, is John’s visionary portrayal of Christ’s kingdom, which the Lord establishes at his first coming.¹³⁹ Revelation 20:1 clearly presents the passage as a *vision*; John opens with: “and I saw” (Rev 20:1a). This strongly suggests its symbolic import and is evidence against a strictly literal interpretation of the one thousand years. In addition, the first event we see in the vision is Satan’s binding

134. Chung in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 135.

135. Clouse, “Introduction,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 7.

136. Hoekema, “An Amillennial Response,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 150.

137. Actually we should speak of a millennium of 365,242.5 days. A year is actually 365.2425 mean solar days.

138. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 452 (see also 445).

139. Interestingly, many historic premillennialist scholars hold that Rev 20 does not necessarily suggest a period of literally one thousand years. See: Ladd, *Revelation*, 262; Mounce, *Revelation*, 362; Osborne, *Revelation*, 701.

with a chain, which surely is not literal (especially since his binding appears as a spiritual event elsewhere: Mt 12:29¹⁴⁰). And what kind of key would unlock “the abyss” (Rev 20:1)? And where would it be kept? Surely the key is a symbol of control, as when Christ holds “the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev 1:18). May we really imagine that the Lord holds physical keys that control death and Hades?

Revelation 20:4–6 speaks of the saints living and reigning with Christ, which appears elsewhere as a spiritual reality in the present experience of God’s people (1Co 3:21–22; Eph 1:3; 2:6; Col 3:1–2)...¹⁴¹ In Revelation 20:6 we read that “they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years,” whereas in Revelation 1:6 John applies this same imagery to John’s first century audience: “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.” This reigning of the saints with Christ on thrones pictures the kingdom of Christ, which is already established (cf. ch. 10).¹⁴² His kingdom, then, is defined chronologically as *a complete and perfect, long-lasting period*. Warfield approvingly cites William Temple: “The church is still in its infancy. Two thousand years are as two days.”¹⁴³ As James Adderley expresses it: “Christianity is a very young religion” and “we are only at the beginning of Christian history even now.”¹⁴⁴

Besides, elsewhere Christ’s second coming occurs at “the end” (1Co 15:23–24) and brings in “the last day” resurrection (Jn 6:39, 40, 44, 54). “Therefore, in view of the total absence of supporting evidence from the New Testament, it is exceedingly hazardous to claim that a thousand years intervene between Christ’s coming and the end of the world on the grounds that Revelation 20 teaches a millennium.”¹⁴⁵

The millennial era has already lasted almost 2,000 years; it may continue another 10,000 or more for all we know. It is the perfect time

140. The binding of Satan during Christ’s earthly ministry and until his second advent was known in ancient times. See: *Acts of Pilate* 22:2.

141. I would note, however, that in *John’s vision* the millennial *rule* is confined to Christ and the first-century martyrs, though it covers the whole Church age.

142. Older postmillennialists and some more recent ones hold that the millennium is a distinct final stage in the advance of Christ’s kingdom. See: David Brown (1800s) and Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, ch. 5.

143. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 347, n 34.

144. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 348 n 34.

145. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, xvii–xviii.

of Christ's rule in his kingdom (Rev 1:5–6) — a time that shall eventually result in the subduing of all nations.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

Christianity is an historical faith: it is intimately intertwined with the ebb and flow of history. Our God not only originates history (creation) but governs it (providence), speaks in it (revelation), involves himself in it (incarnation), and redeems it (redemption). Consequently, the issues of time are relevant to Christianity as it operates in the temporal realm. God is governing history on the basis of his redemptive plan. The time frames I deal with above demonstrate the temporal impact of God's comprehensively redemptive action in history.

146. For more information see Gentry, *The Book of Revelation Made Easy*, ch. 6.

ESCHATOLOGICAL FEATURES

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Mt 24:3)

In this chapter I will focus on four familiar eschatological features which I have not considered in detail so far: the day of the Lord, the great tribulation, the rebuilding of the temple, and the new creation.

It is odd that the biggest-selling prophetic studies published today deal with the horrible great tribulation.¹ Despite the prominence of the glorious millennium in the eschatological debate, it seems that the Christian public has more interest in the tribulational woes than in the millennial glory. What is worse, most Christians misinterpret the great tribulation — even placing at the wrong end of history.

The Day of the Lord

The “the day of the Lord” appears frequently in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament prophets (Isa 13:6, 9; Eze 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Am 5:18, 20; Ob 15; Zep 1:7; Mal 4:5). It also appears in the New Testament (Ac 2:20; 1Co 5:5; 1Th 5:2; 2Th 2:2; 2Pe 3:10; Rev 6:17; 16:14). The concept can appear even apart from the full phrase, “day of the Lord.” Scripture calls it a “day of punishment” (Isa 10:3), a “day of doom” (Jer 51:2), a “day of trouble” (Eze 7:7), a “day of darkness” (Joel 2:2), a “day of the Lord’s anger” (Zep 2:2). Or prophets may simply call it “that day” (Isa

1. See n 126 on p. 335 above. Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) has sold over 35 million copies in fifty-four languages. The *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye has sold over 65 million copies and has been translated into many languages. Premillennialist Timothy P. Weber notes, with evident frustration: “It is very significant that the best-selling dispensationalist books of all time are *fictionalized* accounts of the end-times scenario: no careful exegesis there, no laborious comparisons with other alternatives, just a ripping good story told well. Weber in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 21.

2:11, 17; 7:18; 11:10; Jer 4:9; 30:7; Eze 24:26; 29:21; Hos 1:5; 2:16, 18; Joel 3:18; Am 2:16; 8:3; Mic 2:4).

The “day of the Lord” may be “sometimes used by the prophets to refer to any specific period of time in which the God of Israel intervenes in human affairs to save and judge” and “invariably the Day of the Lord is associated with acts of violent judgment” (DBI 196, 197). This concept always appears in the singular form, as an individual day. Nevertheless, “the ‘day of the Lord’ is not a one-time occurrence” for “there have been days of the Lord in the past” (EDBT 147). We see them coming against Babylon (Isa 13:6, 9), Egypt (Eze 30:3–4), Jerusalem (Joel 1:14–15), Edom (Oba 8, 15), and others.

Ultimately, however, “it seems necessary to distinguish between a primary day — one of intervention by Yahweh with limited effect — and a secondary day — one of universal cosmic judgment” (*ABD*, 2:85). Though several experiences of “the day of the Lord” appear in Scripture, they all relate to one another in that they each point to the ultimate, final day of the Lord. In chapter 12 I focus on 2 Peter 3:10 which highlights the ultimate day of the Lord that concludes history. Consequently, since “the prophets not only view historical events as ushering in the day of the Lord’s visitation” they also “look to an ultimate eschatological event Therefore this ‘day’ is both near and far, both historical and eschatological for Israel. It may be a divine visitation within history as well as a final visitation that climaxes history” (*EDT* 295).

For the purposes of preteristic postmillennialism, I should note that we have in the New Testament “the early Christian view that in some fashion the eschatological era had been inaugurated with the coming of Christ and the Spirit. Thus in Acts 2, Peter can cite Joel 2 and interpret the experiences of Pentecost in light of eschatological fulfillment” (*EDT*, 295). In fact, the dark clouds of the “day of the Lord” in AD 70 hang over much of the New Testament. God is preparing to punish his people Israel, remove the temple system, and re-orient redemptive history from one people and land to all peoples throughout the earth (Mt 8:10–11; 21:43; Jn 4:23). This dramatic redemptive-historical event not only ends the old covenant era, but points to the end of history itself.

In the New Testament we have some debate over categorizing any given “day of the Lord” statement. It seems that only two options exist: it may refer to AD 70 or to the Second Advent. Nevertheless, we do have at least three clear passages that point to AD 70 as a “day of the Lord.” Acts 2:20 must highlight AD 70, for it appears in the very context of Jerusalem and includes tongues-speaking which is a sign of coming

judgment upon Israel (cf. Dt 28:49; Isa 28:11; 33:19; Jer 5:15; 1Co 14:21–22). Peter’s sermon not only blames the Jews for Christ’s recent death (Ac 2:22–23, 36), but urges the Jerusalemites to “be saved from this perverse generation” (Ac 2:40). Below in chapter 15 I will show that “the man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2 arises in the context of Israel’s AD 70 destruction, because that passage speaks of near term concerns (2Th 2:6–7). And once again, the context involves “the day of the Lord” (2Th 2:2). Hebrews 10:25 urges the first Jewish Christians to not forsake “our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near” (Heb 10:25). And this in a book declaring the old covenant order is “ready to disappear” (Heb 8:13).

The Great Tribulation

As we approach the great tribulation in Scripture we must recognize that “few chapters of the Bible have called forth more disagreement among interpreters than Matthew 24 and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21.”² Space does not permit a thorough analysis of these much debated passages.³ In the next few pages I will sketch the general argument for a preterist understanding of the great tribulation. I will focus on its presentation in Matthew 24 (which I briefly mention in chapter 7). All premillennialists and many amillennialists deny a truly preteristic approach to this text.⁴

Matthew 24: Interpretations

Oftentimes, non-postmillennialists argue that Matthew 24 contradicts postmillennialism’s optimism: “Postmillenarians have a different problem in that they want to support their view that the world is going to get better and better as the Gospel gradually triumphs; but this passage of

2. D. A. Carson as cited by Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 157.

3. For more detail, see: Gentry, *Perilous Times*, chs. 2–3. DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (1999). For a debate between a preterist and a futurist, see: Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (1999). The best academic commentary on Mt 24 is by France, *Gospel of Matthew (NICNT)*, 885–931. See also: Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia* (2000), *passim*. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen* (2004), *passim*. Wright, *Victory*, 339–67. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, ch. 10.

4. Amillennialists Hoekema (*Bible and the Future*, 112–117, 178) and Riddlebarger (*Amillennialism*, ch. 13) deny the preterist view. Amillennialists Adams (*The Time Is at Hand*, App. B) and Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 999–1006) affirm it.

Scripture does not support this and, in fact, predicts increasing evil with the climax at the Second Coming.”⁵ Postmillennialism “stands in sharp contrast with that whole body of biblical data which describes the days prior to the coming of Christ as days in which lawlessness abounds (Matthew 24:12)” and “Matthew 24 itself is strong proof of all this.”⁶ “Matthew 24 is such a difficult passage from the postmillennialist perspective.”⁷

Due to the prominence of the great tribulation in popular study, I will allot more space to it than to the other eschatological features in this chapter. If the great tribulation refers to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, then non-postmillennialists may not use it against postmillennialism. Furthermore, this study will undercut the pessimism of the other eschatological positions that assume the church’s predestined collapse and defeat.

The Key Text

As I note in chapter 7 the key to understanding the great tribulation in Matthew 24 is the *time statement* in verse 34: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled.” This is *the* statement with which futurists or historicists must reckon. Some point to Matthew 24:34 and such verses as “difficult texts” requiring that we “look at them carefully.”⁸ Generally commentators point to two problems in interpreting this verse: (1) We must reconcile the nearness statement of verse 34 with verse 36, which reads: “But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” (2) We must properly interpret “*all* these things,” because many of these seem worldwide and consummational (e.g., Mt 24:14, 21, 27, 29–30).

Amillennialist theologian Anthony Hoekema holds that the Lord means “this generation” in a qualitative sense, referring to an “evil” (Mt 12:45), “adulterous” (Mk 8:38), or “perverse” (Mt 17:17) body of people. “By ‘this generation,’ then, Jesus means the rebellious, apostate, unbelieving Jewish people, as they have revealed themselves in the past, are

5. Walvoord, *PKH*, 381.

6. Hanks, “The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism,” 158. Hanks, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 27.

7. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1125.

8. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 113.

revealing themselves in the present, and will continue to reveal themselves in the future.”⁹

Herman Ridderbos’ amillennial view is similar to Hoekema’s, but is somewhat broader. With Hoekema, he sees in “all these things” a *compaction of two events*: the AD 70 destruction of the temple *and* the consummative Return of Christ.¹⁰ Consequently, “all these things” will occur upon “this generation,” which in his understanding refers not just to the Jewish race, but to all “people of this particular disposition and frame of mind who are averse to Jesus and his words.” Matthew 24:34, then, serves as “a pronouncement upon the certainty of the fulfillment, without any further limitation of the time.”¹¹

Some dispensationalists hold that “this generation” means “this race,” i.e., *generic Israel*. This was the view of Pentecost in the 1950s: “The word generation is to be taken in its basic usage of ‘race, kindred, family, stock, breed,’ so that the Lord is here promising that the nation Israel shall be preserved until the consummation of her program at the second ad-vent.”¹² So, “this generation” really points to Israel throughout the ages.

Other dispensationalists hold Pentecost’s most recent view: “Since these signs will all occur in the seven years of Daniel’s seventieth week, the generation that sees the beginning of these signs will ‘not pass away until all these things happened’ (v. 34), for they all will fall within a brief span of time. . . . These signs will be given to a generation that cannot begin until after the church has been translated.”¹³ So, “this generation” speaks of Israel as she exists during the post-rapture great tribulation era. Grudem agrees that this interpretation refers to whatever “generation” sees the beginning of these things.¹⁴

9. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 113. F. Büchsel, “*genea*,” *TDNT*, 1:663. For a literary critical perspective by a dispensationalist arguing the same idea, see: Nelson, “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective,” 369–386.

10. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 502. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 178.

11. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 502.

12. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 281. Cf. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:316. SRB, 1034. English, *Studies in the Gospel According to Matthew*, 179. Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew*, 451–453. More recently Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 637.

13. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 256. See also: Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 89. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 286–287. Walvoord, *PKH*, 391ff.

14. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1126 n 26.

Amillennialist Cornelis Venema recognizes that the text must be referring to Jesus' contemporaries, but explains: "because his Olivet Discourse answers a twofold question of his disciples — when will the temple be destroyed? and, What will be the sign of his coming and the 'end of the age?' — this interpretation maintains that the 'all things' of Matthew 24:34 refers to those things in the immediate context that coincided with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It does not refer to or include, however, other things mentioned in the broader context of the discourse that refer to Christ's coming at the end of the age."¹⁵

Historic premillennialist Blomberg argues that "the problem is solved, however, if we understand Jesus to mean that this great tribulation beginning at AD 70 would in some way continue until his second coming."¹⁶ But this will not do, for then we would have the command for Christ's followers to continually flee from Judea to the mountains (Mt 24:16ff). And the enormity of the "great tribulation" would have to extend over the entirety of the inter-advent age, which would destroy the statement "then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of world until now, nor ever shall be" (24:21). Has the entirety of Christian history been an unrelenting "great tribulation"? Surely not.

The proper view is much simpler. I will present arguments that undermine all of the previously mentioned views. First, however, I need to point out specific difficulties in the other interpretive suggestions.

Responses. Regarding Hoekema's view that "this generation" is a qualitative pronouncement, this does not contradict the more obvious view that Christ speaks of his contemporary generation. In fact, it harmonizes with it. The Jews of that very era are, in fact, a rebellious generation. Theirs is a most heinous transgression (note Paul's referring to "the transgression" of Israel in Ro 11:11–12 in the Greek): the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, is an unrepeatably horrible act: "you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses" (Ac 3:14–15).¹⁷ *Because the Jews of that era reject God's Son Scripture deems them an adulterous, perverse, evil*

15. Venema, *The Promise of the*, 101–02.

16. Blomberg in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 74.

17. Mt 20:18–19; 27:11–25; Mk 10:33; 15:1; Lk 18:32; 23:1–2; Jn 18:28–31; 19:12, 15; Ac 2:22–23; 4:26–27; 5:30; 7:52; 1Th 2:14–15.

generation. Consequently, God's judgment falls on them in AD 70 (Lk 23:28–31; 1Th 2:14–16).

Ridderbos' view that Matthew 24:34 simply means these events will certainly transpire upon people of that "frame of mind" fares no better. If this speaks of both the AD 70 event and an end time great tribulation (as he argues), then these events do *not* occur to all people "who are averse to Jesus and his words." The negative sanctions fall only upon those living when "all these things" occur, which in his view *was* in AD 70 and *will be* at the Return of Christ. On this reading the judgment does not fall upon those living in the hundreds of years between the events.

Pentecost's 1958 view says that "this generation" means "the race of Israel." Ridderbos correctly notes that such a view ends up as a mere truism if "this generation" simply means "Israel as a nation."¹⁸ It would mean that Israel will not pass away until all these things happen to Israel. But in the dispensational view, Israel will never pass away. So the statement would be irrelevant as a means of identifying any prophetic time context. Obviously Pentecost himself saw the weakness of the view, which led him to scuttle it and adopt another.

What about Pentecost's 1990 view that "this generation" refers to a distant future generation that will see the outbreak of "all these things"? The Lord is speaking to his present disciples who had just pointed out the stones of the historical temple (Mt 24:1). It is *that* temple which God will be destroy (v 2). His statement regarding *that* temple's coming destruction gives rise to his entire discourse (v 3). Jesus identifies the signs that *they* would experience: "Let no one deceive *you*" (v 4), "they will deliver *you* up to tribulation" (v 9), "when *you* see the abomination" (v 15), and "when *you* see all these things" (v 33). How could they suspect he was not really speaking to them but about their descendants thousands of years later?

Venema's explanation of "all these things" is surely a case of special pleading. Who could discern that he means this? and that you must back up and sort out the material Christ presents? Indeed, we see Jesus using the same phrase in Matthew 23:36 where he surely means "*all* these things," for there he does not refer to anything that sounds like the second advent. Besides, we may more easily answer Venema's two-question concern by recognizing that *after* this statement in Mt 24:34 the

18. Ridderbos, *Commentary on Matthew*, 450.

Lord begins speaking about his second advent (see discussion of transitional nature of Mt 24:34–36 below, pp. 355–56).

The Proper View. “This generation” surely means Christ’s contemporary society, which involves *the very Jews who reject Him*. We may defend this analysis from a number of angles. First, although Matthew commonly uses the Greek *genea* (“generation”), he only does so regarding a contemporary generation. Matthew 1:14 illustrates the *temporal generation* view: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.”¹⁹ Here one generation follows upon another. A generation comes; then it goes — it does not continue for ages.

Second, in the other five instances in Matthew where the word *genea* appears with the near demonstrative (*haute*, “this”), it clearly refers to the generation *then living* (Mt 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36). In Scripture the idea of a “generation” of people involves roughly twenty-five to forty years (Nu 32:13; Ps 95:10).

Third, the phrase “this generation” appears in the very context that intimately relates to and leads into Matthew 24 (cf. 23:36–38 with 24:1–2). In Matthew 23:36 “this generation” unquestionably speaks of Jesus’ contemporaries, as even dispensationalists admit.²⁰ Here Jesus is condemning his contemporary adversaries, the scribes and Pharisees (23:2, 13–16, 23–29). He says that they will “fill up the measure of the guilt” of the *previous* generations (23:32). They will do this by persecuting Jesus’ followers (23:34), so that “upon you [scribes and Pharisees] may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed” (23:35). He concludes: “Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation” (23:36). This employs the same crucial terms as Matthew 24:34.

Truly then, “all the alternative senses proposed here . . . are artificial.”²¹ Nevertheless, Riddlebarger complains that “we should avoid reducing the Olivet Discourse to a prophecy of the events of A.D. 70 and a local judgment upon Israel, typical of preterism.” But then two paragraphs later he makes relevant observations that undermines his

19. See also: Mt 11:16; 12:39–45; 16:4; 17:17; and 23:36.

20. Ice in Gentry and Ice, *Great Tribulation*, 103–04. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew,” *BKC*, 2:75. Walvoord, *PKH*, 363. Edward E. Hindson, “Matthew,” in Hindson, *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament*, 77.

21. France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 989.

dismissive complaint: “Jesus spoke of future events which would forever change the course of redemptive history and impact Israel and all the nations of the earth. Jesus pronounced the covenant curses on Israel’s religious leaders and announced that the nation would be cut off.”²² In fact, shortly thereafter he explains that Jesus’ statement of a “great tribulation” of “this magnitude” refers “to the destruction of Jerusalem, precisely because” of “the very gravity of this tribulation” in AD 70.²³ So then, we are not *reducing* the Olivet Discourse by applying it to the events of AD 70: we are *recognizing* AD 70 as an enormous redemptive historical event of universal implications. Changing from 2000 years of Jewish exclusivism and 1000 years of a temple based worship is surely of great redemptive-historical consequence. Premillennialist Hélène Dallaire notes the significance of AD 70: “during the first century CE, and especially after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (70 CE), every aspect of religious life was threatened. . . . As a result of the destruction of the temple and its sacrificial system, it became necessary for Jewish scholars of the first century CE to develop a new system of laws and traditions.”²⁴ D. A. Carson comments that never was “so high a percentage of a great city so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem.”²⁵ This was truly a “great tribulation” — and at the very home of Christianity

A Survey of Matthew 24:1–36

Precursory signs. Certain signs will precede the temple’s destruction in “this generation.” Jesus does not want his disciples to be confused by these (24:4ff). The first few are but pre-indicators of the temple’s final judgment (24:8). This point is significant because later he instructs the disciples regarding his glorious second advent (24:36ff). He specifically says of “that”²⁶ distant event that no such signs will appear (24:36–44).

He warns his disciples that false Christs will arise and mislead many (24:5). We have many examples of great pretenders, who almost certainly made Messianic claims, such as Simon Magus (Ac 8:9, 10). Justin Martyr

22. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 160.

23. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 170–71.

24. Hélène Dallaire, “Judaism and the World to Come,” Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 55, 56.

25. Carson, “Matthew,” 501.

26. A far demonstrative, in contrast to the near demonstrative “this” in v 34.

mentions him and others: “After Christ’s ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods” (*First Apology* 26). Josephus, who witnesses Jerusalem’s fall, mentions the “deceivers and impostors, who under the pretence of divine inspiration fostering revolutionary changes” (*J.W.* 2:13:4) and “the Egyptian false prophet” (*J.W.* 2:13:5; cf. *Ac* 21:38), who even operate at the place where Jesus speaks, the Mount of Olives.

We read in the next verses of “wars and rumors of wars” (*Mt* 24:6–7a). These serve as signs of the temple’s end by referring to the collapse of the dramatically successful *Pax Romana*. Origen (AD 185–254) speaks of the “abundance of peace that began at the birth of Christ” (Origen, *Romans* 1:3). Historians observe that “in the Roman Empire proper, this period of peace remained comparatively undisturbed *until the time of Nero*.”²⁷ This ruptures with the formal beginning of the Jewish War (AD 67) and the Roman Civil Wars in the violent Year of Four Emperors (AD 68–69), which for Rome “was almost the end” (Tacitus, *Histories* 1:11).

Matthew 24:7–11 speaks of many woes. We may account for all of these woes in the events leading up to AD 70: famines,²⁸ pestilences,²⁹ earthquakes,³⁰ persecution,³¹ apostasy, and false prophets.³²

The “world” witness. Verse 14 reads: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Riddlebarger objects that “this idea applies to the end of the age and the second advent, not the events of A.D. 70.”³³

27. Reicke, *The New Testament Era*, 110.

28. *Ac* 11:28; Josephus, *Ant.* 20:2:5; *J.W.* 5:10:2–5; Tacitus, *Annals* 12:43; Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 18:2; Dio Cassius, *History* 60:11; Eusebius, *Chronicle*, Year of Abraham 2065; Orosius, *History* 7:6:17.

29. *Annals* 16:13; Suetonius, *Nero* 39.

30. *Ac* 16:26; *J.W.* 4:4:5; Tacitus, *Annals* 2:47; 12:58 14:27; 15:22; Pliny, *Natural History* 2:86; Suetonius, *Nero* 48; *Galba* 18; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4:11; Orosius 7:7; Seneca, *Epistles* 91.

31. *Ac* 4:3; 5:18–33; 6:12; 7:54–60; 8:1ff; 9:1–4, 13, 23; 11:19; 12:1–3; 13:45–50; 14:2–5, 19; 16:23; 17:5–13; 18:12; 20:3, 19; 21:11, 27; 22:30; 23:12, 20, 27, 30; 24:5–9; 25:2–15; 25:24; 26:21; 2Co 11:24; 2Th 2:14–15; Heb 10:32–34; Rev 2:9; 3:9. This was followed by the Neronian Persecution (AD 64–68) just preceding the temple’s destruction (AD 67–70); Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

32. *Ac* 13:6; 20:29; Ro 16:17, 18; 2Co 11:13, 26; Gal 2:4; 1Ti 4:1; 2Pe 2:1; 1Jn 4:1; Josephus, *J.W.* 6:5:2–3.

33. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 166.

Bloesch agrees: “Part of the problem with the preterist interpretation is that the sign of the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations manifestly did not occur at that time (see Mt 24:14; Mk 13:10).”³⁴

Lindsey declares of the word *oikoumene* that it means “*the whole inhabited earth* (which is the only possible meaning of the Greek word *oikoumene*).”³⁵ Yet the word “world” (*oikoumene*) often means the Roman Empire, as when Caesar Augustus takes a census of the “world” (Lk 2:1; cp. Ac 11:28; 24:15). The phrase “all the nations” is exegetical, referring to those nations subsumed under Rome’s imperial authority. The world to which the “gospel of the kingdom was preached” receives a witness: “the gospel which has come to you, as it has also in all the world. . . . The gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven” (Col 1:6, 23; cf. Ac 2:5; Ro 1:8; 10:18).

The Abomination of Desolation. Jesus warns: “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)” (Mt 24:15). This refers to the AD 70 event, as we may discern from several angles: (1) The temple is then standing in the “holy city” (Jerusalem, Mt 4:5; 27:53). (2) In the context the disciples point to that particular temple (Mt 24:1), giving rise to this very discourse (Mt 23:38–24:3). (3) Christ points to that temple, when he speaks of the temple’s destruction (Mt 24:2). (4) The specific time frame demands an AD 70 reference for the “abomination” (Mt 24:34).

The “abomination of desolation” will be so awful that it will result in desperate flight from the area (Mt 24:16–20). It will occur “in the holy place.” Surely this involves the temple, but it may be broader, speaking of both the city and the temple. Two problems present themselves to the temple-only view: (1) Luke 21:20 interprets the phrase as the surrounding of the *city*, which does indeed happen (Josephus, *J.W.* 5:12:1). Jerusalem itself is a holy place, being the capital of the “holy land” (Zec 2:12).³⁶ (2) The original Old Testament context mentions both “the city and the sanctuary” (Da 9:26).

34. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 79. See also: Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 124, 145. Bavinck, *The Last Things*, 114.

35. Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust*, 219.

36. Jerusalem is a holy place: Ne 11:1, 18; Isa 48:2; 52:1; 66:20; Da 9:16, 24; Joel 3:17. For Jewish references to Israel as the “holy land,” see: 2 Baruch 63:10; 4 Ezra 13:48; 2 Maccabees 1:7.

The Lord summarily designates the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Roman armies by citing Daniel's phrase, the "abomination of desolation." During those days, firebrands stir revolution within the city that results in "the outer temple [being] all of it overflowed with blood" (*J.W.* 4:5:1; cf. 5:1:1–3; 5:13:6).

Ultimately, of course, Titus' completes his victory. Then the Romans burn "the holy house itself, and all the buildings lying round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them" (*J.W.* 6:6:1). This is particularly distressing to the Jew, for the abominable Gentile (*Ac* 10:28; 11:2–3; cf. *Eph* 2:14³⁷) ultimately enters God's holy temple (cp. *Ac* 21:27–28). The first century temple has around it a constant and tangible reminder that Gentiles may not enter the temple: "When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that 'no foreigner should go within that sanctuary' for that second [court of the] temple was called 'the Sanctuary'" (*J.W.* 5:5:2; cp. 2:16:2; 6:2:4³⁸). Thus, the "abomination of desolation" involves Jerusalem's devastation (beginning with its encircling), which culminates in this final abominable act.

The eagles and lightning. This very conclusion seems to be in Christ's mind, when he states: "For wherever the carcass is, there the *eagles* [*aetos*] will be gathered together" (*Mt* 24:28 NKJV). The Roman ensigns set up by Titus in the holy of holies in the temple were *eagles* (*aetos*, *J.W.* 3:6:2). According to verse 27 the Roman armies under Christ's providential direction result in a death-dealing, destructive judgment, a "coming of the Son of Man" on Israel "like lightning."³⁹

Of this interpretation of Matthew 24:27 Amillennialist Riddlebarger complains that "the Bible does not teach a coming of Christ in judgment which is invisible and localized to Jerusalem."⁴⁰ This, though, is a

37. The Jewish Mishnah states: "If a man went through the country of the Gentiles in hilly or rocky country, he becomes unclean" (*Oholoth* 17:6). "The dwelling-places of Gentiles are unclean" (*Oholoth* 17:7).

38. See also Philo, *Leg.* 212; Mishnah, *Mid.* 2:3; *Kelim* 1:8

39. Lightning is a frequent symbol of destructive power: *2Sa* 22:15; *Job* 36:32; *Ps* 18:14; 78:48–49; 140:6; *Eze* 19:16; 20:18; 21:10; *Zec* 9:14; *Rev* 11:19; 16:18.

40. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 241.

metaphor explaining the divine providence behind AD 70, as Riddlebarger should know since he cites a Keith Mathison edited work that explains it.⁴¹ One wonders how Riddlebarger would explain the parable of vine-growers (Mt 21:33–39). For after giving it, Christ asks “when the owner of the vineyard *comes*, what will he do to those vine-growers (Mt 21:40)?⁴² When “the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they understood that He was speaking about them” (Mt 12:45). Most commentators recognize that the parable refers to the temple’s AD 70 demise.

Great tribulation. Many bring forth Matthew 24:21 to overthrow the broad-based preterist argument. Walvoord states that “interpreted literally, the tribulation clearly eclipses anything that the world has ever known by way of destruction.”⁴³ Hoekema and Riddlebarger agree.⁴⁴

But against such comments I would argue: First, the *covenantal significance* of the temple’s demise stands as the most dramatic redemptive-historical outcome of the Jewish War. Because of the carnage, Josephus laments in words quite similar to our Lord’s: “The war which the Jews made with the Romans hath been the greatest of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of” (J.W., Preface, 1, 4; cf. 5:10–5). Even to this day the Jews go the “wailing wall” of the temple to pray.

Second, we must regard the events as God’s *holy judgment* upon Jerusalem’s wickedly crucifying his Son.⁴⁵ This comes out clearly in the

41. Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?*, 51–55.

42. That Mt 21:40 uses the Greek term *elthe* (from *erchomai*) and Mt 24:27 uses the term *parousia*, does not harm this comparison. Both terms can apply to the second coming of Christ: *elthe* (*erchomai*) in 1Co 4:5; 11:26; 2Th 1:10; *parousia* in 1Co 15:23; 1Th 4:15. And *parousia* can even apply to other types of coming, such as the coming to Paul of Stephanas (1Co 16:17) and Titus (2Co 7:6), or even the *presence* of Paul among friends (Php 2:12) or in appearance (2Co 10:10). Riddlebarger even mentions this problem of the alternative uses of *parousia* (Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 263 n 44).

43. Walvoord, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy*, 3:129. See also: Turner, “Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1–41, 13.”

44. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 178. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 262.

45. The New Testament frequently emphasizes this. The Jews are responsible: Ac 2:22–23; 3:13–15a; 4:26–27; 5:30; 7:52; 1Th 2:14–15. They demand that the Romans crucify Him: Rev 17; Mt 20:18–19; 27:11–25; Mk 10:33; 15:1; Lk 18:32; 23:1–2; Jn 18:28–31; 19:12, 15.

Parable of the Vineyard (Mt 21:37–41), which portrays that generation's killing of the king's son.

Third, just a few verses after Matthew 24:21–22, the Lord mentions the Noahic Flood (vv 38–39), which *actually does* destroy the *entire* world population (Ge 7:20–22), except for one family (Heb 11:7; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 2:5). Even the futurists see their great tribulation as stopping far short of leaving only *one family* alive (dispensationalists leave one-third of the Jewish race alive at the end of the great tribulation⁴⁶). The issue before us is the magnitude of the covenantal destruction, not the magnitude of contemporary deaths.

Fourth, Christ employs *apocalyptic hyperbole* to reflect the situation's enormous gravity. Such apocalyptic language is stock-in-trade terminology in biblical prophecy. It applies to the tenth plague on Egypt (Ex 11:6) and the Babylonian captivity (Eze 5:9).⁴⁷ Both catastrophes are covenantal judgments in history causing radical changes in society and culture.

Astronomical signs. Matthew 24:29–30 reads: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Futurists see these verses as "of particular importance" in demonstrating the error of preterism,⁴⁸ showing that "this approach to 24:29–31 cannot be sustained."⁴⁹

The darkening of the sun and moon is common apocalyptic language for signifying the collapse of nations, such as in Old Testament judgments on Babylon (Isa 13:1, 10, 19), Idumea (Isa 34:3–5), Israel (Jer 4:14, 16, 23ff; Joel 2:10–11), and Egypt (Eze 32:2, 7–8, 11–12).⁵⁰ This imagery is especially appropriate for Israel, for the Mishnah teaches: "Upon three

46. For evidence of this see dispensational writings such as: Showers, "Further Evaluation of Christian Reconstructionism," 19; Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 195. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 248; PSB, 1101; PKH, 332.

47. We can even see similar hyperbole in comparing the unsurpassable faithfulness of Hezekiah and Josiah (2Ki 18:5; 23:25).

48. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 174. See also: PEBP, 255. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 178.

49. Turner, "Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1–41," 19.

50. See: Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 98–100.

things the universe stands: upon Torah, and upon the Temple service, and upon deeds of loving kindness" (*m. Aboth* 1:2). Even allegedly literalistic dispensationalists can write of Isaiah 13:10: "The statements in 13:10 about the heavenly bodies . . . no longer function may figuratively describe the total turnaround of the political structure of the Near East. The same would be true of *the heavens* trembling and *the earth* shaking (v. 13), figures of speech suggesting all-encompassing destruction."⁵¹

The final collapse of Jerusalem and the temple will be the sign that the Son of Man, whom the Jews reject and crucify, is in heaven (Mt 24:30).⁵² The fulfillment of his judgment-word demonstrates his heavenly position and power (cf. Dt 18:22). This causes the Jewish tribes of the Land (*ge*) to mourn (*kopto*, cf. Lk 23:27–28; cp. Mt 8:11–12). Through these events the Jews were to "see" the Son of Man in his judgment-coming in terrifying cloud-glory: clouds symbolize his divine majesty by stormy destruction (Isa 19:1; cf. Ps 18:10–14; La 2:1; Eze 30:3–5). The first century Sanhedrin and others will experience such in their life times (Mt 26:64; Mk 9:1; cf. Rev 1:7 with Rev 1:1, 3).

The trumpet gathering. Matthew 24:31 portrays the ultimate Jubilee of salvation, which Christ decorates with imagery from Leviticus 25. Following upon the collapse of the temple order, Christ's "messengers"⁵³ will go forth powerfully trumpeting the gospel of salvific liberation (Lk 4:16–21; Isa 61:1–3; cf. Lev 25:9–10). Through gospel preaching God gathers the elect into the kingdom of God from the four corners of the world, from horizon to horizon.⁵⁴

The remainder of the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:36–25:46) looks beyond the signs for "this generation" (*haute*, near demonstrative) to "that" (*ekeines*, far demonstrative) *sign-less* day and hour (Mt 24:34–36).⁵⁵ Thus, the Lord turns his attention from the imminent events of that generation

51. John A. Martin, "Isaiah," *BKC*, 1:1059. See also: comments at Isa 34:2–4 (p. 1084); Jer 4:23–28 (p. 1136); Joel 2:2a, 10–11 (pp. 1415–1417).

52. Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 100–101.

53. "Angels" (*aggeloi*) should be understood here as "messengers," as in Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:24, 27; 9:52. Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 103–105.

54. For the phrase "one end of heaven to the other," see: Dt 30:4; Neh 1:9. The proclamation of the gospel is to be worldwide, Isa 45:22; Ps 22:27; Lk 13:29; Ac 13:39.

55. See: Gentry, *Perilous Times*, ch. 3. See also: France, *Matthew*, 889–94. Raymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 1005.

to his second advent at the end of history. Besides these demonstratives, we may discern a turning point at 24:36 on the following bases: (1) 24:34 appears to function as a conclusion, which suggests that which follows is new material. (2) The Greek *peri de* (24:36) functions as a subject change indicator. (3) Signs highlight the earlier period (24:6, 32–33), but disappear after v 36. (4) Christ clearly knows when the destruction of the temple will be (24:14, 34), but does not know the date of his second coming (24:36). (5) The wait before 24:36 is short (“this generation,” 24:34), whereas the wait after is “long” (Mt 24:48; 25:5, 19). (6) The atmosphere before the transition involves war and turmoil, whereas after the break we see peace and normalcy (e.g., cp. 24:6–7, 15, 22 with 24:38–41). (7) Before the break an opportunity to flee exists (24:16–18), whereas none exists after it (24:42–44).

Copious, clear, and compelling evidence demonstrates that the great tribulation occurs in the first century.⁵⁶ It punctuates the end of the Jewish era and the old covenant as Christianity separates from its Jewish mother, as through “birth pangs” (Mt 24:8).⁵⁷

The Temple’s Rebuilding

Several Old Testament prophecies seem to expect the rebuilding of the Jewish temple at some time still in our future today. Among those passages are: Isaiah 56:7; 66:20–23; Jeremiah 33:18; Zechariah 14:16–21; Ezekiel 40–48; and Malachi 3:3–4.

Dispensationalists argue that Jews will return to their Land so that their Messiah can rule over an exalted Jewish kingdom. This will involve a re-established temple and sacrificial system. They believe that many Old Testament passages “predict the Millennial Temple as the center of world renewal and blessing, turning all the nations to Temple worship.”⁵⁸ In fact, dispensationalists expect *two* future temples: one built during the seven year tribulation and the other during the millennium.⁵⁹

56. Grudem is hesitant: “it seems appropriate to conclude that it is unlikely but possible that the prediction of a great tribulation has already been fulfilled.” *Systematic Theology*, 1102.

57. Of Mt 24:14 Raymond argues: “Jesus was referring here by ‘end’ to Israel’s end as a nation that followed upon the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.” *New Systematic Theology*, 1001.

58. *PEBP*, 373.

59. *PEBP*, 372–73; *DPT* 404–05. Walvoord, *PKH*, 199.

Some dispensationalists even hold these teachings to be cardinal Scriptural truths.⁶⁰ John F. Walvoord freely admits that “most thorough-going students of premillennialism [i.e., dispensationalism] who evince understanding of the relation of literal interpretation to premillennial doctrine usually embrace the concept of a literal temple and literal sacrifices.”⁶¹ John C. Whitcomb puts it even more strongly: “Consistent dispensationalism must teach the practice of animal sacrifices for a restored and regenerated Israel in the Millennium.”⁶² He adds later: “Israel will have the only sanctuary and priesthood in the world during the Millennial Kingdom; thus the temple courts and sacred areas will need to be very large to accommodate the vast number of priests and Levites.”⁶³ *The Coming Temple: Center Stage for the Final Countdown*, a dispensational work, clearly reveals this dispensational longing: “How can we be so sure that the Temple will really be rebuilt? Because the Bible says so.” The book shows that many Christians today are raising money for this rebuilding.⁶⁴

The fundamental passage undergirding this view is Ezekiel 40–48. According to dispensationalists: “Ezekiel 40–48 not only indicates that there will be a temple in the Millennium, but also seems to indicate that sacrifices will be reinstituted in this temple as well.”⁶⁵ In the millennium “the new temple will be built, dwarfing Solomon’s temple. . . . The glory of God will return through the east gate and fill the new temple, never to again depart. . . . The Prince and the Zadokites will offer sacrifices to YHWH to make atonement for sins and to express worship: sin, guilt, burnt, grain, drink, freewill, and fellowship offerings.”⁶⁶ Historic premillennialists concur: In referring to Ezekiel 40–43 (and other texts) Richard

60. Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (1989); Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (1988); Stewart and Missler, *The Coming Temple*, 188. See: Sidey, “For the Love of Zion,” 46–50.

61. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 315. See also: Ice and Price, *Ready to Rebuild*, 130ff.

62. Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices,” 215.

63. Whitcomb in *PSB*, 979.

64. Stewart and Missler, *Coming Temple*, 171. The book is dedicated: “To our wonderful friends in Israel this book is lovingly dedicated.” A major group working to this end is the Jerusalem Temple Foundation in Los Angeles, California (*Coming Temple*, 189).

65. Mark F. Rooker in Campbell and Townsend, *Case for Premillennialism*, 131.

66. *DPT*, 270.

S. Hess writes: "There can be no doubt that it was intended to be interpreted at face value. Ezekiel wanted his readers to believe that he actually did see the temple in the last days of its existence."⁶⁷ Consequently, "if the words of the prophet are to be realistically fulfilled, as the early generations of readers of, and listeners to, the prophet certainly expected, then in its canonical context, it must take place sometime in the future before the final appearance of the new heavens and the new earth. For various reasons, it seems best to describe the time of the restored temple as millennial or as the millennium."⁶⁸

This doctrine is so patently erroneous, both theologically and exegetically, that some scholars call it the "Achilles' heel of the Dispensational system of interpretation."⁶⁹ Even dispensationalists recognize that "the future function of the millennial temple (Ezekiel 40–48) has long been problematic for dispensationalists."⁷⁰

The Dispensational View

Walvoord presents the dispensational position on Ezekiel's millennial temple: "In the Millennium, apparently, sacrifices will also be offered, though somewhat different than those required under the Mosaic Law, but this time the sacrifices will be memorial, much as the Lord's Supper is a memorial in the Church Age for the death of Christ."⁷¹

The argument for such a temple is ultimately due to dispensationalism's literalistic hermeneutic. They maintain that to symbolically interpret Ezekiel's revelation is hermeneutically flawed in that it leaves "unanswered why such specific details were revealed" to Ezekiel.⁷²

67. Hess in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 33.

68. Hess in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 34.

69. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 248.

70. John C. Whitcomb, "Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel," 201.

71. Walvoord, *PKH*, 202. Fellow dispensationalist Whitcomb disagrees that the sacrifices will be only memorial: "Future animal sacrifices will be 'efficacious' and 'expiatory' only in terms of the strict provision for ceremonial (and thus temporal) forgiveness within the theocracy of Israel." Whitcomb, "Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices," 210. But Walvoord's view is the predominant view in dispensationalism, as is demonstrated by Mitchell, "The Question of Millennial Sacrifices," 248ff.

72. Some historic premillennialists agree, as per Richard S. Hess: "It seems best to describe the time of the restored temple [of Eze 40–48] as millennial or as the

Furthermore, Walvoord admits, “those who adopt the figurative interpretation have not agreed as to the meaning of this temple”⁷³ (as if differences of opinion were absent in dispensational discussions of this issue⁷⁴). Here is his rationale for a rebuilt temple: “Though it is objectionable to some to have animal sacrifices in the millennial scene, actually, they will be needed there because the very ideal circumstances in which millennial saints will live will tend to gloss over the awfulness of sin and the need for bloody sacrifice. The sacrifices offered will therefore be a reminder that only by the shedding of blood and, more specifically, the blood of Christ, can sin be taken away.”⁷⁵

Problems with the Dispensational View

First, the dispensational view is hermeneutically flawed. Previously (ch. 7) I commented on the error of literalism as a basic hermeneutic. What is more, in Ezekiel 40ff we have *marot elohim*, “divine visions.”⁷⁶ This fact could easily militate against literalism, because Scripture often ideally conceptualizes spiritual truths in visions. This is the same sort of vision occurring in earlier chapters in Ezekiel, where the prophet *frames spiritual truths as concrete realities*. See particularly Ezekiel 1–3 and 8–11 (cf. the distinction between a vision and direct revelation in Nu 12:6).

In fact, we cannot literally interpret certain aspects of the vision: (1) The site of the temple is on a “very high mountain” (Eze 40:2), although Jerusalem has no “very high mountain.” (2) The river’s source and flow is incredible — flowing from under the temple’s threshold it becomes a great river (Eze 47:1–2). (3) The river’s making the Dead Sea fresh and bringing life to all that it touches (Eze 47:6–12) is surely symbolism. (4) The Twelve Tribes receive parallel tracts of land, which would be awkward in real geography (Eze 47:13ff). The exegetical pressures against the dispensational view of future sacrifices are just too great. The *New*

millennium.” Hess, “The Future Written in the Past,” in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 34; cf. 28–35.

73. Walvoord, *PKH*, 202. Cf. Stewart and Missler, *The Coming Temple*, 227ff.

74. Two prominent dispensationalists who deny a future temple are H. A. Ironside (*Ezekiel the Prophet*, 284ff) and J. S. Baxter (*Explore the Book*, 32ff). Some such as Whitcomb have disputed the common explanation of the sacrifices as “memorials.” Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” 201–217.

75. Walvoord, *PKH*, 202

76. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 40–48*, 496.

Scofield Reference Bible (1967) notes of the *sin offering* sacrifices in Ezekiel 43:19: “the reference to sacrifices is not to be taken literally.”⁷⁷ Here it makes a major concession to dispensationalism’s critics, while breeching one of their fundamental principles, literalism.

Dispensationalists argue that the particular details in Ezekiel’s temple vision militate against an ideal portrayal. But this phenomenon is quite common in Ezekiel.⁷⁸ For instance, when Isaiah speaks of the king of Tyre, he does so in a few verses in brief, general terms (Isa 23:1–17). But Ezekiel provides many details in three chapters dealing with that king’s greatness and fall (Eze 26–28). We see the same sort of detail in prophecies portraying judgments upon Egypt and Jerusalem.

The special details of the temple vision flow from Ezekiel’s being a priest (Eze 1:3). He even characterizes Israel’s sin as centering in the temple (Eze 8–11). Even Solomon’s temple is a material symbol of heavenly and spiritual truths that are important in its construction. So why should not a vision allow for such detail in portraying spiritual truths? The spiritual truth is more glorious than the physical building.

Furthermore, John’s vision of the New Jerusalem obviously reflects back in some ways upon Ezekiel’s vision. John seems to adapt Ezekiel’s vision as portraying God’s kingdom in history.⁷⁹ But John’s is manifestly a symbolic portrayal, for the city’s size is a 1,342-mile cube. This would cause the top of the city to extend more than 1100 miles beyond the orbit of the International Space Station (ISS), which orbits at 190 miles above the earth. Like John’s vision, Ezekiel’s is an ideal symbol, not a prophecy of a literal city.

Second, the dispensational view is redemptively retrogressive. As David Brown complains over a century ago: Such a position is guilty of “Judaizing our Christianity, instead of Christianizing the adherents of Judaism.”⁸⁰

Ezekiel’s temple vision, if we interpret it literally, would reimpose *circumcision* and displace baptism (at least for males): “No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel” (Eze 44:9).

77. *New Scofield Reference Bible*, 888, note 1.

78. See: Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, 431–450.

79. Beasley-Murray, “Ezekiel,” *EBC*, 684. Most Revelation commentators see Ezekiel’s immense influence on Revelation.

80. Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming*, 352.

This re-establishes what the New Testament asserts is forever disestablished.⁸¹ Christ permanently removes the circumcisional separating “parti-tion” between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:11–21). The “true circumcision” are those who worship Christ in the Spirit (Php 3:3), for “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything” (Gal 5:6; Col 2:11).

A literalistic approach to Ezekiel’s vision would re-institute *redemptive* sacrifices, despite the new covenant’s fulfilling and removing them (Heb 7:27; 8:13; 9:26; 10:1–14). It re-institutes “the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering” (Eze 40:39; cf. 43:21), though Christ takes these away (Heb 10:5, 9, 18). Why would the Lord return again to the “weak and beggarly elements” of the ceremonial law (Gal 4:9)?

John 4:21 anticipates the removing of the temple order: “The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.” Hebrews 8:13 does as well: “When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.” Various other Old Testament prophecies transcend the Mosaic pattern of worship in the temple environs (Isa 19:19; Jer 3:16; Zec 14:21; Mal 1:11). Which shall we follow? References that transcend temple worship; or those that reintroduce it? Obviously, we are dealing with symbolic language. When properly interpreted no contradiction exists between the two types of references. Historic premillennialists recognize the problem but moan: “I cannot easily harmonize the two streams of teaching in the New Testament,” nevertheless “if we cannot flatten out all the bumps in this picture, I will not worry.”⁸² But the bumps needing flattening out are in the dispensational system. And these should be cause for worry for anyone desiring a smoothly operating system.

