

# The Premillennial Deception: Chiliasm Examined in the Light of Scripture

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## Premillennial Contradictions

The predominant eschatological view among Bible-believing Christians in the twentieth century is premillennialism. Premillennialism is the view that after His second coming, Jesus Christ will rule the earth for 1000 years. Thus Christ's second coming is before the millennium (premillennial). Premillennialists teach that at the second coming of Christ, the living saints are raptured and the dead saints are raised from the dead. All these saints are given glorified, immortal bodies. They meet Christ in the air and return to rule with Him on earth for 1000 years. This 1000-year period is one of worldwide peace and righteousness. At the end of the 1000-year period Satan is loosed from his prison to deceive the nations. Vast armies rebel and attack Christ and the saints in Jerusalem; these armies are then destroyed by fire from heaven. After the defeat of these rebel armies the final resurrection and judgment take place; then comes the eternal state. This, in brief, is the essence of premillennialism; there are many variations. Among premillennialists there are pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation and post-tribulation rapturists. Dispensational premillennialists place the rapture not at the second coming but at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation.

### *The Myth of Literal vs. Non-literal Interpretation*

Premillennialists argue that they hold to a literal interpretation of Scripture, while charging that their theological opponents (e.g., postmillennialists) have a tendency to spiritualize prophetic passages. The truth is that premillennialists, amillennialists and postmillennialists *all* believe that Scripture should be interpreted literally at times and symbolically at other times, *depending on the context of the passage and intent of the author*. Premillennialist authors tell their readers that they interpret the Bible literally. But if you read their books, scenes with bows, arrows and horses become future battles with tanks, helicopters and airplanes. The mark of the beast becomes a computer chip or bar code. The locusts from the bottomless pit (Rev. 9) supposedly become attack helicopters, and so on. Are there any premillennial authors or commentators who believe that the beast from the sea with seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 13) is a literal creature? The point is, premillennialists, amillennialists and postmillennialists all interpret some passages symbolically and some passages literally. The only way to determine who has the best interpretation is to use sound biblical principles of interpretation in examining the passages in question. This means that the context, the audience, the author's intent, the time of the writing, and so on, must be considered. Furthermore, Scripture cannot contradict Scripture; therefore, when two passages seem to be in conflict with one another, the clearer passage should be used to interpret the less clear. This principle is very important, for there are many clear passages in the New Testament which teach about the second coming of Christ.

Premillennialism is based on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20. Most premillennialists are unaware of a postmillennial interpretation. Many premillennialists are told that fundamentalists are premillennial while theological liberals are postmillennial. Most

premillennialists do not know that the dominant view among Protestants from the Reformation to the late 1800s was, in fact, postmillennialism. Premillennialism became the dominant view *after* the 1909 publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Premillennialists are often unaware of the many serious theological and exegetical problems that accompany their interpretation.

### *The Day of the Lord*

The premillennial position is that Christ will return and the saints will be resurrected, then after 1000 years of earthly rule the final judgment will occur and the wicked will be judged. Note that the premillennialist believes there is a 1000-year gap between the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. The resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked are also separated by 1000 years. Does the Bible teach that there is a 1000-year gap between the second coming of Christ and the final judgment? Does it teach that there is a 1000-year gap between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked? Actually, there is *no* gap between these events. In fact, as will be shown, the Bible teaches that these events are to occur on the *very same day*. Thus, premillennialism is theologically and biblically impossible.

The gospels and epistles present a unified picture of the second coming and the judgment by Jesus Christ. The second coming of Christ, the rapture, the resurrection of the righteous and wicked, and the judgment of the righteous and the wicked all are to occur on the *same day*. The Apostle Paul teaches that when Christ returns, He will take vengeance on the wicked. The wicked will receive everlasting destruction, but Christ will dwell with the saints. All who believe will admire and glorify Christ. When will this occur? On “that day” (singular), “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 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. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in *that day*, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe” (2 Th. 1:7-10).<sup>1</sup> Is there a 1000-year gap between the destruction of the wicked and the glorification of the saints? No, they both occur on *that day*. Does Christ crush the wicked from His throne in Jerusalem? No, He is revealed from heaven. On the final day Christ comes from heaven to judge *all* men, both the righteous and the wicked. “The reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked are interwoven with each other *as to time*, and made to follow, both of them, immediately on the coming of the Lord. Surely this passage should make perfectly clear that there is no secret rapture to be followed at an interval of seven years by an open revelation of the Lord and His glory to the world. Surely it is perfectly clear also that since the coming of the Lord brings upon the wicked ‘eternal destruction away from the face of the Lord,’ there are no wicked who will survive His coming to be ruled over a millennium to follow. But there must be wicked people surviving, according to the premillennial scheme.”<sup>2</sup>

Does the Apostle Paul teach that Christ will return to earth, and then set up a 1000-year reign which is to be followed by a final judgment? No, he does not. Paul says that the second coming of Christ and the glorification of the saints will occur *immediately* prior to the final state. Paul does *not* teach that a 1000-year gap exists between the second coming and the end of earthly, human history: “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. *Then comes the end*, when He delivers the kingdom to God the

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Grier, *The Momentous Event*, p. 55, quoted in Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), pp. 166-67.

Father, when He puts an end to all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.... Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last* trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.... Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor. 15:23-25, 50-54). Christ returns, the saints receive immortal, glorified bodies; “then comes the end.” There is no 1000-year earthly kingdom, for when Christ returns, He delivers the kingdom to the Father. Furthermore, after Christ’s return, death is completely destroyed and abolished. How can there be converts in the millennium who live, have children and die, if death is abolished at the second coming? “The whole design of the latter portion of this chapter is to show that after the resurrection, the bodies of believers will be like the glorious body of the Son of God, adapted to a heavenly, and not earthly condition.”<sup>3</sup>

The Apostle Paul teaches that both the righteous and the wicked will be judged on the *same* day: “But 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” (Rom. 2:5-8). The inspired apostle says nothing of a 1000-year gap between the judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Christ’s second coming is always associated in Scripture with the final judgment of *all* men. This will occur “in *the day* when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16).

The Apostle Paul always teaches in his epistles that the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the reward of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked occur on the *same* day—the day of the Lord. He says, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then suddenly destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake you as a thief.... For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Th. 5:1-4, 9-10). “Paul associates the second coming with the resurrection and the ensuing glory of the saints *and* the sudden destruction of the wicked. Without the shadow of a doubt, *that day* has its reference to both parties:—believers are to look for it (1 Th. 5:4-10), for *then* they shall obtain salvation in all its fullness (vs. 9), *then* they shall ‘live together with him’ (vs. 10); while that *same* day will bring the false security of unbelievers to an end in their ‘sudden destruction.’”<sup>4</sup> Paul does *not* tell the Thessalonians that a secret rapture will occur seven years prior to the second coming. The rapture occurs on the *same* day that the wicked are judged.<sup>5</sup> If

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on I & II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978 [1857]), pp. 329-30.

<sup>4</sup> Grier, p. 54, quoted by Boettner, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> “Surely Paul would not have written these words if he had been looking for a secret rapture. There is nothing here to indicate that Christians are to be raptured away seven years before the day of judgment. Rather, they are to receive relief from tribulation and suffering ‘at the *revelation* of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel’” (Boettner, pp. 167-68). If Christians are to be secretly raptured away from the earth seven years before

the wicked receive “sudden destruction” and the saints are glorified, no one is left to populate the earth during the premillennialists’ 1000-year reign. After Christians receive their heavenly, glorified bodies, they do not marry and bear children. Who, then, is there to rebel against Christ at the end of the 1000-year earthly reign? The glorified saints certainly cannot rebel, and the unbelievers are all suffering torment in the lake of fire.

The Apostle Peter fully concurs with Paul’s teaching regarding Christ’s second coming. In his second epistle he deals with scoffers who deny the second coming of Christ: “‘Where is the promise of *His coming*? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’... But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the *day of judgment* and perdition of ungodly men.... But *the day of the Lord* will come as a thief in the night, in which 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. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of *the day of God*, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (2 Pet. 3:4-12). Peter teaches that the second coming, the day of judgment and the beginning of the final state occur contemporaneously. Like Paul, Peter says that these events occur on “the day of the Lord.” According to premillennialism Christ does not *come* on the day of judgment, because He is already on earth ruling from Jerusalem. But Peter says that when Christ returns, the judgment occurs and then the heavens and earth are destroyed. The premillennialist believes that Christ will return and rule on earth for 1000 years *before* the elements are destroyed. Thus Peter’s account of Christ’s coming totally contradicts premillennial doctrine.

Premillennialists teach that there is a 1000-year gap between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked. They teach that the bodily resurrection of the wicked occurs at the end of the millennium. But the parables of Jesus Christ totally contradict premillennial doctrine. In the parable of the wheat and the tares Jesus said that *both* will grow together until the harvest: “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 a bundle to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Mt. 13:30).<sup>6</sup> The harvest obviously refers to the final judgment. “At last the separation shall be such that all the wicked shall be cast into hell fire, and the godly placed in heaven.”<sup>7</sup>

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Christ’s second coming, then why do the Scriptures repeatedly teach that Christians are to remain on earth until the revelation of Christ? The resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, and the final judgment both occur on *the same day* (the day of the Lord, Mt. 13:47-50; 25:31-34, 41, 46; Jn. 5:28-29; 6:3-40, 44, 54; Rom. 2:5-8, 16; 1 Th. 5:1-4, 9-10, etc.).

<sup>6</sup> When Jesus explained this parable to His disciples in Mt. 13:36-43, He indicated the time that the harvest will take place. He said that the harvest is the *end* of the age, and the reapers are angels. To preclude any idea of a partial harvest before the full harvest, the Greek word *sunteleia* is used (v. 39). “The word ‘end’ is translated from the Greek word ‘*sunteleia*,’ meaning *full end*. According to Young’s Analytical Concordance, ‘*sunteleia*’ is only used six times in the New Testament. It always designates the Judgment Day, that is, the end of the world.... The use of the Greek word ‘*sunteleia*’ in each of these verses absolutely precludes the possibility of the righteous being taken out of the world before the full end of the age” (Boettner, pp. 168-69).

<sup>7</sup> David Dickson, *A Brief Exposition of the Evangel of Jesus Christ According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981 [1647], p. 189). Jesus taught the same thing in the parable of the dragnet: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be *at the end of the age*. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of

In Matthew 25 Jesus instructed His disciples with regard to the second coming: “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. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels....’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt. 25:31-46). Christ described a general judgment of *all* men, not just the wicked. He placed the final judgment *immediately* after His return, *not* 1000 years after His return. “The average Christian believes that Mt. 25:31-46 is a picture of the Last Judgment. And he is right. The premillennialist has to explain this passage away because it does not fit in with his prophetic view. In his interpretation he has to forsake ‘literal’ interpretation of which he speaks so much. He has to explain that the ‘all nations’ are not ‘all nations,’ and that the nations that are there are there only ‘representatively.’ There is nothing in the passage to indicate this. It is a clear picture of the Last and Universal Judgment.”<sup>8</sup>

Jesus taught plainly that there will be a general resurrection in which *all men* will be raised on the *same* day. He did not say that some will be raised, and then the rest will be raised after 1000 years (or for the dispensationalist, 1007 years): “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). The idea that the resurrection of the righteous is to occur 1000 years (or 1007 years) before the end of the world is contradicted by Jesus four more times in John chapter 6: “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up *at the last day*. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up *at the last day*” (Jn. 6:39-40; cf. 44, 54). The last day is the day of judgment. “Clearly there can be no other days after the last day.”<sup>9</sup>

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fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 13:47-50). His teaching is that the judgment of all men, both the good and the evil, will take place at the *end* of the world. The good go to heaven and the wicked go to hell. They will not be separated *prior* to the final judgment.

<sup>8</sup> J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty Four*, p. 94, quoted in William E. Cox, *Biblical Studies in Final Things* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966), p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Boettner, p. 169. “The dispensational answer to these objections is to argue that there is a secret rapture before the seven year tribulation. All Christians are removed from the earth at this time. But during the seven year tribulation there will be a mass conversion of Jews upon earth. These post-rapture saints will have children and thus provide new, unglorified believers for a general resurrection and judgment at the end of the millennium. The problem with this view is that the Bible does *not* teach a secret rapture seven years *prior* to Christ’s second coming. In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Paul says that the *same* day Christ comes to be glorified by His saints is the very same day He returns ‘in flaming fire’ to judge the wicked. In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Paul comforts the church age saints at Thessalonica with the blessed hope of rest that will be both theirs and Paul’s when Christ returns in flaming fire and judges those who have been troubling the church. According to dispensational assumptions, however, this passage could not be referring to the Christian’s blessed hope. In dispensational thinking there is no flaming judgment associated with the church return of Christ, which is a secret rapture” (Curtis Crenshaw and Grover E. Gunn, III, *Dispensationalism: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* [Memphis, TN: Footstool, 1985], p. 422). Dispensationalists argue that “the blessed hope” in Scripture refers to the secret rapture. Yet Paul places the phrase “the blessed hope” in conjunction with Christ’s “glorious appearing” in Tit. 2:13. For Paul the rapture and public, visible second coming are coterminous; they are *not* separated by seven years. Furthermore, 1 Th. 4:16 explicitly teaches that the rapture is a *public* event, not secret: “for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a *shout*, with the *voice* of

## *The Chronological Fallacy*

The premillennial position with regard to Revelation 19 and 20 is that chapter 19 describes the second coming of Christ, while chapter 20 describes Christ's reign on earth. Granted, if one casually reads these two chapters, the premillennial position looks tenable. But if one *closely* examines these two chapters it will be seen that the premillennial position simply cannot be true. The premillennial, "literalist" approach to these chapters is self-contradictory and suffers from insurmountable interpretive difficulties.

The premillennial position is that the events of chapter 20 follow the events of chapter 19 chronologically. In the second half of chapter 19 Christ returns and judges the nations, then in chapter 20 He reigns over the nations. But if chapter 19 is taken literally, *there are no nations for Christ to rule over in chapter 20*. "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the *nations*. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.... Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of *all* people, free and slave, both small and great....' And the *rest were killed* with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh" (Rev. 19:15-21). Premillennialists say that this obviously refers to a literal battle. There are dead bodies on the battlefield, and the birds are feasting on their flesh. But if chapter 19 is interpreted literally, chapter 20 doesn't make any sense. Verse 3 says that Satan is cast into the bottomless pit, "so that he should deceive the *nations* no more." How can Satan deceive the nations in chapter 20 when all the nations were just completely obliterated by Christ at the end of chapter 19? The description of Christ's destruction of those who oppose Him in chapter 19 is total: verse 19 says the birds will eat the flesh of *all* people, verse 21 says the *rest* were killed. The passage emphasizes that Christ will destroy *all* His opposition. When the battle is over, no one is left standing; there are no pockets of resistance. If Christ has just obliterated all the nations, and all unbelievers are dead, how then does Christ rule over the nations in chapter

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an archangel, and with the *trumpet* of God." If the rapture were to occur seven years before the second coming of Christ, then everyone could calculate the year, month and day of His second coming. But Jesus said that no one knows "the day or hour" of His coming (Mk. 13:32). There isn't a shred of evidence in the Bible for a secret rapture seven years prior to Christ's visible second coming. The secret rapture theory cannot be found in the church prior to 1830. The Bible teaches that the rapture, the general judgment and the second coming all occur on the *same* day: "the day of the Lord." After a careful study of all the phrases, words and passages associated with the rapture and second coming, Oswald T. Allis wrote: "The question which confronts us is this. If the distinction between the rapture and the appearing is of as great a moment as Dispensationalists assert, how are we to explain Paul's failure to distinguish clearly between them? And the failure of other writers, Peter, James, and John, to do the same? Paul was a logician. He was able to draw sharp distinctions. If he had wanted, or regarded it important, to distinguish between these events, he could have done so very easily. Why did he use language which Dispensationalists must admit to be confusing? Feinberg [a noted dispensationalist scholar] made the following surprising statement regarding the three words we have been discussing: 'We conclude, then, that from a study of the Greek words themselves the distinctions between the coming of the Lord for His saints and with His saints is not to be gleaned' (*Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* p. 207). Such an admission raises the question whether the distinction itself is valid. If the distinction is of importance, Paul's ambiguous language is, we may say it reverently, inexcusable. If the distinction is negligible, accuracy of statement would be quite unnecessary. We conclude, therefore, that the language of the New Testament and especially of Paul not merely fails to prove the distinction insisted on by Dispensationalists but rather by its very ambiguity indicates clearly and unmistakably that no such distinction exists" (*Prophecy and the Church* [Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974], pp. 184-85).