Significantly, the text provides us with absolutely *no hint* that these sacrifices will be “memorial,” as per dispensationalists (and contrary, by the way, to their literalism). Dispensationalist Whitcomb writes: “Ezekiel, however, does not say that animals will be offered for a ‘memorial’ of Messiah’s death. Rather, they will be for ‘atonement’ (45:15, 17, 20; cf. 43:20, 26).”⁸³ He is correct. Ezekiel’s sacrifices are those Moses

81. Ac 15; Ro 2:26–29; 4:9–12; 1Co 7:18–19; Gal 5:2–6; 6:12–15; Php 3:3; Col 2:11; 3:11.

82. Hess in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 35.

83. Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” 211.

establishes in the Levitical system, if literally conceived. The Scripture clearly speaks of their legal function in the Old Testament as *actually making reconciliation*. In fact, in Ezekiel 45:15, 17, 20 the sacrifices that will be offered in the alleged future temple are specifically said to “make reconciliation” or “atonement.” They are *not* memorials. The phraseology used here — the piel form of *kaphar* — is identical to that which Moses uses in Leviticus and Numbers.⁸⁴

How could the “millennial scene” require bloody sacrifices “because the very ideal circumstances in which millennial saints will live will tend to gloss over the awfulness of sin and the need for bloody sacrifice,” as per Walvoord? Does this mean that the universal prevalence of the righteous knowledge of God (Isa 11:9) under the direct administration of Christ “glosses over the awfulness of sin” in the dispensational millennium? Would not such universal, deeply rooted righteousness make sin all the more heinous and conspicuous? And does not the Lord want us today deeply to recognize the awfulness of sin? Why then did not the sacrificial system continue in the present? Do not the words in the administration of the Lord’s Supper point to the awful fact of sin, without animal sacrifices (1Co 11:23–32)?

The Postmillennial View

To understand the significance of Ezekiel’s visionary temple, we must keep in mind the conceptual idea which the temple structure and services embody. In essence the temple itself is a symbol: it symbolizes the *covenantal relationship* of God with his people. The heart of the covenant appears in that most important promise: “I will be your God, you will be My people.”⁸⁵ The temple is the special place where God dwells among his people (1Ki 6:12–13; Jer 7:4–7), as he does in the tabernacle preceding it (Ex 29:42; 25:22; 30:36). God’s glory is especially present in his sanctuary (1Ki 8:11; 2Ch 7:1–2), even though no temple could contain his immense being (1Ki 8:27; Isa 66:1; Jer 23:24).

This idea clearly relates to Ezekiel’s temple vision in 48:35: “The name of the city from that day shall be: The Lord is There.” That visionary

84. Lev 6:30; 8:15; 16:6, 11, 24, 30; Nu 5:8; 15:28; 29:5.

85. See earlier discussion in Chapter 6. See: Ge 17:7; Ex 5:2; 6:7; 29:45; Lev 11:45; 26:12,45; Dt 4:20; 7:9; 29:14–15; 2Sa 7:24; Ps 105:9; Isa 43:6; Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Eze 11:20; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23; Hos 1:10; Zec 8:8; 13:9; 2Co 6:18; Rev 21:3, 7.

temple symbolizes God's glorious presence in Christ's kingdom, which comes in the new covenant era, and it is so because even further defined, it is symbolic of Christ Himself. *Christ is the true presence of God* which could only be hinted at in the temple construction. "Ezekiel's vision of the new temple is part of this prophetic pattern of a restoration so total that it sublimates the ceremonial structure in glory. Ezekiel's restoration returns David to the throne, and sees a temple that is a sanctuary of Paradise, where the river of life flows from God's throne past trees whose leaves are for the healing of the nations."⁸⁶

One of the Old Testament's closing prophecies is Malachi 3:1: "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight." This coming is the message of the New Testament: the Lord has come to "tabernacle" among us (Jn 1:14, Gk.; *ekenosen*, cf. Jn 1:1; 1Jn 1:1–3). When he comes, shepherds visit him, while out in the fields keeping *sacrificial sheep* destined for the temple.⁸⁷ When his parents present him forty days later in the temple, Simeon praises him as the "glory of Your people Israel" (Lk 2:32) — language reflecting God's Shekinah glory, which evidences God's presence in the temple (Ex 40:34, 35; 1Sa 4:21–22).

He stands as the glorious realization of the temple's meaning, for he who sees him sees the Father (Jn 14:9), for "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). He even transfigures before his disciples as a glorious display of his true identity (Mt 17:1–8; Mk 9:2–8). Consequently, he justly claims to be *greater than the temple* (Mt 12:6), for he is its fulfillment, being the very presence of God. In fact, he is "the stone which the builders rejected" which "has become the chief cornerstone" of God's new temple (Mt 21:42).⁸⁸

Consequently, as his prophetic ministry opens Christ stands in the shadow of the earthly temple and informs Jerusalem of this glorious truth: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," by which "He was speaking of the temple of His body" (Jn 2:19, 21), a temple "not made with hands" (Mk 14:58). Therefore, he offers Himself to men as the

86. Clowney, "The Final Temple," 106. I am indebted to Clowney for his insights presented in this article, several of which I relate below.

87. Hendriksen, 150. The presence of shepherds in the fields in winter months indicates the tending of sacrificial sheep.

88. See McKelvey, "Christ the Cornerstone," 195–204. Joachim Jeremias, "*lithos*," *TDNT*, 4:268ff.

heavenly manna, which was once housed in the Ark of the Covenant in the temple.⁸⁹ He offers the living waters of Ezekiel's temple (Eze 47; cf. Joel 3:18; Zec 14:8) to his hearers (Jn 4:10–15; 7:38–39). He is the sacrificial “Lamb of God” destined for temple service (Jn 1:29). As he establishes the new covenant (Lk 22:20), he impresses upon the hearts of his followers God's Law (Mt 5:16–20; cp. Jer 31:31–34; 2Co 4:3, 6; Heb 8:8–11), which was formerly kept on stone tablets in the Holy of holies (Ex 25:21; Dt 10:5; Heb 9:4). Thus, when he dies the temple era formally ends with the rending of the temple veil (Mt 27:51). When he speaks of the temple's absolute destruction in AD 70, he does not intimate any God-endorsed rebuilding (Mt 24⁹⁰), nor the return of the temple *mount* to holy status (Jn 4:21–24) — indeed, he speaks of faith casting the temple mount into the sea (Mt 21:21).

Christ is the True Temple. Many commentators note John's demonstrating Jesus' fulfillment of the temple (Jn 2) as one of the purposes of his Gospel, as well as his fulfilling the sabbath (Jn 5), the Passover (Jn 6), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7).⁹¹ His people in mystical union with him are called his “body” (Ro 12:5; 1Co 12:27; Eph 4:12). Thus, we who are his people are also designated a “temple.”⁹² This is due to his indwelling presence among his people, so that we, having the true temple within, may be called a temple. Christ in us is the hope of glory (Col 1:27). Not only is he who is the true temple in us, but we are also “in Christ.”⁹³

Thus, prophecies regarding the temple's rebuilding (when not referring to Zerubbabel's temple) speak of Christ and his building his church (Mt 16:18; cf. Zec 6:12–13). He himself is the foundation and

89. Jn 6:49–58; Rev 2:17; cf. Ex 16:33–34; Heb 9:4.

90. Compare my study of Daniel 9:24–27 in the preceding chapter with the great tribulation study above (particularly Mt 24:15; Da 9:27). The temple is to be finally destroyed, never to be endorsed by God again.

91. See Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 77. Commentators noting this include: C. H. Dodd, Raymond Brown, R. Schnackenburg, B. Lindars, C. K. Barrett, and Leon Morris.

92. 1Co 3:16–17; 6:19; 2Co 6:16; Eph 2:19–20; 1Pe 2:5–9.

93. Ro 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1, 2; 39; 9:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10; 1Co 1:2, 30; 3:1; 4:10, 15, 17; 15:18, 19, 22, 31; 16:24 2Co 1:21; 2:14, 17; 3:14; 5:17, 19; 11:3; 12:2, 19; Gal 1:22; 2:4, 16; 3:14, 17, 26, 28; 5:6; 6:15; Eph 1:1, 3, 10, 12, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:11; 4:32; Php 1:1, 13; 2:1, 5; 3:3, 9, 14; 4:21; Col 1:2, 4, 28; 2:5; 1Th 2:14; 4:16; 5:18; 1Ti 1:14; 2:7; 3:13; 2Ti 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 10; 3:12, 15.

cornerstone (Lk 20:17; 1Co 3:11, 16–17; Eph 2:20). As Christ's people we are *priests* (Ro 15:16; 1Pe 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6) who offer our bodies as *living sacrifices* (Ro 12:1–2) and our service as acceptable *sweet smell offerings* (2Co 2:14–16; Php 4:18; Heb 13:15–16; 1Pe 2:5). Thus, “we have an *altar* from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb 13:10). As he converts more people by his sovereign grace, his new covenant temple grows stone by stone (Eph 2:21; 4:12, 16; 1Pe 2:5, 9). As a master builder Paul labors in that temple (1Co 3:9–17).

Through a series of Old Testament temple and ritual allusions, Paul points to *the new temple of God*: “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 6:16–7:1). So, as Clowney well notes, “we must recognize that this is not spiritualization in our usual sense of the word, but the very opposite. In Christ is *realization*. It is not so much that Christ fulfills what the temple means; rather Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed.”⁹⁴

Taylor well distills the basic ideas in Ezekiel's complex temple vision: (1) The building's immaculate symmetry portrays the perfection of God's plan for his people. (2) The meticulous detail of the rites indicates the centrality of worship in the new covenant era. (3) The focus on the temple points to God's abiding presence with his redeemed community. (4) The waters of life flowing from the temple express Holy Spirit's life-giving operation in the new age. (5) The careful allocation of levitical duties and land apportionment speak of the duties and privileges of God's people in the future.⁹⁵

The New Creation

In chapter 12 I refer to the new creation. There I focus on the *consummational* new heavens and new earth. In this chapter I will concentrate on the *pre-consummational* new creation.

94. Clowney, “The Final Temple,” 119.

95. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 253–354.

Oftentimes non-postmillennial eschatologies do not fully appreciate the tremendous redemptive-historical transformation that Christ initiates in his incarnation. Premillennial eschatologies tend to postpone the effects of redemption to the end of history, after the historically discontinuous second advent.⁹⁶ Amillennial eschatology tends to remove the transformational blessings either to above or beyond history, either to heaven or to the consummational new earth.⁹⁷ Postmillennialism, however, expects Christ's redemptive labor to have a transformational effect in time and on earth, continuous with present spiritual realities already set in motion by Christ.

The major passage setting forth this spiritual transformation is Isaiah 65:17–25. In that glorious scene Isaiah presents a dramatic image of the gospel economy's historical impact. This economy will develop through “a multi-stage process that culminates at the final judgment.”⁹⁸ This *redemptive* economy will gradually transform the world ethically and spiritually, so that it appears as a “new heavens and a new earth” of which “the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa 65:17).

Isaiah's vision is the background of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:17, which refers to contemporary spiritual realities: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”⁹⁹ According to New Testament theology, the Second Adam, Christ, stands at the head of a new creation (Ro 5:14; 1Co 15:22, 45).

Calvin views Isaiah 65:17–25 as a new covenant blessing that results from a change in covenantal administration:

By these metaphors he promises a remarkable change of affairs; as if God had said that he has both the inclination and the power not only to restore his Church, but to restore it in such a manner that it shall appear to gain new life and to dwell in a new world. These are exaggerated modes of expression; but the greatness of such a blessing, which was to be manifested at the coming of Christ, could

96. See: North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (1990).

97. See my response to amillennialist Gaffin's article “Theonomy and Eschatology,” in Gentry, “Whose Victory in History?” North, *Theonomy*, 207–230. See also: North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, ch. 5.

98. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 104.

99. See: Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, TNTC, 75–76. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 209. See also: Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 48–49.

not be described in any other way. Nor does he mean only the first coming, but the whole reign, which must be extended as far as to the last coming.¹⁰⁰

The transformational effect of the gospel kingdom is such that those who are newly born of its power¹⁰¹ are thereby constituted *new creatures*: “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Gal 6:15). The transforming power of the gospel creates a “new man” of two warring factions, Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:15–18). Gospel-transformed new creatures are to lay aside the old self and take on the new (Eph 4:22–23), which is “created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24; cf. Col 3:9–11). This is because they are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

This glorious conception involves both a re-created “Jerusalem” and “people” (Isa 65:18–19). Interestingly, in Galatians 6 Paul speaks of the new creation in the context of a transformed “Israel of God” existing in his day: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a *new creation*. and as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon *the Israel of God*” (Gal 6:15–16; cf. Ro 2:28–29). In that same epistle, he urges a commitment to the “Jerusalem above” (the heavenly Jerusalem, Heb 12:22) rather than to the cast out Jerusalem that now is (the historical capital city of Israel, Gal 4:25–26).

The *heavenly Jerusalem* is the *bride of Christ* that comes down from God to replace the earthly Jerusalem (Rev 21:2–5) in the first century (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). With the shaking and destruction of the old Jerusalem in AD 70, the heavenly (re-created) Jerusalem replaces her: His “voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made [i.e., the Levitical ritual system¹⁰²], that the things which

100. Calvin, *Isaiah*, 4:397–398.

101. Jn 3:3; Jas 1:18; 1Pe 1:23; 1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 5:1, 18.

102. Heb 9:11 (cf. vv 2, 8, 24) reads: “Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not *made with hands*, that is, not of *this creation*.” The old tabernacle/temple system is “made with hands” (Heb 9:24, cf. 2, 11) and is of “this creation,” whereas the new is heavenly (8:5; 9:23). Notice the contextual contrast between Mt. Sinai, where the

cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we *are receiving* a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:26–28; cp. 8:13).

Contrary to amillennialism, there is no “substantial evidence . . . for identifying [Isaiah 65:17ff] with the perfect eternal state.”¹⁰³ We must consider Isaiah’s specific statements. He speaks of glorious elevated conditions — but conditions still continuous with the present. We see this in the experiences of birth, aging, death, time, sin, and curse: “No more shall an *infant* [‘ol, “suckling”] from there live but a few days, nor an *old man* who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall *die* one *hundred years old*, but the *sinner* being one hundred years old shall be *accursed*” (Isa 65:20). This is preconsummational, for sinners will not be in the post-resurrection perfect state.

Adams defends the amillennial interpretation of these elements with a rhetorical question: “How else can perfection be described in words which have imperfect objects and concepts as referents?”¹⁰⁴ The answer is: “Easily!” Surely it is not impossible to think of post-resurrection perfection without mentioning six elements of temporal imperfection in the same sentence. Could Isaiah not say that in the (eternal, consummate) new heavens “no infants will be born, no one will age, no sin will exist, and the curse forever ceases”? What is so difficult with stating matters in this way? Does not our Lord inform us that “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30)?

Fellow amillennialist Hoekema also deals with the passage rhetorically by referring to Isaiah 65:19: “Can one imagine death without weeping?”¹⁰⁵ This is surely less difficult than imagining death without death (cf. 65:20)! But in the context, we must understand the reference *culturally*: when God’s blessings come upon his city and people, then will pass away the “old things” (65:17) of cultural judgment, devastation, and sorrow due to sinful rebellion (65:2–8, 11–12). In Isaiah’s day the Lord notes: “Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and wail for grief of spirit” (Isa 65:14). The rejoicing of God in his people *collectively considered* will lead to the relief of their

ceremonial system is received (12:18–21) and heavenly Mt. Zion (12:22–25).

103. Adams, *Time Is at Hand*, 15.

104. Adams, *Time Is at Hand*, 15.

105. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 202.

sorrow caused by his past displeasure and cultural wrath (cf. Dt 28:15ff; Ps 137). No longer will the “cry of distress” be heard from his people (cf. 2Sa 22:7; Ps 18:6; Isa 19:20), because the world will be dominated by them and not by the oppressor (65:25).

The covenantal language here shows that *culture-wide disinheritance* caused by rebellion will be *a thing of the past*. Instead, covenantal inheritance will prevail: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isa 65:21–22). This reverses covenantal curse language (which Isaiah uses so frequently): “You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes” (Dt 28:30; cf. Zep 1:13; Mic 6:15).

The new heavens and new earth here (and many places elsewhere) refer to the new covenant era. It characterizes the system-wide transformation that occurs with the coming and spread of the gospel.

Conclusion

Although one’s millennial view should flow out of a comprehensive understanding of Scripture, often a few particular biblical features play an inordinately significant role in the millennial debate. Misapprehending these discrete features can distort the overall system of biblical eschatology.

In this chapter I survey several prominent features of God’s prophetic Word to show how postmillennialism understands them within its eschatological framework. Though opponents deem some of these to be contra-indicative of postmillennialism (e.g., the great tribulation, the rebuilding of the temple), they are perfectly accounted for in the post-millennial system. The great tribulation is the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The rebuilt temple is the bride of Christ, his body, the church.

Explaining the new heaven and new earth language in Isaiah 65 poses no problem for the postmillennialist, nor should it pose a problem for the premillennialist. That a period of unprecedented, literal blessings is in store for mankind prior to the resurrection and the final judgment is not a hermeneutical problem for either system of interpretation. It is, however, a decided problem for the amillennialist.

ESCHATOLOGICAL CHARACTERS

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. (Mt 12:30)

As in the last chapter, I will now consider some stray issues often associated with eschatological studies. Here I will focus on various eschatologically significant characters.

The Prophet Elijah

In Malachi 4:5 we have the last word God speaks to Israel before Christ's incarnation. Malachi presents an eschatologically significant matter that dispensationalists and other evangelicals have debated for years. That brief reference reads: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal 4:5).

The Significance of Malachi 4:5

The significance of this reference to Elijah is two-fold. First, in antiquity Jews widely anticipate that literal Elijah will appear before the end. The great Talmudic scholar John Lightfoot notes: "It would be an infinite task to produce all the passages out of the Jewish writings which one might concerning the expected coming of Elias."¹ The *DJBP* notes that "out of this model of ideal prophet evolved speculations about an eschatological prophet (Mal 4:5) who would serve as a restorer of the social order (Mal 4:6). By the Tannaitic period the eschatological Elijah was thus imagined as the ultimate arbiter of unsettled legal and ritual questions."² Consequently, the Jews deem Elijah "the loftiest prophet of the OT," so that "no OT hero fills a larger place in Jewish tradition."³ The

1. Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament*, 2:243.

2. *DJBP*, 189.

3. J. Strachan, "Elijah," *DB*, 1:687, 691. See: Sirach 48:1ff.

New Testament mentions no other Old Testament prophet as many times as Elijah (thirty).

Second, the Gospels even allude to Elijah and this very reference several times in conjunction with Christ's ministry. Due to Malachi 4:5 the first century Jews hold that Elijah will come before the great Day of the Lord (Mt 17:10–12; Mk 9:11–12). Consequently, during John Baptist's ministry many think he is Elijah (Jn 1:21–25), because he preaches in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17). When John denies he is Elijah, many surmise Jesus might be (Mt 16:13–14; Mk 8:27–28; Lk 9:7–8, 18–19). As Christ is dying some mistakenly believe he is calling for Elijah from the cross (Mt 27:47–49; Mk 15:35–36). In a literal sense Elijah *does* come during Christ's ministry, for he appears with Moses when the Lord transfigures before them (Mt 17:3–4; Mk 9:4–5; Lk 9:30–33). Two of these references note that this event brings Malachi 4 to the minds of the three disciples who witness it (Mt 17:11–13; Mk 9:12–13).

The Fulfillment of Malachi 4:5

The evidence is really quite clear that Christ fulfills Malachi's Elijianic prophecy in the first century. This not only undercuts both dispensationalism's hermeneutic and its eschatology, but supports preteristic expectations and postmillennial eschatology.

In Matthew 17:10–13 we read:

And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. . . ." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

Here Christ teaches his disciples that John the Baptist fulfills the Malachi prophecy *covenantally*, even though the Jews do not understand it. John introduces the restoration of all things, i.e., redemptive history's final phase in Christ's kingdom — with its power to progressively bring the world to salvation (as per postmillennialism, Mt 13:31–33; Jn 3:17; Ro 11:15). Christ establishes the kingdom and then returns to heaven to await the historical conquest of all his enemies (Ac 2:33–35; 1Co 15:21–27; cf. Mt 28:18–20). He will not return until he brings all things under his providential rule (Ac 3:21; 1Co 15:25).

Objections to the Fulfillment of Malachi 4:5

Dispensational objections sometimes approach desperation. Some commentators even forsake their literalism and allow that John does fulfill the passage. Pentecost writes: “The prophecy is interpreted by the Lord as being fulfilled, *not in literal Elijah*, but in one who comes in Elijah’s spirit and power.”⁴ The *Prophecy Study Bible* explains at Matthew 11:14: “Jesus’ statement that John was ‘Elijah who is to come’ indicates the ministry predicted by Malachi 4:5–6.”⁵

Others focus on (and misinterpret) a reference similar to Matthew 17. In a critique of postmillennialist Boettner, dispensationalist Hoyt writes: “When citing a prophecy from Malachi 4:5 and the New Testament reference to it, Boettner erred in ignoring part of the text in Matthew (11:14). Christ said that John the Baptist would have stood for Elijah if they would receive him. But they did not, which must mean that Elijah is yet to come. The reason Christ could make reference to John the Baptist as he did was that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17). It therefore seems obvious that there was a principle in relation to Elijah which was also true of John the Baptist, and the reference made by Christ was by way of application and not interpretation.”⁶ In short, John could have been Elijah, but is not, due to Israel’s sin.

But Matthew 17 is unambiguously clear. In Matthew 11 Christ is rebuking the spiritual obstinacy (11:16ff) of the crowds that come to hear him (11:7). He urges them to hear and understand (11:15). He does not fear that they will derail prophetic fulfillment by their unbelief. When he says, “He who has ears to hear” (11:15), he does not imply that his views of John may be invalid; rather he alludes to the spiritual dullness of those who reject his teaching (Mt 13:9, 43; Mk 4:9; Lk 8:8; 14:35). The reason why John comes in the “spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk 1:17), and why Israel should receive him as “Elijah who was to come” (Mt 11:14), is because he fulfills the Elijah prophecy.

Neither may John the Baptist’s denial of being Elijah (Jn 1:21) undercut his fulfilling the prophecy.⁷ He is merely denying that he is the

4. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 312 (emph. mine); cf. English, “The Two Witnesses,” 666.

5. *PSB*, 1131.

6. Hoyt, “A Dispensational Response,” in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 147–148. Cf. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr. in *BKC: NT*, 60.

7. Walvoord, *PKH*, 339.

actual *corporeal* return of Elijah from heaven, which first century Jews widely anticipate. In the Talmud we read: “But when God shall bring [Elijah] to life in the body, he shall send him to Israel before the day of judgment.”⁸

The Antichrist

Perhaps more than any other evil figure in Scripture, Christians most fear the Antichrist. After all, “in premillennial eschatology the final world ruler who opposes God and his Christ (particularly in relation to his deity), oppresses God’s elect (especially the Jewish people), and seeks to usurp the place of divine worship through desecration of the holy (especially Jerusalem and its temple) is known as the Antichrist.”⁹

Many dispensationalists believe he is alive today. In an interview in *Eternity* magazine in 1977 Hal Lindsey responds to a question regarding the Antichrist: “In my personal opinion, he’s alive somewhere now.”¹⁰ This reminds us of Tertullian’s statement 1700 years ago that Antichrist “is now close at hand.”¹¹ One poorly timed 1988 book was *Gorbachev: Has the Real Antichrist Come?*¹² Best-selling author Dave Hunt writes that there “is strong evidence indeed that the Antichrist could appear very soon — which means that the rapture may be imminent.”¹³ He is convinced that “somewhere, at this very moment, on planet Earth, the Antichrist is almost certainly alive.”¹⁴ Mark Hitchcock’s 2002 book asks: *Is the Antichrist Alive Today?* He titles chapter 8: “Antichrist is Alive and Well.”¹⁵

The dispensational *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* even includes a heading: “Is the Antichrist Alive Today?” In so doing it struggles to correct fellow dispensationalists who “tragically” are “guessing dates and selecting possibilities for the Antichrist.”¹⁶ Of course, this sort of belief

8. See sampling of Talmudic references in: Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 2:243–247.

9. *DPT*, 43.

10. Lindsey, “The Great Cosmic Countdown,” 80.

11. Tertullian *De Fuga* 12.

12. Faïd, *Gorbachev* (1988).

13. Hunt, *Peace, Prosperity, and the Coming Holocaust*, 256.

14. Hunt, *Global Peace*, 5.

15. Hitchcock, *Is the Antichrist Alive Today?* (2003).

16. *PEBP*, 26.

has for generations been the tendency among dispensationalists, who constantly point out numerous possible Antichrist candidates.¹⁷

Amillennialists are not so excitable, but they generally concur with Cornelis Venema that: “the Bible does teach that the Antichrist will appear prior to Christ’s return at the close of this present age. This Antichrist will likely be a person in whom the growing opposition to the gospel and truth of God’s Word will be concentrated.”¹⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones holds that “we can, I think, be certain that the Antichrist will ultimately be concentrated in one person, who will have terrible power, and will be able to work miracles and do wonders in a way that will almost deceive the elect themselves.”¹⁹ Anthony Hoekema states that “we can thus expect to continue to find antichristian powers and persons in every era of the church of Jesus Christ until his Second Coming,” consequently, “it would not be correct to say that John had no room in his thinking for a future personal antichrist, since he still looks for antichrist who is coming.”²⁰ Raymond, citing others, holds that Antichrist is “a distinct personage who will appear on the scene of this world just prior to the advent of Christ,” and states that he “will be revealed and will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even set himself up in the God’s temple (the church), proclaiming himself to be God.”²¹

Ironically, the least helpful verses for developing the dispensational, premillennial, and amillennial views of the Antichrist are the *only* ones that expressly mention him. “Antichrist” appears only four times in all of Scripture: in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; and 2 John 7. (John Walvoord in his comprehensive *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* does not even mention these verses in his treatment of “Prophecy in 1, 2, and 3 Jn and the Epistle of Jude” — or anywhere else in his 800-page work.²²)

17. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist* (1995). Kyle, *The Last Days are Here Again*, ch. 7. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (1992). McGinn, *Antichrist*, 252–62. Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (1991). DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (1991). North, *Rapture Fever* (1993). See especially a dispensational analysis of the problem which adopts a modified preterism: Pate and Haines, *Doomsday Delusions* (1995).

18. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 178.

19. Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, 118.

20. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 158.

21. Raymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 1032.

22. Walvoord, *PKH*, 513ff. On the cover and beneath the title of this massive work we read: “All the prophecies of Scripture explained in one volume.”

Many writers argue that other figures, such as Daniel's Little Horn, Paul's Man of Sin, and John's Beast, refer to a personal, end-time Antichrist: The "organic development of sin finally culminates in the 'man of sin' (II Thessalonians 2:3–12). That is the kingdom of Antichrist."²³ "Plainly the idea [in Rev 13:18] is that the world . . . ultimately will bring forth the antichrist, who is here called the beast."²⁴ "Now let me give you my proof that Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13 all refer to the Antichrist."²⁵ "The New Testament also teaches us to look for a single, final antichrist in the future (see 2Th 2:3–4)."²⁶ Under "Titles of the Antichrist," the *Popular Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* lists "the beast," "the man of lawlessness, and Daniel's "little horn."²⁷ But these associations are surely mistaken. Not only do none of the contexts of these titles mention the word "Antichrist," but they actually contradict the explicit references to Antichrist. This is all the more remarkable in that the word "Antichrist" does not even appear in the context of the beast of Revelation, despite the fact that Revelation's author, John, is the only New Testament writer who does employ the word "Antichrist" elsewhere.²⁸

The origin of the doctrine of Antichrist in the first century is obscure. It does seem that many Christians think of the Antichrist as a particular individual. John mentions this widespread belief: "You have heard that the Antichrist is coming" (1Jn 2:18b). John's point in mentioning him, however, is to correct the false views that are confusing his audience.

Pentecost cites 1 Jn 4:2–3 once, but does not explain it or allude to the other verses in his treatment of "Antichrist" in his recent 350-page work. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 302ff.

23. Hanko, "Response to 'The "Other Side" of Postmillennialism,'" 298.

24. Heys, "Our Hope for Our Savior's Return," 152. See also Riddlebarger, *The Man of Sin*, 108–09, 121.

25. Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, 115.

26. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 70. See discussion of 2 Thessalonians 2 below. For further detail, see: Gentry, *Perilous Times*, ch. 4.

27. *PEBP*, 24; see also: 69. See also: *DPT*, 44–47.

28. Dispensationalist Walvoord mentions Antichrist in his discussion of the Little Horn in Daniel 8, which he also draws into his treatment of the man of lawlessness and the beast. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 240, 493. Amillennialist Anthony A. Hoekema and Gregory K. Beale, as well as premillennialist George Eldon Ladd do, as well: Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 154–162; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*; 691. Ladd, *The Last Things*, ch. 6.

Early Christians are picking up many false eschatological concepts. John even corrects a false notion regarding his own living until Christ's second advent (Jn 21:22–23). Paul uses a false teaching regarding baptism for the dead to drive a point home regarding the resurrection (1Co 15:29). Paul often urges his followers to hear him and preserve those things he teaches (Php 4:9; 1Th 2:13; 2Ti 1:13; 2:2). We should expect this sort of confusion, for the Lord himself taught his disciples that within his own generation (Mt 24:34) “many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many” (Mt 24:5); “many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many” (Mt 24:11); and “false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Mt 24:24).

Warfield provides helpful insights into John's teaching on the Antichrist: “he makes three declarations concerning Antichrist which appear to traverse its implications. He transposes Antichrist from the future to the present. He expands him from an individual to a multitude. He reduces him from a person to a heresy.”²⁹ These three observations undermine the bulk of modern Antichrist discussion.

Antichrist's Time

John's readers are hearing that though Antichrist is not yet on the scene, he nevertheless “is coming.” but John informs them that this “antichrist” “is *now* already in the world” (1Jn 4:3). As Warfield notes “that post-positd ‘already’ [carries] with it the utmost strength of assertion.”³⁰ John writes: “this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (1Jn 4:3b). John clearly warns them that that which they “heard was coming” is “now already in the world.” In addition, he remarks: “As you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, *even now* many antichrists have come” (1Jn 2:18). Due to the appearing of these antichrists, his readers should understand that “it is the last hour” (1Jn 2:18). They are not harbingers of a distantly future Antichrist, for their presence is the signal that “the last hour” has already “come” (*gegonasin*). The “even now” emphasizes the presence of that which they fear (“as you heard”).

An objection from one amillennialist theologian against post-millennialism is postmillennialism's removal of the antichrist not only

29. Warfield, “Antichrist,” *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:358.

30. Warfield, “Antichrist,” *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:358.

from our future expectation but from the very center of time: “more and more that kingdom of darkness comes to manifestation as time progresses. At the very center of time therefore, stands the development of the Antichristian world power. Really, postmillennialism has no room for Antichrist in its thinking. . . . Antichrist cannot be taken seriously.”³¹

Antichrist's Impersonality

In redirecting his readers' focus from the Antichrist's future to his contemporary existence, John points out that the Antichrist is a *movement*, rather than an individual. In dealing with the idea of “the Antichrist,” he writes: “even now many antichrists have come” (1Jn 2:18). In fact, Antichrist is a “spirit” (1Jn 4:3) that pervades these many “antichrists” (1Jn 2:18), which involve “many deceivers” (2Jn 7). Such views as Hoekema's are surely mistaken: “The New Testament also teaches us to look for a single, final antichrist in the future (see 2Th 2:3–4).”³²

Antichrist's Tendency

Antichrist really is not a multitude of people, but rather the “spirit” (1Jn 4:3) among them that promotes deception (2Jn 7) regarding Christ. “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1Jn 2:22). John clearly applies the conception of the one Antichrist (*ho antichristos*) to the generic tendency to promote lies about the identity of Christ. He repeats this point in his second letter: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and the antichrist [*ho antichristos*]” (2Jn 7). Thus, “according to 1 John, what is to be dreaded about the Antichrist is not the unleashing of awesome destruction but the fomenting of heresy.”³³

On the basis of these four references we learn that Antichrist is not an individual, malevolent ruler looming in our future. John was “not looking to the appearance of some supernatural being in the prophesied future.”³⁴ Rather, *Antichrist is a contemporary heretical tendency* regarding the person of Christ, which is current among many in John's day. Hoekema errs when he writes: “Yet it would not be correct to say that

31. Hanks, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 25–26.

32. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 70.

33. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist*, 17.

34. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist*, 17.

John had no room in his thinking for a personal antichrist, since he still looks for an antichrist who is coming.³⁵ As we shall see below, the beast of Revelation and the man of lawlessness are also contemporary realities in the first century — though wholly distinct from Antichrist.

The Beast of Revelation

Next to Antichrist the beast of Revelation is probably one of the best-known eschatological images in Scripture.³⁶ Much has been written about him — most of worthless because most writers gloss over a fundamental element necessary to properly identifying the beast: John's own declared expectations regarding Revelation's time frame.

The Beast's Time

As I show in Chapter 7 John clearly expects his prophesied events to occur in his day. Revelation opens and closes by stating the imminence of the events specified within. Revelation 1:1a reads: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must shortly take place." Revelation 22:10 warns: "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand."

In light of Revelation's significance to its first-century audience (Rev 1:4, 11; 2–3), the beast must be someone relevant to that audience. Revelation 13 portrays him as a horrible and powerful foe attempting to crush God's people.

The Beast's Identity

Most commentators agree that the beast imagery in Revelation shifts between the generic and the specific.³⁷ That is, sometimes the beast seems to picture a kingdom, sometimes an individual leader of that kingdom. At some places the beast has seven heads, which are seven kings collectively considered. In Revelation 13:1 John notes that he "saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads." Revelation 17:10 specifically notes that the seven heads represent "seven kings." Thus, the *beast* is generically portrayed as a *kingdom*. Kingdoms,

35. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 158.

36. For a more detailed argument see my book, *The Beast of Revelation* (2002).

37. Walvoord, *PKH*, 582. See also: Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 202; Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1:349; Mauro, *Things Which Soon Must Come to Pass*, 402; Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 306–307.

however, have representatives. This is why, in the same contexts John also speaks of the beast as an individual. John urges his readers to “calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of *a man*” (Rev 13:18). In Revelation 17:11 the interpreting angel tells John and his readers “the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and *is one of the seven*.” Many commentators of various schools of interpretation recognize this frustrating shifting-referent feature.

His Generic Identity. The beast’s generic identity is the first century Roman Empire. According to Revelation 17:9 the beast’s seven heads represent “seven mountains.” Perhaps nothing is more obvious in Revelation than this: the seven mountains symbolize Rome. After all, *Rome* is the one city in history distinguished by and recognized for its seven mountains.³⁸ The referent is virtually beyond doubt: the very Rome existing in the day of John’s seven churches (Rev 1:4, 11; 2:1–3:22) — *not* a “revived Roman Empire,” as per dispensationalism.³⁹

His Specific Identity. But who is the beast *individually* considered? John informs us that the beast imagery also applies particularly to “a man.” The beast in his personal incarnation is Nero Caesar. He and he alone fits the bill as the specific or personal expression of the beast. This vile character fulfills all the requirements in the very text of Revelation. Notice the following:

First, the *number of the beast*. In Revelation 13:18 the beast’s number is “666.” The usefulness of this number lies in the fact that in ancient days alphabets serve as both phonetic symbols and arithmetical values.⁴⁰ Significantly, a common *Hebrew* spelling of his name is: *Nrwn Qsr*, which provides the numerical sum 666.⁴¹

38. See pagans writers: Ovid, *De Tristia* 1:5:69 and *Elegiae* 4; Claudian, *In Praise of Stilicon* 3:135; Statius, *Sylvae* 1; 2:191; Pliny, *Natural History* 3:5, 9; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6:782 and *Georgics* 2:535; Horace, *Carmen Secularae* 7; Propertius 3:10, 57; Martial 4:64; Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 6:5. Christians: Tertullian, *Apology* 35; Jerome, *Letter to Marcella*; and *Sibylline Oracles* 2:18; 11:114; 13:45; 14:108. Interestingly, when I mentioned this view in a lecture in Lynchburg, Virginia, I heard much laughter. Someone pointed out to me that Lynchburg was also on seven hills and that this implied that perhaps Jerry Falwell was the beast!

39. Walvoord, *PKH*, 233, 608–14; *PEBP*, 343; *PSB*, 994.

40. For the Hebrew values of the alphabet see: For Hebrew see: *Gesenius*, 30. Or see the appropriate letters at their entries in *BDB* (1972).

41. Hillers, “Revelation 13:18,” 65. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim* (1903). For a description of how this works, see ch. 16 below.

Second, the *textual variant*. Hebrew would not have been widely known by non-Jewish, Greek-speaking Roman informers. Consequently, some manuscripts change 666 to 616. The difference surely is no accident of sight made by an early copyist. The numbers 666 and 616 are not similar in appearance in the original Greek — whether spelled out in words or written out as numerals. Textual scholars agree: it must be intentional.⁴²

Although we cannot be absolutely certain, we may make a strong and most reasonable case for the following conjecture. John, a Jew, used a Hebrew spelling of Nero's name in order to arrive at the figure 666. But as Revelation continues its life beyond John's immediate hearers, a well-meaning copyist who knows the meaning of 666 probably offers 616 to make its deciphering easier. It surely is no mere coincidence that 616 is the numerical value of "Nero Caesar," in its more common Latin spelling.

Third, the *beastly image*. Revelation 13 both calls and portrays the one behind the 666 riddle as a "beast." Because of its natural association, the term "beast" can easily symbolize persons with a bestial nature. Almost all scholars agree that Nero possessed a bestial nature. Nero is even feared and hated by his own countrymen, as ancient Roman historians agree.⁴³ The pagan writer Apollinarius of Tyana, a contemporary of Nero, specifically calls him a "beast."⁴⁴

Fourth, the *war with the saints*. John's beast will "make war with the saints and to overcome them" (Rev 13:7). In fact, he conducts such blasphemous warfare for a specific period: forty-two months (Rev 13:5). Nero begins his persecution of Christians in AD 64.⁴⁵ This is the first ever *Roman* assault on Christianity, as many Church Fathers (e.g., Eusebius, Tertullian, Paulus Orosius, and Sulpicius Severus) and Roman authorities (Tacitus and Suetonius) note.⁴⁶ The persecution finally ends when Nero

42. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 751–752. David H. Van Daalen, "Six Hundred Sixty-six," in *OCB*, 699–700.

43. Suetonius, *Nero* 7:1; 27:1; 12:1; 28–29; 33–35; Tacitus, *Histories* 4:7; 4:8; Pliny, *Natural History* 7:45; 22:92; Juvenal, *Satire* 7:225; 10:306ff; See also: Dio, *Roman History* 61:1:2; *Ascension of Isaiah* 4:1; *Sibylline Oracles* 5:30; 12:82.

44. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4:38.

45. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church*, 22; Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:379.

46. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25:3; Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2:28; Tertullian (AD 160–220), *On the Mantle* 4; *Apology* 5; Paulus Orosius (AD 385–415), *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 7:7; Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44; Suetonius,

dies on June 8, AD 68, forty-two months later, but for a few days.⁴⁷ Nero's own end even comes by sword, as per Revelation 13:14.⁴⁸

The Great Harlot

In Revelation 17:3–6 John views a horrifying sight. Seated upon the dreadful beast is the sinful Harlot:

I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead [was] a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

Since she sits on the seven-headed beast, some believe she represents the city of Rome. This is because she is resting on Rome's seven hills and is called "Babylon," which often applies to Rome in antiquity. But since the beast itself represents Rome, it seems redundant to have the woman representing the same. Also, the name "Babylon" does not historically belong either to Rome or Jerusalem, and thus cannot prove that the city is Rome.⁴⁹ I am convinced beyond any doubt that this harlot is first-century Jerusalem. The evidence for so identifying Jerusalem is based on the following considerations.

First, Revelation 14:8 calls Babylon "the great city." But in the first mention of "the great city" in Revelation 11:8, this indisputably refers to Jerusalem, "where also our Lord was crucified" (cf. Lk 9:31; 13:33–34; 18:31; 24:18–20). Her greatness especially highlights her *covenantal status* in the Old Testament.⁵⁰ But even pagan writers speak highly of Jerusalem

Nero 16.

47. Gonzalez, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, 36; von Mosheim, *History of Christianity*, 1:138–139.

48. Suetonius, *Nero* 49.

49. Most commentators, even many dispensationalists, recognize the term "Babylon" is symbolic. See: Walvoord, *Revelation*, 218. Though Charles Dyer suggests that it may be ancient Babylon that is actually rebuilt (Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon* [1991]). See also: DPT, 62. PEBP, 43.

50. Jer 22:8; Lam 1:1. The adjective "great" is applied to Jerusalem in ancient

as a significant contemporary city. Tacitus calls it “a famous city.” Pliny the Elder comments that it is “by far the most famous city of the ancient Orient.” Appian, a Roman lawyer and writer (ca. AD 160) called it “the great city Jerusalem.”⁵¹ The Sibylline Oracles, Josephus, and the Talmud concur in calling Jerusalem “a great city.”⁵² Thus, the first interpretive clue to Babylon’s identity points to Jerusalem.

Second, the harlot is filled with the blood of the saints (Rev 16:6; 17:6; 18:21, 24). Of course, with the outbreak of Nero’s persecution, which commences just prior to John’s writing Revelation,⁵³ Rome is stained with the saints’ blood. But Rome has only recently entered the persecuting ranks of God’s enemies. Throughout Acts *Jerusalem* appears as the *persecutor* and Rome as the protector of Christianity.⁵⁴ Interestingly, in the Olivet Discourse context Jesus reproaches Jerusalem: “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. . . . Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Mt 23:34–35, 37). Before his stoning Stephen rebukes Jerusalem: “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them who showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Ac 7:51–52).

Jewish writings: “In opposition to her rival Alexandria, which was designated ‘the little,’ Jerusalem was called ‘the great.’” Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 82.

51. Tacitus, *Histories* 5:2; *Fragments of the Histories* 1; Pliny, *Natural History* 5:14:70; Appian, *The Syrian Wars* 50.

52. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:150–154, 408–413; Josephus, *J.W.* 7:1:1; 7:8:7. For Talmudic references, see: Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 82. For a discussion of this issue, see my *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, 169ff.

53. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.

54. See the following verses: Ac 4:3; 5:18–33; 6:12; 7:54–60; 8:1ff; 9:1–4, 13, 23; 11:19; 12:1–3; 13:45–50; 14:2–5, 19; 16:23; 17:5–13; 18:12; 20:3, 19; 21:11, 27; 22:30; 23:12, 20, 27, 30; 24:5–9; 25:2–15; 25:24; 26:21. See also: 2 Co 11:24; 2Th 2:14–15; Heb 10:32–34; Rev 2:9; 3:9; etc.

Paul warns of Jewish persecution: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1Th 2:14–16).

Third, the harlot’s dress reflects the *Jewish priestly colors* of scarlet, purple, and gold (Ex 28).⁵⁵ In fact, she even has a blasphemous tiara on her forehead, which reads: “Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth” (Rev 17:5). This negatively portrays the holy tiara that the Jewish high priest wore, which declares “Holy to the Lord” (Ex 28:36–38). Still further, the harlot has a gold cup in her hand, reflecting the high priest on the Day of Atonement, according to the Jewish Talmud.⁵⁶

Fourth, Rome cannot commit adultery against God, for she had never been God’s wife. But Jerusalem was God’s wife,⁵⁷ and Scripture often charges her with committing adultery against him.⁵⁸ The harlot imagery better suits an adulterous wife, such as Jerusalem.

Fifth, John clearly engages in a *literary contrast* between the harlot and the chaste bride, suggesting that he is counterposing the *Jerusalem below* with the *Jerusalem above* (Rev 21:2; cf. Gal 4:24ff.; Heb 12:18ff.).⁵⁹ In Revelation 17:2–5 and Revelation 21:1ff the contrast is remarkable and detailed. We must remember that Revelation specifically designates the bride as the “New Jerusalem” from heaven. We see at least five contrasts:

55. Cf. Rev 17:4–5 with Ex 25:2, 4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16; 28:1–2, 5–12, 15, 17–23, 33.

56. Golden vessels are common on the Day of Atonement. The fire-pan for scooping cinders was gold (Yoma 4:4). “The High Priest always sanctified his hands and his feet from a golden jug” (Yoma 4:5).

57. Isa 50:1; 54:5; 62:4; Jer 2:2; 3:14, 20; 31:32; Hos 1:2; 2:2, 7, 16; 5:4; 9:1, 10.

58. Isa 1:21; 57:8; Jer 2:2, 20; 3:1–20; 4:30; 11:15; 13:27; Eze 16; Hos 2:5; 3:3; 4:15.

59. Most commentators recognize this phenomenon, even though they miss its significance. See: Royalty observes that “the cities of Babylon and the New Jerusalem are set in clear contrast” (*The Streets of Heaven*, 129, cf. 177). Dispensationalist Thomas agrees that “the resemblances are too close and too many to be accidental” (*Revelation: 8–22*, 572).

(1) Notice how John is *introduced* to the harlot: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters’ “ (Rev 17:1). This is identical to the way he sees the bride: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife’ “ (Rev 21:9).

(2) The two women have a contrasting *character*: “Come, I will show you the judgment of the *great harlot* who sits on many waters” (Rev 17:1). “Come, I will show *you the bride, the Lamb’s wife*” (Rev 21:9).

(3) The two women appear in *contrasting environments*: “So he carried me away in the Spirit into the *wilderness*. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast” (Rev 17:3). “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a *great and high mountain*, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:10).

(4) John focuses on the contrasting *dress* of each woman: “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication” (Rev 17:4). “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints . . . having the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Rev 19:8; 21:11).

(5) John contrasts their *names*. Earlier in Revelation John calls earthly Jerusalem by pagan names quite compatible with the designation “Babylon.” In Revelation 11:8 he describes here as “spiritually Sodom and Egypt.” In an earlier day Isaiah identifies Jerusalem as Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1). The idea is that rather than conducting herself as the wife of God, she has become one of God’s enemies, like Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.

The fact that the harlot sits on the seven-headed beast (which represents Rome) indicates not her *identity* with Rome, but her *alliance* with Rome against Christianity. The Jews demand Christ’s crucifixion (Mt 27:24–25; Jn 19:12–15; Ac 2:23) and constantly either directly persecute Christians (Mt 23:37ff; Ac 8:1; 1Th 2:14–17) or stir up the Romans to do so (Ac 12:1–3; 17:5–7).

The evidence proves that the harlot is Jerusalem.⁶⁰ John's Revelation contrasts the Jerusalem below with the Jerusalem above, as in Hebrews 12:22 and Galatians 4:25–26. The Jerusalem below has forsaken her husband in denying the Messiah.

The Man of Lawlessness

We come now to another difficult eschatological passage, one rivaling Daniel 9 in the intensity of its interpretive controversy: 2 Thessalonians 2. This famous passages contains Paul's reference to the "man of lawlessness" (Nestle's Text) or "man of sin" (Majority Text).

Scholars note this passage's exceptional difficulty. Augustine writes regarding a certain portion of the passage: "I confess that I am entirely ignorant of what he means to say." New Testament Greek scholar Vincent omits interpreting the passage in his four volume lexical commentary: "I attempt no interpretation of this passage as a whole, which I do not understand." Renowned Greek linguist A. T. Robertson despairs of the task of interpreting this passage because it is "in such vague form that we can hardly clear it up." Leon Morris urges "care" in handling this "notoriously difficult passage." F. F. Bruce notes that "there are few New Testament passages which can boast such a variety of interpretations as this." Ernest Best mentions that much in the passage is "exceptionally difficult."⁶¹ Even some dispensationalists admit that it is an "extremely puzzling passage of Scripture that has been a thorn in the flesh of many an expositor."⁶²

As with the hotly debated Daniel 9:24–27 passage, so here: an exceedingly difficult prophecy becomes a key text for dispensationalism. Note the following comments by dispensationalists.

- Constable observes that "this section of verses contain truths found nowhere else in the Bible. It is key to understanding future events and it is central to this epistle."

60. For more detail see my *The Book of Revelation Made Easy* (2008). See also: Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (1987). Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* (2007).

61. Augustine is cited in Alford, *The Greek New Testament*, 2:82. Vincent, *Word Studies*, 4:67. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:51. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 213. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 309. Best, *First and Second Epistles to Thessalonians*, 274.

62. English, *Rethinking the Rapture*, 72.

- According to Walvoord, the man of lawlessness revealed here is “the key to the whole program of the Day of the Lord.”
- Of 2 Thessalonians 2 Chafer notes: “though but one passage is found bearing upon the restraining work of the Holy Spirit, the scope of the issues involved is such as to command the utmost consideration.”
- Ryrie and Feinberg employ 2 Thessalonians 2:4 as one of the few passages used “to clinch the argument” for the rebuilding of the temple.⁶³

Undoubtedly, non-postmillennial commentators place considerable weight on this passage.

Because of its enormous difficulties, 2 Thessalonians 2 generates lively debate in eschatological studies. The pessimistic eschatologies of amillennialism, premillennialism, and dispensationalism frequently employ this passage as evidence of worsening world conditions leading up to the final apostasy. In his chapter “Postmillennialism and the Spiritual View,” amillennialist Lloyd-Jones points to 2 Thessalonians 2 against postmillennialism: “There will be an intense period of tribulation at the end of this period.”⁶⁴ When setting forth objections against postmillennialism, amillennialist Hoekema makes but a cursory reference to this passage in a mere two sentences, confident that it offers a self-evident refutation of postmillennialism.⁶⁵ Though this is a perplexing passage requiring caution, data in it at least remove it as an objection to postmillennialism.

Paul's Historical Setting

When Paul visits Thessalonica he preaches to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (Ac 17:1–3). Though some Jews believe him, others explode in mob action against the Christian message (17:4–5). They drag “some of the brethren to the rulers of the city” complaining: “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored

63. Thomas L. Constable, “2 Thessalonians,” *BKC*, 2:717. Walvoord, *PKH*, 493. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:85. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 151. See also: Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Jew After the Rapture,” in Feinberg, *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 181.

64. Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, 225.

65. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 178. See also: Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 26.

them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king — Jesus” (17:6–7). After taking security from Jason and the others, the civil rulers let them go (17:9). This allows Paul to depart safely to Berea. The Jews are not so easily quieted, however, for “when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds” (17:13). This results in Paul’s immediate departure to Athens (17:14–15).

This explains the strong language against the Jews in the Thessalonian epistles, and helps uncover some of the more subtle concerns therein. In his first epistle he writes: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1Th 2:14–16).

This Jewish context is important for grasping the situation Paul confronts. Interestingly, he alludes to the Olivet Discourse throughout. The Olivet Discourse prophesies the destruction of the temple and the judgment of the Jews for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Mt 23:35–24:2; Lk 19:41–44; cf. Ac 17:3; 18:5).⁶⁶

An Exposition of the Text

Verses 1–2. Paul’s reference “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (2Th 2:1) is the *crux interpretum* of this passage. Paul here refers to the AD 70 judgment on the Jews — the very judgment Christ emphasizes in the first portion of his Olivet Discourse, John focuses on in the Book of Revelation, and other writers consider in several other Scriptural passages.⁶⁷

66. Page attempts to draw the parallel with Revelation 20, comparing the restraint and deception of Satan and the flaming coming of Christ there with the deception, restraint, and coming here. Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” 31–44.

67. For an excellent analysis of such texts see: Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City, passim*.

Though Paul speaks of the second advent just a few verses before (1:10), he is not dealing with that issue here. In 2 Thessalonians 1:10 he even employs a different word for the *coming* of Christ (*elthe*) from what he uses in 2:1 (*parousia*). In chapter 1 the second advent brings “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (1:9); here this coming results in temporal “destruction” (2:8). There the second advent includes “his mighty angels” (1:7); here the temporal judgment mentions nothing about these angels (2:1–12). Thus, the *second advent* provides an *eternal resolution* to their suffering; the *AD 70* Day of the Lord affords *temporal resolution* (cf. Rev 6:10).

Furthermore, the “gathering together to Him” Paul mentions in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 seems to reflect Matthew 24:31. The word translated “gather together” here is *episunagoge*. Its cognate verb form is found in Matthew 24:31, where Christ ties the *gathering* to “this generation” (Mt 24:34). It signifies the elect’s calling into Christ by means of the *trumpeting in* of the archetypical Great Jubilee (cf. 2Th 1:11; 2:14).⁶⁸ Here it functions the same way. With the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Christians will henceforth be “gathered together” in a *separate* and *distinct* “assembly” (*episunagoge*; the church is called a *sunagoge* in Jas 2:2). After the temple’s destruction God will no longer tolerate going up to the temple to worship (it will be impossible!), as Christians frequently do prior to AD 70.⁶⁹

Paul consoles them by denying the false report that “the day of Christ had come” (2Th 2:2). Apparently, the very reason for this epistle, which Paul writes so soon after the first one, is because some unscrupulous deceivers are forging letters from him. In them they are claiming charismatic insights into eschatological concerns. In his earlier letter he corrects their grief over loved ones who die in the Lord, as if this would preclude their sharing in the resurrection (1Th 4:13–17). Now new eschatological deceptions are troubling the young church (2Th 2:1–3a):

68. Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 144–150. Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 25–28.

69. Ac 1:4; 1:8; 18:21; 20:16; 24:11. Even in this early post-commission Christianity, believers continued to gravitate toward the Jews: engaging in Jewish worship observances (Ac 2:1ff.; 21:26; 24:11), focusing on and radiating their ministry from Jerusalem (Ac 2–5), frequenting the temple (Ac 2:46; 3:1ff.; 4:1; 5:21ff.; 21:26; 26:21), and attending the synagogues (13:5, 14; 14:1; 15:21; 17:1ff.; 18:4, 7, 19, 26; 19:8; 22:19; 24:12; 26:11).

some believe that the Day of the Lord had come⁷⁰ and, consequently, they quit working (2Th 3:6–12).

The word “trouble” (*throeo*; 2:2) is in the present infinitive form, signifying a continued state of agitation. This is the same word Christ uses in the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13:7; Mt 24:6). And he uses it in a similar theological context: one warning of *deception* and *trouble* regarding the *coming* of the Day of Christ (Mk 13:5–7).

Verses 3–7. Paul shows deep concern regarding the deception (2Th 2:3a). To avoid the deception and to clarify the true beginning of the Day of the Lord upon Jerusalem, Paul informs them that “that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2:3). Before they can say the Day of the Lord “is come,” then, they must witness first (see RSV) the falling away and the revelation of the man of lawlessness, who is also called “the son of perdition.” (These do not necessarily occur in the chronological order presented, as even dispensationalists admit.⁷¹ Verse nine is clearly out of order and should occur in the midst of verse eight, if strict chronology were important.)

The word “falling away” is *apostasia*, which occurs in the New Testament only here and in Acts 21:21. Historically, the word can apply to a *revolt*: either political or religious.⁷² But to which does it refer here? Does it point to a future worldwide apostasy from the Christian faith, as per pessimistic eschatologies? Amillennialist William Hendriksen writes that this teaches that “by and large, the visible Church will forsake the true faith.” Dispensationalist Thomas L. Constable comments: “This rebellion, which will take place within the professing church, will be a

70. Greek: *enesteken*. Stephenson, “On the Meaning of *enesteken he hemera tou kuriou* in 2 Thessalonians 2:2,” 442–451. *BAGD*, 337. See: Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 215. Note the agreement among the following translations: NASB, NKJV, NEB, TEV, Moffatt’s New Translation, Weymouth, Williams, Beck.

71. Constable, *BKC*, “2 Thessalonians,” 718. Non-dispensationalist Marshall comments: “The argument is difficult to follow, partly because of the way in which Paul tackles the theme in a non-chronological manner.” Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 185.

72. For political *apostasia* see the Septuagint at Ezr 4:12, 15, 19; Neh 2:19; 6:6. For religious *apostasia*, see: Septuagint at Jos 22:22; 2Ch 29:19; and 33:19, and in the New Testament at Ac 21:21.

departure from the truth that God has revealed in His Word.”⁷³ Or does the *apostasia* refer to a political rebellion of some sort?

I believe that it speaks primarily of the Jewish apostasy/rebellion against Rome. Josephus certainly calls the Jewish War against Rome an *apostasia* (Josephus, *Life* 4, 9, 10; *J.W.* 2:2:7; 2:16:4; 7:4:2; 7:6:1). Probably Paul merges the religious and political concepts here, though emphasizing the outbreak of the Jewish War, which results from their apostasy against God (Mt 22:1–7; Lk 19:41–44; 1Th 2:14–16). The emphasis must be on the revolt against Rome because it is *future and datable*, whereas the revolt against God is ongoing and cumulative. Such specificity would be necessary to dispel the deception on which Paul is focusing. In conjunction with this final apostasy and Jerusalem’s consequent destruction, Christianity and Judaism are forever separated and both are exposed to Rome’s wrath.⁷⁴

The “man of lawlessness” is Nero Caesar, who also is the beast of Revelation, as a number of Church Fathers believe.⁷⁵ This passage’s difficulty lies in the fact that Paul “describes the Man of Sin with a certain reserve” (Origen, *Celsus* 6:45) for fear of incurring “the charge of calumny for having spoken evil of the Roman emperor” (Augustine, *City of God* 20:19). Paul and his associates had already suffered at the hands of the Thessalonian Jews for “acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king – Jesus” (Ac 17:7). Wisdom demands discretion when referring to imperial authority; his recent (1Th 2:17) personal

73. Hendriksen, *I and II Thessalonians*, 170. Constable, “2 Thessalonians,” 718.

74. “The destruction of Jerusalem and of its temple marked not the end of the world, but the end of a world. It indicated the final separation of Judaism from Christianity, of the synagogue from the Church . . . which thereby opens up principally to the Gentiles.” Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, 229–30. “The fall of Jerusalem left a permanent mark on the development of the Church. First and foremost, it meant a violent shift of centre, in which the Church was gradually to lose Palestine, the homeland of Jesus and his disciples, and with Palestine Aramaic-speaking Judaism, including the opportunity of spreading eastwards beyond the Roman Empire into Persia and to the second great centre of Jewry at Babylon.” Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 133.

75. For example: Augustine, *City of God* 20:19; Chrysostom cited in Alford, *Greek Testament*, 2:80. If we are correct in equating him with the beast, we could add: Victorinus, *Apocalypse* 17:16; Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors* 2; Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2:28, 29. See my book, *Beast of Revelation*.

ministry among them allows it: they were to “remember” that while with them he “told [them] these things” (2:5).

Paul clearly implies that something is *presently* (ca. AD 52) “restraining” (present participle) the man of sin “that he may be revealed in his own time” (2Th 2:6). The man of lawlessness is alive and waiting to be “revealed.” This implies that for the time being, Christians could expect at least some protection from the Roman government: the Roman laws regarding *religio licita* are currently in Christianity’s favor, while it remains a sect of Judaism. This begins to end after the malevolent Nero ascends the throne, for he begins persecuting Christianity in AD 64. Paul certainly enjoys the protection of Roman law (Ac 18:12ff) and makes important use of it in AD 59 (Ac 25:11–12; 28:19), when he seeks protection from the malignancy of the Jews. He expresses no ill-feelings against Rome when writing Romans 13 in AD 57–59, during the early reign of Nero, the famous *Quinquennium Neronis*.⁷⁶

When Paul writes 2 Thessalonians 2, he is under the reign of Claudius Caesar. He seems to employ a word play on Claudius’ name. The Latin word for “restraint” is *claudere*, which is similar to “Claudius.”⁷⁷ Interestingly, Paul shifts between the neuter and masculine forms of “the restrainer” (2Th 2:6, 7). This may indicate he includes both the imperial law and the present emperor when referring to the “restrainer.” While Claudius lives, Nero, the man of lawlessness, is powerless to commit political lawlessness. Christianity is free from the imperial sword until the Neronian persecution begins.

Remarkably, imperial law keeps the Jews so in check that they do not kill James the Just in Jerusalem until about AD 62, after the death of the Roman procurator Festus and before Albinus arrives (Josephus, *Ant.* 20:9:1). With these events the “mystery of lawlessness” is being uncovered as the “revelation of the man of lawlessness” (the transformation of the Roman imperial line into a persecuting power in the person of Nero) is occurring.

The evil “mystery of lawlessness” is “already working,” though restrained in Claudius’ day (2Th 2:7). This perhaps refers to the evil conniving and plotting of Nero’s mother, Agrippina, who poisons

76. Trajan, *Epistle* 5; cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 19. See: Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero*, ch. 3.

77. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 310.

Claudius so that Nero can ascend to the purple (Tacitus, *Annals* 12:62ff; Suetonius, *Claudius* 44).

The Roman emperor, according to Paul, “exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped” (2Th 2:4a). The phrase “so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” is interesting. When an infinitive (*kathisai*, “to sit”) follows *hoste* (“so that”), it indicates a *purpose* intended, not necessarily a *purpose accomplished*.⁷⁸ Nero intends or desires to present himself as God. We see the evil potential of emperor worship just a few years before, when the emperor Caligula (a.k.a. Gaius) attempts to put his image in the temple in Jerusalem (Josephus, *Ant.* 18:8:2–3; Philo, *Embassy to Gaius*). Philo tells us that “so great was the caprice of Caius [Caligula] in his conduct toward all, and especially toward the nation of the Jews. The latter he so bitterly hated that he appropriated to himself their places of worship in the other cities, and beginning with Alexandria he filled them with images and statues of himself.”⁷⁹

The future emperor Titus, for all intents and purposes, accomplishes this enormity, when he concludes the temple’s destruction set in motion by Nero. Titus actually invades the temple in AD 70, with the following result: “And now the Romans . . . brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator, with the greatest acclamations of joy” (Josephus, *J.W.* 6:6:1). This parallels Matthew 24:15 and functions as *Paul’s abomination of desolation*, which occurs in “this generation” (Mt 24:34).

Not only so but in Nero the imperial line eventually openly “opposed” (2Th 2:4) Christ by persecuting his followers. Nero even begins persecuting Christians, when he presents himself in a chariot as the sun god Apollo, while burning Christians in order to illuminate his self-glorifying party.⁸⁰

Verses 8–9. Second Thessalonians 2:8–9 reads: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the

78. As in Lk 4:29, where the Jews led Jesus to a hill “so as to cast him down (*hoste katakretnisai auton*).” Best, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 286–290. Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar*, 214.

79. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius*, 43, as cited by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:6:2.

80. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 279–284. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.”⁸¹ The lawless one is eventually openly revealed. The mystery form of his character gives way to a revelation of his lawlessness in Nero’s wicked acts. This occurs after the restrainer [Claudius] is “taken out of the way,” allowing Nero the public stage upon which he can act out his horrendous lawlessness.

In Christ’s judgment-coming against Jerusalem, we also discover judgment for the man of lawlessness, Nero. Thus, Christians may take comfort in the promised relief from both Jewish and Neronic opposition (2Th 2:15–17). Not only does Titus destroy Jerusalem within twenty years, but Nero himself dies a violent death in the midst of the Jewish War (June 9, AD 68). His death, then, will occur in the Day of the Lord in conjunction with Christ’s judgment-coming against Israel. Christ destroys Nero with “the breath of his mouth,” much like Assyria is destroyed with the coming and breath of the Lord in the Old Testament (Isa 30:27–31) and like Israel is crushed by Babylon (Mic 1:3–5).

Conclusion

Several prominent evil characters lurk in Scripture’s prophetic drama. Too often Christians know these names better than their biblical and historical contexts. What contemporary evangelical Christian has not heard and spoken about the beast and the Antichrist? Adherents to pessimistic eschatologies see these evil minions of Satan as providing evidence against the postmillennial hope. We see in this chapter, however, that such concerns are not legitimate. When we carefully study these characters in terms of their historical context, the prophecies concerning their imminent appearance comport well with preteristic postmillennialism.

81. Such imperial arrogance would produce alleged miracles as confirmation. Vespasian is called “the miracle worker, because by him “many miracles occurred.” Tacitus, *Histories* 4:81; Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7.

ESCHATOLOGICAL APOCALYPSE

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. (Rev 22:6)

Introduction

The Apocalypse, more popularly called Revelation, stands apart from the rest of the New Testament as the one book pre-eminently concerned with prophetic questions. A wrong view of this capstone of biblical prophecy is therefore inimical to any hope for a truly biblical eschatology. Indeed, non-postmillennial scholars often point to the woes of Revelation as contrary to postmillennialism.¹ Although I cannot delve deeply into Revelation, we must at least grasp its fundamental drift and major features.² The vantage point from which I approach Revelation is that of redemptive-historical preterism, which I introduced briefly in chapter 7. Despite popular opinion, Revelation is a prophetic work that is mostly fulfilled in our past. After introducing several interpretively significant aspects of Revelation, I will survey its prophetic flow.

Revelation's Audience

When interpreting any biblical book of the Bible it is important to understand the audience to which it is directed. The evangelical interpreter should understand a passage's grammar in light of its historical context, not despite it. At least three factors in Revelation emphasize the original audience and their circumstances. These strongly support a preterist position. When we combine these with Revelation's

1. For example, Hamilton, *Basis of the Millennial Faith*, 33; Milne, *What The Bible Teaches About the End of the World*, 80–81. Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, 219.

2. For more information see my: *The Divorce of Israel: A Redemptive-Historical Commentary on Revelation* (forthcoming) and Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (2006). See also my *The Book of Revelation Made Easy* and Bass, *Back to the Future* (2004).

expectation, the preterist approach becomes justified on the basis of sound hermeneutical principle.

First, in Revelation John is writing to particular, historic, individual churches that exist in his day. Revelation 1:4 provides a common epistolary opening: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come." In verse 11 he specifically names the seven churches to whom he writes: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. We know these cities as historical places containing actual churches.

In Revelation 2 and 3 John addresses these seven churches with individual exhortations and warnings. Interestingly, we may discover many historical, geographical, and political allusions in the letters, showing that John does, in fact, have his original audience in view.³

Second, we learn that John writes to those churches in order to be *understood*. The first sentence of John's work contains its title. And from that title we know John fully intends that his work be a "revelation" so that he might "show" his readers what must take place. The Greek word for "revelation" is *apokalupsis*, which means an "opening up, uncovering." John intends for his book to open up divine truth for his original audience.

Furthermore, in Revelation 1:3 we read: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." John expects the members of the seven churches to hear, *understand*, and keep the directives in Revelation. Revelation calls upon each church to give careful, spiritual attention to its words.⁴

Third, in his first chapter John also notes that he and the seven churches are already in "tribulation," which anticipates the major focus of the book: the "great tribulation" (Rev 7:14). "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in the tribulation" (Rev 1:9a). Revelation 2 and 3 contain allusions to greater problems brewing on the world scene.⁵

3. See: Ramsey, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (1963). Worth, *Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture* (1999) and *Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture* (1999). Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (1989).

4. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

5. Rev 2:10, 22–23, 25; 3:9–11.

So then: John is obviously writing to particular historical churches about their current, grave, and worsening circumstances. We must not overlook the original audience factor; Revelation's message must be relevant to them.

Revelation's Expectation

As I mention in chapter 7, one of the most obvious, yet most overlooked features of Revelation is John's expectancy. The events in Revelation are urgent and impending. The "time is at hand"; the events "must shortly come to pass." John strategically places this temporal expectation: it appears twice in the opening, introductory chapter (Rev 1:1, 3) and four times in the final, concluding chapter (Rev 22:6, 7, 12, 20). Its appearance in both of these chapters is significant because these bracket the highly wrought symbolism of the prophetic body of Revelation, which runs from Revelation 4:1 through 22:6. The portions of Revelation in which we find the time indicators are generally of a more historical than prophetic character; they are more didactic than symbolic. But we also discover similar temporal expectations scattered throughout the prophecy: Revelation 2:16; 3:11; 6:11; 10:6; 12:12; 16:17.

By noting the particular audience addressed and their expectation, I do not see how we may escape preterism of some sort. Nevertheless, many attempt to escape such logic.

Some commentators, such as John Walvoord, understand these terms as indicating that whenever the events do start coming to pass, they will occur with *great speed*, following one upon the other with great rapidity. Others, such as Robert Mounce, view them as indicating such events are *always imminent*. That is, the events are always ready to occur, though they may not actually occur until thousands of years later. Still others, such as Leon Morris, see John's references as a measure of *God's time, not man's*. That is, John is saying that these events will come to pass "shortly" from God's perspective. But, then, we must remember that "a day with the Lord is as a thousand years" (2Pe 3:8).⁶

But can these approaches overthrow our evidence? John is writing to actual historical churches existing in his own day. They are *already* in the earliest stages of "tribulation" (Rev 1:9a). He would be cruelly mocking their circumstances by stating that when help comes, it will come with

6. Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 35. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 55–56. Mounce, *Revelation*, 41, 340. Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 46–47.

swiftness — even though it may not come until two or three thousand years later. Or telling them that the events are always imminent — even though the readers of his letter may never experience them. Or that God will send help soon — according to the way the eternal God experiences time.

In addition, each of these options fails due to the very fact that John repeats and varies his terms as if to dispel any confusion. Think of it: If these words in these verses do not indicate that John expects the events to occur soon, *what words could John have used to express such?* He makes clear statements regarding temporal nearness.

Revelation's Date

John writes Revelation prior to AD 70, and probably as early as AD 65–66. I will not rehearse the argument for this “early date” (as opposed to AD 95–96), because I deal with this in depth in my *Before Jerusalem Fell*.⁷ Though the pre-AD 70 date is the dominant view of the 1800s and early 1900s, later twentieth century scholarship gravitates to the later date. Nevertheless, we are witnessing a remarkable return to a pre-70 dating. Boxall notes that this position “is undergoing something of a revival in scholarly circles,” citing J. A. T. Robinson, Albert A. Bell, Christopher Rowland, Stephen S. Smalley, and himself.⁸ I would also add E. Earle Ellis, R. B. Moberly, Mark Wilson, Thomas B. Slaton, Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, N. T. Wright, and Roland H. Worth.⁹

Suffice it to say that when John writes, the temple is still standing in Jerusalem (Rev 11:1–8) and the sixth emperor of Rome (Nero) is still ruling (Rev 17:9–10). We must keep the early date in mind because a large portion of the prophecies in Revelation unfold in the era leading up to AD 70, as I will show.¹⁰

7. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (1998). Some dispensationalists are even accepting the early date: Pate and Haines, *Doomsday Delusions*, 40.

8. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 8. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 224–26. Bell, “The Date of John’s Apocalypse,” 93–102. Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (1982). Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 40–48.

9. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*, 210. Moberly, “When Was Revelation Conceived?,” 376–93. Wilson, “Revelation,” in *ZIBBC*, 4:247. Slaton, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” 252–58. Rojas-Flores, “The Book of Revelation and the First Years of Nero’s Reign,” 375–92. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 358ff. and Worth, *Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture*, 90, 179, 205.

10. Though my Jerusalem-focused view depends on the early date, it is inac-

Revelation's Theme

Revelation's theme appears also in the first chapter, in Revelation 1:7: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him." This theme easily applies to Christ's judgment-coming against first-century Israel.¹¹ This cloud-coming reflects similar Old Testament cloud-comings of God against various historical peoples. God "comes" upon Israel's enemies in general (Psa 18:7–15; 104:3), upon Egypt (Isa 19:1), upon disobedient Israel in the Old Testament (Joel 2:1, 2), and so forth. That he comes in the clouds does not necessarily refer to his final, second advent to end history. Consider the following evidence:

(1) The coming is against "those who pierced him." The New Testament clearly emphasizes the guilt of the Jews of the first century in killing Christ.¹² As the dispensationalist *Bible Knowledge Commentary* states: "the Jews had crucified their Messiah and King."¹³ (2) These persons are called "all the tribes of the earth." Here we should most probably translate the "earth" (*ge*) as "land," i.e. the Promised Land (see discussion below). The "tribes" (*phule*) in Revelation are Israel's Twelve Tribes (Rev 7:4–8; 21:12; cp. 5:5). Whenever John speaks of "tribes" beyond Israel, he adds some such qualifier as "every tongue and kindred" (5:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Furthermore, Christ teaches that the focus of the

curate to charge that *all* preterists depend on this dating. After all, (1) most preterists see Revelation as picturing the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Thomas Ice is greatly mistaken in declaring that preterists "usually" focus on AD 70 (*DPT*, 368, 369). In fact, the Jerusalem-focus is a minority position in preterist scholarship. (2) It is theoretically possible that John is picturing Jerusalem's fall *after the fact* in order to interpret the event in a drama. Besides, (3) some dispensationalists belittle the preterist view for depending on an early-date, as if that in itself destroyed the approach. They do this inconsistently, in that they do not deem the highly debated early-dating of Daniel as destroying their interpretation of that book. Mal Couch argues: "In order to correctly interpret Daniel, three assumptions are important. (1) Daniel is a genuine book penned by the prophet Daniel in the sixth century B.C. . . ." (*DPT*, 67). See also: Pentecost in *BKC:OT*, 1324–25; *PSB* 990; *DPT* 81.

11. For the different ways in which Christ is said to "come" in Scripture, see ch. 12 above, 278–81.

12. See: Ac 2:22, 23, 36; 3:14, 15; 4:8–10; 5:30; Mt 21:33–35; 23:29–34:2; Lk 23:27–31; Jn 19:5–15; 1Th 2:14–16.

13. *BKC:NT*, 16.

“great tribulation” (Rev 7:14) is Judea (Mt 24:16, 21). (3) This coming will appear *soon*, according to the inspired writer (see previous discussion). The second advent has not occurred yet, some 1,900 years after he declares that his coming will be “quickly” (Rev 22:7, 12, 20).

The Jewish War with Rome from AD 67 to 70 kills tens of thousands of the Palestinian Jews, and enslaves thousands upon thousands more. The Jewish historian Josephus, who is an eye-witness, records that 1,100,000 Jews perish in the siege of Jerusalem, though scholars dispute this figure. J. L. von Mosheim, the great ecclesiastical historian, writes that “through-out the whole history of the human race, we meet with but few, if any, instances of slaughter and devastation at all to be compared with this.”¹⁴

But as awful as the Jewish loss of life is, Jerusalem’s utter devastation, the temple’s final destruction, the sacrificial system’s conclusive cessation, and biblical Judaism’s disappearance are even more devastating.¹⁵ As the temple goes up in smoke, so does biblical Judaism which will be replaced by rabbinic Judaism. “The destruction of the Temple was nevertheless a turning-point in Jewish religious history in that it brought about a fundamental change in the character of Judaism.”¹⁶ The *covenantal significance* of the temple’s loss is the most dramatic outcome of the War. Hence, any Jewish calamity after AD 70 pales in comparison to the redemptive-historical significance of the loss of the temple. Thus, after seeing the temple site shortly after its destruction, Rabbi Joshua lamented: “Woe unto us! that this, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!” (*Abot R. Nat.* 4).

So then, we may easily account for John’s prophecy regarding Christ’s metaphorical judgment-coming in the first century. He clearly expects the events to occur “soon.”

Revelation’s Focus

One important, overlooked term in Revelation is the Greek word *ge*, generally translated “earth” in Revelation (except at 10:2, 5, 8). It occurs

14. Von Mosheim, *History of Christianity*, 1:125.

15. Biblical Judaism necessarily and factually ceased within a few years after AD 70. In its place arose Rabbinic Judaism as Jewish leaders sought to carry on the traditions without the biblically mandated sacrificial worship structure.

16. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule*, 345

eighty-two times in Revelation's twenty-two chapters. This word has two basic meanings: (1) the "earth," indicating the entire globe, or at least the "known world"; and (2) "land," referring to a particular portion of the earth, such as the "land of Israel" (Mt 2:20–21) or the "land of Judah" (Mt 2:6). It seems that in Revelation it generally refers to "the Land," i. e., the famous and beloved Promised Land (cp., Dt 1:21–22; 4:1, 5, 40; 28:8; Jos 1:2, 6, 11; Jer 3:18; Eze 8:12; 11:17; 12:19, 22; 13:9), "the land of Israel (Eze 7:2).¹⁷

Several reasons justifying such a translation include: (1) The very Jewish nature of Revelation suggests its plausibility. The lexical and syntactical peculiarities of Revelation are extremely Hebraic.¹⁸ (2) The term first appears in the theme verse in Revelation 1:7, where it must mean the Promised Land (see previous argument). (3) Later uses strongly suggest a Palestinian reference. John sometimes sets it over against the "world" (Rev 3:10) or "every nation" (Rev 11:9,10; 13:7, 8; 14:6). (4) In Revelation the devastation on the "land" awaits the sealing of 144,000 Jews representing all twelve tribes (cf. Rev 7:1, 4–8; 14:3).

I will now provide an overview of Revelation's dramatic flow.¹⁹

The Preparation for Covenantal Judgment

The first part of this divine word (Rev 1–5) prepares John and his audience for the terrifying judgments to follow. Despite the turmoil Christ appears among the seven churches as their Defender (Rev 1:12ff). He knows their tribulation and will cut it short (Rev 2–3; especially: 2:10; 3:10; 6:10).

17. "Palestine was to the Rabbis simply 'the land', all other countries being summed up under the designation of 'outside the land.'" Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 14. In the Mishnah at Kelim 1:6 we read: "There are ten degrees of holiness. The Land of Israel is holier than any other land." The Babylonian Talmud comments: "It has been taught on Tannaite authority: B. R. Simeon b. Yohai says, 'Three good gifts did the Holy One, blessed be he, give to Israel, and all of them he gave only through suffering. C. These are they: Torah, the Land of Israel, and the world to come'" (*Berakhot* 1, III.12 A).

18. See Charles, *Revelation*, 1:cxvii–clix; Aune, *Revelation*, 1:clx–ccvi.

19. For the question regarding symbolic v. literal interpretation, see: Gentry, *The Book of Revelation Made Easy*, ch. 1. John specifically declares that this book — featuring a seven-headed dragon (12:3), a seven-headed beast (13:1; 17:3), lion-headed horses (9:17), and a 1500 mile high city (21:16) — was "signified" (*esemanen*) to John (1:1).

Then John steels his readers against the storm of God's judgment by showing God on his heavenly throne before the upheaval and devastation. Almighty God appears in glorious, serene, sovereign control sitting upon his judgment throne (Rev 4). The leading image of God is "the one who sits on the throne" (Rev 3:21; 4:2–4, 9, 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5). The Lord Jesus Christ is seen as the Judge of Israel (Rev 5; cf. Mt 26:64), who has "the Land" trodden "outside the city" (cp. Heb 13:11–13) as in a wine press (Rev 14:14, 17–20).

The Divorce of Geo-Political Israel

In Revelation 6–19 (with several asides) John portrays Jerusalem's judgment in cyclical fashion. This follows on the opening of the seven-sealed scroll.

The Seven-Sealed Scroll

The seven-sealed scroll seems to represent a "certificate of divorce" handed down against Israel by the enthroned Judge. In Scripture marriages are based on a covenant contract, so that in biblical days the Jews write out divorce decrees.²⁰ The following evidence leads to the conclusion that the scroll in Revelation 6 is a *bill of divorce*.

First, Revelation emphasizes two particular women, who obviously correspond to one another as opposites, as positive and negative images: the wicked harlot (Rev 17–18) and the pure bride of Christ (Rev 21). They correspond to the *earthly Jerusalem*, the place of Christ's crucifixion (Rev 11:8), and the *heavenly Jerusalem*, which is holy (Rev 21:10), as I will show below. Revelation's drama presents the revelation and execution of the legal (Rev 15:3; 16:5–7) judgment on the fornicating harlot (Rev 17:1–19:3) and the coming of a virginal bride (Rev 21), obviously to take the harlot's place after a marriage supper (Rev 19:7, 9). Carrington explains: "The Harlot has disappeared, the Bride is taking her place. It is impossible any longer to maintain that the Harlot means Rome; the

20. Dt 24:1, 3; Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8; Mt 5:31; 19:7; Mk 10:4. See: Gittin in the Mishnah. *Get* "literally 'writ' [of separation]" (Danby, *The Mishnah*, 307). Also: Lewittes, *Jewish*, ch. 10: "The *Get*." For the covenantal basis of marriage see: Pr 2:17; Eze 16:8; Mal 2:14. For a fascinating study of covenantal marriage, including in Revelation, see: Sebastian Smolarz, "Covenant and the Metaphor of Divine Marriage" (2005). This dissertation will soon appear in book format.

antithesis must lie between the old Israel and the new, the false Israel and the true, the Israel that is to appear so soon as the New Jerusalem.”²¹

Second, the Old Testament background for this image derives from Ezekiel, John’s main source.²² Israel’s judgment appears in Ezekiel 2:9–10 as written on a scroll on the front and back. This corresponds perfectly with Revelation 5:1. In Ezekiel 2–9 the prophet outlines Jerusalem’s devastation, which corresponds with Revelation 6ff. In Ezekiel 16 the prophet presents Israel as God’s covenant wife, who becomes a harlot (see also Jer 3:1–8; Isa 50:1), while trusting in her beauty and committing fornication. This corresponds to John’s Jerusalem-Babylon image (Rev 18). As her jealous husband (Ex 20:5; 34:14; cp. Nu 5:14, 30), God casts Israel out and judges her for this evil conduct.

Third, following the “divorce” and the judgments flowing from it, John sees a new “bride” coming out of heaven (Rev 21–22). In Revelation’s drama, God does not take his new bride until he legally judges his current harlotrous wife. John himself presents the image of the harlot, bride, and marriage feast — we are not reading this into the text eisegetically. Thus, the divorce imagery fits the book’s dramatic flow.

The fornicating harlot’s judgment starts after the Lamb (Christ) receives the seven sealed scroll from God. God the Father turns over the judgment to Christ, who will open the scroll, thus having judgment authority committed to him (Rev 5:4–7; cp. Jn 5:22, 27; 9:39; Ac 10:42; 17:31). At his trial leading to his condemnation, Christ tells Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin that they shall see the “Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64). This fits well with Paul’s allegory in Galatians 4:21–31, wherein one wife is cast out (Hagar who represents the Jerusalem below) and another is taken (Sara who represents the Jerusalem above). Recalling that Revelation’s theme is Christ judgment coming against the Jews who crucify him, we note that the leading image for Christ in Revelation is that of “the Lamb that was slain” (Rev 5:6, 12; 13:8²³) and whose blood gives victory to his people (Rev 1:5; 5:6–9; 7:14–16; 12:11; 15:2–3; 19:2; 21:9; 22:3).

21. Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation*, 294.

22. Ezekiel greatly influences Revelation, even providing the outline for it. See: Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 64. See also: Bøe, *Gog and Magog* (2001). Vogelgesang, “The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation” (1985).

23. See also: Rev 5:8, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9–10, 14, 17; 12:11; 14:1, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 21; 22:1, 3.

As the Lamb opens the seals, the judgments begin. The *first seal* (the white horse with its long distance weapon) pictures the Roman army victoriously fighting their way to Jerusalem, the capital city (Rev 6:1–2). This horseman does not represent Christ because: (1) Christ is the one opening the seals in heaven (Rev 5:5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7). (2) He remains in heaven, while the other seals are opened (Rev 6:3, 5, 7, 9, 12). (3) It seems inappropriate for the living creatures (who had just fallen before Christ in praise, Rev 5:8–10, 13) to command Christ the Lord: “Come!” (4) The white horse is the only similarity with Revelation 19:11, which does picture Christ. So then, the first horseman is God’s “avenger” upon Israel, the Romans who are “his armies” avenging God’s anger at Israel’s rejecting his overtures (Mt 22:7; cf. vv 1–7). The white color of the horse pictures victory, not holiness. God often uses the unjust to bring his judgments in history.²⁴

The *second seal* (the red horse and its close-in weapon) pictures the eruption of the Jewish civil war during the Jewish War (Rev 6:3–4). In Greek the definite article emphasizes “the peace.” Here “the [well-known] peace” refers to the famous *pax Romana* covering the Roman Empire.²⁵ Hence, the sign function of “rumors of wars” in Matthew 24:6: in such a peaceful era wars could serve as signs. Josephus laments that the civil war in the Land causes more carnage than the Romans themselves (cp. Mt 10:34–36; 24:10–12).²⁶

The *third seal* (the black horse and scales) portrays famine plaguing Israel (Rev 6:5–6) — in that black symbolizes famine (Lam 4:8; 5:10) and the “pair of scales” containing wheat and barley portray basic food items being measured out. One of the most horrible aspects of Jerusalem’s woes is the famine they themselves cause by their own internal civil strife.²⁷ The Roman historian Tacitus states that: “It was upon each other that they turned the weapons of battle, ambush and fire, and great stocks

24. Dt 28:15, 49; Isa 10:5–6; 44:18–45:4.

25. “Building on the foundations laid by his uncle, Julius Caesar, [Augustus] brought peace. . . . The internal peace and order which Augustus achieved endured, with occasional interruptions, for about two centuries. Never before had all the shores of the Mediterranean been under one rule and never had they enjoyed such prosperity. The *pax Romana* made for the spread of ideas and religions over the area where it prevailed.” Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1:21.

26. Josephus, *J.W.* 4:3:2; 5:1:1, 5.

27. Josephus, *J.W.* 4:6:2; 5:10:2–5. See: Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.12.4.

of corn went up in flames” (*Hist* 5:12). Josephus writes as an eyewitness: “Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the marketplaces like shadows, all swelled with the famine” (*J.W.* 5:12:3).

The *fourth seal* (the pale horse named Death) causes the death of one-fourth of Israel (*Rev* 6:7–8). The animals devouring the dead indicates covenantal curse (*Dt* 28:15, 26). Josephus reports of the zealots’ treatment of the dead: “their dead bodies were thrown to the dogs” (*J.W.* 6:7:2) and that some “were cast out naked, and seen to be the food of dogs and wild beasts” (*J.W.* 4:5:2). This seal reflects God’s Old Testament judgment upon Jerusalem: “For thus says the Lord God, ‘How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it!’” (*Eze* 14:21; cp. *Eze* 5:17; 33:27; *Am* 4:6–10).

With the *fifth seal*’s opening we get another look into heaven. We see the altar in heaven and hear the promise of vindication for Christian martyrs (*Rev* 6:9–11). This vindication will occur in “a little while” (*Rev* 6:10). It comes in the final collapse of Jerusalem at the end of the Jewish War. This is in keeping with Revelation’s near term indicators (1:1, 3; 2:16; 3:11; 6:11; 10:6; 12:12; 16:17; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20).

The *sixth seal* (stellar phenomena) symbolizes the fall of Israel’s government (*Rev* 6:12–17). Scripture often associates these phenomena in picturing governmental collapse: Babylon (*Isa* 13:1, 10, 19); Egypt (*Eze* 32:2, 7–8, 16, 18); Idumea (*Isa* 34:3–5); Judah (*Jer* 4:14, 23–24). That they “hid themselves in the caves” (*Rev* 6:15) reflects historical events: Josephus mentions that the Jews actually sought refuge underground during the AD 67–70 war, as per the symbolic imagery.²⁸ For instance, he states that many Jews “went down into the subterranean caverns” (*J.W.* 6:8:5; cp. 6:8:4) and that the Romans “made a search for under ground, and when they found where they were, they broke up the ground and slew all they met with” (*J.W.* 6:9:4). Christ warns that this would happen to his generation (*Lk* 23:27–30).

At Revelation 7:1 a gracious interlude interrupts the seals (*Rev* 7:1–8) before presenting the seventh seal (8:1). The “four angels” temporarily

28. Josephus, *J.W.* 6:7:3 (cf. 7:2:1).

hold back the “winds” (of destruction²⁹), countering the four destroying horsemen. This providential halt in the judgments allows the minority population of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to flee as the Roman general Vespasian is distracted (with the fall of Nero and the Roman Civil Wars) before he reaches Jerusalem (cp. Mt 24:16–22).³⁰ We have both Christ’s prophecy (Lk 21:20–22) and historical records (Eusebius and Epiphanius)³¹ that Christians would flee Jerusalem and be spared.

In this context the 144,000 sealed saints of God appear on stage. The figure “144,000” is a perfect number composed of exactly twelve squared times 1,000. The perfectly rounded figure appearing in this symbolic book must itself be symbolic. But of what?

The 144,000 saints represent *Jewish converts to Christianity* who dwell in Israel. Note the following: (1) The text expressly refers to the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 7:4–8), whom John later calls the “first fruits” (Rev 14:4); Christianity’s first converts hail from Israel (Ac 1:8; 2:5–12, 22–24, 36–42; cp. Ro 1:16; 2:9–10). (2) John distinguishes them from “the great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev 7:9). (3) The Old Testament source from which John draws his imagery is Ezekiel 9:4, which clearly specifies they are from Jerusalem. (4) God protects them in “the Land” (ge), which is being judged (Rev 7:1; 14:3). This fits well with the previous action occurring in Israel. (5) Such a designation comports well with Christ’s warning his followers to flee Jerusalem before its final overthrow (Mt 24:15–16; Lk 21:20–24). He promises that those who heed his prophecy will be protected (Lk 21:18–19). (6) Revelation’s events are to occur “shortly” because the “time is near” (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). This fits perfectly with the historical flight of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem prior to its fall.

The Seven Trumpets

With the opening of the *seventh seal* the seven trumpet series begins sounding (Rev 8:1–6). The first four trumpets show judgments upon things, the last three upon men. They review and intensify the chaos of the seals: destruction increases from one-fourth (Rev 6:8) to one-third (Rev 8:7–12). Regarding earthquakes and eruptions, James Moffatt writes:

Portents of this abnormal nature are recorded for the seventh

29. Jer 49:36, 37; 51:1, 2; Da 7:2; Mt 7:24ff.

30. Josephus, *J.W.* 4:9:2; 4:11:5.

31. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:5. Epiphanius *Heresies* 29:7:7ff; 30:2:7

decade of the first century by Roman historians. . . . Volcanic phenomena . . . in the Egean archipelago . . . are in the background of this description, and of others throughout the book; features such as the disturbance of islands and the mainland, showers of stones, earthquakes, the sun obscured by a black mist of ashes, and the moon reddened by volcanic dust, were the natural consequences of eruption in some marine volcano, and there — adjoining Patmos — was in a state of more or less severe eruption during the first century.³²

W. Boyd Carpenter writes: “Perhaps no period in the world’s history has ever been so marked by these convulsions as that which intervenes between the Crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus records one in Judea (*J.W.* 4:4:5); Tacitus writes of them in Crete, Rome, Apamea, Phrygia, Campania (*Ann.* 12:58; 14:27; 15:22); Seneca (*Ep.* 91), in AD 58, mentions their extending their devastations over Asia (the proconsular providence, not the continent), Achaia, Syria, and Macedonia.”³³

These judgments reflect the plagues upon Egypt at the Exodus.³⁴ Jerusalem is now the equivalent of Egypt (see Rev 11:8). She and other cities in Israel are worse than Nineveh (Mt 12:41), Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (Mt 11:21–23). She has become a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9; 3:9) — much like Jesus warns (Jn 8:44).

With the fifth trumpet we witness an outbreak of demonic torment (Rev 9:1–21). The fallen star here is Satan, “the angel” of the pit (v 11). The demons confined to the pit (2Pe 2:4; Jude 6; Lk 8:31) are loosed to torment Israel (vv 2, 3; cf. Rev 18:2), just as Christ warns (Mt 12:43f). The period of torment is “five months,” which indicates the final siege of Jerusalem by Titus, when the Jews go mad as they are hopelessly trapped.³⁵ This siege lasts five months: “Titus began the siege of Jerusalem in April, 70. The defenders held out desperately for five months, but by the end of August the Temple area was occupied and the

32. James Moffatt, *Revelation*, in *EGT*, 5:404. See: Seneca, *Lucilius* 91; Tacitus, *Histories* 1:2–3 and *Annals* 12:58; 14:27; 15:22.

33. W. Boyd Carpenter, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” *Ellicott*, 6:146.

34. Cf. Rev 8:5 with Ex 19:16f, Rev 8:7 with Ex 9:18ff; 8:8–9 with Ex 7:20f; 8:11 with Ex 10:21. Cf. Dt 28:15, 60ff.

35. Josephus, *J.W.* 5:1:1, 5.

holy house burned down, and by the end of September all resistance in the city had come to an end.”³⁶

At the sixth trumpet Roman reinforcements arrive (Rev 9:12–21). The four angels are destroying “angels” loosed upon Israel in fury. They probably represent the four Roman legions, which are headquartered at the Euphrates.³⁷ Historians observe that “at the siege of Jerusalem four legions were involved (the Fifth, Tenth, Fifteenth and Twelfth).”³⁸

The Mighty Angel

In Revelation 10:1–11 we see a mighty angel standing astride land and sea. The angel is clearly Christ, as we see in comparing Revelation 10:1 with 1:13–16. He declares that Israel’s time is up: “There should be no more delay” (Rev 10:6). This answers the plea from the martyred souls at heaven’s altar (Rev 6:10).

As he declares no more delay he proclaims that “the mystery of God is finished” (Rev 10:7). By this we understand that God finally, forever, and fully accepts the Gentiles³⁹ as he removes the temple with its “separating wall” (Eph 2:14; Rev 11:1–2). The end of the temple economy and national Israel is near (1Co 10:11; 1Th 2:16; Heb 1:2; 9:26; 12:26–27; 1Jn 2:18).

The Temple and the Two Prophets

In Revelation 11 a voice commands John to measure the *inner temple* in the “holy city” (Jerusalem),⁴⁰ where the Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8).⁴¹ This measuring signifies the *preservation* (cf. Zec 2:1–5; Rev 21:15) of the inner court of the temple. But the *outer temple court* is left unmeasured, and is, thus, destined for *destruction* (Rev 11:1, 2).

The inner temple represents the temple’s true essence that continues in Christianity. The New Testament calls Christians “temples” by employing this very Greek term, *naos*.⁴² As in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the sacrificial system here receives a heavenly replacement (Rev 11:19). The

36. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 382.

37. Coneybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, 76.

38. Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People*, 315.

39. Eph 2:12,19; 3:3–6; Ro 16:25; Col 1:25ff.

40. Isa 48:2; 52:1; Neh. 11:1–18; Mt 4:5; 27:53.

41. Lk 9:22; 13:32; 17:11; 19:28.

42. 1Co 3:16–17; 2Co 6:16; Eph 2:19ff; 1Pe 2:5.

outer court speaks of the physical temple, which the Romans will soon destroy (Mt 24:1–2, 11). History records that Jerusalem’s wall “was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to.”⁴³

The “forty-two months” (Rev 11:2) or “1260 days” (v 3) indicates the period of the Jewish War with Rome from its formal engagement until the temple was destroyed. “When Vespasian arrived the following Spring [AD 67] to take charge of operations, he steadily reduced Galilee, Peraea . . . Titus [Vespasian’s son] began the siege of Jerusalem in April, 70. . . . By the end of August the Temple area was occupied and the holy house burned down.”⁴⁴ From Spring AD 67 to August/September AD 70 is a period of nearly forty-two months.

The “two prophets” probably represent a small body of Christians who remain in Jerusalem to testify against it. They appear as *two*, in that they are legal witnesses to the covenant curses.⁴⁵ Though they are slain on earth they live on in heaven.

The Jerusalem Church Protected

In Revelation 12 John backs up chronologically in order to show the “mother” church in Jerusalem, which is protected from Satan-inspired resistance. This would cover the time frame from Christ’s ministry through the Book of Acts up until Jerusalem’s destruction.

The Persecution by the Beast

We must understand the “first beast” in Revelation 13 both generically and individually. This is not unusual in Scripture: Christ’s body is generic (the church) and specific (Jesus); Adam is generic (man) and specific (Adam). Generically the “beast” is Rome; individually it is Nero Caesar, the head of the Roman Empire of the day.⁴⁶

The rationale for the generic identity is as follows. The book’s time frame supports the identification (see earlier argumentation). The beast

43. Josephus, *J.W.* 7:1:1.

44. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 381–382.

45. Dt 17:6; 19:5; Mt 18:16; 2Co 13:1; 1Ti 5:19; Heb 10:28.

46. See the beast study in ch. 15 above. For more detailed information, see: Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation* and Gentry, *The Book of Revelation Made Easy*, ch. 4.

rises from the sea, which suggests the Italian peninsula where Rome is located and when considered from the vantage of either Patmos or Israel (across the Mediterranean Sea). It has “seven heads” (Rev 13:1; 17:3) that are “seven mountains” (Rev 17:8, 9); Rome is famous for its “Seven Hills.” The beast’s number is an exercise in Hebrew gematria: converting letters into numbers. An ancient Hebrew spelling of Nero Caesar perfectly fits the value: “*Nrwn Qsr*” (Rev 13:18): *n* [50] *r* [200] *w* [6] *n* [50] *q* [100] *s* [60] *r* [200].

The beast’s evil and blasphemous character suggests Nero specifically, and the emperors generically: Since Julius Caesar the emperors were often considered divine. Roman historian Dio Cassius reports on Nero’s return to Rome from Greece: “The people cried out: ‘Thou August, August! To Nero, the Hercules! To Nero, the Apollo! The Eternal One! Thou August! Sacred voice! Happy those who hear thee!’”⁴⁷ In addition, Nero was the first emperor to persecute Christianity (13:7), and his persecution prevails as a virtual state of siege for around forty-two months (Nov. AD 64 to June AD 68, Rev 13:5).

The healing of the beast’s deadly wound pictures Rome’s revival after the devastating Roman Civil Wars of AD 68–69, which are caused by Nero’s suicide with his own sword. Roman historian Tacitus reports on the Roman Civil Wars: “This was the condition of the Roman state when Servius Galba . . . entered upon the year that was to be for Galba his last and for the state almost the end.”⁴⁸ Roman historian Suetonius writes regarding the outcome of the Civil Wars two years later: “The empire, which for a long time had been unsettled and, as it were, drifting through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors, was at last taken in and given stability by the Flavian family.”⁴⁹ Josephus, the Jewish court historian to the Flavians, agrees: “So upon this confirmation of Vespasian’s entire government, which was now settled, and upon the unexpected deliverance of the public affairs of the Romans from ruin.”⁵⁰

The “second beast” is the first beast’s minion (Rev 13:11–12). He represents apostate Judaism as concentrated in its religious leadership in its high priestly aristocracy: (1) He arises from “the land” (*tes ges*), i.e., from within Israel. (2) He appears as a “lamb” (Rev 13:11), reminding us

47. Dio, *Roman History* 62:20:5.

48. *Histories* 1:2, 11.