20? This chapter assumes that all the nations are still in existence and that Christ is ruling over these nations. If the nations are completely destroyed in chapter 19, and in chapter 20 the nations are still intact, then clearly the premillennial understanding of these chapters is wrong.

The literalistic, premillennial understanding of the final battle at the end of the millennium also has serious problems. Revelation 20:8 speaks of the vast armies of Gog and Magog. All the nations of the earth will gather in the Middle East for a literal battle against Christ and the saints who are holed up in Jerusalem. Premillennialists teach that this is a real battle with guns, tanks, airplanes, helicopters, and so on. But this interpretation is absurd. The resurrected Christ with His glorified, spiritual body and the glorified, immortal saints cannot be threatened with physical weapons. Christ and the saints cannot be killed; they are already immortal! They cannot even be *hurt* by such weapons. After His resurrection Christ could pass through solid walls (Jn. 20:19). Bullets, bombs, flame-throwers, nuclear weapons, etc. cannot threaten Christ and the saints at all. All the armies of the world could not harm or be a threat to even one resurrected, glorified believer, let alone the all-powerful, resurrected Christ. The idea that Jesus Christ (who is God, possessing all power and authority in heaven and earth) could be threatened by tanks and earthly weapons is ridiculous.

### *Earthly or Heavenly Rule?*

Does the Bible teach that Christ will rule from an earthly Jerusalem in Palestine? Is Christ's kingdom postponed until the second coming? Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). Christ's kingdom does not originate from an earthly Jerusalem but from a heavenly one. It doesn't begin at the second coming but began at His resurrection. "Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth'" (Mt. 28:18). Paul said that Christ was "declared to be [or appointed] the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Peter said that Christ was enthroned as king in heaven immediately after the resurrection: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your foot-stool'" (Ac. 2:34-35). Daniel prophesied that in the days of the fourth empire (the Roman empire) God would set up "a kingdom which will never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44).

Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was near or at hand (Mt. 3:2, Mk. 1:15, Lk. 4:43). He gave no indication of an earthly kingdom over 2000 years in the future but a spoke of a spiritual kingdom which was to begin immediately after His resurrection. If Christ did have an earthly kingdom in mind, why did He emphatically reject the kingdom offered to Him by the Jews? "Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to a mountain by Himself alone" (Jn. 6:15). "From the very onset Jesus not merely gave no encouragement to, but quite definitely opposed, the expectation of the Jews that an earthly, Jewish kingdom of glory, such as David had established centuries before, was about to be set up."<sup>10</sup> The Bible does not teach that we are to wait and look forward to a time when Christ rules from an earthly Jerusalem; rather, it teaches that Christ is already king and that He already rules from heaven: "[God] raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:20-21). "Kings place at their right hand those whom they design to honor or whom they

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<sup>10</sup> Allis, p. 71.

associate with themselves in dominion.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus Christ, the exalted Redeemer, has universal dominion. What He achieved definitively by His death and resurrection is now being progressively realized throughout the whole earth.

If one interprets Revelation 20:9 literally (with Christ ruling from an earthly Jerusalem), then one has chosen an interpretation that contradicts the rest of the New Testament. Paul wrote, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Christians belong to the Jerusalem which is above. The earthly Jerusalem corresponds to Hagar and is in bondage (Gal. 4:26). Christians are exhorted to go outside the earthly Jerusalem, “For here [on earth] we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb. 13:13-14). Are the saints to look forward to Christ establishing an earthly Jerusalem? Not at all! “But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country...for He has prepared a city for them” (Heb. 11:16).

To what, then, do the camp of the saints and the beloved city in Revelation 20:9 refer? “The camp of the saints and the beloved city, therefore, certainly represent the church and the people of God. And they represent the entire church, in the whole world and even in heaven.”<sup>12</sup> John says that the new Jerusalem is the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2); this is an obvious reference to the church. He also equates the new Jerusalem with the Lamb’s wife (Rev. 21:9-10). Prior to the second coming, the Lamb’s wife (the bride, the new Jerusalem) exists in heaven and on earth. Thus John in apocalyptic language is describing the final attack of Satan’s forces against the church. “The nations of Gog and Magog in compassing about and coming to battle against Christendom in its widest sense certainly intend to destroy ‘the beloved city,’ the cause of Christ, and to make paganism supreme in the world. In this they revel in their wickedness and become ripe for the judgment.”<sup>13</sup>

The premillennialist will object to this interpretation as non-literal and thus defective. But premillennialists actually take very little of chapter 20 literally; they spiritualize freely when it suits their purpose. Does anyone really believe that armies in the future will be riding horses and using wooden weapons? Are there going to be two countries named Gog and Magog in the future? Of course not! Cox writes,

An axiom of Bible study is that most sections demand literal interpretation unless the context or other known Scriptures demand figurative or spiritual interpretation. In apocalyptic literature the very opposite is true: here one must interpret figuratively unless literal interpretation is absolutely demanded.... Apocalyptic writings are known to have definite characteristics, such as figurative language, imagery, numerology, hyperbole, and the like. These are used for a purpose—to teach spiritual lessons to God’s people. These characteristics are used much in the same way a producer uses stage props and scenery. The important thing in watching a drama is not the props, but the message they help to portray.<sup>14</sup>

When dealing with the book of Revelation, which is filled with symbolic imagery, one must define this imagery not by the morning newspaper or CNN but by examining the clearer portions of Scripture where many of John’s pictures are clearly defined. *Scripture* must be used to interpret Scripture. The clear passages must be used to interpret the less clear. Premillennialists do the very opposite. Their interpretation of Revelation 20 has become a straitjacket into which all the clear passages of Scripture must be forced. Thus, instead of the simple, scriptural teaching

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Ephesians* (Carlisle: PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]) p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1986 [1969]), p. 654.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 655.

<sup>14</sup> Cox, p. 159.

regarding Christ's second coming to judge the world, one finds in premillennialism separate comings, separate judgments, glorified saints dwelling among sinful men, and so on. Although premillennialism is popular and its theories regarding Russia, the Middle East and the antichrist may be exciting, its teachings, unfortunately, have little in common with Scripture.

### *The Return in Flaming Fire*

If the Bible teaches that Christ is *not* on earth when fire falls from heaven to destroy the wicked at the end of the millennium, but *returns* from heaven in flaming fire, then premillennialism cannot be true. Why? Because Revelation 20:9 describes the *end* of the millennium and not its beginning. "They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them." According to popular premillennialist teaching, Jesus and the saints are holed up behind the walls of Jerusalem, surrounded by a vast army. God the Father then rescues Jesus and the saints by destroying the vast armies of Gog and Magog. (The idea that the resurrected Christ and glorified saints need to be rescued from an attack by guns and tanks is absurd, as noted above.) Are there other passages in the Bible that help in understanding this passage? Yes, there are many. Listen to how Isaiah the prophet describes the second coming of Christ: "For behold, the LORD *will come* with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh" (Isa. 66:15-16). Paul teaches that when Christ returns it will be "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God" (2 Th. 1:8). Peter says, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which 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" (2 Pet. 3:10). Paul warns Christians that when Christ returns, their works will be tested by fire: "Each one's work will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:13-15). Where is Christ when the fire falls from heaven in judgment on the wicked? Is He on earth in Jerusalem, as premillennialists assert? No, Christ cannot be in Jerusalem because He *returns* in flaming fire.<sup>15</sup> Thus, according to the abundant testimony of Scripture, Revelation 20:9 refers to the second coming of Christ. Why is this significant? Because it means that Christ returns at the *end* of the millennium; Christ's coming is *postmillennial*. Christ is not *saved* by flaming fire; He

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<sup>15</sup> Christian apologist Greg Bahnsen has noted that premillennialists assert that Jesus Christ is subjected to a second humiliation at the end of the millennium. The idea of Christ and the saints being forced by the armies of Gog and Magog to take refuge behind the walls of Jerusalem is nothing less than a second humiliation of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ endured humiliation only once. He came to earth to suffer and die for His people only once. He was born in a manger. He lived among sinful men. He was subjected to the temptations and assaults of Satan and the hatred of His own people. He was rejected by His disciples. He was arrested, tortured, executed as a common criminal and placed in a tomb. His life on earth at His first coming is called His humiliation. But once Christ rose from the dead, He entered into His exaltation. He is the exalted, glorified king who has "all power in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18); who rules from heaven (Eph. 1:20); whose "name is above every name" (Phil. 2:9-11). Can Christ who has "all power" be subjected to a second humiliation? No, such an idea clearly contradicts the New Testament teaching regarding His exaltation. Premillennialism is not only exegetically impossible but also theologically impossible. (The author acknowledges his indebtedness to Greg Bahnsen's insightful lectures on eschatology.)

*returns* in flaming fire. If the clear passages of Scripture are allowed to interpret the unclear, the Bible teaches a postmillennial return of Christ.

## The Postmillennial Alternative

Thus far it has been shown that the premillennial understanding of the millennium cannot be true because it contradicts the clear teaching of the gospels and epistles regarding the second coming of Christ, the nature of kingdom, the final judgment, and so on. It is not enough merely to disprove an interpretation of Scripture; one must also provide a biblical alternative. A biblical alternative can only be arrived at by letting Scripture interpret Scripture. One can only understand Revelation 20 if he uses the clear historical and didactic portions of Scriptures to understand John's symbolic language. Such a process will show that the events described in Revelation 20:1-10 are descriptive of what is to take place *between the resurrection of Christ and His second coming*.

### *The Binding of Satan*

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while (Rev. 20:1-3).

In these verses John describes the binding of Satan. Since Satan is a spiritual being, the key and chain are obviously symbolic of a restraining power imposed upon Satan.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of the binding is that Satan "should deceive the nations no more." Does the Bible tell us when this event occurred? Yes, the Bible teaches that Satan was defeated and bound at the *first* coming of Christ.

In Matthew 12:28-29 Jesus specifically tells the Pharisees that His control over the demons proves that He has bound Satan and is now plundering Satan's goods: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." Christ's binding of Satan does not occur at the second coming but at His first coming; this binding proves that His kingdom is a present reality, not something far off in the future.

When Jesus instructed His disciples regarding His coming crucifixion, He said, "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 people to Myself" (Jn. 12:31-32). In Revelation 20 Satan is bound so that he will no longer deceive the nations. In John's gospel Jesus says the same thing in different language: Satan is cast out and Jesus will draw all people to Himself. Jesus' binding of

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<sup>16</sup> When Christ gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 16:19), He did not hand Peter a set of keys; He was speaking figuratively of the power of the gospel. When it says in Rev 1:18 that Christ has "the keys of hell and death" (KJV), it means that Christ has *power* over hell and death. Jesus is not a literal "lamb." Satan is not a literal "dragon." The "key" and "chain" are not literal. "They stand for the real sovereign and restraining power of our Lord Jesus Christ. The figurative expressions help us to understand the spiritual realities and they help to portray them to the mind" (J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* [Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971], p. 192).

Satan enables Him to plunder Satan's house. Christ's victorious death and resurrection enabled Him to conquer (spiritually) all nations. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8). When the twelve apostles returned from a preaching mission in which they had authority to cast out demons, Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Lk. 10:18-19, cf. 9:1).

The author of Hebrews taught that through Christ's death "He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). The verb translated destroy (*katargein*) means literally to render inoperative, to nullify, or to render ineffective. "As incarnate, then, Christ was able to die; and it was his incarnation that set the stage for the performance of that great cosmic drama which is at the center of human history and the means of man's deliverance from his fearsome enemy. At the cross, the place of death, the decisive encounter between God and Satan occurred. The Son came into the world precisely for this purpose, that *through death*, his death, he might render ineffective our enemy the devil who wields the power of death."<sup>17</sup> Christ definitely defeated Satan and limited his power at the cross. "In Rev. 20, one particular aspect of that binding is before us, namely, the limiting of Satan's power to deceive the nations as he did before the coming of Christ. From that time forward during the whole of the interadvental dispensation Satan is defeated in fact. He can still go about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but in this particular respect he is a caged lion."<sup>18</sup> The Apostle Paul concurs: "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Paul describes Christ's work of redemption as leading "captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8). The Bible teaches that Satan received his death blow at Christ's first coming (Gen 3:15).

The binding of Satan so that he would not deceive the nations occurs as a result of Christ's death at Calvary and coincides with the spread of the gospel to all nations. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and *on earth*. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt. 28:18-19). Christ defeated Satan and bound him; this restraining of Satan's power to deceive the nations is what makes the Great Commission possible. Before Christ came, God's Word and salvation were, with rare exception, limited to the tiny nation of Israel; Satan had religious control over the vast reaches of the earth. After Christ came, Satan was definitively defeated, and continues to be restrained as the gospel spreads throughout the whole earth. Satan can no longer deceive the nations by keeping them from hearing the gospel.<sup>19</sup>

One obvious objection to the interpretation discussed above is the length of the millennium. If the binding of Satan and the millennium take place between the first and second coming of Christ, then how can the millennium be described as a 1000-year period? Christ died almost 2000 years ago. Should not the millennium have come to an end a long time ago? No.

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Cox, p. 162.

<sup>19</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance, An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion, 1987), p. 506. Chilton notes a second reason for the binding of Satan: "to prevent him from inciting the eschatological 'war to end all wars'—the final battle—until God is ready. When God's Kingdom-City is fully matured, then He will once more release Satan and allow him to deceive the nations for the final conflagration. But the fire will fall according to God's schedule, not the Dragon's. At every point, God is controlling events for his own glory."

The number 1000 is symbolic and denotes a long, indefinite period of time. Chilton explains how the number 1000 is used in biblical imagery:

Satan is to remain bound, St. John tells us, for a thousand years—a large, rounded-off number. We have seen that, as the number *seven* connotes a fullness of *quality* in Biblical imagery, the number *ten* contains the idea of a fullness of *quantity*; in other words, it stands for *manyness*. A thousand multiplies and intensifies this (10 x 10 x 10), in order to express great vastness (cf. 5:11; 7:4-8; 9:16; 11:3, 13; 12:6; 14:1, 3, 20). Thus, God claims to own “the cattle on a thousand the hills” (Ps. 50:10). This of course does not mean that the cattle on the 1,001st hill belongs to someone else. God owns all the cattle on all the hills. But He says “a thousand” to indicate that there are many hills, and much cattle (cf. Dt. 1:11; 7:9; Ps. 68:17; 84:10; 90:4). Similarly the thousand years of Rev. 20 represent a vast, undefined period of time.... It has already lasted almost 2000 years, and will probably go on for many more.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, it has been shown that Revelation 20:9 refers to the second coming of Christ. If the thousand years were meant to be taken literally, then one could calculate the very year and day of Christ’s second coming. Jesus said that only the Father knows that day (Mt. 24:36).

Another objection is that if Satan is bound, why is the world in such a mess? Why is there so much evil in the world? This objection is easily answered by the text itself which does *not* say that Satan is bound in reference to *all* activity but only with reference to the deceiving of the nations. Furthermore, it does not mean that Satan cannot still work his deception on individuals *within* nations. Satan still deceives many people. “But during the period of the binding of Satan the nations would not be entirely deceived as were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Never until that short period just before the second coming of Christ would the nations be deceived as they were before the first coming of Christ. To that end Satan was bound.”<sup>21</sup>

Those who insist that the binding of Satan must refer to the total cessation of *all* Satanic activities have neglected to study Jude 6. Jude reveals what God did to the angels who rebelled with Satan: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” These angels are described as locked up in chains, yet we know that demonic activity occurred throughout Christ’s ministry. “Therefore to be chained does not mean cessation of evil activity. Even so, Satan, though bound, continues his evil work. But he is bound by the decree of God. He cannot deceive the nations as he did previous to the coming of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, people are being saved out of every tribe, tongue and nation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 506-507. “The thousand years may be defined as the period between the two comings of Christ, or, more strictly, between the return of the ascended Son to glory, his mission to earth completed, and the loosing of Satan ‘for a little while’ (verse 3 above). The latter, however, is the final event of this period and it ends, as we have seen, in the conclusive defeat of Satan and his host at Christ’s second coming. This is the perspective clearly delineated in the assertion of Hebrews 10:12 f., that ‘when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down (enthroned) at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet’ (cf. Ps. 110:1); and this is precisely what St. Paul affirms when he writes that ‘he must reign until he had put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25)’” (Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, [Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990], p. 212.)

<sup>21</sup> Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, p. 194.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## *The Millennial Reign*

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).

These verses discuss the saints' reign with Christ during the millennium. In verse 4, John describes those who reign with Christ in two ways. First, those who rule with Christ are described as on thrones, exercising judgment. This is a reference to the twenty-four elders who sit upon twenty-four thrones in Revelation 4:4 and 11:16. "St. John's twenty-four elders are the representative assembly of the church, the Royal Priesthood. Throughout the prophecy God's people are seen reigning as priests with Christ (1:6, 5:10), wearing crowns (2:10, 3:11), possessing kingly authority over the nations (2:26-27), seated with Christ on His Throne (3:21). These things are all symbolized in the picture of the heavenly presbytery (4:4): As *kings*, the elders sit on thrones; as *priests*, they are twenty-four in number (cf. 1 Chr. 24), and they wear crowns (cf. Ex. 28:36-41)."<sup>23</sup> In symbolic language John describes the spiritual reign of the church during the millennium. The church rules from heaven in the sense that Christians positionally are in Christ seated on the throne with Him in heaven (cf. Eph. 2:6; Rev. 3:21). The church receives all its authority from Christ who rules from heaven, yet Christians must apply His Word to every area of life on earth. Christians rule with Christ and reign over the world by preaching the gospel, teaching and discipling the nations. The church is to be the salt and light of the earth, spreading the influence of God's Word until "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

The church reigns as a corporate body of priests and kings. The New Testament clearly teaches that its reign began at the first coming. That is why the church is repeatedly described as a royal priesthood: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Pet. 5:9). Jesus Christ "has made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:5-6). "You...have redeemed us...and made us kings and priests to our God" (Rev. 5:9-10). "We established from verses 1-3, compared with clear New Testament passages, that the time of Satan's binding is the inter-advent period. So that to fix the time of Satan's binding is to fix, at the same time, the time of the millennium.... As for the reign of the saints, John himself referred to the living Christians as kings and priests (Rev. 1:6). Certainly a king is one who reigns. Paul speaks in the past tense (Col. 1:13) when he pictures the present reign of the saints: 'Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and *hath translated us into the kingdom* of the Son of His love.' Ephesians 2:6 also is in the past tense: 'And raised us up with him, and *made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*.'"<sup>24</sup>

John included all the martyred saints in his description of those who rule with Christ. He wrote to an audience suffering persecution unto death; therefore, he emphasized that the martyred saints who refused to submit to the Roman emperor worship also reign with Christ. "If

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<sup>23</sup> Chilton, pp. 508-509.

<sup>24</sup> Cox, pp. 164-65.

verse 4bc is rightly interpreted of the martyrs, we must assume that verse 4a relates to the Church generally. In this initial statement John declared that Daniel's vision now receives its fulfillment. The promised kingdom is given to 'the people of the saints of the Most High,' i.e., the Church of the Son of man and Messiah Jesus. The martyrs are then singled out for particular mention because of the situation of the Church for which John writes."<sup>25</sup> All believers, both living and dead, are part of the church and share in Christ's reign. "Does this reign of the saints take place in heaven or on earth? The answer should be obvious: both! The saints' thrones are in heaven, with Christ (Eph. 2:6); yet, with their Lord, they exercise rule and dominion on earth (cf. [Rev.] 2:26-27; 5:10; 11:15). Those who reign with Christ in His kingdom are all those whom He has redeemed, the whole Communion of Saints, whether they are now living or dead.... The church is both heavenly and earthly. Similarly, the Church's sphere of rule includes the earth, but it is exercised *from the Throne in heaven*."<sup>26</sup> John wants to comfort saints who are living under severe persecution with the thought that nothing—not even death—can take away their rule and triumph with Christ. "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). "While Satan is bound, there are those who participate in the rule of Christ (Rev. 20:4). These participants include both the martyred saints in heaven ('the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness') and the persevering saints on earth ('and those who [*oitines*] had not worshiped the beast')."<sup>27</sup> The Greek grammar indicates two classes of persons who reign during the millennium: those who are in heaven and those upon earth. This passage refutes the premillennial concept of a purely earthly reign. "The kingdom He is here bestowing upon them is not an earthly, political kingdom, for He expressly forbids such carnal kingly 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*."<sup>28</sup>

### *The First Resurrection*

But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:5-6).

The Apostle John teaches that those who reign with Christ during the millennium have experienced a "first resurrection." The rest of the dead did not live until the end of the millennium. Premillennialists interpret this passage as teaching two distinct *bodily* resurrections separated by one thousand years. We have already noted, however, that the clear passages in the gospels and epistles that deal with the resurrection of the *body* and the final judgment contradict the premillennial view. Revelation 20 itself contradicts the premillennial interpretation. The binding of Satan (vs. 2-3) occurred during Christ's first advent, and the fire falling from heaven (v. 9) occurs during the second coming. Thus, we should let the Scriptures define the meaning of

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<sup>25</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 295.

<sup>26</sup> Chilton, p. 514.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), p. 415-416.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 485 (emphasis in original).

the first resurrection. If a physical resurrection contradicts the clear teaching of the whole New Testament, then John likely is referring to a spiritual resurrection. When we examine the Scriptures to see if they indeed speak of a spiritual resurrection we find abundant evidence that John definitely had something spiritual in mind. “If we can determine by Scripture what the first resurrection is, we will go a long way in the understanding of the entire chapter. It is the key which will unlock the door.”<sup>29</sup>

The two resurrections spoken of by John in Revelation 20 are identical to the two resurrections spoken of by Christ and recorded in John’s own gospel. Jesus tells us that there are two resurrections. The first pertains to the soul and is conditioned upon hearing and believing. The second pertains to the body and refers to the resurrection on the last day. “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 to 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” (Jn. 5:24-25). “The first resurrection has nothing to do with the body; it concerns the soul. As soon as the word of Christ is accepted by faith...one ‘has everlasting life (on this see 1:4; 3:16) and has passed out of death into life’; and what else is this but *the first resurrection*....”<sup>30</sup> Jesus discussed the second resurrection in verses 28 and 29: “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.” “The second resurrection is physical in character. It pertains to the great day of the consummation of all things.”<sup>31</sup>

God told Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit, he would most certainly die (Gen. 2:17). When he ate the fruit, he died *spiritually*. In Adam the whole human race fell and became “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Paul said, “She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives” (1 Tim. 5:6). Jesus referred to unbelievers as “the dead”: “Let the dead bury their dead” (Mt. 8:22; cf. Lk. 9:60). “Since the first death is primarily the death of the human soul, it is the soul that must be resurrected *first*. Consequently we must expect to find in the New Testament references to the resurrection of the soul. This we find in abundance.”<sup>32</sup> “We know that we have passed *from death to life*, because we love the brethren” (Jn. 3:14).

The Apostle Paul says that believers are “raised up” together with Christ: “even when we were *dead* in trespasses, [God] made us *alive* together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and *raised us up* together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:5-6). This is an explicit reference to a *spiritual* resurrection. The believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the basis for his regeneration. Thus, when Paul discusses baptism (which is a sign and seal of regeneration) he connects the resurrection of the soul (regeneration) with the resurrection of Jesus Christ: “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...” (Col. 2:13-14). “Before that final resurrection there is another, a First Resurrection: the resurrection of ‘Christ the first fruits.’ He rose from the dead, and resurrected all believers with Him. Note: St. John does not say that the believer himself as such is resurrected, but that he has a part in the First Resurrection. He is

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<sup>29</sup> Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 1:201.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, p. 181.

sharing the Resurrection of Another—the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>33</sup> Thus the first resurrection occurs definitively in Christ’s resurrection and then progressively throughout the millennium, as people are regenerated and believe in Christ. Chilton writes,

The First Resurrection is thus spiritual and ethical, our regeneration in Christ and union with God, our recreating in His image, our participation in His Resurrection. This interpretation is confirmed by St. John’s description of those in the First Resurrection—it completely corresponds with everything he tells us elsewhere about the elect: They are blessed (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14) and holy, i.e., *saints* (5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9; 21:2, 10); as Christ promised all the faithful, the Second Death (v. 14) has no power over them (2:11); and they are priests (1:6; 5:10) who reign with Christ (2:26-27; 3:21; 4:4; 11:15-16; 12:10). Indeed, St. John began his prophecy by telling his readers that all Christians are royal priests (1:6); and the consistent message of the New Testament, as we have seen repeatedly, is that God’s people are now seated with Christ, reigning in His kingdom (Eph. 1:20-22; 2:6; Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9). The greatest error in dealing with the millennium of Rev. 20 is the failure to recognize that it speaks of present realities of the Christian life.... The First Resurrection is taking place now. Jesus Christ is reigning now (Ac. 2:29-36; Rev 1:5). And this means of necessity, *that the millennium is taking place now as well.*<sup>34</sup>

As noted above, when John used the phrase “the first resurrection,” he was using language that Christians familiar with the Scriptures would instantly associate with the rebirth of the soul in regeneration (e.g., “being made alive,” “being raised,” and “passing from death to life”). This interpretation is in complete harmony with the New Testament and the context of Revelation 20. Who are they that John says do not have to fear the second death? It is those who have been born again (that is, Christians). “Note the similarity of language as John says in Rev. 20:6 that he who has part in the first resurrection will escape the second death. That the second death is *spiritual* rather than physical is apparent from the fact that those cast into the lake of fire—which is the second death (Rev. 20:24)—are tormented throughout eternity. It is incongruous to have John say that a *physical* resurrection guarantees against a *spiritual* punishment. Both are spiritual, both the first resurrection and the second death.”<sup>35</sup> “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power” (Rev. 20:6).

### *Kingdom as Millennium*

Both premillennialist and postmillennialist regard the kingdom and the millennium as basically synonymous terms.<sup>36</sup> The major point of contention is whether we are presently living in the millennium (or kingdom) or whether the millennium is in the future, after the second coming. A second point of contention is the nature of the kingdom. Is the kingdom a spiritual kingdom in which nations are transformed by the preaching of the Word of God, or is the kingdom a literal, earthly kingdom where Christ rules as a dictator over the nations by physical force? The millennium and the kingdom of Christ are one and the same. A brief examination of

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<sup>33</sup> Chilton, p. 517.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 518-19.

<sup>35</sup> Cox, p. 167.

<sup>36</sup> This book is concerned with the pre-consummate form of the kingdom (prior to the eternal state).

the biblical teaching regarding Christ's mediatorial kingship will prove that we are living in Christ's kingdom right now; it is not wholly future.

### *The Time of the Kingdom*

In his prophetic explanation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream Daniel revealed that the kingdom of Christ would be established in the days of the Roman empire: "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" (Dan. 2:44). The vast majority of interpreters (including dispensationalists) identify the four kingdoms as (1) the head of gold—the neo-Babylonian empire; (2) the breast and arms—the Medo-Persian empire; (3) the belly and thighs—the Grecian empire; (4) the legs and feet—the Roman Empire. Daniel says that the statue which represents these successive pagan empires is still standing when the kingdom of Christ is set up. Gentry writes,

In Daniel 2:31-45, the kingdom of Christ is said to come down to earth as a stone to smite the world kingdom, existing under a fourth imperial rule. As we read through the passage, we learn that it 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" (Dan. 2:34-35).... In this imagery, we have both continuity over time and remarkable development: the stone *grows* to become a mountain. We also witness struggle and resistance: the stone eventually smashes the image. Finally, we rejoice in its fortunes: the image is thoroughly crushed. This gradual progress to victory against opposition is portrayed also in Daniel 7:26, where we witness victory as "the result of *many* blows rather than of *one*." This process manifests *progressive corporate sanctification* in history.<sup>37</sup>

Premillennial dispensationalists recognize that this passage refers to the setting up of Christ's kingdom (the millennium). But since they believe that the millennium occurs wholly in the future, they must engage in exegetical gymnastics to fit the vision into their system of interpretation. First, they must ignore the progressive growth of Christ's kingdom from a stone to a mountain. The overthrow of the Gentile world power must be sudden and total to fit into their scheme. Yet Christ describes His kingdom as starting very small and growing progressively throughout history (Mt. 13:31-33). Second, in order for the passage to fit in with a wholly-future kingdom concept, dispensationalists have invented the idea of a wholly-future, revived Roman empire. They interpret the phrase "in the days of these kings" as referring to the toes of the image. They argue that the toes of the statue and the ten horns of the fourth beast of Daniel 7 represent ten kingdoms which will form the basis of the future, restored Roman Empire. Young writes,

Thus, it is argued, the time of the prophecy is fixed as being, not the first but the second Advent of Christ.... Christ will then come *for* His saints: the Church will be caught up to heaven, and the Stone will fall. This view must be rejected as being exegetically untenable. It makes too much of the symbolism. We are not expressly told that there are ten toes. The *ten* kings can be derived only from the ten horns of Dan. 7:24-27. That there are ten toes is merely inferred from

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<sup>37</sup> Gentry, p. 251.

the fact that the colossus appears in the form of a man. Furthermore, *the image was not smitten upon the toes but upon the feet* (2:34). Now the feet and legs are to be taken together (2:33).... Lastly, the phrase *in the days of these kings* cannot refer to the ten toes (Gaebelein), for the toes are nowhere identified as kings. Nor does it refer to the kings of the fourth monarchy, for no such kings are mentioned; the only kings or kingdoms mentioned are the four empires.<sup>38</sup>

The image represents four successive pagan empires. They are viewed organically because each incorporated the preceding empire. The statue is one. The kings obviously represent the four kingdoms represented by the statue. This should be obvious when we keep in mind that the recipient of the vision (Nebuchadnezzar) is the first king. “The kingdom of Messiah...was set up 1900 years ago in the days of the Caesars by Jesus and His apostles, and has been growing and spreading ever since.”<sup>39</sup>

There is abundant evidence within the gospels that the kingdom was established during Christ’s first advent. John the Baptist preached: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is *at hand*” (Mt. 3:2). When Jesus began His ministry He preached, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is *at hand*. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1:15). “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is *at hand*’” (Mt. 4:17). The phrase “at hand” means nearness in time. “What it implied must have been clear, at least in part, to every Jew. It was the announcement of the kingdom of Messiah, David’s Son. What they did not understand was the real nature of that kingdom, and the way it was to be introduced.”<sup>40</sup>

When John the Baptist and Jesus preached that the kingdom was about to break forth in history, they did not mean 2000 years in the future. Jesus said during His own lifetime that the kingdom was a *present* reality: “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt. 12:28). Did Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of God during His earthly ministry? Certainly! “The very fact that Satan’s kingdom was being invaded and his possessions (demoniacs) are being carried off by Christ (Mt. 12:25-29) is proof that the kingdom had come.”<sup>41</sup> When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered in the present tense: “the kingdom of God *is* within you” (Lk. 17:21). “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing [present tense] into it” (Lk. 16:16). The kingdom is present and spiritual.

Jesus told His disciples that some would be alive personally to see “the kingdom of God present with power.” “He said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power’” (Mk. 9:1). “He is saying that some of those whom he is addressing...are going to see the kingdom or kingship or reign of God come ‘with power.’ The reference is in all probability to Christ’s glorious resurrection, his return *in the Spirit* on the day of Pentecost, and in close connection with that event his position, with great power and influence, at the Father’s right hand.”<sup>42</sup> The interpretation that says there are people living two thousand years in the future that will not die until the kingdom comes in power clearly violates simple rules of biblical interpretation. Would

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<sup>38</sup> Edward J. Young, *Daniel* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1949), p. 78.

<sup>39</sup> Allis, p. 123. The fact that the dispensational interpretation of a revived Roman empire was *not* held by any theologians or commentators prior to the invention of dispensationalism in the nineteenth century should make us highly suspicious of the revived Roman empire concept. If a revived Roman empire was what Daniel had in mind, we would expect someone prior to J. N. Darby to find it in the text.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Gentry, pp. 216-17.

<sup>42</sup> William Hendricksen, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 333.

the audience that heard Jesus' promise have regarded His words as referring to people not yet born?

A passage which reveals both the nature and the time of the kingdom is Jn. 18:36-37: "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.'" Jesus not only says that He is king, but He also says that is the very reason He was born into the world. He corrects the Jewish expectation of an earthly, political kingdom. "The text does *not* say, as some foolishly teach, that Christ's kingdom is irrelevant to the world; rather, it affirms that the kingdom is not *derived* from earth: He was speaking of the *source* of His authority, not the place of His legitimate reign. His kingdom is not *of* this world but it *is* in this world and over it."<sup>43</sup> The premillennialist makes the same mistake that the Jews did by their expectation of a top-down, political dictatorship of the Christ in Jerusalem. If such had been the case, then why did Jesus explicitly reject the offer of the Jews to make Him an earthly, political king (Jn. 6:15)? Christ's kingship is spiritual; He rules from the right hand of power in heaven (Eph. 1:20-21).