49. *Vespasian* 1:1.

50. Josephus, *J.W.* 4:11:5.

of temple worship in that “the lamb is the dominant sacrificial victim” (*IDB* 3:58). (3) He “spoke as a dragon,” i.e., as Satan (13:11; 12:3), which reflects John and Jesus’ estimation of what Israel has become (Rev 2:9; 3:9; Jn 8:44). (4) He is also the “false prophet” (Rev 19:20), which reminds us of Israel’s long line of prophets.

The Angelic Proclamation

In Revelation 14:6–8 we hear an angel proclaim “Babylon’s” destruction: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth; to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people; saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’ And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’” As I note in the preceding chapter “Babylon” stands for Jerusalem.

In Revelation 14:14–16 an angels reaps souls for the Son of Man’s harvest of Israel (Jn 4:35), re-imaging the securing of the 144,000 converts to Christ from Israel. This is not a judgment scene, for: (1) This vision occurs immediately after positive statements regarding perseverance of the faithful (Rev 14:12), the heavenly benediction upon them (Rev 14:13a), and the promise of rest from their labors (Rev 14:13b). Since they are thus blessed this fits nicely with this vision speaking of the Son of Man protectively gathering his own. (2) The “white” color of the cloud upon which the Son of Man sits is not an appropriate image for the storm of God’s judgment. In Revelation judgment phenomena involve thunder, lightning, hail and so forth (4:5; 8:5; 10:3; 11:19; 16:18; 19:6), which are more naturally associated with dark clouds (see the storm clouds rolling ominously across the sky in 6:14). (3) This harvesting of grain picks up on the earlier positive statement in Revelation 14:4, which declares the “blameless” 144,000 to be the “first fruits.” First fruits harvests are tokens of God’s favor (cp. Lev 23:9–14) so that they become a time of celebration (Dt 16:9ff). (4) Nothing particularly judgmental is stated in this vision, though the following vision involves dramatic images that are indisputably judgmental (vv 17–20).

In Rev 14:17–21 a gruesome, judgment appears under a vintage image. In the days of Christ and the apostles Israel becomes ripe for judgment (Mt 23:31–36; 1Th 2:16). The gruesome action take place “outside

the city,” i.e., outside Jerusalem. This corresponds to Christ’s crucifixion “outside” the gate or the city (Heb 13:12–13; Jn 19:17). It also clearly relates the scene to the area surrounding Jerusalem, i.e., the land of Israel. The land of Israel as a Roman province stretched from the Leontes River to Wadi el Arish, a distance of 1,600 furlongs, or about 200 miles (Rev 14:20).

The blood flow to the horses’ bridles seems to poetically describe the blood that covered the lakes and rivers during several dramatic battles between the Romans and the Jews. “But as many of these were repulsed when they were getting ashore as were killed by the darts upon the lake; one might then see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink . . . as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks, and of dead bodies all swelled.”⁵¹

The Seven Vials of Wrath

In Revelation 15 we have a vision of the saints in heaven just preceding the outpouring of the vials of wrath. Again, God is answering the saints’ prayers for vengeance in Revelation 6.

These vials bring increasing woe (Rev 16). The Roman armies come with ease from the Euphrates (Rev 16:12). Josephus notes that behind Titus “there followed also three thousand, drawn from those that guarded the river Euphrates” (*J.W.* 5:1:6). Josephus notes that in the initial imperial engagement of the war, Vespasian adds to his legions: “a considerable number of auxiliaries got together, that came from the kings Antiochus, and Agrippa, and Sohemus, each of them contributing one thousand footmen that were archers, and a thousand horsemen. Malchus also, the king of Arabia, sent a thousand horsemen, besides five thousand footmen, the greatest part of whom were archers” (*J.W.* 3:4:2). The same holds true for the final stages of the war under Titus, beside “whom marched those auxiliaries that came from the kings, being now more in number than before, together with a considerable number that came to his assistance from Syria” (*J.W.* 5:1:6). So then, not only does Titus draw troops from the Euphrates in the east (*J.W.* 5:1:6), but Antiochus IV is the king of Commagene, and “Samoseta, the capital of Commagene, lies upon Euphrates” (*J.W.* 7:7:1). In addition, Titus calls the tenth legion through Jericho (*J.W.* 5:1:6; 5:2:3), east of Jerusalem (cf. *Jos* 13:32; 16:1; 20:8). With

51. Josephus, *J.W.* 3:10:9; cf. *J.W.* 4:7:5–6; 6:8:5.

the convergence of so many trained soldiers, Jerusalem divides into three bickering factions: “the great city was split into three parts” (Rev 16:19).⁵²

The Roman legions pummel the city with talent-weight stones, which appear as an enormous hail storm (Rev 16:21): “The catapults, that all the legions had ready prepared for them, were admirably contrived; but still more extraordinary ones belonged to the tenth legion: those that threw darts and those that threw stones, were more forcible and larger than the rest. . . . Now, the stones that were cast, were of the weight of a talent, and were carried two furlongs and further. . . . As for the Jews, they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was of a white colour.”⁵³

The Final Collapse of Babylon/Jerusalem

Revelation 17–19 contains a highly wrought description of Jerusalem’s collapse. She is satisfied that she is beautiful and has all that she needs and needs not fear the loss of her “husband” (Rev 18:7). This matches the Jewish pride in Jerusalem: “‘Ten measures of beauty,’ say the Rabbis, ‘hath God bestowed upon the world, and nine of these fall to the lot of Jerusalem’ – and again, ‘A city, the fame of which has gone out from one end of the world to the other.’ ‘Thine, O lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, and eternity.’ This – explains the Talmud – ‘is Jerusalem.’”⁵⁴

The beast’s *seven heads* are seven mountains (Rev 17:9) representing the seven hills of Rome. These seven heads also represent seven kings, or the *first seven Caesars* of Rome (Rev 17:9–10): Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero, and Galba.⁵⁵ The sixth king (Nero) is in power at the writing of Revelation. The seventh will soon be ruling, but only for a short while (Galba rules from June 8, AD 68 to January 15, AD 69). The ten horns (Rev 17:12) apparently represent the ten major Roman provinces: Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and

52. Josephus, *J.W.* 5:1:1: “It so happened that the sedition at Jerusalem was revived, and parted into three factions, and that one faction fought against the other.” Elsewhere Josephus designates the leaders of the faction by the names John, Eleazar, and Simon.

53. Josephus, *J.W.* 5:6:3.

54. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 82.

55. Notice the enumeration of the emperors in Josephus, *Ant.* 18–19; 4 Ezra 11 and 12; Sibylline Oracles 5; 8; Barnabas 4; Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, and Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 5.

Germany.⁵⁶ The beast fails to destroy Christianity, but destroys Jerusalem (Rev 17:14–18:24). John attributes Jerusalem's destruction (and the beast's) to Christ's providence (Rev 19:11ff).

The Glory of Christ's Bride

In Revelation 20–22 John presents Christ's bride, who contrasts to the adulterous harlot. In Revelation 20:1–6 we have a picture of Christ's heavenly rule with his saints. Though beginning in John's era, this passage with its thousand years necessarily extends out into the future beyond the short time frame restrictions common to Revelation. The whole of Revelation 20 is a unique section that projects the reader beyond the limited time frame. By providing this glance, John provides the persecuted saints of the long-term consequences of their faithful endurance.

I deal with the *length* of the “millennium” in chapter 13. The “thousand years” symbolizes a great period of time which we should not understand literally. I will not rehearse the argument for the figurative use of “one thousand” here. I will, however, briefly reflect on Satan's binding in order to fill out the picture of Christ's kingdom.

The Binding of Satan

Revelation 20 opens with a reference to “an angel coming down from heaven.” This angel, who possesses “the key to the bottomless pit,” binds Satan for a “thousand years.” John Walvoord provides a typical dispensationalist approach to this: “The expositor is not free to spiritualize the interpretation of the vision but must accept the interpretation in its ordinary and literal meaning. If this is done, there is no other alternative than the premillennial interpretation which holds that at the second coming of Christ, Satan will be bound for a thousand years. This will constitute one of the major features of Christ's righteous rule upon the earth.”⁵⁷

But the “chain” here must be a *metaphor* showing God's restraint on this spiritual being, Satan. Otherwise, of what material would this chain be composed? The same is true of its corollaries: the “key,” the “seal” (cf. Rev 7:2–8), and the “abyss.” Does the abyss have a literal key? And where would Christ hang the key? In Rev 3:7 Christ holds “the key of David,”

56. Farrar, *Early Days of Christianity*, 464, n 1.

57. Walvoord, *Revelation*, 293.

showing that he has authority to permanently open and shut (*kleisei*, 3:7; cp. 20:3) — much like the angel binding and sealing Satan in the abyss. Undoubtedly the key is a metaphor for control, as when Christ holds the keys to death and hades (Rev 1:18) — surely death does not have an actual physical key designed to open a warded or levered lock! And does the abyss have a door with a lock on it?

Satan's binding begins in the first century. Christ initiates it during his earthly ministry (Mt 12:24–29), secures it in legal fact at his death and resurrection (Lk 10:17; Jn 12:31–32; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15), and dramatically demonstrates it in the collapse of Christianity's first foe, Judaism (Rev 12; 17–18⁵⁸). The collapse of Jerusalem is significant because the Satanic resistance to Christ's kingdom begins with the Jewish persecution of Christ and Christianity.⁵⁹

This binding continues throughout the Christian era (i.e., the “thousand years”), except for a brief period just prior to the second advent (Rev 20:2–3, 7–9). It does *not* result in the *total inactivity* of Satan; rather it enforces Christ's complete control of his power. God similarly restricts angels who fall from heaven (Jude 6; 2Pe 2:4; cf. Lk 8:31). John carefully qualifies the purpose of Satan's binding: it is “in order that” (*hina*) Satan not “deceive the nations.” Interestingly, even premillennialist Ladd holds that Satan's binding “does not mean his complete immobility. His incarceration in the abyss does not mean that all of his activities and powers are nullified.”⁶⁰

The implications of this binding are enormous. Before Christ's coming all nations beyond Israel are under Satan's dominion.⁶¹ Israel alone of all the peoples of the earth knows the true God and enjoys his salvation.⁶² But with Christ's coming and the spread of “the gospel of the kingdom,” Satan's dominion over the Gentiles collapses. In the years between

58. The demise of the Great Harlot is the demise of Jerusalem. See ch. 15 above, pp. 382–86.

59. The Scriptures speak of Satan's involvement in the Jewish apostasy (Mt 12:43–45; Jn 8:44; Rev 2:9; 3:9). Because of this, the Jews prompt Christ's crucifixion (Mt 20:18–19; 27:11–25; Mk 10:33; 15:1; Lk 18:32; 23:1–2; Jn 18:28–31; 19:12, 15; Ac 2:22–23; 3:13; 4:26–27; 5:28, 30; 7:52; 1Th 2:14–15), and Israel becomes the church's first persecutor (Mt 23:37ff.; Ac 8:1; 12:1–3; 17:5–7; 1Th 2:14–17).

60. Ladd, *Revelation*, 262.

61. 2Ki 17:29; Psalms 96:3–5 [cf. 1Co 10:20]; Lk 4:6; Ac 14:16; 17:30; 26:17–18.

62. Dt 7:6ff; Psalms 147:19–20; Am 3:2; Ro 3:1–2.

Christ's ministry upon earth until the destruction of the temple, Satan prompts massive demonic activity attempting to thwart his binding and the establishing of Christ's kingdom. But where Christianity spreads, idolatry withers in its presence, as Satan's kingdom fades.⁶³

The Millennial Reign and Resurrection

Concurrent with Satan's binding comes the rule of the martyrs (Rev 20:4–6). Although the vast majority of Revelation focuses on events that will occur “soon” (Rev 1:1, 3), this section on the thousand years *begins*, but is not completed, in the first century. It projects itself into the distant future, allowing a glimpse of the end result of the events beginning in the apostolic era.

In Rev 20:4 John focuses on the martyred saints, who participate in Christ's heavenly rule (Rev 20:4): “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness and those who had not worshiped the beast.”⁶⁴ Given John's time frame concern (cf. Rev 1:3, 9), his focus is on the martyrs of the first-century era.⁶⁵ In fact, 20:4 is the answer to the plea of the martyrs in Rev 6:9–11, as we can see from the strong parallels between the passages:

63. “All heathen at any rate from every region, abjuring their hereditary tradition and the impiety of idols, are now placing their hope in Christ, and enrolling themselves under Him.” Athanasius, *Incarnation* 37:5. See also: Sections 30:4, 6–7; 31:2–3.

64. This position represents a major change from my earlier, Augustinian view. After deeper study while researching my commentary on Revelation, I now see that John presents only one group on the thrones in Rev 20:4, martyrs who did not worship the beast. He does not envision two groups, deceased martyrs and living resisters. This interpretation does not preclude the fact that all true Christians also rule and reign with Christ, for we see John expressly stating this in Rev 1:6. But Rev 20 is making a different point: it is showing that those facing martyrdom should not fear all is lost. They will be vindicated by arising in heaven above to reign over the beast and false prophet, who perish in AD 70 (Rev 19:20–21). This focus on martyrs here no more denies that living Christians also rule than Rev 14:13 implies that Christians dying before that benediction are not blessed: “And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord *from now on!*”’”

65. Rev 6:9–11; 7:9, 13–15; 11:7–12; 12:5; 13:7, 15; 14:13; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24.

Rev 20:4

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God.

Rev 6:9

I saw underneath the altar the *souls* of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.

In Revelation 20:1–3 John explicates the first phase of Christ’s triumph over Satan: he is *spiritually bound*, being restricted from successfully accomplishing his evil design in history. In Revelation 20:7–10 we witness the second and concluding phase of Christ’s triumph: Satan is *personally punished*, being tormented in the eternal flames of the lake of fire. John employs this two-fold pattern of spiritual/physical realities followed by initial/conclusive realities in the resurrection reference in Revelation 20, as well.

The “first resurrection” secures the participation of the martyred saints in Christ’s rule (Rev 20:4–6). The context suggests that this resurrection may not be literal. After all, we see a chain binding Satan and a key locking the abyss. As in the case of the two-fold triumph over Satan, this is the *initial, spiritual victory-resurrection*.⁶⁶ That is, it refers to the spiritual resurrection of the martyrs who are born again by God’s grace and enter heaven to new life. After all, elsewhere Scripture speaks of *salvation as a spiritual resurrection*: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1Jn 3:14).⁶⁷ For dramatic purposes John ties this resurrection to the martyr’s vindication in AD 70.

Elsewhere John, Revelation’s author, speaks of a non-literal resurrection that occurs at the moment of salvation, much like Rev 20 associates a non-literal resurrection with the martyrs’ vindication in AD 70. He presents this in such a way that it serves as an advance indication of the final eschatological resurrection:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the

66. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 449.

67. See also: Ro 6:8–11; Eph 2:6; Col 2:13–14.

Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (Jn 5:24–29)

John presents the martyrs' vindication metaphorically as their being resurrected to enthronement, which does not require a physical resurrection. This non-literal enthronement should not surprise us in that earlier he more broadly states that he "has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev 1:6). After all, Christians are "overcomers" (cf. 1Jn 2:13–14; 4:4; 5:4–5) and sit with Christ in heavenly rule: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev 3:21). As Paul puts it, Christ "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6).

The "rest of the dead" do not participate in this first century, spiritual resurrection. In fact, they "do not live again until the thousand years" is finished (Rev 20:5). For John's purposes, these dead probably refer to "the rest," who were killed in Revelation 19:21. In the future they will be physically resurrected (implied) in order to experience "the second death" (eternal torment in both body and soul, Mt 10:28), which occurs on Judgment Day (Rev 20:11–15).

Though dispensationalists boast that Revelation 20 presents their system in clear and certain terms, this text actually presents them with serious problems. Consider: (1) The concluding period of earth history, which experiences the glorious victory of Christ, is a thousand years long, but its length appears in only one chapter of the entire Bible. (2) Christ's thousand year rule not only appears in only one chapter in Scripture, but that chapter is in the Bible's most symbolic book. (3) Consistency requires that dispensationalists literally interpret the "key" to the abyss as a physical object (Rev 20:1), though Christ also holds a "key" to death (Rev 1:18). (4) If we interpret Revelation 20 literally then only those Christians who live during the beast's time will enter the premillennialist's millennium, for only those who are martyred under him and effectively resist him will rule (Rev 20:4). (5) If Revelation 20 presents only two resurrections, then premillennialists have no resurrection for converts who die during both the tribulation and in the millennium. After all, the rapture/resurrection (the first resurrection) occurs just prior to the

tribulation, and the only other resurrection (the second resurrection) is for the lost who are resurrected at the end of the millennium. (6) Their view of a millennium in which Christ personally rules the nations results in his second humiliation, wherein his kingdom turns against him and surrounds him in Jerusalem (Rev 20:8–9). (7) The premillennial view presents an absurd situation. On this view mortals who are aware that immortal, resurrected saints have been ruling them for a thousand years will nevertheless revolt against those immortals in trying to defeat them.

Judgment Day

The postmillennial scheme involves Christ's rule through his people in history. Under his providential rule Christ's spiritual kingdom will spread throughout the earth and will dominate human life and culture for ages. But not all men will convert to Christ during this era. At the end of the kingdom era and just preceding Judgment Day, Satan will be released for a "little while" from his bondage (Rev 20:3). He will gather a sizeable force of rebels, who will attempt to supplant the prevailing Christian influence in the world (Rev 20:7–9).⁶⁸

No sooner does Satan prepare his forces than fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them (Rev 20:9). This apparently portrays Christ's second advent for what it represents to the wicked. Christ returns "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Th 1:8). Before he can actually harm the Christian order (he merely surrounds "the camp of the saints and the beloved city," Rev 20:9), history ends and eternal judgment comes. At this time men enter their final, eternal abode: either the new heavens and new earth or the lake of fire (see chapter 13, above). Here John shows that not only will the Lord vindicate his people by historical sanctions on earth, but there will be a final and conclusive judgment of the wicked and a blessed confirmation of the righteous.

The Spiritual Beauty of the Bride

The new creation/Jerusalem of Revelation 21–22 begins in the first century, although it unfolds throughout history and stretches out into eternity in its ultimate consummation. Note the following evidence:

68. See: North, *Dominion and Common Grace* (1987).

(1) The time frame, following closely upon the vision of the new creation/Jerusalem, strongly demands it (Rev 21:1, 2; 22:5–7). (2) Revelation's flow clearly suggests it. The new Jerusalem (Rev 20–22) immediately replaces the old Jerusalem (Rev 19) rather than waiting several thousand years. (3) Elsewhere Scripture teaches that the new creation (salvation) enters history before the final consummation.⁶⁹ Isaiah 65:17–25 shows that the new creation on earth still experiences sin, aging, and death in the physical realm; thus, it cannot refer to heaven and eternity. It is from above, however.⁷⁰ (4) The New Testament anticipates the immediate change of the old era into the new.⁷¹ (5) The New Testament speaks of the church as Christ's bride (Eph 5:25ff; 2Co 11:2ff; Jn 3:29). The bride totally supplants Israel in AD 70.

John presents salvation's glory in poetic terms. The absence of the sea (Rev 21:1) pictures harmony and peace within. In Scripture the sea often symbolizes discord and sin.⁷² Christianity offers the opposite (Ro 5:1; Eph 2:12ff; Php 4:7, 9). The bride-church is the tabernacle-temple of God (Rev 21:3) because God dwells within her and no literal temple is needed.⁷³ Salvation removes grief,⁷⁴ introduces one into the family of God,⁷⁵ and brings eternal life (Rev 21:6, 8).

John also presents the glory of the bride-church (Rev 21:9–22:5) in poetic imagery. She shines brilliantly like light (Rev 21:10, 11).⁷⁶ Consequently, she is as precious to God as costly gold and jewels (Rev 21:11, 18ff).⁷⁷ This beautiful bride-church has a sure foundation and impregnable walls (Rev 21:12–21).⁷⁸ Thus, she is destined to have a massive influence in the world (Rev 21:16).⁷⁹ God cares for her by providing her with the

69. 2Co 5:17; Eph 2:10; 4:24; Gal 6:15. See ch. 14 "Eschatological Features."

70. Rev 21:2; Gal 4:22ff; Heb 12:22; Col 3:1,2.

71. Jn 4:20–24; Heb 2:5; 12:18–29; Mk 9:1.

72. Rev 13:1,2; Isa 8:7ff; 23:10; 57:20; Jer 6:23; 46:7.

73. Rev 21:22; cf. Eph 2:19–22; 1Co 3:16; 6:19; 2Co 6:16; 1Pe 2:5,9.

74. Rev 21:4; 1Th 4:13; 1Co 15:55–58; Jms 1:2–4.

75. Rev 21:7; cf. Jn 1:12–13; 1Jn 3:1ff.

76. Mt 5:14–16; Ac 13:47; Ro 13:12; 2Co 6:14; Eph 5:8ff.

77. 1Pe 1:7; 2:4–7; 1Co 3:12.

78. Mt 16:18; Ac 4:11; Eph 2:19f; 1Co 3:10ff; Isa 26:1; 60:18.

79. Isa 2:2ff; Eze 17:22ff; 47:1–11; Da 2:31–35; Mic 4:1; Mt 13:31–32; 28:18–20; Jn 3:17; 1Co 15:20ff; 2Co 5:19.

water of life.⁸⁰ Thus, she brings healing to the nations by her presence (Rev 21:22; 22:1–5).⁸¹

The Exhortations in John's Conclusion

In Revelation 22:6ff we find closing assurances of Revelation's prophecies. An angel declares them certain (v 6), testifies that they come from God (v 6), and notes that they are continuous with the Old Testament prophetic line (v 7). Furthermore, Christ reaffirms their truth (vv 7, 12–13, 16, 20) and John speaks by revelation (v 8a).

The closing emphasis on Revelation's expectation reiterates the temporal nearness of the events. The restatement of their nearness harmonizes with Revelation 1:1–3 and serves as a closing bracket to the time frame. We discover this through express declaration (Rev 22:6), a promise of imminent divine intervention (Rev 22:7, 12, 20),⁸² the command forbidding the sealing of the prophecies (Rev 22:10),⁸³ and the compelling urgency and contemporary relevance of the message to its original audience (Rev 22:14–17; cf. Rev 1:3, 4).

John closes the book by giving covenantal warnings against tampering with its contents. Revelation is a covenant document from God himself.

Conclusion

Interestingly, Revelation really does not speak to postmillennialism until its *last three chapters*. There it presents the postmillennial hope as victorious in history. The previous chapters, which speak of chaos and devastation and which influence today's pessimistic eschatologies, relate events looming in John's day, and are therefore distant past events from our perspective. To approach Revelation with the view that its judgment scenes still loom before us radically misunderstands Revelation in particular and biblical eschatology in general. "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear."

80. Jn 4:14; 7:37–38; 6:32–35.

81. Rev 22:2, 3; Isa 53:5; Eze 47:1–12; Mt 13:33; Lk 4:18; Jn 4:14; Heb. 5:12–4; Gal 3:10–13; 1Pe 2:2, 24.

82. Mk 9:1; Mt 24:30, 34; 26:64.

83. Contra Da 8:26; 12:4, 9.

PART V

OBJECTION

PRAGMATIC OBJECTIONS

So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."
(Matthew 17:20)

In this section I respond to commonly heard objections against postmillennialism. Davis rightly analyzes the problem: "Since postmillennialism is a position which has not been widely held in recent times, some contemporary authors in their references to it have not given an accurate representation of its true nature and claims."¹ I arrange the leading objections into three basic classes: pragmatic (ch. 18), theological (ch. 19), and biblical (ch. 20). Of course, I anticipate many objections during my positive presentation of the evidence for postmillennialism above. Here, however, I will focus expressly on the leading objections.

"Historical Decline Disproves Postmillennialism"

Perhaps the most popular objection to postmillennialism is that experience teaches that the world is in a great moral and spiritual decline, which is antithetical to postmillennialism's historical optimism. Dispensational theologians are especially vigorous in pressing this argument.

L. S. Chafer claims postmillennialism died in the 1930s because "the present insane, corrupt condition of the world killed the theory by the contradiction of its own developing character."

Alva J. McClain scoffed that "this optimistic theory of human progress had much of its own way for the half-century ending in World War I of 1914. After that the foundations were badly shaken; prop after prop went down."

J. Dwight Pentecost notes postmillennialism's "failure to fit the facts of history."

1. Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, 12.

Herman Hoyt complains: "I am unable to see any comparable relation of the doctrine to the world of reality round about me."

John F. Walvoord "wonders how the writers of this [postmillennial] book can read the newspapers with their accounts of increased crime and a decaying church and come up with the idea." He also writes: "This view has largely been discarded in the 20th century, because many anti-Christian movements have prospered and the world has not progressed spiritually."²

Paul Enns notes that World Wars I and II "militated against the optimism of the doctrine."³

Paul N. Benware responds against postmillennialism that "the idea that the world is getting better and better does not at all seem to be in line with reality. The evidence points rather to a world that is growing more and more wicked."⁴

Craig Blaising complains about my presentation in our debate book: "By virtue of its insistence that the interadvent kingdom will necessarily progress and advance to the level of a worldwide Christian order, postmillennialism owes us an explanation of the history of the last two thousand years. Nineteenth-century postmillennialists (and even Lorraine Boettner in the twentieth century) were happy to oblige us, so confident were they that the progress of which they spoke *could be seen* even as their theology required that it *must be seen*. Gentry, however, is strangely silent on this issue. Is this acceptable?"⁵

2. I confess there are times when I look at the enormous sales of dispensational works and find myself agreeing that the church itself is not progressing spiritually.

3. Chafer, "Foreword," Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 9. Alva J. McClain, "Premillennialism as a Philosophy of History," Culbertson and Centz, *Understanding the Times*, 22. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 386–387. Herman Hoyt, "A Dispensational Premillennial Response," in Clouse, *The Millennium*, 144. Walvoord, "Review of *House Divided*," 372. Walvoord, "Revelation," *BKC* 2:978. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 384.

4. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 128.

5. Blaising in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 75. I would note that my being "strangely silent" on the issue is due to the following: (1) I determined to use my limited space to focus on the biblical evidence. (2) The postmillennial response is well-known, as Blaising himself points out. (3) I deal at length on the question in the first two editions of the present work, so that my position is publicly accessible.

Historic premillennialists and amillennialists frequently make the same sort of observations. Premillennialist Kromminga writes (and amillennialist Hanks would agree): “In view of the present collapse of our western civilization and of the tremendous obstacles that have of late been thrown in the way of Christian missions and of the oppression to which the Christian Church is subjected in many an erstwhile Christian country to the point of virtual extinction, it is not at all surprising, that the postmillenarian view should at present be at low ebb.”⁶ Erickson sees a difficulty for postmillennialism in that the Bible speaks of “spiritual and moral conditions as worsening in the end times.”⁷ He continues elsewhere: One problem with postmillennialism “is its optimism concerning the conversion of the world, which seems somewhat unrealistic in the light of recent world developments.”⁸

Amillennialists concur:

Jay E. Adams notes that “the advent of two World Wars . . . virtually rang the death knell upon conservative postmillennialism as well. . . . It is spurned as highly unrealistic because it predicts a golden age around the corner in a day in which the world nervously anticipates momentary destruction by nuclear warfare.”⁹

Floyd E. Hamilton writes: “The events of the past thirty years have revealed the fallacy of such reasoning. World War I shattered the hopes of the advocates of peace through international cooperation, in the Hague Peace Conference. The failure of the League of Nations and the breaking out of World War II, have given the final death blow to any hopes of the ushering in of an era of universal peace and joy through the interplay of forces now in action in the world.”¹⁰

Louis Berkhof assumes that “the experiences of the last quarter of a century” are inimical to postmillennialism.¹¹

Kim Riddlebarger points out that “it is self-evident that the stated post-millennial expectations have not yet been realized.”¹²

6. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church*, 264–265. Hanks, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 26.

7. Erickson, *Contemporary Options*, 72.

8. Erickson, *Contemporary Options*, 71.

9. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand*, 2.

10. Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 22.

11. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 719.

12. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 124.

These and other writers¹³ would do well to note Grudem's analysis: "Postmillennialism in its most responsible form is not based simply on the observation of events in the world around us, but on arguments from various Scripture passages."¹⁴ Blomberg and Chung comment with evident surprise:

Even postmillennialism, whose demise many were trumpeting in the 1960s and the 1970s after two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, the liberal-leaning churches of many mainline Protestant denominations, and the rapid secularization of the Western world, particularly outside the United States, has made a comeback. The spectacular growth of the church, at least numerically, in many parts of Latin America, Africa, China, and Southeast Asia in the 1980s and 1990s led some people to revive a more chastened form of postmillennialism.¹⁵

Neo-orthodox and liberal scholars also dispute postmillennialism on this basis. In analyzing the decline of postmillennialism earlier in this century, Moorhead states: "postmillennialism looked increasingly implausible because events had stubbornly refused to follow its scenario. . . . Experience simply had not sustained postmillennialism. The product of an era when evangelicalism enjoyed cultural dominance, it could not survive when that ascendancy waned. It became a relic of a lost world."¹⁶ Peters surmises: "People of the twentieth century cannot accept this naive optimism, however. Moral progress has stopped, if not reversed. Two world wars, the conversion of 5 million Jews not into Christians but into ashes, atomic warfare. . . . all this removes any ground for belief that Christ now rules and that the devil is chained. Postmillennialism is dead."¹⁷

But again, nowhere does this objection find more vigorous expression than among dispensational popularizers (whose ideas are sometimes bemoaned by professionally trained dispensational theolo-

13. See also the following writers: Cox, *Biblical Studies in Final Things* (1966). Gromacki, *Are These the Last Days?*, 179. LaSor, *The Truth About Armageddon*, 160. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events*, 38. Milne, *What the Bible Teaches About the End of the World*, 80.

14. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1111.

15. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, xv.

16. Moorhead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism," 77.

17. Peters, *Futures – Human and Divine*, 30.

gians¹⁸). Hal Lindsey writes: “There used to be a group called ‘postmillennialists’ World War I greatly disheartened this group and World War II virtually wiped out this viewpoint. No self-respecting scholar who looks at the world conditions and the accelerating decline of Christian influence today is a ‘postmillennialist.’”¹⁹ Of course, a quick rhetorical response to observations based on the World Wars has at least as much merit as those objections: Who won World Wars I and II? Did the anti-Christian forces of evil overwhelm those nations wherein resided the greatest missionary forces for Christianity in the world? Did the world become a more dangerous place for Christianity because of the defeat of Japan in Asia and Germany in Europe?

Deeper responses to such objections are available, however. These are basically three-fold.

The Problem of Narrow Sampling

Such historical experience arguments involve too narrow a sample. The better question regarding historical development is: Have world circumstances and particularly conditions for the Christian church improved *since Christianity’s inception in the first century*? That is, taking into account the big picture, the historical long run: Are Christians as a class today generally better off than were Christians as a class of the first two or three centuries? Are world conditions better today in Christian-influenced areas than they were in the first century? Anyone who is cognizant of the Roman persecutions against the early church should be quite aware that Christians today are in a much better situation in wider swaths of the earth today.

In debates on the subject I point out the irony of this objection to postmillennialism in light of the circumstances of the debate: “Here we are in a free land, sitting in our comfortable Bible-believing church, dressed in our ‘Sunday best,’ holding one of our many personal Bibles (the world’s largest selling book!) debating whether or not there has been any advance in the conditions of Christianity since its persecuted inception 2,000 years ago!” Ironically, the one who most vigorously be-

18. Craig A. Blaising attempts to distance “expositional-theological” dispensationalism from Lindsey’s “popular” views. Review section of *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (July/ Sept. 1990) 365. Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook*, 172; Bock, “Charting Dispensationalism,” 26–28.

19. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 176.

moans the decline of Christianity, Hal Lindsey, is the author of a book published (before Bantam Books bought the rights) by one of the nation's largest Christian publishers, one of the largest selling books of the last forty years, selling thirty-six million copies in fifty-four languages: *The Late Great Planet Earth*.²⁰ It may be the case that we are witnessing a decline in America over the last fifty years. (It may even be the case that the sales figures for Lindsey's book demonstrate this decline!) But has this decline completely wiped out centuries of Christian progress? The answer clearly is that it has not.

Will our present slippage and decline continue and spread into total apostasy and chaos to a point beneath that of the first century? Of course, we cannot answer this today on the basis of *historical analysis*. Answering this question is the task of the Christian exegete who recognizes that God's Word "shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). It is the point of this book to demonstrate that God's will is for the redemption of the world as a system in the historical long-run and before the physical return of Christ in final judgment. In the final analysis, until Christianity returns to the size and conditions of the first century, this argument against postmillennialism carries no weight. In fact, even then the argument will be only tentative in that the faith may once again revive and blossom. Indeed, until the Lord returns and we are on our way up to heaven, no one can effectively argue: "The postmillennial hope failed." Then and only then will such an argument be persuasive.

Of course, the postmillennialist can turn the tables on the pessimistic historical short-run argument. Consider the collapse in 1991 of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. Thirty years ago dispensationalist Gannet saw the second advent as the only hope for the overthrow of Communism and other forms of political oppression: "What peace of mind this brings to Christians as the end time approaches. What a cause for rejoicing that righteousness, not Russia, shall ultimately triumph. This triumph of Christ over Communism emphasizes the folly of getting side-tracked in spending our time primarily in opposing Communism rather than in an all-out proclamation of the gospel of grace."²¹ Also keep in mind Adams' comment, which obviously had the

20. As reported in Lindsey and Missler, "The Rise of Babylon and the Persian Gulf Crisis," 64.

21. Alden A. Gannet, "Will Christ or Communism Rule the World?" in Feinberg,

Communist Soviet Union in view: postmillennialism “is spurned as highly unrealistic because it predicts a golden age around the corner in a day in which the world nervously anticipates momentary destruction by nuclear warfare.”²² A book brimming with newspaper clippings of the portentous danger of Communist Russia warns: “We are on an irreversible course for world disaster.”²³

Note well: No knowledgeable postmillennialist would point to the current collapsing of Communism as a proof of postmillennialism (although Communism everywhere will have to collapse before the final stages of the postmillennial advance of Christ’s kingdom, since it is inherently anti-Christian).²⁴ Yet, it is encouraging to watch the freeing up of Christianity in the totalitarian lands once dominated by monolithic, atheistic Communism — despite claims by dispensationalists of irreversibly worsening world conditions. It is a heartening cause for rejoicing and continuing prayer (and surely the result of the effectual fervent prayers of persecuted Christians) to read such headlines as: “Religion Gains Momentum in Soviet Union,”²⁵ “Prayers and Bible Welcomed in the Kremlin,”²⁶ “Albania Awakes from Atheism,”²⁷ “Churches Gain Favor with Castro, See Spiritual Awakening,”²⁸ “New Law Extends Religious Freedom,”²⁹ and “Evangelism Finds a Place on New Soviet Agenda.”³⁰ Who knows where all of this will lead in the near future?

And what about the recent growth of Christianity in Latin America and Africa? According to Wikipedia: “At the beginning of the 21st century Christianity is probably the main religion in most of sub-Saharan Africa There has been tremendous growth of Christians in Africa. As evidence, only nine million Christians were in Africa in 1900, but by the year 2000, there were an estimated 380 million Christians.”³¹ Many

Prophecy and the Seventies, 64–65.

22. Adams, *Time Is at Hand*, 2.

23. Kirban, *Countdown to Rapture*, 11. Cf. 148–160.

24. North, *Marx’s Religion of Revolution* (1989). F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (1974). Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators* (1985).

25. New York Times release, *Greenville Piedmont* (Oct. 7, 1991) A–1.

26. Article in *Christianity Today* 35:11 (Oct. 7, 1991) 42–43.

27. Art Moore, in *Christianity Today* 35:6 (May 27, 1991) 52–54.

28. Christ Woehr, in *Christianity Today* 35:1 (Jan. 14, 1991) 46ff.

29. Ken Sidey, in *Christianity Today* 34:16 (Nov. 5, 1991) 76ff.

30. Russell Chandler, in *Christianity Today* 34:18 (Dec. 17, 1990) 39ff.

31. “Christianity in Africa.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Africa

scholarly articles and technical books are noting the “rapid spread of Christianity over the African continent.”³² In *The Christian Post* we find an article titled: “Fastest Growth of Christianity in Africa,” which notes that “according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, the southern hemisphere is taking the lead in growth figures for worshipers. Africa is leading the charge with 390 million Christians, more than three times than 35 years ago.”³³ It continues: “Further statistics show that according to the projection of the current trend, Africa’s congregation is likely to grow by another 200 million by 2025.” In *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* we read: “Reformed and Presbyterian churches are thriving in many other African countries [non-South Africa].”³⁴

If “short run” arguments are valid (and they are *not*), we could just as easily use the preceding headlines for evidence of postmillennialism!

The Problem of Impatient Anticipation

We must note against our objectors that nothing in the postmillennial definition requires *either* relentlessly forward progress *or* a reaching postmillennialism’s highest advance by any particular date. The gradualistic postmillennialism I present in this book simply teaches that *before the end* — whenever that indeterminate time might be (Mt 24:36), it certainly has not occurred yet — the kingdom of God will reach world-dominating proportions. For postmillennialists:

It is not expected that the pathway in time to that point will exhibit uniform progress on all fronts for all visible churches and denominations. The advance of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness can be thought of as the spiritual equivalent of a world war. The tide of the war as a whole may clearly be running in one direction rather than the other, but this does not mean that the victorious side does not experience setbacks and temporary defeats on various fronts on the way to ultimate victory.³⁵

32. Back cover copy on *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* by Elizabeth Isichei.

33. Chan, “Fastest Growth of Christianity in Africa.” See also: “The Changing Face of Christianity.”

34. *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 4:539.

35. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 15.

Ice is quite mistaken when he claims that “postmillennialism teaches that this current age will be a time of *steady* and upward growth.”³⁶ As Davis expresses it: “The postmillennial outlook does not involve a scenario of uninterrupted worldly progress in the interval between the present and the beginning of the great revival.”³⁷ Consider the following analogy: In the early stages of World War II the outcome appears dismal for the Allies with the fall of France and the bombing of London. Yet we know that the tide turns and the Allies win. Likewise, in countering this objection we must respond to the objector: if we are not currently being raptured, then you are not currently being reasonable. Postmillennial progress on the cosmic level follows the pattern of sanctification on the personal level: just as we experience ups-and-downs in our Christian walk, so will history experience ups-and-downs in its Christian development.

Furthermore, why has not dispensationalism and premillennialism been wholly discredited by its constant cry of “the end is at hand”? LaHaye writes with no hesitation: “The fact that we are the generation that will be on the earth when our Lord comes certainly should not depress us. . . . If you are a Christian, after reading this book you ought to know the end is near!”³⁸ We see the clearest examples of date setting in Hal Lindsey’s *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon* (expected before 1990), Edgar C. Whisenant’s *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Is in 1988* (expected in 1988) and *The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989* (expected in 1989), and Richard Ruhling, M.D., *Sword Over America* (expected in early 1990s), and Grant R. Jeffrey, *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny* (expected in AD 2000).³⁹

Unfortunately, as the following titles indicate, the list explodes when the year 2000 approaches: *Planet Earth — 2000: Will Mankind Survive?; I Predict 2000; Prophecy 2000: Rushing to Armageddon; The 90’s: Decade of the Apocalypse; How Close Are We?: Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ; Storm Warning; The Final Countdown; Armageddon: Appointment with*

36. Ice in Couch, *DPT*, 310.

37. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 133.

38. LaHaye, *Beginning of the End*, 172.

39. “The decade of the 1980’s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it” (Lindsey, *The 1980’s*, 8, *emph. his*). Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Is in 1988* (1988). See: Jim Ashley, “Ruhling Believes ‘Crisis’ Events Near,” *Chattanooga News – Free Press* (Oct. 7, 1989), Church News Section. Jeffrey, *Armageddon* (1988).

*Destiny; The Rapture Book: Victory in the End Times; Earth's Final Days; Storming Toward Armageddon: Essays in Apocalypse; Final Approach: The Opportunity and Adventure of End-Times Living; Is This the Last Century?*⁴⁰ Yet the authors of these books continue writing today, almost a decade later.

Robert Fuller's scholarly research into the naivete of date-setting shows the relentless determination by dispensationalists to identify the Antichrist.⁴¹ Dwight Wilson's plea to fellow premillenarians is for them to quit embarrassing the viewpoint by participating in date-setting, which creates false (and ultimately embarrassing) expectations of an imminent end.⁴² Marvin Pate and Calvin Haines also urge fellow dispensationalists to avoid *Doomsday Delusions*. Dispensationalists, though, generally do not heed their warnings.

The very argument dispensationalists and premillennialists employ against postmillennialism — “we see no postmillennial progress” — can easily be turned in another way against them: Christ teaches us that he will come again. Since he has not come yet, and since his coming is allegedly always impending, we may assume he is not going to return at all. But surely this sort of argument is erroneous: simply because something has not happened *yet*, does not mean it cannot and will not happen *ever*.

Millard J. Erickson admits of this sort of objection (which he himself makes): “This criticism, it must be admitted, may have to be qualified eventually.”⁴³ D. H. Kromminga agrees: “But it remains doubtful, to say the least, in case through the operation of these same forces peace should once again be restored to our world, whether then postmillennial hopes will not also revive once more.”⁴⁴ Even dispensationalist Robert Culver has changed his view: “Postmillennialism is not dead. It seems probable that any period of prolonged peace in the world would provide the climate in which a revival of postmillennialism might take place.”⁴⁵

The Problem of Newspaper Exegesis

The eschatological debate must be resolved on the basis of biblical analysis, not newspaper exegesis. Short-cut arguments from experience

40. See bibliographic documentation in ch. 13: “Eschatological Time Frames.”

41. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist* (1995).

42. Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (1991). DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (1991).

43. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology*, 72.

44. Kromminga, *Millennium*, 264–265.

45. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, 207.

may carry weight among those not theologically inclined, but they should have no bearing upon the theological argument in light of the above observations. Abram was old and childless when the Lord promised him an innumerable seed (Ge 15:5). He even died with only one legitimate son. Yet he believed God would perform the work promised. Could not righteous Simeon have been mocked for awaiting the consolation of Israel, since God's voice had been silent for four hundred years (Lk 2:25)? B. B. Warfield writes:

The redemption of the world is similarly a process. It, too, has its stages: it, too, advances only gradually to its completion. But it, too, will ultimately be complete; and then we shall see a wholly saved world. Of course it follows, that at any stage of the process, short of completeness, the world, as the individual, must present itself to observation as incompletely saved. We can no more object the incompleteness of the salvation of the world today to the completeness of the salvation of the world, than we can object the incompleteness of our personal salvation today (the remainders of sin in us, the weakness and death of our bodies) to the completeness of our personal salvation. Everything in its own order: first the seed, then the blade, then the full corn in the ear. And as, when Christ comes, we shall each of us be like him, when we shall see him as he is, so also, when Christ comes, it will be to a fully saved world, and there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, in which dwells righteousness.⁴⁶

In the final analysis R. J. Rushdoony is on target when he notes the *underlying modernism* of eschatological arguments that are based on current world conditions: "Such comments are in principle modernistic, in that they assess Scripture, not in terms of itself, but in terms of the times, the modern age."⁴⁷ Amillennialist Cornelis Venema well expresses the fallaciousness of pragmatic arguments against postmillennialism: "When critics of Postmillennialism, for examples, point out how the church is declining in numbers and influence in many western countries, or at the increasing secularism of modern culture, postmillennialists are frequently unimpressed. They rightly argue that the debate regarding the millennium is a debate fundamentally about the teaching of the Word of

46. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 101–102.

47. R. J. Rushdoony, "Introduction," Kik, *Eschatology of Victory*, vii.

God.”⁴⁸ As Morton Smith observes more generally “eschatology by its nature treats of matters that have not yet come to pass, the only way by which we can have knowledge of it must be by revelation.”⁴⁹

“Postmillennialism Undermines Watchfulness”⁵⁰

Because of the widespread (and false!) view of the imminency of Christ’s return (see ch. 14, “Eschatological Features”), some have argued that postmillennialism destroys the spirit of “watchfulness” that the Lord enjoins upon his people. This objection is frequently employed in either or both of two ways. It may allege that specific Scriptural passages encouraging watchfulness are dismissed by the postmillennial system (e.g., Mt 24:42; 25:13). Or it may imply that postmillennial adherence has the practical effect of dulling Christian sensitivity to the things of God by taking the believer’s mind off the second coming of Christ to receive his church into heaven.

Amillennialist Richard Gaffin has reservations with regard to postmillennialism because it “deprives the church of the imminent expectation of Christ’s return and so undermines the quality of watchfulness that is incumbent on the church.” Amillennialist Herman Hanko warns of the postmillennial concern for Christian victory in history: “And through it all, he no longer is mindful of his calling to watch unto the end. . . . The believer must live, in obedience to his Lord, in constant longing and expectation of the end of all things.”

The best-selling dispensationalist author Dave Hunt laments postmillennialism because, he says, “there is an increasing antagonism against eagerly watching and waiting for Christ’s return, which surely was the attitude of the early church.” Premillennialists John Demarest and William Gordon write: “The objection thus impeaches the wisdom of Christ in making known to man the fact of his coming again in the clouds, and then drawing an argument for our constant WATCHING.” Bruce Milne agrees.⁵¹

48. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 229.

49. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2:721.

50. For more information, see my section on “Imminence” in Ch. 14.

51. Gaffin, “Theonomy and Eschatology,” in *TRC*, 218. For a critique of Gaffin’s article see: Gentry, “Whose Victory in History?” in North, *Theonomy* (1991). Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 24. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 8. Demarest and Gordon, *Christocracy*, 384. Milne, *Know the Truth*, 263.

Despite many anti-postmillennial protestations, “to expect the Lord in our life-time is not a pre-requisite of true piety — this would be to base the Christian life, in most generations, upon a falsehood.”⁵² Those who argue for an “any moment” view of the return of Christ as a major spur for holy living root ethical conduct in erroneous expectations.

As I pointed out in chapter 14, the Scripture very clearly notes that *we cannot know when Christ is going to return* (Mt 24:36). Consequently, *we must always be prepared* (Mt 25:13), despite our ignorance as to the timing of his return. Although we cannot know its timing, if we are *obediently working* for his glory according to his Word, then that Day will not catch *Christians* as “a thief in the night” (1Th 5:1ff). This is the true meaning of “watchfulness.” “After all, watchfulness implies delay.”⁵³ *We are to watch ourselves, not for “signs.”*

The word “watch” in Matthew 24:42 and 25:13 is *gregoreo*. This word literally means “be awake.” It implies being alert as opposed to being asleep. Being awake signifies *active spiritual service*, whereas being asleep indicates moral laxity and spiritual dereliction (1Th 5:6–7). In 1 Corinthians 16:13 we find this word tied in with a series of words of ethical synonymity: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.” The accent is on diligent commitment and faithful readiness to serve. The emphasis in the Scriptural employment of this term is not on literally looking out each day in anticipation of an any moment appearing of Christ, but on vibrant service. Since we cannot know when he will return, we must always be alert. *This is the calling of the Christian. Eschatological imminency is not mandatory for moral watchfulness.* During World War II Allis wrote:

This argument has been stated in various ways, all of which involve the assumption that men cannot expect and watch for the coming of Christ and be stimulated and safeguarded by the thought of it unless they can believe that it may take place ‘at any moment.’ This argument is not valid. A mother may live in the constant, ever-present hope and expectation of seeing her absent boy, even when she knows that he is on the other side of the globe. Intensity of affection disregards time and distance. Seven years was a long time for Jacob to serve for Rachel; and he had made a contract with Laban and knew that he would be held to the letter of it. Yet the years

52. Macleod, “The Second Coming of Christ,” 20.

53. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 91.

seemed to him like a 'few days' (the Hebrew might be rendered 'single days') for the love he had for her. . . . The interest men take in an objective, the effort they are willing to make to attain it, does not depend on its nearness nearly so much as on its greatness, its desirability, and the probability or certainty of its ultimate achievement. The nearness of the goal may appeal to a man's selfishness, ambition, pride, even to his indolence.⁵⁴

Despite its employment in the debate by some, Paul's statement in Titus 2:13 does not demand imminency, when he urges our "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The word "looking" (*prosdechomai*) does not demand the connotation "look for with imminent expectation." It simply means "wait for, expect." A number of translators translate the passage with the idea of "waiting."⁵⁵ Hendriksen notes that it means "*waiting for* or *patient looking forward to*."⁵⁶ Patience anticipates *delay*.