The Bible teaches that Christ received His kingship with power at His resurrection (Rom. 1:4). Thus the resurrection is the turning point of all human history: "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" (Mt. 28:18-20). On the basis of Christ's comprehensive, universal authority in heaven and on earth the apostles are commanded to go and make disciples of all nations. In the Bible, the resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Christ are treated organically as an aspect of His exaltation.

The prophet Daniel had a vision in which he saw the ascension of Christ (note that Jesus received the kingdom at the ascension not the second coming): "I kept looking in the night vision, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and *a kingdom*, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away: And *His kingdom* is one which will not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14-14 NASB). "Through his resurrection and ascension, Jesus was declared to be the Messianic Son of God in power (Romans 1:4)... Therefore Peter could say on Pentecost regarding the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, '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. 2:36)."<sup>44</sup>

The author of Hebrews says that after Christ suffered humiliation He was crowned with glory and honor by the Father: "You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet" (Heb. 2:7-8). "Christ's enthronement is an accomplished fact ever since His ascension.... Today we are not waiting for a future kingship of Christ: He is *now* on His throne. Indeed, in the New Testament, the most quoted or alluded to Old Testament

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<sup>43</sup> Chilton, p. 515, quoting Gary North, *Backward, Christian Soldiers? An Action Manual for Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> Crenshaw and Gunn, p. 334.

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. The sitting at the 'right hand' of God is a semantic equivalent to sitting on God's throne, as is evident in Rev. 3:21: 'I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.'<sup>45</sup> Thus Peter could preach, "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be *Prince* and Savior" (Ac. 5:31). If the apostles were teaching (as premillennialists do) that Christ's kingship was far off into the future, then why did the Jews accuse them of preaching the kingship of Christ? "These are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus" (Ac. 17:7).

If Christ's kingship and the millennial reign are future events, then why does the Apostle Paul always describe Christ's enthronement with *past* tense verbs? "He *put* all things under His feet and *gave* Him to be head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). "God *has* highly exalted Him and *given* Him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). Why does Paul, writing in the first century, use the present tense to describe the reign of Christ? "For He must *reign* till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. 15:25).<sup>46</sup> Why does Paul tell the Colossian believers that they have been "translated [past tense] into *the kingdom* of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13)? For the believers in the first century, the kingdom (the millennium) was a present reality.<sup>47</sup> Should we attempt to force the teaching regarding the kingdom as taught consistently in the gospels, Acts and the epistles into the premillennial mold? Does it not make sense to interpret Revelation 20 in light of the explicit and consistent teachings of the rest of the New Testament?

Premillennial interpreters attempt to circumvent the New Testament's teaching about the kingdom by making a distinction between the expressions "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God." The kingdom of heaven is considered Jewish, Messianic and Davidic. Dispensationalists teach that this earthly, Jewish kingdom was offered by Christ to Israel, but Israel rejected this offer of the kingdom; therefore, this kingdom was postponed until the second coming of Christ, when Christ will establish a 1000-year political dictatorship over the world from His throne in Jerusalem. (The fact that Christ rejected the offer of a Jewish, political kingdom during His first advent [Jn. 6:15] is ignored by these interpreters). The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is considered universal. It encompasses the church age and all Gentile believers. Thus the present age is the dispensation of the kingdom of God.

The problem with the dispensational view is that the expressions "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are used interchangeably in the gospels and thus are synonyms. Old Testament scholar Oswald T. Allis writes,

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<sup>45</sup> Gentry, p. 221. Gentry lists the passages as follows: Mt. 22:44, 26:64; Mk. 12:36, 14:62, 16:19; Lk. 20:42-43, 22:69; Ac. 2:34-35; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12.

<sup>46</sup> When Paul discusses the enthronement of Christ he uses the aorist tense, which indicates that Christ's enthronement occurred *at a point in time past*. When he discusses the reign of Christ he employs a present active infinitive. Paul was convinced he was living in the millennium (in Christ's kingdom).

<sup>47</sup> "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17)—things which are a present day reality in Christian experience and enjoyed by God's people everywhere.... 'But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you' (Mt. 6:33). This implies that the kingdom is obtainable now by the believer, and that as it is obtained these other things also are given to him. That Paul throughout his ministry preached the kingdom as a present reality is made clear from his words to the elders of Ephesus as he reminded them that for three years he had dwelt among them 'preaching the kingdom' (Ac. 20:25), and from the closing verses of the book of Acts: 'And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding' (Ac. 28:30, 31). These verses disprove the idea that the kingdom is only future" (Boettner, p. 285).

It would be natural that they should be. The thought of the kingdom is prominent in the Old Testament; and the passage which naturally suggests itself is Dan. 2:44 where we read: 'And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed.' This will be the kingdom of the God of heaven. Consequently, it is quite as proper to abbreviate it to 'the kingdom of heaven' and the 'kingdom of God,' as it is that 'the ark of the covenant of the LORD' should be called 'the ark of the covenant' and 'the ark of the LORD' (e.g., Josh. 6:6-8). That the two expressions are equivalent is indicated especially clearly by the fact that they are used in synonymous parallelism in Mt. 19:23, and also because three of the parables which appear in Mt. 13 as parables of the kingdom of heaven (the Sower, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven) appear in Mark or Luke as parables of the kingdom of God.<sup>48</sup>

Dispensationalists involve themselves in exegetical gymnastics and bizarre, hairsplitting distinctions, because their system of eschatology is not *derived from* the text but *forced upon* the text. The simple fact is that Matthew, writing to a predominately Jewish audience, preferred the phrase "kingdom of heaven," while Luke and Mark, who wrote to a predominately Gentile audience, preferred the phrase "kingdom of God."

Historic premillennialists take a more subtle approach. They argue that the age of fulfillment is a present reality, but that the time of consummation or kingdom fullness awaits the second coming and millennial reign. Historic premillennialist G. E. Ladd writes: "Christ is now reigning as Lord and King, but his reign is veiled, unseen and unrecognized by the world. The glory that is now his is known only by men of faith. So far as the world is concerned, Christ's reign is only potential and unrealized.... If then the present age is the time of Christ's veiled reign and hidden glory, and the Age to Come is the time of the Father's all-encompassing dominion, the millennial kingdom will be the age of the manifestation of Christ's glory when the sovereignty which he now possesses but does not openly manifest...will be displayed in the world."<sup>49</sup> Ladd then bases his scriptural argument on the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:2-3 (which has already been shown to be a reference to Christ's first coming and not His second) and the fact that the Bible promises a time before the final state when righteousness will prevail, evil is largely eradicated, and the earth experiences peace and prosperity. Ladd's argument regarding the period of righteousness and peace on earth *presupposes* that such blessings cannot occur before the second coming. Postmillennialists believe there is sufficient scriptural warrant for regarding the prophecies of worldwide blessing as occurring *prior* to the second coming. The central problem with Ladd's argument is the simple fact that it contradicts the Apostle Paul's account of the second coming: "Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His

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<sup>48</sup> Allis, p. 67. "*Ephesians is virtually an anti-dispensational polemic by the Apostle Paul!* Notice the teaching in Ephesians regarding matters antithetical to dispensationalism: Christ is held as presently in His position as a kingly Lord (1:19-22) and, as just pointed out, we are presently seated with Him (1:3, 2:6). Paul applies the application of 'the Promises of *the* covenant' (literally) to Gentiles in the Church (2:10-12). He emphasizes the removal of the distinction of the Jew and the Gentile (2:12-19). He refers to the building up of the Church as being the building of the temple (2:20-22). The New Testament phase of the Church is said to have been taught in the Old Testament, although not with the same fullness and clarity (3:1-6). Christ's kingly enthronement is celebrated by the pouring out of gifts upon His Church/kingdom (4:8-11), with the expectation of the historical maturation of the Church (4:12-14). Paul mentions the kingdom in a way that indicates its spiritual, rather than political, nature (5:5)" (Gentry, p. 224). Many if not most dispensationalists are unaware that most of their major distinctive doctrines were not held by *any* Christian scholars, commentators or theologians until after the 1830s when their system was invented by J. N. Darby. Darby's view became popular after the publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909).

<sup>49</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 63.

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” (1 Cor. 15:23-24).<sup>50</sup>

## The Nature of the Kingdom

Premillennialists err not only in regard to the time of the kingdom but also in regard to the nature of the kingdom. Dispensationalists believe that Jesus came into the world to establish an earthly, Jewish political kingdom. The Jews rejected Christ’s offer, and thus the earthly political kingdom would have to wait for the second coming and the millennium.

### *The Kingdom Is Spiritual*

The truth is that the Jews and even the disciples wanted an earthly, Jewish political kingdom, but Jesus rejected their concept of the kingdom and instead taught a *spiritual* kingdom. This is brought out very clearly in Jesus’ encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The two disciples expressed disappointment that Jesus did not redeem Israel: “We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (Lk. 24:21). These men were expecting political deliverance from Rome. They had an earthly, political conception of the kingdom. Jesus corrected their conception by focusing on the cross: “Then He said to them, ‘O

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<sup>50</sup> Premillennial scholars are aware that 1 Cor. 15:23-24 is an excellent proof text against their position; therefore, they have attempted to circumvent the clear meaning of this passage primarily in two ways. Some premillennialists argue that “then comes the end” does not refer to the consummation of all things but to the end *of the resurrection*. They interpret the passage to mean, “then, sometime in the distant future comes the end; i.e., the resurrection of the wicked.” R. C. H. Lenski writes, “Paul writes simply: ‘Then the end,’ and omits the verb as not being necessary. Our versions translate quite correctly: ‘Then cometh the end,’ and use the present tense. Those who think of a double resurrection supply a future tense: *estai*, ‘then will be or shall come the end.’ This permits the interval which they find, for they may extend this future tense into a thousand years, or as far as they please. The only difficulty is that Paul sets down no verb and no tense; and a doctrine which is based on a verb or a tense that is inserted rests on what does not exist. ‘Then the end,’ with neither a verb nor a tense of any kind, means ‘then at the Parousia.’ No known rule of language allows us to supply a future tense, to say nothing about the long interval.... What Paul says is that the Parousia and the resurrection usher in the end, namely the abolition of all hostile powers (here, indeed, including the wicked) and the transfer of the kingdom to God” (*The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 672-74). A second argument is based on the Greek word for then (*eita*). It is argued that the word *then* can mean whatever sequence of time one pleases, either immediately or far off into the future. Thus the passage could be paraphrased, “Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then, *after the 1000 year millennial reign is over* comes the end.” This argument is disproved by the simple fact that the adverb *eita* in the N.T. *never* refers to a long interval of time. It is the adverb used to denote a *short* period of time (cf. Mk. 4:17, 28; 8:25; Lk. 8:12; Jn. 13:5; 19:27; 20:27; 1 Cor. 12:28; 15:5, 7; 1 Tim. 2:13; 3:10; Heb. 12:9; Jas. 1:15). Note how Paul uses two different adverbs in this passage: one to denote a long interval, and another to denote a short interval. “And we may observe, that while there is an order of succession between the three events noticed in verses 23 and 24 (namely, 1. The resurrection of Christ; 2. The resurrection of his people; 3. The end); yet the adverb *epeita*—denoting the order of succession between the *first two* (Christ’s resurrection and that of His people) where the interval is *long*—is no longer used to denote the order of *succession* in the *latter two* events (the resurrection of Christ’s people, and the end), but is changed for *eita*, as if for the purpose of marking to us that though there is a regularity of *order* in the events thus noticed, yet there is not a regularity as to the *length of interval*; so that the adverb suited to denote a *long* interval (*epeita*) in v. 23, is changed in v. 24 to *eita*, an adverb suited to denote a *short* interval.... [Thus] while the interval between the *first two* events—the resurrection of Christ, and that of His people—has been in our view *long*; the interval between the *last two*—the resurrection of Christ’s people and the *end*—will be one which in our view would be esteemed *short*” (Gipps, *First Resurrection*, quoted in Brown, pp. 482-83).

foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Lk. 24:25-27).

Jesus proclaimed a redemptive, spiritual kingdom, a kingdom entered by being born again, by partaking in the first resurrection: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5)—a kingdom not of weapons and political might but of meek, humble service to Christ and one’s neighbor.<sup>51</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:5). “Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey” (Mt. 21:5). When asked about His messiahship, Jesus appealed to His works of service, mercy and healing (Mt. 11:4-6). “He refused the efforts of the Jews to make Him a king or involve Him in conflict with the Roman rulers. He declared to Pilate, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (Jn. xviii. 36). Had Jesus come to set up such a kingdom as Dispensationalists describe, He could not have made this reply to Pilate. Or, at least, His words would have to be taken as meaning, ‘My kingdom is not *now* of this world.’ For according to the Dispensational view it was a worldly kingdom, a kingdom which would involve the forcible overthrow of Rome that Jesus had offered the Jews, and would have given them (even as recently as the triumphal entry?) had they been willing to receive it.”<sup>52</sup>

Jesus specifically told the Pharisees that His kingdom would not be established with military might or visible fanfare: “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’” (Lk. 17:20-21). Paul also rejected an earthly, carnal conception of the kingdom: “The kingdom of God is not food or drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). “Christ stated on numerous occasions that the purpose for His first coming was to save His people from their sins, not to establish an immediately full blown kingdom that would instantaneously crush all the enemies of the Jews.... An offer of an earthly kingdom that would establish His immediate reign in Jerusalem is not stated or insinuated anywhere in the gospels. He repeatedly divulges that He came to bring salvation to His people, and that *then* He—through His people—would bring in a kingdom (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; Mt. 13:31-33; 1 Cor. 15:21-28; 1 Jn. 5:4; Rev. 2:26, 27; 5:10; 12:10).”<sup>53</sup> There is not a shred of evidence in the gospels or epistles of an Armageddon-introduced, instantaneous, earthly political kingdom.

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<sup>51</sup> “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 18:3-4). “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. 22:25-26). “It is only in the measure that the will of God is done in the hearts and lives of individual men and so makes itself felt in the affairs of the world, that the kingdom can be said to be realized, to be ‘come.’ And since those and only those, who accept the gospel and profess their faith in Christ are entitled to be called members of His Church, the connection between the kingdom and the Church must obviously be quite close” (Allis, p. 80). “Your kingdom come. Your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>53</sup> Crenshaw and Gunn, p. 66 (cf. Mt. 1:21; 9:13; 11:25-30; 16:21; 17:22-23; 18:11; 20:18-19, 28; Mk. 1:1, 14-15; 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33-34, 45; 14:24-25; Lk. 1:68; 2:38; 4:18-19; 5:32; 9:22, 44; 18:31-34; 19:10; Jn. 1:29; 2:19-22; 3:16; 4:42; 5:38-47; 6:14, 29, 38-40; 10:11, 15-28; 11:25-27, 51-52; 12:27, 46).

## *The Kingdom Is Universal*

Dispensational premillennialists teach that the millennial kingdom is Jewish and earthly. The Bible teaches that the kingdom is universal, pan-ethnic (composed of all races) and spiritual. “The Jewish nation, because of their covenantal rebellion against Messiah and their rejection and murder of Jesus Christ, have forfeited their status as “a distinctive, favored people in the kingdom.”<sup>54</sup> Christ taught that God would reject Israel for her apostasy: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Mt. 21:43). Who replaced Israel as the recipient of God’s revelation, the sacraments, government, and so on? *The church*—composed of both Jews and Gentiles. ““From you [the Jews],’ says Jesus, the ‘kingdom of God,’ that is, the special kingdom privileges—the special standing in the eyes of God which this people had enjoyed during the old dispensation, to which had now been added the blessed words and works of Jesus—‘will be taken away.’ Why? Because they had not lived up to their obligations.... So, in the place of the old covenant people there would arise—was it not already beginning to happen?—‘a nation producing its fruit,’ a church international, gathered from both Jews and Gentiles.”<sup>55</sup>

Paul does teach that a time will come when there will be a large conversion of Jews (Rom. 11:26), but the Jews who are saved become part of the church; they do not remain a separate people. “The New Testament era church is not a distinct body of people for a time. Rather, it is a newly organized fulfillment of the old body for *all* time. This church is one with the Jewish forefathers, being grafted into the Abrahamic root and partaking of its sap (Rom. 11:17-18).”<sup>56</sup> Thus, at the beginning of His ministry Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). “In His first sermon at Nazareth (Lk. 4:16), He applied the words of Isaiah 61:1 so pointedly to the Gentiles as to give grievous offense to the nationalistic expectations of His hearers, who sought to kill Him, just as years later the Jews at Jerusalem tried to kill Paul for the same reason (Ac. 22:21). Such passages as the above indicate with unmistakable plainness that from the very onset Jesus not merely gave no encouragement to, but quite definitely opposed, the expectation of the Jews that an earthly, Jewish kingdom of glory, such as David had established centuries before, was about to be set up.”<sup>57</sup>

The kingdom that Christ came to establish through His death and resurrection is composed of people of every nation, tribe and tongue. Paul said, “He Himself is our peace, who has made both [Jews and Gentiles] *one*, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us” (Eph. 2:14). God does not have two peoples but *one*. The dispensational idea of an Israelitish kingdom during the millennium with a rebuilt temple has no basis in New Testament theology. Could Paul be any clearer than when he says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28)? The temple is being rebuilt now: “You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:19, 21). “There could not be a more distinct assertion that all difference between the Jew and Gentile has been done away within the pale of the Christian church. This, however, is not a mere matter of assertion, it is involved in the very nature of the gospel. Nothing is plainer from

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<sup>54</sup> Gentry, p. 229.

<sup>55</sup> Hendricksen, *Matthew*, p. 786.

<sup>56</sup> Gentry, pp. 230-31.

<sup>57</sup> Allis, p. 71.

the teachings of Scripture than that all believers are one body in Christ, that all are the partakers of the Holy Spirit, and by virtue of their union with Him are joint and equal partakers of the benefits of His redemption; that if there be any difference between them, it is not in virtue of national or social distinction, but solely of individual character and devotion.... There is no intimation that any one class of Christians, or Christians of any one nation or race, are to be exalted over their brethren.”<sup>58</sup> “And if you are Christ’s, then *you are Abraham’s seed*, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

### *The Kingdom Is Expanding*

Premillennialists assert that the Great Commission given to the church (Mt. 28:18) will fail. The passages which speak of worldwide peace and prosperity must refer to a future millennial kingdom established at the second coming. Thus the premillennial view of the kingdom is one of instantaneous success brought about by Christ’s return. Jesus, however, taught something very different than what premillennialists expect. He taught that the kingdom would start very small and then, over time, experience progressive growth. Eventually this kingdom will grow to dominance in the world *prior* to the second coming: “‘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’” (Mt. 13:31-33).

In the parable of the mustard seed Christ spoke of the great success of the gospel and the great growth of His kingdom in the world. “The imagery is unquestionably of *something magnificent beyond expectation*: a minuscule mustard seed gives rise to a tree.”<sup>59</sup> The kingdom starts with a few disciples in the tiny nation of Israel but grows and grows until it is the greatest herb in the garden. “In this pair [of parables] Christ points out some of the characteristics of the kingdom...its small beginning, its gradual increase and its immense development. It will embrace all peoples and nations, and it will penetrate and transform their entire life.”<sup>60</sup> Did Christ teach that the gospel would fail in history before His second coming? Did He teach that the kingdom would come in suddenly? No. He promised continued growth unto victory, in time and on earth, before the second coming.

The parable of the leaven teaches that the gospel will spread throughout the world until the whole world is *thoroughly* penetrated. The leaven is to conquer the meal until *all* is leavened. “The leaven parable, then, parallels in sentiment the glorious expectation for the kingdom of heaven in the other parables. The kingdom will *penetrate all* (Mt. 13:33). It will produce up to a *hundred-fold return* (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).”<sup>61</sup> There is to be incredible development of Christianity in the world. “Each Christian soul is to be a missionary, passing on the subtle influence to others, for he must not receive and refuse to give. This implies that the Christian must live in the world,

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 [1871-73]), 3:810-11.

<sup>59</sup> Gentry, p. 238.

<sup>60</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982 [1915]), p. 194.

<sup>61</sup> Gentry, p. 239.

for the leaven cannot work without contact. Human life must be touched at all points, in order that its work and its play, its religion and its relaxation, its politics and its commerce, its science and its arts, may be raised and warmed by the penetrating action”<sup>62</sup> of Christ’s glorious gospel and its sanctifying effect upon men, institutions and cultures.

In these parables Jesus was counteracting the Jewish expectation of the kingdom in His own day, an expectation of a sudden kingdom, a kingdom of earthly, Jewish political power and glory, a kingdom that would come “with observation.” Jesus says no, the kingdom starts imperceptibly small and subtle, but it will grow progressively throughout the whole earth until all nations are discipled. Premillennialists have merely taken the false, Jewish expectation of the kingdom and transferred it to the second coming of Christ. But in doing so they must explain away Christ’s kingdom parables because they teach progressive, worldwide growth and victory *before* the second coming.<sup>63</sup>

A passage which clearly identifies the time of the millennium (between the two advents) and the nature of the millennium is 1 Corinthians 15:20-28: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, 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. For ‘He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 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.” This is certainly one of the most anti-premillennial passages in the New Testament. In describing the physical resurrection of believers Paul says that there is only one physical resurrection, and that occurs at the second coming (v. 23). Premillennialists must have at least two physical resurrections, one at the second coming and another at the end of the millennium (for believers who died during the 1000-year earthly reign of Christ).

Paul very specifically says that when Christ returns “then comes the end”; he emphatically rejects the premillennial concept of a thousand-year reign of Christ *after* the second

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<sup>62</sup> Plummer, pp. 194-95.

<sup>63</sup> The dispensational interpretation of the parable of the leaven is that the leaven represents evil working subtly upon the church, until the professing church becomes totally corrupt. While it is true that sometimes leaven is used in Scripture to represent evil (e.g., Mt. 16:6), it is not always so used (cf. Lev. 7:13; 23:7). For example, at the feast of Pentecost, leavened bread was offered to God in gratitude for God’s provision of daily food. It is exegetically illegitimate to take the meaning or use of a word in one context and insist it must always have the same meaning, even when obviously used in a different sense. The dispensational interpretation of the parable of the leaven is both confusing and absurd. “How could Jesus who represented this kingdom as so supremely desirable have said, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven,’ if by this he meant ‘The kingdom of heaven is like an evil principle working subtly, which shall irremediably corrupt the hearts of all who receive it’? Could Jesus have used the words ‘kingdom of heaven’ so confusingly: of a blessed kingdom into which all should wish to enter and also a mere travesty or counterfeit of that kingdom, a kingdom of hypocrisy, falsehood, and evil which all should seek to shun? Could He have done this without involving His hearers in utter and inextricable confusion?” (Allis, pp. 86-87). Dispensationalists argue that the mustard seed parable teaches that this age is characterized by “abnormal external growth.” The herb turning into a tree means that the little herb has grown into a monstrosity. “The parable teaches that the enlarged sphere of profession has become inwardly corrupt. That is the characterization of this age” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958], p. 147). Dispensationalists involve themselves in such exegetical absurdities because they must attempt to explain away the passages which are diametrically opposed to their whole system of interpretation.

coming. That Paul means the end of the world can be inferred from both the analogy of Scripture and the immediate context. The disciples asked Jesus, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of *the end* of the age?” (Mt. 24:3). That “the end” really means the *end* is made clear by verse 24 which teaches that after Christ subdues all His enemies, He will hand the kingdom over to God the Father. “Consequently the end will not occur, and Christ will not turn the kingdom over to the Father, until *after He has abolished all opposition....* Notice further: Verse 25 demands that ‘He must [*dei*] reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.’ Here the present infinitive ‘reign’ indicates the continuance of His reign. We have already seen...that *He is presently reigning, and has been so since His ascension.* References elsewhere to the Psalm 110 passage specifically mention His sitting at God’s right hand. *Sitting at the right hand entails active ruling and reigning not passive resignation.* He is now actively ‘the ruler over the kings of the earth’ and ‘has made us kings and priests to His God and Father...’ (Rev. 1:5). Here in 1 Cor. 15:25, we learn that He must continue to reign, putting His enemies under His feet. Until when? The answer is identical to that which has already been concluded: His reign from heaven extends to the *end of history.*”<sup>64</sup>

Premillennialism asserts that Christ’s present rule over the earth from heaven will be a failure. According to premillennialism, the Great Commission to disciple all nations before Christ returns will never be accomplished. The church of Jesus Christ, fully empowered by the Holy Spirit for kingdom victory, will not succeed. Thus Christ at His second coming will subdue the nations by force—by political power, by coercion. But Paul says, “He must reign [present tense], till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). “Most commentators, in obedience to the context, understand the passage to refer to all hostile powers, whether demoniacal or human. These are *to be put down*, i.e., effectively subdued; not annihilated, and not [all] converted; but simply deprived of all power to disturb the harmony of his kingdom.”<sup>65</sup> Verse 26 says that “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” According to Paul this occurs at the second coming of Christ, when all the saints are raised (v. 23). But if death is abolished at the second coming of Christ, how can those who are supposed to be converted during the tribulation and millennium die? And how can there be a second, physical resurrection of believers at the end of the millennium if death was abolished at the second coming? *If death was abolished at the second coming, as Paul says, the premillennial concept of the millennium is impossible.*

## Old Testament Kingdom Prophecies

After noting that premillennialism contradicts New Testament teaching regarding the second coming, the general resurrection, and the time and nature of the kingdom, the obvious premillennial question is: “But what about the Old Testament kingdom prophecies—don’t they refer to a literal, Davidic, Jewish, earthly kingdom ruled by the Messiah?” One of the pillars of dispensationalism is the maxim that the Old Testament kingdom prophecies must be interpreted literally. Thus they can only be applied to ethnic Israel and cannot refer to the church, for Israel and the church must be kept distinct in God’s plan. While the idea of interpreting the Old Testament kingdom prophecies literally is appealing, there are a number of insurmountable exegetical and theological problems connected with a literal interpretation.

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<sup>64</sup> Gentry, p. 247.

<sup>65</sup> Hodge, *I and II Corinthians*, pp. 330-31.

(1) The first problem is that the New Testament teaches that with the coming of Christ the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been removed. Christ has *one* body not two (1 Cor. 10:17, 12:12). The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been removed (Eph. 2:14). God has made two peoples into *one* (Eph. 2:15). Gentiles are fellow citizens and full members with the Jews in God's household; God is building both Jewish and Gentile believers into *one* temple (Eph. 2:11-22). After the resurrection, ascension and Pentecost there is neither Jew nor Greek, for Christians are all *one* in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). Gentiles who believe in Christ are called the true sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). The Apostle Peter takes Old Testament titles for Israel and applies them directly to the church: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...who once were not a people but are now the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:9-10; cf. Ex. 19:5-6). "The word *genos* [nation] denoting blood-relation is applied to the Christians as members of one family through the new birth."<sup>66</sup> Paul calls the church "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). He says of believers, "We are the circumcision" (Phil. 3:3). Paul says that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but what is important is the new birth (Gal. 6:15). "It is not natural decent, that makes a man a child of Abraham."<sup>67</sup> "Those who are the children of the flesh, these are *not* the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Rom. 9:8). The promises to Israel were made not according to "the flesh" but according to "the spirit." In the Old Testament, Israel is the bride of Jehovah. Yet in the New Testament the church is repeatedly called the bride of Christ (Rev. 18:23; 21:2, 9; 22:17). Christ only has one bride—the church. To say that God has two separate peoples is to implicitly assert that God is a polygamist. God only has one people: the church, "the Israel of God." When the Apostle Paul discusses ethnic Israel he has nothing to say about earthly blessings but aims to show that the spiritual blessings promised to Israel are to be secured only by faith, and are the common possession of all believers, both Jew and Gentile. Paul's concern for Israel was not that they might inherit the land of Canaan, but "that they might be saved" (Rom 10:1; cf. v. 9).

(2) If believers are to look forward to a literal fulfillment of the prophecies that have Christ and the saints ruling from Jerusalem, then why does the author of Hebrews tell Jewish believers to have nothing to do with the earthly Jerusalem? "Jesus...suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here [on earth] we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come" (Heb. 13:12-14). Earthly Jerusalem was but a type of the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem: "But you have 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" (Heb. 12:22-23). By faith Abraham looked "for the city whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). The "Jerusalem which now is...is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem *above* is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:24-25). Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The New Testament makes it very clear that the earthly Jerusalem where God dwelt was but a type of Christ's church. God dwells in His church. The Apostle John says that the New Jerusalem is the church, the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2). The dispensational idea of a literal, earthly rule from Jerusalem cannot be found in the New Testament; in fact, the apostles taught that believers, both Jewish and Gentile, should have nothing to do with such an earthly Jerusalem. Therefore it makes perfect sense to interpret the kingdom prophecies regarding

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), p. 134.

<sup>67</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:810.

Jerusalem as finding fulfillment in Christ's new Jerusalem—the church. In doing so we are merely letting the New Testament interpret the Old.

Jesus said to the woman of Samaria that Jerusalem would lose its special significance as a central and sacred site for worshiping the Father: “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (Jn. 4:21-23). Jesus announced “that Jerusalem was going to lose its peculiar character—that it would cease to be, even to the Jews themselves, ‘the city of their solemnities, whither the tribes should go up’—that in fact, it would possess not a whit more of distinctive religious character than the mountain of Samaria, about which the woman consulted him.... But by the work of Christ these localities are stripped forever of their ceremonial sacredness. ‘Salem’ and ‘Zion’ are now in every place where ‘the Father is worshipped in spirit and in truth.’ It is this very change beyond all doubt which the apostle designed to express, when he said to the Hebrews, who were clinging to the *local* Jerusalem and the *literal* Zion, after all their glory had passed away, ‘But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem’” (Heb. 12:22).<sup>68</sup>

(3) Dispensationalism teaches that the kingdom prophecies which speak of a rebuilt temple will be fulfilled literally: someday the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. The major problem with this view is that the apostles applied the prophecies regarding rebuilding the temple *not* to a literal temple, but to the church. Paul says that God is building the temple *now*: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22). Jesus Christ is the true temple (Jn. 20:19, 21; Mk. 14:58). Because Christians are united to Christ, and because Christ dwells in His people, they are the temple of God. Paul says, “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’” (2 Cor. 6:16). Paul takes a passage that dispensationalists say must apply to a literal temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 37:27) and applies it to the Christian church in his own day. “Thus, the prophetic notion of the rebuilding of the Temple (when not making reference to Zerubbabel’s Temple) speaks of Christ and the building of His church (Matt. 16:18; cf. Zech. 6:12-13). He Himself is the foundation and cornerstone (1 Cor. 3:11, 16-17; Eph. 2:20). As Christ’s people, we are priests (Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6) who offer our bodies as *living sacrifices* (Rom. 12:1-2) and our service as acceptable *sweet smell[ing] offerings* (2 Cor. 2:14-15; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:5). Thus, ‘We have an *altar* from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat’ (Heb. 13:10). As more people are converted by His sovereign grace, His New Covenant Temple grows stone by stone (Eph. 2:21; 4:12, 16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). As a master builder Paul labored in that Temple (1 Cor. 3:9-17).”<sup>69</sup>

A passage of Scripture that clearly proves that the kingdom prophecies regarding the temple are being fulfilled now in the growth of Christ’s church is Acts 15. The apostles and elders are gathered together in Jerusalem to discuss the conversion of the Gentiles and what to do regarding their keeping certain aspects of the Mosaic law. Peter discussed the conversion of the

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<sup>68</sup> David Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1876 [1983]), pp. 369-70 (capitalization altered).

<sup>69</sup> Gentry, p. 359 (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:5-9).

Gentiles and their receiving the Holy Spirit (vs. 7-8). He said that God “made no distinction between us and them” (v. 9). Paul and Barnabas relate also what God did among the Gentiles (v. 12). James spoke and quoted an Old Testament prophecy regarding the tabernacle of David and applied it to the ingathering of Gentiles into the church: “Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. *And with this the words of the prophets agree*, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things’” (vs. 14-17). Note that James used the plural “prophets.” All the prophets agree that the tabernacle of David is being rebuilt by Jesus Christ the Lord, and all the Gentile nations are flowing into it. “David conquered the surrounding nations to obtain the full extent of the Promised Land. To an infinitely greater degree, David’s descendant Jesus Christ rules over all the nations of the earth.”<sup>70</sup> James applied Amos 9:11-12 to the present church age not to a future millennium.