Though it is true that we should eagerly long for the Return of Christ, it is neither true that this entails its imminence nor that this is the only genuine spur to diligence. As far as the imminent expectation of Christ's Return goes, the Christian should deeply long for personal release from this body of sin and his entry into the glories of heaven, which comes at death. Yet he labors where God has currently placed him by his providence: in the God-created world of time and space.

Furthermore, regarding imminence as a spur to holiness we all know that we could die this very minute. We are statistically more certain that we *will* die in a relatively short time (Ps 90:4–6, 10; 1 Pe 1:24) than we are that Christ will return today. Upon exiting temporal life through the door of death we will find ourselves in the presence of the Lord our Judge, where we will give account (2Co 5:8, 10). This ought to spur us to live for him, as the Parable of the Rich Barn Owner (Lk 12:16–21) indicates. John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) wisely warns: "Is not the consummation of the world, for each of us, the end of his own life? Why are you concerned and worried about the common end?" (*In Ep I ad Thes* 9:1).

54. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 169.

55. See: *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible*, J. B. Phillips' *New Testament in Modern English*, Moffatt's *New Translation*, Weymouth's *New Testament in Modern Speech*, *Amplified Bible*, Williams' *New Testament in the Language of the People*.

56. Hendriksen, *I and II Timothy and Titus*, 372.

Still further, every Christian knows that he lives constantly under the moment-by-moment scrutiny of Almighty God. We cannot escape his presence during any moment of life, for “there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom *we must give account*” (Heb 4:13). This motivated David to live for God and to praise him for his greatness (Ps 139). The *certainty* of our absolute *present openness* to the Lord ought to move us to serve him more faithfully, even more so than the *prospect* that he may possibly return today.⁵⁷

No spur to holiness is lost by denying the imminency of Christ’s Return. Surely holiness is not furthered among Christians by their holding for 2000 years what has proven to be an error. As Murray notes: “living in expectation of the advent of Christ is *not* the same as believing the advent to be just at hand in point of time. If the latter belief were required of Christians, then all the generations of the Church except the last would be required to believe a deception.”⁵⁸

Besides, if anticipation of the appearing of Christ at any moment is a major New Testament theme and ethical spur, how can we account for passages that clearly expect a *delay* of his return — in the same passages (see Mt 25:5, 14, 19 in conjunction with Mt 24:42; 25:13)? It is interesting that in Christ’s parable the *foolish virgins* expect his imminent return (Mt 25:1–13). Significantly, the *wicked scoffer* is not prepared for the long delay of Christ’s Return (2Pe 3:3–9). And just as significantly, we must believe that Peter lived in holiness despite teaching that the second advent was at a distance.

Returning once again to Murray, we observe that: “What is of ultimate significance is not whether Christ will come in our lifetime or later, not whether or not our death must intervene, but the truth that whether he come ‘sooner’ or ‘later’ we shall all share alike in the full redemption which that day will bring.” He continues: “The sanctifying power of the Advent upon our present conduct has indeed nothing to do with our being able to fix its time; it has to do rather with a true scriptural appreciation of what that even means.”⁵⁹ As Davis observes, we should understand that the call to watchfulness in regard to the second coming is based on its *unexpectedness*, not its calculability (Lk 12:35–40).⁶⁰ Smith

57. Alexander, “The End is Not Yet,” 1ff.

58. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 212.

59. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 214, 215.

60. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 105.

agrees: “The Bible clearly teaches that we should be prepared for his return at any time, and that he will come unexpectedly, as a thief in the night, but this does not necessarily say that it has been imminent for every age of the church’s life.”⁶¹

“Postmillennialism is Rooted in Evolutionary Thought”

In this and the next two sections I will analyze related objections to postmillennial eschatology. These problems point to the alleged basis (evolution), method (liberalism), and result (social gospel) of postmillennialism. Let us consider the evolutionary argument first.

Not infrequently a complaint against postmillennialism is that it is closely associated with evolutionary thought. Often both the optimism and the developmental progress inherent in evangelical postmillennialism are alleged to have been derived from evolutionary science. Because of this misperception it is not uncommon to hear the criticism that “postmillennialists have had some difficulty maintaining a genuine supernaturalism.”⁶² In his study of millennial views Walvoord parallels a theologically liberal, evolution-based postmillennialism with theologically orthodox, Scripture-based postmillennialism (although he allows there is some distinction between them).⁶³ Berkhof sharply distinguishes between evangelical, supernaturalistic postmillennialism and its naturalistic, evolutionary imitation. Yet, after citing several liberal postmillennialists, he writes: “These quotations are quite characteristic of a great deal of present day Postmillennialism, and it is no wonder that the Premillenarians react against it.”⁶⁴

Historically, this alleged association of evolutionary thought with postmillennial theology has ignored the fact that both a developed postmillennialism (e.g., the Puritans), as well as nascent postmillennialism (e.g., Athanasius), arose well before scientific evolutionism, which is generally dated from the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859). Historically, we may even argue that the evolutionist stole from the postmillennial idea of progress rather than vice versa.

61. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2:801.

62. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology*, 72.

63. Walvoord, “The Millennial Issue in Modern Thought,” 154.

64. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 718.

Interestingly, earlier in the twentieth century dispensationalists were strong advocates of Thomas Chalmers' 1814 "Gap Theory" of Genesis 1 through the influence of G. H. Pember's *Earth's Earliest Ages*. This was an attempt to accommodate Scripture to evolutionary geology. Scofield himself was very strong on this view of Genesis 1:1 and 2, as was the Pilgrim Bible (1948).⁶⁵ *The New Scofield Bible* (1967) removed the note from Genesis 1:1–2, but then placed its essence at Isaiah 45:18. Even when dispensationalists reject this viewpoint (e.g., John Whitcomb and Henry Morris), they still play into the hands of the evolutionary humanists. North points out that "there is also no doubt that the humanists have relied on the widespread fundamentalist faith in premillennialism to strengthen their hold over American life."⁶⁶ This is due to the premillennialists' retreat from cultural influence. They hand over authority to the humanists.

Is Darwinism optimistic? Not regarding the long run. The atheistic, evolutionist philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote in 1935: "There is no law of cosmic progress, but only an oscillation upward and downward, with a slow trend downward on a balance owing to the diffusion of energy. This, at least, is what science at present regards as most probable, and in our disillusioned generation it is easy to believe. From evolution, so far as our present knowledge shows, no ultimately optimistic philosophy can be validly inferred."⁶⁷ It is difficult to see how such statements could be deemed close to postmillennialism. Indeed, North has noted similar applications of the Law of Entropy in the Scientific Creation movement and also in certain New Age philosophies and modern evolutionism.⁶⁸

The ultimate problem with the "postmillennialism = evolutionism" argument is that *it identifies things that differ in fundamental respects*. The goals, motives, and standards of evangelical postmillennialism are clearly supernaturalistic, whereas those of secular humanism are thoroughly naturalistic. Postmillennialism's *goal* is the glorification of Jesus Christ in all areas of life; humanism's goal is the glorification of man in all areas of life. Postmillennialism's *motive* is faithfulness to the resurrected Christ; humanism's motive is faithfulness to self-sufficient man. Postmillennial-

65. SRB, see notes spanning 3–4. See brief discussion in Rushdoony, *God's Plan for Victory*, 6–7 and North, *Is the World Running Down?*, 270.

66. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, 271.

67. Russell, "Evolution," 81.

68. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, *passim*.

ism's *standard* is the written revelation of Almighty God in Scripture; humanism's standard is autonomous human reason or mystical illumination. Evangelical postmillennialism and *some* forms of evolutionism expect historical progress. Yet the nature and results of this progress are radically different.

This leads to the next objection.

"Liberal Tendencies Govern Postmillennialism"

A more popular and simpler exception to postmillennialism is that it contains the *seeds of liberalism* within it. Dallas Theological Seminary professor Robert Lightner writes: "Postmillennialism found it almost impossible to stem the tide toward liberal theology. The nonliteral method of prophetic interpretation that both postmillennialism and amillennialism rest on, leaves the door wide open, hermeneutically at least, for the same kind of interpretation to be applied to other biblical matters, such as the deity of Christ, and the authority of the Bible."⁶⁹ Ice believes that "evangelical postmillennialists believe that many nineteenth-century postmillennialists went astray by adopting humanistic liberalism."⁷⁰

Walvoord argues similarly when he complains that postmillennialism cannot resist the tendency to liberalism in that it "lends itself to liberalism with only minor adjustments."⁷¹ Pentecost agrees that there is "the trend toward liberalism, which postmillennialism could not meet, because of its spiritualizing principle of interpretation."⁷² *This argument equates theolo-gical liberalism with optimism, a very questionable assumption.* Neo-orthodox theology, existentialist to the core, was a reaction to the optimism of the older liberalism. It is nonetheless equally hostile to an orthodox view of biblical revelation.

Jay Adams notes the temptation of this sort of argument for premillennialists, while disavowing its helpfulness: "But side-by-side with [the postmillennialists], liberals began announcing similar expectations,

69. Lightner, *Last Days Handbook*, 84.

70. *PEBP*, 307.

71. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 35; also 34. This is an incredible and indefensible assertion. Postmillennialists believe in the visible, glorious return of Christ to cause the physical resurrection of the dead and to hold the Great Judgment of all men, assigning some to heaven and others to hell. I know of no liberal theologian that holds any of these fundamental assertions.

72. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 386.

while attributing them to very different causes. . . . Evangelicals found it easier to attack the general idea of a world getting better and better (held by both) than to make methodological distinctions between conservative, supernaturalistic postmillennialism and liberal, naturalistic modernism.”⁷³ Grenz discourages such associations with postmillennialism noting that “their outlook differed fundamentally from both secular and liberal Christian utopianism.”⁷⁴ He further notes that “the central aspect of postmillennialism, therefore, lies not in societal transformation per se, but in the spread of the gospel and the conversion of a great number of persons.”⁷⁵

Dispensationalist Culver’s honesty in this regard is refreshing: “During the ‘golden age’ of American Protestant modernism, which came to an end with World War II, modernists adopted a kind of postmillennialism to which earlier advocates would have given no approval It was based more on the theory of evolution and humanism than on any interpretation of the Bible and need not occupy our attention here. The present heirs of modernism, the neoorthodox and neoliberal people, are scarcely more optimistic about the course of the present era than premillennarians and so are not inclined to postmillennialism.”⁷⁶

I have already dealt briefly with the issue of hermeneutics in chapter 7. Virtually no evangelical scholars except dispensationalists assert that “literalism” is a protection against liberalism. Premillennialist Ladd complains against dispensationalists:

Walvoord goes on to say that ‘the diverse theological systems of Roman Catholic, modern liberal, and modern conservative writers are found to be using essentially the same method.’ This amounts to the claim that only dispensationalism, with its literal hermeneutic of the Old Testament, can provide a truly evangelical theology. In my view this simply is not true. B. B. Warfield did not use the same ‘spiritualizing’ hermeneutic as the liberal. The liberal *admits* that the New Testament teaches the bodily resurrection of Christ, but his philosophical presuppositions make it impossible for him to accept it. On the other hand, B. B. Warfield was the greatest exponent of a high view of biblical inspiration of his day. He was prepared to

73. Adams, *Time Is at Hand*, 1.

74. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 66.

75. Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 68.

76. Culver, *Daniel in the Latter Days*, 206–207.

accept any doctrine which could be proved by the Scriptures. If he 'spiritualized' the millennium, it was because he felt *a total biblical hermeneutic required him to do so*. This is not liberalism.⁷⁷

In his response to dispensationalist Hoyt, Ladd laments:

Hoyt's essay reflects the major problem in the discussion of the millennium. Several times he contrasts nondispensational views with his own, which he labels 'the biblical view' (pp. 69–70, 84). If he is correct, then the other views, including my own, are 'unbiblical' or even heretical. This is the reason that over the years there has been little creative dialogue between dispensationalists and other schools of prophetic interpretation.⁷⁸

Cox notes: "Indeed, some [dispensationalists] allow but two alternatives: their own school or liberalism. In this area of theology, especially, a label often becomes a libel."⁷⁹

Does literalism protect against theological distortion? This sort of argument can be turned on the dispensationalist. Should it be argued that *premillennialism leads to cultism* because of the literalistic hermeneutic of such premillennial cults as: Mormonism, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God, and others?⁸⁰ Does not Pentecost himself admit that *literalism was the method applied by the Christ-rejecting Pharisees*?⁸¹ Was not literalism a factor in the medieval cloister and self-flagellation?

Does possible misuse of a particular hermeneutic require the abandonment of that hermeneutic "for safety's sake"? Surely Pentecost is correct in his forced admission: "And yet it can not be denied that literalism was the accepted method [of rabbinism]. Misuse of the method does not militate against the method itself. It was not the method that was at fault, but rather the misapplication of it."⁸² The question arises: why

77. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 19–20.

78. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in Clouse, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 93.

79. Cox, *Biblical Studies in Final Things*, 175. Cox is amillennial.

80. I have responded elsewhere to this fallacy of equating divergent systems by their use of similar terminology. See: Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 318–340.

81. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 17–19.

82. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 19.

should postmillennialists abandon their hermeneutic method that is *vaguely* akin to that which is twisted by liberals?

Is it true that postmillennialism “lends itself to liberalism with only minor adjustments” (as per Walvoord)? “Minor adjustments”! Postmillennialism *by definition* cannot be liberal: “Postmillennialism” holds that Christ with Return *post* the millennium. What liberal believes Christ will return *at all*?⁸³ Walvoord’s derogatory assertion overlooks the whole-sale supernaturalism inherent within postmillennialism and suggests that the wholesale naturalism involved in liberalism are only minor differences! As Murray observes: “the naturalistic optimism of the nineteenth century stood opposed to the old theology *all along the line*.”⁸⁴

Amillennialist Kim Riddlebarger suggests a linkage between postmillennialism and liberalism, even though he denounces the dispensational tendency to link amillennialism with liberalism.⁸⁵ Thankfully, amillennialist Robert Strimple has accepted my argument that postmillennialism *by definition* cannot be equated with liberalism: “I express appreciation for Pastor Gentry’s attempt to establish his postmillennial eschatology on a biblical basis. Surely he has laid to rest the charge (too often heard in the past) that the kind of evangelical postmillennialism he advocates rests on liberal, humanist, evolutionist presuppositions.”⁸⁶

“Postmillennialism Results in a Social Gospel”

Due to the pietistic retreatism so characteristic of fundamentalism, there is a strong tendency among dispensationalists to equate the social concern of postmillennial eschatology with Social Gospel liberalism. The dispensationalist urges that “God didn’t send me to clean the fish bowl, he sent me to fish.”⁸⁷ When the Christian expresses a cultural concern for the sins of modern culture and a desire for their rooting out, the pietist moans, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, or frets: *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* He fears that such a concern is surely *The Road to Holocaust*.⁸⁸

83. Many liberals even debate whether Christ lived *at all*. And when they do admit he lived, they still deny he lived *again* through a resurrection.

84. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 210. Emph. added.

85. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 30, 35.

86. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 58.

87. Lindsey, “The Great Cosmic Countdown: Hal Lindsey on the Future.” In *Eternity* 28 (Jan. 1977) 21.

88. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*; House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*

Ryrie charges that the “social gospel . . . has been an outgrowth of this system since the idea of a world free from evil is envisioned as a result of man’s efforts.”⁸⁹

Some retreatist amillennialists fear the same. Protestant Reformed Church theologian Herman Hanko insists: “There [is] also a question raised as to whether even mild, or moderate, postmillennialism does not after all, in fact, with its view of a kingdom of Christ being realized in this present world, end up by laboring for the realization of the kingdom of Anti-Christ and develop into radical and liberal postmillennialism and social gospelism.”⁹⁰ Such, then, “makes postmillennial thinking of considerable danger.”⁹¹ Modified amillennialist Donald Bloesch expresses concern: “It can be shown that postmillennialism was a guiding motif among the votaries of the Social Gospel movement.”⁹² Amil-lennialist Spykman *opens* his basic discussion of postmillennialism by referencing the “social gospel.”⁹³

Renaissance humanism in the 1700s and 1800s held a high view of man, which led it to believe that unaided human effort could lift the human race to a higher plane of moral integrity and cultural glory. Such man-centered labor would bring in a secular millennium of abundance and peace. This teaching became known as the Social Gospel.

Just as the premillennialist would argue that the millennial cults are aberrations of the premillennial hope, so I argue that the Social Gospel is a mutation of the postmillennial vision. This has been recognized even by non-evangelical historians, when comparing evangelical postmillennialism and Social Gospel advocacy: “The concepts which had earlier clustered around a gradualist vision of the millennium in fact persisted

(1988); Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (1989). For a thorough response to these see: Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*. See also: DeMar, *The Debate Over Christian Reconstruction* (1988); DeMar, *The Legacy of Hatred Continues* (1989); and North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction* (1991).

89. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 13–14.

90. Hanko, “An Interesting Conference on Postmillennialism,” 60.

91. Hanko, “The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism,” 159.

92. Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 103. His modifications to amillennialism are mentioned on pages 100, 111. Bloesch later recognizes the Social Gospel movement as involving meliorism rather than optimism. That is, “meliorism holds that the world is neither completely evil nor completely good, but that it can always be improved” (257).

93. Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 534.

until the end of the [1800s] and even beyond. Of course considerable changes occurred in the configuration of ideas. What had once been defined solely in terms of evangelical Protestantism was later secularized in important ways. The process of secularization entailed a partial transfer of redemptive power from religious to secular institutions.”⁹⁴ This resulted in the wholesale “secularization of the eschatological vision” and a strong tendency “to divinize society.”⁹⁵ Clearly, when postmillennialism is gutted of its supernaturalism and redemptive concerns it is no longer evangelical postmillennialism.

Lindsey makes a most astounding and groundless charge in this regard, when he asserts that postmillennialists “rejected much of the Scripture as being literal and believed in the inherent goodness of man No self-respecting scholar who looks at the world conditions and the accelerating decline of Christian influence today is a ‘postmillennialist.’”⁹⁶ Because leading postmillennialists have been devout Calvinists — e.g., Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, W. G. T. Shedd, R. L. Dabney, J. H. Thornwell — adhering to the doctrine of man’s inherent total depravity, this claim is absurd.⁹⁷ Lightner is a bit more reluctant to tar evangelical postmillennialism with the Social Gospel brush, noting evangelical postmillennialism “needs to be disting-uished.”⁹⁸

The postmillennial concern with social righteousness as well as individual holiness causes lamentation even among some non-dispensationalists. Peter Masters writes: “May the Lord keep us all dedicated wholly to the work of the Gospel, and deliver us from taking an unbiblical interest in social affairs (especially out of frustration at the poor progress of our evangelistic labours!).”⁹⁹

Social Gospel advocacy certainly picked up elements of evangelical postmillennialism. But it reduced the supernatural transformation wrought by regeneration into mere humanistic moral effort.¹⁰⁰ Immanent forces replaced transcendent ones as the impetus to advance and the

94. Quandt, “Religion and Social Thought,” 391.

95. Quandt, “Religion and Social Thought,” 396, 407.

96. Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 176.

97. For helpful discussions of God’s common grace in the world in light of man’s total depravity, see: North, *Dominion and Common Grace* (1987); North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, ch. 7.

98. Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook*, 84.

99. Masters, “World Dominion,” 21.

100. Quandt, “Religion and Social Thought,” 396.

basis of hope. Though many of the hopes of the two views are similar — the reduction of crime, poverty, and suffering — the explanations, methodologies, and goals are vastly different.

Furthermore, as Rushdoony argues, it is erroneous to assert “that historical succession means necessary logical connection and succession.”¹⁰¹ Evangelical postmillennialism is a vastly different schema for history from Social Gospelism. Liberal H. Richard Niebuhr traced the development of the Social Gospel from: (1) Calvinistic postmillennialism, to (2) revivalistic Arminianism, to (3) statist humanism (Social Gospel).¹⁰² Rushdoony properly notes that if Calvinistic postmillennialism is considered the cause of the Social Gospel it must also be considered the cause of its *opposite*: revivalistic Arminianism.

“Preteristic Postmillennialism is Anti-Semitic”

Two issues merge today in forming the anti-Semitism charge against preterism: The first is the horrific Nazi holocaust that ruthlessly slaughtered so many Jews. This enormous evil has rightly impacted our psyche regarding both the suffering of the Jews and the sinfulness of man. Its impact is widely felt in biblical and theological studies, just as it is in historical, sociological, political, psychological, and other fields of academic endeavor.

The second is political correctness, with all of its absurdities and hyper-sensitivity. We are all familiar with this liberal mindset and its heightened sensitivity to any sort of perceived slight to any people group — except for Christians, especially evangelical Christians. Combined with an extreme relativism, the very facts of history are either totally suppressed or radically reinterpreted in order to promote the new values inherent in this perspective.

In this sort of environment any promotion or defense of *Christianity*, especially regarding its *truth claims* and its *history-altering impact*, is fair game for intellectual derision and academic assault. The modern mind stands aghast that we believe Jesus Christ is “*the way, the truth, and the life*.” The notion of Jesus as the only Savior is anathema that is condemned with all the vitriol that can be mustered.

101. Rushdoony, “Postmillennialism versus Impotent Religion,” 123.

102. See: Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (1959).

The preterist “sin”

Furthermore, the preterist approach to NT prophecy makes the matter even “worse” by (allegedly) adding the additional baggage of overt anti-Semitism. This is because preterists believe that two series of events from the first century are foundational to NT prophecy and the future development of human history. The first set of events involve the birth, life, work, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The second includes the destruction of Jerusalem, the collapse of the Jewish temple, and the permanent cessation of the sacrificial system. (I should note, however, that as Richard Gaffin and others notes, the AD 70 judgment is really an extension of Christ’s first coming. Thus, these are not *two* series of events, but one *elongated* one.)

In the preterist system these two event-series dramatically demonstrate the wrath of God against Israel, combining to:

- legally effect the ending of the old covenant which was God’s revelation for governing Israel
- permanently disestablish Israel from its central role in redemptive-history
- establish forever the new covenant and its final reorganization of the people of God in the church of Jesus Christ

This is anathema! Such a theology should be *denounced* in the public square, not given a hearing! How can we even think that God judged Israel in the first century merely for rejecting the Messiah and persecuting his followers? And especially in affirming this world-conquering religious construct, preteristic postmillennialism! The secularists com-plain: “Aren’t all religions equal?” “Isn’t truth relative?” “Wasn’t Jesus just a first century itinerant preacher and mystic?” “Away with this man, we have no king but Self!”

So then, preterism exalts Christ as the only Savior, affirms Christianity as the only approach to God, promotes the Bible as the unique, infallible, inerrant, authoritative revelation of God. And — God forbid! — we see the judgment of first century Israel as the will of God and the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in clearing the way for the ascendancy of Christianity. This, according to the modern mindset, is anti-Semitism in all of its ugliness and simplicity.

Our defense

But is the preterist scheme anti-Semitic? I myself have been criticized for promoting this “anti-Semitic” theology. Before I even start with the general defense of preterism against this charge, I will clearly and forthrightly state: *anti-Semitism is evil and should not be held by any Christian*. You cannot be anti-Semitic and follow Jesus’ command: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” I will also declare that I myself am opposed to anti-Semitism and have never held to it or any form of racism.

But this issue is not about *me*. So I must speak to the broader issue regarding whether or not preterism as such is anti-Semitic. My answer to this question should be surmised from all that I have said before: *No*. Preterism as a theological construct is *not* anti-Semitic. Let me now respond to the “preterism = anti-Semitism” charge.

Definitional defense

First, I would point out that we need to define our terms. What is “anti-Semitism”? A basic, sufficient definition is found in *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Unabridged Dictionary*. There we learn that “anti-Semitism” is: “1. prejudice against Jews; dislike or fear of Jews and Jewish things. 2. discrimination against or persecution of Jews.” This is the only legitimate definition in alleging anti-Semitism. No plank in the preterist system suggests that preterism dislikes Jews, fears them, or wants to discriminate against or persecute them.

The belief that God will not once again exalt Israel above all other nations (as in the OT, e.g., Dt 7:6–8; Psa 147:19–20) is not anti-Semitic. It may be *contra-Judaic*, but it is not *anti-Semitic*. That is, preterism may contradict religious Judaism *theologically*, but it does not persecute racial Jews *personally* or *socially*.

Second, I would point out another necessary definition. Preterism teaches that (1) *God* punished Israel; and he did so (2) in the events of *the first century*. Preterism holds *neither* that Christians were ever called upon to persecute Jews (in either the first century or today) *nor* that God’s judgment wrath is to *continue* against them today. The prophetically-determined, biblically-defined judgment of God came against them in the concrete, historical, non-repeatable events of the first century. *That* was the generation that rejected Christ; *that* temple was the focus of his wrath. Those people and that institution have long since perished.

We need to distinguish between an interpretation of a book written 2000 years ago in the context of great struggle for the life of the church

and the ravings of modern racists, zealots, and hotheads. I am interpreting a book regarding events that occurred twenty centuries ago; I am not calling for a continued pogrom against the Jews. In fact, my evangelical Christian theology forbids it (do unto others) as well as my postmillennial expectations (all people-groups will be saved), as well as the obvious fact that my Savior and his apostles were Jewish.

Theological defense

To criticize the preterist interpretation of Revelation as anti-Semitic because of its strong teaching against the first-century Jews requires that you also criticize the Gospels and Acts on the same basis. Those liberals who charge that Revelation's denunciations of Israel are anti-Semitic must *also* charge the Gospels and Acts as such. In fact, virtually every contemporary academic study dealing with the history of anti-Semitism traces the roots of modern anti-Semitism to these books. See for example:

John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

T. A. Burkill, "Anti-Semitism in St. Mark's Gospel," *NT* 3 (1959): 34–52.

W. R. Farmer, *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1999).

Riemund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

L. T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 419–41.

The New Testament in general. Jack T. Sanders writes that "whether or not Christian writers cringe at applying the term 'anti-semitism' to part of the New Testament, we must realize that it is that hostility that we are describing" (Sanders *The Jews in Luke-Acts* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], xvi).

The Gospel of Matthew. Some scholars view Matthew as the “most severely ‘anti-Jewish’ Gospels.”¹⁰³ For instance, Jewish scholar David Flusser comments on Matthew 8:11–12 regarding the “sons of the kingdom” being cast out: “This is a vulgar anti-Judaism of many members of the early Gentile church.”¹⁰⁴

Regarding Matthew 27:25, Galambush (an apostate Christian) laments: “It is hard to imagine a more *anti-Jewish* account than this ‘most Jewish’ gospel.” She also states that 1Th 2:14–16 “was slanderous in its original context and, in later years, disastrous in its consequences.”¹⁰⁵

Matthew 27:25 is of such concern that it played prominently in the following story. A May 21, 2000 Associated Press article commented on the re-writing of the decennial Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany (which dates back to 1634). It was re-written so as to remove “anti-Semitic” aspects of the crucifixion account: “When enraged Temple leaders shouted ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ during a climactic scene at the premiere Sunday of the world’s most famous Passion play, dissenters defended Jesus for the first time: ‘Set him free!’ The revision is among a series of thoughtfully scripted changes introduced for the millennial production of the Oberammergau Passion play, acted roughly every decade since 1634. Many of the story’s most ardent critics now declare this version a milestone in decades-long efforts to expunge negative images of Jews. ‘I can say positively that it is a turning point,’ said Irving Levine, an interfaith expert for the American Jewish Committee, which has been working with the Anti-Defamation League since the 1960s to remove Jewish stereotypes from the Oberammergau play.”

In his article “Mel Gibson and the Gospel of Anti-Semitism” Charles Patterson writes: “The trouble with Mel Gibson’s film ‘The Passion’ is not the film itself, but the gospel story on which it’s based. The gospel story, which has generated more anti-Semitism than the sum of all the other anti-Semitic writings ever written, created the climate in Christian Europe that led to the Holocaust. Long before the rise of Adolf Hitler, the gospel story about the life and death of Jesus had poisoned the bloodstream of

103. S. McKnight, “A Loyal Critic: Matthew’s Polemic with Judaism in Theological Perspective,” in Evans and eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*, 199.

104. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, xxiii.

105. Galambush, *The Reluctant Parting*, 125.

European civilization.”¹⁰⁶ To ameliorate the situation, Gibson edited the film to drop the offending text.

In February 4, 2004, the *New York Times* published an article by Sharon Waxman titled: “Gibson To Delete A Scene In ‘Passion.’” That article also charged that Matthew 27:25 was anti-Semitic and dangerous. She writes: “Mel Gibson, responding to focus groups as much as to protests by Jewish critics, has decided to delete a controversial scene about Jews from his film, ‘The Passion of the Christ,’ a close associate said today. A scene in the film, in which the Jewish high priest Caiaphas calls down a kind of curse on the Jewish people by declaring of the Crucifixion, ‘His blood be on us and on our children,’ will not be in the movie’s final version, said the Gibson associate, who spoke on condition of anonymity. . . . Jewish leaders had warned that the passage from Matthew 27:25 was the historic source for many of the charges of deicide and Jews’ collective guilt in the death of Jesus.”

The Gospel of Luke. Weatherly opens his important defense of the historicity and moral character of Luke’s writings with these words: “Is the New Testament anti-Semitic? . . . As the question as been posed and answers sought, the Lukan corpus has become a particular focus of investigation.”¹⁰⁷

Luke repeatedly blames the Jews for Christ’s death: Luke 24:20; Acts 2:22–23, 36; 3:13–15a; 4:10; 5:28, 30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27–29; 26:10. And this is deemed the seed of full blown anti-Semitism by Josef Blinzler who writes: “It was repeatedly stated on the part of the Jews that, when all was said and done, modern anti-Semitism was nothing else than the logical result of the Christian thesis that the Jews were guilty of the death of Jesus.”¹⁰⁸

The Gospel of John. Many critical scholars argue that John is the most anti-Semitic of the Gospels. In fact, it is one of leading documents for arguing the point. See for example:

106. JewishVirtualLibrary.Org.

107. Jon A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 106, 1994), 13.

108. Joseph Blizner, *The Trial of Jesus: The Jewish and Roman Proceedings Against Jesus Christ Described and Assessed from the Oldest Accounts*. Trans from 2d ed. by Isabel and Florence McHugh. (Westminster, Mary.: Newman, 1959).

Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 111–16.

R. Fuller, “The ‘Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel,” *Dialog* 16 (1977): 35.

E. J. Epp, “Anti-Semitism and the Popularity of the Fourth Gospel in Christianity,” *CCAR Journal*, 22:4 (Fall, 1975), 35–52.

M. A. Getty, “The Jews and John’s Passion Narrative,” *Liturgy* 22:3 (March 1977): 6ff.

Biblical defense

Revelation has John speaking strong words against apostate Judaism. He clearly writes of synagogues as a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9; 3:9; cp. Jn 8:44) and Jerusalem is called “Sodom and Egypt” (Rev 11:8), and more. The preterist approach to the book finds even more evidence of strong language against Israel. In Bratcher and Hatton’s *Handbook on the Revelation to John*, which “concentrates on exegetical information important for translator, and . . . attempts to indicate possible solutions for translational problems related to language or culture.”¹⁰⁹ When they get to Rev 2:9 they well note that “it is probable that these are Jews” to whom John is negatively referring. But then they write: “If translators feel that translating *Jews* literally will give the wrong impression to readers, it will be helpful to say ‘those who say (claim) to be God’s people, but are not.’”¹¹⁰ This avoids language many deem anti-Semitic.

But such strong language against Jews is no different from the way the classical prophets of the OT spoke against Israel. In the OT the prophets denounced Israel, as we see in for example in: Jeremiah 23:1ff; Ezekiel 34:10; Isaiah 56:8–11.

Isaiah denounces Israel: “Alas, sinful nation, / People weighed down with iniquity, / Offspring of evildoers, / Sons who act corruptly! / They have abandoned the Lord, / They have despised the Holy One of Israel, / They have turned away from Him” (Isa 1:4). He calls her leaders “rulers of Sodom” and her people “people of Gomorrah” (Isa 1:10). Was Isaiah anti-Semitic?

In Isaiah 10:5–6 Assyria is sent by God against a “godless nation” (Israel). In fact, he scathingly derides the temple in his day: “he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; / He who sacrifices a lamb is like the

109. Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, vii.

110. Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 47.

one who breaks a dog's neck; / He who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood; / *He who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol.* / As they have chosen their own ways, / And their soul delights in their abominations" (Isa 66:3).

Jeremiah calls Jerusalem a harlot (like John does in Revelation!): "You are a harlot with many lovers.... You have a polluted land" (Jer 3:1, 2). "I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also" (Jer 3:8).

Does not Israel's own Scripture, the Tanak¹¹¹ (our OT), warn them of God's wrath if they turn against him (as evangelicals believe they did in rejecting Jesus and demanding his crucifixion)? Deuteronomy 28:15ff and Leviticus 26 are just two Mosaic warnings to this effect. Thus, Walker well notes that "this threat-tradition cannot be dismissed as inherently anti-Semitic. Once again Jesus was standing four-square within an accepted tradition seen throughout the canonical prophets, whereby God's people and their institutions could be denounced in the name of Israel's God. Indeed within the Jewish sectarianism of Jesus' day the pronouncing of judgement upon the present regime in Jerusalem was not unusual."¹¹²

Historical defense

The Dead Sea Scrolls. The DSS were written by a sect of Jews who separated from Jerusalem to live in the area of Qumran sometime around 100 BC They wrote many documents regarding their reasons for leaving Jerusalem and the temple system. They hoped for the overthrow of the current high-priestly aristocracy. Their writings scathingly revile Jerusalem, the temple and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Were these devout Jews anti-Semitic? Consider their writings:

In 4QpNah the Qumranians "accommodated the whole text of Nahum to Jerusalem ('Nineveh'), indicating the way in which even texts that did not originally concern faithless Israel could be read as if they did." There they even declared of their fellow Jews that Jerusalem was the "dwelling place" of the wicked of the nations.

111. Tanakh is an acronym based on the initial letters of the three main divisions of the OT: T (*Torah*, the Mosaic law), N (*Neviim*, the Prophets), *Ketuvim* (the Writings).

112. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 274; see also 224.

Commenting on Hab 2:8 they wrote: “Interpreted this concerns the last priests of Jerusalem, who shall amass money and wealth by plundering the peoples. But in the last days, their riches and booty shall be delivered in to the hands of the army of the Kittim [i.e., Romans]” (1Qp Hab 9). Here we see a pre-justification of Jerusalem’s destruction by Rome that is similar to the preterist analysis, yet these are devout Jews.

The Qumranians scorned the temple priests. The high priest “robbed God and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself” (1Qp Hab 8:11–12). 1QpHab 7 speaks of the “Wicked Priest” so that when he “ruled over Israel his heart became proud, and he forsook God, and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches. He robbed and amassed the riches of men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself.”

They write: “The city is Jerusalem where the Wicked Priest committed abominable deeds and defiled the temple of God. The violence done to the land: these are the cities of Judah where he robbed the poor of their possession” (1QpHab 12). In the Tosefta (*t. Men.* 13:22) we find the reason for the destruction of the first century temple: “On what account did they go into exile? Because they love money and hate one another.”

The Qumranians withdrew from Jerusalem partly due to Jerusalem’s leaders being “the Spouter of Lies who led many astray that he might build his city of vanity with blood and raise a congregation on deceit” (1QpHab 10:12). The separatist Qumran community deemed Jerusalem “a place of vanity built with blood” (CDC 12:2), a “fortress of wickedness” (4QTestimonia).

Johnson well observes: “Anyone who has read the Dead Sea Scrolls knows that the community that wrote them had an extreme hostility to all outsiders.”¹¹³ They called Jews outside of their community “sons of the pit” (1QS 9:16; CD 6:15; 13:14), who are ruled by the angel of darkness (1QS 19–21; 5:2, 10), and are “the ungodly of the covenant” (1QM 1:2). Of those Jews they write in 1QS 2:4–10: “Be cursed of all your guilty wickedness! May he deliver you up to torture at the hands of all the wreakers of revenge.”

Thus, the Qumran community deemed Jerusalem as defiled and worthy of divine curse (CDC 1:3; 4:18; 5:6; 6:16; 12:1–2), as did much of

113. Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander,” 439.

the apocalyptic literature beginning in 200 BC, as we see in *1 Enoch* 83–89; *The Apocalypse of Weeks*; T. Levi 17:10; and *Jubilees* 23:21.

Conclusion

If we believe that the NT is the inspired word of God.... And if we believe that it records actual historical events and statements.... Then we have to interpret it according to its original intent. Though it is true that some racists have used the statements of the NT to justify ill-treatment of Jews, this is an *abuse* of this historical document. These people should be rebutted on moral and theological grounds, not by throwing out the NT. Nor by suppressing the meaning of what John wrote in Revelation.

Conclusion

The average evangelical Christian is more likely to respond to postmillennialism with pragmatic objections than with either theological or biblical objections. After all, we live in a highly pragmatic age. What dispensational author Thomas Ice has said of premillennialists is also true of amillennialists: “Premillennialists have always been involved in the present world. And basically, they have picked up on the ethical positions of their contemporaries.”¹¹⁴ But when these pragmatic objections are carefully considered in terms of what the Bible says and what postmillennialists say, they quickly fade away. These objections are rooted in either a misunderstanding of the postmillennial system itself or a misreading of the historical evidence.

When postmillennialism is analyzed in terms of its systemic unity and its insistence on the long-term glory of God’s work of salvation in history, it should at least be appreciated as a valid eschatological option. But it is more than that. As I have been arguing throughout this book, postmillennialism is the eschatology of Scripture.

114. Comment during a 1988 debate: Gary North and Gary DeMar vs. Thomas Ice and Dave Hunt. Quoted by DeMar, *Debate Over Christian Reconstruction*, 185.

THEOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS

So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" " (Zec 4:6–7)

In this chapter I leave the pragmatic and experiential objections and enter into more serious ones: those related to theological aspects of the eschatological question.

"Sin Undermines the Postmillennial Hope"

In the previous chapter I allude to the Calvinistic doctrine of man's total depravity. Clearly the leading postmillennial scholars hold strongly to this doctrine. In this section I will explain how postmillennialism may offer an optimistic outlook on history even though we live in a world of depraved sinners. The theological doctrine of the depravity of man is frequently urged against the prospect of postmillennial kingdom victory.

In J. Dwight Pentecost's assessment of the deficiencies of postmillennialism, his fourth objection is along these lines. He speaks of "the new trend toward realism in theology and philosophy, seen in neo-orthodoxy, which admits man is a sinner, and can not bring about the new age anticipated by postmillennialism."¹ As I mention in the previous chapter, Hal Lindsey asserts that postmillennialism believes in "the inherent goodness of man."²

Herman Hanko, a strong Calvinist, is convinced that "from the fall on, the world develops the sin of our first parents. This development continues throughout history. . . . More and more that kingdom of darkness comes to manifestation as time progresses."³ Indeed, in his view

1. Pentecost, *Things to Com*, 387.

2. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 176.

3. Hanko, "An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism," 25.

postmillennialism “is a mirage, therefore, a false hope, because it fails to reckon properly with the fact of sin” and “cannot take sin as seriously as do the Scriptures.”⁴

How may the postmillennialist respond? In the first place we should note that despite the presence of sin, sinners do nevertheless convert to Christ. We must remember that each and every convert to Christ was at one time a totally depraved sinner. And yet we have hundreds of millions of Christians in the world today. Salvation comes by the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. How can we deny the gospel’s power that has already saved millions of depraved sinners? What God can do for one sinner he can do for another. This is evident in the apostolic era (Ac 2:41; 4:4), as well as in biblical prophecy (Isa 2:3–4; Psa 86:9; Rev 5:9; 7:9).

A fatal objection to postmillennialism cannot arise from the *power of sin*. After all, the power of God to save greatly overshadows the power of sin to destroy. Indeed, “with God all things are possible” (Lk 18:27). In the ultimate analysis, the issue is not the power of sin, but the power of God. Throughout the present work I show that the Bible teaches that it is God’s will to bring redemption gradually to the whole world *as a system* through the proclamation of Christ’s gospel while building his church.

In one sense though it is true that the postmillennialist overlooks the depravity of man. He *overlooks* it — that is, *looks over and beyond it* — to see the resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵ We see the glorious power of Christ’s resurrection overwhelming the destructive power of Adam’s fall.⁶ We need to consider the *strength of grace* in comparison to the *power of sin*. The Christian should ask himself: “Have I ever seen a lost man become saved?” The answer is: *Yes*. This being the case, it is evident that grace is stronger than sin. The Christian should then ask a follow up question: “Does the Bible teach that a saved man can lose his salvation?”

4. Hanko, “The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism,” 159.

5. David Chilton well states: “Like Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee, [despairing evangelicals] looked at ‘nature’ rather than at the Lord Jesus Christ; like the Israelites on the border of Canaan, they looked at the ‘giants in the land’ instead of trusting the infallible promises of God; they were filled with fear, and took flight.” Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 232.

6. North, *Is the World Running Down?* (1988). Strangely, a sentence after stating that postmillennialism “fails to reckon properly with the fact of sin,” Hanko stumbles past the postmillennial resolution to the problem: “Nothing will be changed until sin is taken away. Christ did this on His cross!” Hanko, “The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism,” 159.

Here the answer is: *No*. In both cases, we see the superior power of God's grace over man's sin. As postmillennialist scholar David Brown once put it: "Souls that have felt the Saviour's grace know right well its matchless power. After their own conversion, they can never doubt its converting efficacy *on any scale that may be required*."⁷

In the preceding chapter I interact with Lindsey's complaint that postmillennialists "rejected much of the Scripture as being literal and believed in the inherent goodness of man."⁸ Responding again to Lindsey, I would note that postmillennialists do not believe in the inherent goodness of man, but Lindsey most definitely believes in the inherent weakness of the gospel. He believes that man's sin successfully resists the gospel even to the end of history. Jonah also had a concern regarding the power of the gospel: he feared its power *to save* wicked, powerful Nineveh (Jon 1:2–3, 10; 3:2; 4:1–4).

Gary North notes the irony of the complaint that I am considering here. Anti-postmillennialists

believe that a postmillennial revival is inherently impossible because of the power of rebellious autonomous men. They have great faith in man — autonomous, unsaved man. He can thwart the plan of God. Autonomous man says "no" to God, and God supposedly chooses never to overcome this "no." So, it is in fact the critic of postmillennialism who has faith in autonomous man. He believes that unsaved mankind has such enormous power to do evil that God cannot or will not overcome evil in history by the Spirit-empowered gospel.⁹

Though the "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9), the postmillennialist firmly believes that "God is greater than our heart" (1Jn 3:20). We are confident that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1Jn 4:4). After Christ's resurrection the church receives the Spirit's outpouring (Jn 7:39; Ac 2:33). And God promises that historical power is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zec 4:6).

We must emphasize this point: *We may not convincingly argue for any optimistic expectation for mankind's future on a secular base*. This glorious postmillennial prospect is not in any way, shape, or form rooted in any

7. Brown, *Christ's Second Coming*, 302–303.

8. Lindsey, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 176.

9. North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, 63.

humanistic effort. We cannot have a high estimation of man's future based on man in himself, for "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Ro 8:7–8). When left to himself man's world is corrupted and destroyed — a classic illustration being in the days of Noah (Ge 6:5). *But God refuses to leave man to himself.*

But neither does the hope for the man's progress under the gospel relate to the Christian's self-generated strength, wisdom, or cleverness. Left to our own efforts, we Christians too quickly learn that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Were our future outlook rooted in the unaided power even of redeemed man, all would be hopeless. But our hope is in the resurrected Christ. "The labor is ours; the subduing is His."¹⁰

Amillennialist Bernard Woudenberg's complaint against postmillennialism is woefully ill-conceived: "It is like the children of Israel rushing in to take the land of Canaan, but without Moses at their head (Numbers 14:40–45). Christ alone holds the right to rule, and he does (Ephesians 1:19–22), and we are never more than simply servants of His."¹¹ As Woudenberg notes in his self-vitiating argument, Christ *does* rule! Therefore, postmillennialists humbly bow themselves before him and seek to employ his Law-word under his headship. Would Woudenberg dismiss authoritative church leadership? Is eldership a usurpation of the authority of Christ who is the Head of his church? How, then, can he dismiss the prospect of Christian leadership in the world, as if it implies a usurpation of Christ's authority?

"The King's Absence Undermines the Postmillennial Kingdom"

Another objection to postmillennialism grows right out of dispensationalism's literalistic hermeneutic: How can there be a kingdom without a king? Hunt states dogmatically: "there can be no kingdom without the king being present."¹² Indeed, he puts the matter as badly as possible: "The growing acceptance of the teaching that a Christian elite has a mandate to set up the kingdom without Christ's personal presence

10. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew*, 422.

11. Woudenberg, "Hope as an Incentive to Godliness," 161.

12. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 259.

is genuine cause for concern.”¹³ “Christian elite”? “Cause for concern”? Charles E. Stevens writes: “Christ’s kingdom is presently in abeyance. The promised king came to his own and was rejected. David’s throne is vacant. The king is ‘exiled’ in heaven. . . . Scripture everywhere repudiates and disproves the doctrine that Christ is now reigning as Prince of peace, seeking through the church to extend His kingdom on earth by means of the gospel.”¹⁴

But even historic premillennialists can imply this objection, as does Millard J. Erickson: “Premillennialists assert that Christ the King is absent and will do great things when he returns; postmillennialists assert, however, that according to this passage Christ *is* present and will be to the end of the age.”¹⁵ Elsewhere he states: “the absence in Scripture of a clear depiction of an earthly reign of Christ without his physical presence seems to be another major weakness of this position.”¹⁶

What does Hunt mean by “a Christian elite”? Concerned Christians who run for office and are elected? Dedicated Christians who establish Christian schools? Committed Christians who train up their children for Christian living in all of life? Faithful Christians who pursue the Great Commission in seeking to “make disciples of all the nations” (Mt 28:19)? What is more, can we not turn his own objection against him by asking about the “Christian elite” who “will reign with [Christ] for a thousand years” (Rev 20:6)?

And what about Hunt’s concern that postmillennialists believe that Christians have “a mandate to set up the kingdom”? Actually Christ “set up the kingdom” while on earth (Mt 12:28; Lk 17:21; Jn 18:36–37; Col 1:13; cf. ch. 10 “Eschatology and Realization”). Therefore, we are now receiving “a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb 12:28). We promote his kingdom by preaching it (Ac 8:12; 28:23, 31) and urging others to enter it (Ac 14:22). Because of this we are *ambassadors* for our king (Eph 6:20; 2Co 5:20), “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col 4:11). He “has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev 1:6).

What does Hunt mean when he charges that we labor without “Christ’s personal presence”? Does he denigrate the spiritual presence of

13. Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, 43.

14. Charles E. Stevens, “The Church of Christ and the Kingdom of Christ in Contrast,” in Feinberg, *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 102–103.

15. Erickson, *Contemporary Options*, 64.

16. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1223.

Christ now? Is not Christ personally present with us as he promises: “And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20)?¹⁷ In fact, does he not know that “Jesus Christ is in you” (2Co 13:5) and that “Christ in you” is “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27)?

Regarding the claim that Christ must be physically present for his kingdom to manifest itself, Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice write:

Within the Reconstructionist framework, Messiah is in heaven and only present mystically in his kingdom. His absence from the earth during his kingdom reign robs Messiah of his moment of earthly glory and exaltation. It is a truncated reduction of the true reign of Christ. Since the first phase of Christ’s career, his humiliation, was spent physically upon the earth, it follows that there should be a corresponding display of his great glory through his reign on the earth.¹⁸

Though not intended as such, their statement demeans Christ and his redemptive labor for several reasons.

In the first place, it diminishes Christ’s absolute glory and majesty as he sits enthroned at God’s right hand. The New Testament repeatedly presents him as the heavenly King of kings enthroned in awe-inspiring majesty “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named” (Eph 1:20–21).¹⁹ Shall we say, then, that his rule from heaven somehow robs him of glory? Is his present session in heaven “a truncated reduction” of his reign? Peter views the matter quite differently, stating that he “is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (1Pe 3:22).

In addition, this statement speaks rather condescendingly of Christ’s rule, when it does come (in their view). It offers Christ but a “moment of glory” and speaks of his wondrous mystical presence as if meager: He “is *only* present mystically.” But his kingdom is an “eternal kingdom,” not a momentary one (1Pe 3:22).²⁰ Christ’s indwelling presence displays itself

17. Mt 18:20; Ro 8:9–11; Gal 4:19; Col 1:27; 3:16; Heb 13:5.

18. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 240.

19. In addition: Mt 28:18; Ac 2:30–36; Ro 8:34; 1Co 15:23, 24; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 10:13; 12:2.

20. Isa 9:6; Lk 1:33; Rev 11:15; 22:5.

in the rich blessings that flow from his glorious exaltation.²¹ Shall we say he “is *only* present mystically”?