(4) The greatest argument against the dispensational idea that the kingdom prophecies must be taken literally is the fact that these passages, if taken literally, would involve the Jews in activities clearly forbidden by the New Testament. Hodge writes,

If those prophecies foretell a literal restoration, they foretell that the temple is to be rebuilt, the priesthood restored, sacrifices again offered, and that the whole Mosaic ritual is to be observed in all its details. (See the prophecies of Ezekiel from the thirty-seventh chapter onward.) We know, however, from the New Testament that the Old Testament service has been finally abolished; there is to be no new temple made with hands; no other priest but the high priest of our profession; and no other sacrifice but that already offered upon the cross. *It is utterly inconsistent with the character of the Gospel that there should be a renewed inauguration of Judaism within the pale of the Christian Church.*<sup>71</sup>

Dispensationalists are aware that the New Testament has abolished the temple worship, the sacrificial system and the ceremonial law. Thus they argue that the reinstatement of the temple service during the millennium is only memorial in character; the sacrifices offered are not for atonement but only as a memorial to Christ. But such an argument disregards the fact that Christ has already given the church a perpetual memorial as a permanent replacement for the sacrificial system: in the Old Covenant the people would eat portions of the sacrificed lamb, but in the New Covenant we feed upon Christ spiritually at the Lord’s supper. The idea that the church will return to the inferior (Heb. 9:11-15), the shadow (Heb. 10:1; 8:4-5), the obsolete (Heb. 8:13), the symbolic (Heb. 9:9), and the ineffectual (Heb. 10:4) during the millennium is unbiblical and absurd.

Furthermore, dispensationalists must violate their own system of literal interpretation to hold to the concept of a memorial sacrificial system. “The ‘millennial’ sacrifices in the prophecy of Ezekiel 45 are expressly said to ‘make reconciliation’ (Ezek. 45:15, 17, 20), using the piel of the Hebrew *kaphar* (as in Lev. 6:30; 8:15; 16:6 ff.). Yet...what literalist, reading the phrase ‘make reconciliation,’ would surmise that this was only ‘memorial?’ Where is the consistent literalism here? 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.’ This is

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<sup>70</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 555.

<sup>71</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:808, emphasis added.

convenient but illegitimate.”<sup>72</sup> Dispensationalists criticize postmillennialists for not taking the kingdom prophecies literally, yet they freely spiritualize passages that do not fit into their eschatological paradigm. If a portion of a passage cannot be taken literally because it contradicts New Testament theology, why not the whole passage? Why not be consistent?

(5) Another insurmountable exegetical obstacle for the premillennialist is the fact that the kingdom prophecies cannot be taken literally without contradicting each other. Some prophecies state that no Gentiles will be allowed in Jerusalem and in the temple: “So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then *Jerusalem* shall be holy, and no *aliens* [i.e., non-Jews] shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:17). “In that day there shall no longer be a *Canaanite* in the house of the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 14:21). “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘No *foreigner*, uncircumcised in heart or *uncircumcised in flesh*, shall enter My *sanctuary*, including any *foreigner* who is among the children of Israel’” (Ezek. 44:9). Yet other prophecies state clearly that all nations will go to Jerusalem to God’s holy temple (“the house of the God of Jacob”): “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and *all nations* shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, *to the house of the God of Jacob*; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD *from Jerusalem*” (Isa. 2:2-3). If one holds that these kingdom prophecies must be interpreted literally, there is no way that these passages can be reconciled. Taken literally, these prophecies teach that all nations will convert to Judaism and be physically circumcised “in order to qualify themselves for entering Jerusalem and the house of the Lord.”<sup>73</sup> This interpretation would contradict the clear New Testament teaching that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised and follow the ceremonial law (Ac. 15:24; Gal. 2:14; 4:9-11; 5:1-6, 11-14). Premillennialists wisely refrain from holding such a position. If interpreted literally, these prophecies predict a worldwide conversion of Gentiles *not* to Christianity but to the Old Testament Judaical religion.

A literal interpretation also leads to a blatant contradiction between the prophets Isaiah and Malachi. In Isaiah (2:2-3, quoted above) all nations are envisioned as going to Jerusalem to the temple, but in Malachi the temple worship is represented as taking place *in* all nations. “‘For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in *every place* incense shall be offered to My name, and a *pure offering*; for My name shall be great among the nations,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11). One prophet has all nations going to the temple in Jerusalem. The other has the *temple* going to all nations. If taken literally, this doesn’t make sense. “Are there any except *Romanists*, who take ‘incense’ here, and the ‘pure offering’ *literally*? Do not all understand the prediction to mean simply this, that not at Jerusalem only, but everywhere, and not by Jews only, but by all nations without distinction, from one end of the world to the other, *acceptable worship* shall ascend to God? And how is it that all unite in so understanding it? Clearly because ‘incense’ and ‘offering,’ in the Jewish sense, having given place under the Gospel to ‘spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,’ *there is no other kind of worship of which* we can understand the prediction.”<sup>74</sup>

Premillennialists cannot harmonize these prophecies while holding to a literal interpretation. Thus (as noted above) they arbitrarily take parts of the kingdom prophecies

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<sup>72</sup> Gentry, pp. 153-54, quoting from *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1967), p. 888, note 1 (at Ezek. 43:19).

<sup>73</sup> Brown, p. 366.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

literally and spiritualize the sections which cause serious problems for their system. For example, atoning sacrifices are said to be mere memorials, and the worldwide conversion of the Gentiles to Old Testament Judaism is spiritualized or ignored. The standard Protestant interpretation of these passages (until the rise of premillennialism in the nineteenth century) was that the Old Testament prophets were describing the universality and spirituality of gospel worship throughout the earth, brought about by the success of the gospel. These prophets were using Old Testament language to describe New Testament kingdom victory. Hodge writes,

It is undeniable that the ancient prophets in predicting the events of the Messianic period and the future of Christ's kingdom, borrowed their language and imagery from the Old Testament institutions and usages. The Messiah is often called David; his church is called Jerusalem, and Zion; his people are called Israel; Canaan was the land of their inheritance; the loss of God's favour was expressed by saying that they forfeited that inheritance, and restoration of his favour was denoted by a return to the promised land. This usage is so pervading that the conviction produced by it on the minds of Christians is indelible. To them, Zion and Jerusalem are the Church and not the city made with hands. To interpret all that the ancient prophets say of Jerusalem of an earthly city, and all that is said of Israel of the Jewish nation, would be to bring down heaven to earth, and to transmute Christianity into the corrupt Judaism of the apostolic age.<sup>75</sup>

The postmillennial interpretation of the kingdom prophecies allows the New Testament to interpret and elaborate on these prophecies. The clearer passages are used to interpret the less clear. The progressive nature of divine revelation is recognized and respected. Many doctrines revealed but dimly under the Old Covenant are more fully expounded under the New. The New Testament teaches that these prophecies are to be fulfilled before the second coming and not after; these prophecies apply to the church and not ethnic Israel. The premillennialist rejects this view because he is forced by his own presuppositions to fit the clear, didactic portions of the New Testament into a simplistic, inconsistent literalism. The Old is not interpreted in light of the New but the New is forced into an earthly, typological, Old Covenant conception of the kingdom. There are many difficult things to understand in the Bible, "but they will become darker still, if, instead of explaining the dark things by the clear, we *explain the clear things by the dark, making the Old Testament the key to the New*. It is this unnatural method which lies at the foundation of all the *Jewish* expectations of Christians; and never till we reverse the process

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<sup>75</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:809. "The prophets clothed their thoughts in forms derived from the dispensation to which they belonged, i.e. from the life, constitution, and history of their own people. In view of this fact, the question naturally arises as to whether the form was essential, so that the prophecy was destined to be fulfilled in the exact terms in which it was uttered. While it was but natural that prophecies referring to the near future should be realized in all particulars, it is by no means self-evident that this should also be the case with prophecies that point to some future dispensation. The presumption is that, after the forms of life have undergone radical changes, no more can be expected than a realization of the essential central idea. In fact, the New Testament clearly proves that a literal fulfillment is not to be expected in all cases...hence, it is precarious to assume that a prophecy is not fulfilled as long as the outer details are not realized. Cf. Isaiah 11:10-16; Joel 3:18-21; Micah 5:5-8; Zech. 12:11-14; Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:15-17" (L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950], pp. 151-52). Premillennial authors admit this when they discuss battles with jets, tanks, attack helicopters, nuclear weapons, and so on. How would an Old Testament prophet describe the church of Christ and its glorious expansion in such a way as to be comprehensible to his audience? He would have to use terminology with which the ancient Jews were accustomed.

are we safe from the danger to which Jerome alludes, of *Judaizing our Christianity*, instead of Christianizing the adherents of Judaism.”<sup>76</sup>

Although premillennialists are wrong when they apply the kingdom prophecies to the period *after* the second coming of Christ, they are correct when they say that these prophecies must be fulfilled *before* the eternal state, “such as the overcoming of active opposition 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; Zech. 8:3-5), the conversion of people (Ps. 72:27), death (e.g., Ps. 22:29; 72:14; Isa. 65:20), sin (e.g., Isa. 65:20; Zech. 14:17-19, suffering (e.g., Ps. 22:29; 72:2, 13, 17),...national distinctions and interaction (e.g., Ps. 72:10-11, 17; Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 14:16-17)... [And] though reduced to minority proportions, there will be the continuance of the curse, despite the dominance of victory (Isa. 65:25).”<sup>77</sup> Thus the postmillennialist believes that the worldwide success of the gospel prior to the second coming does not result in a period of *perfection* where everyone is saved but issues forth a period where Christianity *dominates* nations and cultures. This period can be described as semi-golden (not perfect, not sinless), yet a period of worldwide Christian civilization.

## Messiah’s Reign

The prophetic picture of Christ’s reign is multi-faceted. Some of the prophecies point to the beginning and growth of the kingdom (e.g., Dan. 2:35 ff.; Isa. 9:6-7), while others reveal a glimpse of the kingdom in a mature state (e.g., Isa. 11:9; Mic. 4:1-4). The Old Testament prophets predicted that Christ would achieve victory in history. Christ’s kingdom victory flows from His death and resurrection. “Christ’s redemption is as comprehensive as sin is, and more powerful. Christ’s bodily resurrection was more powerful than death. So are the objective effects of His resurrection in history.”<sup>78</sup> Premillennialists hold that the preaching of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit will fail to save the world. But the Bible teaches the exact opposite. It is true that there are periods of decline, apostasy and resistance, but the overall picture is one of growth unto victory. Christians who base their doctrine on the latest headlines instead of the Word of God are pessimistic and escapist. “But with God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it 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).

### *Universal Knowledge of the True God*

The prophets teach that a time is coming when spiritual darkness, false religions, pagan superstitions and gross ignorance will be displaced by the light of revealed truth: “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; cf. Hab. 2:14). How do the waters cover the bottom of the sea? Every channel, valley, plain, hill and mountain on the

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<sup>76</sup> Brown, p. 373.

<sup>77</sup> Gentry, p. 208. A passage which is devastating to the *amillennial* position (which sees the fulfillment of many of the kingdom prophecies in the eternal state) is Isa. 65:20, 23: “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.... They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.” People will not die in the eternal state, nor will women give birth.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

bottom of the sea is covered; there are no deserts on the bottom of the sea. Thus, the gospel will inundate the world. “The good news of redemption was not merely local news for a few villages in Palestine, but was a world message; and the abundant and continuous testimony of Scripture is that the kingdom of God is to *fill* the earth, ‘from the sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth’ [Zech. 9:10]”<sup>79</sup> “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD” (Jer. 31:34).

### *All Nations Will Worship Jehovah*

There is to be a genuine acceptance of the true religion and spiritual gospel worship among all nations. “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 1:11). “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD’S, and He rules over the nations” (Ps. 22:27-28). “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name” (Ps. 86:9). “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” (Ps. 72:8-11). Psalm 72 is a “glowing description of the reign of the Messiah, as righteous (vs. 1-7), universal (vs. 8-11), beneficent (vs. 12-14), perpetual (vs. 15-17). It speaks of the social (vs. 2-4, 12-14) and economic benefits of His reign (v. 16), as well as the spiritual benefits (vs. 5-7, 17). The imagery of pouring rain here reflects the spiritual presence of Christ in the Person of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; John 14:16-18) being poured out upon the world from on high (Isa. 32:15, 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10; Acts 2:17-18). Christ is ‘in’ us via the Holy Spirit, which is poured out upon us since Pentecost.”<sup>80</sup>

### *The Church Will Be Prominent in World Affairs*

Although the Bible teaches the separation of church and state, it does *not* teach the separation of religion and state. It is to the church that Christ gave the responsibility of spreading the kingdom and discipling all nations (Mt. 28:18-20). Thus the prophets, using Old Testament terminology, pictured all nations flowing into the church to receive instruction and learn God’s law. “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:2-3) “In the book of Hebrews ‘Mount Zion,’ God’s holy mountain, is spiritualized to mean the church (12:22). Hence in this prophecy it must mean that the church, having attained a position

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<sup>79</sup> Boettner, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Gentry, p. 199.

so that it stands out like a mountain on a plain, will be prominent and regulative in all world affairs.”<sup>81</sup>

Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 (which speaks of “My Servant” [the Messiah] bringing justice to the Gentiles) and says it is being fulfilled. Isaiah’s prophecy begins at Christ’s first coming and continues through His church. At the end of the Great Commission Christ said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.... He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law” (Isa. 42:1, 3-4). Young writes,

Nevertheless, he will successfully carry through his task to its completion, namely, *he will place judgment [or justice] in the earth*. In this connection *earth* is not limited to Palestine, but refers to the whole earth, and thus points up the universality of the servant’s work. Furthermore, the servant will actually place judgment in the earth. When he completes his work, judgment will be found in all the earth. The conversion of the heathen is not the result of one mighty, eschatological act, but of the gradual, tireless work of the servant. Hence, it may also be said that inasmuch as the servant works through his servants, they too are included here in the mysterious figure of which the chapter speaks.<sup>82</sup>

The isles or coastlands await Christ’s law (or doctrine). The Messiah’s work continues through His church and it is not completed until every far-off continent receives the gospel. Christ is discipling the nations, and His work is not completed until all civil governments base their laws upon His perfect law. The victory of the gospel is so assured that the Holy Spirit adds the words “justice to victory” in Matthew’s quote of Isaiah (Mt. 12:20).

### *Universal Peace*

Christ’s kingdom is spiritual, yet it will have great social effects throughout the whole earth: “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4; cf. Mic. 4:3). “Their beating their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, is clearly figurative language, a figure appropriate for the time in which this prophecy was given, but to be fulfilled in a far distant age

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<sup>81</sup> Boettner, p. 25. “But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked” (Isa. 11:4). “As for the earth itself, that earth upon which the poor and the oppressed lived, He will smite it. He is above that earth, a supra-earthly, super-natural being; and He can do with that earth what He will. The very breath of His mouth, as it were, is a rod, with which He can chastise and smite, ‘...and out of His mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword...’ (Rev. 1:16b). What comes forth from His mouth is His Word, and that Word is a judging, smiting Word” (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 1:385).

<sup>82</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, 3:115. “Christ was sent in order to bring the whole world under the authority of God and obedience to him; and this shows that without him everything is confused and disordered. Before he comes to us, there can be no proper government amongst us; and therefore we must learn to submit to him, if we desire to be well and justly governed” (John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah, loc. cit.*). When we speak of a government and justice system based upon Christ’s law, we do not mean an “ecclesiocracy” or a church-dominated government. Christ has “all authority in heaven and on earth.” The civil government and courts are just as obligated to obey Jesus Christ as is the church. They are to apply God’s Word to their particular sphere of authority: that of civil justice.

in which nations would not spend their energies and substance in destructive wars.”<sup>83</sup> This period of worldwide peace and prosperity is not the result of Christ’s second coming but the result of all nations flowing into Christ’s church (Isa. 2:2) and learning and applying Christ’s doctrine to their lives (v. 3). Peace is not the result of physical threats from Christ in Jerusalem, but the result of regenerated hearts that believe the gospel and obey Christ. Self-government flows from a regenerate heart. When the vast majority of people on earth become Christians, war will only be found in history books. “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. 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. 11:6-9). “This [v. 6], and the three following verses describe the peaceableness of the Messiah’s kingdom.... The wild and the tame creatures shall agree together, and the former shall become the latter; which is not to be understood literally of the savage creatures, as if they would lose their nature...but figuratively of men, comparable to wild creatures, who through the power of divine grace, accompanying the word preached, shall become tame, mild, meek, and humble.”<sup>84</sup> This will come about as a result of Christ’s *first* coming, for He is the stem of Jesse who is anointed with the Holy Spirit (vs. 1-2).

### *Great Prosperity*

A passage which shows that the worldwide spread of Christianity will have great economic and social benefits is Isa. 65:17-25. Although Isaiah uses the terminology of the new heavens and new earth he cannot be referring to the eternal state, because he describes people experiencing “birth, aging, death, time, sin, and curse.”<sup>85</sup> “Heaven and earth are employed as figures to indicate a complete renovation or revolution in the existing course of affairs. With the advent of the Messiah the blessing to be revealed will in every sense be so great that it can only be described as the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.”<sup>86</sup> Isaiah 65:17-25 says,

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. No more shall an infant 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. 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. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,

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<sup>83</sup> Boettner, p. 120.

<sup>84</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1810]), 5:71.

<sup>85</sup> Gentry, p. 363.

<sup>86</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, 3:514.

the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the LORD.

The reign of Christ and the spread of the gospel will have a great influence on the world. There will be great physical longevity (v. 20). As the Israelites inherited the wealth of the Egyptians, Christians will inherit the science and technology of the heathen. The plagues and curses that accompany a society in rebellion against God (e.g., abortion, state theft, sexual immorality, etc.) will cease as Christian civilization receives covenant blessings instead of covenant curses. There will be great economic benefits. "Men will keep the fruits of their labor. They will leave an inheritance to their children."<sup>87</sup> The threat of crime, warfare and disease will be so reduced that people will enjoy the fruit of their labor many years (vs. 21-23). The church will dwell in blessed fellowship with Christ, and He will protect His people from harm (vs. 24-25). "There will be no more persecution of the church of Christ, the mountain of God's holiness."<sup>88</sup>

## The Issue of Interpretation

The main issue which separates premillennialism from postmillennialism is one of interpretation. The premillennialist insists that the Old Testament kingdom prophecies must be interpreted literally and thus must apply only to ethnic Israel. Starting with this presupposition the premillennialist must ignore and/or twist the many New Testament passages which contradict his position. On the other hand, the postmillennialist holds that these prophecies can only be understood in the light of New Testament doctrine. Thus the postmillennialist interprets many kingdom prophecies figuratively, not because he has a preference for figurative interpretation but because the New Testament *requires* it. If the apostles applied Old Covenant expressions such as the temple, Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem and the Israel of God to the New Covenant church, are we not justified in doing the same?

The Messianic age predicted by the prophets began with Christ's first coming. The final era of history called the "latter days" began with the ascension and glorification of Christ.<sup>89</sup> Old Covenant Israel has given way to the New Covenant church—the new and true "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). The kingdom that Christ established is expanding progressively throughout the earth, through the discipling of all nations by Christ's church. The rock is growing into a great mountain and is filling the whole earth (Dan. 2:35), the mustard seed is growing into a large tree (Lk. 13:19), and the whole earth is being leavened by the gospel (Lk. 13:21). The church—which is the New Jerusalem, God's New Covenant Zion (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2)—is being "exalted above the hills; and all nations will flow into it" and learn God's Word (Isa. 2:2-3). God is even now rebuilding His glorious temple, the church (Eph. 2:21-22; Ac. 15:14-18). Jesus Christ even now lives and reigns with His people by His Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Rev. 20:4). A time is coming when even all (ethnic) Israel will be saved and be grafted into God's *one* olive tree—the New

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<sup>87</sup> Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 106.

<sup>88</sup> Gill, 5:387.

<sup>89</sup> The biblical phrase "the last days" refers to the Messianic age. The *apostles* were living in the last days. Peter said, "He indeed was foreordained...but was manifest in *these last times* for you" (1 Pet. 1:20). The author of Hebrews said that God "has in *these last days* spoken to us by His Son" (Heb. 1:2). Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 and said this prophecy referred to Christ's pouring out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost: "it shall come to pass in *the last days*, says God" (Ac. 2:17). James, writing to Christians in his day, said, "You have heaped up treasure in *the last days*" (Jas. 5:3). Premillennialists have been asserting that their generation was the last generation ever since the 1830s! Fifty years from now Hal Lindsey's books will be available very cheap at garage sales.

Covenant Church (Rom. 11:25-26). God's plan to save all nations through a Seed (i.e., Jesus Christ) was not an afterthought but central to the covenant with Abraham.<sup>90</sup> The Old Testament prophecies were not given to stand alone. They are incomplete without the New Testament. When the New Testament is ignored, these prophecies are Judaized. What is tragic regarding premillennialism is that the glorious, worldwide victory of the cross has been turned into a massive defeat, and the church triumphant has been declared the church impotent. Campbell writes,

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any doubt or hesitation regarding the certainty of the presence of the kingdom, or of its nature, potency, and its ultimate triumph, and that this is the kingdom which a few years earlier was announced as 'at hand.' It is everywhere implicit that the kingdom spoken of in the Psalms and the Prophets was designed by God to bring to fulfillment all that was unconditionally promised to the patriarch Abraham, to the nation of Israel, and to David the king. All subsequent promises, predictions, and covenants were designed by God to implement—to bring to fruition—all that was embraced in that early promise to Abraham of world-wide blessing to the human race.<sup>91</sup>

Postmillennialism acknowledges that the most important events in human history were the life, sacrificial death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It exalts the cross and its effects upon the world. Jesus Christ defeated sin and Satan at Calvary. He rose from the dead and was given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). Christ was enthroned as king at the right hand of God the Father, and as a conquering king He poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church, giving it the power to accomplish its task of worldwide dominion (Jn. 15:7; Ac. 2:1-4, 33-36). Christ is progressively subduing His enemies and will not return until all His enemies are subdued (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

Before the fall God commanded Adam to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). Adam and his descendants were to develop a worldwide, godly civilization. But Adam sinned, and the human race fell in him. God did not abandon His plan for a worldwide, godly civilization. But because of sin, godly dominion could only be achieved through a redeemer—the second Adam. Jesus Christ came not just to save a few people here and there but to save the whole world, to disciple all nations until a worldwide, godly Christian culture is achieved. Since the postmillennialist believes that the Great Commission and the discipling of all nations will occur in history before the second coming, he is both optimistic and patient. Evangelism, church planting and discipleship are the keys to kingdom growth unto victory. "The Christian is to labor against difficult circumstances with the expectation of the gradualistic development of God's kingdom good in history."<sup>92</sup> The victory promised by the prophets, achieved definitively on the cross, and guaranteed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit should keep our hands on the

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<sup>90</sup> "In blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:17-18). The Apostle Paul refers to God's promise to Abraham in Rom. 4:13. He doesn't say that Abraham would be heir to *Canaan* but that he would be "heir of the *world*." For Paul, Canaan was but a type. The Israelites conquered Canaan with the physical sword; Christ's church is conquering the whole world with the spiritual sword: the Word of God. Abraham is told his descendants will possess the gates of their enemies. Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church (Mt. 16:18). Christ's church is to be on the offensive. Jesus Himself promised that nothing—not even Satan—can stop the advance of His church. Victory is assured.

<sup>91</sup> Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1954), p. 193.

<sup>92</sup> Gentry, p. 534.

plow. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Premillennialism is the eschatology of defeat and escape. It teaches that the Great Commission will fail, and that God’s plan for a worldwide, godly civilization will not occur in history. The emphasis among premillennialists is on personal witnessing, entertainment, and empire-building for pastors (e.g., Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Bakker, etc.). The attitude toward society is “don’t polish brass on a sinking ship.” There is a purposeful neglect of cultural, social, artistic, economic and political issues.<sup>93</sup> Rushdoony writes,

Amillennialism and premillennialism are in retreat from the world and blasphemously surrender to the devil. By its very premises, either that the world will only get worse (amillennialism), or that the Christian hope is the rapture (premillennialism), it cuts the nerve of Christian action. Who, reading Hal Lindsey’s new book, *The Terminal Generation*, will embark on such godly ventures as a Christian school, work to establish Christian political goals, biblical law, and the like? If we hold that the world can only get worse, or that we will soon be raptured out of it, what impetus is left for applying the word of God to the problems of the world? The result is an inevitable one: premillennial and amillennial believers who profess faith in the whole word of God number *conservatively* twenty-five percent of the American population. They are also the most important segment of American society, with the least impact on American life.<sup>94</sup>

Premillennialism must be rejected because it views Christ’s victory as a massive failure in history, it encourages retreat from our kingdom responsibilities, and it is unscriptural. “Any theory which thus disparages the gospel of the grace of God must be false.”<sup>95</sup> “The Scriptures not only fail to teach the premillennial system, but they definitely exclude it as a possible interpretation.”<sup>96</sup>

## Objections

A number of objections have been advanced against postmillennialism; among them are the following:

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<sup>93</sup> Since the 1980s there has been a steady increase of premillennialists becoming involved in the cultural, social and political spheres. The increase is the result primarily of two things. First, things have gotten so bad in America culturally (homosexuality, pornography, violence, adultery, fornication, etc.), socially (crime, abortion, drugs, etc.), and politically (statism, confiscatory taxes, evil politicians, etc.), that even many premillennialists could no longer stand on the sidelines (the abortion issue alone has been a catalyst for thousands of believers). Second, some very influential premillennialists have been influenced by the writings of R. J. Rushdoony and Gary North (e.g., Pat Robertson). This involvement is still very small (there are, after all, supposedly 55 million evangelicals), and it is totally inconsistent with premillennial presuppositions. If the rapture is only a few years away (as the vast majority of evangelicals believe), then what is the point of building schools, clinics, universities, and political organizations? Why should one even bother to own a house, have a large family, and work to leave an inheritance to the next generation, if there *is* no next generation? The vast majority of premillennialists are still on the sidelines, watching our society sink deeper into the mire of sin and apostasy. The eschatology of pessimism, defeat and escape has, to a large extent, become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

<sup>94</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, “Postmillennialism Verses Impotent Religion,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, 3:126-27.

<sup>95</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:865.

<sup>96</sup> Boettner, p. 375.

1. *If postmillennialism is true, then why has the twentieth century witnessed such a great moral and spiritual decline?* Although the postmillennialist believes in the progress of the gospel throughout the interadvental period that does not mean that there will not be periods of apostasy and declension during that period. If one examines the growth of Christianity from the ascension to the present day, the progress of the gospel is astounding. When the Apostle Paul died in A.D. 68 most of Europe was in spiritual darkness. Many European religions involved the occult and human sacrifice. The gospel is responsible for amazing spiritual, ethical, economic, and political progress in many parts of the world. Even during the last hundred years of spiritual decline in the West, the gospel has made amazing progress in South Korea, parts of Africa, parts of Latin and South America, and now even in parts of the former Soviet Union. One should never make the mistake of judging a very long period of time by only one small part of it. Europe was suffering spiritual declension in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and then within only a few generations over half of Europe was converted to Christ (the Reformation reached into Germany, France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, etc.). “The eschatological debate must be resolved on the basis of biblical analysis, not newspaper exegesis. Short-cut arguments from experience 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 (Gen. 15:5). He even died with only one legitimate son. Yet he believed God would perform the work promised.”<sup>97</sup> Scripture must be interpreted by the Scripture, not by *The New York Times*. To judge the promises of God in terms of the latest news broadcast is to place a human, fallible, changing standard above God’s Word.

2. *Won’t postmillennialism lead to the mixing of church and state?* No. Postmillennialists believe in the separation of church and state. Christ is the head of *both* church and state. The church is responsible to obey Christ within its God-ordained sphere of authority, and the state is responsible to obey Christ within its God-given sphere of authority (civil justice and national defense). The church receives its ordinances from the Bible, and the state is to base its laws upon God’s unchanging moral law. Christ was given all authority in heaven and *on earth* (Mt. 28:18). To argue that the state is not responsible to apply the Word of God to its area of authority is to give the state unlimited tyrannical power. The state must not interfere in the affairs of the church, and the church must not interfere in the affairs of the state; yet both must look to Christ and obey his Word, for He is king and Lord of all.

3. *Doesn’t Christ need to be physically present on earth as king in order to have a kingdom?* No. This objection presupposes that Christ came to establish a physical, political kingdom. As explained above, the Bible teaches that Christ came to establish a spiritual kingdom. God’s Word declares that Christ is the exalted, glorified king who rules from heaven. He is spiritually present in His church (2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27), and the spiritual blessings that flow from His exaltation are more advantageous to the church than even His physical presence. Pentecost was the result of the King pouring out the Holy Spirit upon His church. The church has more power *after* the ascension than it had before. If Christ’s physical presence was crucial to the kingdom, could Jesus have said to his apostles, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. *It is to your advantage* that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Jn. 16:7-8).

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<sup>97</sup> Gentry, pp. 433-34.

4. *If the whole world is converted to Christ, how can there be a final rebellion at the end of the millennium?* The Bible does teach that there will be a Satanic rebellion at the end of the kingdom age (Rev. 20:7-9). Satan is allowed a brief period (“a little while,” Rev. 20:3) once again to deceive the nations. The reason God permits this final rebellion is not given. This final rebellion is not a problem for the postmillennialist, because he does not believe that every living person will be saved. “Ezekiel’s prophecy of the River of Life suggests that some outlying areas of the world—the ‘swamps’ and ‘marshes’—will not be healed, but will be ‘given over to salt,’ remaining unrenewed by the living waters (Ezek. 47:11). To change the image: although the Christian ‘wheat’ will be dominant in world culture, both the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest at the end of the world (Mt. 13:37-43). At that point, as the potential of both groups comes to maturity, as each side becomes fully self-conscious in its determination to obey or rebel, there will be a final conflict. The Dragon will be released for a short time, to deceive the nations in his last-ditch attempt to overthrow the Kingdom.”<sup>98</sup> The “little while” of Rev. 20:3 is not an exact phrase. Perhaps a new generation comes upon the scene that does not share the faith of their parents. How such a rebellion could occur after a long period of Christian influence is illustrated by what happened in Puritan New England (e.g., Unitarianism).

5. *Did not Jesus say that the gate to eternal life is narrow, “and there are few who find it” (Mt. 7:14)?* This passage does appear to contradict the postmillennial assertion that eventually the vast majority of mankind will be saved. But does not the Bible also teach that the redeemed will be a vast *multitude* (Rev. 7:9)? Did not Jesus a few verses later say that *many* will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 8:11)? The Bible cannot contradict itself. How is Matthew 7:13-14 to be interpreted in light of the many passages which speak of the worldwide victory of Christ’s kingdom? First, keep in mind that Christ was not making a prophetic statement regarding the future but simply describing the present situation. He was prodding the disciples to action with His statement, not predicting the future. “They are to look around them and see that so many souls are presently perishing, so few men are seeking righteousness and salvation. What will they do about this sad predicament? Do they love Him

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<sup>98</sup> Chilton, p. 519. The premillennial interpretation of Rev. 20:7-9 has serious problems of its own (as noted above). Jesus Christ who could only suffer humiliation *once* is once again subjected to humiliation. There is the absurdity of heathen armies attacking Christ and the saints with bullets and bombs, even though they have glorified, immortal bodies and cannot be hurt or die. Furthermore, the New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is *not* on earth when the fire falls from heaven to rescue the saints but that He *returns* in flaming fire. Chilton points out the premillennial abuse of the terms “God and Magog”: “Those who interpret the war of ‘Gog and Magog’ as an end-time war involving the Soviet Union usually pride themselves on being ‘literalists.’ Yet we should take note of what a strictly literal interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39 requires: 1. Gog’s reason for invading Israel is to plunder her silver and gold, and *to take away her cattle* (38:11-13); contrary to much premillennialist exposition, nothing is said about expropriating Israel’s oil or extracting minerals from the Dead Sea. 2. *All* of Gog’s soldiers are on horseback (38:15); there are no soldiers in trucks, jeeps, tanks, helicopters, or jets. 3. *All* of Gog’s soldiers are carrying swords, wooden shields, and helmets (38:4-5); their other weapons are *wooden* bows and arrows, clubs, and spears (39:3, 9). 4. Instead of using firewood (apparently no one even considered using gas, electricity, or solar power), the victorious Israelites will burn Gog’s wooden weapons for fuel for seven years (39:9-10).... The expression Gog and Magog does not, and never did, refer to Russia. That has been entirely made up from whole cloth, and simply repeated so many times that many have assumed it to be true. Ostensible reasons for this interpretation are based on a peculiar reading of Ezekiel 38:3, which speaks of ‘Gog, the chief prince of Meshach and Tubal.’ The word *chief* is, in the Hebrew, *rosh*; some have therefore translated the text as ‘Gog, the prince of Rosh.’ *Rosh* sounds something like *Russia*; therefore Gog is the prince (or premier) of Russia. Unfortunately for this ingenious interpretation, *rosh* simply means *head*, and is used over 600 times in the Old Testament—never meaning Russia” (Ibid., pp. 521-22).

enough to seek its reversal? Christ's challenge to them is ethical."<sup>99</sup> This interpretation is borne out in Luke 13:23, where Christ discusses the same issue and focuses His attention not on the number who are saved, but on the importance and urgency of becoming saved right now.