Furthermore, this statement forgets that a major aspect of his *humiliation* is the fact that he comes to earth.²² House and Ice overlook the fundamental consequence of his *exaltation*: he returns to heaven to take up his manifest glory. In his High Priestly prayer the Lord prays:

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. . . . As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. . . . Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:4, 5, 18, 24)

Why does Christ’s kingdom require his physical presence on earth? After all, does not Satan have a kingdom on earth, although he is only spiritually present (Mt 12:26; Lk 4:6; 1Jn 5:19)? Do not Satan’s covenantal servants on earth promote his mission in history? Is Satan’s kingdom any less a kingdom just because he is not reigning from a literal throne on earth?

What kind of glory is it for Christ to personally and corporeally rule a political kingdom on earth, when that kingdom eventually revolts against him at the end (Rev 20:7–9)?²³ This view insists on a *second humiliation* of Christ. Hunt boldly (and erroneously) states: “In fact, dominion — taking dominion and setting up the kingdom of Christ — is an *impossibility*, even for God. The millennial reign of Christ, far from being the kingdom, is actually the final proof of the incorrigible nature of the human heart, because Christ Himself can’t do” it.²⁴

“Postmillennialism Confuses the Beginning of Christ’s Reign”

21. Jn 7:39; Ro 8:9; 1Co 3:16; 6:19; 2Co 6:16; Gal 4:6; 1Jn 3:24; 4:4.

22. Ro 8:3; Heb 2:14; 10:5.

23. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 547–551. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 317. Walvoord, *PKH*, 628–29. Jordan in *PEBP*, 237.

24. Hunt, “Dominion and the Cross,” Tape 2. See also Hunt, *Beyond Seduction*, 250.

Amillennialists often complain that postmillennialism requires a two-step movement of Christ to kingship, which brings confusion into the question of when the “millennium” begins. Cornelis Venema expresses the alleged problem clearly:

The first objection to Postmillennialism can be stated by this question: When does Christ become king? Golden-age Postmillennialism suggests that the kingship of Jesus Christ is not so much a present as it is a future reality. The coming of Christ in the fullness of time, though it inaugurated a new period in the history of redemption, did not by itself constitute the great turning point in history so far as the kingdom of God is concerned. . . . The problem with this construction is that it compromises the testimony of the New Testament that the reign of Christ commences with his first advent and installation at the right hand of the Father.²⁵

Kim Riddlebarger follows suit: “Postmillenarians must face other difficult problems as well. For one thing, if postmillennial expectations are correct, then when does the millennial age begin?”²⁶ Venema concurs when he asks: “Is the millennium now or future?”²⁷

This complaint is rooted in a faulty understanding of postmillennialism. Even older forms of postmillennialism (which see a future literal 1000 year kingdom glory before Christ returns) hold that Christ is king and reigning as a result of his first century exaltation. The later onset of the millennium in this older view is simply exhibiting his already established kingship in a powerful, public way. In fact, in this view Christ’s reign leads history to that time, which starts with the conversion of Israel.

But this objection certainly does not apply to the gradualistic postmillennialism that I advocate (as Venema recognizes²⁸). As I show throughout out this book Christ ascends his throne in the first century (e.g., ch. 10 “Eschatology and Realization”). And as the enthroned king he actively reigns over his kingdom by gradually revealing his glory in history.

25. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 342, 343.

26. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 238.

27. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 345.

28. See: Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 342n and 345.

Venema continues this line of critique by noting that the passages that “speak of Christ’s kingship refer to the entire present age subsequent to Christ’s ascension and prior to his return at the end of the age.” He then cites Philippians 2:9–11 and comments: “This description of Christ’s exaltation defines his present glory, not one that is reserved to the future in any new or distinguishable sense.”²⁹ I agree. The personal glory of Christ himself does not change over time. Postmillennialism never suggests that it does.

But we are talking about *eschatology*, not *Christology*. And as a matter of fact, *the manifestation of his rule on the earth through time does develop*. Does not Christ himself refer to his kingdom as a mustard seed that “is smaller than all other seeds” only to note that “when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree” (Mt 13:32)? This requires us to reflect on its *growth* and *development*. Does this not require us to conceive of his kingdom as small and insignificant in its beginning and large and dominant in its later development? And does not he compare it to leaven which works in meal “until it was all leavened” (Mt 13:33)?

Strimple claims that postmillennialism contradicts itself in equating the millennial era with the church age kingdom: “If the ‘Millennium’ in the Bible refers to the entire Christian era, the ‘millennial conditions’ that must prevail before Christ returns would seem to be those conditions that prevail *now*.”³⁰ Well, yes and no. That is, the “millennium” certainly prevails now. And “millennial conditions” are present — *but only in seed form*. Much like we as individuals are presently sanctified on earth (1Co 1:2; 6:11; Heb 10:14), are being progressively sanctified in history (Jn 17:19; Heb 12:14), and will ultimately be perfectly sanctified in heaven (Ac 20:32; 26:18). If we can be sanctified *while* growing in sanctification (Ep 5:26; 1Th 5:23; 1Pe 2:2), why cannot “millennial conditions” be present *while* growing in influence? As I note above, the kingdom *develops* over time; consequently, the “millennial conditions” will mature over time. This is why the Lord commands his disciples: “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,” for he promises: “I will build My church” (Mt 16:18).

Venema surmises that the developing glory that postmillennialism expects implies some additional “intervening” age in the outworking of

29. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 343.

30. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond*, 71.

God's plan. He turns to Scripture and comments against postmillennialism: "Something quite different is affirmed: Christ's reign both in the present age and in the age to come, with no other age intervening." He then states: "a new age intrudes that is neither the present age nor the age to come in the biblical sense of these expressions."³¹ By complaining in this manner, he is building on the two age schema in God's plan (which I hold). Robert Strimple does the same, when he objects to my argument with these words: "Our Lord knows of only *two* ages, the present age and the age to come."³² Riddlebarger follows suit.³³ But I agree with amillennialists on this fundamental biblical structure that distinguishes time ("this age," the temporal order) and eternity ("the age to come," the eternal order).

Yet as I point out against Strimple³⁴ (and now Venema and Riddlebarger): In the two-age schema, *all of history* is "this age" and the "age to come" is *eternity*. Consequently, using Strimple's line-of-reasoning, would not the remarkable differences between the old covenant economy and the new covenant economy (type/antitype; temple worship/non-temple worship; anticipation /fulfillment) suggest that the New Testament itself is an "age intervening"? But Strimple knows that it does not; the two age scheme prevails.

Nevertheless, does not the coming of Christ in the first century *within "this age"* mark off a different *stage* of "this age"? It most certainly does (Mt 3:2; Mk 1:15; Gal 4:4). Yet these two *stages* (old covenant/new covenant; pre-Christ/post-Christ; former days/last days) within the *one present age* (basically: history itself) are unmistakably different. Venema himself expresses the incarnation thus: "In the coming of Christ, the long-awaited coming of God's kingdom on earth is inaugurated" (p. 26). So the Old Testament was *not* God's "kingdom on earth" *in this sense*. And that is a noteworthy difference. In fact, amillennialists (and postmillennialists!) are fond of arguing that the coming of Christ and the new covenant

31. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 344, 345.

32. Strimple, "An Amillennial Response," in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 63.

33. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 241.

34. Gentry, "Victory Belongs to the Lord," in Gentry, *Thine Is the Kingdom*, 140–50.

brings “age to come” principles into “this age” so that since his coming, we have a “blended” age.³⁵

So then, at the height of the glory of the postmillennial kingdom, we will still be in “this age.” Yet we will be in a heightened *stage* of “this age.” The highest development of Christ’s kingdom in the postmillennial system is no more another “age” than is the new covenant era when compared to the old covenant.

“Scripture Presents a Suffering-Church Motif”

The present theological objection arises from the intrinsic, historical pessimism in all non-postmillennial systems. Many argue that the church’s calling is to endure suffering throughout the entirety of history, only receiving her glory beyond the present era. If this is so, no room exists in the biblical view of the church for a long era of righteousness, peace, and prosperity.

Amillennialism strongly urges this suffering-church motif:

William Hendriksen teaches as strongly as conceivable that the gospel age “will finally result in the complete destruction of the church as a mighty and influential organization for the spread of the Gospel. For, finally every tribe and people and tongue and nation will worship antichristian government.”³⁶

Herman Ridderbos, on the basis of Matthew 10:23, notes: “Jesus is here predicting persecution to the end, although they will always have a refuge to flee to.”³⁷

Richard Gaffin vigorously states this viewpoint: “Over the interadvental period *in its entirety*, from beginning to end, a *fundamental* aspect of the church’s existence is (to be) ‘suffering with Christ’; *nothing*, the New Testament teaches, *is more basic* to its identity than that.”³⁸ Gaffin calls this his “most substantial reservation” to postmillennialism.³⁹

Fowler White argues that “the forces of evil [will] gather strength, especially toward the end.”⁴⁰ Strimple holds that we should look for

35. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 38.

36. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 178. This statement depends on his idealist conception of John’s Revelation.

37. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 507.

38. Gaffin in Barker, *Theonomy*, 211 (emph. mine).

39. Gaffin, in Barker, *Theonomy*, 250.

40. White, “Agony, Irony, and Victory,” 167.

“persecution, apostasy, Antichrist . . . [as] essential elements in the New Testament picture of the last days.”⁴¹

White approvingly cites G. K. Beale: “the exercise of rule in this kingdom begins and continues only as one faithfully endures tribulation.”⁴²

Kim Riddlebarger concurs: “If the church is to suffer with Christ until his return, this undercuts the triumphalism of postmillennialism.”⁴³

Gaffin establishes his case on the basis of three important passages of Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7ff.; Philippians 3:10; and Romans 8:17ff. How shall the postmillennialist respond to these biblically-rooted theological observations? I deal with Gaffin’s particular argument in some detail elsewhere,⁴⁴ so here I will only summarize my postmillennial response in point 1 below. Then I will provide an even broader response to the additional points made by Strimple, White, Riddlebarger, and others.

The postmillennialist responds to these objections by noting that:

1. *Scripture is occasional and historical*

The New Testament epistles are speaking to real people in their original settings. Historically, the early church to whom the apostles write exists in the throes of a rapidly expanding and increasingly deepening persecution. Consequently, warnings of persecutorial suffering apply to the original recipients in a direct, relevant, and important way. We misconstrue them if we universalize them so as to *require* the *continued* persecution of the church until the second advent. Of course, on those occasions in which God leads us today through similar circumstances, the New Testament directives, principles, and examples certainly apply. Let us specifically consider Gaffin’s main texts.

2 Corinthians 4:7–8. This passage reads: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.”

Gaffin comments that Paul “effectively distances himself from the (postmil-like) view that the (eschatological) life of (the risen and

41. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 64.

42. White, “Agony, Irony, and Victory,” 174.

43. Riddlebarger, *Case for Amillennialism*, 127.

44. Gentry, “Whose Victory in History?”

ascended) Jesus embodies a power/victory principle that progressively ameliorates and reduces the suffering of the church.” He then informs us that “Paul intends to say, as long as believers are in ‘the mortal body,’ ‘the life of Jesus’ manifests itself as ‘the dying of Jesus’; the latter describes the existence mode of the former. Until the resurrection of the body at his return Christ’s resurrection-life finds expression in the church’s sufferings. . . ; the locus of Christ’s ascension-power is the suffering church.”⁴⁵

Gaffin is overlooking the context. Most exegetes note that Paul is here giving an historical testimony of *his own apostolic predicament*; he is *not* setting forth a universally valid truth or a prophetically determined expectation.⁴⁶ Consider the passage’s wider context. A major point in this portion of Paul’s letter is to defend his apostleship against false apostles (2Co 2:14–7:1). Notice the shift between the *apostolic* “we” and the *recipient* “you” (2Co 4:5, 12, 14–15).⁴⁷ Gaffin himself admits that “strictly speaking, [Paul’s statements] are autobiographical.”⁴⁸ That is my point: these statements are personal observations not prophetic expectations.

Furthermore, Gaffin’s comments are far too sweeping: “Over the interadvental period *in its entirety*, from beginning to end, a *fundamental* aspect of the church’s existence is (to be) ‘suffering with Christ’; *nothing*, the New Testament teaches, *is more basic* to its identity than that.” Is suffering (persecution?⁴⁹) throughout the “entirety” of the interadvental period a “fundamental” aspect of the church’s existence? Is there absolutely “nothing . . . more basic” in the New Testament? If we are not suffering (persecution?), are we a true church? Is Gaffin suffering greatly?

Strimple makes similar observations: “When the apostle Paul thinks of this present time, he thinks of *suffering* as its characteristic mark (Ro 8:18, see also Jn 16:33; Ac 14:22; Ro 8:36; 2Co 1:5–10; Php 1:29; 3:10; 1 Peter 4:12–19).” In fact, Christ himself “tells his disciples that in this present age they cannot expect anything other than oppression and

45. Gaffin, “Theonomy and Eschatology,” 212.

46. For example, see the commentaries on 2 Corinthians by Philip E. Hughes, F. F. Bruce, A. T. Robertson, John Calvin, Marvin R. Vincent, Albert Barnes, E. H. Pluntree, James L. Price, and F. W. Farrar.

47. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 194. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 135.

48. Gaffin, “Theonomy and Eschatology,” 211.

49. If persecutorial suffering is not in Gaffin’s mind here, then all other forms of suffering are irrelevant to the argument against postmillennialism.

persecution and must forsake all things for his sake.”⁵⁰ Surely these overstate the case.

Philippians 3:10. Here Paul writes: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” Gaffin comments: “Paul is saying, the power of Christ’s resurrection is realized in the sufferings of the believer; sharing in Christ’s sufferings is the way the church manifests his resurrection-power. Again, as in 2 Corinthians 4:10–11, the locus of eschatological life is Christian suffering.”⁵¹ But is Paul referring to universal suffering that is contrary to postmillennialism? Is Christ’s resurrection-power *limited* to upholding believers in times of persecutorial suffering?

Again, we must understand his statements in terms of Paul’s present condition: He is writing from prison (Php 1:7, 13).⁵² As with the case in 2 Corinthians 4, and as Davidson notes regarding Philippians 3, “verses 4–11 are a biographical passage.”⁵³ As such, his insights will apply to others *when* they suffer for Christ; his insights do not *necessarily require* that Christians will always suffer persecution.

Romans 8:17. This verse reads: “If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” Gaffin comments: “This correlation of future glory and present suffering is a prominent concern in the section that follows. At least two points are worth noting about ‘our sufferings’ (v. 18): (1) their nature/breadth and (2) their terminus” (i.e., the resurrection).⁵⁴ But against Gaffin I would note that this passage concludes Paul’s argument in Romans 6–7. Romans 6 and 7 deal with the *internal* struggle of the Christian against *indwelling sin*, not the *public* buffeting of the Christian against *external persecution*. Postmillennialism does *not* expect a time in history wherein we will no longer have a sin nature. As John Murray notes on this verse: “Christian suffering ought not to be conceived of too narrowly. In the passages so far considered, and

50. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 63.

51. Gaffin in Barker, *Theonomy*, 213.

52. Paul was imprisoned many times (2Co 11:23) and suffered much affliction (1Co 15:32; 2Co 1:8–11; 6:5).

53. NBC, 1030. Hendriksen suggests that this letter may even be in response to the Philippians’ specifically expressed concern about Paul’s condition. Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, 19.

54. Gaffin, “Theonomy and Eschatology,” 213.

elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., 2Co 1:5–10; 1 Pe 4:12–19), suffering includes but is more than persecution and martyrdom.”⁵⁵

Even the next reference to suffering by Paul refers to the decaying condition of the natural world (Ro 8:19) and is not tied to persecutorial suffering by opponents of Christianity. Although postmillennialism teaches life expectancy will increase over time (Isa 65:17–21⁵⁶), it also holds that death remains throughout the kingdom era (Isa 65:20; 1Co 15:26). The sufferings of Romans 8 are not evidences against postmillennialism, which promises the elimination of *persecutorial* suffering *for the faith*. Even as Christ’s kingdom advances in the world, at its glorious height it will be but a pale reflection of the glory of our total liberty in the resurrection when we possess a glorified, eternal body.⁵⁷

2. *Persecution is serious external oppression*⁵⁸

As we reflect on this point in the debate we must bear in mind a vitally important matter: The only kind of suffering that contradicts postmillennialism is suffering rooted in dangerous external threats and oppression (especially when designed to suppress or punish the Christian faith).⁵⁹ The New Testament era Christians are indeed a suffering people, enduring “threats and murder” (Ac 9:1–2), capital punishment (Ac 7:59; 12:1–2), and imprisonments and beatings (2Co 11:23–25), while being made a “public spectacle” and having their “property seized” (Heb 10:32–34). And were *these* conditions to continue until the end, postmillennialism could *not* be true.

If amillennialists claim the church is under persecutorial suffering here in America, then we effectively discount the grievous nature of our

55. Murray, *Romans*, 1:213.

56. This is even occurring now: “Between 1960 and 1997, life expectancy at birth of Americans increased approximately 10% from 69.7 to 76.5 years.” Frank R. Lichtenberg, “Sources of U.S. Longevity Increase, 1960 - 1997” (December 2000). See also online the CESifo Working Paper Series No. 405. See URL: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=263113

57. See discussion in Murray, *Romans* 1:300–302.

58. For a fuller treatment of the arguments below, see chs. 4 and 5 in Gentry, *Thine Is the Kingdom*,

59. The postmillennialist would not *limit* such external dangers to a religious pogrom, for we also believe in the eventual cessation of war and the large scale reduction of criminal behavior. But in employing the suffering argument as they do, amillennialists are referring to persecutorial suffering.

early forefathers' persecution, while exaggerating our own trials.⁶⁰ Reading *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (1563) quickly shows us how much better our condition is today.⁶¹ And since the end has not yet come, what if our (imperfect but welcome) advantageous conditions here in America were to spread throughout all the world?⁶² We know from our experience that Christianity can exist in a large-scale, long-lasting external peace from persecutorial suffering.

3. *Persecution does not always prevail*

Remembering the form of persecution highlighted above, I am always surprised to hear amillennialists overstate their case when arguing that we as disciples of Christ "cannot expect anything other than oppression and persecution."⁶³ Moule well notes what we all know from history: "No attentive observer can doubt that many and many a loving and humble disciple, called to lead a quiet life before the Lord in the 'sequestered vale,' 'serves his generation' with faithful diligence, and passes at last to rest, encountering scarcely one perceptible *collision* on the way."⁶⁴

The conditions in which Strimple himself lives contradict his bold claim. Is Strimple suffering in a way proving his point? Were his circumstances as Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary that bad? Is his retirement really not what he had hoped it would be? If *persecutorial* suffering is the "fundamental aspect of the

60. My statement must *not* be construed to mean that the American condition illustrates the height of the postmillennial glory, as if our condition were all that marvelous. Nor should it suggest my blindness to the genuine suffering of Christians in many places in the world still today, especially in Islamic countries. *Nowhere* does postmillennialism claim *that by the year 2009* the full gospel glory will be won. Until history ends postmillennialism cannot be disproved on an analysis of world conditions. In fact, most postmillennialists would agree with Warfield that "the church of the twentieth century [is] still the primitive church," a church in its infancy. Benjamin B. Warfield, "Are They Few That be Saved?", in Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 347.

61. We should also consult the martyrologies by the Venerable Bede (d. 735), Florus of Lyon (d. 860), Wandelbert (842), Rhabanus Maurus (845), Ado of Vienne (d. 875), and Notker the Stammerer (896).

62. Premillennialist Hess notes that "we are blessed with an absence of severe testing here in this country." Hess in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 28.

63. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 63.

64. Moule, *Studies in II Timothy*, 117.

church's existence" of which nothing "is more basic to its identity," then those of us living in America should not be identified with Christ as members of his church.⁶⁵ Where are we in America being imprisoned for our faith, being tortuously beaten for our convictions, and being persecuted to death?

4. *Suffering is compatible with postmillennialism*

Postmillennialists can affirm suffering-with-Christ as a basic element of our Christian experience even up to the end — *if* we carefully reflect on the biblical requirements of the suffering argument.

(a) *We suffer as fallen creatures enduring physical weakness in this age.* In Ro 8:17 Paul argues that if we are his children, then we are "heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." He explains this suffering by teaching us that "the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope" and that "the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (8:20, 22).

Paul is explaining why believers, though "free from the law of sin and of death" (8:2), still suffer "the whole range of the weakness which characterize us in this life,"⁶⁶ "the whole gamut of suffering, including things such as illness, bereavement, hunger, financial reverses, and death itself."⁶⁷ How can this be? Our glory awaits the future "redemption" of the body (8:23) by the Spirit of God (8:11). We are even too weak to pray as we ought, so the Spirit (who resurrects) intercedes for us (8:26–27).

Thus, Paul laments his being in a "mortal body" (Ro 6:12; 8:11), a body subject to corruption and decay (2Co 4:16); he declares that ultimately this "mortality" must put on "immortality" (1Co 15:53–57).⁶⁸ We suffer in bodies that are mere "earthen vessels" (2Co 4:7), subject to "bodily illness" (Gal 4:13), "frequent infirmities" (1Ti 5:23), "sickness to the point of death" (Php 1:27). Elders in the church must assist in prayers for healing (Jas 5:17) because sickness is painful and limiting (Gal 4:13),

65. Gaffin in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*, 210–11.

66. Murray, *Romans*, 1:311.

67. Moo, *Romans*, 511.

68. See also: Ro 8:10, 11, 13, 23; 12:1; 1Co 6:13, 15, 16, 20; 2Co 4:10; Php 1:20; 3:21; Col 2:11; and 1Th 5:23. Murray, *Romans*, 1:220.

“to the point of death” (Php 1:27) and may even cause death and its bereavement (Jn 11:33; Ac 9:36–37).

Fowler White urges us to understand that “the relationship between the church’s victory and suffering in Romans 8 reflects a theologically fundamental consideration.”⁶⁹ But when we properly analyze the suffering argument, postmillennialists are not confronted with an insurmountable challenge. For postmillennialism does not expect the elimination of mortality this side of the resurrection. And so these sufferings due to mortality will continue even at the height of the advance of the gospel.⁷⁰ These should be borne *as Christians*, not as “the rest who have no hope” (1Th 4:13; cf. Eph 2:12; Jas 1:2–4; Tit 2:7).

(b) *We suffer in a world with the principle of evil present.* As regenerate, spiritually (semi-eschatological) resurrected believers, we abhor the sinful tendencies present in ourselves and in others. Paul is torn as he struggles to please God (Ro 7:21–23). He cries out in misery: “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Ro 7:24). As Bruce puts it: “Paul himself knows what it means to be torn this way and that by the law of his mind which approves the will of God, and the law of sin and death which pulls the other way. The Christian, in fact, lives in two worlds simultaneously, and so long as this is so he lives in a state of tension.”⁷¹

Even at the height of the kingdom’s (postmillennial) advance in the world we will suffer temptation due to “the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Mt 13:22). We will always struggle against the “sin which so easily entangles us” (Heb 12:1), the “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (1Jn 2:16). Due to our suffering the temptation to sin within, each Christian must follow after Paul, declaring: “I buffet my body and make it my slave” (1Co 9:27; cp. Ro 8:13; Col 3:5).

5. *Suffering is contrasted with eternal glory*

Even the very height of earthly, postmillennial glory pales in comparison to the “weight of glory” that is ours, and that stirs our

69. White, “Agony, Irony, and Victory,” 167.

70. Although many of these will be lessened by the advances in science and medicine. As Gary North has amusingly commented: “If anyone ever speaks longingly to you of ‘the good old days,’ just respond with two words: ‘dentistry.’”

71. Bruce, *Romans*, 151

deepest longings as sons of God (cf. Php 1:23). As recipients of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, Christians experience “the heightened form which our desire for this future [resurrection] state assumes. For it is not mere desire to obtain a new body, but specifically to obtain it as soon as possible” (cf. 2Co 5:1–10).⁷² What is more, we who know God’s saving mercies deeply desire “the state of immediate vision of and perfect communion with God and Christ” which “the future life alone can bring” with its “perfected sonship.”⁷³ Anything short of perfected sonship is a form of suffering “not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Ro 8:18).⁷⁴

Indeed, our very state of mortality is suffering when compared to eternity, for the body is “sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1Co 15:42–44). As Christians “we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. While we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2Co 5:1–2, 4). We are motivated by the fact that Christ “will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Php 3:21).

Conclusion

Thus, the postmillennialist agrees that we are to “suffer with Christ” until he returns, for we grieve over the sufferings of our forefathers, endure the pains and limitations consequent upon our fallen experience, bemoan our own indwelling sin as well as the sin of the unconverted, and earnestly long for the eternal glory we will share in the presence of God. Strimple even recognizes the suffering of Romans 8 involves “sin and all of its consequences,” “all the corrupting consequences of human sin,” not just persecution.⁷⁵ Gaffin admits: “Christian suffering ought not to be

72. Vos, *Redemptive History*, 46.

73. Vos, *Redemptive History*, 55.

74. The *pros* in the *ouk axia / pros* construction signifies comparison.

75. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 61, 106.

conceived of too narrowly. Suffering includes but is more than persecution and martyrdom.”⁷⁶

Earthly suffering involves times of prosperity as well as times of adversity. Even at the height of the kingdom’s earthly development we will *always* need to struggle in order to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Mt 6:33), always resisting the temptation to arrogantly declare: “my power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth” (Dt 8:17).

“The Kingdom Is a Failure So Far”

Amillennialists often attempt to turn the postmillennial system on itself. Robert Strimple complains: “what is the nature of Christ’s present kingdom. Because Gentry has defined the victory Christ seeks in the present age in terms of ‘the vast majority of human beings’ . . . he must view Christ’s kingly reign as a *failure* so far—a failure for these now two thousand years since his ascension.”⁷⁷ Kim Riddlebarger concurs: “Indeed, the nagging question remains, ‘If postmillenarians are correct about their millennial expectations, what does this say about the progress of the kingdom thus far?’ Must we speak of the history of the church to date as an abject failure, although a golden age presumably lies ahead? Of course not. But this is the direction in which postmillennial expectations push us.”⁷⁸

Cornelis Venema also pursues this line of critique:

How, then, can advocates of this Postmillennialism continue to describe in the most glowing of terms the anticipated glory of a coming millennial era? Does the glory of this anticipated millennium not start to tarnish and fade when it is admitted that it has been a reality since the beginning of the Christian church of the new covenant era?⁷⁹

To these objections I would respond as follows.

1. These are absolutely erroneous implications

This form of reasoning exposes the methodological problem afflicting the amillennial argument. It is an example of a grossly non sequitur form

76. Gaffin in Barker, *Theonomy*, 213–14.

77. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 61.

78. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 238.

79. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 347.

of argument. They forget the postmillennial definition of the kingdom: The kingdom is *by divine design* to enter the world “mysteriously” (Mt 13:11) *growing* from a “seed” to a “mature plant,” from imperceptible, fragile-appearing beginnings to obvious, world-dominating fullness.

The literary context of Matthew’s record of the Kingdom Parables provides important insights that dispel the amillennialist charge. In the preceding context Matthew presents Christ as claiming his kingdom is powerfully *present* (Mt 12:28), but in the following material he shows that his own people reject the King (Mt 13:53–58). How can this be? The Kingdom Parables explain this surprising reality. They show the kingdom’s divinely-ordained method: it begins in a “mystery” (Mt 13:11), even being intentionally hidden at first (Mt 13:13). Some of its seed does not grow and prosper (Mt 13:3–8); in fact, the first century Jews — though the Old Testament people of God — have the kingdom intentionally hidden from them (Mt 13:14–17). But in the long run the kingdom will gradually develop to a place of dominance in history (Mt 13:30–33).

Since these are *Christ’s own explanations* of his kingdom’s predestined expectations in history, how can its early stages be a failure because they are unlike its final stages? Christ’s kingdom rule is no more a “failure” than a seed is a “failure” because it is not a mature tree with edible fruit. The kingdom is not failing of its purpose any more than a baby is failing because he lacks teeth, cannot walk, and cannot talk.⁸⁰ Both the seed and the baby are *successes* when they operate according to their design, a design which promotes gradually developing maturity. Of course, they become “failures” (as it were) if they never move past their immature stages. The kingdom is maturing, however. Amillennialists are making the same mistake the Emmaus Road disciples make when they look too narrowly at Christ’s crucifixion (Lk 24:17–21): “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21a). They fail to see the *divinely-ordained*, developing big picture. And for this Christ rebukes them: “And He said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary’” (Lk 24:25–26a).

80. Comedian Steven Wright says that he has a diary he kept from the first day of his birth. He wrote: “Day 1: Still tired from the move. Day 2: People are talking to me like I am an idiot.”

2. *The argument is framed wrongly*

Actually Strimple frames his critique wrongly when he expresses his concerns about my view of “the nature of Christ’s present kingdom.”⁸¹ The question, though, is not about its *nature* (we both agree it is by “nature” a spiritual, redemptive kingdom), but about its *expectation*, that is, its historical *goal*. The postmillennialist argues that the kingdom *has grown* since the first century. It has not attained its full maturity, but it has definitely grown as prophesied.⁸² After all, my definition highlights the “increasing gospel success” and its “gradually” producing its effect. Progress *has* been made; the kingdom is *not* failing.

Conclusion

As creatures created in God’s image, we ought to think theocentrically. We ought, therefore, to think theologically. The theological objections to postmillennialism are far more serious than the pragmatic objections I consider in the preceding chapter. Yet, as I show, these are not sufficient to overthrow postmillennialism’s strong positive case. In fact, as with so many objections to postmillennialism, most of these are based on an improper conception of this optimistic eschatology, rather than on genuine weaknesses in the system. Because eschatology is fundamental to biblical revelation, we ought not hold an eschatological system with major theological problems. Postmillennialism is a coherent system that flows naturally from the Scriptural record.

81. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 61.

82. See ch. 11 “Eschatology and Expansion.”

19

BIBLICAL OBJECTIONS

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (Ac 17:11)

We have now come a long way in our presentation, explanation, and defense of postmillennialism. I have been dealing with numerous texts and theological arguments positively supporting it. I will now respond to objections rooted in particular texts which some deem contra-indicative to postmillennialism. Some theologians, such as Anthony Hoekema, Paul N. Benware, Wayne Grudem, and Cornelis Venema,¹ employ Matthew 24 and Revelation as evidence against postmillennialism. I will not deal with these texts below in that I deal with them elsewhere (see chs. 14 and 16)

Zechariah 14:4

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.”

Zechariah has been called “the most messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament.”² And surely it is. But Zechariah is greatly misunderstood in dispensationalism. Dispensationalists hold that Zechariah 14 undermines non-dispensational views such as postmillennialism. I will summarize the view from Dallas Seminary’s *Bible Knowledge Commentary* and then give a brief

1. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 178–79. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 129. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1125. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 349.

2. *ISBE*¹, 4:3136.

postmillennial interpretation of the passage. Parenthetical page references refer to this work.³

That dispensationalist believe this prophecy undermines postmillennialism is evident in the following comment:

Zechariah 14 progresses from the initial plundering of Jerusalem near the end of the future Tribulation, through the catastrophic judgment on the Gentile armies at Messiah's Second Advent and the establishment of His millennial reign, to a description of the worship in Jerusalem during the Millennium. The fact that these events have not yet occurred points to a premillennial return of Christ, that is, His return *before* the Millennium.⁴

The Dispensational Interpretation

Dispensationalists apply verse 1 to a great tribulation still in our future, which introduces the earthly millennial reign of Christ and comprises “the day of the Lord.” They see this verse as portraying the “military intervention of the Messiah,” with verse 4 detailing its accomplishment as the Lord descends upon the Mount of Olives (*BKC* 1:1570). Then he will establish his political kingdom over the earth, accompanied by “changes in illumination, climate, and topography which God will bring on Jerusalem, Palestine, and no doubt the whole earth during the Millennium” (1:1570). All of this arises from a literalistic reading of verses 6–11.

Zechariah 14:12–15 supposedly is a “parenthetical flashback” describing “the second phase of the invasion of Jerusalem by the confederated Gentile armies.” After this, “the survivors from all the nations will worship annually in Jerusalem. ‘The survivors’ are not the Jewish remnant. . . [but are those] from nonmilitary personnel of those nations whose armies were destroyed by Messiah” (*BKC* 1:1570, 1571).

Verses 16–17 speak of “a newly instituted worldwide religious order embracing both Jews and Gentiles” that will be established and “will center in Jerusalem and will incorporate some features identical with or similar to certain aspects of Old Testament worship.” Thus, “worshiping annually in Jerusalem will be necessary for the people to enjoy the fertility of crops” (*BKC* 1:1570, 1571).

3. F. Duane Lindsey, “Zechariah,” *BKC*, 1:1569–72. See also: Walvoord, *PKH*, 332–334.

4. *BKC*, 1:1569.

This entire dispensational scheme is wholly out of accord with the flow of redemptive history, so much so that it has been called an “evangelical heresy” by Meredith G. Kline. Indeed, “A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. G. Machen . . . were outspoken opponents of dispensationalism, which they considered close to heresy.”⁵ Non-premillennial evangelicals vigorously denounce this interpretation. As redemptive history progresses to “the last days” (Isa 2:2–4; 1Co 10:11; Heb 9:26), which Christ institutes in the first century as the “fullness of time” (Mk 1:14–15; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1–2), the entire temple order and sacrificial system is forever done away with (Mt 24:1–34; Heb 8:13; Rev 11). Accompanying the physical temple’s removal, divine worship is forever de-centralized and universalized (Jn 4:21–23; Mt 28:18–20). In addition, God merges the redeemed of all nations into one kingdom without ethnic distinction (Ro 11:13–24; Eph 2:12–21; Gal 6:12–16; Rev 7:9–10). This very much contradicts dispensationalism’s reversing the divine economy back to an old covenant-like order, complete with the elevating of the Jewish race over all peoples.

Of course, a major problem with the dispensational viewpoint here in Zechariah 14 is *it’s a priori* interpretive literalism (see ch. 7). The postmillennialist would interpret the passage in a much different light. The whole passage — as often with prophecy — is a mingling of literal and figurative prophetic allusions, as we shall see.

The Postmillennial Interpretation

The siege of Jerusalem described in Zechariah 14:1–2 points to the AD 70 judgment upon Jerusalem. J. Dwight Pentecost admits that the disciples who hear the Olivet Discourse would naturally apply Zechariah 14 to that event. But then, he says, such requires the confusing of God’s program for the church with that for Israel.⁶ So, he and other dispensationalists interpret the passage literalistically, with all the topographical and redemptive historical absurdities this creates. As they do this they totally omit any reference to the destruction of the very city and temple being rebuilt in Zechariah’s day. Yet *this* literal temple (the second temple) *is* destroyed in AD 70, as all agree.

Zechariah 14:1–2 pictures the Roman imperial forces joining the various client kings who engage the Jewish War AD 67–70. This war is

5. Weber in Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, 15.

6. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 248.

conducted by an empire of “nations” (v 2), consisting not only of the Romans but the lands of Syria, Asia Minor, Palestine, Gaul, Egypt, Britain, and others.⁷ Client kings, such as Antiochus, Agrippa, Sohemus, Malchus, and Alexander, provide auxiliary forces for Rome during the Jewish War (*J.W.* 2:18:9; 3:4:2; 5:1:6). The consequences are disastrous: much of Israel’s population is either killed or led captive. D. A. Carson observes that never was “so high a percentage of a great city so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem.”⁸ Yet the Lord defends those who are *truly* his people, insuring their escape from the besieged city (vv 3–4).

The Lord will fight for his true people “as when he fought in the day of battle” (v 4). The Lord’s feet standing on the Mount of Olives and his fighting for his people need be no more literal than other references regarding the Lord’s fighting for Israel in the Old Testament. The language is similar to that in Joshua 10:14, 42 and 23:3, where the Lord “fought for Israel.” In Joshua these references indicate his providential favor in Israel’s victory and deliverance, not his corporeal presence. Prophecy often mentions God’s feet when his and Israel’s enemies are thwarted and are given success against all odds (Ps 18:9; Isa 60:13; Nah 1:3; Hab 3:5).

The cleaving of the Mount of Olives under him employs the common imagery of God’s conquering and restraining power in Old Testament prophecy. In Micah 1:3–4 we read that “the LORD is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.” Even dispensationalists admit this speaks of the Old Testament subjugation of Israel under heathen nations for her sin.⁹ Mentioning the direction of the cleft “indicates the direction of their flight,” i.e., the Christians who flee Jerusalem when God judges it.¹⁰ They ultimately flee to all points of the compass, taking the gospel with them (cf. vv 8–9).

7. Swain, *Harper History of Civilization*, 1:198. The Roman empire was composed of imperial provinces, senatorial provinces, and client kingdoms.

8. Carson, “Matthew,” 501.

9. John A. Martin, “Micah,” *BKC*, 1:1477. Walvoord, *PKH*, 301. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 111.

10. G. N. M. Collins, “Zechariah,” *NBC*, 761.

In the latter part of verse 5 the coming judgment upon Jerusalem, which disperses the Christians over the Roman Empire, is ultimately God's coming in angelic judgment ("holy ones" are angels). Jerusalem's destruction by Rome is providential destruction by "his armies" (Mt 22:7). It leads to darkness and woe upon Israel (Zec 14:6–7; cf. Ac 2:20, 22; Mt 24:29). Yet, as Jerusalem collapses and Christianity separates from her Jewish constraints, the waters of life begin flowing out into all the world (v 8; cp. Mt 24:14; Ac 1:8; 9:15). The Lord's kingdom overflows Israel's limited borders so that he becomes the King of all the earth (v 9; Mt 28:18–19; Eph 1:20–21).

The subsequent topographical and liturgical references figuratively portray the ethical and spiritual changes that occur under Christ's spiritual administration as his worship spreads through the earth (vv 10ff¹¹). Even Jerusalem and the Jews shall be nourished by the waters of life eventually (vv 10–11; cf. Eze 47:1ff; Jn 7:38–39). The enemies of God's people will either be vanquished (vv 12–13, 14), converted (vv 16, 20–21), or reduced to insignificance (vv 14, 17–19).

The Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned, not as a literal reinstitution of the Old Testament feast, but as the ultimate hope pre-figured in that feast: the time of the full evangelical harvest (cf. Jn 4:35–38). Those who do not convert will be reduced to servile labors, lacking the blessing of God (vv 17–19).

Overall, however, the kingdom of God (represented here by a rejuvenated Jerusalem, cp. Gal 4:25–26; Heb 12:22; Rev 21:2) will be spread throughout the earth. All areas of life will be consecrated to the Lord: even the horses' bells will contain the inscription written on the High Priest's miter (vv 20–21).

Matthew 7:13–14

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

This is a popular passage that seems to undermine the postmillennial outlook. These words are often cited to show the paucity of the number of saved:

11. See Isa 40:4; Zec 4:7; Mk 11:23; Lk 3:5.

Louis Barbieri: “Even the Lord Jesus acknowledged that *few would find* the true way, the way *that leads to life* (i.e., to heaven, in contrast with ruin in hell).”¹²

A. B. Bruce: “The passage itself contains no clue to the right way except that it is the way of *the few*.”¹³

John MacArthur: There cannot be a billion Christians in the world because “such figures certainly do not square with what Jesus said about many on the broad road and few on the narrow.”¹⁴

Herman Hanko: “There are several passages in the scriptures which refer to the fact that the number of the saved, though a great multitude, is nevertheless, relatively speaking small. Texts such as Matthew 7:14 and 22:14 are referred to in this connection. . . . It is like a narrow way, and there are only a few who enter this way.”¹⁵

Wayne Grudem: “Jesus seems here to be saying that those who are saved will be ‘few’ in contrast to the ‘many’ who travel toward eternal destruction.”¹⁶

Undoubtedly, postmillennialism’s distinctive principle is its conviction that the vast majority of men will be saved. How do we reply to this comment by our Lord himself?

We must note, first, that in other places the Bible speaks of the vast number of the redeemed. Interestingly, just a few verses later — and apparently soon after stating the words of Matthew 7:13–14 — the Lord speaks seemingly contradictory words in Matthew 8:11: “And I say to you that many [*polus*, the same word in Mt 7:13 for the lost] will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Revelation 7:9 speaks boldly of a great number of the redeemed: “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” And of course we should recall those prophecies which speak of “all nations” flowing into the kingdom (e.g., Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–4).

12. Barbieri, “Matthew,” *BKC*, 2:34.

13. Bruce, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” *EGT*, 1:132.

14. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 191.

15. Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 15, 16.

16. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1124.

Obviously, for the evangelical Christian Scripture holds no contradictions. How, then, can we reconcile such seemingly contradictory passages? And more importantly, how does the postmillennialist deal with Matthew 7:13–14 in light of his optimistic expectations?

To resolve the matter we must realize “our Lord’s purpose is rather ethical impression than prophetic disclosure.”¹⁷ That is, he is urging his disciples to consider the *present situation* they witness round about them. They are to look around them and see that many souls are presently perishing and so few men are seeking righteousness and salvation. What will they do about this sad predicament? Do they love him enough to seek its reversal? Christ’s challenge to them is ethical.

In John 4:35 Jesus urges the dim-eyed disciples to see how work must be done: “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” In Matthew 7 he warns against false prophets that will arise among the people (Mt 7:15–20). Then he warns that a man must hear *and act* upon his words (Mt 7:21–27). His disciples must feel the horror of the present vast numbers entering the broad way to destruction.

Certainly the gate to heaven *is* narrow: Christ is the only way, the only truth, and the only life (Jn 14:6). “There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Ac 4:12). For “no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Co 3:11). But the Lord’s statement in Matthew 7:13–14 does not imply that *always and forever* he will only save a few people in each era. In fact, Scripture frequently indicates that great multitudes will be saved, that all nations will be disciplined, that the *world* as an organic system will experience the redeeming work of Christ, that all of his enemies will be subdued — to the “ends of the earth.”

Adam’s fall exacts an enormous toll upon the human race, to be sure. But Christ is the Last Adam (1Co 15:45), whose resurrection and ascension will surely outstrip the effects of Adam’s fall as history unfolds. Indeed, “as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1Co 15:22). In fact, “if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many” (Ro 5:15). This is why he delays his coming,

17. Warfield, “Are There Few That Be Saved?,” in Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 338.

so that he may gather the elect in: “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2Pe 3:9; cp. Ro 2:4; Rev 2:21).¹⁸ The longsuffering is toward “us” (3:9), who are the “beloved” (3:1, 8, 14, 17), the “brethren,” the elect (1:10–11). He is not willing that any — i.e., of us — should perish. Indeed, we should “account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2Pe 3:15).

That the Lord is using the statement in Matthew 7:13–14 as an *ethical prod* rather than a *prophetic word* is evident from his using it in another context. In Luke 13:23, we read: “Then one said to Him, ‘Lord, are there few who are saved?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from’” (Lk 13:24–25). Here he refuses to answer the question regarding the number of the saved. This is one of those questions that men ask in order to evade Christ’s call to righteousness. The Lord is not prone to allow such rabbit trails to lead him away from calling men to commitment. His statement in Matthew 7:13–14 serves his purpose. Let us avoid this particular rabbit trail.

Matthew 13:36–39

Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.”

A frequent misconception regarding postmillennialism is that it eventually expects an “each and every” *salvific universalism*. With that false perception critics press this passage as evidence that Christianity will

18. See: Owen, *Works of John Owen*, 10:348–349. Election comes to historical fruition “when it pleases God” (Gal 1:15).

never gain the upper hand in the world, even until the very end at the resurrection.

Amillennialist Anthony Hoekema objects to postmillennialism, partly due to this passage:

In the Parable of the Tares (or Weeds) found in Matthew 13:36–43 Jesus taught that evil people will continue to exist alongside of God's redeemed people until the time of harvest. The clear implication of this parable is that Satan's kingdom, if we may call it that, will continue to exist and grow as long as God's kingdom grows, until Christ comes again. The New Testament gives indications of the continuing strength of that 'kingdom of evil' until the end of the world when it speaks about the great tribulation, the final apostasy, and the appearance of a personal antichrist. To suppose, therefore, that before Christ's return evil 'will be reduced to negligible proportions' would seem to be a romantic oversimplification of history not warranted by the biblical data.¹⁹

Fellow amillennialist R. B. Kuiper agrees, noting that this passage teaches a "parallel development of the kingdom of light and that of darkness. . . . That twofold process is being exemplified in current events."²⁰ Herman Hanko concurs.²¹

Dispensationalists follow this same line of reasoning. In his treatment of the Parable of the Tares, dispensationalist John Walvoord is convinced that "the parable does not support the postmillennial idea that the Gospel will be triumphant and bring in a golden age."²² Louis Barbieri explains the significance of the parable as indicating "in this period between Jesus' rejection and His future return He the King is absent but His kingdom continues, though in a newly revealed form. . . . This mystery period does not involve a universal triumph of the gospel, as postmillennialists affirm."²³

Premillennialists William Moorehead and Millard Erickson agree.²⁴

19. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 180. Cf. Hamilton, *The Basis of the Millennial Faith*, 33.

20. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism*, 208–209.

21. Hanko, "An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism," 15.

22. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 373.

23. Barbieri, "Matthew," *BKC* 2:50–51. Cf. J. B. Chapman, "The Second Coming of Jesus: Premillennial," in Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 2:341.

24. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3:1216. William G. Moorehead, "Millennium," *ISBE*¹, 3:2053.

A proper understanding of this parable requires us to understand its literary setting, however. Certainly this particular parable, which is found collected among the Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13, does not overtly teach the “universal triumph of the gospel.” But it does not need to. The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven (Mt 13:31–33) teach that concept.²⁵ That is, the Mustard Seed Parable teaches that Christ’s kingdom will grow until it dominates its setting (the world). The Leaven Parable teaches the method of its victory: through total permeation within, until the whole (world) is leavened.

The point of the Parable of the Tares is not to reiterate what the Mustard Seed and Leaven Parables teach. Rather, it teaches that despite the enormous worldwide success of the gospel, we will always have a mixture of the unrighteous and the righteous. Gospel success will never totally root out either sin or sinners in history — not even during the kingdom’s highest development in the future. And this is true in both the premillennial or the postmillennial schemes. Consider Christ’s bold instruction here *in light of the contemporary setting of the parable*: the gospel is having only a minuscule influence in the world; the Lord himself is approaching the time of his crucifixion. Christ warns his people of the great trials and tribulations through which they must go. Yet he speaks here of what those possessing power should do with sinners in his kingdom! Surely this implies his kingdom’s massive influence.

Clearly this parable portrays the entire world as God’s field, where he desires to plant wheat: he “sowed good seed in his field” (v 24); “the field is the world” (v 38). God expends the effort — surely a great and purposeful one — in order to create a field of wheat (the righteous, v 38a) in all the world (cf. Mt 28:18–20). An enemy (the devil, v 39) intervenes and sows tares (the wicked, v 38b) — surely not with equal success, particularly in light of the parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven. The parable’s point is that tares will be found among the predominant wheat: the tares are the intruders, not the wheat. The Son of Man returns to a *wheat* field, not a *tare* field. The tares must be left alone *for the sake of the wheat*.

Luke 18:8

I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

25. See earlier discussion in ch. 11 “Eschatology and Expansion” above.

Dispensationalists employ this verse with great confidence against postmillennialism.

Wayne House and Thomas Ice: "This is 'an inferential question to which a negative answer is expected.' So this passage is saying that at the second coming Christ will not find, literally, 'the faith' upon the earth."

Hal Lindsey writes: "In the original Greek, this question assumes a negative answer. The original text has a definite article before *faith*, which in context means '*this kind of faith*.'"

Borland agrees: "The faith spoken of is probably the body of truth, or revealed doctrine, since the word is preceded by the definite article in the original. Improvement in the worldwide spiritual climate is not here predicted."

Wiersbe follows suit: "The end times will not be days of great faith."²⁶

This verse is also brought out by amillennialists, such as R. B. Kuiper, Herman Hanko, Donald Bloesch, and Kim Riddlebarger,²⁷ as well as premillennialists such as Wayne Grudem.²⁸ Indeed, Martyn Lloyd-Jones dogmatically asserts: "There is one verse, one statement, which, as far as I am concerned, is enough to put the postmillennial view right out. It is Luke 18:8."²⁹ Bloesch declares that postmillennialism "flatly contradicts Jesus' intimation" here in Luke 18:8.³⁰

In response, we may note several avenues of rebuttal. First, we must determine the focus of the question. Some doubt exists regarding whether this question is even dealing with Christianity's future existence as such. In the context, the Lord is dealing with the matter of *fervent prayer*. The definite article that Borland thinks must refer to "the body of truth, or revealed doctrine" seems rather to refer to *the faith* in prayer evidenced in the importune widow's persistence: "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1). Christ is asking if *that* sort of persistent prayer will continue after

26. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 229. Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust*, 48. Borland in *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament*, 160. Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:249.

27. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism*, 209. Hanko, "An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism," 16. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 57. Riddlebarger, *Case for Amillennialism*, 237.

28. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1124.

29. Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, 217.

30. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 103.

he is gone. B. B. Warfield demonstrates that the reference to “the faith” has to do with the *faith-trait* under question in the parable: perseverance. He doubts the reference even touches on whether or not the Christian faith will be alive then, but rather: Will Christians still be persevering in the hope of the Lord’s vindicating their cause? As in Matthew 7:13–14, He was urging them to keep persevering.³¹ This interpretation of the meaning of “the faith,” appears among non-premillennialists,³² as well as premillennialists and even some dispensationalists.³³

Second, we must determine the expectation in the question. Even if it does refer to the Christian faith or the system of Christian truth, why is a negative prospect expected? As with the Matthew 7:13–14 passage, could not Christ be seeking to motivate his people, encouraging them to understand that the answer issues forth in an optimistic prospect? In another context was not Peter’s answer to such a query optimistic (Jn 6:67, 68)?³⁴ Could it not be that “the question is asked for the purpose not of speculation but of self-examination?”³⁵

In point of fact, *the question does not “assume” a negative answer at all.* It is not a rhetorical question. The Funk-Blass-Debrunner Greek grammar notes that when an interrogative particle is used, as in Luke 18:8, “*ou* is employed to suggest an affirmative answer, *me (meti)* a negative reply.”³⁶ But neither of these particles occurs here. Thus, the implied answer to the question is “ambiguous,”³⁷ because the Greek word used here (*ara*) implies only “a tone of suspense or impatience in interrogation.”³⁸

Third, we must determine the terminus in view in the question. Apparently, Christ has in mind his imminent coming in judgment upon Israel, not his distant second advent to end history. Christ clearly speaks of a *soon* vindication of his people, who cry out to him: “I tell you that He

31. Warfield, “The Importune Widow and the Alleged Failure of Faith,” in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 2:698–710. See also: Marshall, *Luke*, 676.

32. Hendriksen, *Luke*, 818. Green, *Luke*, 642–43. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC. Nolland, *Luke*, 870.

33. Alford, *Luke*, 614. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 2:232. Bock, *Luke* 2:1455–56.

34. For similar ethical promptings, see Warfield, “Are There Few That Be Saved?” *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*.

35. Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke*, 818. See also: NBC, 857.

36. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, 226 (§ 440).

37. Funk, *Greek Grammar*, 226.

38. BAGD, 127.

will avenge them speedily” (Lk 18:8a; cp. Rev 1:1; 6:9–10). He is urging his disciples to endure in prayer through the troublesome times coming upon them, just as he does in Matthew 24:13, which speaks of the first century generation (Mt 24:34). In fact, the preceding context of Luke 18 speaks of Jerusalem’s destruction (Lk 17:22–37).

Fourth, we must determine the implication of millennial views regarding the question. In the final analysis, no evangelical millennial view supposes that absolutely *no* faith will exist on the earth at the Lord’s return. Yet, to read the statements I quote above regarding Luke 18:8 and its supposedly expecting a negative answer, one would surmise that Christianity will be totally and absolutely dead at his return.

Thus, non-postmillennialists cannot successfully employ this passage against postmillennialism. Its *standard* is misinterpreted: The Lord’s teaching regarding fervent prayer is changed into a warning regarding Christianity’s future. Its *grammar* is misconstrued: The grammar indicating *concern* becomes an instrument of *doubt*. Its *goal* is radically altered: Rather than speaking of soon-coming events, it supposedly points to history’s distant end. Its *final result* is overstated (even if all the preceding points be dismissed): No critic of postmillennialism teaches that “the faith” will entirely and completely vanish from the earth at Christ’s Return.

Luke 22:29–30 and Matthew 19:28

And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Lk 22:29–30)
So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration,³⁹ when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Mt 19:28)

The approach to these verses clearly distinguishes all premillennial views from amillennial and postmillennial perspectives. All premillennialists vigorously dispute the non-premillennial positions by interpreting these verses (and their parallels) in a literalistic fashion. The dispensationalist is especially vigorous in this assertion, although other

39. Note that Luke’s version of this thought substitutes the word “kingdom” for “regeneration.”

premillennialists also hold that these passages require a premillennial understanding.⁴⁰

John Walvoord employs these and related passages in his argument against amillennialists, and by implication postmillennialists. Of Luke 1:30–33 he writes:

If it is true, as advocates of amillennialism contend, that the Old Testament has been misunderstood and that a literal fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant should not be expected, why would God instruct His angel to use such terminology for Mary?

. . .

Later Christ confirmed [the disciples'] expectation in promising them that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the promised period of restoration (Matt. 19:28). This promise was confirmed later in Luke 22:30 when Christ met with His disciples for the Passover the night before His crucifixion. Again, they were assured that they would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴¹

The dispensational expectation, then, clearly anticipates a literalistic political governance by the apostles.

The amillennial view also differs with a leading postmillennial interpretation. Amillennialists generally apply them exclusively to the heavenly realm. Norval Geldenhuys explains: "So the disciples are not to expect earthly glory and worldly power as a reward, but heavenly joy and a holy vocation in His eternal kingdom."⁴² William Hendriksen argues that these verses apply to "'the restored (or: renewed) universe,' 'the new heaven and earth'. . . ; in other words the reference is clearly to the period beginning with the day of Christ's return for judgment."⁴³

Postmillennialists are divided regarding whether these passages apply to the eternal state or to the kingdom of Christ in the present. David Brown allows either view.⁴⁴ We may take the passages either way without

40. For example, see Ladd's use of Matthew 19:28 in *A Theology of the New Testament*, 48, 109, 205, 628, 631.

41. Walvoord, *PKH*, 65. See also: Barbieri, "Matthew," *BKC* 2:65; Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 154–155.

42. Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 563.

43. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 730.

44. *JFB*, 2:119 (see discussion at Lk 18:30).

compromising the eschatological system.⁴⁵ But the verses cannot refer to the premillennial conception of a Judaized, earthly, political kingdom. Such a view is based on a simplistic hermeneutic, is contextually erroneous, and involves serious redemptive retrogression.

Focusing on the Luke 22:29–30 passage, we may make a stronger case for its direct relevance to the kingdom's earthly aspect in time and on earth, though allowing its eternal implications by extension (just as our present salvation and service have eternal implications). In chapters 10 and 11 I show in detail that Christ establishes his kingdom during his earthly ministry. Here the Lord specifically says: "And I *bestow* upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me" (Lk 22:29). The Greek translated "bestow" is *diatithemai*, which is the present indicative, demanding a present bestowal. This fits perfectly with all other references to the kingdom's presence studied heretofore (e.g., Lk 11:20; 17:20–21; Ro 14:17; Col 1:13). He is not speaking of the kingdom's future eternal and heavenly aspects. Here Christ the King indicates that he is presently *bestowing* formal authority on his apostles; they are his ambassadors (2Co 5:20) who reign with him (Ro 5:17, 21; cp. Rev 1:6).

The kingdom Christ is here bestowing is not an earthly, political kingdom, for he expressly forbids carnal trappings: "And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called "benefactors." But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves'" (Lk 22:26). His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom of humble spiritual service rather than regal political glory.

As a consequence of his bestowing the kingdom, the Lord holds out to them the promise "that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk 22:30). The reference to the eating and drinking at his table must speak of the Lord's Supper, which he institutes only a few moments before (Lk 22:13–20). Though he is about to die (Lk 22:21–23), they should not

45. Pentecost's radical shift of views regarding the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven does not seem to him to compromise his eschatological system, even though he is in disagreement with his former views and other leading dispensationalists. Compare Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 147–148 (early printing; nowhere in the more recent printings, which have changed, is there any note that the work differs from its 1958 version) with Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 222–223. Contrast the later Pentecost with Walvoord, *PKH*, 374–375.

despair, for he will be with them spiritually. This will be particularly evident as they gather for “communion” (1Co 10:16; Rev 3:20) with him at “the Lord’s Table” (1Co 10:21).

Since the kingdom is a present, spiritual reality, we may not take the sitting on thrones in a literal sense, for the apostles never really sit on thrones. This has spiritual implications, much like the Pharisees’ sitting in “Moses’ seat” (Mt 23:2) — which certainly was not a literal chair. Although here he expressly refers to the Apostles themselves, elsewhere all Christians sit on thrones: he “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6; cf. Rev 3:21).

Luke 22 links the Lord’s Supper with Christ’s judicial rule in history. It is a means for exercising spiritual and covenantal judgment among men (cf. 1Co 11:22–34).⁴⁶ The Lord’s Supper covenantally distinguishes between men, separating the saved and the lost. It appears that the express application to his Apostles is especially in his mind. The particular concern is that their authority from him will be demonstrated in Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70. By their preaching, the Apostles would be “passing sentence on the twelve tribes of Israel, who would reject their ministry as they had done his”⁴⁷ (1Th 2:15–16; cf. Mt 23:32–37; Ac2:19–20, 37–40). Gary North observes: “Their sitting in judgment over Israel was fulfilled representatively, yet no less definitively, for Old Covenant Israel is no more.”⁴⁸

Acts 3:19–21

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

This is a favorite passage of dispensationalists, who believe it establishes the premillennial expectation in a clear and compelling way.

J. Dwight Pentecost: “Notice that Peter pointed out that Christ’s enthronement at His Father’s right hand in heaven is of indefinite

46. See discussion in North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 215ff.

47. Scott, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, 3:265.

48. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, 217. See: Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 2:265–266.

duration, and that He will not return to the earth to take the Davidic scepter and mount the Davidic throne and reinstitute the covenanted Davidic kingdom until the nation does repent. . . . The very fact that Peter anticipated the institution of the Davidic kingdom at some future time shows that the promise had not been abrogated because of Israel's rejection, but only postponed."⁴⁹

Charles E. Stevens: "The king is 'exiled' in heaven (Ac 3:20–21; 7:55–56). . . . Scripture everywhere repudiates and disproves the doctrine that Christ is now reigning as Prince of peace, seeking through the church to extend His kingdom on earth by means of the gospel."⁵⁰

Warren W. Wiersbe: "The declaration is that, if the nation repented and believed, the Messiah would return and establish the promised kingdom."⁵¹

Stanley D. Toussaint: "Acts 3:17–21 shows that Israel's repentance was to have had two purposes: (1) for *individual* Israelites there was forgiveness of sins, and (2) for *Israel as a nation*, her Messiah would return to reign," i.e., in the Millennium.⁵²

Amillennialists, of course, hold a fundamentally different conception of the passage, referring its goal to the final state rather than the millennium. Anthony Hoekema comments: "Surely the words 'the times of restoration of all things' refer not to an intermediate millennial interval but to the final state."⁵³ G. C. Berkouwer concurs: "There is good reason to believe that this involves an eschatological perspective."⁵⁴ Paul Erb, Jay E. Adams, Phillip E. Hughes, and Willem Van Gemen agree.⁵⁵

A preteristically-inclined postmillennial understanding of this passage is more satisfying than either of these views, being historically relevant

49. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 275, 276.

50. Charles E. Stevens, "The Church of Christ and the Kingdom of Christ in Contrast," in Feinberg, *Prophecy and the Seventies*, 102–103.

51. Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:414.

52. Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," *BKC* 1:362. Interestingly, Toussaint vigorously argues that this is a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel; Pentecost just as adamantly argues that such a re-offer was impossible until after A.D. 70. Toussaint, "Acts," 361. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 469–476 and Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 274–276.

53. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 185, cf. 282.

54. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 403.

55. Erb, *Bible Prophecy*, 133; Adams, *The Time Is At Hand*, 31. Hughes, *The True Image*, 405–06. Van Gemen, *Progress of Redemption*, 392.

to the original audience and redemptive-historically significant to the New Testament message. Let us see how this is so.

In the context Peter is preaching a message especially relevant to *the Jews of that day*: He opens with “Ye men of Israel” (Ac 3:12), emphasizing their lineage from “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (3:13a). They are the “sons of the prophets” and the sons of “the covenant” (3:25). Tragically, these highly favored people are guilty of crucifying the Messiah: “God . . . glorified His Servant Jesus, whom *you* delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But *you* denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted *to you*, and [*you*] killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. . . . Yet now, *brethren*, I know that *you* did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers” (Ac 3:13b–15, 17). His message is especially and particularly relevant to them because they are the very generation that kills the Messiah: “this generation” has a special responsibility (Mt 11:16; 12:41–42; 23:36; Lk 17:25), being the generation that witnesses the Messiah (Mt 13:17; 23:37; Jn 1:11).

After pointing out their particular guilt in Christ’s crucifixion, Peter notes God’s sovereign ordering of the event, which Scripture prophesies: “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Ac 3:18). Then he exhorts these crucifiers of Christ to “repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (3:19a). In essence Peter urges: “Let them repent, for their vast evil has not frustrated God.”⁵⁶ As premillennialist John Gill recognizes: “The apostle’s sense is, repent of the sin of crucifying Christ, which is what he had been charging them with.”⁵⁷ Contextually, this call to repent from their sins must focus on their particular guilt in crucifying Christ, a recurring theme in Acts especially in the preaching of Peter (Ac 2:22–23, 36; 3:13–15a; 4:10; 5:28–30; 10:39), but also in that of Stephen (Ac 7:52) and Paul (Ac 13:28–29; cp. 1Th 2:14–16).

With an eye on the coming AD 70 judgment, Peter issues a warning from Moses: “And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people” (Ac 3:23; cp. Dt 18:19). This reflects Peter’s previous warning regarding the “blood,

56. Blailock, *Acts of the Apostles*, 63.

57. Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 8:168.

fire, and smoke” coming upon Jerusalem, and his urging his Jewish auditors to “be saved from this perverse generation” (2:19–21, 40).

Peter then adds to this urgent call: “So that⁵⁸ times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Ac 3:19b). The “times of refreshing” hold before Jerusalem the promise of “a respite from the [AD 70] judgment pronounced by Jesus, as it brought the Ninevites a respite from the judgment pronounced by Jonah.”⁵⁹ These times of refreshing speak of the glorious salvation that God mercifully offers them, along with God’s favor that would issue forth from it.⁶⁰ This refreshing will be especially glorious, for it not only stands in contrast to but also *delays* the horrible wrath under which they now live and which will soon crash down upon their co-religionists.

Referencing John Lightfoot, Adam Clarke observes that this respite “may be here applied to the *space* that elapsed from this time till the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This was a *time of respite*, which God gave them to repent of their sins, and be converted to himself.”⁶¹ As Gill argues, their repentance

may intend no other than the removing a present calamity, or the averting a threatened judgment, or the deliverance of persons from national ruin. . . . These Jews had crucified the Lord of glory, and for this sin were threatened with miserable destruction; the apostle therefore exhorteth them to repentance for it, and to a conversion to the Messiah, that so when ruin should come upon their nation, they might be delivered from the general calamity; when it would be terrible times to the unbelieving and impenitent Jews, but times of refreshment, ease, peace, and rest from persecution, to the believers, as is next expressed.⁶²

58. The KJV “when” is most definitely mistaken, as all exegetes are agreed. The Greek *hopos on* must be translated “that” or “so that.”

59. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 91n. See my earlier discussion of the “to make an end of sins” phrase in Da 9:24.

60. Though Peter directs this particularly to Israel, we should note by extension that “for every church, or nation, or family, those ‘times of refreshing’ come as the sequel of a true conversion, and prepare the way for a more complete restoration.” E. H. Plummer, in *Ellicott*, 7:19. “This is done in every believing soul; all things are *restored* to their primitive order.” Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, 5:707.

61. Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary* 5:707.

62. Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 8:168.

Peter preaches this message with the burning hope that those who kill the Messiah will repent and receive consolation. Perhaps they would respond to him as did his Pentecost audience (Ac 2:37, 40–47). He promises them that if they repent Christ will yet come to them — *in salvation*: “that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you” (Ac 3:20). This means that “he should be *again sent*, in the power of his Spirit, to justify and save them.”⁶³ Gill notes that he is sent “not in person, for this regards neither his first, nor his second coming, both which might be terrible to the awakened Jews; . . . but here it regards his being sent, and his coming in the ministration of the word, and by his spirit, to the comfort of their souls.”⁶⁴ Currently Christ is in heaven physically away from them; in fact, “heaven must receive [Him] until the times of restoration of all things” (3:21). Still, God promises to send him to them *in salvation*.⁶⁵ Although he is in heaven, he is not beyond their reach for he comes to dwell in those who have faith in him (Jn 14:23; Eph 3:17). Gospel preaching brings the voice of the living Christ to the hearer (Eph 2:17; cf. Ro 10:14: “how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?”).

This interpretation of the “sending” (*apostello*) of Jesus in salvation is no more awkward than is the second advent view, for nowhere else in Scripture is this wording used for *either* the sending of the Son in salvation *or* at the second advent. Though it is more precise to speak of the Father sending the *Spirit* in the gospel (Jn 14:26), we must understand that the Spirit’s sending results in the sending of the Son into the believer (Ro 8:9; Gal 4:6).⁶⁶ In this context Peter focuses on what they did to Christ, who was perfectly subject to God. God fore-announced his

63. Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, 5:707.

64. Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 8:168.

65. Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 4:40–41. Cf. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 151.

66. Here Peter uses *apostello* (to send on a mission) rather than the more mundane *pempo* (which appears in Jn 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7). He does so because the “sending” of Christ in the preaching of the gospel is an extension of God’s sending (*apostello*) Christ into the world on a mission (cf. Jn 3:17, 34–35; 5:36, 38; 6:38, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36). After all, the Son whom he sends into the world sends his apostles to promote his will (Mt 10:5; Jn 4:38; 17:18; 20:21) by sending them the promise of the Father (Lk 24:49). This idea appears again in Ac 3:26, where, after God “raised up His Servant,” he “sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”

incarnation (Ac 3:18); Christ is God's "Servant" (3:13, 26), "His Christ" (3:18), "the prophet" whom God raises up (3:22). Hence the unusual manner of speaking: he is emphasizing the anointed Christ as the one who is subject to the Father and who is being sent on a commission to Israel (cp. Mt 10:5–6; 15:24; cp. 23:37).

This particular sending of Christ does not await his second advent. Why would Peter tell the Jews that if they repent today, God will send the Son thousands of years later? He is presenting Christ to them *at that very moment*. In fact, Christ's exaltation forever provides for the sending of the Son to lost sinners; this is particularly true for those to whom he is speaking: "When God raised up his Servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from his wicked ways" (Ac 3:26 NIV).

Peter continues: Christ must remain in heaven "until the times of restoration of all things" (Ac 3:21a). Peter's use of the word "until" is significant. It relates to *Christ's mediatorial kingdom in history*. Wilmot's point is on target: "The word 'until' which denotes that *during* these times the Lord Jesus will remain in the heavens, having been there 'received' upon His ascension, to the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the context. 'Until,' according to the lexicon, carries the meaning of, 'continuedly, fixing attention upon the whole duration. . . .' The force of 'until' . . . makes the times of restitution simultaneous with Christ's mediatorial session in heaven. He will come again not to introduce the restitution predicted by the prophets, but because He shall then have completed it."

This "restoration of all things" *begins* in the first century during the ministry of Christ. John Calvin notes in this regard that "Christ by His death has already restored all things . . . but the effect of it is not yet fully seen, because that restoration is still in process of completion, and so too our redemption."⁶⁷ In fact, Peter informs his auditors of the events begun in their time: "Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days" (Ac 3:24). This contemporary focus is also clear from Matthew 17:11, where John Baptist functions as an Elijah introducing the restoration of all things in the new covenant (cf. Mal 4:5–6). Maintaining a redemptive-historical perspective, Gill states that this refers to "the accomplishment of all promises and prophecies concerning the bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles, and the conversion of the Jews, and so the gathering in all the

67. John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles* (CNTC), 6:103.

elect of God; and concerning all the glorious things spoken of the church of Christ in the latter day.”⁶⁸ Clarke explains that “it must be the accomplishment of all the *prophecies* and *promises* contained in the Old Testament relative to the kingdom of Christ upon earth; the whole reign of grace, from the ascension of our Lord till his coming again.”⁶⁹ This begins in the first century.

The restoration is *a reformation that supplants the old order* (Heb 9:10). It is a process leading to “the regeneration” of the fallen world as a system (Jn 1:29; 3:17; 4:42), where Christ’s will shall be done in earth (Mt 6:10) as his kingdom grows and spreads (Mt 13:31–33; 1Co 15:20–27). It will fulfill all things “which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Ac 3:21), as in Isaiah 2:2–4; 9:1–7; 11:1ff. Thus, Acts 3:24–25 demonstrates that “these men of Israel who stood listening to Peter were ‘sons of the prophets’ — not in the OT sense of the words which denoted the professional prophetic guild, but in the sense that they were heirs of the promises made by God through the prophets, promises which had found their fulfillment before their very eyes. So, too, they were ‘sons of the covenant’ made by God with Abraham, and that in a special sense, for they had lived to see the day when that covenant came true in Christ: ‘In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”⁷⁰ Calvin writes: “I refer it to the whole period, so that the sense is, that whatever he had said before regarding the Kingdom of Christ is witnessed to by all the prophets.”⁷¹

This fulfillment progressively grows during “the times” of the “restitution of all things.” F. F. Bruce explains: “The gospel blessings that were to flow from His death and resurrection must spread abroad throughout the world, and then He would return from the right hand of power.”⁷² Even rebellious Israel will be re-incorporated into the kingdom (Ac 1:6; Ro 11:1–25). Christ will not return bodily until this reformation/restoration/regeneration process has overwhelmed the kingdom of Satan on earth. The battle between these rival kingdoms takes place on earth and in time. The representatives of each leader will fight the ongoing battle.

68. Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 8:168.

69. Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary* 5:707.

70. Bruce, *Acts*, 93.

71. Calvin, *Acts*, 6:103.

72. Bruce, *Acts*, 91.

2 Timothy 3:1–4, 13

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. . . . But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Employing these (and similar) verses, premillennialist Kromminga and amillennialists Herman Hoeksema, Louis Berkhof, Herman Hanko, Leon Morris, and Kim Riddlebarger agree with Anthony Hoekema that “the postmillennial expectation of a future golden age before Christ’s return does not do justice to the continuing tension in the history of the world between the kingdom of God and the forces of evil.”⁷³ William Hendriksen comments on this passage: “These seasons will come and go, and the last will be worse than the first. They will be seasons of ever-increasing wickedness (Mt 24:12; Lk 18:8), which will culminate in the climax of wickedness.”⁷⁴ See also premillennialist Wayne Grudem.⁷⁵

Riddlebarger sees this passage as a problem for those who hold the prospect of a victorious church: “Throughout the last days, some will distort the gospel to tickle itching ears and gather followers to themselves.” He continues in response to postmillennialism: “Paul warned us that this lamentable state of affairs is an inevitability for Christ’s church.”⁷⁶

Dispensationalists agree. Wayne House and Thomas Ice argue that “the Bible speaks of things progressing from ‘bad to worse,’ of men ‘deceiving and being deceived’ (2 Timothy 3:13), we look out at our world and see how bad things really are.”⁷⁷ John Walvoord concurs: “With the progress of the present age, in spite of the dissemination of the truth and the availability of Scripture, the world undoubtedly will continue to

73. Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 180. See: Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church*, 72, 265. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 718. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 817. Hanko, “An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism,” 16–17. Morris, “Eschatology,” in *EC*, 4:95. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 238.

74. Hendriksen, *I and II Timothy and Titus*, 283.

75. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1124–25.

76. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 126.

77. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, 183.

follow the sinful description which the Apostle Paul gave here.”⁷⁸ Wiersbe agrees: “Passages like 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 paint a dark picture of the last days.”⁷⁹

Such interpretations of this passage, however, are exegetically flawed and anti-contextual. Nothing taught in these verses is contra-postmillennial. Note the following observations.

First, Paul is dealing with a particular historical matter in the first century. He is speaking of things that *Timothy* will be facing and enduring (2Ti 3:10, 14). He is not prophesying about the constant, long-term, unyielding prospects for all of history. Likewise, when Paul writes to the church at Corinth complaining that “it is actually reported that there is immorality among you” (1Co 5:1), we should not lift it from its context as a universal principle applying to all churches. He is writing specifically to them.

Second, the text does not demand unrelentingly bad times lie before the church in all of history. And though difficult “times” (*chairoi*) will come during the last days (the period between the first and second advents, see ch. 13), this does not demand a pessimistic position. The Greek term Paul employs here is *kairoi*, which indicates “seasons.” It is the logical error of quantification to read this reference to (some) “seasons” of difficulty as if it said *all* seasons will be difficult. The “difficult times” (*kairoi chalepoi*) are “qualitatively complexioned and specifically appointed seasons.”⁸⁰ Postmillennialists are well aware of the “seasons” of perilous times that beset the church under the Roman Empire and at other times.

Third, this passage does not teach historical decline accelerating in history. Citing 2 Timothy 3:13 in the debate leaves the unwarranted impression that things shall irrevocably become worse and worse in history. But the verse actually says: “evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Paul is speaking of *specific evil men* becoming ethically worse, not more and more evil men becoming increasingly dominant. He is speaking of their *progressive*

78. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 495.

79. Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:249; see also 2:249. Cf. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology*, 623. Chapman, “The Second Coming of Christ: Premillennial,” Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 2:341. Milne, *What the Bible Teaches About the End of the World*, 80–81.

80. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 7n.

personal degeneration, i.e., the progressive anti-sanctification of evil men. Paul says absolutely nothing about a predestined increase in the number and power of such evil men.

Fourth, Paul balances his teaching with a note of optimism. As a good postmillennialist, Paul clearly informs Timothy that these evil men (cf. 2Ti 3:1) “will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all” (2Ti 3:9). Since God places limits on those evil-doers, Paul speaks as a man who expects victory. How different from the widespread, pessimistic conception of the progressive, limitless power of evil in our day. Paul’s conceives of the ultimate, long term impotence of evil in history.⁸¹

Titus 2:13

Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

Pessimistic eschatologies often use this passage as evidence that postmillennialism wrongly directs the Christian’s hope for the future. Here Paul urges believers to see the second advent as their “blessed hope.” In Romans 8:22–25 he mentions that we groan in this fallen world “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved.” This eager expectation looks to our resurrection at the end of history. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 Paul commends the Thessalonians regarding “how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

In 1 Peter 1:3 the Apostle speaks of our “living hope” in obtaining “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled” which will “be revealed in the last time,” so that we “may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In 2 Peter 3:11–13 he states that we are “looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” because “according to His promise we are looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” See also Hebrews 9:28 and James 5:7.

Consider the following charges against the postmillennialist outlook:

81. See: Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, ch. 12: “Pessimism and the Great Commission.”

Craig Blaising responds to my presentation of postmillennialism: “Scripture repeatedly tells us that our hope is to be fully set on Christ’s coming.”⁸²

Cornelis Venema agrees: “The fifth and final objection to be urged against golden-age Postmillennialism is that it alters the focus of the believer’s hope for the future.”⁸³⁸⁴

Robert Strimple agrees, citing Venema against me.⁸⁵ He vigorously asserts with italics that “the New Testament everywhere makes clear that *the focus of the believer’s hope is to be the second coming of Christ*.”⁸⁶

Donald Bloesch claims postmillennialism is deficient in that it “tends to lose sight of the two-sidedness of the millennial hope — hope *within* history and hope *beyond* history.”⁸⁷

Postmillennialist Iain Murray recognizes this recurring complaint: “Probably the most common contemporary prejudice among orthodox Christians against the view of prophecy advocated in the preceding pages arises from the belief that it misdirects the true hope of the Church. That hope, it is said, is nothing less than the second advent of Christ, together with the ushering in of an eternal kingdom — it is not a temporal hope relative to the prospects of this world.”⁸⁸

How shall we respond to this form of objection? Is it a proper charge against postmillennialism?

First, the charge is unfounded. I would point out that the second advent *is*, in fact, the postmillennialist’s *ultimate* hope. What postmillennialist downplays the second advent of our Lord, which brings with it the resurrection of the body and our eternal glory? I challenge our critics to present documentary evidence in this direction from the writings of postmillennialists. I have never seen a postmillennial author dismiss the second coming of Christ as inconsequential. This objection is based on (false) *implications* drawn from postmillennial presentations, not from presentations *themselves*.

82. Blaising in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 75.

83. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 355. See also: Venema, “Evaluating Postmillennialism — II,” 22.

84. Blaising in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 75.

85. Strimple in Blaising, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 66.

86. Strimple in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium*, 65.

87. Bloesch, *Last Things*, 103.

88. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 209.

Indeed, all postmillennialists would agree with Iain Murray that “the privileges brought by Christ to the believer at death and at his Coming rightly represent the latter as the culminating glory. It is incomparably the blessed hope.”⁸⁹ He continues: “However bright, comparatively, the world may become when the Church reaches her fullest development in history, the Advent of Christ will ever remain the pole-star of faith and hope. For earth, however blessed, will never begin to equal heaven. As Bengel points out, even in that future time when there shall be ‘an overflowing fulness of the Spirit,’ Christians will still be in conflict with indwelling sin, they will still face temptation and meet with death.”⁹⁰ Murray even titles a chapter in his postmillennial work: “Christ’s Second Coming: The Best Hope.”⁹¹

Second, this objection is confused. Christianity does not have just one hope. Indeed, our faith offers hope at every level of life. The postmillennial hope regarding the historically unfolding future is one of those levels. Though again: our *ultimate* hope is the “blessed hope” of the second advent, which ushers us into our perfect eternal state. What greater hope can there be? But is hoping for a better future for the church and our families misguided? Was Abraham wrong to “hope against hope” for offspring (Ro 4:18)? Was Isaiah wrong for hoping for earthly justice and better days for Israel (Isa 59:9, 11)? In *Thine Is the Kingdom* I state regarding this sort of objection: “we do not prefer earthly dominion over consummational glory.”⁹² But we do hope for earthly dominion for the church.

Third, this complaint overlooks our definition. The very name of our eschatological system *demand*s the significance and the reality of the glorious second advent as the polestar of our eschatology. Postmillennialist Loraine Boettner includes in his definition of postmillennialism: “the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace.” In fact, he points out that the very name “postmillennial” emphasizes “that He will return after the Millennium.”⁹³ Postmillennialist John J. Davis agrees: “This perspective is called postmillennial because in

89. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 215.

90. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 217—18.

91. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, ch. 10.

92. Gentry, *Thine Is the Kingdom*, 85.

93. Boettner, *The Millennium*, 4. This is restated in his chapter on “Statement of the Doctrine,” 14. He repeatedly affirms the consummating second advent.

this understanding Christ will return after the period of millennial blessing.”⁹⁴

Our system name speaks of Christ’s return! In fact, each of the *labels* given to the four main evangelical eschatologies highlight *two* and *only two* features of eschatology: the nature of the kingdom and the timing of Christ’s coming relative to the kingdom. The fact that “millennium” is in each label indicates the nature of the kingdom as being composed either of glorious earthly conditions (premillennial, dispensational premillennial, postmillennial) or no glorious earthly conditions (*amillennial*). The timing of Christ’s return relative to the kingdom is related by the prefixes “pre” and “post” (*amillennialism* does not hold that any “millennial” conditions will prevail).

Davis even declares the second advent as the fifth of his five “main tenets of the postmillennial position”: “Finally and simultaneously there will occur the visible return of Christ, the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the final judgment, and the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth.”⁹⁵ In my definition of postmillennialism in chapter 4, I include the following: “After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, to end history with the general resurrection and the final judgment after which the eternal order follows.” Does this sound as if I am diminishing the second advent? By definition, then, postmillennialism emphasizes the second coming.

Fourth, this complaint forgets the point of the debate. The eschatological debate necessarily focuses on the *differences* between the millennial systems and the *distinctives* of the postmillennial viewpoint. Each of the four evangelical eschatological systems is anchored in the future, bodily return of Christ. This is not a point of dispute.

In postmillennialism’s case our distinctive lies in the kingdom’s victorious unfolding in history under Christ’s providential rule prior to his Return. Hence, we must emphasize the *historical* hope of victory in the debate, or else we are not defending postmillennialism as such. What is more, we press this distinctive blessing of the postmillennial view in that it involves very practical matters for the Christian’s current labor.

J. Marcellus Kik states the historical phase of postmillennialism well, then notes the postmillennial anticipation of the second advent:

94. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 11.

95. Davis, *Christ’s Victorious Kingdom*, 10, 11.

The *postmill* looks for a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious age of the church upon earth through the preaching of the gospel under the power of the Holy Spirit. He looks forward to all nations becoming Christian and living in peace one with another. He relates all prophecies to history and time. After the triumph of Christianity throughout the earth he looks for the second coming of the Lord.⁹⁶

Fifth, this objection is impractical. After affirming Christ's coming as our "blessed hope," then what do we do? What becomes of the many other Scripture passages urging our attention to issues *other than* the second advent? It may be that William Miller made his view of the blessed hope practical by sitting on a hill waiting for it on March 21, 1843, then again on October 22, 1844 — but surely the objection does not require this sort of activity!

Iain Murray points out that William Tennent, Jr. (1705–77) had a public disagreement with George Whitefield (1714–70). As he reports it, Whitefield asked Tennent if he rejoiced that our time of death is at hand when we "will be called home and freed from all the difficulties attending this chequered scene." Tennent replied: "No, sir, it is no pleasure to me at all, and if you knew your duty it would be none to you. I have nothing to do with death; my business is to live as long as I can — as well as I can — and to serve my Lord and Master as faithfully as I can, until he shall think proper to call me home."⁹⁷

In his sovereign plan, God put us in this world — not to wait, but to work. And he will not take us out of this world until the appropriate time (Jn 17:15; cp. Php 1:19–26). Yes, we are thankful for the ultimate hope in Christ's coming, and we long for it as our blessed hope. But we have work to do now in the circumstances to which God has called us. And the biblical expectation regarding the church's future on earth encourages that work. Is it wrong to commit to furthering the Great Commission with hope for its fulfillment in time and on earth? Is it a misguided hope to pursue Christ's directives with enthusiasm and anticipation? Surely not! Indeed, Christians must "be steadfast, immovable, *always abounding in the work of the Lord*, knowing that your toil is *not in vain* in the Lord" (1Co 15:58).

96. Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 4.

97. Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 219.

Revelation 20:7–10

And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Amillennialists sometimes argue, as does Meredith Kline: “Revelation 20:7–10 by itself refutes the postmillennial projections, for it is evident that the nations of the world have not become officially Christianized institutions during the millennium.”⁹⁸ Kim Riddlebarger agrees by asking: “How can such a thing happen, if Christ’s kingdom has truly transformed the political, cultural, and economic affairs of all the nations? The global revolt betrays the postmillennial insistence that the nations of the earth will be Christianized. The extent of evil depicted here means that whatever Christianizing of the nations has taken place is more shallow than deep.”⁹⁹ Regarding postmillennialist John J. Davis’s presentation, Riddlebarger wonders how “the ‘present evil age’ could be completely transformed by the kingdom of God only to become essentially evil again during the brief period of apostasy.”¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately, these complaints not only radically misunderstand postmillennialism, but the implications of the very text to which they are referring. In response I would point out:

First, postmillennialism is not universalistic. It does *not* expect an each-and-every salvific universalism or Christian-cultural ethical perfection (these will occur only in the consummate, eternal new heavens and new earth). Just as evangelical churches today can have within them unconverted members, false professors of Christ, so will global Christianity even toward the end. The Christianizing we anticipate is *large scale*, not *full scale*.

98. Kline, “Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium,” 221.

99. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 223–24.

100. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 256.

Riddlebarger stumbles badly later when he asks the question: “Does the New Testament anticipate a golden age for the church?”¹⁰¹ When he argues against postmillennialism he radically misrepresents postmillennialism and subtly mis-states the millennial debate: “Although the kingdom of God is a present reality through the reign of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the full realization of the blessings of the age to come is not a gradual or progressive process. The full realization of such blessings will be wrought by Jesus Christ at his second advent and not through a gradual eclipse of evil and the cessation of unbelief.”¹⁰² I must ask: What postmillennialist theologian has ever argued that “the *full* realization” of God’s blessings comes in history prior to the second advent? Riddlebarger states *twice* that he is speaking about “the full realization.” No millennial view equates the millennium with the perfection of God’s blessings in eternity, not even the dispensational view that has Christ himself on earth managing its day-to-day operations and overseeing its entire bureaucratic structure.

Furthermore, consider this: Riddlebarger himself holds that by the phrase the “last days” Paul “referred to the course of the entire interadvental age” and that “throughout the last days, some will distort the gospel,” noting that “this lamentable stage of affairs is an inevitability for Christ’s church.”¹⁰³ Would he say the church itself is not a Christianized institution because of its internal buffetings? Can the church of Jesus Christ exist despite apostasy by some? Can good and faithful Christian churches or missionary institutions not eventually apostatize? As Cornelis Venema observes: “the corridors of history are littered with the dead corpses of once strong and vibrant churches.”¹⁰⁴ Shall we say that while those churches were faithful they were not “Christianized” institutions? Then why cannot the postmillennial kingdom come to exist despite the later apostasy of some? Contrary to Riddlebarger, Venema consistently recognizes that postmillennialism actually projects the “pervasive” (not total) influence of the biblical faith and the conversion of “the vast majority” of people to Christ.¹⁰⁵

101. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 236.

102. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 237.

103. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 126.

104. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 166.

105. Venema, *Promise of the Future*, 239.

Second, this passage follows one that presents Christianity's large-scale influence (Rev 20:1–6). Revelation 20:7–8 does not teach that this resistance or apostasy will occur *during* and *throughout* the entire thousand years. As the text clearly states, it is “when the thousand years are completed” (20:7). Consequently, since the “thousand years” is an image of a long period of time, postmillennialists expect the gospel victory in history to prevail for centuries (or millennia!) during which “officially Christianized institutions” will dominate human culture (“the mountain of the house of the LORD / Will be established as the chief of the mountains / And will be raised above the hills,” Isa 2:2a). Revelation 20:7–10 teaches only that *after the end of the “millennium” and just before the end of history* some will fall away and revolt against the prevailing Christian culture.

How does a revolt after, say, 10,000 years of sanctified Christian culture remove the significance of that preceding cultural glory? Postmillennialism sees Revelation 20:7ff as an *apostasy*. And an apostasy requires something to apostatize from. That is, it implies a large-scale reality from which some fall away. Even if the whole world as such should at the end fall away from the Christian faith, the world would have already experienced the long-term victory expected in postmillennialism prior to that time.

Third, this text speaks of only a short-term apostasy. The Revelation text not only places the revolt at the *very end* of history, but presents it as covering only “a short time” (Rev 20:3). Thus, after speaking of the “thousand years” of Satan’s binding (the period during which the church’s victory will arise and prevail), the text rather *quickly* and *summarily* states that Satan will be released from his binding and then gather people for war (20:8–9). Whereupon it appears that rather suddenly and effectively “fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (20:9b = 2Th 1:7–10). How can Riddlebarger muse: “It is hard to attribute this deplorable condition to a brief period of apostasy after Jesus Christ and his saints have ruled over these nations for a thousand years”?¹⁰⁶ How is that so “hard”? That is precisely what the text states: “and when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released” (20:7). And he will only “be released for a short time” (20:3).

The fact that John states that Satan gathers “the nations” does not necessarily imply *all* the Christianized nations. The phrase “the nations”

106. Riddlebarger, *Amillennialism*, 238.

(*ta ethne*) is a common phrase that means “the Gentiles” (Ro 16:4; Gal 2:12; Eph 3:1) or more generally “the peoples” Gentiles” (Mt 21:43; 24:7; Ac 17:26). That they number “like the sand of the seashore” (Rev 20:8c) simply means they are a considerable number, like the number of those who fought against Joshua (Jos 11:4), and Israel during the period of the Judges (Jdgs 7:12), and the Philistines who fight Solomon (1Sa 13:5). This image does not require a literal accounting equivalent to the actual number of the sand particles on the world’s seashores. But again, even if this implies the vast majority of the nations of the earth (it cannot be *all* of them, for they would have no one to attack, 20:9), this occurs after a long period of Christian dominion.

So then, how is that the “the global revolt betrays the postmillennial insistence that the nations of the earth will be Christianized” (Riddlebarger)? From what are the nations revolting? A “revolt” does not occur against a weak and uninfluential people, but a dominant people. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (10th ed.) defines “revolt” for us: “to renounce allegiance or subjection (as to a government).” The very idea of the revolt itself implies Christianity’s prior dominance.

Conclusion

For the devout Christian the ultimate issue determining a particular eschatological system’s validity is none other than God’s Word. The evangelical theologian believes along with the covenant child that “the Bible tells me so.” If *biblical* problems afflict a person’s millennial outlook, he is in serious trouble. Such is not the case with postmillennialism. In this chapter I examine several of the leading biblical objections to postmillennialism. The postmillennial system can account for these, along with others that I touch on elsewhere in this book. Clearly the Bible itself sets before the Christian a grand historical hope that is postmillennial in orientation.

PART VI

CONCLUSION

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,” calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it. (Isa 46:10–11)

Contrary to the perception in many popular and even some scholarly approaches to millennial studies, eschatology is a deeply rooted and intricately involved aspect of Christian theology. We must not approach it in a naive manner or treat it in a superficial way. Consequently, we should not expect any single text to present an entire eschatological system — not even the famous Revelation 20 passage. Eschatology is woven into the whole fabric of Scripture as the story within; it is not painted on it as a decoration without. It is the very ligamentation, not the ornamentation of Scripture. Properly comprehending God’s eschatological message requires a working knowledge of the whole drift and framework of God’s revelation in Scripture.

Scripture’s eschatological message is one of glorious victory, not only in eternity, but also in time and on earth before Jesus returns bodily in glory to judge the world. In fact, this is the message of both the Old and New Testaments.

A Summary of the Old Testament Evidence

We can adequately understand God’s sovereign plan for the world only when we approach it in light of its historical inception. In the Bible’s account of universal origins we discover the very purpose of history. God creates man in his own image (Ge 1:26) as a materio-spiritual being (Ge 2:7). Man’s God-ordained purpose is to bring honor and glory to God by exercising godly dominion in the earth (Ge 1:26–30).

Because God possesses almighty power (Job 40:1–42:6); Isa 40:12–28), and governs by inscrutable wisdom (Isa 55:8–9; Ro 11:32–35), the Christian actually should be predisposed to the historical victory postmil-

lennialism expects. The postmillennial system best balances the material and spiritual aspects of Scripture and gives full significance to both the temporal and eternal features of God's plan and man's obligation to him. The Lord creates man and history for his glory; therefore, man and history *will* bring glory to him. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev 4:11). "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Ro 11:36).

Postmillennialism teaches that a time is coming in earth history, continuous with the present and resulting from currently operating, God-ordained spiritual forces, in which the overwhelming majority of men and nations will voluntarily bow in salvation to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This humble submission to his gracious scepter will issue forth in widespread righteousness, peace, and prosperity. Scripture's eschatology is victory-oriented. This victory-orientation begins with the protoevangelium in Genesis and weaves its golden cord throughout Scripture all the way through Revelation 22. Certainly the biblical record expects struggle in history due to man's fall. But it is a struggle that will triumphantly issue forth in victory rather than deadlock, defeat, or despair. The Seed of the Woman (Christ) will conquer the Seed of the Serpent (Satan) — in time and on earth. This is a fundamental truth of biblical eschatology.

We may trace the victory theme through the outworking of the Lord God's sovereign covenant. His administration of universal affairs is covenantal, unfolding in Scripture through a series of unified, successive, and judicially related covenants. Hence, Paul speaks of "the covenants of the promise" (Eph 2:12). The Adamic (Ge 1:26–30) and Noahaic (Ge 9:1–17) covenants set the stage for the dominion of godly man and the victory of God's saving grace in history. The Abrahamic Covenant promises the spread of salvation to "all the families of the earth" (Ge 12:1–3). The gospel is the tool for the spread of the Abrahamic blessings through both family generation and evangelistic outreach (see Gal 3:8, 29). The Davidic Covenant identifies the regal nature of the pre-eminent covenant seed, Jesus Christ, and secures his throne and gracious rule in the plan of God (2Sa 7:8–16). The new covenant insures the victory of God's grace by working in the hearts of men (Jer 31:31–34; Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25; 2Co 3:6; Heb 8:8–13).

Maintaining covenantal harmony, the patriarchal and Mosaic era prophecies foresee a time in earth history, issuing forth from Christ's first advent, in which God's glory and righteousness will cover the earth (Ge 22:17; 49:10; Nu 24:17–19). The Old Testament prophets, as prosecutors

exercising God's covenant lawsuits, continue the hope of victory — despite opposition from without and defection from within Israel. They command kings and judges of all the earth to bow to Christ, and promise that the ends of the earth will turn to God in salvation (Ps 2; 22; 72; Isa2:1–4; 9:6–7; Mic 4:1–4; Zec 14).

Although, early on, God's gracious saving work largely confines itself to Abraham's family, it is not always to be thus. God will gain the victory apart from Jewish exclusiveness and Old Testament ceremonial distinctives. All people who receive God's grace will be on an equal footing before him (Isa 19:21–24; Jer 3:16–17; 31:31–34; 48:47; 49:6, 39).

A Summary of the New Testament Evidence

As we enter the New Testament record Christ's birth immediately confronts us. The birth of "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1) gloriously echoes the Old Testament victory theme, showing that his first coming begins the fruition of the promises (Lk 1:46–55, 68–79). The fullness of time comes in the first century through Christ's incarnation (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10; Tit 1:2–3).

Christ's covenanted kingdom comes near in his early ministry because the "time was fulfilled" for it to come (Mk 1:14–15; Mt 3:2). Thus, John Baptist is something of a marker separating the fading Old Testament era from the dawning kingdom era (Mt 11:11–14; Mk 1:14–15; Jn 3:26–30).

During his earthly ministry we witness Christ's power over demons as evidence that the kingdom has come (Mt 12:28). It does not await his second advent (Lk 17:20–21), for as he preaches the gospel, he claims to be king while on earth (Jn 12:12–15; 18:36–37). Following his resurrection and ascension, Pentecost becomes the celebration of his enthronement in heaven (Ac 2:30–36). From then on we hear of his being in a royal position at the right hand of Almighty God (Mk 16:19; Ro 8:34; Eph 1:20; 1Pe 3:22; Rev 3:21).

Because of this, first-century Christians proclaim him as a king (Ac 3:15; 17:7; Rev 1:5) possessing regal dignity, authority, and power (Eph 1:22; Php 2:9). Beginning in the first century people at conversion enter into the kingdom of Christ (Col 1:12, 13; 4:11; 1Th 2:12). Christ's kingdom rule goes where his people go, for they are the subjects of his kingdom (Rev 1:6, 9) and are now mystically seated with him in a rulership position (Eph 1:3; 2:6; 1Co 3:21–22; Rev 3:21).

The actual starting point of Christ's kingly victory is at his resurrection from the dead (Mt 28:18–20; Ac 2:30–31; Ro 1:3–4) and his ascension to God's right hand (Da 7:13–14, 27; Lk 22:69; 24:46–53).

Celebrating his cosmic victory over sin, death, and Satan, he pours out his Spirit to empower his faithful subjects for kingdom service (Ac 2:32–33; Eph 4:8).

Christ's kingdom is essentially spiritual in nature (Jn 18:36–37; Ro 14:17) and operates from within the heart (Lk 17:20–21). We enter his kingdom through salvation (Col 1:12, 13; Jn 3:3). He rules his kingdom by his mystical presence from heaven (Jn 18:36; Eph 4:8–14) and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:39; Ro 8:9; 1Co 3:16). The basic power of the kingdom is the "*gospel* of the kingdom" (Mt 4:23; 9:35; Mk 1:14–15), for it is the power of God unto salvation (Ro 1:16; 1Co 1:18; 2Co 6:7). The basic function of the kingdom is to promote God's truth (Jn 18:37; 2Co 10:4–5).

The kingdom is not a future, Armageddon-introduced, earthly, political kingdom. By misreading Scripture, the first-century Jews seek a political kingdom to overthrow Rome, and when Christ does not offer them this they reject him (Jn 6:15). Even his disciples are confused and disappointed for a time (Lk 24:21–27). Israel as a geo-political entity is once for all set aside as the specially favored nation of God (Mt 8:11–12; 21:43), because of her prominent role in crucifying Christ (Ac 2:22–23, 36; 3:13–15; 5:30; 7:52; 1Th 2:14–15). The Messianic kingdom includes people of all races on an equal basis (Isa 19:19–25; Zec 9:7; Ro 10:12; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:12–17; Col 3:11). Though God judges Israel in the first century and removes her "most favored nation" status, he does not irrevocably abandon the Jews, for eventually great numbers of them will enter his kingdom (Ro 11:11–25).

As God's focus shifts from the single race of Israel, a confined land, and a single temple, the New Testament-phase church becomes "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), "the circumcision" (Php 3:3), "the seed of Abraham" (Gal 3:7, 29), the "Jerusalem above" (Gal 4:24–29), the "temple of God" (Eph 2:21), "a royal priesthood" and a "peculiar people" (1Pe 2:9–10). Consequently, we learn that promises to Israel apply to the church (Jer 31:31–34; Mt 26:28; Ac 15:12–17).