6. *Doesn't Luke 18:8 say that when Christ returns, He will not find faith on the earth?* In the parable of the persistent widow Jesus said, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8). Many premillennialists agree that this question assumes a negative answer—that Christ will return to an apostate, unbelieving world. In response we should note that the context indicates that Christ is probably referring to *the faith of persistent prayer* and not the Christian faith in general (cf. vs. 1-8). Furthermore, if the premillennial interpretation of this passage were correct, it would teach that when Christ returns, there are *no* Christians at all. Not even the premillennialist believes that, for the Bible teaches that there will be many Christians when Christ returns. Does Christ's question assume a negative answer? No, the Greek grammar used leaves the answer to Christ's question ambiguous.<sup>100</sup> Why? Because Christ was using a question in the context of His teaching on persevering prayer to motivate His disciples to pray like the persistent widow. After Christ's ascension, persecutors and serious dangers would come to the apostles; thus they must persevere in prayer. "Thus, it is clear that this passage is radically misunderstood when urged against postmillennialism. Its *standard* is misinterpreted. The Lord's teaching regarding fervent prayer is changed into a warning regarding the existence of the Christian faith in the future."<sup>101</sup>

7. *Did not Christ promise the twelve apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel?* The premillennialist interprets Luke 22:29-30 and Matthew 19:28 literally. He believes that these passages teach that the twelve apostles will sit on thrones and rule the world as political leaders during the millennium. The postmillennialist believes that these passages refer to the apostles' spiritual rule as ambassadors of Christ. There are a number of reasons why the premillennial interpretation should be rejected. First, we have already noted that the concept of a Judaized, earthly, political kingdom is totally contrary to the spiritual nature of the kingdom as taught by Christ and the apostles. Second, Jesus taught that the kingdom was a present, spiritual reality not a future, earthly kingdom. Third, in the Luke 22:29-30 passage, Jesus used the *present* tense and not future tense. "Here the Lord specifically says: 'And I *bestow* upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed upon Me' (Lk. 22:29). The Greek for 'bestow' is *diatithemai*, which is the present indicative and which indicates a present bestowal.... Here Christ the King indicates that He is presently *bestowing* formal authority on His apostles; they are His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) who reign with Him (Rom. 5:17, 21)."<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, this passage cannot be taken in the literal sense, for the ten tribes carried away by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. have forever been lost, being absorbed among the Gentiles. Thus, the only way the apostles could judge the twelve tribes would be by judging the Gentiles and the Jews, which is precisely what Christ instructed them to do (cf. Mt. 28:18-20). "With Calvin I believe that the

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<sup>99</sup> Gentry, p. 475.

<sup>100</sup> "In point of fact, *the question does not 'assume' a negative answer at all.* It is not a rhetorical question. The classic Greek grammar Funk-Blass-Debrunner 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....' But neither of these particular particles occurs here, so the implied answer to the question is 'ambiguous,' because the Greek word used here (*ara*) implies only 'anxiety or impatience'" (Gentry, p. 481).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 482.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 484-85.

regeneration has reference to the Gospel dispensation. It has reference to the new order of things which was started with the advent of Christ. The regeneration is another expression for the Kingdom of God.”<sup>103</sup>

## Common Eschatological Fallacies

There are a number of common eschatological fallacies held by premillennialists and amillennialists. The most common deal with the antichrist, the beast and the mark of the beast.

### *The Antichrist*

Most Christians today are taught that the antichrist is alive right now, and that he is about to break forth onto the world scene as a brilliant yet wicked world leader. Although the antichrist is perhaps the most popular figure in the current prophecy scene, he is also the most misunderstood. The problem is that premillennial authors focus their attention on Daniel’s little horn, Paul’s man of sin, and the beast in Revelation, yet ignore the passages of Scripture which actually discuss antichrist. There are only four passages of Scripture which expressly mention “antichrist,” all in the epistles of John (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7). John corrects the false notion of antichrist that had arisen among Christians in his own day; he declares that antichrist is not something far off in the future but a *present reality*. Second, he says that antichrist is not a single individual but a large group of people. Third, he defines antichrist not as a person (a coming world leader) but as a current movement: “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, *even now* many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour” (1 Jn. 2:18). Many Christians in John’s day had heard that antichrist (singular) was coming. John responded by saying that *even now* many antichrists (plural) had arisen. The verb “have arisen” or “have come” (*gegonasin*) indicates that these antichrists arose in the past and were still present. The presence of these antichrists proves that “it *is* (present tense) the last hour” (2:18). Thus it is evident that John (who wrote the book of Revelation) rejected the idea of a future, singular antichrist; instead, he warned Christians of a heretical movement (or movements). There are *many* antichrists. “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 an antichrist” (2 Jn. 7). “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 Jn. 2:22). ““These antichrists who have arisen,’ says John, ‘belonged to us, but they were not of us.’ In other words, they took up the Christian position, they claimed they were Christian, they professed to be teachers of the Christian Church, and yet they have been separated from the Christians in order that it would be clear to all that they were not of them. In other words, they claimed to delight in the true religion and yet they destroyed it.”<sup>104</sup> John focused the attention of his readers upon one, or perhaps two, heretical movements. The first, probably Gnostic in origin, denied the real humanity of Jesus Christ (2 Jn. 7). The second, probably Jewish in origin, denied that Jesus was the Messiah (1 Jn. 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.”<sup>105</sup> “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was

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<sup>103</sup> Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, p. 215.

<sup>104</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Walking with God: Studies in I John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), p. 100.

<sup>105</sup> Gentry, p. 373.

coming, and is *now already* in the world” (1 Jn. 4:3). “Antichrist is not an individual, malevolent ruler looming in our future. Rather, *Antichrist was a contemporary heretical tendency* regarding the person of Christ that was current among many in John’s day.”<sup>106</sup>

### *The Beast*

Another greatly misunderstood figure from the Bible is the beast of Revelation. The beast, unlike the antichrist, is at least a real political leader. The problem with most modern interpretations seeking to identify the beast is that the many textual indicators given by John to identify the beast are ignored in favor of the futurist, revived Roman emperor idea.

In the book of Revelation the beast is identified as both an empire and as a leader of an empire. The empire is without question the Roman empire of John’s own day. In Revelation 13 John is standing on the sand of the sea and observing a beast rising up out of the sea. The beast has “seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (Rev. 13:1-2). John describes the very same animals alluded to by the prophet Daniel to describe three of the four great world empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece (Dan. 7:1-6). The fourth empire, which has all the beast-like features of the other empires (only much worse), is none other than the Roman Empire (Dan. 7:7). In Revelation 17:12 John declares that the ten horns are ten kings; they are the leaders or governors of the ten imperial provinces. In Revelation 17:9-10, John identifies the seven heads as both seven hills (a place) and seven kings (individuals). In the ancient world Rome was known as the city of seven mountains. John, standing on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, looks in the direction of Rome and sees a beast coming out of the sea. Rome was a world empire that had authority over all peoples and nations (Rev. 13:7); that was the culmination of the four empires in Daniel, an empire that was satanic to the core (v. 2); and that existed on seven mountains (v. 9). Following are some other features about the beast.

(1) The beast was not only an empire but was also a *man* (Rev. 13:18). John says that the beast had a blasphemous name on its heads (v. 1). The Roman Caesars were worshiped as gods. Roman emperors were referred to as: *Sebastos* (one to be worshiped), *divus* (god) and even *Deus* and *Theos* (God).<sup>107</sup> Nero’s coins said “Savior of the world,” and Domitian was referred to as “our Lord and our God.” John gives a number of specific indicators that identify the beast, all of which point not to someone over 2,000 years in the future, but to an emperor still living in John’s own day: *Nero*. Revelation 17:10 says, “There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.” John specifically says that the sixth king is presently ruling. Who is the sixth king? None other than Nero, the first great persecutor of Christians. Following is a list of the Roman Caesars: 1. Julius (49-44 B.C.), 2. Augustus (31 B.C.-A.D. 14), 3. Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), 4. Gaius (Caligula, A.D. 37-41), 5. Claudius (A.D. 41-54), 6. Nero (A.D. 54-68), 7. Galba (A.D. 68). John said that the sixth king was ruling when he wrote; this king would be followed by a seventh who would rule for only “a short time” (Rev. 17:10). This was fulfilled to the letter: Nero was followed by Galba who ruled for only three months before he was assassinated.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>107</sup> Chilton, p. 328.

(2) John gives another identifier of the beast: a number. “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666” (Rev. 13:18). Why does not John just say who the beast is? Why does he speak cryptically? John was writing from Patmos where he was exiled by the Romans. The church was being persecuted systematically by the Roman state under Nero. John identifies the Roman emperor but he does it in such a way so that he protects the church from reprisal if the letter is intercepted by the Roman authorities. Almost every church in the Roman empire contained both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews living in John’s day used their alphabet for both sound symbols (phonetics) and numerical values. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet had a numerical value. A Hebrew spelling of Nero’s name found in documents contemporary with the writing of Revelation is *Nrwn Qsr*, which equals exactly 666.<sup>108</sup>

(3) Another indicator is the beastly image itself. Nero truly possessed a wicked, bestial nature. He was even referred to as a “beast” by his contemporaries.<sup>109</sup> “Nero, who murdered numerous members of his own family (including his pregnant wife, whom he kicked to death); who was homosexual, the final stage in degeneracy (Rom. 1:24-32); whose favorite aphrodisiac consisted of watching people suffer the most horrifying and disgusting tortures; who dressed up as a wild beast in order to attack and rape male and female prisoners; who used the bodies of Christians burning at the stake as the original ‘Roman candles’ to light up his filthy garden parties; who launched the first imperial persecution of Christians at the instigation of the Jews, in order to destroy the Church; *this* animalistic pervert was the ruler of the most powerful empire on earth.”<sup>110</sup>

(4) John said that the beast would make war upon God’s saints. “The Beast is said to ‘make war with the saints and to overcome them’ (Rev. 13:7). In fact, he is said to conduct such blasphemous warfare for a specific period of time: 42 months (Rev. 13:5). The Neronian persecution, which was initiated by Nero in A.D. 64, was the first ever *Roman* assault on Christianity, as noted by Church fathers Eusebius, Tertullian, Paulus Orosius, and Sulpicius Severus, as well as by Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius.”<sup>111</sup> Nero’s assassination by the sword on June 8, A.D. 68, ended the bloody persecution of believers. Note that Nero’s persecution of Christians lasted 42 months, exactly as prophesied by the Apostle John in Revelation 13:5.

### *The Mark of the Beast*

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<sup>108</sup> “The number 666 in some ancient manuscripts of Scripture is actually changed 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. Although we cannot be absolutely certain, a strong and most reasonable case may be made for the following conjecture. John, a Jew, used a Hebrew spelling of Nero’s name in order to arrive at the figure 666. But when Revelation began circulating among those less acquainted with Hebrew, a well-meaning copyist who knew the meaning of 666 might have intended to make its deciphering easier by altering it to 616. It surely is no mere coincidence that 616 is the numerical value of ‘Nero Caesar,’ when spelled in Hebrew by transliterating it from its more common Latin spelling” (Gentry, pp. 376-77).

<sup>109</sup> The pagan writer Apollinius of Tyana, a contemporary of Nero, specifically mentions that Nero was called a “beast” (ibid., p. 377). Nero may have acquired the nickname “the beast” from some of his perverse activities. Nero was a sadistic pervert who was hated and feared, even by the pagan Romans.

<sup>110</sup> Chilton, p. 329.

<sup>111</sup> Gentry, pp. 377-78.

Is everyone soon to receive a bar code on his forehead and/or right hand in order to buy and sell goods? Is the government going to force people to have a computer chip inserted in their right hand for identification purposes? While these things are possible, they have absolutely nothing to do with the mark of the beast spoken of in Revelation. In the Old Testament God spoke of total allegiance to Him and His law as a putting of the law on the forehead and on the hands: “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Dt. 6:8). In Revelation, those who are faithful to Christ, “the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14:4), are said to have “His [the Lamb’s] Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). John also refers to it as a seal: “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads” (Rev. 7:3). The Lord tells the church at Sardis: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem...” (Rev. 3:12). Even after the second coming John says, “His name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). In the old covenant “Aaron bore on his forehead the name of the Lord inscribed on the crown on the front of the priestly mitre.”<sup>112</sup> It is obvious that having the name of Christ (or God the Father, Rev. 14:1) on the forehead is not meant to be taken literally but is representative of allegiance to God, ownership by God, and even the presence of God the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the mark of the beast should be viewed as “the Satanic parody of the ‘seal of God’ on the foreheads and hands of the righteous.... Israel has rejected Christ, and is ‘marked’ with the seal of Rome’s total lordship; she has given her allegiance to Caesar, and is obedient to his rule and law. Israel chose to be saved by the pagan state, and persecuted those who sought salvation in Christ.”<sup>113</sup> The mark of the beast is a counterfeit of God’s seal on His people. Those who give their allegiance to Caesar and the Roman state have social respectability and the benefits that go with it (economic, political, religious, etc.). The Roman state demanded total allegiance to Caesar; everyone was required to make an offering of incense unto Caesar as God. “All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the beast], whose names have not been written in the Book of Life...” (Rev. 13:8). But Christians refused to worship the beast and thus were persecuted unto death and became economic and social outcasts. The mark of the beast reflects a wicked heart that worships and serves Caesar. “The imagery no doubt comes from the practice of branding slaves with the mark of their master.”<sup>114</sup> Christians are slaves of Christ; all others are slaves of Satan. Revelation 13 focuses on the Roman Empire and the beast—Nero Caesar. Things look very bleak for the church in chapter 13, but in chapter 14 the prophet focuses his attention upon Christ and His people. Those who persecute the church, who worship the beast, will receive their due: “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever” (Rev. 14:9-11). But Christians are blessed: “‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (v. 13). Although these words should comfort Christians of all ages, they were written specifically to comfort believers suffering the persecution of Nero—the Beast.

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<sup>112</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 54.

<sup>113</sup> Chilton, p. 342.

<sup>114</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation*, pp. 153-54.

This truth is confirmed when the many time indicators within Revelation are considered. John wrote, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants *things which must shortly take place*.... Blessed is he who reads...for *the time is near*.... The Lord God...sent His angel to show His servants *the things which must shortly take place*” (Rev. 1:1-3; 22:6). Five times Jesus Christ declared, “I am coming *quickly*” (2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20); He was referring to His coming to judge apostate Israel and their Roman accomplices in the persecution of the church (this judgment occurred in A.D. 67-70). But He promised to spare a faithful first-century church from the coming conflagration: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world” (3:10). The purpose of the references to the millennium, the second coming, the final judgment and the eternal state is to give persecuted first-century Christians a glimpse of the church’s glorious future. The significance of the book of Revelation to its first-century audience must no longer be ignored.

## Conclusion

An examination of the biblical teaching concerning the second coming of Christ; the millennium; the kingdom of God; the nature, goal and destiny of the church; the kingdom prophecies; etc. has shown that premillennialism is unbiblical; it is exegetically and theologically inconsistent with the clear teaching of God’s Word. Those who defend premillennialism can do so only by disregarding the many passages which teach that the resurrection, final judgment, and delivering up of the kingdom to the Father occur at the *end* of time. The rise of premillennialism in evangelical churches coincided historically with the rise of unbiblical pietism, Arminianism, dispensationalism and retreatism. Ideas have consequences; if Christians do not believe that God’s moral law is binding on the *nations*; if they believe that the world still belongs to Satan, that Christians cannot win in history, that believers are not responsible to apply the Word of God to all areas of life—then they will be attracted to a system of eschatology that teaches defeat and falsely leads people to believe that they are free from their social responsibilities. Thus, a *biblical* doctrine of last things is crucial if Christians are going to be salt and light to society and maintain vigor and optimism during the battles that lie ahead. Christians must return to that system of eschatology that the Bible teaches: postmillennialism.

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