Evangelism is the essential pre-condition to postmillennial success. Apart from Christ we can do nothing (Jn 15:5; Mt 19:26); in him we can do all things (Php 4:13, 19; Mt 17:20). Because he possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18; cp. Eph 1:19–22; Php 2:9–11), his Great Commission expects his people to win converts, baptize them into his body, and then instruct them in "all things" that he taught (Mt 28:19). Due to Christ's glorious presence with us, the Great Commission expects all nations to convert to Christ (Mt 28:19; Jn 12:32), just as do the

prophets (Ps 22:27–28; Isa 2:1–4; Mic 4:1–4). The kingdom comes gradually, growing and ebbing ever stronger as history unfolds over time (Da 2:35ff; Eze 17:22–24; 47:1–9; Mt 13:31–33; Mk 4:26–29).

The Christian witness involves exposing evil (Eph 5:11) and calling men to repentance from *all* unrighteousness in *every* realm (Lk 3:8; 24:47), so that Christ may take “every thought captive” (2Co 10:5). As citizens of Christ’s kingdom, Christians are to engage every area of life with body, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:37) to the glory of God (1Co 10:31; Col 3:17), for they will give an account of every word and deed (Mt 12:36; 2Co 10:5). God’s redemption in Christ will bring the world as a system to salvation (Jn 1:29; 3:17; 1Jn 2:2) as the vast majority of the world’s population converts to him (Jn 12:31; 1Ti 2:6). The stumbling of the Jews in rejecting Christ opens up the prospect of mass conversions from among the Gentiles (Ro 11:12). Eventually the vast majority of Jews and Gentiles alike will convert, leading to the “reconciliation of the world” (Ro 11:15, 25).

Christ is presently ruling and reigning from heaven (1Co 15:25a). He will not return in his second advent until “the end” of history (1Co 15:24), when he turns the kingdom over to the Father (1Co 15:28). His second advent will not occur until he conquers his earthly enemies (1Co 15:24). He will conquer his last enemy, death, at his return when we arise from the dead (1Co 15:26).

Christ’s gifts to his church well equip her for the task of winning the world to him. God the Father delights in the salvation of sinners (Eze 18:23; Lk 15:10). The gospel is nothing less than “the power of God unto salvation” (Ro 1:16; 1Co 1:18, 24). Therefore, the church has the certain hope of victory, not due to her own strength but God’s promise (Ac 13:47–48; 15:14–19), Christ’s presence (Mt 28:20; Ac 18:10), and the Spirit’s power (Ro 8:9; 1Co 3:16).

Christ binds Satan in principle (i.e., definitively) during his ministry (Mt 12:28–29), thus casting him down from his dominance (Jn 12:31; Lk 17:10) on the basis of his redemptive labor (Col 3:15). Therefore, despite Satan’s great power, Christians may resist him, causing him to flee (Jas 4:7). They may even crush him beneath their feet (Ro 16:20) because “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1Jo 4:4).

Conclusion

In accordance with the plan of God and under his almighty hand, Christianity will overwhelm the world so that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). A day

is coming when the large majority of the human race will bow before the Lord in humble worship, offering up the labor of their hands and the glory of their kingdoms to him who is “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 17:14; 19:16).

Scripture’s glorious message — in *both* the Old and New Testaments — is that “every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Ro 14:11). Paul confidently asserts that

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1Co 15:20-28).

APPENDIX

THE HYPER-PRETERIST ERROR

“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1Co 15:12).

In chapter 7 I introduce preterism. Basically it is a hermeneutical tool that helps us understand the many New Testament prophecies regarding the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70. Preterists gladly accept the basic doctrines of universal Christian theology, which teach that other important biblical prophecies are not yet fulfilled. Among those unfulfilled prophecies are:

- the visible, glorious, personal second coming of Christ
- the physical resurrection of the dead
- the final corporate judgment of all men on Judgment Day
- the end of the present earth and temporal history
- the establishment of the consummate, physical new creation

Consequently, preterists affirm the basic doctrinal construct which is the universal, historic, formal, corporate, public, systematic belief of the institutional Christian church of all times.

Preterism has long been accepted as an approach to select passages of Scripture, dating all the way back to at least as early as Eusebius (AD 260–340¹). Dispensationalist Thomas Ice admits: “There is early preterism in people like Eusebius. In fact, his work *The Proof of the Gospel* is full of preterism in relationship to the Olivet Discourse.”² It was an especially

1. For example: “Such was the reward of the iniquity of the Jews and their impiety against the Christ of God, but it is worth appending to it the infallible forecast of our Saviour in which he prophetically expounded these very things” (*Eccl. Hist.* 3:7:1). Then he begins interweaving the Olivet Discourse with Josephus’ *Jewish War*.

2. Ice, “Update on Pre-Darby Rapture Statements,” audio tape. Cited in DeMar and Gumerlock, *Early Church*, 15.

well known interpretive approach in the 1800s and early 1900s, though until recently “preterism” never described an entire theology. It only served to provide select hermeneutic insights into specific prophetic pronouncements limited by near-term temporal indicators.

Unfortunately, growing up out of this perspective some over zealous interpreters have transformed this important hermeneutic device into a full-scale theological construct, creating a whole new free-standing theology. For all practical purposes we may state that this extreme form of preterism arose in the early 1980s, though we discover several of its distinctives a century earlier, especially in J. Stuart Russell’s, *The Parousia* (1878).³ Those holding this mutated form of preterism prefer to call it either “full preterism” or “consistent preterism.” But orthodox preterists generally label it “hyper-preterism” or “unorthodox preterism.” Hyper-preterism is to preterism what hyper-Calvinism is to Calvinism: It is a theological error created by pressing legitimate concerns too far. It is the result of imbalance and selective proof-texting unconstrained by Christianity’s doctrinal history.

At the most basic level, hyper-preterists believe that AD 70 witnesses the final accomplishment of *all* prophecies not fulfilled before that time. This includes the second advent, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the consummational new heavens and new earth, and several other eschatological doctrines. A key verse in their system is Luke 21:22, which all (even dispensationalists) agree refers to AD 70: “these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” I will return to this verse shortly.

This modern movement arises largely from among members of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, known as the Churches of Christ (e. g., Max King, Tim King, Don Preston, and Ed Stevens). According to Stevens, one of its leading proponents, some “hyper-preterists” have even become Unitarians.⁴ Others are beginning to apply the biblical references to hell to the events of AD 70, thereby denying the doctrine of eternal punishment.⁵ The theological foundations of the movement

3. Slightly earlier, though, a convert of Charles Finney began promoting the view that the second coming occurred in AD 70: John Humphrey Noyes (1811–86). He was the Utopian socialist, who founded the Oneida Community in 1848. He exercised little influence among orthodox Christians. See: Douglas, *Who’s Who in Christian History*, 515.

4. Stevens, “Wanda Shirk & PIE,” 3–17.

5. Dawson, *Jesus’ Teaching on Hell* (1997).

appear to be continually mutating, which we might expect in that the movement has no creedal moorings (as we shall see). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that it is adrift on a sea of untrained theologians.⁶

Whereas orthodox preterism is a *hermeneutic* approach to specific New Testament prophecies, hyper-preterism is more than that. It uses the specific near-term passages as a starting point for developing an entire *theology* that contradicts universal, historic Christian orthodoxy. Thus, orthodox preterism is *exegetical preterism*, working from *interpretive conclusions* drawn from New Testament prophecies regarding specific first century events. Whereas hyper-preterism is *theological preterism*, building on *theological implications* drawn from those select biblical texts and then read back over *all* eschatological passages.

Opponents of *any* large scale preterist analysis, especially those holding to classic dispensationalism, too easily confuse preterism and hyper-preterism. And even when they are not actually confused over the issues, they either mention hyper-preterism alongside of preterism in order to discredit the orthodox version through guilt-by-association or they stumble when trying to present the issues. For example, Norm Geisler writes: “*Extreme (full) preterism* maintains that *all* New Testament predictions are past, including those about the resurrection and the Second Coming, which likewise occurred in the first century. This model has been held by David Chilton (1951–1997) — see *Paradise Restore* and *Days of Vengeance*) and Kenneth Gentry (b. 1953 — see *Before Jerusalem Fell*).”⁷

Thomas Ice fumbles his critique of preterism in the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*. Even though he is well aware of my writings (frequently citing them), Ice states: “Preterists such as Kenneth Gentry (pp. 86–89) believe that current history is identified as the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21–22 and 2 Peter 3:10–13.”⁸ But in the very pages he cites (from my contribution to *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*) I state the *opposite* of what he reports. I write regarding the

6. The Foreword to a book by John Noe from this movement inadvertently highlights the (all too typical) problem: “John is not a professional theologian. He has had no formal seminary training, but that may be an advantage.” Then again, lacking training in biblical languages, exegetical principles, systematic theology, and historical theology may not be helpful at all.

7. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 615. Emph. his. I might note that he also states the wrong date for my birth.

8. Ice, “Preterism,” in *PEBP*, 284–89.

new creation in Revelation 21–22: “The new creation language suggests a first-century setting. The new creation begins flowing into history before the final consummation (which will establish a wholly new physical order, 2 Peter 3:10–13).” Thus, I believe that the 2 Peter 3 reference does *not* refer to the present spiritual new creation, but points to the final, permanent new creation order established only at the final consummation (see my argument in ch. 14 above).

A few sentences later, after specifically mentioning only my name, when stating “preterists such as Kenneth Gentry,” Ice practices his sleight-of-hand: “Because of the current spread of preterism, pastors and teachers need to be prepared to defend *orthodox eschatology* from this attack. Those who *believe that Christ came in AD 70* will be found looking for our Lord’s any-moment return when He does rapture the church without any signs or warning.”⁹ Note that Ice here lumps all preterism into the hyper-preterist camp and writes off preterism as opposed to “orthodox eschatology.” This practice is as unconscionable as it is unending. Such errors and mis-statements are unfortunate in that orthodox preterists even oppose hyper-preterism more vigorously than they do dispensationalists. We understand that hyper-preterism strikes at the fundamentals of the faith.¹⁰

Unfortunately, even historic premillennialists can stumble here, too. Blomberg and Chung state that

preterism has taken on a higher profile in some Reformed circles. This view sees all biblical prophecy about the events leading up to Christ’s second coming as fulfilled in the first century. At times it even argues that the second coming itself was fulfilled in Jesus’ invisible coming in judgment on Israel in AD 70.

They attach to this statement a footnote that reads: “See esp. Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*.”¹¹

9. Ice in *PEBP*, 289. Emph. mine.

10. Though we oppose hyper-preterism more vigorously, the fact remains that it is a rather small movement that does not demand the same amount of attention as dispensationalism, with its multi-million selling books and installed based of millions of adherents.

11. Blomberg and Chung, *Historic Premillennialism*, xv.

Brief Theological Critique

*Creedal Failure*¹²

First, hyper-preterism is definitionally heterodox in that it lies outside of creedal orthodoxy. No ecumenical creed of the church allows for the second advent occurring in AD 70. “All of the major branches of Christendom firmly hold to the return of Jesus Christ to the abode of humanity.”¹³ Nor does any creed allow for dismissing the future bodily resurrection of believers. Nor do the creeds reduce the universal, personal judgment of all men at the end of history to a confined, representative judgment at the beginning of Christian history in AD 70.

In fact, “with the exception of the certainty of death, the one eschatological doctrine on which orthodox theologians most agree is the second coming of Christ.”¹⁴ It would be most remarkable if the entire church that came through AD 70 missed the proper understanding of the eschaton and did not realize its members had been resurrected. And that the next generations had no inkling of the great transformation that took place. Has the *entire* Christian church missed the *basic contours* of Christian eschatology for its first 1900 years? Has the “blessed hope” really been a “blessed hoax” all these years?

Second, hyper-preterism has serious implications for the perspicuity of Scripture. This viewpoint not only has negative implications for the later creeds, but for the instructional abilities of the Apostles. Despite the Spirit-filled Apostles writing under divine inspiration, no one in church history understands the *major issues* of which they speak. Until very recently, that is. Are the Scriptures *that* impenetrable on an issue of *that* significance (remember hyper-preterism has built an entire, self-contained theology)?

Clement of Rome lives through AD 70 and yet has no idea he is resurrected, for he continues to look for a physical resurrection (*Clement* 50:3). Jude’s (supposed) grandsons still seek a physical resurrection (cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3:24:4). Whoever these men are, they come right out of the first generation and from the land of Israel with absolutely no inkling of an AD 70 resurrection or a past second advent. See also the *Didache* 10:5; 16:1ff (first century); Ignatius, *Trallians* 9:2; *Smyrnaens* 2:1;

12. For a fuller treatment of the creedal problem, see my chapter in Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?*, ch. 1

13. Sauter, *Eschatological Rationality*, 33.

14. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1192.

6:1; *Letter to Polycarp* 3:2 (early second century); Polycarp 2:1; 6:2; 7:1. See also Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr.

Berkouwer rightly notes that the reason the resurrection finds early creedal acceptance is because of the New Testament's clear emphasis on it. The hyper-preterist view has serious and embarrassing implications for the perspicuity of Scripture and the integrity of Christianity. And this despite the fact we are now (supposedly) in our resurrected states and have the outpoured Holy Spirit (Eph 4:8) and his gift of teachers (Eph 4:11), whom he gives to protect us from every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:12–14).

Third, the hyper-preterist system leaves the new covenant Christian (in our post AD 70 era) without a canon. If AD 70 fulfills all prophecy and if the entire New Testament speaks to issues in the pre-AD 70 time frame, we do not have any directly relevant passages for us. The entire New Testament must be transposed before we can use it. Of course, we see a similar situation with the Old Testament. The Old Testament is directly designed for the old covenant people operating under the levitical system. But in the New Testament we have an interpretive word from God explaining the change in redemptive-history and interpreting the old covenant for us.

Hermeneutic Failure

Fourth, hyper-preterism suffers from serious errors in its hermeneutical methodology. When a contextually defined passage applies to the AD 70 event, the hyper-preterist will take *all* passages with *similar* language and apply them to AD 70, as well. But similarity does not imply identity. After all, Christ cleanses the temple twice and in virtually identical ways, but the two events are not the same — for one begins his ministry (Jn 2:13–17) while the other ends it (Mt 21:12–13).

Furthermore, we must distinguish *sense* and *referent*. For instance, several types of “resurrection” appear in Scripture: the dry bones of Ezekiel 37; spiritual redemption in John 5:24; physical redemption at the grave in John 5:28; Israel's renewal in Christ in Romans 11:15; and the beast's resurrection in Revelation 13:3. Orthodox preterists, however, hold that passages specifically delimiting the time-frame by temporal indicators (such as “this generation,” “shortly,” “at hand,” “near,” and similar wording) must apply to AD 70, but similar sounding passages may or may *not*.

Resurrection Errors

Fifth, their most serious error involves their removing the physical resurrection from systematic theology. Paul specifically declares Christ's resurrection to be the paradigm of our own (1Co 15:20ff).¹⁵ Yet we know that his was a physical, tangible resurrection (Lk 24:39), whereas ours is (supposedly) spiritual. What happens to the biblically defined analogy between Christ's resurrection and ours in the hyper-preterist system?

Sixth, numerous other theological and exegetical problems afflict a spiritual-only resurrection. For one thing, the hyper-preterist view diminishes the significance of the somatic implications of sin: Adam's sin has *physical* effects, as well as judicial and spiritual effects. Where are these taken care of in the hyper-preterist system? Death's implications are not just judicial and spiritual, but also physical (Ge 3:14, 19; Mt 10:28; Ro 6:23). If Christians are *now* fulfilling the resurrection expectation of Scripture, then the gnostics of the early Christian centuries are correct. The physical world is superfluous in the hyper-preterist viewpoint. The anthropology of hyper-preterism is defective in this, not accounting for the theological significance of man's body/soul nature (Ge 2:7). This can also have implications for the person of Christ and the reality of his humanity.

Seventh, regarding the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, we must wonder why the Greeks mock Paul in Acts 17 for believing in the resurrection, if it were not a physical reality. We must wonder why Paul aligns himself with the Pharisees on the issue of the resurrection (Ac 23:6–9; 24:15, 21). We must wonder why we Christians still marry, since Christ teaches that in the resurrection we will *not* marry (Lk 20:35). We must wonder why the Apostles never correct the widespread notion of a physical resurrection so current in Judaism (cf. Josephus, Mishnah, Talmud, etc.).

Still further, we must wonder why we “resurrected” Christians must yet die. Why do we not leave this world like Enoch and Elijah? Furthermore, where and what is the resurrection of the lost (Jn 5; Rev 20)? Paul considers Hymeneus and Philetus to be wrecking men's faith by saying the resurrection is past (2Ti 2:17–18). A wrong view of the resurrection is a serious matter to Paul.

Eighth, practically I wonder on the hyper-preterist view what the difference our resurrection makes in this life? We get ill and are weak on

15. See below for an analysis of this passage.

the same scale as those prior to the AD 70 resurrection. Does this glorious resurrection of the “spiritual body” have no impact on our present condition? A hyper-preterist analysis might leave us to expect that Paul looks to AD 70 as an agent of relief from the groanings and the temptations of the flesh (Ro 7:25; 8:19–24), yet we still have such — despite the supposed resurrection.

Christology Implications

Ninth, Acts 1 clearly defines Christ’s second advent in terms of his ascension, which is a physical and visible event. For example, in Acts 1:8–11 Luke is careful to say the disciples are “beholding” him as he ascends; the cloud receives him “from the eyes of them” (v 9b); they are “gazing” as he was “going” (v 10); they are “looking” (v 11); they “beheld” (v 11). We know his ascension is a visible and glorious phenomenon involving his tangible resurrected body. And an actual visible cloud is associated with his ascension (v 10).

Then we read that the angelic messengers resolutely declare “this same Jesus” (i.e., the Jesus they knew for over three years, who is now in a tangible resurrected body) will “so come *in like manner* as you saw Him go into heaven” (v 11). The Greek *on tropon* literally means “what manner.” The Greek phrase “never indicates mere certainty or vague resemblance; but wherever it occurs in the New Testament, denotes identity of mode or manner.”¹⁶ Consequently, we have express biblical warrant to expect a visible, bodily, glorious return of Christ paralleling in kind the ascension. The hyper-preterist position contradicts this clear teaching of Scripture.

Tenth, if AD 70 ends the Messianic reign of Christ (cf. hyper-preterist view of 1Co 15:24, 28), then the glorious Messianic era prophesied throughout the Old Testament is reduced to a forty year inter-regnum. Whereas by all biblical accounts it is a lengthy, glorious era. A problem with premillennialism is that it reduces Christ’s reign to 1000 literal years; hyper-preterism reduces it further to forty years. The prophetic expressions of the kingdom tend to speak of an enormous period of time, even employing terms frequently used of eternity (2Sa 7:13; Da 2:44; Lk 1:33; Rev 11:15). Does Christ’s kingdom parallel David’s *exactly*, so that it only lasts for the same amount of time?

16. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles*, *ad loc.*

History and Church Errors

Eleventh, hyper-preterists eternalize time, by allowing history to continue forever. This not only goes against express statements of Scripture, but also has God enduring a universe in which sin will dwell forever and ever and ever. God will never finally conclude man's rebellion; he will never finally reckon with sin. Christ tells us that the judgment will be against rebels in their *bodies*, not spiritual bodies (Mt 10:28). The hyper-preterist system does not reach back far enough (to the Fall and the curse on the physical world) to highlight the significance of redemption as it moves to a final, conclusive consummation, ridding the cursed world of sin. The full failure of the First Adam must be overcome by the full and final success of the Second Adam.

In addition, we have a problem regarding divine election. If history continues forever, the number of the elect is not a set figure. The elect becomes an every growing number that never ceases. The Lamb's Book of Life becomes an unending recording rather than a set record.

Twelfth, hyper-preterism has serious negative implications for ecclesiastical labor. Shall we limit the Great Commission to the pre-AD 70 era, due to the interpretation of "the end" by hyper-preterists (Mt 28:20)? Is the Lord's Supper superfluous today, having been fulfilled in Christ's (alleged) second advent in AD 70 (1Co 11:26)?

These are just a few samples of the wide-ranging theological and historical problems facing hyper-preterism. But now let us reflect on some particular Scriptures that are important to the dispute with the hyper-preterists.

Select Exegetical Observations*1 Corinthians 15*

We must recognize the enormous significance of Christ's resurrection for the Christian worldview. To illustrate this I will deal with just one of the redemptive-historical *effects* of his resurrection: the eschatological resurrection of believers. Christ's resurrection not only secures our present redemption *for* glory (Ro 4:25; 10:9–10) but our future resurrection *to* glory (Ro 8:23).

As I note above one major feature of hyper-preterism is its denying the believer's future physical resurrection at the end of history. As I will show, this contradicts a major result of the resurrection of Christ. Before I demonstrate this I must briefly summarize the argument for Christ's

physical resurrection, which is the effective cause of our own future resurrection.

The Scriptures teach that Christ arises from the dead in the same body in which he dies (Jn 2:18–19, 21). As such, it miraculously attests to the truth of his divine mission on earth (Mt 12:39–40). This is why his disciples find the tomb and his burial clothing empty, for when he arises his physical body departs from them (Mt 28:6; Jn 20:4–11, 15). The gospels present the resurrected Christ in a material body that men can touch and handle (Lk 24:39), which still has the wounds of the cross (Jn 20:27), to which people can cling (Jn 20:17; Mt 28:9), and which can eat food (Lk 24:42–43; Jn 21:11–14). Christianity affirms Christ’s corporeal resurrection as a prominent feature of its high supernaturalism and eschatological orientation.

But how does that speak to the issue of *our* resurrection? In that my space is limited I will simply provide an abbreviated commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, which speaks directly to the point and is a favorite passage for hyper-preterists. They often point out that Paul speaks of a “spiritual body” (v 44) and argues that “you do not sow the body which is to be” (v 37).

The Corinthian Context and Problem

Before surveying this chapter we must be aware of a major underlying problem in this church located in the Greek city of Corinth: a mixture of a quasi-gnostic philosophy (highlighting higher knowledge and denigrating the physical realm) and an exorbitant pride rooted in pneumatic-eschatological claims.

Indeed, Paul opens his letter by referring to their pneumatic gifts (1:7; cp. chs. 12–14) and the matter of a Greek concern for “knowledge” (1:18–25; cp. chs. 2–4, 8–10). These issues almost invariably lie behind the particular problems he addresses. For example, their sexual immorality is rooted in their unconcern with issues of physical morality (1Co 6:13, 15; “the body doesn’t matter! what’s the problem?”) and their denial of legitimate sexual relations in marriage (1Co 7:1–4; “we are above physical relations”). And their charismatic abuses are quite well-known (1Co 12–14). They even revolt against local social conventions and boundary markers in disregarding public decorum in dress (hair style) by their “eschatological women” (1Co 11; see Gordon Fee’s commentary on 1Co). These women assert that since the eschaton has come, then the resurrection is past — consequently, they are like the angels in heaven

who have no need of marriage nor differentiation from males (based on Mt 22:30).

Introducing the Problem and the Solution

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul focuses on a denial of the resurrection of the body. In the first part of his argument for the resurrection (vv 1–34) he repeatedly expresses his concern for its *necessity*: “if the dead are not raised” (15:12, 13, 15, 16, 29, 32). To dispel all doubt about our resurrection he links Christ’s resurrection to ours (as elsewhere: Ro 8:1; 1Co 6:14; Php3:21). As we will see, this linkage powerfully affirms the physical resurrection.

In the second part of his response (1Co 15:35–57) Paul adapts his argument for the resurrection to the pneumatic-eschatological theology of his audience. He rebuts them by responding to their spiritual pride regarding “knowledge” and “gifts.” He argues that *they themselves* have not yet received the full spiritual blessings of redemption (and neither will they in a few weeks, as per the ludicrous hyper-preterist AD 70 scheme). They will not attain the fullest expression of the Holy Spirit until “the end” (v 24a), at the consummation (v 24b–28), following upon the resurrection of the dead (vv 21–23). Effectively Paul not only corrects their present dismissal of the importance of the material order, but affirms their future eternal materiality in a physical body!

Paul’s First Argument. After insisting that Christ is resurrected from the dead and that this is the foundation of our redemptive hope (1Co 15:1–19), Paul then powerfully links our resurrection to Christ’s. In other words, his whole point regarding Christ’s resurrection is to lay a foundation for ours. In verse 20 we read: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the *first fruits* (Gk., *aparche*) of those who are asleep.” This first fruits imagery carries a load of theological implications regarding our physical resurrection.

First, the temporal significance of “first” requires that Christ’s resurrection is peculiarly the first of its kind. No other consummate-order resurrection occur before his. Second, in that he is the “first fruit” he *represents* the rest, just as the Old Testament offering of the first part of the harvest represents the whole harvest (cp. Ro 11:16). Christ’s resurrection represents our own. Third, the “first fruit” also promises more to come. Christ’s is unique for the time, but it points to others to follow at “the end” (1Co 15:24). Thus, the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits is: (1) the first of this order to occur, (2) represents his people’s

resurrection, and (3) expects more eschatological resurrections to follow at the end.

Consequently, the *fact* of Christ's resurrection is essential to the believer's resurrection — *and anticipates it*. From Adam arises death and all of its processes; so from Christ arises life and its fullest blessings (1Co 15:21–28). Christ's resurrection is necessary for the triumph of life over death (vv 25–26), which we will finally and fully enjoy only when we ourselves arise from the dead, wherein Christ defeats the “last enemy” (v 26). It is fundamentally important to Paul.

In 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 Paul presents a relentless and vigorous *ad hominem* against his Corinthian opponents: He notes he is risking his life for what the Corinthians deny (vv 30–32). He lashes out against their spiritual pride in thinking they have arrived at the fullness of Holy Spirit blessings (v 33). He warns that their “bad company” on this matter has “corrupted good morals” (v 33; cp. 1Co 6–7 particularly). They must become “sober” and “stop sinning” in this (v 34). And all of this in the context of his argument for the resurrection of believers!

Thus, once we determine the nature of Christ's resurrection, we understand the nature of our own. If Christ physically arises from the dead, then so shall we, for he is the “first fruits” of our resurrection. The only way around our physical resurrection is to deny Christ's physical resurrection.

Paul's Second Argument. Paul finally arrives at the specific objection toward which he is driving: “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’” (1Co 15:35). Here he is clearly speaking of a physical resurrection in that: (1) His opening question concerns how the “dead” are “raised,” that is, “with what kind of *body*”? (2) The verb “raised” is attached to “the dead” in verses 1–34, and to their actual “bodies” in verses 35–58. And since he is dealing with their objection regarding a physical resurrection, he now emphasizes the “body” (*soma*) in this portion of his argument (vv 35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 44). (3) Christ's resurrection from “the dead” is the key to the whole passage and argument (vv 12, 13, 15–16), and his was a physical resurrection. In fact, Paul mentions Christ's resurrection in the context of his being “dead,” “buried,” and “raised.” Christ's *body* was buried; so his *body* is what raised.

Contrary to their quasi-gnostic, hyper-spiritual, eschatologically-conditioned claims, Paul establishes the death of the body as the precondition for the fullness of the life they presently claim. He illustrates this by the seed that is sown, which must “die” (1Co 15:36–37) so that it

can arise to eschatological glory. Despite their pride of “having arrived,” the pneumatic Christians cannot “be there” yet. Their bodies haven’t been “sown.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:38–41 Paul emphasizes two crucial truths in response to their question (v 35): (1) “God gives it a body just as *he* wished” (v 38a). As with Augustine later, all objectors must recognize: “Is he who was able to make you when you did not exist not able to make over what you once were?” (*Sermons on Ascension*, 264:6). Any objection regarding the difficulty of resurrecting a dead body is more than accounted for by the fact that it is God who effects it.

(2) God gives bodies appropriate to their environment (1Co 15:38b). He gives fish bodies appropriate to water, birds appropriate to flight, and so on (vv 39–41). And all bodies have a level of “glory” appropriate to their estate (vv 40–41), whether they be “earthly” or “heavenly” (v 40). Christ adapts the glorious condition of the resurrected body for victory over the decay element. Though our pre-eschatological condition suffers dishonor and weakness, our future estate will enjoy glory and power (vv 43–44; cp. Ro 8:11; 2Co 4:7–12; Php3:21). In fact, it is “the body” itself that Christ will transform from being perishable to imperishable (vv 42, 52–54).

Paul employs shock therapy against these pneumatics: “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1Co 15:44). His point appears to be that not only should they not denigrate the present material order (which they do, chs. 6–7), but he informs them that they will arise again in a “spiritual *body*” in the eschatological order! And here is where the hyper-preterist theological naivete causes them to stumble so badly. Hyper-Preterists believe Paul’s reference to the “spiritual body” speaks of the *substance* of the body, its compositional makeup. Consequently, they boldly employ this verse for discounting a physical resurrection. Of course, this is as wrong-headed as to say a Coca-Cola bottle is made of Coca-Cola. Note the following evidences supporting the orthodox approach to Paul’s argument (to name but a few):

(1) This “spiritual (*pneumatikos*) body” is no more immaterial than the “natural (*psuchikos*) body,” even though both “spirit” (*pneuma*) and “soul” (*psuche*) often refer to the immaterial element within the creature. Here Paul uses these (usually spiritual) terms to describe the *body*, and we know that our present natural (*psuchikos*) body is material. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 these adjectives distinguish the believer and the unbeliever. Rather than distinguishing their body materials, the terms

focus on their driving forces: spiritual (Holy Spirit driven) concerns over against animal appetites

(2) In Paul the semantic domain for *pneuma* overwhelming means “pertaining to the Holy Spirit” (e.g., 1Co 2:13; 3:1; 12:1; Ro 1:11; Eph 1:3; 5:19). That is, *governed by* the Spirit of God. The adjectives *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos* describe, therefore, the essential governing characteristic of each body: the present, unresurrected, fallen *body* over against the future, resurrected, redeemed *body*. That is, they speak of the earth-related, animal-appetite-controlled condition of the present order (the totality of man in his earthly estate) over against the eternity-related, Holy Spirit-controlled condition of the resurrected estate (the totality of man in his eternal estate). The glory of the eschatological state entered into by the eschatological resurrection involves the full dominance of the Holy Spirit and all that that entails (including the body’s imperishable condition and its moral control). And contextually, Paul designs his response to confront the prideful Corinthian pneumatics who think they have arrived at full spiritual glory. (Later Paul will note that the natural is first, not the spiritual, showing that the Corinthians must first live out their present lives before attaining the fullness of the Spirit, v 46).

(3) Paul’s parallels and contrasts show his concern is not physical versus immaterial, but perishable versus imperishable (1Co 15:42), dishonor versus honor (v 43a), and weakness versus power (v 43b). Our resurrected condition will be so governed by the Holy Spirit that the weaknesses of our present condition will be totally overcome by the transformational power of the Spirit. Indeed, he emphasizes the difference of *glory* as the key (vv 40–41).

(4) According to scholars such as A. T. Robertson, generally adjectives ending in *-inos* denote compositional material, whereas those ending with *-ikos* signify characteristics. This fits the flow of Paul’s argument regarding the “natural” (*psuchikos*) and the “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) body as I present it above — and it supports the historic faith of the church regarding the resurrection.

(5) Once again Paul brings in the parallel between Adam and Christ as illustrating the differing circumstances of our estates (vv 45–48). In verse 45 he applies Genesis 2:7 in light of his resurrection argument, contrasting the Adamic condition (the first Adam) with the resurrected Christ (the second Adam). (He cites the LXX: “the man became a living [*psuchen*] soul.”) Adam’s body was a *psuchen* body subject to animal weaknesses (hunger, death, and so forth, Ge 1:29; 2:17). Once again we have the distinction between the *psuche* (soul) and *pneuma* (spirit): But we

know that Adam was not immaterial, nor was Christ in his resurrection. The idea here is that just as Adam is the source of our perishable bodies as the “first Adam,” so Christ is the source of our Spirit-powered bodies as the “last Adam” (the man of the last estate or condition of the redeemed). Thus, Paul is drawing the parallel between the two material bodies and their consequent conditions (cp. v 22), then noting the superiority of the consummate state represented in Christ’s resurrection condition.

(6) In 1 Corinthians 15:47 (“the first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven”) Paul is not speaking of the origin of Adam and of Christ, but the *quality* of their conditions (focusing on the *resurrected* Christ). He is reiterating the difference between their weakness/power, inglorious/glorious conditions. Resurrected believers share the heavenly life of Christ but are not *from* heaven themselves. Paul contrasts the resurrection body with the Genesis 2:7 Adam (vv 45–46). Thus, “just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (v 49). We shall wear the image of the heavenly second Adam, whatever his resurrection is like.

(7) In 1 Corinthians 15:50 he contrasts man’s fallen condition with his eternal condition in Christ: “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” The phrase “flesh and blood” shows the need for transformation. It highlights the weakened, sinful estate, not the material condition. In the LXX “flesh and blood” stands for human weakness as subject to and indicative of death (cf. Dt 32:42; Isa 49:26; Jer 51:35; Eze 39:17–18; Eph 1:17). Therefore, “flesh and blood” parallels the decayed realm, for “this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality” (v 53). Paul uses *touto* (“this”) four times: twice in 53 and twice in 54. His use of “this” demands continuity of the body (this body) even during transformation to the resurrected estate.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, the historic position of orthodox Christianity is sustained. Christ is physically resurrected (though with transformed powers) and so shall we be. God creates man as distinct from angels. He designs us as physical creatures for: (1) God sovereignly and purposely creates the objective, material world in which we live (Ge 1; Ps 33:6–11). (2) He lovingly and carefully forms our physical bodies for dwelling in this material world (Ge 2:7–24), which he entrusts to man (Ps 8:1–9; 115:16). (3) He brings his objective, propositional revelation to us

through the historical process of inspiration and inscripturation by means of men moved by the Spirit of God (2Ti 3:16–17; 2Pe 1:20–21). (4) In the Second Person of the Trinity, God takes upon himself a true human body and soul (which he still possesses, Col 2:9) and enters history for the purpose of redeeming men back to a right relationship with him (Ro 3:9:5; Heb 2:14). (5) His elect people will inherit the eternal estate in resurrected, physical bodies (Jn 5:28–29; 1Co 15:20–28) so that we might dwell in a material New Creation order (2Pe 3:8–13).

Daniel 12:1–2

In Daniel 12:1–2 we find a passage that clearly speaks of the great tribulation in AD 70: “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued” (12:1). But it also seems to speak of the resurrection occurring at that time: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt” (12:2).

How are we to understand this passage? Does Daniel teach that the eschatological, consummate resurrection occurs during the great tribulation in AD 70? No, he does not. Let me explain.

Daniel appears to be presenting Israel as a grave site under God’s curse: Israel as a corporate body is in the “dust” (Da 12:2; cp. Ge 3:14, 19). In this he follows Ezekiel’s pattern in his vision of the dry bones, which represent Israel’s “death” in the Babylonian dispersion (Eze 37).¹⁷ In Daniel’s prophecy many will awaken, as it were, during the great tribulation to suffer the full fury of the divine wrath, while others will enjoy God’s grace in receiving everlasting life. Luke presents similar imagery in Luke 2:34 in a prophecy about the results of Jesus’s birth for Israel: “And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.’”

17. See: *DBPET*, 148. Thus, Da 12 does not directly teach individual, bodily resurrection. Nevertheless, the fact that it uses such language shows that a literal bodily resurrection lies behind the image, and so it indirectly affirms the future bodily resurrection.

Christ himself points out that some from Israel will believe and be saved, while others will not (e.g., Mt 10:34–36; 13:11–15), that in the removing of the kingdom from Israel many will be crushed and scattered like dust (Mt 21:43–45). He even speaks of the saved Jews as arising from the “shadow of death” (Mt 4:16). Though in AD 70 elect Jews will flee Israel and will live (Mt 24:22), the rest of the nation will be a corpse: “wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (Mt 24:28). Indeed, in AD 70 we see in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem (Mt 22:7) that “many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt 22:14).¹⁸ Elsewhere he employs the imagery of “regeneration” to the arising of the new Israel from out of dead, old covenant Israel in AD 70: “You who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28).

This paralleling of divine blessing and divine curse, of life and death (cf. Ro 11:15) for those in Israel is a frequent theme (under varied images) in the Book of Revelation¹⁹: God’s angels protect some Jews from the winds of judgment, while not protecting others (Rev 7:1–9). John measures some Jews for safe-keeping in the temple, while not measuring others (11:1–2). Some stand high upon Mt. Zion in safety (Rev 14:1–5), while others do not (Rev 14:17–20).

Returning now to Daniel, it appears that Daniel is drawing from the hope of the future, literal resurrection and applying it symbolically to the first century leading up to the tribulation in AD 70. That is, he is portraying God’s separating believing Jews out of Israel through the winnowing of Israel in AD 70. Again, this is much like Ezekiel’s practice in his vision of the valley of dry bones.²⁰ Though Ezekiel’s prophecy is concerned with Israel as a whole, whereas Daniel shows that Israel’s hope is the believing remnant.

In Daniel 12:4 the prophet hears a command to seal up his message until Israel’s end, thus delaying its prophesied actions. In Revelation 22:10 John receives a command precisely the opposite of Daniel’s,

18. See Mt 22:1–13 as an image of God’s inviting Jews to Christ, which invitation Israel rejects.

19. See my discussion of Lk 2:34 in Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 252–54.

20. In doing this Daniel operates much like the Apostle John who uses Old Testament texts and re-applies them in his Revelation drama. For instance, John re-applies the historical exodus imagery to teach a new exodus (e.g., Rev 15:1–3).

resulting in Revelation as a whole being opened and thereby fulfilled shortly: “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” (Rev 22:10; cp. 1:1, 3; 22:6).

Then Daniel sees in 12:5–7 an image that forms the pattern of John’s vision in Revelation 10:5. A man (angel) standing above the waters uttering an oath to the eternal God. He promises that the events of Israel’s end will be finished, transpiring within a period of “a time, times, and half a time.” This apparently signifies a period of one year, two years, and half a year, which is John’s three and one-half years or forty-two months (Rev 11:2; cp. Rev 12:14).

In Da 12:8 the prophet expresses confusion about the outcome of his prophecy. He knows neither *when* (Da 12:6) nor *how* (Da 12:8) these prophecies will come to pass. But according to Revelation 10:6–7, John is informed both *when* and *how* they will transpire — since he lives in the end time period (which begins with the incarnation of Christ, Ac 2:16–17, 24; 1Co 10:11; 2Ti 3:1; Heb 1:1–2; 9:26; 1Jn 2:18; 1Pe 1:20).

So the resurrection in Daniel 12 does not support the hyper-preterist approach because it does not associate the *consummate* resurrection with the AD 70 tribulation. Daniel only picks up on resurrection imagery and, like Ezekiel, applies that to corporate Israel. He is teaching that in the events of AD 70, the true Israel will arise from old Israel’s carcass, as in a resurrection.

Luke 17:22–37

Hyper-preterists see Matthew 24 in its entirety focusing on AD 70, whereas most (not all) orthodox preterists see Jesus as shifting their attention from AD 70 to the second advent in the transition passage at Matthew 24:34–36.²¹ One of their strong points in making this observation is to point out that Luke 17 seems to mix up the material that we claim is so well-structured and sorted in Matthew 24. And if this is so, then we no longer have any warrant for separating the two events. In response I would note the following.

First, this issue is not really a crucial matter. Orthodox preterists see no doctrinal problems arising if we apply all of Matthew 24 to AD 70. We generally do not do so because of certain exegetical markers in the text. But if these are not sufficient to distinguish the latter part of Matthew 24 from the earlier part, it would not matter.

21. See my discussion of this in ch. 14.

As I argue on pages 355–56 above, however, I do believe we should recognize a transition in Matthew 24:34–36. That being so, how do we explain the problem of Luke’s “mixing up” the Matthew 24 material? This leads to my second point.

Second, the two texts record different sermons. The Lord presents the discourse recorded in Matthew 24 on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24:3) after looking out over Jerusalem (Mt 23:37). Whereas in Luke 17 he is on his way to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 17:11; 18:31; 19:11). In Matthew Jesus is answering his *disciples* regarding their question about the temple’s future (Mt 24:1–3). In Luke 17 he is interacting with the Pharisees (Lk 17:20–23) about the coming of the kingdom, when he turns to speak to the disciples. No one is commenting on the temple, as in Matthew 24:1–2. In fact, we find Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse four chapters later in Luke 21:5–24.

As Morris notes regarding liberals who argue that Luke places this teaching in the wrong context: “It is much better to hold that . . . Jesus [either] uttered the words on more than one occasion or . . . Luke is correctly applying them to another situation.”²² So no matter what Jesus is speaking about, Luke is not shifting the material around. He is recording a different sermon altogether.

Third, similarity does not entail identity. That is, because *similar* prophecies occur in Matthew 24 as in Luke 17 does not mean they apply to the *same* events. We see that similar expressions do not require identical realities when Scripture refers to Christ as a “lion” in some places (Rev 5:5), whereas in other places it calls Satan a “lion” (1Pe 5:8). Consider the prophetic concept of “the day of the Lord.” As I point out on pages 341–43 above, in the Old Testament it occurs in several places and applies to different historical judgments. For instance, the day of the Lord comes upon Babylon, Idumea, and Judah (Isa 13:6, 9; Eze 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Am 5:18, 20; Ob 15; Zep 1:7; Mal 4:5). Even though the language is the same (after all, all wars are basically similar) and the phrase occurs in the singular (which suggests there is only one day of the Lord), these must be different events.

Fourth, Jesus is employing *stereotypical* language. By that I mean that some images can apply to different events. For instance, Sodom frequently represents man’s rebellion deserving God’s judgment — even when not referring expressly to Sodom itself (Dt 29:23; Isa 1:9–10; 3:9;

22. Morris, *Acts*, 286.

13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Am 4:11). Notice Jesus' own reference to Lot from the Sodom episode (Lk 17:28–29, 32) and to Noah's flood (Lk 17:27; Mt 24:37–38). The flood in Noah's day becomes an image of God's judgment in other contexts (Isa 54:9; Eze 14:14, 20; Heb 11:17; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 2:5).

Likewise, Old Testament judgment language is often stereotyped, so that it can apply to different historical episodes. For instance, in the historically distinct judgments upon Babylon, Edom, and Egypt we read of the stars and moon being darkened or wasting away (Isa 13:1, 10; 34:4–5; Eze 32:2, 7–8). Using the hyper-preterist approach we should argue that these are the same events because of the same language. But instead, scholars recognize the common use of stereotypes in prophecy.

Fifth, Jesus is merely pointing out common life issues. In both chapters that we are considering, Jesus uses mundane activities as cameos of every day life. These are not alluding to historically datable events. Consider, for instance, Christ's references to the two men in the field (Lk 17:36; Mt 24:40) or the two women grinding at a mill (Lk 17:35; Mt 24:41). These are portraits of daily life activities that will be caught up in and overwhelmed by God's judgment. Thus, these serve as compelling images of the disruption of daily life cycles, as in Exodus 11:5; Job 31:10; Isa 47:1–2.

Sixth, the record of the temple cleansing exposes the interpretive error. Using the hyper-preterist's method of noting inter-linking language as evidence that the same events are in view is mistaken. For if you use this method you will conclude that the Gospels are in error in assigning a temple cleansing to the beginning of Christ's ministry (Jn 2:13–17) as well as one to its end (Mt 21:12–13). The language is so similar that liberals say that one of the Gospels must be making a mistake by putting it in the wrong historical context. Yet the integrity of the Gospel record demands that Christ did this twice.

Consequently, exegetical integrity does not require that the latter portion of Matthew 24 reflects the same event as the earlier portion.

Luke 21:22

As I mention above, Luke 21:22 is perhaps *the* key verse that hyper-preterists use. In its context it reads as follows: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, in

order that *all things which are written may be fulfilled*" (Lk 21:20–22). Inarguably, the context here is focusing on AD 70, as even dispensationalists agree.²³

The hyper-preterists naively assume that Jesus is speaking globally of absolutely all prophecies when he declares that "all things which are written" will be fulfilled in AD 70. They hold, therefore, that *no* prophecy remains, which means that prophecies regarding the resurrection of all men, the second coming, and more came to pass in AD 70. They base their argument on deficient hermeneutics. Consider the following observations.

First, the context explains the particular "all things" Christ has in mind. He is *not* speaking universally of absolutely all biblical prophecy. Rather, he is referring only to the judgment prophecies *regarding Jerusalem's destruction*. Note that the disciples point out the temple's stones as the spark to the discourse (Lk 21:5). Then Jesus declares that "these things" will not be left one upon another (21:6). Then the disciples ask "when therefore will *these things* be?" (21:7). Jesus responds with the prophecy regarding *Jerusalem's* destruction (21:8–24), for he is dealing with Jerusalem's surrounding and desolation (21:20). Then he declares "*these* are the days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (21:22). Clearly his focus is on Jerusalem and her temple.

Second, "all" is not necessarily an all inclusive universal. In Matthew 3:5 we read that "then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan." No one argues that each and every man, woman, and infant came out to John. In Matthew 13:32 Jesus declares that the mustard seed "is smaller than all other seeds," even though it manifestly is not. Is Jesus mistaken? On and on we could go with illustrations. Clearly "all" does not necessarily mean "each-and-every." And as I note in the preceding point, it surely refers only to prophecies regarding Jerusalem's destruction.

Third, on the hyper-preterist exegesis Christ's statement would be absurd and erroneous. Are "all" prophecies fulfilled in AD 70? The virgin birth? Christ's crucifixion? His resurrection? Yet the text states "that all things which are written" are fulfilled.

Fourth, the grammar of the passage limits the declaration. Jesus speaks of "all things which are written" by employing a perfect passive

23. See: *PSB*, 1237. *DPT*, 164. Walvoord, *PKH*, 386.

participle: *gegrammena* (“having been written”). This refers to prophecies already written — *when he speaks in AD 30*. Yet we know that more prophecies arise later in the New Testament revelation. Once again we see a limitation on Jesus’ statement. Furthermore, technically it does not even refer to any prophecy which Christ *speaks*. For these are not prophecies that have already been *written*. That being the case, the final resurrection (for instance) is outside of this declaration (Jn 5:28–29). Thus, Jesus is referring to all things written *in the Old Testament*. At this stage of redemptive history those are the only prophecies that had already been written.

So then, the key verse supporting hyper-preterism does not function like they think. Though hyper-preterism is built on out of context proof-texts, they are without any sort of textual foundation.

Conclusion

More and more rebuttals to hyper-preterism are appearing on the scene. In fact, some are being written by former hyper-preterists who became disillusioned. One particularly interesting website in this regard is: “The UnPreterist Blog Spot.”²⁴ The following standard rebuttals to the system are important tools for evangelicals to consider.²⁵

Jay E. Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?* (Stanley, N.C.: Timeless Texts, 2003).

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Christ’s Resurrection and Ours,” *Chalcedon Report* (April, 2003).

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Foundational Errors of Hyperpreterism” (taped lecture available at KennethGentry.com).

Jonathan Seraiah, *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 1999).

R. C. Sproul, “. . . in Like Manner,” *Tabletalk* 24:12 (December 2000): 4-7.

24. See: <http://unpreterist.blogspot.com/>.

25. I would note that Dr. Kenneth G. Talbot of Whitefield Theological Seminary is currently working on a book-length, critical analysis of hyper-preterism.

Vern Crisler, "The Eschatological *A Priori* of the New Testament: A Critique of Hyper-Preterism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 15 (Winter, 1998): 225-56.

Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999), App. C.

Keith A. Mathison, ed., *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism*. I contribute one chapter to this work.

Psalm 72

“A Psalm of Solomon”

Give the king Your judgments, O God,
And Your righteousness to the king's Son.
He will judge Your people with righteousness,
And Your poor with justice.
The mountains will bring peace to the people,
And the little hills, by righteousness.
He will bring justice to the poor of the people;
He will save the children of the needy,
And will break in pieces the oppressor.
They shall fear You
As long as the sun and moon endure,
Throughout all generations.
He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass,
Like showers that water the earth.
In His days the righteous shall flourish,
And abundance of peace,
Until the moon is no more.
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.
Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him,
And His enemies will lick the dust.
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles
Will bring presents;
The kings of Sheba and Seba
Will offer gifts.
Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him;
All nations shall serve Him.
For He will deliver the needy when he cries,
The poor also, and him who has no helper.
He will spare the poor and needy,
And will save the souls of the needy.

He will redeem their life from oppression and violence;
And precious shall be their blood in His sight.
And He shall live;
And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him;
Prayer also will be made for Him continually,
And daily He shall be praised.
There will be an abundance of grain in the earth,
On the top of the mountains;
Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon;
And those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.
His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And men shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him blessed.
Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
And blessed be His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen and Amen.

The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

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(See “Abbreviations” at the front of the book
for additional references.)

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